

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

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Abstract approved:

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Increasing numbers of individuals aspire to, seek out, and need a college degree in order to be competitive in the job market (Goyette, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). College degrees provide access to economic, social, and health benefits (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Autor, 2014). The United States also needs more college educated citizens to fill employment demands (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010). Despite the increased amount of college-seeking students and the country's need for more college graduates, post-secondary institutions also face stress in meeting enrollment goals (Bidwell, 2013; Burd, 2015). These realities make the college planning process an important area of investigation.

One aspect of this process is the role of parents in their children's development of college-going expectations and college planning. Both within popular press and scholarly research, parents are lauded as a key mechanism for leveraging college opportunities for their children (Cohen, 2012; Mullen, 2010). Children of parents who have the time and means to be more involved in their education and college planning are more likely to enter college (Perna & Titus, 2005). For example,

enrollment rates are higher for children of parents with knowledge of the financial aid system, admissions criteria, and other mechanisms of the process (Charles, Roscigno, & Torres, 2007; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; D. H. Kim & Schneider, 2005; Tierney, 2002). Parents experiencing financial strain and competing financial demands, such as retirement savings, may be less likely to provide support to their children (Napolitano, Pacholok, & Furstenberg, 2014).

Despite evidence of their importance, it is less clear why and how parents develop college-going expectations and provide support. Further investigation of the influence of parents' contexts on their role in this process and the support they can provide is warranted. The dissertation asked the following research questions:

Manuscript 1: What do parents see college and a college degree providing for their children? How do parents' own life experiences influence those thoughts and expectations? Manuscript 2: How do parents view, and support children in, college preparation and planning? How do these views and supports differ by parent and family characteristics? To answer these research questions, the study conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with parents of 35 college-bound high school seniors. Parents of high school seniors were at the end of the college planning process. This allowed for reflection on the role parents played. The sample came from two high schools within a Northwestern city of approximately 55,000 people.

The results from the first manuscript report parents' own school, work, and life experiences were important factors in shaping their college-going expectations for their children. For parents without a four-year degree, or did not earn one until later in life, a degree provides the means towards a stable, middle-class lifestyle. Parents

recalled struggles because of limited prospects they do not wish their children to experience. Parents with two- and four-year degrees that experienced relative stability and sometimes success in work and home want the same for their children. Some parents emphasized the importance of gaining a specific credential for job placement, while others emphasized the general importance that furthering one's education provides within any area of the job market. College-educated parents specifically mentioned the role college could provide in allowing for personal growth and perspective taking for their children.

The second manuscript found parents felt supports provided very early in their children's lives were critical to ensuring college access. Many academically socialized their children by stressing the importance of education. They made efforts to align their expectations with a positive environment for their children to grow. In high school, parents often discussed the selection of courses and ways to be competitive on their college application. For many of these families, this process was one of trial and error. They often learned from mistakes made from their older children's transitions, which helped provide better support to their younger ones. Families with greater resources were able to provide more opportunities for their children, including the ability to visit colleges and the option to explore private and out-of-state institutions. For low- and middle-income families, particularly when the child was immature and lacked clarity on their desired career field, community college was often suggested and ultimately selected. All families were cost-conscious, making opportunities for aid important in perceived options and final selections.

Together the two manuscripts highlight important ways parents provide support to their children to encourage college enrollment. Parents' expectations, and the shape those expectations take, guided their parenting practices. The results suggest all parents, regardless of socio-economic position, can invest in their children's education and set high expectations they hope for them to meet. However, more resourced families are better able to align expectations to environment. They are also more likely to be able to provide additional options to their children, both in college preparation and decisions. It is important for high schools, postsecondary educational institutions, and policy makers to understand that all families struggled at one point in the college planning process, and assuming more resourced families do not need much support is misguided. For all families, clearer policies on what parents and their children should be doing to prepare for college, as well as obtainable options for those families, given financial, personal, and academic factors, is needed.

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Getting Kids from Cradle to College: Parents' Expectations and Support to College-Bound Children

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

Timothy M. Ottusch, Author

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Study 1	41
Chapter 3: Study 2	70
Chapter 4: Conclusion	104
Bibliography	125
Appendix	149

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Demographic information on study participants	69
2. Demographic information on study participants	103

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is expected more than ever, by parents and children, for children to embark on college following high school graduation (Goyette, 2008; Presley, Clery, & Carroll, 2001). Over their careers, those with a college degree expect to earn half a million to a million dollars more than those with a high school diploma (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Autor, 2014). These disparities have increased since the 1970s (Carnevale & Rose, 2015). Those with a degree are more likely to be happier in their job, have better health, vote, and volunteer (Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2009). A college degree “is no longer considered a potential stepping-stone to a better life. It is fully acknowledged as the gatekeeper to a myriad of social and individual benefits” (A. F. Cabrera, La Nasa, & Burkum, 2001, p. 1). The United States also needs more of its citizens to hold a college degree (Marklein, 2012; Stilwell, 2015). By 2025 there may be a shortage of 20 million college-educated citizens (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010).

The increased importance of a college degree must also be placed within the current context. Several societal shifts in higher education, family life, and the American economy have placed increased importance on how the country can get its citizens to college and the role parents play in their child’s process towards college enrollment. These shifts, explained below, help create a picture of how parents have to negotiate many different challenges in supporting their child to college. It also shows why it is important to understand parents’ experiences and feelings about this process to best support them.

First, colleges and universities have become more selective in whom they admit. This movement has been spurred by the increased amount of applications institutions receive versus the growth in slots available and the amount of applications students are submitting. It has also been a result of universities trying to increase their prestige (Burd, 2014; Hossler, Gross, & Beck, 2010; Stevens, 2007). The prestige of a university is important for some as state funding

decreases and the need/desire for out of state and international students who will pay more increases (Burd, 2014; Mortenson, 2012). These movements now mean the same SAT score from the 1980s or 1990s does not get a student into as competitive a school today (Bound, Hershbein, & Long, 2009). The students most affected by this increased competition are the ones with the worst academic records, whose acceptance rate has lowered by 20 percent since the 1970s (Bound et al., 2009). Students, and their parents, now more than ever must be strategic about their preparation during high school to be marketable once they apply to schools.

Second, there have been changes to the costs and financial aid structure of higher education. Colleges have become more expensive, with tuition increasing faster than wages (Stiglitz, Tyson, Orszag, & Orszag, 2000). Most Americans do not see college education as being affordable for all families (Gallup & The Lumina Foundation, 2014). The costs of attending a public four-year institution in 1982 cost \$6,942 (in 2011-12 dollars) and increased to almost \$17,000 by 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In 1989 tuition comprised about 25% of public higher education's revenue. By 2014, it had raised to 47%. This increase has pushed the tuition rate (not including room and board) for public higher education from \$2,792 (in 2014 dollars) in 1989 to \$5,777 per year in 2014 (Woodhouse, 2015).

Many universities have shifted their approach in how they allocate financial aid. In an effort to bring in the most talented and affluent students, many institutions have shifted towards merit-based financial aid rather than just need-based aid. This means students are rewarded aid based on their academic record rather than their economic need. For low-income and middle-income students, while they may receive these merit-based awards, they are generally less generous than those offered under need-based programs (Burd, 2015). This is seen as a tactic to lure students from families that can pay more in tuition after the smaller discounts from merit-aid

(Mortenson, 2012). Some low-income students can end up paying more than affluent students (Burd, 2015).

The rising costs have placed increased burdens on students and their parents to find ways to pay for tuition and other expenses. Low-income and middle-income families are particularly likely to have to take on debt (student or parent loans), with low-middle-income families taking on the most (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Houle, 2014). The rising costs mean many families are left unsure of how paying for college will actually happen (Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Some research has suggested that the increased amounts of applications submitted by students is an effort to find not only the best school that will accept them, but also the school that will offer them the best financial aid package (Bound et al., 2009; Eagan, Lozano, Hurtado, & Case, 2013). Students are less likely now to select their first choice school, instead selecting a college with the best financial aid offer (Eagan et al., 2013). Some families may be selecting two-year, instead of four-year schools to start because of the increased cost demands (Sallie Mae, 2014a). The process itself has become complicated for families from all socio-economic backgrounds (Mullen, 2010; Stevens, 2007). It is important to understand how parents navigate these complexities with their children.

Third, at the same time of these movements in higher education, attention to the role of parents in the college planning process has increased. The amount of time parents, particularly college-educated parents, spend in child care has increased since the mid-1990s (Ramey & Ramey, 2009). This time has somewhat been concentrated in older children, including time spent attending and transporting children to sporting events and education related activities (Ramey & Ramey, 2009). This suggests parents are strategically investing time in their older children to prepare them for college applications. A few scholars have pointed out the changes in parenting

and the college application process as likely non-coincidental movements (Ramey & Ramey, 2009; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Stevens, 2007). Popular press and scholarly articles alike have started to investigate parents' efforts on behalf of their children to help get them into college (Iversen, Napolitano, & Furstenberg, 2011; Lareau, 2011; Mullen, 2010; Napolitano et al., 2014). However, further research is needed to investigate parental roles in this process.

Finally, it is important to understand the contexts of parents and their implications for the support they provide. Some argue the increased time spent by parents is a reaction to the returns a college education brings in earnings and security (Ramey & Ramey, 2009). American wages, particularly among those without a college degree, have been stagnant now for several decades. Employees are also less likely to stay with the same company their entire careers. Many are less likely to receive equivalent earnings at their next job, particularly for those without postsecondary education (Farber, 2007; Hacker, 2008). In addition, starting in the early 1980s, the employment sector has shifted more towards offering defined-contribution plans (i.e. 401Ks) instead of defined-benefit (i.e. pensions) plans. This places burdens on employees (i.e. parents) to save money out of their possible modest earnings for their retirement (Hacker, 2008; Munnell, Golub-Sass, & Muldoon, 2009). Families with children in general are often financially vulnerable (Hacker, 2008). Some evidence suggests these vulnerable positions influence parental aspirations for their children to avoid similar situations (Irwin & Elley, 2013; Iversen et al., 2011). Family contexts are important to understand in how they shape the role parents play in the college planning process.

The shifts in higher education and family life make the role of parents in their children's college planning and preparation an interesting and important topic of inquiry. Students and their parents must now navigate a more competitive and expensive higher education system. At the

same time, many families are strained and strapped for time and money; but know college is more important than ever. It is important to understand how parents make decisions on why and how they will support their children. These insights will inform researchers, policy makers, education stakeholders, and families on how to support parents and their children through this process.

We know already that parents are influential in getting their children to college. Parents' expectations, socio-economic status, savings, information seeking, academic support, and discussions with their children influence their children's eventual destination (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2007; Bates & Anderson, 2014; Belley & Lochner, 2007; A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; A. F. Cabrera et al., 2001; Charles et al., 2007; Conley, 2001; Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2014; Horn, Chen, & Chapman, 2003; Hossler et al., 1999; Kalenkoski, 2005; King, 1996; McDonough, 1997; Somers, Cofer, & VanderPutten, 2002). These initial studies, however, have just started to skim the surface about how parents, both with and without college experience, navigate preparing their children for post-secondary education.

Based on what we know about the process and the critical areas that need to be addressed, the current study addresses two key aspects of the college planning process.

The first paper addresses why parents want their child to go to college and what they see a college credential providing. Specifically it asks two main questions:

1. What do parents see college and a college degree providing for their children?
2. How do parents' own life experiences influence those thoughts and expectations?

The second paper addresses how parents, given those expectations, support their children throughout their life towards college. It specifically asks two main questions:

1. How do parents view, and support children in, college preparation and planning?

2. How do these views and supports differ by parent and family characteristics?

Literature Review

Theoretical and empirical work on the college choice process has increased in the past three decades. First, theoretical orientations are reviewed. Second, I review the larger overview of higher education. Third, the important predictors of enrolling in college will be reviewed. It is important to understand what factors predict college enrollment to see how parents may be influential, directly and indirectly, in this process. Fourth, I overview how parents are involved in this process. What is known, and not known, about parents' involvement guided the study's design and interview questions. Although these topics will appear in a linear order, they are interconnected in how they influence children and their families. Descriptions of these interconnections will be given throughout.

Before theoretical and empirical work is reviewed, I want to define what I mean by the college choice process and college planning process. The college choice process and college planning process is defined here as the path the child takes from aspiring to go to college to eventually deciding on where he or she will attend. This study focuses on the role parents in this process. Given the interest and focus on parents in this study, the process also involves how parents developed expectations for their children to go to college. The college choice process and college planning process, as defined here, draws heavily on the model of college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Although planning and choice may be interpreted as different things, for this study they will be used interchangeably because this process involves planning and choice, even if a choice is made of only a single school. This model will be described below.

Finally, I want to define what I mean by college, for the purposes of this study. A larger description of the higher education system will be given below. Often college is short-handed to

mean four-year colleges and universities. For this study, college is short-handed to mean postsecondary education. By this I mean community colleges, four-year colleges, four-year universities, and other higher education settings (such as accrediting Art Institutes; Bok, 2015). In this dissertation, college refers to both two-year and four-year institutions.

Theory

The study is guided by three models/theories: Hossler and colleague's model of college choice, cultural capital theory, and the life course framework. Current research often draws on at least one of these models/theories.

The college choice model. The model for college choice contains three main phases: predisposition, search, and choice. It was developed during a large-scale longitudinal study of Indiana high school students and their parents in the 1980s (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999). It has provided a framework for how to explore the process, preparation, and decisions made by children and parents. The predisposition phase is when the child develops aspirations and expectations to go to college. This influences the pathway of preparation and planning of the child and parents. This phase is influenced by one's socio-economic status, the child's academic achievement, the aspirations and encouragement of parents, peers, and experiences within the school district (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999). Expectations of children and parents seem to have a bi-directional relationship (Froiland, Peterson, & Davison, 2013). It is important to understand parents' expectations, given their relationship to children's expectations and future planning and decisions.

The search phase is when children and their parents search for information and plan towards their expectations. This phase includes efforts in academic preparation. Parents and their children may plan on how to reach the financial demands of college (Hossler et al., 1999). It

appears this planning and preparation can happen very early in life, particularly for higher-SES children and parents (Mullen, 2010). The search phase influences both other phases. More information on institutions, costs, and requirements may influence aspirations and perceived options for enrollment (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997).

The choice phase is when students apply to schools and make final attendance decisions. It includes students signing up for community college courses and technical programs. Like the search phase, schools considered are influenced by the other two phases. Parents' expectations and support can influence what schools are considered, and ultimately selected (Hossler et al., 1999).

This model loosely guides the literature review below, as well as the interview guide (See appendix for interview guide). The model proposes that children and their families move through a process of aspiring to going to college, searching out and preparing for college, and then utilizing this work and data to make a final choice. Although the dissertation's two manuscripts do not directly address choice, parents' discussions of final decisions are included in analysis when pertinent to areas of expectations and support.

Cultural capital. The theory of cultural capital articulates how class differences in non-economic resources influence differences in educational and occupational attainment (McDonough, 1997). Cultural capital is cultural competencies parents possess and pass down to their children. It is the product of differences between socio-economic classes and is used subsequently to maintain these advantages (Tierney, 2002). Pierre Bourdieu, the prominent figure in cultural capital theory, articulates cultural capital disadvantages working class families by not possessing the knowledge held by higher socioeconomic status families (Bourdieu, 1986). This is accomplished through knowing when to invest resources at strategic times to maintain

these class advantages (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). These strategic investments help monopolize resources and allow for those intergenerational exchanges to occur (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

For education, parental cultural capital includes knowledge about the college admissions process, including domains not immediately apparent to all parents (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; McDonough, 1997). This includes knowledge of the admissions and financial aid systems, and how to navigate those systems to advocate for their child to obtain the best possible education (McDonough, 1994). For example, college-educated parents generally have more knowledge on how to boost test scores and meet university requirements (McDonough, 1997). Low-SES parents and children are more likely to start planning later in high school, missing key opportunities to strategically invest in classes and extracurricular activities that might provide benefits (Horn et al., 2003).

Cultural capital is held through a person's habitus, or the internalized beliefs and perceptions they carry. These beliefs and perceptions shape the aspirations, attitudes, and expectations a person has for oneself and one's family members (McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Habitus is developed by families, peers, community members, and schools through the socialization process (Lareau, 2000). It is influenced by parents' education and academic achievement, and more broadly one's socio-economic status (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010; McDonough, 1994). One's habitus influences how members of groups, such as families, aspire to certain educational levels, plan, and make choices. One's habitus influences what is perceived as a "good" option (McDonough, 1994). For example, Mullen (2010) compared students enrolled in either Yale or Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). She found students tended to select schools based on perceived fits with the people at

those institutions (Mullen, 2010). Predispositions for a certain style, and experiences with being around certain types of people, influenced students to match their habitus with the type of school culture and type of program offered. For Yale students it was the liberal arts atmosphere, while for SCSU it was the practical translation of degree to job, around similar working and middle-class students.

One's habitus explains how cultural capital is activated. For cultural capital to become an advantage, it has to be utilized. If one does not aspire to go to college, their knowledge, or their parent's knowledge, of the college application process does not bring advantages (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).

This study focused on how parents' predispositions were formed, how resources were accumulated and activated, and the barriers faced in accomplishing these tasks. Cultural capital theorists would argue higher-SES parents will possess more capital and will use that to confer as many advantages for their children as possible. It is important to investigate those that hold, and do not hold, capital to understand the best ways to support all families.

Life Course. The life course helps us understand lives in context. A person moves through age-graded roles and transitions. They experience events that shape their life and life history. The life course helps describe and explain how lives happen within historical time and place and are influenced by the timing of transitions and events. It posits lives are interdependent with those around them and are a balance between the agency of the individual and the social structures in which they reside (Elder, Shanahan, & Jennings, 2015; Settersten, 2003).

Life course principles in particular helps frame the current study and help us understand existing scholarship. The principle of human agency posits individuals make decisions and act within the social and historical settings in their lives. The settings bring both opportunities and

constraints (Elder et al., 2015). Social structures vary in size and form, ranging from institutional structures such as the U.S. educational system down to a social structure of rules between two people (such as parent and child). Social structures are not stable, and can be influenced by human agency (Settersten & Gannon, 2005). This implies parents' agency within an educational setting may influence the support and benefits children and parents receive. It also implies the social structures around parents may constrain their ability to support their children.

Within a life course, people live interdependently with significant others around them (Elder et al., 2015). The pathways, transitions, and important life events of significant others mutually influence each other. One person's trajectory or transition may influence the trajectory or transition of another. This helps frame how parents' economic standing, school experiences, and position in their own age-graded roles may influence their children's college choice processes. The children's destinies may be influenced by the role parents take or do not take in their lives. Parents' views and experiences with educational institutions may influence how they talk to and support their own children in that domain. It is important to understand the mutual influence parents and children may have on each other in this process.

The principle of historical time and place articulates how the location of a family and the time in which they have children go through the college planning process has important implications for what the transition may look like. The principle posits one's life course is influenced by events over time in the location in which they live. One's location geographically and in historical time influences opportunities and constraints (Elder et al., 2015). For families, the proximity to quality schools and societal views of college are just a few factors to keep in mind.

The timing of a certain transition or occupation of a certain role has important implications for both the person and those around her/him. The location within a life course has important implications for the consequences of the timing of an event (Elder & Johnson, 2003; Elder et al., 2015). The life course is seen as going through age-graded, expected transitions and roles. There is an assumption that there are opportune times to go through these transitions and occupy certain roles. These expectations may be formal, such as legally mandated transitions (for example, voting and driving), or informal, such as societal expectations of when a transition is best seen as happening (for example, marriage and childbearing). Going through transitions at certain times may also bring certain advantages and disadvantages (Settersten, 2003). For example, the American higher education structure tends to place importance on transitioning into college directly after high school and holding the role of college student before family and major employment demands are in play. Those that do not take this pathway are penalized in educational and occupational pursuits (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005). It is important to understand how parents' own on and off-time educational experiences may have influenced their expectations for their children's transitions into the role of college student.

Finally, and similar to cultural capital theory, the life course framework focuses on cumulative effects. It suggests early investment over time by parents may give their children advantages over other families. The principle of linked lives focuses on how educational pathways, values, and resources are transferred through generations. Life course theorists articulate that over time individuals may accrue advantages in education and other domains (Elder et al., 2015). This is seen as cumulative advantage/disadvantage (CAD). These differences emerge over time between people through advantages and disadvantages in location, training,

and resources (Dannefer, 2003). It is important to understand how lifelong differences between families support surface in this process.

Overall, life course, cultural capital, and the college choice model help guide an understanding of the previous literature and how the current study investigated the role of parents in their children's college planning processes. Life course and cultural capital theory help frame the importance of interdependency between parent and child and the resources possessed by parents. It documents the importance of context, not just for the child, but the parents as well. The following sections will draw, when appropriate, on this work in describing the college planning field.

The Purposes of Higher Education

The college planning process and the role of parents specifically, need to be placed within the context of the higher education system. What college is perceived to be providing, including what parts of it are valued, is important. Parents' perspectives on these issues can have important implications for their expectations and the support they provide to them.

The American higher education system has been in place since before it was officially a country. Originally constructed as a means towards educating the elite white men of the country, it has expanded greatly since the American Civil War and again following World War II to educate and train the greater society (Bok, 2015; Delbanco, 2014). The industrialization of the country spurred colleges to start offering more occupation centric programs. These areas included formal teacher, business, and public health training, among others. The Morrill Act in the mid-1800s helped develop land-grant institutions (Bok, 2015).

Generally, the role of higher education is three-fold: 1) provide occupational training; 2) foster research; and 3) Give students a well-rounded education, via liberal arts education,

providing skills applicable to all areas of life (Bok, 2015). Initially teachers' colleges and similarly created occupation centric schools did not focus as much on the liberal arts. Likewise, the liberal arts often did not focus on occupation specific training. But over time these roles of higher education have converged where most schools now offer both components (Bok, 2015). This includes community colleges, which typically offer liberal arts and vocational training (Bok, 2015). The components of occupation and liberal arts training are particularly relevant for the college planning process.

The structure of higher education means different institutions provide different things. This makes it particularly important for families when they launch their children into the system. Community colleges typically offer vocational training (welding, nursing, etc.) as well as general education (i.e. liberal arts) opportunities. The vocational training and general liberal arts education sometimes are the end goal of students. For others, the associates degree in liberal arts or the courses accumulated are transferred to four-year institutions in order to gain further credentials (Bok, 2015). At four-year institutions, the emphasis on practical occupational skills and the liberal arts act on a continuum. At four-year colleges, often referred to as liberal arts colleges, they focus more on liberal arts training, emphasizing development in critical thinking, reading, writing, and expansion of world view more so than occupation specific skills. However, this has been changing and they often offer vocational type programs. Other four-year universities and colleges feature a balance of liberal arts curriculum, with about 40-50 percent of coursework geared more towards major-specific classes (Bok, 2015).

The purpose of higher education and the tension between vocational training and liberal arts education is constantly being discussed (Bok, 2015; Delbanco, 2014; Zakaria, 2014). Currently, given the high costs of higher education, many question the benefits of liberal arts

education in its ability to provide future employability and return on investment (Delbanco, 2014). However, others argue that when asked, employers cite skills gained through liberal arts training, such as critical thinking, flexibility and adaptability in learning as the most important (Bok, 2015; Zakaria, 2014). In addition, liberal arts education is the means to which higher education tries to develop students into citizens, a key pillar in maintaining a democracy. It also can expand one's worldview, making them a more empathetic person, crucial to working with others and maintaining a civil society (Delbanco, 2014; Zakaria, 2014). The importance placed on the two ends of college can be important in where students decide to go to college, what they want out of college, and how they experience college (Mullen, 2010). Parents' views of college also influence how they parent their children in college, and the emphasis they place on job-skill development and personal growth (Hamilton, 2016). Thus, the importance parents place on college and what they view it is as providing may have important implications to the expectations they carry for their children and how they support them to college.

Predictors of College Enrollment

To understand how parents are involved in their children's college choice process, it is important to understand what parents' attributes and actions influence future college enrollment. A large amount of research on the predictors of college enrollment exists. Parent influence is evident.

Important predictors of college enrollment include: Parents' education, family income, family net worth, living in a two-parent household, high student expectations and aspirations, high parent expectations and aspirations, high child GPA and test scores, a strong academic curriculum, the number of siblings a child has (negative influence for the amount they have but a positive influence if they have older siblings), having an older sibling go to college, being

female, getting help from counselors, parents' knowledge of loans and grants, and parents' college education savings (Attewell et al., 2007; Bates & Anderson, 2014; Belley & Lochner, 2007; A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Charles et al., 2007; Conley, 2001; Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2014; Horn et al., 2003; Hossler et al., 1999; Kalenkoski, 2005; King, 1996; McDonough, 1997; Perna & Titus, 2005; Somers et al., 2002). Whites and Asian Americans are more likely to attend college compared to African American and Latino children (Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2014; Somers et al., 2002). Some evidence suggests that these differences are more related to SES than race (Bates & Anderson, 2014).

Factors related to enrolling in a 4-year versus a 2-year school include: parents' education and family income, being African American, test scores, a high GPA, moving less as a child, children's aspirations, parents' expectations, parents' encouragement, alignment between parents' expectations and the support they provided the children, taking ACT/SAT preparation courses, and visiting colleges (Attewell et al., 2007; Horn et al., 2003; Kalenkoski, 2005; D. H. Kim & Schneider, 2005; Mullen, 2010; Perna & Titus, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Important predictors of enrolling in a selective college include: parents' education, being of Asian descent, parents' income, family wealth, high test scores, children's aspirations, parents' expectations, alignment between parents' expectations and the support they provide their children towards college enrollment, parent participation in college guidance programs, the number of colleges the family visits, and academic track (Flint, 1992; Hossler et al., 1999; D. H. Kim & Schneider, 2005; Mullen, 2010; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stevens, 2007).

Parents, as the research shows, are influential in getting their children to college. With this in mind, it is important to understand how parents are involved, how they transfer advantages

and their own expectations to their children. Past research has started to highlight some of these domains. The current study's two manuscripts add to this emerging area of research.

The College Choice Process and the Role of Parents

This section describes the college choice process, with particular emphasis on parent involvement. The process starts at different points for families. Sometimes this process begins early in the child's life. For others it starts the child's senior year in high school. This process includes predisposing the child towards the notion of going to college and academic preparation. It includes searching for information on different options, applying, and ultimately making a final choice (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999). Evidence suggests parents can be influential in direct and indirect ways (Dyce, Albold, & Long, 2013). This section will loosely follow Hossler and colleagues' college choice framework. It will break these phases into sections to best describe the process and begins with how parents' develop college-going expectations for their children.

Parent's role in predisposing their children to college. Expectations are the first step towards college enrollment. It is during the predisposition stage that students plan on continuing their education after high school (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999). These predispositions set the route moving forward. This route includes what classes students should take, the effort one puts into their studies, financial preparations, and decisions on reasonable options for the child to attend (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999; Tierney, 2002).

For a parent to influence their children's expectations for college they need to have college expectations for their children themselves. Cultural capital states one's expectations are shaped by their habitus (McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Parent's habitus

is influenced by social class, their knowledge of higher education, the academic achievement of the child, and their context (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011; McDonough, 1994). Their context may include society's views on the value of a college degree. Some parents expect their children to go college from birth (Y. Kim, Huang, & Sherraden, 2014; Lareau, 2011; Mullen, 2010). Other parents, particularly those without a 4-year degree, expect their child to be college-bound to avoid the stresses and burdens they experienced (A. S. P. Cabrera, 2014; Irwin & Elley, 2013; Iversen et al., 2011).

Parents directly and indirectly influence their children's predispositions towards college. Parents' habitus is said to influence the expectations of their children through disclosure of expectations (McDonough, 1994). Parent-child conversations about college influence their children's aspirations (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1994). Parents' expectations for their children may occur because of the children's academic successes. A child doing well academically can foster greater expectations. The parent may foster those raised expectations back to their child (Froiland et al., 2013; Lippman et al., 2008; Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002). Low-income parents' expectations are particularly influenced by their children's strong academic performances (Attewell et al., 2007; Belley & Lochner, 2007; Irwin & Elley, 2013; Long & Riley, 2007; McDonough, 1997).

The timing of when parents and children develop college-going predispositions is important. College expectations by eighth grade is optimal for proper planning to occur in high school (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). Families without expectations at that time may miss strategically selecting courses or tracks. These classes and tracks play into the future marketability of the child and best prepare them academically for

college coursework. Low-SES families are less likely to have college expectations in the eighth grade (Lucas, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Overall, the habitus of a parent and the influence it has on their child's college going habitus is important. We still do not have a firm grasp yet of exactly how parents develop their college-going expectations, as well as how they transfer them to their child. It is important to gain this knowledge as it has important repercussions for the college choice process.

Academic preparation and parent involvement. Academic preparation is arguably the most important predictor of college enrollment. Families and students ideally plan from ninth grade the academic curriculum of the child (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Rueda, 2005). Their academic trajectory prepares them for the rigors of college coursework and influences the attractiveness of their applications. Consistent academic achievement in school predicts college enrollment, including selecting a 4-year versus a 2-year institution (Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2014; Kalenkoski, 2005; Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006; Stephan, Rosenbaum, & Person, 2009). If a student takes one advanced math class while in high school (Algebra 2 or higher), they are more likely to go to college (Choy, Horn, Nuñez, & Chen, 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005).

A child's academic preparation is heavily influenced by their academic track. The coursework taken by a child influences whether they meet admissions requirements, college enrollment, and their readiness for college classes (Perna, 2005). Low-SES students and parents often take a less streamlined approach in course selection (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Lucas, 2001). This is worrisome since college-preparatory tracks may foster individual and parent aspirations to go college, and is particularly influential on low-income families (Attewell et al., 2007; Belley & Lochner, 2007; Hossler et al., 1999; Irwin & Elley, 2013).

A family's socio-economic status often dictates the academic trajectory of the child. For some middle- and high-SES parents, involvement and academic planning is a lifelong pursuit. Lareau's (2011) in-depth study of family life documented the strategic efforts middle-income families put forth, which developed their children into marketable college students. These intentional efforts by parents to develop the children's talents and overall development started well before high school (Lareau, 2011). Working class parents were more hands off, particularly with involvement in school. The natural characteristics and talents of the child dictated successes and failures (Lareau, 2011). Mitchell (2007) has argued that concerted cultivation, and the overall influx of parent involvement in their children's academics, is a direct response to the changing higher education climate. The investment in school seems necessary in order to secure opportunities and navigation of the system itself.

Lareau's (2000; 2011) work on parenting practices, particularly with learning and school, aligns with an important area for children; academic socialization (Lareau, 2000, 2011). Academic socialization includes the parents' beliefs about education and school, and their actions based on those beliefs. Those beliefs and actions set the tone for the child about the importance, or lack thereof, of learning and school (Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004). Before children even embark on school, parents' beliefs on the importance of learning can dictate the amount and type of stimulating materials for their children. Parents, based on their beliefs of learning and human development, may read to their children more (Taylor et al., 2004). Parents' beliefs related to academic socialization are somewhat rooted in their own educational experiences. Parents with negative memories of school may be less inclined to be involved than parents with positive memories. Parents' experiences with schooling influences the home

learning environment, and subsequently how their child adjusts to, and succeeds in, school (Taylor et al., 2004). Thus, expectations parents set is important for future success.

Harris and Robinson (2006) view parents as “stage setters” in the domain of education and learning. “Stage setting” involves both having the perspective to foster academic growth and learning, and being able to provide the environment for their children to do so (Harris & Robinson, 2016). They argue that while many parents may feel education and learning is important, those with more resources are able to consistently provide the environment to have education as a “central feature of youths’ self-definition” (Harris & Robinson, 2016, p. 191). For example, middle- and high-SES parents often are able to provide more books and stimulating opportunities for their children. Given their resources, it is easier for them to afford homes in quality school districts with similarly resourced families. This consistency in message and environment allows parents to be better able to successfully transmit expectations and values (Harris & Robinson, 2016).

Empirical evidence on academic socialization and stage setting documents parents influence from early childhood to college. Yamamoto and colleagues (2016) found parent-reading engagement with their four-year-old children predicted academic achievement. However, they found middle-class parents were more likely to read to their children than low-SES parents (Yamamoto, Li, & Liu, 2016). Holloway and colleagues (2016) found the self-efficacy of a parent is related to how competent their children feel in school (Holloway et al., 2016). They also found SES moderated this relationship, with children from middle- and high-SES homes benefiting more from a parent high in self-efficacy than a low-SES parent (Holloway et al., 2016). Similarly, Sonnenschein and colleagues (2016) found children benefited when parents engaged in reading and math practice with them. Low-income parents were less likely to

engage in those activities compared to middle-income parents (Sonnenschein, Metzger, & Thompson, 2016). A study in middle-school found parent involvement predicted children's views that their parents expected them to do well. These expectations predicted how regulated their children were in their own learning, which then influenced their academic achievement (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Overall, parents are key in the academic socialization of their children, starting very early in life, and continuing throughout. However, like Lareau's (2000; 2011) findings on differential parenting practices by SES, more educated and higher income parents appear more likely to engage in academic socialization type practices.

In addition, early parent involvement seems particularly important as the child moves through middle and high school, towards college. Typically, day to day parent-child interactions decreases after elementary school, making the expectations and the stage set by parents important (Harris & Robinson, 2016; Hill & Tyson, 2009). In middle school for example, discussions about school related topics positively relate to academic success, while day-to-day homework support is not. Homework help may be reserved only for struggling students (Hill & Tyson, 2009). It is important to understand how parents' expectations, stage setting, and academic socialization practices influence expectations and support during the college planning process.

On top of the environment parents set, differences in parents' feelings about, and knowledge of, the school system are important to understand. Middle- and high-SES parents often possess more knowledge of the academic system (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Parents' involvement in the schools also brings greater understanding of policies and how to advocate effectively for their children (Lareau, 2011). Middle- and high-SES families, it is argued, know important points where decisions have to be made about coursework (Lucas, 2001; Perna, 2005).

These parents often feel more self-efficacy towards supporting their children and subsequently perceive more invitations by the school to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Working-class parents may not feel as confident and are least likely to know how to advocate to get their child into a class or track (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Lucas (2001) calls this effectively maintained inequality, where individuals and families ensure they gain qualitative advantages whenever possible.

Overall, it is important to investigate how parents academically support their children. It is important to understand the barriers (contextual, logistical, and perceived) parents may face in this process.

Search: Gathering information on college. The second phase of Hossler and colleagues model of college choice involves searching for information. Children and parents may gather information on requirements, costs, and financial aid. This can be done through searching college specific websites, requesting mailings, touring campuses, and meeting with college representatives (Hossler et al., 1999; Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). Students and their parents often look for personal fits and realistic options (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999). This section will focus only on searching for information on admissions requirements, although these three areas - requirements, costs, and financial aid- are interrelated.

The search phase is generally seen as happening between a student's sophomore and senior years (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). One's predisposition guides when it is appropriate to start such efforts. High-SES families are more likely to start the search process earlier (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000), while some do not begin until senior year. A later start

tends to be happen more for low-SES families (Perna, 2006a; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). This timing influences college planning moving forward (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997).

The search phase sets families in a cycle of constant evaluation of new and old information. Some children and parents have expectations and interests in certain schools to start. As planning moves forward, other enticing schools and programs can surface that peaks their interests. The student's aspired to location often switches during their sophomore and senior years (Hossler et al., 1999).

The degree to which parents are involved in this phase is varied. Some parents are very involved. Other parents serve as a more consultant, letting their children seek out information and the parents help work through things. Some are uninvolved (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). The scant research existing on this topic suggests those with more cultural capital tend to be more involved, serving at the very least as a consultant. These parents may search independently of the child for information and make more suggestions on programs or locations (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). Low-SES parents are more likely to struggle with the complex process and are the least likely to search for information (Settersten & Ray, 2010; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

Standardized tests offer another avenue for parents to influence their child. Parents may have their child take the ACT and SAT earlier than their senior year. This allows more time for a re-take if the child does not get a desired score. Their scores may place them on college mailing lists (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006b). It opens up options for students, particularly for students that do well and especially for low-income students that do well (Hoxby & Avery, 2012; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006b). Low-income high-achieving students may

warrant institutional aid that would allow them the opportunity to attend a more selective institution for less money than some 4-year public schools with smaller endowments (Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Hoxby & Turner, 2015). Students that do not take these tests may not appear on these schools' radars (Hoxby & Avery, 2012).

Despite the existing research, the search phase is the least known part of the college choice model. More research is needed, particularly to understand parents' perspectives and involvement in this phase.

Search: Gathering information on costs. Information on admissions requirements is just one aspect of the search phase. Another involves gathering information on costs. Information on costs, and perceptions of costs, are important in what children and parents perceive as viable options.

The closer to the student's graduation, the more likely the child and parents have obtained cost information. For students in the sixth to 12th grades, less than a third of their parents have information on costs. By the 11th and 12th grades, this number increases to more than 50%. Families with students with better grades, and parents with more education, higher expectations, and those more involved are more likely obtain information (Horn et al., 2003).

Many families struggle to understand the true costs of attending a college or university. Some parents of high school students overestimate the cost of paying for in-state public university tuition and fees by 180%. They overestimate the costs of attending a college when room and board are factored by more than 100% (Horn et al., 2003). Parents make even larger errors when estimating the costs of attending a 2-year college, but are closer in estimating the costs of a private 4-year college. The closer private college estimations suggests parents are more

likely to do more in-depth research when expecting their child to attend such institutions (Horn et al., 2003).

Inaccurate cost estimations are just one issue in this phase. Many parents, even those with junior or senior children, are unsure of the true costs of college. The National Center for Education Statistics reported 29% of parents could not estimate costs (Horn et al., 2003). Parents with more education and higher incomes, high expectations, academically strong children, and those that spoke with someone about financial aid are more likely to provide an estimate. Students are more likely to provide an estimate and be more accurate with their estimates if they talked with their parents about costs and financial aid. (Horn et al., 2003). Goldrick-Rab's (2016) research with lower-income college students suggests the lack of clarity of the higher education economic system and complexity of figuring out costs, even between semesters, makes it very hard for families to understand the type of support they will receive and their responsibility for covering the remaining costs (Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

Knowledge of costs, and perceptions of costs, are influential to families moving forward. Costs are the first barrier for families in thinking of college as a viable option (Long & Riley, 2007). It is important for families to have information on costs early in the process, including middle school (Hallett & Griffen, 2015). If costs are perceived as too high or are not clearly understood for all families, expectations and actions may be influenced. A college is a potential choice only if it is looked into and applied to. If seen as too costly this may influence future expectations and actions (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Perceptions of affordability may guide the type of institution researched by families (Bers, 2005; Stiglitz et al., 2000). The saliency in what is seen as an affordable option by the family is an important line of investigation that the proposed study will look into.

Parents' information on costs and their perceptions of college affordability are important. While the two manuscripts do not specifically look at costs and paying for college, assumptions of affordability and efforts made in the planning process to understand costs no doubt influence expectations and planning moving forward, and eventually final decisions.

Search: Financial aid. Financial aid plays an important part in children, particularly low-income and middle-income children, gaining access to higher education. It eventually influences enrollment decisions (Hossler et al., 1999). Prior research suggests this is the most complicated area of the college planning process for parents and their children to understand. It is an important area to investigate.

Financial aid comes in many different forms, including grants, loans, scholarships, and work-study programs. Aid is given based on economic need (i.e. need-based aid) or based on achievement (i.e. merit-based aid). To obtain state and federal aid, students fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form. A FAFSA form includes information on the parent's income level and household demographics. Based on that information, an expected parent contribution (EPC, or expected family contribution; EFC), eligibility for loans, work-study, and grant aid is calculated. Most institutions also use the results to calculate need-based institutional aid. Any remaining costs after aid and the EFC is called unmet need. The student and their parents are responsible for paying unmet need.

The process of financial aid has been described as complicated and confusing for parents and their children (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Long & Riley, 2007; Perna, 2006b; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Venegas, 2006). Many families are unaware of what their projected EFC might be, the differences between a loan and a grant, and what families will be expected to contribute

(Goldrick-Rab, 2016; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Students also apply to schools before they know their aid status, leaving uncertainty of affordability.

One common issue for families is their lack of clarity of the real cost of college versus the sticker price (Hoxby & Turner, 2015; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). The sticker price of a college is the listed price for tuition, fees, and room and board. The actual price is what the family would pay after aid, work-study options, and other support. The actual price may sometimes be less than half the sticker price (Leonhardt, 2009). Inflated tuition estimates document family struggles with the transparency of college costs.

Knowledge and perceptions of financial aid and costs are important. What is perceived as affordable guides behaviors of parents and children (Long & Riley, 2007). Yet low-income families are less likely to have information in this area (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). For example, one option for low-income families are Pell Grants (federally issued grant aid to children based on their financial need). The maximum award available for students is \$5,775 (Federal Student Aid, 2015b). This covers the full cost of an average 2-year public college's tuition and fees and about two-third of the average tuition and fees at a 4-year public in-state college (The College Board, 2015). Many parents and children are unaware of this support and are deterred by the complexity of the system (Long & Riley, 2007; Venegas, 2006). For the 2007-08 academic year, it was estimated that more than two million students, who would have been eligible for a Pell Grant, did not submit a FAFSA form (Kantrowitz, 2009).

Parents' perceptions of this topic is not well understood. More insights are needed. Families often struggle with what they are expected to contribute. For the expected family contribution, some families estimate their EFCs based on their experiences with older children going through the process (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). Families may also project

costs through specific calculators that help estimate aid (Federal Student Aid, 2015a). Most families are unaware until they receive their FAFSA results.

Even after they receive their letters, it is often confusing for families to interpret what the family is responsible for paying for, what work-study is, and what is a loan versus what is a grant (Marcus, 2015). Families from almost every income level have unmet need as well. Low-income and low-middle-income families have the highest amount of unmet need (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Long & Riley, 2007; Presley et al., 2001). For example, Long and Riley (2007) found low-income students at 4-year public schools had on average \$6,167 and lower-middle income students had on average \$5,955 of unmet need for that school year. Middle-high and high-income students averaged about \$5,000. Goldrick-Rab (2016) also argues the FAFSA forms do not account for child to parent support, assuming support only flows from parents to children. Research has found this is not always the case, particularly for low-income families (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Silva, 2012).

Parent-child conversations about financial aid tend to happen by the time a student graduates high school. Nearly two-thirds of families report talking about financial aid during their child's junior and senior years (De La Rosa, 2006). Parents are also likely to have talked to someone else or read materials on financial aid (Horn et al., 2003). Parents with more education, higher income levels, higher expectations, more involvement in their children's schooling, and academically strong children are more likely to talk to someone or read materials about financial aid (Horn et al., 2003). Some argue families need information as early as middle school. This may allow families to see how college might be financially viable. Accurate information on costs and aid may shape aspirations and planning moving forward (Hallett & Griffen, 2015).

Overall, it is important to understand the barriers parents' experience. For parents that have effectively navigated this domain, hearing their experiences may also help in educating and empowering parents.

Costs. The rising costs of tuition and expenses at colleges and universities worries parents. Tuition continues to outpace growth in wages, worrying many families that college is not a viable option (Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007; Stiglitz et al., 2000; The College Board, 2015). Despite this, many parents believe they will find a way to make it happen (Dyce et al., 2013; Herrold & O'Donnell, 2008; Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007), although only a quarter of parents are confident they have the money (Dyce et al., 2013). Recent media attention has also begun to highlight the struggles families, including those making \$100,000 or more a year, face with negotiating the costs (Lieber, 2017; Seligno, 2017). A recent report found a student from a family earning \$69,000 a year could only afford 5% of schools if not relying on loans and 26% if taking out loans. Even children from families earning \$105,000 a year cannot afford 40% of school when taking on loans (Poutre, Rorison, & Voight, 2017). These numbers assume the families had saved 10% of their disposable income the prior 10 years, something most families are not able to do (Poutre et al., 2017). It is important to know how parents are planning and saving for their children's college education.

Parents plan to pay through savings, current earnings, working more hours, and through student loans (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Sallie Mae, 2014a; Stiglitz et al., 2000). About 50% of single parent or remarried families say the ex-spouse will pay some college expenses. About 40% of single-parent or remarried families plan to have both biological parents contribute towards their college expenses (Sallie Mae, 2015). Low- and middle-income families are likely to rely on student loans. High-income families are more likely to plan on using savings and

earnings. They are also more likely to expect other family members contributions (for example, grandparents), and to get parent-specific loans (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008; Sallie Mae, 2014b). Other strategies include the parent getting an extra job, using retirement savings, equity loans, and taking out a second mortgage or refinancing an existing one (Sallie Mae, 2014b; Stiglitz et al., 2000).

Many parents lack a plan on how exactly college will be paid for. About 40% of parents with children under the age of 18 have a plan. High-income parents (\$100K+) are more likely to have a plan and college-educated parents spend the most time planning (Charles et al., 2007; Sallie Mae, 2014b). Meanwhile, a Sallie Mae (2014b) survey found 40% of parents are not saving or planning. These parents are less confident in meeting the costs required for college and plan to pay a smaller share of their children's costs. Parents with a plan are more likely to save and have a savings goal (Sallie Mae, 2014b). They are more likely to set realistic options on where the child can attend (McDonough, 1997).

Similar to plans on how to pay for college, disparities exist in who saves for their children's college education. About half of families with children under the age of 18 have saved for their children's college education, at an average of \$21,000. This amount is not specific to one child, meaning this could be spread across multiple children (Sallie Mae, 2014b). A study on middle-income parents with high school students reported average savings of \$15,000 (Manly & Wells, 2009). Some factors associated with saving are family income, parent education, prior family college experience, concerns and knowledge of costs, the amount parents are willing to pay, parent-child conversations about college, parents' and students' expectations, and students' GPA (Hossler & Vesper, 1993; Manly & Wells, 2009; Sallie Mae, 2014b; Steelman & Powell, 1989). Financial constraints are the main reason behind lack of savings. For parents with

incomes less than \$100,000 a year, they are more likely to save when they are willing to stretch financially and believe college is a sound investment (Sallie Mae, 2014b).

Whether saving or not, loans are a reality for most families. Between 1993 and 2013, the percentage of college graduates with a loan raised from about 20% to nearly 75%. During this time, average debt raised by more than \$25,000. About 15% of parents of eventual college graduates take on loans (Kantrowitz, 2014). Seventy percent of college seniors have debt, at \$30,000 on average (The Institute for College Access & Success, 2015). Students that do not graduate but take out loans leave with an average of \$15,000 (Avery & Turner, 2012). Eight in 10 parents think children have to take out too much in loans to finance their education (Immerwahr & Johnson, 2007). This seems to have made some parents and their children are adverse to debt (Autor, 2014; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Settersten & Ray, 2010).

Parents report their children's college ends up being paid for by a combination of grants and scholarships (30%), parents' income/savings (27%), student loans (18%), students' income/savings (11%), parent borrowing (9%), and funds from other family members and friends (Sallie Mae, 2014b). A third of families that take out loans did not expect to originally. Most families do not have back-up plans to pay for college if an emergency or job loss happens. Many do not have a plan on every year of college will be paid for (Sallie Mae, 2014a).

The parents' planning and saving has important implications for their children's pathways. Parental savings can send a message to their children of the expectations they have for them (Hossler et al., 1999). The increased costs in conjunction with the evidence that many parents do not have a plan and cannot save gives increased impetus to understand parents' perspectives on this process.

The financial realities of families. The planning of parents must be understood within the context of their broader financial reality. College savings are just one avenue their money can go. Retirement savings and “rainy day”/emergency savings are often a higher priority than college savings. How high of a priority college expenses are often dictates if families save (Yilmazer, 2008). Some parents have expressed guilt over choosing retirement over college savings (Iversen et al., 2011). Retirement savings makes up about half of the amount of money families save, while college savings comprises about 10% (Sallie Mae, 2014b). Many families are not able to save for any circumstance and have little to no net worth (Hacker, 2008; Napolitano et al., 2014; Stiglitz et al., 2000).

The college planning process, and the support parents can give, must contend with present day financial obligations. College savings may come in direct conflict with daily household expenses, parents’ own educational aspirations, child care for other children, college expenses for other children, unexpected expenses (i.e. garage door breaks), and unexpected economic times (Iversen et al., 2011; Napolitano et al., 2014). One study of middle-income families during the recession found families cut child college savings plans first when times get tough. Sports, clubs, and other activities for their children also generally were cut (Iversen et al., 2011; Napolitano et al., 2014).

The family financial context, and its implications for college-going expectations and planning, is important to understand. Siblings and grandparents, for instance may be influential factors. Parents may have to think about a sibling’s current or future college costs, such as the reality of paying for two children at the same time (Iversen et al., 2011). The number of siblings in the house is associated with an increased likelihood of the family taking on loans (Cha, Weagley, & Reynolds, 2005). Families with multiple children provide less support, and are more

likely to provide no support (Long & Riley, 2007; Yilmazer, 2008). Older siblings may be less likely to receive support, compared to younger ones. Younger siblings may have less competition for parents' resources (Steelman & Powell, 1989). It is particularly important to understand how the transitions of all of the children in a family influence parent support. In addition, grandparents can support their grandchildren to meet college costs (529 accounts, other savings accounts, etc.). We have little empirical information on how grandparents exactly do this (Baldwin, 2013; Powell, 2014; Tierney, 2002). Overall, more investigation is needed on the relationship between the financial realities of parents and the college planning process.

Counselors and schools: Their role with students and parents. Counselors and other school personnel can influence the college planning process. Generally, counselors can support children and their parents by: (1) by fostering college-going goals and an understanding of college generally; (2) supporting academic preparation; (3) Helping students make decisions; and (4) promoting a college-going atmosphere at the school (McDonough, 2005; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). They are particularly important for first-generation and low-income students and their parents. They can serve as a resource in providing information on tests, admissions requirements, financial aid, costs, and other information (McDonough, 1997, 2005; Tierney & Venegas, 2006; Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). Some schools have even started to foster college-going aspirations in elementary school (Oregon GEAR UP, 2015). It is important to understand how parents may or may not have utilized counselors to support their children.

Choice. The predispositions and search phases eventually lead the child and their parents to a final "choice set." The choice set includes applied to schools. It is influenced by the family's socio-economic background, the perceptions of affordability of an institution or a type of institution, the information available to the family, the child's academic achievement, and parent

encouragement (A. F. Cabrera et al., 2001; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Mullen (2010) argues students and their families make class-based decisions, and pick schools that fit “their kind.” These choice sets are a product of the expectations held by children and their parents, and the planning and preparation done to that point (Hossler et al., 1999). It is important then to understand expectations and their role in college planning, as this has implications for which schools may be considered, applied to, and eventually selected. The two manuscripts do not directly focus on choice, but expectations and support eventually influence it.

Parents are seen as the number one influence in schools considered (Hossler et al., 1999). Parents value proximity, particularly those from working- and middle-class backgrounds. They also value the program of study, campus safety, academic reputation, the quality of the faculty, job placement rates, and the financial aid available (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000). Parents are more likely to value safety and costs than their children (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000; Kirk et al., 2011). High-SES parents are the most likely to look at a broader range of locations (McDonough, 1997). They are also more likely to focus on their children’s competitiveness for institutional aid (Onink, 2014). Older siblings’ transitions may influence parents’ perceptions of a fit for the transitioning child (Goodman, Hurwitz, Smith, & Fox, 2014). The look and feel of schools also influence final choice set decisions (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Hossler et al., 1999; Mullen, 2010).

Location, and the ability to live at home, more often shape the choice sets of first-generation, low-income, and rural students (Bers, 2005; Koricich, 2014; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Students tend to “cool out” their aspirations throughout high school, coming to manageable options as they learn more about admissions and financial requirements (Horn et al., 2003; Hossler et al., 1999). It is not well known how parents help in this cooling process.

The aspirations, preparation, and choice sets all eventually lead the child and their parents towards a final decision. The final choice is influenced by the schools the child was admitted to, the family's income level, parents' aspirations and encouragement, financial considerations, student academic preparation, school quality, the importance of location for the child and the parents, and child characteristics (Bers, 2005; A. F. Cabrera et al., 2001; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). Costs, financial aid and knowledge of the higher education system seem to come into increased importance during this time.

Socio-economic disparities in choice have increased of late. Low-income students are far less likely than high-income students to attend a 4-year college (Plank & Jordan, 2001). This is true even when low-income students perform above average and high-income children perform below average (Plank & Jordan, 2001). The rate of high-income students attending elite and selective institutions has increased by more than 10% since 1985, while fewer middle-income students do so. Affluent families seem to be pushing out middle-income families from attending these schools (Astin & Oseguera, 2004). Tuition increases are a major reason behind these disparities. Parents are pivotal in allowing their children to attend more expensive and selective institutions: Loans and family finances are often needed to meet the high costs of these institutions (Presley et al., 2001; Steelman & Powell, 1989). Most low-income and middle-income families have a tough time meeting these demands (Stevens, 2007).

Families more than ever, of all income levels, are seen as cost-conscious and sensitive to their financial aid packages (Sallie Mae, 2014a). Children and their parents are more likely than ever to not select their first choice option. Instead, they are more likely to select the school that offers the best financial aid package (Eagan et al., 2013). For institutional aid, an additional

\$1,000 in grant aid increases the likelihood the child attends the school by 1.66% for all children, and 3% for children from families earning less than \$50,000 (Hurwitz, 2012).

Finally, parents' perspectives are needed on decisions involving community colleges. While the two manuscripts here focus on expectations and planning, their perspectives of community college through those phases may influence how they view community colleges. The decision to attend a community college happens at different points for families. About two-thirds of children make the decision to attend community college during their senior year, about 10% planned attending all along, and more than a quarter decide following graduation (Bers, 2005). For students that eventually enroll in a community college, anywhere from one-third to two-thirds applied and are accepted to 4-year schools (Bers, 2005; K. Smith & Bers, 1989). The decision to attend a community college is perceived as tougher for those that were admitted to 4-year institutions (K. Smith & Bers, 1989). Most parents (estimates of 80%) of children that enroll in a community college are involved in the college choice process. This involvement often happens later in high school (Bers & Galowich, 2003). Important factors for these parents include: Finances, allowing the child to work and go to school, location, allowing the child to save money, uncertainty of the child's major, and questions about their college readiness (Bers, 2005; Bers & Galowich, 2003; Long & Riley, 2007; Presley et al., 2001). It is important to continue to add to our knowledge of how parents work with their children and decide community college is the best route for their child, among those that consider 4-year options and those that do not. With the option of the free year of community college for these families, it is important to understand how that influenced planning moving forward.

Overall, the college choice process of parents is in need of deeper investigation into the role of parents and their perspectives on this complicated and yet necessary process.

Research Questions

Parents are an important aspect of a child's college planning process. The expectations they carry, and the type of support they provide, is important. Yet we also lack qualitative insights from parents on why exactly they want their child to go to college in the first place. It is also important to understand what they see as important areas of support they provided to their children that ultimately prepared them for college. The dissertation's two manuscripts address those issues.

The first manuscript addresses two key questions: 1) What do parents see college and a college degree providing for their children? 2) How do parents' own life experiences influence these views?

The second manuscript addresses two key questions: 1) How do parents support children in preparation and planning towards college? 2) What similarities exist between parents and their support by their educational, work, and family backgrounds?

The two manuscripts draw from a larger study of parents' perspectives and involvement in the complete college planning process. The four main questions that guided the larger study included:

1. How do parents support their children through the college choice process?
2. Why do parents support their children through this process?
 - a. What are barriers preventing parents from supporting their children?
3. What strategies do parents use to gather resources for this process?
 - a. What support would parents like to have in this process?

4. What contextual factors shape the role parents take in this process (i.e. interactions with school environment, sibling's college experience, and their own educational experiences)?

The dissertation next moves into the first manuscript, followed by the second. A concluding chapter follows provides reflections on how the current findings relate to past scholarship and assumptions, and importantly, provides insights for practice, policy, and future research.

Chapter 2: Study 1

How Parents' Lives Shape College Expectations for Their Children: School, Work, and
Family Experiences

How Parents' Lives Shape College Expectations for Their Children: School, Work, and Family Experiences

For centuries, higher education has been the means toward allowing everyone the opportunity for a better life (Delbanco, 2014). Since the end of the Civil War, its mission, once originally focused on educating the elite, extended to larger society. This education includes occupational and liberal arts training (Bok, 2015). In the United States, attending college and obtaining a degree/credential, is a key priority from individual to national levels (Bates & Anderson, 2014; Katehi, 2015). College educated individuals, both two-year and four-year graduates, are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Associate's degree and bachelor's degree holders expect to earn 24 percent and 66% more over their careers than high school graduates respectively (College Board, 2016).

One key factor in the pathway to college are parents. Most parents, regardless of socioeconomic status, expect their child to go to college (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). Parents' expectations influence child enrollment in direct and indirect ways. Parents' expectations influence their children's educational expectations, academic achievement, college planning, and enrollment decisions (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Charles et al., 2007; Froiland et al., 2013; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1994; Mistry, White, Benner, & Huynh, 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Sandefur et al., 2006; Zhang, Haddad, Torres, & Chen, 2011).

Parents' expectations are a product of their life course positions and experiences. Those from high socioeconomic means often develop college expectations for their child to go to maintain, or improve, their standing (Mullen, 2010). Parents who more recently climbed to the middle class via educational credentials also seem to expect their child to do the same. Working

class parents often hope attending college will provide better job prospects than what they experienced (Hamilton, 2016; Irwin & Elley, 2013; Mullen, 2010; Napolitano et al., 2014).

The reasons behind parents' expectations seem to have important implications for how parents support their children to college. These expectations often align with the larger mission of higher education. Some evidence suggests children's upbringing in college educated, typically higher-SES families influences them to see college as a means towards both a place to gain occupational skills and develop in personal domains (Mullen, 2010). This perspective more often articulates the importance of the liberal arts education, as well as skill development, with its focus on the development of critical thinking, expansion of worldview, empathy, and the ability to learn (Bok, 2015; Delbanco, 2014; Zakaria, 2014).

Children from less privileged backgrounds are perceived as having college engrained as a place to gain job-skills (Hamilton, 2016; Mullen, 2010), aligning more with the view college is a place of development of concrete skills that translate specifically to the world of work (Bok, 2015). Little research has looked into why parents develop expectations for their children to go to college and their visions of what college should provide for them. This seems particularly important given the influence of parents' expectations on children's expectations and college planning (Hossler et al., 1999). Parents' views about the purpose of higher education may influence their own children's views its purpose, where they go, how they experience college, and what they study (Hamilton, 2016; Mullen, 2010). It is important for higher education institutions to understand the role of parents to best support and recruit students.

This article investigates how parents of college-bound high school graduates developed their expectations for their children and their visions of what college should provide for them. The current study particularly investigates the influence of parents' life histories and contexts, as

it seems to have important implications to how they parent their children for life after high school. It also looks at the variation within and across socioeconomic status. As Hamilton noted in her study of parenting practices of college-aged children, “Parents views of college are not just shaped by their current class standing; they carry their complex class histories with them” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 34).

The College Planning Process

Considerable interest of late is on understanding what factors predict whether a child makes it to college, and what influences expectations, planning, and decisions. The role of parents, and particularly their expectations, directly and indirectly influence a child’s pathway to college (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Charles et al., 2007; Hossler et al., 1999; Mistry et al., 2009; Perna & Titus, 2005; Zhang et al., 2011). However, a deeper understanding is needed to understand parents’ visions of what college can provide for their children, and how parents’ own life histories may influence the college planning process.

A child’s pathway to college is a process of the child developing the expectations to go to college, academic preparation, investigation into different potential schools, and finally a decision between any schools considered (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999; Tierney, 2002). A child’s expectations to go to college are then a key first step towards college enrollment and set in motion and influence planning, preparation, and decisions (Hossler et al., 1999). A parent’s expectations for their child are an important factor in shaping the child’s expectations, academic preparation, and several aspects of the planning and decision making process (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1994, 1997). The influence, and importance, of parents’ expectations throughout this process makes it important to understand what shapes them.

Parent Expectations

Parents' life histories and context shape their expectations. Generally, one's geographical, historical, and temporal location, and their experiences within educational and employment institutions influences their perspectives and actions (Elder et al., 2015). According to cultural capital theory, one's expectations are shaped by their habitus, or the internalized beliefs and perceptions they carry. These beliefs and perceptions, influenced by one's context, shapes one's expectations (Grodsky & Riegle-Crumb, 2010; McDonough, 1994; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). It also influences the timing and nature of the expectations. This can have implications for the college planning process (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997).

A parent's habitus is important in the context of one's cultural capital, or resources and skills accumulated. This capital is usually transferred to their children (Tierney, 2002). In education, this can be thought of as knowledge of the educational system, such as opportune times to engage in certain academic and logistical pursuits, and how to effectively navigate towards them (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; McDonough, 1997). Parents can utilize their capital to support the preparation and planning of their children. Higher-SES parents often possess more capital, advantaging them within institutions, such education (Bourdieu, 1986; Tierney, 2002). Cultural capital becomes an advantage when it is activated (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). For the college planning process, it can mean fostering their children's expectations, as well as college preparation and planning towards those goals. A parent's habitus influences if, when, and how individuals utilize their cultural capital. This can have important implications for preparation ultimately towards and during college (Hamilton, 2016; Lareau, 2011; Mullen, 2010).

Impact of Parent Expectations and Dispositions

One prominent study on the influence of habitus and cultural capital in education is Lareau's (2011) intimate study of family life. Her work highlighted differences in parents' dispositions, which influenced parenting style. Starting quite early in life, the environments created based on family resources and parenting styles shaped differences in pathways. Middle- and high-SES families practiced a parenting style Lareau labeled as *concerted cultivation*. This style includes strategic efforts to develop their children's talents, academic and otherwise, towards success in school. These families had the resources to make such efforts, including intervening when needed. For poor and working-class families, they followed the strengths and weaknesses of the child, letting them naturally grow without heavy academic intervention and strategic efforts (Lareau, 2011). By elementary school graduation, Lareau noted, the sense of expectations of the parents already varied, with bigger things (i.e. college) already seemingly in the minds of the upper-middle class parents and children. When these families were revisited post-high school, children raised in a concerted cultivation fashion had better academic trajectories.

Mullen's (2010) interviews with Yale and Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) students documented differences in the habitus between the students, which influenced college preparation, planning, and decisions. Yale students stressed the importance of the liberal arts component of college, including the development of critical thinking, citizenship, and ability to learn (Bok, 2015). SCSU students were more practical in their choice, aiming to gain a credential to get a job. These students emphasized the vocational related end of the purpose of college (Bok, 2015; Delbanco, 2014). For them, SCSU served the role of gaining job market translational credentials than broader liberal arts training. Student views appeared to be influenced through their upbringing, suggesting parents' perspectives of college helped shape

children's views of college (Mullen, 2010). Using a sample of college-aged children and their parents, Hamilton (2016) found parents' backgrounds influenced their visions of what college should be for their children. These visions influenced their parenting practices. These practices swayed how their children interpreted and experienced college. For example, parents that saw college as a time of occupational training and personal development were more likely to let their children make mistakes to learn from them, and stressed the development of personal and job-related skills. Some affluent parents stressed the social aspect of college, to the detriment of occupational training (Hamilton, 2016).

Parents' educational and occupational experiences have been shown elsewhere to influence expectations and parenting practices (Irwin & Elley, 2013; Iversen et al., 2011; Napolitano et al., 2014). For parents with college experience, they fostered the expectations for their children to take the same pathway. This often influenced their parenting through involvement in school, extra-curricular activities, and financial support to supplement their development. For working class parents, their expectations came from a lack of encouragement they received to go college, and negative work experiences. They wished not to see their own children experience that pathway (Irwin & Elley, 2013; Napolitano et al., 2014).

Overall, the influence of parents' life experiences on their expectations seem to have important implications for parenting practices. For college specifically, what parents see college providing for their children may influence all phases of the college planning process. It is important to assess parents' expectations, where they come from, and how it shapes their vision of what college provides. It is important to understand this process for within and between social classes as well. Research suggests parents' reasons behind their educational expectations, and specifically the purpose they see in their children going to college, may provide different college

planning pathways. As Hamilton noted, “When scholars model the role of parents by proxy- looking only at parental income, education, and occupation – we miss the mechanisms (i.e., the underlying beliefs and practices) that explain the important variation in student outcomes within larger class groups” (Hamilton, 2016, p. 18).

The Current Study

In order to understand these mechanisms, the current study addresses two larger questions: 1) What do parents see college and a college degree providing for their children? 2) How do parents’ own life experiences influence these views?

Sample & Methods

The sample comes from 35 interviews with parents of 35 college-bound high school seniors. They were conducted between June and October 2015. The interviews focused on the parents’ role in the college planning process. The families come from two high schools within the same Northwestern city of about 50,000 people. The city’s overall population is largely white (83% white, 11% Latino, and 1% each in African American, Asian American, and Native American populations). About 25% of the city’s population has a four-year college degree and 90% graduated from high school or attained their GED. About 20% of the population lives in poverty and the median household income is \$48,000. The percentage in poverty is higher than its state’s and the national average. The median income is slightly lower than the state and national averages (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The city contains a hospital, community college, and a large distribution center for a retail chain. Most women in the city work in healthcare and social assistance, education, or retail. Most men work in manufacturing or construction, as well as retail.

The city's two high schools have a combined enrollment of about 2,600 students. George Washington High School (pseudonyms utilized for both high schools and other sensitive information) has a student population of just under 1,300 students with 55% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Roughly, 75% of its students attend some form of college after graduation. Of those that attend college, 20% attend a 4-year university or college. Lincoln High School has a student population of just more than 1,300. About 30% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. About 90% of its students attend college after graduating, with 35% heading to 4-year schools. Both high schools offered at the time a fifth-year dual-enrollment program. This program allowed a student that met graduation requirements to attend community college for free by staying a fifth year in high school. It covered the cost of tuition for 12 credits, as well as a stipend for books. Parents were eligible to participate in the interviews if their child selected the 5th year program because they were seen by the community college as being college students, would only be taking college classes, and met high school graduation requirements otherwise.

Parents were recruited via e-mail messages sent out by principals from both high schools, flyers were passed out at each high school's senior night and graduation ceremonies, and at least two letters were sent to each parent's home informing them of the study. Snowball sampling was also utilized. At the end of the interview, the parent(s) were asked if they knew anybody that would be eligible and interested in participating. Eligibility requirements included being the parent (or significant other of the parent) to a child graduating from one of the two sampled high schools who planned to attend some form of post-secondary education after high school (including the fifth-year program).

Interviews were scheduled at a time and place of convenience for the parent(s). Most interviews were conducted in the parents' homes or a coffee shop. Interviews averaged 60-90

minutes in length. They covered a range of topics from developing expectations for their child to go to college, support provided, and how college decisions were made. This article's findings draw primarily from three sets of questions: 1) When did you first think about [name] as college bound? Why did you see [name] in this way? 2) What do you see as the biggest benefits of your child attending college? What do you see as the biggest costs? 3) How have your own educational experiences shaped your expectations for [name]? How have your job experiences shaped your expectations? How have your spouse/partners' experiences influenced expectations? The study was approved by the university IRB. All parents received a \$20 gift card to a local grocery store for participation.

Thirty-five interviews were conducted in total, with four being via snowball methods. Fourteen interviews were conducted with two parents, the remaining with one. Characteristics about the families are available in Table 1. Seventy-one percent of the families had at least one parent with a college degree, 34% had two. The median family income was \$85,000 (range \$24,000-\$500,000), higher than the town median. The average child GPA was 3.47. The majority of students enrolled in a community college or in-state university (18 and 11 respectively). Four students selected to attend a private institution and two an out-of-state public university (Table 1).

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the first author. The first author read all the transcripts and interview notes several times. Transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.TI qualitative software and were first coded following an open coding method. Preliminary open codes were based on topics from parents' direct words and concepts from past scholarship (Charmaz, 2003). The codes and coding frame were reviewed and comparisons between and within codes helped refine the coding framework. Refined codes included "school experiences-

college experience,” “work experience- need degree,” and “standard of living/lifestyle.” Given emerging themes from the data, as well as research suggesting possible income and education differences between parents in developing college expectations and their role in the college planning process (Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997), the first author further reviewed the selected codes to analyze possible socio-economic variability. Discrete categories were not created in order to utilize the variability of parent background. For example, some families had a parent with a four-year degree. However, some of those parents received their degree during young adulthood while others did not graduate until mid-life, after their children were born. Discrete categories would mask intra-category variation. A final review of the code reports helped refine major themes identified, mentioned below.

Since the study had an eligibility requirement of having a college-bound child to participate, all parents voiced expectations that their child would attend college growing up. For most parents this was an expectation from the child’s birth, and was not really a question of whether or not they would go. Only a few parents did not develop their expectations before their child was in middle school. Given all parents had expectations, and generally expectations very early in life, the analysis below focuses on the details of those expectations. The research below shows that expectations for the same end goal (i.e. a college credential), can look different depending on the life course of the parents and their perspectives of the educational and employment institutions in the United States.

Findings

Gateway to Stable Work

All the parents see a college degree providing their children both opportunity for employment and stability in their workforce status. Parents see college providing opportunities

for employment in solid, good-paying jobs. Some parents saw the benefits it brought to their own lives in terms of pay and job security when they went back to school and finished a credential. John, a 50-year-old married father of two children, went back to school after service in the Navy and time in the workforce. He obtained his bachelor's degree and now is a financial representative for an insurance agency. Before his degree, and training at his new company, his family experienced a few instances of financial insecurity because of lack of education and vulnerability to layoffs during unsteady economic times. He sees a college degree as providing his daughter with a more direct path towards a comfortable lifestyle. "I think she'll have less stress in her life over the long-haul than we did. We got married early and had to struggle to get where we are. I think her trajectory will be a lot faster..." For parents like John, and his wife Sabrina, they hope a college degree will provide a better life than what they experienced, a common sentiment in American culture.

Beyond general employment, parents see a degree as empowering their children by opening up more options. They see a degree as more likely providing a career, and not just a job. Cora, a 47-year-old married mother of three, had recently graduated with a master's in social work and hired on as a specialist for a local school district. To her, a degree flips the script and gives more power of choice to the person.

If you don't go to college you don't have access to a lot of career opportunities and it's pretty empowering to be able to, regardless whether she goes into nursing, she gets to make that choice, it's not made for her. With our society today there is a not lot of jobs that are careers that are self-supportive. That's pretty powerful to be able to be the driver of your own bus instead of looking at ads on craigslist and saying "where can I just make money to survive."

Cora, and her husband Jamie, also college educated, were two among many parents that wanted their children to not be forced into low-wage, low-ceiling type work. These parents, as

Cora noted, hope for their children to have careers in something they enjoy, rather than just getting by.

Aside from the sentiment of career versus job, some parents have had direct experience with seeing the vulnerability of not having a college degree in today's society. Mindy, a 43-year-old married mother of two, has a bachelor's degree and currently is the director of a non-profit. She noticed the lack of options one has without a degree when her husband, John, lost his job in management when his employer went under. Without a degree, he struggled to find a job despite his experience.

... I'm not necessarily saying that everybody needs to go to college but my husband was in management for 20 years and then he wasn't. And when you start to look for another job, even though you have 20 years' experience but you don't have that college degree that they're asking for, and it's kind of a tough sell. And so I tell her, it's not necessarily what you get your degree in, but it is showing an employer that you put four years into getting that degree.

Similar to Mindy's comments, this desire by parents for a child to get some form of postsecondary education credential was often in response to personal experiences of seeing employers more and more preferring, if not demanding, a college education. William, a 53-year-old married stepfather to focal child Rose, has a high school diploma and was laid off from his position as a production worker at a local factory at the time of the interview. William notes for younger workers, they must advance their education to obtain the same jobs he and his generation has had.

Well right now the job situation, most employers are asking for college degrees, regardless of whether they might not even apply to the job. And most times they don't, you know. It will be a necessity for younger workers ... For us old people, you know, they don't expect us to have one. But for the newer workers coming in, they do expect it, a degree.

Similar to William, Wesley and his wife Bonnie talked with their son Aiden about the importance of obtaining a degree in today's society, even for industries that once did not require

credentials. Both Bonnie and Wesley have managed to get by in life without an associate's degree or higher, but understand that will not be an option for their son.

Bonnie: I think the most vocal that I was with him actually was to tell him that you thought how much you should have gone to school. And how the jobs you currently have are now, they are requiring that you have at least a bachelor's. And he just got in before that happened so he's always told them, this isn't going to happen, you know?

Wesley: So for example, I got really lucky, I got grandfathered in, nobody can get hired in my position without a degree. I don't have one.

For these parents, a college degree gets a person's foot in the door, even if the degree is not in the same area as the job position. They know their children will be constrained without some form of credential. Several parents felt they got their job because they simply had a degree, regardless of the major to job fit. Victor, a 57-year-old married father of three, has a master's degree in marine biology. He was unable to obtain a job in his area of study but feels he obtained work in other areas because of his degree. Victor's oldest daughter graduated with a bachelor's degree in public health and got hired at an insurance company.

... So the thing is, we can sum it up, we know from ourselves, at least in my case, I think you are always better off if you have a degree or certificate. That will support you to show that you are valuable. And then we decided the same thing for our daughter.

To parents, a college degree is a symbol of what skills a person has and/or what type of worker they are. In general, a degree was a sign of holding more universal skills such as follow-through and adaptable skills such as critical thinking, applicable in various settings. Melinda, a 53-year-old married mother of three, has a bachelor's degree and now serves as a manager at an organic fruit market. She previously worked at a technology company and observed diversity in backgrounds doing the same job.

I think going to college, to me, it rounds you as a person. I don't really think it matters what your major is. Because being in a technology company and seeing all the different degrees that I worked with, or the people with degrees that I

worked with, and you know it didn't matter ... And it just, it rounds you, it rounds you out as a person. It teaches you how to research and to read and to write and yea so.

Craig, a 47-year-old married father of two, has some college experience and runs his own fishing and insurance companies. Despite not having a degree himself, he noted favoring those with a degree.

I just think his, as an employer, I personally if I hire, I don't care honestly what their degree is. But the fact that they had the gumption to get into college is pretty impressive to me, however they did it. I don't care if somebody paid for it, they still had to go do it. That to me shows perseverance. And that, at the very basics, looks really good on a resume.

For parents like Craig with his hiring experience or Melinda with her time at the technology company, these parents see the skills a degree gives a person, both in skill development and perceptions of themselves as a worker. They know their children will be better off having a degree, no matter where they go in their working years.

Some parents also noted the safety net a college degree can provide, such as if divorce or health issues were to come for their children's future significant other. Megan, a 47-year-old mother of three, is a pharmacist. She recalled her parent's divorce and a conversation with her grandfather. He pushed her to go to college to avoid any vulnerability in case of divorce. Coupled with her husband Roger's parents' divorce, they do not want their children vulnerable in those types of situations. She prefers her children get practical degrees that tie directly to a career, making it easier in her eyes to gain meaningful employment.

We kind of collectively realized that it's important that you have something. You don't know if your spouse will get sick and die, you just don't know. It's important that you have something you can use to support yourself when you need to.

In all, parents see a post-secondary education credential as opening up opportunities for employment and often options in what type of job they obtain. The hopes for their children's future jobs often tied to the type of lifestyle they hope for their children to have.

A Bridge to the Middle Class

Parents' perspectives on what a degree provides extended past just being able to get and maintain a job. Parents see benefits in the type of job obtained and accompanying lifestyle. For working-class parents, and recent entrants into the middle-class, they see a college degree as a way out of working more labor intensive and undesirable jobs. Their visions resemble closely what most would consider the idealized middle-class lifestyle. Kelly, a 40-year-old divorced mother of two and applications analyst, sees a college degree helping her daughter avoid long hours and undesirable schedules, for lower pay, that she has had to endure. "Well I tell her all the time I want her to work smart not hard. Do not work double shifts like your mom. Don't do it because it sucks."

Bella, a 54-year-old mother of three children is partnered with Clint, a 53-year-old high school graduate and union laborer. Bella previously worked at a timber company but her body eventually could not handle the work. She got her credentials to be a real estate agent and has since instilled in Jeffrey, Clint's son, the longevity more intellectual jobs have compared to manual labor ones.

His dad is a union laborer and we've always told him that sometimes that breaks your body down, just like myself in my younger years, I used to work at a lumber mill. And after a while, physical labor can break your body down. And he has a brain so he might as well utilize that.

For parents like Bella, who only recently has seen her family move more into the middle-class, she has seen both sides of what life is like with and without credentials. Like her, Annett, a married mother of two, discussed her blue-collar upbringing and her husband's battle through

poverty growing up as motivational factors for wanting their children to go to college. Annett and her husband obtained their bachelor's degrees and have a very comfortable life. However, they remind their children of what they experienced growing up and the importance of education in providing the lifestyle they have.

My parents didn't have a four-year degree. In South Dakota you could graduate in two years and get your teaching license. And so I was the youngest grandkid on her side of the family so I had... no one had finished college ... And my parents were very poor. And they saved for my college, they're very frugal. And they paid for my college and you know I paid extraneous anything but they made sure I had housing and tuition. And so from my perspective, and the kids understand this too, you grow up, you have the responsibility and a pressure and appreciation to succeed and do well.

For parents like Bella, Kelly, and Annett, their experiences, currently or previously, in the working class has them wanting their children the option to avoid the work and lifestyle that comes with options that are more limited.

For middle- and upper-class parents, a college degree is a necessity for their children in order to maintain their status in the socio-economic ladder. For some parents, their lifestyle has been maintained for a while, and their children's college attendance is a normal step towards extending that culture. Eric, a 54-year-old married father of Colton, is a chief operations officer and comes an educated family. For him, a degree provides the possibility of doing something you like to do, modeling that in turn for his son. Colton enrolled in a private university out-of-state and plans to become a dentist.

He just sees it from that side of the family they're all very successful, really nice homes and cars. And that isn't a measure of success, they're very happy and challenged by the things that they do. They can't wait to get up and go to work each day. Whereas some people "ehhh I got to go to work for the man and you know what I'm going to go get a paycheck." No, I'm not that person. I can't wait to get to work each day because there are things that I can do better. I can help our company make more money and I can help people achieve greater things themselves. And I think he saw that level of excitement from them and said, you know what, I want to be a part of that as well.

In addition, Eric and his family's educational and professional experiences also stressed the type of degree he pushed towards his son, even down to suggesting dentistry over medicine because of the pay opportunity.

Similar to Eric's comment, many parents expressed a desire for their child to like the career they go into. They see college as more likely providing that opportunity, yet still providing a stable income. Jane, a 46-year-old married mother of two boys, has a bachelor's degree and is a volunteer director for a small non-profit. Her husband Kevin has a bachelor's degree and is an engineer. She expresses those dual hopes for her college-bound son.

He's a thinker and he wants a desk job and so I know that he ... he wouldn't be happy in a job that didn't require I think a college education. But so the, you know career aspects and you know income related possibilities, we are expecting that would help. That would pay off the investment of the college, gets paid off eventually by your income.

In addition to greater happiness with work, the parents also see benefits in work-family balance. They know middle-class, white-collar, jobs usually provide greater flexibility in their schedules and opportunities to be present with their children. Brian, a 47-year-old divorced father of two, has two associate's degrees and is an engineering technician for the county roads department. His job offers him more time with his children after school and on the weekends compared to his ex-wife, who works as a clerk.

She (the mother) never went to school, college. I think she took one term at the community college and that was it. And then started working for grocery stores and that's all she's ever done is clerking. And so they saw her working strange hours and weekends, stuff like that. And dad's here, maybe he's working when we go to school and when we come home he comes home ... So they saw the benefits of that, having an education and working those types of hours then the parent-child relationship grows stronger because I'm working the same hours that they're working and when we come we get to share together as a family.

For Brian, this was important given his son's learning disabilities. Megan, among other parents, also noted the ability of one or two parents to have the flexibility to be their kids. Between her job as a pharmacist and her husband's job in real estate, they were able to manage their schedules when their children were little to go without the need for daycare. They have remained equally present, and invested, in their children's schooling, since then.

We had daycare real early on but after Ruth was about four we just made it work where one of us was at home and that I think was important. We were able to raise our kids with our own values and not rely on somebody else.

Megan, Brian, and other parents hope their children can have the same option when they eventually start their own families. Alongside being more marketable for employment, parents see a myriad of benefits of the types of jobs their children can obtain with a degree, and the type of lifestyle it provides. For many of the parents, they hope for their child to get the most happiness from their job, while having the flexibility for a stable, happy family life too. And for some parents, their perceptions of college go beyond fostering employment, and towards the development of their child.

Growth and Identity into Adulthood

Most parents shared similar views that a degree is more likely to provide a stable, good-paying job. However, a point of demarcation came in perceptions of the benefit college provides to one's personal development. For college-educated parents particularly, they note numerous benefits of their children simply going to college, regardless of what they study and intend to do after. They see college providing a time of personal growth and development. Corynn, a married mother of four, exemplifies many parents' sentiments with her discussion about the space for growth college can provide.

... But I think just the other benefit is just growing up. I mean just that time to figure out yourself and life and figure out a direction. I mean just, it's such a

different experience. I mean you're kind of on your own but yet our kids weren't having to financially having to bear all that burden. I mean they didn't have to go to work and try to go to school and try to do all this stuff. So they have the freedom to go and devote their time to studies and devote their time to social time or the sport that they chose to do or you know. But on the other hand the money they did get for food or whatever they had to figure out how to balance some of that stuff and make it last for the month. If they want to go out to dinner every night that's not going to last you [laughing].

Corynn's comments point to a key divergence in perspectives and realities for families in opportunities for college. Her comment points to a vision of college many families cannot provide for their children. It is closest to the residential college experience, with the child not expected to work a large amount of hours while in school. The opportunities provided by social and economic standing gives some children the opportunity for a different experience than those that have to commute and/or work significant hours to afford the related costs. Some of these parents directly discussed the benefits of having the "college experience" as opposed to taking advantage of the fifth year dual-enrollment program option. Jane, mentioned above, speaks about the decision the family had to make between the costs related to sending their child directly to a residential state university versus delaying a year and having their son take classes for free at the local community college.

I guess like, comparing it to [the community college] for example, and you know these last two years they've had that 5th year high school [program] and a lot of kids took that opportunity and did that. But I guess my husband and I always felt like, boy, college was such a great experience, living on campus being part of that college environment. It's such a great experience. And we wouldn't want them to miss that opportunity. And so we really felt like, you know, he needs to go move on campus and have that experience that we really enjoyed. And I guess if we hadn't, then we wouldn't have maybe relayed that to him.

Not all families went this route and the child did enroll in the 5th year program. These parents mostly see their child eventually transferring to a four-year residential college. For the parents that did value the experience component, and had the resources to provide that, that sets

up another set of expectations for their children when they go to look at potential schools. For children like Martin, they have the realistic opportunity to look at residential schools, based on the parents' expectations of college and the resources to match them.

Parents also see college as a providing a safe space to make, and learn, from mistakes. For many parents, particularly ones with college experience or worries of their children's current maturation status, college is an opportune time to make smaller mistakes in college, struggling with relationships and direction, even failing a class, rather than going straight into the workforce. Dale, a 55-year-old married surgeon and father of three biological and two stepchildren, sees college as somewhat of a safe holding pattern for young people, before they are ready to handle themselves in the real world.

I think college is like a finishing school for life at this point. I don't think people learn any skills that they need in work, I think you learn your work skills at work, but I don't think 18-year-olds with very few exceptions are ready to go out and take life on in any meaningful way. I guess at one point they were, I'd have to guess the world was very different then. I knew some guys who I went to high school with who stepped out into the workforce at 18, not a single one of them did very well. I think the reason they didn't go to college because they were already sort of screw ups in high school and that's why they didn't go away. And I think people nowadays in our complex world require four more years to get done. I think that's how long it takes to be an adult. I mean you're not really an adult until you've been through it, you need to have kind of a soft-cushy place to make a bunch of bad mistakes, you need to learn how to deal with social situations on your own, and I think it's a good way to do it.

His comments point to the reality that college can provide students, within reason, experience with setbacks that will not likely look poorly on them in the job market. Jamie, a married father of three, has a bachelor's degree and works in the juvenile justice system. For him, he knows mistakes will happen to his children, but it provides opportunities for growth too.

I think you learn to deal with some teachers that I really didn't care for and you learn how to get along or not get along with them. Getting along with other people, people you live with, that's a whole another experience. I think of Malia in college, I want her to experience some of those things. We all think "well I

turned out ok.” We hope she has similar experiences. I think all parents want better for their kids, want them to do more and have a better experience and I also approach it that way. I don’t want them to make the same mistakes I made. I want them to make their own mistakes. Different mistakes.

For Jamie and Dale, and other parents, they see college as helpful in developing maturity, relationships, and a sense of responsibility. Jamie’s comment also points to another benefit parents see; expansion of worldview. Many noted college-providing exposure to different people, ideas, and often settings, regardless of postsecondary institution attended. They see the diversity of student populations and perspectives in higher education help develop their children into more accepting and aware people. Debbie, a 57-year-old divorced mother of Carrie, draws upon her own experiences of going to college later in her life.

I think that, I know that I grew as a person going to school and interacting with people socially. It opens your eyes, it changes you. It stretches you in different ways and challenges you, that critical thinking as other people contribute to that. Those discussions, it’s interesting to hear. It makes you realize that it’s not all about you. It’s a good journey.

Nick, a married father of two and a pastor at a local church, sees college as providing daughter Liz exposure to people that are different from her more rural, somewhat isolated perspective. He recounted a story of Liz having had strong opinions about Vegans, but then a friend became one, forcing her to reevaluate the type of person she saw as being a vegan. He hopes college provides more opportunities for exposure to people different from her.

Yea, and I think that would be especially beneficial for Liz because she does tend to be very opinionated in particular way of looking at the world and lifestyle and towards stuff like that. Not that her opinions are wrong, but being exposed, not just being exposed to the variety of people out there that don’t share her views and lifestyle but also to learn to interact with them in ways that are positive and broadens her a little bit more so that she is not quite as prejudice perhaps in her views.

Parents are also aware that different schools often provide different worldviews. Despite his daughter choosing to go the 5th year program route, Nick pushed heavily for his daughters to

go to a Christian college because he supported the views that the university stressed and wanted imparted on his children.

Well my factors were [laughing], again, more of a Christian world-view type of thing. That's just increasingly becoming more important for me at least given the direction that some of the other colleges are going in terms of the worldview that they're basically instilling into the students. It's becoming increasingly different than a Christian world view.

Like Nick, Nadine, a mother of two with some college experience, worried about the lifestyle and distractions of more liberal campuses. She supported her daughter's desire to go to a Christian university, which fit Nadine's view of the type of people she wanted around her in the key developmental time. While not tied only to religion, many parents were very aware that not only does college influence one's development and worldview, but also it looks different depending on where their child goes. Important factors included demographics, location, or quality of the school. Some schools were not seen as fitting the parent's vision of what college should be for their child in terms of who they will be around and what they will experience. Whether it matters in final decisions, parents' initial feelings about where they want their child and whom they want them surrounded by, seems to influence at least the planning process with their children.

Discussion

Most parents' aspire for their children to go to college and play important roles, directly and indirectly, in supporting their children's pathways to college (Hossler et al., 1999; Spera et al., 2009). For some, college provides occupational training necessary to enter the workforce. It also provides, via the liberal arts curriculum, skills applicable to all jobs, such as problem solving and critical thinking, among others. Finally, it ensures the development of a well-informed citizenry (Bok, 2015; Delbanco, 2014; Zakaria, 2014). In the current study, parents' expectations

of what college should provide for their children similarly aligned with these missions. Most stressed the importance of a credential to gain job security. In an era where the value and purpose of education have become more instrumental (Delbanco, 2014; Zakaria, 2014), fewer parents stressed the importance of college providing non-work related growth. Yet there is increasing attention by some to the significance of “soft skills” in both work and life domains (Delbanco, 2014; Zakaria, 2014).

The differences in views on what college provides has important implications for the college planning process. A key tension is often in the balance between liberal arts type training - more focused on development of critical thinking, citizenship, reading, and writing - and occupation specific training (Bok, 2015; Delbanco, 2014). Perceptions of the purpose of college may influence decisions between schools and how parents communicate to their child how college should be experienced (Hamilton, 2016; Mullen, 2010). Parents’ expectations of what their children should be doing in college, including choosing a major, influence how they parented during those years. For some parents, the act of going to college is enough, for others a great deal of focus goes to selection of a major (Hamilton, 2016). Mullen (2010) found upper class students enrolled in Yale spoke of the importance of liberal arts training and the college atmosphere as the key to their educational and personal growth. The working and middle class students enrolled at a commuter public university emphasized majors that translate specifically into jobs (Mullen, 2010). For the current study, some parents, such as Megan and Brian, obtained credentials for particular jobs. In turn, these parents support more applied majors, stressing the importance in college providing occupational skills. Other parents, such as Victor and Wesley, do not emphasize a major as much as getting the degree – their experience reinforce college degrees as the “foot in the door.” These parents are more open with a child choosing a less

defined career path. These perspectives can be important then in how they talk to their children during the college planning process. Parent values and its influence on parenting is important for counselors and institutions to understand in order to adequately support and recruit students.

Parents' school and work experiences revealed a connection to the expectations they have for their children. College-educated families saw a college degree as the way to maintain their social standing. These families were typically the most resourced. Their understanding of the educational system and values of the type of work - usually professional - influenced their support. Eric's son selected a private university with the hope one day of becoming a dentist, an idea somewhat planted by his father. Eric's vision of college for his son seemed to influence his support. Other research has found well-to-do families more often stress selecting professional careers, and have the resources to secure places at selective universities (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010; Stevens, 2007). For families to capitalize on their visions, they must also have the capital to do it - more often held and successfully utilized by higher-SES families (Hamilton, 2016; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). It is important in the future to continue to understand how parents' visions, coupled with their resources, come together to influence child trajectories. For institutions, it is important to understand how these advantages may lead to a self-selection of career pathways, furthering inequalities.

For working class families, their life experiences fostered visions of college yielding the stable, middle-class lifestyle idealized in the United States. Prior research on parenting practices of college-aged children found working class individuals saw having a degree as presenting better opportunities, regardless of degree type, than the jobs they experienced without a credential. Parents who entered the middle-class, but had experiences in the working class, saw first-hand what a degree can provide in both occupational opportunities and personal

development (Hamilton, 2016). For the current study, working-class and many middle-class parents spoke of their desire for their child to grab - or hold onto - a spot in the middle class. Most had some college experience, with a two- or four-year degree. Many at one point lived a blue-collar lifestyle, sometimes moving to the middle class later in adulthood. They, like the working class parents in Hamilton's study, see a degree as providing social mobility or stability. Parents' work and educational experiences may well shape how they parent and help their children make decisions. These parents have high expectations, but often lack the knowledge to navigate the higher education system. They are an important population to reach.

Parents' visions of college were also influential in shaping how they weighed different institutions in light of their financial situations. For college-educated parents like Jane, her vision of college trumped the cost savings of community college, as she emphasized the experiences and personal growth college provides. For these parents, college occurs during a critical time of identity development, maturation, and the taking on of more responsibility, moving eventually towards independence (Settersten & Ray, 2010). These parents emphasized the need to be able to focus on oneself, relatively free of obligations of adult life. Most working-class families did not mention this, perhaps because such experiences come at a heavy financial cost. Future research should continue to investigate this transmission of perspectives. Parents who value "learning for learning's sake" may influence their children to feel the same. This can have important implications as to how students engage in college, what they get out of it, and the transmission of social class between generations.

Another mission of higher education is to provide the opportunities to expand one's worldview. Delbanco (2014) noted college as a "rehearsal space" for learning to interact with others not like oneself, and growing productively from that. Some parents in the current study

were keenly aware that college might or should, provide that opportunity. Parents want their children to expand their worldview, yet for some, still hold close to the family's values. Nadine, and others, explicitly talked about possible negative influences of the college experience (i.e. exposure to alcohol, sex), and discussed how the campus atmosphere influenced choices. For example, religious and state institutions provide different environments. What parents see college optimally providing influenced where they felt their child should go to school. Mullen (2010) found similar self-sorting into schools based on background and lifestyle fit. Further research should continue to investigate the role of parents in defending their choices, as parents' values likely influence the environments they perceive as appropriate for their children.

Finally, Jamie, Dale, and other mostly college-educated parents, know their children will make mistakes. For them, college is a safer space to make them, rather than in the real world where implications might be more severe. Many working class youth do not get such protections (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Silva, 2012). The parents' comments point to their understanding of the more prolonged pathway towards adulthood in today's society (Settersten, 2012; Settersten & Ray, 2010). Parents seem to acknowledge that it takes longer to become an adult anymore, both because of need of further education and personal development. When we think of disadvantages between socio-economic groups, to higher-SES parents, college serves a dual-purpose of providing credentials to obtain a good job and a safety net to shield from larger mistakes that happens to some young people.

Limitations

The study also has some limitations. First, the interviews were conducted with parents of college-bound children. This missed parents with college-going expectations for their children who did not eventually go. In addition, the interviews only gained the perspectives of the parents

and only gained them at the end of the process. Past work by Hossler and colleagues (1999) suggests following parents and children over time gains more information on the process from both parent and child perspectives. McDonough's (1997) and Lareau's (2011) more ethnographic work helps capture family dynamics and the college planning process in a more thorough manner. The interviews did not capture those dynamics, but this type of work is needed. Finally, the interviews were conducted in a town with a community college and close to a four-year university. This may have influenced parents' perspectives given the presence of the two schools in the area. Future work should research families farther from institutions of higher education to understand parent's expectations when two- and four-year institutions are not convenient options.

Conclusion

Parents' life courses appear to influence expectations and involvement in the college planning process. Expectations are the first step in the model of college choice, and directly and indirectly seems to influence all aspects of it (Hossler et al., 1999). It is important to continue to understand the influence of expectations. For high schools and colleges, often seen as the institutions with the most contact in supporting parents and their children, they may benefit from understanding the core of what parents want. For example, the importance of pragmatic majors might be key selling points for some families, but not others. School and community culture may be important for other families that want their child to experience growth in a certain environment. Parent's backgrounds may influence what they see as priorities. It is important to continue to understand this process to best support families through an important point in all of their life courses.

Table 1. Demographic information on parents interviewed.

Child Name	Parent(s) Interviewed ¹	Parent Education	Spouse/Partner Education	Reported Income	Marital Status	Child Destination
Malia	Cora Jamie	MSW Bachelors	Bachelors MSW	120,000	Married	Community college
Jessica	Kelly	Some college		33,000	Divorced	4-yr. In-state public ³
Kyle	Daren	Some college		50,000	Divorced	4-yr. In-state private ³
Jesse	Phil Paula	Some College Some college	Some college Some college	66,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Monica	Nicole	Masters	Bachelors	120,000+	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Bo	Teresa	Bachelors	Some college	85,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Riley	Dena	Bachelors	M.D.	200,000	Married	4-yr. Out-state public ³
Payton	Nadine	Some college	Some college	47,000	Married	4-yr. Out-state private ³
Mandy	Laura	Bachelors	High School	40,000	Married	Community college
Amy	Cassidy	Some College	Bachelors	60,000	Married ²	Community college
Chad	Michelle	Some college		45,000	Divorced	Community college
Tyler	Eric	Bachelors	High school	130,000+	Married	4-yr. Out-state private ³
Greg	John Angela	Bachelors Bachelors	Bachelors Bachelors	200,000+	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Fred	Craig	Some college	Bachelors	70,000	Married	Community college
Brian	Valerie	Bachelors	J.D.	100,000+	Married	4-yr. Out-state private ³
Martin	Jane	Bachelors	Bachelors	95,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Don	Colleen Antoni	Bachelors Some college	Some college Bachelors	100,000	Married ²	Community college
Liz	Nick Evelyn	Masters Bachelors	Bachelors Masters	40,000	Married	Community college
Carrie	Debbie	Bachelors		24,000	Divorced	Community college
Rose	Susan William	Associates High School	High School Associates	60,000	Married ²	Community college
Jeffrey	Bella	Some college	High school	90,000	Partnered ²	Community college
Todd	Dayna	Bachelors		70,000	Divorced	Community college
Trevor	Melinda	Bachelors	Bachelors	45-50,000	Married	Community college
Jackie	John Sabrina	Bachelors Some college	Some college Bachelors	95,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Passia	Harrison Sarah	Masters Some college	Some college Masters	125,000	Married	4-yr. Out-state public ³
Aiden	Bonnie Wesley	High school Some college	Some college High school	83,000	Married	Community college
Britney	Mindy	Bachelors	Some college	100,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Colin	Erin Bill	Bachelors Bachelors	Bachelors Bachelors	90,000	Married	Community college
Jordan	Brian	Associates	Some college	55,000	Partnered ²	Community college
April	Corynn Nathan	Bachelors Associates	Associates Bachelors	240,000	Married	Community college
Chris	Dale Michelle	M.D. Masters	Masters M.D.	500,000	Married ²	4-yr. In-state public ³
Anna	Victor Claudia	Masters Some college	Some college Masters	69,000	Married	Community college
Jeffrey	Annette	Bachelors	Bachelors	100,000+	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Jessica	Lorita Adam	Bachelors Associates	Associates Bachelors	85,000	Married ²	Community college
Ruth	Megan	Bachelors	Bachelors	225,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³

Note. Pseudonyms used. ¹If two parents listed, they were interviewed together. Only one interview was conducted per family. ²Relationships are re-marriage/partnerships where one parent is not biological parent to focal child.

³Child living on or near college campus.

Chapter 3: Study 2

Parents' Academic Socialization and College Planning Support to College-Bound Children

Parents' Academic Socialization and College Planning Support to College-Bound Children

College, in some form, has become an aspired to and chosen pathway for the majority of United States high school seniors following graduation (Bates & Anderson, 2014; Goyette, 2008; Presley et al., 2001; Spera et al., 2009). This study documents the ways that parents, over their children's lives, provide support towards making those aspirations a reality.

One's educational attainment is key in securing employment and a stable income. Those with a high school diploma earn on average about \$5000 a year less than associate's degree holders, and nearly \$20,000 less than bachelor's degree holders (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Unemployment rates for those with a diploma are also higher than associate and bachelor degree holders (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). These disparities in income have increased in the last 50 years (Carnevale & Rose, 2015). In addition, the United States needs more of its citizens to gain postsecondary training to meet job requirements (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010; Marklein, 2012; Stilwell, 2015).

Today, about 75% of graduating high school seniors enroll in some postsecondary education institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Bigger questions have arisen more in how students prepare for college and how their family, community, and institutional structures influence where they go to college and how they do once they get there. About a third of students enroll in four-year colleges and universities, the rest go primarily to community colleges and technical schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The likelihood of students graduating varies by institution type. Students attending selective institutions are more likely to graduate (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). During this time college costs have increased faster than wages, somewhat in response to declines in state higher education funding (Stiglitz et al., 2000; The College Board, 2015; U.S. Department

of Education, 2013; Woodhouse, 2015). Americans contend with an ever more complicated college preparation and applications process (Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Mullen, 2010; Stevens, 2007).

The importance of college, the complexities of the process and the landscape of costs have prompted increased research on the college planning process. It has become more important to understand how students prepare for college applications and subsequent enrollment.

Typically, students that have information on colleges and their costs, and take academically strong classes are more likely to make it to college (Hossler et al., 1999). These efforts help students seek out the most optimal aid packages and affordable college experience, as families become more cost conscious (Bound et al., 2009; Eagan et al., 2013; Sallie Mae, 2014a). Other parenting and family life research also suggests high school students' college planning and academic preparation are the product of earlier life experiences. Parenting practices and earlier school experiences seem to influence future academic achievement and college planning (Harris & Robinson, 2016; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Lareau, 2011). Thus, it is important to understand what parents do earlier in life, as well as in high school, that support their children ultimately towards college.

Scholars have increasingly tried to figure out college planning in order to support children and their families to and through college. Parents' involvement is valuable in several ways. Parents can influence course selection, academic preparation, the searching of information on college requirements and financial aid, children's educational expectations, and a host of other issues (Hossler et al., 1999; Rueda, 2005). This planning is associated with eventual college enrollment, as well as the type of college in which the student eventually enrolls (Goodman, Hurwitz, & Smith, 2014; Kalenkoski, 2005; Sandefur et al., 2006; Stephan et al., 2009). However, less is known qualitatively about the role that parents perceive themselves to

play in supporting their child to college. The aim of this study is to build on what we know about the role of parents in preparing their child ultimately for college, as well as what parents see as important forms of support ultimately leading to college.

Cultural Capital

The cultural capital theoretical framework helps guide our understanding of the college choice process, the role of parents, and the current study. Cultural capital is defined as knowledge and resources, typically more-often held by middle-high and upper-class families, that help support and continue advantages and inequality in society (Bourdieu, 1986; McDonough, 1997). Those families are more likely to hold values and beliefs that align with what is appreciated and rewarded by institutions (i.e. schools). Families with more cultural capital are seen as holding more knowledge of the process, including when and how to utilize resources to obtain desired goals (Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Parents transmit their capital to their children by passing on their values and showing them how to obtain desired destinations. One's values, goals, and beliefs are held by one's habitus, defined as "a common set of subjective perceptions held by all members of the same group of class that shapes an individual's expectations, attitudes, and aspirations." (McDonough, 1997, p. 9). One's outlook then guide, for parents, how they parent their children and pass along knowledge and values, and for children, how they exert efforts in school in line with what they hope to obtain (Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997). This framework helps us understand how parents support children, throughout their life, towards college.

The Role of Parents in the College Choice Process

Traditional studies on the college choice process typically follow the high school years as the main time for college preparation. Hossler and colleagues' (1999) model of college choice

proposes three stages: Predisposition, search, and choice. Predisposition involves the development of college-going expectations, search is when information is sought out on schools and potential choices are considered, and choice is when a final decision is made from the schools considered (Hossler et al., 1989, 1999; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). This study focuses particularly on the search phase, where information is gathered and considered, and academic preparations are made in order to be prepared to apply to college.

Generally, the search phase is seen as happening between a student's sophomore and senior years (Hossler et al., 1989). It includes searching college websites, requesting mailings, touring campuses, and meeting with college representatives (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008). A child and/or parent's predispositions guide when it is seen as appropriate to start such efforts. Affluent and more educated families are more likely to start the search process earlier (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006a; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). The timing of when the search phase begins and the information gathered, influences the college planning moving forward, and involves a constant evaluation of new and old information (A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997).

In line with cultural capital theory, a parent's habitus seems to influence what they value in a college for their child. Parents typically value proximity of school to home, quality of academic programs, and financial aid and costs in selecting a school (Broekemier & Seshadri, 2000; Warwick & Mansfield, 2004). Higher-SES parents are more likely to look at a broader range of locations and focus on the competitiveness of institutional aid (McDonough, 1997; Onink, 2014). Thus one's knowledge about programs gained in the search phase and dispositions about what is an appropriate location guides eventual enrollment decisions. What is viewed as

reasonable is seen as a viable option (Bers, 2005; A. F. Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hallett & Griffen, 2015; Long & Riley, 2007; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Stiglitz et al., 2000). It is important to gain a deeper understanding of what parents do in this process and how that helps shape the eventual enrollment of their college-bound children. This understanding will help best support parents and children through this process.

The degree to which parents are involved is diverse. In high school, most children note getting some college information from their parents (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). The scant research existing on this topic suggests those with more cultural capital tend to be more involved, at least by being there when their children have questions (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). They are also more likely to know things such as success on standardized tests are malleable, giving an advantage when activating ways to improve them. These parents may search independently of their children for information and make suggestions on programs or locations (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). Parents with little college experience are more likely to struggle with the complex process and are less likely to do this (Settersten & Ray, 2010; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). They are more likely to rely on the schools to support their child (McDonough, 1997; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008).

Academic preparation during the search phase is important. A strong course plan feasibly sets the child up for admissions and general college readiness (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2005; Rueda, 2005). Lower-SES families are less likely to see their children engage in this type of planning and rigorous coursework (Goldrick-Rab, 2006; Lucas, 2001). The level of coursework influences what is perceived as a viable college option and perceptions of the child's

college readiness (McDonough, 1997). It is important to gain a greater understanding of parents' involvement in academic preparation and aspects of the college planning process.

Family Life and Parenting

While research on college preparation has largely focused on the high school years, other research has suggested this preparation is a lifelong pursuit. How children are academically socialized and parented, within the constraints and opportunities of their contexts, has important implications for the life course of the child. Cultural capital theory suggests a parent's habitus guides the expectations they have for their children and what they do to support them towards those desired outcomes (McDonough, 1997). McDonough (1997) argues college-educated parents may start supporting their child to college in elementary school through the quality of education they place them in, the people they surround them with, and the expectations they lay out to them. Framed as "setting the stage," Harrison and Robinson (2016) argue the "stage" parents set by conveying the importance of education and creating, and maintaining, an environment that aligns with those expectations is important. For efforts that ultimately support college preparation and enrollment, academic socialization and differential parenting practices help our understanding of this phenomenon (Lareau, 2011; Taylor et al., 2004).

A key way parents seem to "set the stage" and shape the development of their children's predispositions is through academic socialization. Taylor and colleagues note academic socialization "encompasses the variety of parental beliefs and behaviors that influence children's school-related development" (Taylor et al., 2004, p. 163). How parents socialize their children is dependent on parents' own school experiences and views of school and education (McDonough, 1997; Taylor et al., 2004). How they are socialized has implications for school readiness, values placed on school and learning, and ultimately school success (Taylor et al., 2004). Parents can

academically socialize their children through modeling their own engagement with learning, engaging in reading and activities with their child, holding high expectations, and stressing hard work in school (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Sonnenschein et al., 2016; Suizzo, Pahlke, Chapman-Hilliard, & Harvey, 2016; Yamamoto et al., 2016). As children progress particularly into adolescence, the continuation of stressing the importance of education, discussions of current events, identifying effective learning strategies, and planning for the future is important (Hill & Tyson, 2009). These efforts, from early in life to adolescence, typically foster children's engagement in their learning, produce better self-regulation of themselves as learners, and general academic success (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Sonnenschein et al., 2016; Suizzo et al., 2016; Yamamoto et al., 2016).

A key exemplar in how parent's habitus is transferred from parent to child is Lareau's (2011) landmark study on family life. She found middle-to-higher SES parents typically utilize the approach of *concerted cultivation*, where parents actively intervene, advocate, and shape the environment of their children. Working-class families meanwhile utilized the *accomplishment of natural growth* method, where parents typically let their children develop with little intervention and advocacy, letting children's talents and the schools take responsibility (Lareau, 2011). Parents from a concerted cultivation view saw their children's development as more malleable while the natural growth perspective typically saw academic strengths and weaknesses as more fixed. For the current study, it is important to understand the type of parenting they employed in supporting their child throughout their life ultimately to college.

In all, theoretical and empirical research suggests parents' dispositions influence the expectations they have for their children and how they can and should parent towards those expectations. This can include the environment parents create for their children, both in the home

and in schools, as well as active support in finding and working through college-related information. While college planning research typically focuses on only the high school years, this study focuses on how parents supported their child throughout his/her life ultimately to college. Few studies have interviewed parents on the role they played in supporting their child to college (Hamilton, 2016; Hossler et al., 1999; Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997), particularly with a focus on support throughout a child's entire life.

The current study seeks to address two main questions: 1) How do parents view, and support children in, college preparation and planning? How do these views and supports differ by parent and family characteristics?

Sample & Methods

Sample

The sample comes from 35 interviews with parents of 35 college-bound high school seniors asking about their roles in the college planning process. They were conducted between June and October 2015. The families come from two high schools within the same Northwestern United States city. The city's overall population is about 50,000 people and is largely white (83% white, 11% Latino, and 1% each in African American, Asian American, and Native American populations). About 25% of the city's population has a college degree and 90% graduated from high school or attained their GED. About 20% of the population lives in poverty, the median household income is \$48,000. The percentage in poverty is higher than the state and national average, and the median income is slightly lower than the state and national averages (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The city contains a hospital, community-college, and a large distribution center for a retail chain. Most women in the city work in healthcare and social

assistance, education, or retail. Most men work in manufacturing or construction, as well as retail.

The city's two high schools have a combined enrollment of about 2,600 students. George Washington High School (pseudonyms utilized for families, schools, locations, and other sensitive information) has a student population of just under 1,300 students with 55% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Roughly 75% of its students attend some form of college after graduation. Of those that attend college, 20% attend a 4-year university or college. Lincoln High School has a student population of just more than 1,300. About 30% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. About 90% of its students attend college after graduating, with 35% heading to 4-year schools. Both high schools offered at the time a fifth-year dual-enrollment program. This program allowed a student that met graduation requirements to attend community college for free by staying a fifth year in high school. Parents were eligible to participate in the interviews if their child selected the 5th year program because they were seen by the community college as being college students, would only be taking college classes, and had met all requirements to graduate with their diploma otherwise.

Parents were recruited via e-mail messages sent out by principals from both high schools, flyers were passed out at each high school's senior night and graduation ceremonies, and at least two letters were sent to each parent's home informing them of the study. Snowball sampling was also utilized. After the interview was conducted, the first author asked the parent(s) if they knew of anyone that might be interested in participating. Eligibility requirements included being the parent (or significant other of the parent) to a child graduating from one of the two sampled high schools who planned to attend some form of post-secondary education after high school (including the fifth-year program).

Interviews were scheduled at a time and place of convenience for the parent(s). Most interviews were conducted in the parents' homes or a coffee shop. Interviews averaged 60-90 minutes in length. They covered a range of topics from developing expectations for their child to go to college, the support they provided along the way, and how decisions were made on where the child would go to college. For this article, key questions asked included: 1) What do you see as the most important ways you've been able to provide support? Probe: When did you start the process of supporting your child in these ways? 2) Were there particular times when this support was critical to ensuring that (NAME) would make it to college? Probe: What happened? 3) Have there been any kinds of support that you haven't been able to provide or didn't want to provide? If so, why? 4) This is often a time in the child's life where he or she desires more independence and freedom. As you planned for college, were there times when you found it hard to balance the things you wanted with the things your child wanted? 5) Planning for college with a child inevitably has its challenging moments. Can you think of a time when things got bumpy for you and your child? 6) Looking back on this process, what is one thing you wish you had known when (NAME) started the college planning process? The study was approved by the university IRB. Parents were given a \$20 gift card to a local retail chain for participation.

Thirty-five interviews were conducted in total, with four being via snowball methods. Fourteen interviews were conducted with two parents, the remaining with one. Characteristics about the families are available in Table 2. Seventy-one percent of the families had at least one parent with a college degree, 34% had two. The median family income was \$85,000 (range \$24,000-\$500,000), higher than the town median. The average child GPA was 3.47. The majority of students enrolled in a community college or four-year in-state university (18 and 11 respectively). Four students selected to attend a private institution and two in an out-of-state

public university (Table 2). The sample was predominately white. Only six of the children were identified as non-white (not shown), similar to the demographics of two high schools.

Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the first author. The first author read through all the transcripts and interview notes several times. The second author read a selection of the interviews. The first and second authors discussed emerging themes from these readings and notes. Transcripts were then uploaded to Atlas.TI qualitative software and were first coded following an open coding method (Charmaz, 2003). Preliminary open codes were based on topics from parents' direct words (i.e. child personality), notes from the first and second author's initial meeting about emerging themes (i.e. optimal environment), and concepts from past scholarship (Charmaz, 2003). The initial codes were reviewed and further emerging themes were discussed between the first and second authors. The coding frame was then revised, and eight codes were initially reviewed that pertained specifically to parent involvement and college planning. These codes included, "college decisions," "college planning," "early involvement," "managing risk," "parent-school involvement," "person-child fit," "select-cost aware," and "work with child personality." For each of these codes, thematic summaries were completed. The code "college decisions" were dropped from analysis given the study's focus on parent involvement and college planning before decisions were made. The thematic summaries helped frame initial results. The analysis draws on the code reports and thematic summaries of the remaining seven codes.

Initial results suggested differences, based on family income and educational experiences of parents, in parenting practices, similar to other work on socio-economic status and parenting (Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997; Putnam, 2015). The thematic summaries were reviewed with

a focus on documenting similarities and differences based on family income and parent education experiences. A final review of the code reports helped refine major themes identified, mentioned below.

Since the study required parents to have a college-bound child to participate, all parents voiced expectations that their child would attend college growing up. How those parents developed their expectations for their children is covered elsewhere (See Manuscript 1). The development of parent college-going expectations and how those expectations influence parenting practices have been researched by others as well (Hamilton, 2016; Hossler et al., 1999). This paper focuses on how parents with college going expectations fostered the growth of their children to college.

Findings

Cultivating Child Development through Academic Socialization and Learning

Environments

The college planning process is often thought to begin late in middle school or at the beginning of high school. Yet, for many of the parents, when they reflect on important parenting efforts that ultimately prepared their children for college, they cite moments much farther back as critical, and often strategic, in setting their children's pathways. These efforts can broadly be categorized as cultivating the child's development through academic socialization.

Early in the child's life, learning was emphasized and fostered within the households. This was done in attempt to foster early importance of learning and education. Kelly, a divorced mother of two with some college experience, recalls pushing math and science to focal child Jessica, at age four, when she expressed interest in becoming a food chemist, "We built volcanoes and blew things up in the backyard. All the neighborhood kids would come over."

Kelly credits her college child development classes, which she took as a young mother, as influencing her parenting practices. She felt it was important to make learning fun.

Sabrina and John, cite a unique way they fostered the reading of focal child Jackie and older brother James, and the importance they placed on education:

Sabrina: I just wanted to add when they were younger, you know, they had the Playstation and all of that kind of thing. And this is another thing.

John: This is good.

Sabrina: It's like for every half hour of Playstation you need to read one hour.

John: Right.

Tim: O wow.

Sabrina: That was the payment plan. And so even at that young age it was like a tit for tat. You know you're not just going to get this for free. You need to give me something back. But we always integrated some form of that, education in some way.

John and Sabrina also mentioned summer projects, which they felt was important in stressing lifelong, continuous learning. This system made clear the value that the parents placed on education, while also ensuring their children were engaging in activities that aligned with those expectations. John, like Kelly, attended college after his children were born. He feels sitting down with them to do his homework while they did theirs was another way they were able to stress the importance of education.

For five families, their child experienced a temporary learning struggle, or was diagnosed with a disability. This presented, in the parents' eyes, a critical moment of investment and intervention. Cora and Jamie recall struggles focal child Malia had in reading during elementary school:

Jamie: I mean the reading, she had struggled with reading early on. Cora advocated a lot around reading, she did a summer school reading program. Between the 3rd and 4th grade?

Cora: I don't have any idea.

Jamie: And that was something. You know we tried to do more reading at home. Have her read to us. That was definitely a focus for us around the... and you know once she kind of got it... She hasn't had a lot of struggles with school.

It is unclear where Malia would have been without those efforts, and if she naturally would have “got it” without them. Nevertheless, instances like this point to how many parents saw their role in supporting their children’s learning and schooling.

Parents also discussed supporting their children’s development through intentional placements into certain schools and around people that shared similar values. Six families discussed strategic efforts to place their child in certain environments when they deemed some schools as inadequate. For Eric, a Chief Operating Officer, when his family relocated from southern California for work, his family strategically assessed all the nearby schools and bought a house by the strongest elementary and middle school in the area. These schools were known for offering more advanced coursework. For parents already living in the town, perceived struggles of the public schools prompted their action to provide a better environment. Valerie, a married mother of two with a bachelor’s degree, explains the decision they made to keep their son out of the public schools early on:

Valerie: ... At that time the public schools were undergoing financial crisis as they often are, so we had heard about this St. Sebastian school in Pine and we thought “well we can’t afford that. But we’ll look into it.” And then my mother-in-law agreed to help us financially to afford the tuition to St. Sebastian’s school so we thought he needs maybe a more rigorous education so we put him in Catholic school.

Valerie’s comment points to early signs of academic segregation and inequality of pathways. Despite not having the money and the religious affiliation, they drew upon resources to foster the growth of focal child Brian. Valerie and other parents utilized resources to align expectations with environment. Harrison and Susan, also not Catholic at the time, moved daughter Passia to St. Sebastian when they felt the “neighborhood changed.” This move put Passia in a more academically rigorous setting and surrounded her with children they deemed

appropriate. Susan recalls, “She got in with a great group of kids at St. Sebastian, and they just really, they were just focused on learning from the get go. And that became her peer group...”

Harrison and Susan’s comments suggest a worry of being surrounded by less academically serious peers and in a less conducive learning environment had they not made the move. They, like Valerie and other parents, drew upon resources to place their children in a stronger learning environment, with like-minded and typically similarly advantaged families. Nicole, a married mother of four and nurse with a master’s degree, feels her children were farther along academically when they rejoined the public school system. Nicole’s daughter was prepared for advanced classes in high school. These are further efforts of stage setting to their children, as well early cumulative advantage.

Similar to Harrison and Susan’s comment about peer group and school quality, some parents note making strategic efforts in shaping whom their children was surrounded by. Michelle, a remarried mother of two with a master’s degree, recalls explicit conversations she had with her son in elementary school about placing people they saw as positive influences in his life.

There comes a time as your grow up that you need to look at your friends and make decisions less on geography and more on shared values And he actually between grade school and middle school threw out his entire bunch of friends and reseeded and started with a new group of friends who were interested in school because the rest of them were kind of sliding by with Ds and they were getting passed every year.

These efforts of shaping school environment and peer groups was less often noted by blue-collar parents. They were more often to say their thriving children were good influences on their friends who were struggling and considering not furthering their education in any form after high school. Investments early in life were seen as critical towards the rest of their child’s K-12

experience. These academic and social advantages seem to have influenced the track they went down while in high school.

Cultivating Student Development and Investment in Student Learning

The emphasis on learning and the fostering of opportune learning environments extended to high school. This support, often strategic, focused on: 1) supporting their child's academic development and 2) intervening to address concerns when needed. For academic development, some parents recalled conversations with their children on capitalizing on course and extracurricular options, while maintaining high expectations.

For course options, some recall explicit conversations with their children about planning a high school curriculum geared toward college preparation. For a few parents this meant communicating to their children to try for valedictorian. For others, they wanted to ensure their child was on a strong track. Nadine, a homemaker with some college experience, pushed focal child Payton to pick academically strong classes, knowing the implications of it down the line:

I would say the biggest part was when she was starting freshman year of high school ... We really wanted to make sure the right classes were being taken and things looked good on paper. Some friends had like two classes senior year, you know, or junior year they would have no zero period ... When schools are looking at your transcript, I think they see a lot gaps in it. You know?

Other parents also stressed the importance of courses for college applications and college readiness. It also shows the expectations, and often-high expectations, from parents to do well and to invest in classes. Not all parents expressed this; many left class selections up to their children and the schools. However, most directly invested in their children's paths. Some parents reported sending their children to various camps, sometimes affiliated with universities, in order to help foster development and align education as important in their children's lives.

For other parents, some did not have children that saw eye to eye on the importance of a rigorous schedule and investments in school. Cassidy, a maintenance tech with some college experience, recalls rough experiences with focal daughter Amy to take meaningful classes, something she is also dealing with her younger son, “You know like Spanish. I’m going through the same thing with my son, he’s like ‘I don’t want to take Spanish.’ You’re taking Spanish the whole time.” For Amy, her lack of investment in school extended to sports. Cassidy mentioned Amy’s soccer coaches telling her she could play at the collegiate level. Cassidy, similar to her sometimes-unsuccessful efforts to foster interest in school, offered her daughter the chance to go to camps and to investigate being a student-athlete. Amy, however, did not take the advice and investment from her coaches and Cassidy until it was too late.

These parents had to struggle more in aligning their children’s academic curriculum, potential, and achievement with their own expectations. As shown further below, even with heavy involvement, parents were not always able to align their own expectations for their child with the child’s outcomes.

The knowledge by parents that academics and extracurricular activities build a strong application went beyond just getting their child into a college. For many, through investigation of the process and/or trial and error from launching older children, they realized the potential to obtain college credits and merit based aid. Both high schools offered a variety of ways to obtain college credits, such as Advanced Placement and College Now. Evelyn, a college educated married mother of two, discusses opportunities daughter Liz had when she transferred from a Christian high school to Lincoln:

Well I think maybe specifically at Mount Carmel it was very limited in the class offerings and so you only had maybe one or two choices or two periods for an elective ... But there were more choices at Lincoln and she did take honors

English and then the next step was the AP Composition and so I think that really fired her up for, “I got college credit.” ...

Evelyn and Nick said Liz was not a particularly driven student, so they utilized college credits as a way to keep her invested. On the more extreme end of effort was Eric, mentioned above, who discusses intentionally not letting their son work a job, in order to bring the most benefits in strength of application and financial aid:

I didn't have our son work a job and he didn't have a lot of jobs around the home. His job was academics and so his 3.94, weighted with all this AP classes, was his job. And going to Loma Linda, he got the Chancellors scholarship, he got the college of science scholarship, and he got one other scholarship. He's got 80 percent of his education paid for before he even attends and the rest we'll be able to do at interest free or low-interest loans and it's going to be very manageable His job was paying for his college and he accomplished that.

Eric credits attending a college night in a major city featuring many elite west coast colleges and universities early his son's high school years as important to understanding and benefiting from the system. Eric and his wife's knowledge of the system, and ability to offer their son the means towards benefiting the most from it, was not an option for all families. Some parents mentioned children holding jobs, which possibly influenced their ability to study and earn a similar GPA. For others, they did not mention strategic course scheduling as a means towards college credit and scholarships, at least in the same capacity as Eric and some others did. For example, Craig, an owner of an insurance branch and a fishing company with some college experience, notes the benefit his younger daughter will have after going through the college planning process with son, and focal child for the study, Fred. They realized they did not capitalize on all the opportunities available for him:

...I do know that watching him go and getting free credits and doing the tiny bit of AP courses he's done. We went to graduation ceremony, the awards ceremony, and all the kids that walk away with some really nice checks were helpful because they've supported the community and they've taken extra AP classes, it's created more conversation with our daughter...

For many families, like Craig's, it wasn't until going through the process once did they seem to understand the process of college credits and specifics about merit aid. For families like Eric, their son Colton, an only child, they did not miss out because of their resources and social networks to gather information and have the means to utilize it.

Parents also recall supporting their children through academic support and monitoring. Both high schools offered an online grading system, Gradecheck, where parents could see their children's grades and missing assignments. Some parents evidenced overuse of the system: Constant monitoring was done despite little evidence it was needed. However, for most parents, they occasionally monitored their children. Most parents typically note having only one or two of their children fail to keep up on their own. Jamie and Cora rarely used the system for focal child Malia and younger daughter Elie, but use it constantly with younger son Kyle:

Both the girls, they get their stuff done, we don't even talk to them about homework. For him its... we got to sit down every night and say "what did you do in school today? What's your homework?" And then check Gradecheck because it's different than what he'll tell you.

For parents like Jamie and Cora, their monitoring of their son possibly sets him on a different course. In past generations, they might not have known his true academic standing until report cards were filed. For Claudia and Victor, they express the belief their daughter would not have made it to the community college without their constant support. This support departed largely from their older daughter, who made it to and through college with little monitoring:

Tim: And were there particular times that it was critical in supporting Anna to ensure that she eventually made it to college?

Claudia: Oh yeah. Keeping her up on her homework and her grades. And stuff like that.

Victor: It has been an uphill battle at times.

Claudia: The school has this system called Gradecheck and we are able to check grades and all that kind of stuff.

Victor: She didn't like it too much.

Claudia: Yea. So we kept pushing, and pushing and I think that's what got her to where she's at now.

Despite their efforts, Anna graduated with only a 1.79 GPA, showing investment by parents will not always lead to strong academic returns. It is unclear what her path would have been without their monitoring. For other parents, they managed to see their child succeed with little effort on their end. For those that did need investment, like Anna, some recall making large efforts to enable their child to one day get to college. The efforts by Claudia, Victor, and others note the important areas where parents invest to ensure their children reach the goals aligned with the parent's habitus.

Brian, a divorced father of two with an associate's degree, strategically gained custody of his kids, particularly focal child Jordan, in order to have more time to spend on school work.

Brian noted Jordan as struggling with attentional issues, making school a constant struggle:

Brian: Well you know I had Leslie, his older sister, who was "k here you go, here's your homework sheet," she's off, she's straight As all the way through ... She did more math than I ever did. [laughing] Good luck on that one.

Tim: Yea [laughing].

Brian: Get help from your teacher. To Jordan who was like ok what do you need help with? What can I do? I mean after the divorce I curtailed the parent time that I got so that during the week so that I could help him with his homework every day because I knew his mother couldn't do that.

Brian was one of many parents that discussed their schedule as important in being able to provide support to their child, even in just having a presence in the home. Most parents noted simply "being there" for their child as one of the most important ways they supported their child to college. Often, as exemplified by Brian, and others, parents made personalized efforts depending on the characteristics of the child, and often the resources at their disposal. These investments, or lack thereof, continued into more focused aspects of college planning.

Cultivating Child as College Applicant

In the model of college choice, the search phase is a time where information on schools is sought and the filtering of information eventually leads to a choice set (Hossler et al., 1999). The parents in the current study document important insights into how they obtained knowledge about college and how, whether large or small, they directly and indirectly influenced the choice sets of their children.

Sociological and educational research have often noted middle- and high-SES parents as possessing more knowledge and resources in the college planning process. But most of the parents in this study portrayed less knowledge of the system than their ability and efforts to understand it. For many of the college educated parents, their oldest child preparing for life after high school prompted anxiety about figuring out a system that had changed significantly since they went. Jane, college educated, recalls:

And so, you know when my husband and I went to college it was paper application. ... My parents weren't involved at all. And of course I knew that had changed because I talked to friends with older kids. And so when Nick, our first one, I think he was a junior I set up an appointment with the school counselor, the high school counselor, and just asked for the process and information on the process. And what do we do? And how do we do this? And what are the deadlines? What are timeframes? I mean I don't know.

This curiosity was common among college and non-college educated parents alike. For most parents, unless they themselves had gone back to school recently, they and their child spent time trying to understand it. Jane recalls being very involved, searching for information on schools and early admission deadlines, as well as opportune times to visit schools and take college preparatory tests. Jane saw Martin as too busy to be able the lead in college planning, given his involvement with music, tennis, and coursework:

You know, my senior year, my AP classes, my music and everything that again it involved that I was the one saying "ok, the deadline for the application is here and you need to get your essay done and you need to get a letter of recommendation from your teacher so go do that." So if I hadn't done that I don't know [laughing].

And if I had been totally hands off, I'm not sure how that would have gone. I mean he certainly wouldn't have done the early admission.

Martin's senior year and Jane's involvement points to a key point in the college planning process and aspects of inequality: In order to obtain the most advantages in admission and aid, students are expected to have good grades and involvement. To utilize those grades and involvement they also must navigate a complex system effectively. Jane's involvement highlights how parent time and resources are often needed in order to secure those advantages. Jane questioned how children without parent support are able to go through the process alone.

As evidenced by Jane's comments, the aspect of timing in this process was sometimes stressful, and almost always important, for families in order to secure advantages. Some lessons appeared to be learned from older children's experiences. Nicole, mentioned above, went through the process three times before supporting focal daughter Monica. Through trial and error, she learned when best to start the process and how to secure benefits. She had her two youngest children, including Monica, take the College Level Examination Program test to earn college credits for their Spanish language experiences. For her oldest child, she recalls taking him to college night and making adjustments thereafter:

Well we did that once, and I thought this was bullshit you need to do it when you are a junior and I just started taking my kids when they were juniors and they were the only ones there and it's just like "you guys are like, hello?! Get on the train."

Nicole eventually organized materials and shared it with neighbors and family friends to help their children with the process. But it was more than a five year process of knowing the ins-and-outs, and significant involvement, to get to that place.

Annette, a college-educated married mother of two, also came to understand the importance of timing and involvement in the process. Having gone through it with focal child

Jeffrey and older daughter Trisha, she recommends parents starting early in high school to make sure they get every aspect nailed down to best support their child:

Sometimes you wait until junior but I would say sophomore year just to get a feel for what, I don't want to be the over-achiever have your kid take the SAT five times, it is what it is, but I do want to make sure I'm not missing out on opportunities that can help your kid. And so the second time around (with Jeffrey) I was definitely less involved, my son was more involved, but then he slacked off and we missed opportunities. You know what I mean?

For Annette, while she spoke of opportunities for her son, she also was talking about opportunities for the entire family. When children secure merit based aid, it often means less financial burden on parents to chip in. However, upper-middle class families were not immune to mishaps in college planning. Megan, a pharmacist and married mother of three, recalls oldest daughter and focal child Ruth's deadline mishap that resulted in a loss of possible scholarship support. Ruth, a 4.0 student, applied to several schools. Her desired schools were private. However, after the family was surprised to find they were to receive little financial help; Ruth decided to attend the local state university. By this time, however, the family didn't realize they missed the scholarship deadline. They never sought that information during the search phase:

So she would have qualified to have her whole entire tuition paid for but now she gets nothing. So she's paying for everything herself ... And it was really rough, that was a lesson that we learned that even if you don't think you're going to go to a state school you should apply.

For Ruth, Megan, and their family, had they known to seek that information, or gathered that information earlier, that possibility would have informed their actions and protect them from that error.

For some parents, they expressed an easy search phase with their child, involving little research beyond close by, available options. Since the 5th year program offered a free year of community college classes, and a four-year state university was within driving distance, these

accessible options made the process far less stressful than explained by Jane. For example, Dayna a college educated divorced mother of Todd, recalls when she found out about the 5th year program. Todd was not sure on what he wanted to do and struggled in high school. Dayna also worried about Todd fitting in at a large university environment. For Dayna and Todd, the program made financial, academic, and logistical sense:

As soon as I found out about it was like a “o my gosh you’re kidding me.” So I presented it to him and of course he had to, he had to kind of look into it himself ... So once we went to the meetings and he found out about what it was, there was no question.

Given Todd’s mediocre grades and Dayna’s desire for him to remain close, the 5th year program made the search process and development of choice set seemingly quick and painless. Dayna went to a small four-year school before transferring to a larger flagship university when she did her degree. She feels he son needs a small environment that the community college could provide.

For other families though, parents influenced their children’s choice set by letting their children explore beyond their area. Melinda, a mother of three with a bachelor’s degree, recalls telling son Trevor to look into an out-of-state public university that had a good music program, implying going out of state is an option if the fit is right. Often it was the parent’s knowledge of the system and/or schools that opened up these opportunities. Harrison and Susan, mentioned above, knew about the Western University Exchange system, which allows students to attend out-of-state universities for a cheaper price. With this knowledge they toured universities in three states, using campus tours as a way to help form a set of schools daughter Passia would eventually apply to. Susan expresses strong belief that being able to tour the schools helped Passia get to know schools she was interested in:

We helped influence her decision by saying yes when she wanted to go take a tour. You know by going to Portland, by going to Northern Colorado. ... And talking about different campuses. But then encouraging her to go to Western. I think we wanted her to be comfortable. That's probably the number one reason.

The opportunity to tour and investigate schools was not an option for all families though. Laura, whose family of five has a family income of \$40,000, wishes she had the opportunity to look into schools with daughter Mandy. She hopes to at least make an hour drive to a Christian college Mandy hopes to attend once she is done with the 5th year program:

I know she wanted to go check out a lot of the colleges, like in person. And I just couldn't afford to do that for her. That kind of bummed me out. But I think that's about it, because I really tried to help her. I mean I had to fill out questionnaires and put my email address, some of the colleges wanted that, so would do that. But I think the only thing was not being able to take her around to check out colleges. I've seen on movies parents you know take their kids to colleges for... That'd be fun.

The ability to tour universities, and the perceptions of certain universities, private, public, in-state, and/or out-of-state as options influences the choice set. For parents touring certain universities or suggesting students look into universities implies them as options. For other families, such as Mandy's, their inability to tour schools would send a message that those are not options. Some families had explicit conversations about location and fit, particularly when schools beyond their immediately available area were perceived as options. For these families, often out-of-state schools had to have a benefit in program that out-weighed the costs of the school, which often were not met. Megan, mentioned above, explains:

I would say out-of-state, we were like why would you do that for? We wouldn't want to pay out of state tuition. And so we have kind of discouraged her from going to the University of Idaho, she kind of wanted to go there but we couldn't make that... it's got to make out sense to go out-of-state.

Sometimes looking out-of-state led to hurt feelings and tough decisions. Despite Melinda suggesting her son to look out of state, the financial package he received to attend the private

school he desired, partly due to his 3.0 GPA, meant it no longer was an option. Trevor ended up enrolling at the local community college, struggling with his situation. John and Sabrina also experienced a similar situation, when they realized the art school Jackie looked into, and she applied to, cost more than \$40,000 a year. They recall Jackie being down for a while about having to attend the nearby state university. If done over, these parents may not have suggested those avenues. Even with resources and the best intentions, mistakes in the search phase may lead to issues later in the process.

Discussion

Most parents hope for their child one day to go to college and gain a credential that will further their chances to secure a good job and stable life (Hossler et al., 1999; Napolitano et al., 2014; Spera et al., 2009). Various sociological and educational research has focused on factors that explain why a child goes to college and what aspects of family life can alter the pathways children experience (Hossler et al., 1999; Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Less known were qualitative perspectives about parental support, from early in life to college enrollment. For the current study, most of the parents tried to stress the importance of education, and made efforts to align school and home. A few strategically made efforts to place children in certain schools, and at the very least, around certain people. Some explained making large commitments of time and energy to ensure their child thrived in school, or sometimes simply passed. In the search process, they tried to find a school that fit their child, while also within the constraints of their family's financial situation and values.

One of the most salient themes from parents was their socialization attempts, academically and otherwise. Harris and Robinson (2016) propose that it is important for parents to “set the stage” for their children, through setting high expectations and an environment

aligned with those expectations. Typically, higher-SES parents seem to be better able to accomplish that feat (Harris & Robinson, 2016; Lareau, 2011; Shapiro, 2004). In the current study, a parent's habitus, and their stage setting efforts, appeared particularly important early in their child's life. The parents, particularly those with college-experience, tried to foster their children's love of learning and the centrality of education to the children's lives. Kelly, despite not finishing her bachelor's degree, credited her child development classes as helping inform her parenting practices, such as making learning fun. The parents' expectations and subsequent parenting practices seemed to evidence the cumulative processes that foster different pathways of education and development over time (Domina & Roksa, 2012; Harris & Robinson, 2016; Lareau, 2011; Roksa & Potter, 2011). Given the retrospective approach to the current study, more longitudinal research on parenting practices is needed to best understand this domain.

The efforts of parents to academically socialize their children often followed the concerted cultivation approach. These parents evidenced active engagement and navigation of institutions to shape their children's development (Lareau, 2011). When their daughter had an issue, Jamie and Cora sprang to action, possibly alleviating long-term reading struggles. Not all parents utilized this style though. Laura, who, given constrained resources, mostly let the school help daughter Mandy in schooling and the college search process. But parents like Kelly, technically not college-educated, showed "non-college educated" parents may also utilize the concerted cultivation approach, despite not having the resources that typically come with it. Research by Roksa and colleagues found changes in parents' education statuses influenced parenting practices to mirror more of the educational category/status a parent moved into than the category in which they used to reside (Domina & Roksa, 2012; Roksa & Potter, 2011). Parents such as Kelly, John, and others in the study took classes and some graduated after their

children were born. This may have influenced their parenting practices and support. Given the increase in non-traditional students, who are also parents, more research is needed on this topic.

Several families in the study evidenced “stage setting” attempts (Harris & Robinson, 2016). Some parents were able to strategically align their expectations to the environment they desired for their child. The more advantaged families were able to send their children to a Catholic elementary school, or at least the strongest public schools in the area. This placed the children around families with similar habitus and resources. Nicole felt her children were more advanced than the other children once back in the public system. Given the smaller classes and like-mind families involved with the Catholic school, that may have been the case. This ability to control their children’s environment seemingly made it easier for them to align their own expectations with other domains - home, family, school, friends, and neighborhood - in their children’s lives (Harris & Robinson, 2016; Shapiro, 2004). The intentional selection of homes near particular school districts or the enrollment into private schools is not new for parents (Putnam, 2015; Shapiro, 2004). Families with more resources are more likely to be able to afford homes in areas with strong schools and similar families to themselves (Shapiro, 2004). This segregation points to further needed conversations about concerns parents have about the quality of education and the inequality in access to quality education and environments for those that are not able to make such choices.

The transmission of habitus from parent to child on the centrality of learning and school appeared evident. Most of the parents did not have to monitor closely how well their children were doing. It was only when children consistently missed assignments, experienced learning disabilities, and/or lacked maturity that involvement was intense. This is important for later in middle- and high-school, when the day-to-day influence of parents decreases, making the

expectations they directed to their children earlier in life important for school success (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Without the children's perspectives, it is not clear, but it appears the socialization efforts paid off for most families (Taylor et al., 2004). College students' have previously mentioned the importance of their parents simply being there was deemed most important to them growing up, not necessarily homework help (Harris & Robinson, 2016). Although, some show that setting a scene does not always lead to 4.0 GPAs and entrance into the most elite schools. McDonough (1997) also found that a lack of drive and maturity by the child may mean heavy parent involvement may only bring a child to a certain point. If habitus between parent and child differ, and personal characteristics inhibit thriving, it may not lead to the outcomes predicted by cultural capital theorists. Schools can benefit from understanding the parents' expectations and views of school, to better insure the success of children by strengthening ties to the home domain as well.

For college planning, the search process appears particularly influenced by parents' and children's habitus and life experiences. These predispositions and experiences influenced schools investigated and considered for eventual enrollment. For parents like Laura, geography and finances constrained the choices available to daughter Mandy. For Brian, and other parents, a child's uncertainty in career choice prompted investigation into the community college program. This aligns with previous findings (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). Unsurprisingly, lower- and middle-SES families are more often constrained financially and culturally, making proximal and cheaper schools, that match their own background, as often the only schools looked into (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010).

A caveat to this can be religion, as evidenced by Laura. Given financial constraints, Laura pushed Mandy towards the 5th year program. However, the family's strong Christian

values have her supporting Mandy's investigation into a Christian college. Generally, some lower-income children can go to higher-ranking schools for lower costs than close-by state schools. However, they typically do not know this, and never seriously investigate them (Long & Riley, 2007; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Venegas, 2006). Although other life factors may constrain their choices, such as helping their own parents financially (Goldrick-Rab, 2016), more research is needed on these families to understand how finances shape perceived options. It may be that if Laura and Mandy do look into the Christian college they will find the aid makes it a realistic option despite the sticker price.

The choices perceived as options varied by social class. For some of the middle-class, and nearly all of the upper-class families, the search process and development of a choice set was more complicated. The upper-income families often had their child look out of state, and were knowledgeable about opportunities and had the means to means make the more expensive options more manageable. By saying 'look out of state', these parents were implying those were schools were an option. McDonough (1997) notes upper class families are more often to seek smaller, often private, colleges that present a better feel for their children. This perception of fit was assessed through campus tours.

Overall, the current study's findings align with McDonough's (1997) interviews from the late 1980s with children and parents. Family habitus seemed to influence what was an appropriate location for the child. Some schools were not perceived as options and never looked into, regardless of actual fit and affordability. Further research on this topic is needed; particularly in how schools are placed on children and parents' radars and deemed appropriate enough to look into. Given the increased sensitivity of *all* families to costs in recent years (Eagan et al., 2013; Sallie Mae, 2015), it is important to continue to understand how cost and geography

influence the search process. High schools need to be aware of perceived cost and cultural barriers when supporting children to college. Colleges may benefit from becoming more aware of how they are perceived by different types of families.

Finally, the assumption that college-educated parents' easily understand and navigate the college planning process was not met. Cultural capital theorists articulate the importance of cultural capital in possessing the knowledge needed to draw upon and effectively navigate social institutions (Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1994, 1997). Higher-SES families are seen as having more knowledge of the college planning process, which helps secure advantages. While some highly educated families, such as Harrison and Susan, did have knowledge of policies, most families did not. More often these parents had a greater sense of entitlement and a feeling of comfort to gain information on those institutions. For many college-educated parents it had been a long time since they had gone to college and the application process had changed a lot since they attended. Those parents did not necessarily have more knowledge of the system, but they had the resources to attend college nights and meet with a counselor to ask questions. This contradicts some findings where high-SES parents navigated the process easier, or spent money funding private counselors to do it for them (McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). It is perhaps, similar to what Lareau's (2000; 2011) findings that upper middle-class parents simply feel more comfortable navigating institutions. Even if they did not know information, they knew how to get it (Lareau, 2000, 2011). Megan's recollection of daughter Ruth missing a scholarship deadline shows that even among families with two college-educated parents make mistakes. It appears college knowledge is not as widely known as thought. Future research should continue to address the knowledge of lower-, middle-, and high-SES parents to understand what they know, do not know, and how they navigate institutions in order to support their child.

Limitations

While the study gained rich retrospective accounts of parents' support to their college-bound children, a few limitations are important to address. First, the interviews only gained parents' recollections of their support to college-bound children. The college-bound nature means the study missed parents who wanted their child to go to college but did not end up going. It also means that children could have different accounts on parents' perceived support. Future work should follow children and their parents from earlier in life to understand parent support in a more thorough manner. By starting earlier in life this would also catch children that do not enroll, helping us understand parents' support to those children as well. Finally, the study conducted interviews with parents in a town with a community college and in close proximity to a four-year university. The presence of these institutions and programs, such as the fifth year program, influenced support and perceived options for their children to attend. It is important for future research to study families not as close to institutions of higher education.

Conclusion

Overall, these parents of college bound children invested significant time, from early in life up to college attendance, in supporting them to college. Longitudinal and additional retrospective research is needed to investigate the college planning process, including both the role of early life experiences and struggles navigating the complex higher education system. Despite assumptions that typically more well off families are masters of this process, evidence suggests they too struggle to support their child. Additional supports are needed for all families.

Table 2. Demographic information on parents interviewed.

Child Name	Parent(s) Interviewed ¹	Parent Education	Spouse/Partner Education	Reported Income	Marital Status	Child Destination
Malia	Cora Jamie	MSW Bachelors	Bachelors MSW	120,000	Married	Community college
Jessica	Kelly	Some college		33,000	Divorced	4-yr. In-state public ³
Kyle	Daren	Some college		50,000	Divorced	4-yr. In-state private ³
Jesse	Phil Paula	Some College Some college	Some college Some college	66,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Monica	Nicole	Masters	Bachelors	120,000+	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Bo	Teresa	Bachelors	Some college	85,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Riley	Dena	Bachelors	M.D.	200,000	Married	4-yr. Out-state public ³
Payton	Nadine	Some college	Some college	47,000	Married	4-yr. Out-state private ³
Mandy	Laura	Bachelors	High School	40,000	Married	Community college
Amy	Cassidy	Some College	Bachelors	60,000	Married ²	Community college
Chad	Michelle	Some college		45,000	Divorced	Community college
Tyler	Eric	Bachelors	High school	130,000+	Married	4-yr. Out-state private ³
Greg	John Angela	Bachelors Bachelors	Bachelors Bachelors	200,000+	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Fred	Craig	Some college	Bachelors	70,000	Married	Community college
Brian	Valerie	Bachelors	J.D.	100,000+	Married	4-yr. Out-state private ³
Martin	Jane	Bachelors	Bachelors	95,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Don	Colleen Antoni	Bachelors Some college	Some college Bachelors	100,000	Married ²	Community college
Liz	Nick Evelyn	Masters Bachelors	Bachelors Masters	40,000	Married	Community college
Carrie	Debbie	Bachelors		24,000	Divorced	Community college
Rose	Susan William	Associates High School	High School Associates	60,000	Married ²	Community college
Jeffrey	Bella	Some college	High school	90,000	Partnered ²	Community college
Todd	Dayna	Bachelors		70,000	Divorced	Community college
Trevor	Melinda	Bachelors	Bachelors	45-50,000	Married	Community college
Jackie	John Sabrina	Bachelors Some college	Some college Bachelors	95,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Passia	Harrison Sarah	Masters Some college	Some college Masters	125,000	Married	4-yr. Out-state public ³
Aiden	Bonnie Wesley	High school Some college	Some college High school	83,000	Married	Community college
Britney	Mindy	Bachelors	Some college	100,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Colin	Erin Bill	Bachelors Bachelors	Bachelors Bachelors	90,000	Married	Community college
Jordan	Brian	Associates	Some college	55,000	Partnered ²	Community college
April	Corynn Nathan	Bachelors Associates	Associates Bachelors	240,000	Married	Community college
Chris	Dale Michelle	M.D. Masters	Masters M.D.	500,000	Married ²	4-yr. In-state public ³
Anna	Victor Claudia	Masters Some college	Some college Masters	69,000	Married	Community college
Jeffrey	Annette	Bachelors	Bachelors	100,000+	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³
Jessica	Lorita Adam	Bachelors Associates	Associates Bachelors	85,000	Married ²	Community college
Ruth	Megan	Bachelors	Bachelors	225,000	Married	4-yr. In-state public ³

Note. Pseudonyms used. ¹If two parents listed, they were interviewed together. Only one interview was conducted per family. ²Relationships are re-marriage/partnerships where one parent is not biological parent to focal child.

³Child living on or near college campus.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Children who go on to college, and secure some form of postsecondary education, are on average better off in economic, health, and other domains throughout their life course (Abel & Deitz, 2014; Autor, 2014; Oreopoulos & Salvanes, 2009). The United States needs more of its citizens to gain postsecondary training, with projections of two-thirds of the population needing some postsecondary experience to fulfill job demands (Carnevale & Rose, 2015; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010). Not surprisingly, based on those needs to secure stable employment, most parents expect their child to go college (Spera et al., 2009). Evidence suggests that, starting from very early in life, parenting expectations and practices support the development of their children towards educational success (Lareau, 2011; Taylor et al., 2004). In high school, general support and help specific to college planning is important as well (Harris & Robinson, 2016; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997).

The current study sought to address gaps in our understanding of the role of parents' expectations and the support they provide to their children towards college. The two manuscripts, drawing on semi-structured interviews with parents of college-bound children, focused on; Manuscript 1) How parents developed college-going expectations for their child and what they see college providing for them; Manuscript 2) The type of support parents provided towards eventual college enrollment. Below is a brief synthesis of the results of the two manuscripts. I will discuss the implications of these findings for children, parents, families, schools, institutions, and lines of future empirical work. I will close with limitations and a final conclusion.

Study Highlights and Integration

Broadly, the two papers focused on how parents develop the expectations for their children to go to college, and how they parented their children towards those goals. The model of

college choice (Hossler et al., 1989, 1999) and cultural capital theory (McDonough, 1997) both articulate that predispositions influence actions. For the current study, the development of expectations and the support parents provided indeed did work off each other.

Overall, parents' expectations did influence the support they provided. In the first manuscript, parents discussed developing expectations for their children to go to college for various reasons. Some parents had negative experiences within educational and occupational domains, or witnessed others who did. They wanted their children to go farther in school and have more options than they did. For parents with college credentials, their experiences in the workforce influenced their expectations to ensure their children have available a similar lifestyle.

These expectations brought parents to support their children by stressing the importance of education and fostering learning environments to meet those goals. At early ages, general expectations for their child to one day go college ensured parents made school important, and often sought outside-of-school activities – such as camps- to supplement their development. As their children grew older, parents emphasized a sound, sometimes rigorous, high school curriculum. For some parents, these expectations influenced the environment in which they placed their children, such as certain schools or people within their children's social orbits.

The differences in how parents came to their expectations also influenced different parenting practices. Parents who directly translated their degree to a specific job were more likely to favor applied degrees. For others, experiencing or witnessing using a degree in fields outside of the area of study influenced their parenting practices to ensure their children simply enrolled in postsecondary education.

Parents' perspectives of higher education and its functions were important in how they supported their children's college planning. Some emphasized the importance of college

providing a time for children to develop before moving into the world of work and adulthood. For these parents, college provides more than job skills but also important opportunities for overall personal development. Others emphasized the practicality of school and its relation to job-placement. When college planning, a few parents pushed living at college, despite the increased costs, because of the benefits perceived in the experience. Still others stressed a match with academic program, and typically researched the community college when that was not known. As in other areas in college planning, parents' expectations influenced their support to their children.

However, parents' expectations did not solely influence support. In line with other findings on the interaction between expectations and planning (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997), parents' expectations of college changed based on the strengths, weaknesses, and interests of their children. For example, Nick initially desired for his daughter to go to a Christian college, citing the importance of the campus atmosphere. However, his daughter was not interested in the school or really college in general. Nick and wife Evelyn's expectations and support changed based on that in order to help their daughter into a more applied pathway. For parents of multiple children, they often spoke of changing their general expectations for college to fit the uniqueness of each child. Parents' expectations were not set in stone, and it was an interactive process between expectations and support throughout the college planning process.

Finally, schools investigated varied by expectations, often interacting with social class characteristics. Some parents' expectations included leaving open the possibilities of location up to the child, even when it was out of state or private. Other parents saw no need for a child to go out of state when good enough schools were closer, and cheaper. Some saw attending expensive schools as a waste of money, while other pushed some schools precisely because of their

prestige. Overall, parents' expectations influenced the support, and the type of support, they provided to their children. Below, these findings are placed in the context of other research, policies, and trends in education and family life. It begins with a focus on views of higher education and then discusses implications for parenting and college planning. It closes with a brief, formal discussion of limitations and a conclusion.

Parent Perceptions of Higher Education

Parents' views of higher education and its mission are important for understanding and supporting families, as well as recruitment of students. For the current study, parents cited the importance of obtaining skills for a job and providing a stable lifestyle. However, there were differences of opinion by parents about what college is supposed to provide. These differences in viewpoints ranged from almost purely vocational in nature to a more comprehensive education. Bok (2015) notes the main goals of college include both specific job skill training and general skill building, such as critical thinking and broadening of worldview, often tied to the liberal arts. Parents more focused on the first goal pushed more applied pathways and majors. Parents more focused on general educational growth pushed for college as means towards developing into a well-rounded person.

Based on the current study's findings, as well as prior research, in the future it is important to continue to investigate this issue in higher education. Zikaria (2015) and Delbanco (2014) argue for the merits of liberal arts education, pointing to the importance of being able to speak, write, listen, critically think, and have a greater, global perspective as important for all employees, and in turn, employers. They argue a college experience should include both major-specific and liberal arts education components (Delbanco, 2014). With the costs of higher education continuing to rise and the affordability of college and returns of college degrees

questioned, it is important for student support systems and college recruiters to understand the perspective families have of the purpose of college.

The study's results also relate well with prior findings on college choice. Although the current study did not address final choice, it appears parents' expectations of college influenced support and guidance to their children. Mullen interviewed students at Yale and Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), both located in New Haven, Connecticut. Yale students noted selecting the school for the promise of gaining a rounded education. SCSU students selected the school for the promise of obtaining a credential that would lead to a job better (Mullen, 2010). In Hamilton's (2016) interviews with college students and their parents at a large Midwestern University, she found students attending the same university had different experiences based on social background and perceptions of the purpose of college. The importance parents placed on the social aspects, professional development, and overall involvement influenced how their children saw and experienced college.

Parents' expectations for their children, and their views of what college should provide, is important for workforce development as well. In a survey of employers, the most important things employers look for – working in a team, being able to communicate, make decisions, and plan and organize- are all things typically gained through the general education curriculum (Adams, 2014). However, employers also say those are often the skills that recent graduates often lack (Strauss, 2016). Given the salience of parents often in children's lives, parents' perceptions of higher education are an important line of research to continue to investigate. Hamilton (2016) found children put in varying degrees of effort to their classes in college, often influenced by the expectations and guidance they were receiving from their parents. It is

important to gain additional insights from college-bound students, current college students, and their parents, to understand effort and emphasis placed on different aspects of higher education.

The interviews also have important implications for the vocational end of higher education, an important but often forgotten arm of postsecondary education. In the interviews, when parents spoke of expectations to college they typically meant traditional four-year programs. However, vocational options were explored when children expressed interest or struggled in the more traditional areas of school. These parents adjusted their own expectations to support their children. Estimates note the United States only need about a third of its citizens to have a bachelor's degree or higher. About 30% need to have some postsecondary education or an associate's, which include vocational programs (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). Industries such as plumbing, electrical, and welding are already experiencing shortages in its workforce (Hall, 2016; Moore, 2015). Future research should investigate the processes of students heading into vocational pathways, often located on community college campuses, and the role that parents play in the development of expectations, preparation, and support.

In addition, important insights were gained on the role of parents for community college bound children. At the time of the interviews, the two high schools had the 5th year program, which essentially provided students with a free year of community college credits. Since the interviews, Oregon and Tennessee have implemented free community college programs. Implementation is on the rise in other cities and states too (Fodero, 2017; A. W. Smith, 2017). The parents in the current study developed expectations and supported their children to a community college most commonly because of the financial benefits, as well as the opportunity to give the child time to mature and think about career options. This is similar to previous research, with parents more often to suggest looking into a community college than their children

(Bers, 2005; Bers & Galowich, 2003; K. Smith & Bers, 1989). For the current study, some families really struggled with whether or not to stress the community college option, particularly if they thought it was not best for their child's academic and personal development.

Given the financial contributions expected of families, decisions to attend a community college for free or a four-year school really may come down to the parents willingness to help pay. Some parents, particularly those with more financial resources, emphasized the college experience so much they pushed for residential schools. Other parents discussed supporting their child through a quick college planning process because of the 5th year program. Many of these parents originally expected their child would go to a four year school right way. A report on the Oregon Promise, Oregon's free community college program, found 52% of first generation students and 43% of non-first generation students who enrolled in the program originally planned on going to a four-year institution (Hodara, Petrokubi, Pierson, Vazquez, & Young Yoon, 2017). Given the recent implication of these policies, more research is needed. The current study suggests parents often did expect their children to attend a four-year school, but as they planned with their children, community college became a real option.

Academic Socialization and Parenting Practices

Beyond the study's connections to the higher education system, several takeaways are important for practice, policy, and research in family life.

Parents' expectations and parenting practices. First, parents' expectations are important to understand because of what it means for their parenting practices, even from very early in life. College planning research often does not look this far back in understanding how children make it to college. For many parents in the study, they hoped from birth that their children go to college, similar to prior findings (Y. Kim et al., 2014). The parents in the current

study reported reading to their children, looked for things to enrich their children's development, and stressed the importance of learning. The academic socialization literature suggests the environment parents set up for their children is important for their outcomes later in life (Taylor et al., 2004). Academic socialization includes the beliefs parents carry about academics/learning, and the actions they take based on those beliefs. Taylor and colleagues (2004) hypothesize parents' expectations influence the home environment they provide for their children, which ultimately influences their success in school (Taylor et al., 2004).

Academic socialization has important implications for children, from birth to college (Rivas-Drake & Marchand, 2016; Sonnenschein et al., 2016). The reflections from parents noted their perceived efforts early in life through high school, as well as continued high expectations of effort in high school. Taken together, the results from the current study and prior research suggests colleges and universities, as well as K-12 settings, may benefit from taking a more upstream approach in helping parents understand the academic socialization done early in life has implications for the child's development later in life. Particularly parenting education classes, kindergarten readiness researchers and practitioners, and other settings situated within schools and community centers may be good targets for collaboration. College planning research studies need to also consider earlier life factors and to start following families earlier than 8th grade to best understand how this process unfolds. For example, parents emphasized helping children through learning issues that sometimes did not lead to the formal creation of an Individual Education Plan. Additional questions in survey research on important ways parents felt they supported their children, perhaps with several response options and a check all that apply option, might be a quick and easy method. A better approach may be offering parents an open-ended question on this topic.

“Stage setting” and parent resources. The interviews also suggests stakeholders should help parents shape and sustain the environment they provide their children. In current study, the parents spoke of how they “set the stage” for their children’s success early, and throughout, childhood and adolescence. Harris and Robinson (2016) explains “stage setting” as creating, based on parents’ expectations, the children’s contexts (Harris & Robinson, 2016). The ability to maintain the appropriate “stage” for their children throughout their upbringing is important in fostering the best possible success. This can be particularly important when children move to middle and high school, and parent day-to-day influence decreases (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Spaeth, Weichold, & Silbereisen, 2017). While much socio-economic research focuses on the differences amongst parenting practices (Lareau, 2011), some evidence suggests all parents were able to do this to some degree successfully. Parents that had more options in school choice appeared more advantaged. These parents academically socialized their children at home, like other parents, but were also able to place them around similarly resourced families through schools, neighborhoods, and activities.

The efforts by these parents to place their children in St. Sebastian and other high-quality schools suggested there were inequalities in environments and school quality across children in the study. Some families appeared to have more resources to align the home environment with other environments in their children’s lives. Work by Putnam (2015) and Shapiro (2004) find parents make great efforts to find the best environment for their child, given their resources (Putnam, 2015; Shapiro, 2004). Through these different means, families often end up with the most resourced living with each and vice versa. In fact, segregation by family income has increased in the past half century (Fry & Taylor, 2012; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011). The self-

sorting of Americans is particularly salient among families with children, given their greater interest in schools and public services (Reardon & Bischoff, 2011).

The findings from the current study further the evidence of differentiation of pathways for families. Perhaps other children would have been better off if these families joined them in the public schools. Since all families lived within the same town, the results suggest it is important to understand the segregation within towns as well, which Harding and colleagues also suggest is needed (Harding, Gennetian, Winship, Sanbonmatsu, & Kling, 2011). Future research and policy conversations need to understand and develop ways to both support those families concerns on public school quality while decreasing the inequality in society. The environment in which children live is important for their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), and differences in the ability to provide equally strong environments can lead to differences in outcomes. Given the increase in segregation in our country (United States Government Accountability Office, 2016), this is an important area to give attention to. Future college-planning research should build in more questions on wealth and assets, as well as on neighborhoods, schools, and social networks to best understand the ways in which parents shape the environments of their children and how that in turn influences children's trajectories and the college planning process.

The importance of sustained parenting practices. Insights from parents' expectations and support suggest it was not *one* thing they did for their child growing up. Their sustained involvement over time was important. For example, policies in homes that regularly placed education as central may have influenced children's development. These environments are important for their cumulative growth, as well as advantages and disadvantages we see in society. Cultural capital and life course theories articulate that experiences over the life course

build off each other to lead to similar, or different, pathways (Elder et al., 2015; McDonough, 1997). Potter and Roksa (2013) found sustained parent involvement and expectations predicted their children's future academic achievement. This involvement over time, compared to concurrent involvement, partially explained the gaps between socio-economic groups (Potter & Roksa, 2013). Lareau's (2011) study of working- and middle-class families also found parental involvement and interactions over time eventually led to different post-high school outcomes. For practice, school districts should continue to stress the connections between early life and college. Providing examples of how they can be involved in age-appropriate ways may be beneficial.

Parenting practices by social class. The interviews also suggest a possible revision into the boundaries to who engages in certain parenting practices. Lareau's study of working and middle-class families in the 1990s suggested middle-class families make deliberate parenting efforts to foster the growth of their children and intervene when necessary, noted as *concerted cultivation* (Lareau, 2011). For working-class families, they had parenting styles characterized as *accomplishment of natural growth*. For these families, schools were in charge of the educational growth of their children and the children's innate talents dictated outcomes. However, the current study found some deviations. The parents who did not have a four-year degree or was without one until later in life, suggests this idea of parenting styles does not cut as cleanly by social class lines. Some parents typically expected to exemplify parenting closer to accomplishment of natural growth made sure their children were taking strong courses and found non-academic opportunities for them, knowing the implications of it for college readiness and applications.

Overall, these parents point to an important trend found in research and in the changing nature of higher education. This is important for parenting and college planning. Prior research

has found parents that obtain further education than their own parents, and those that earn credentials later in life, see their parenting practices align more with concerted cultivation type practices (Domina & Roksa, 2012; Roksa & Potter, 2011). When mothers further their education after their children were born, they are more likely to have books in the home and are more involved in their children's schools (Domina & Roksa, 2012). Given the increase in parents going back to school (i.e. "non-traditional" students), it is important to continue to investigate the diversity within and between educational categories and its implications for parenting practices.

An important aspect of concerted cultivation, effort as means to success, is important to understand for how parents view learning and school success. The parents in the current study stressed the importance of school and putting effort in their studies to obtain quality grades. In Lareau's study, middle-class parents perceived their children's development as malleable, which meant they knew they could *cultivate* their child's development towards positive means. Parents from a natural growth perspective felt natural innate talents and characteristics dictated outcomes (Lareau, 2011). Children are more likely to see the future relevancy of school and perceive greater penalties if not invested in school when their parents are involved in their schooling. Those two factors, as well as parent involvement, predict student effort in school (Rosenbaum, 1997). Children's educational expectations also predict the utility they see in high school classes and their interest in them (Domina, Conley, & Farkas, 2011).

For the current study, it may be that parents' expectations and socialization attempts engrained in their children the importance of school success. This is particularly important for college admissions and success once in college. High school students cannot just "turn on" their effort when they get to college (Rosenbaum & Person, 2003). Academically unprepared students are more likely to need remedial education and are less likely to do well once in college

(Adelman, 2006; Rosenbaum & Person, 2003). Children may benefit if schools continue to emphasize with parents the importance of effort, and not just innate skill, in fostering academic growth and success. The study provides important insights in need for further investigation. For example, survey research on parents' expectations and how they emphasize the fixed versus growth mindset of learning, and the importance of effort, is an important avenue to understand for college preparation and success once in college.

Parent Involvement in College Planning

The current study's two manuscripts suggest parents are important in areas often outside of the purview of college choice researchers. It also gathered important insights into what is more traditionally assessed areas of college expectations and support domains.

Opportunities to support parents and children. First, while parents' high expectations often lead to benefits in their children's educational pathways, it was not always a guarantee. Some parents had children with high GPAs but did not know how to convert that into scholarship and grant opportunities. These parents would have benefited from better support in order to know of all available options. Hamilton (2016) found parents' expectations did not always help their college-aged children when they did not have the resources and knowledge of the system to follow-through on them. Similarly, some parents had high expectations and said they were very involved, only to see their child not secure strong grades. McDonough (1997) also found parents' expectations and efforts sometimes bumped into a lack of drive and career clarity by their child. Despite high expectations by parents, it is important to remember child characteristics, family knowledge, and their resources are important in shaping children's college-going outcomes.

The reality of mistakes and the lack of knowledge by families is important to have in mind for institutions attempting to support and recruit their children. This is particularly

important for parents with little to no higher education experience. Life course theory posits individuals and families are located within unique historical and temporal locations, which influence perspectives and actions (Elder et al., 2015). For parents without college credentials, their personal experiences in the workforce, whether personally or observationally, influenced them to want their children to go to college. They live in a time when college is important but they do not have inside knowledge to help their children navigate those pathways. Colleges and universities, and programs such as GEAR UP, should continue their efforts to help these families transfer expectations to enrollment. Proposals by the White House to decrease funding to these programs would not offer the support these parents discuss needing (Douglas-Gabriel, 2017). In addition, land-grant universities and their extension programs might be great opportunities to reach youth and their families. More than 100 universities throughout the United States are land-grant institutions and have extension programs (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, 2017). The youth development programs in particular might be an avenue to translate research and policies on the college planning process in an effective manner. A program geared specifically with information on college planning would continue to help 4-H youth development programs towards their goals of successful transitions to adulthood, civic engagement of youth, better health and wellbeing, and economic stability of youth as they enter into adulthood (Oregon State University Extension, 2017).

At a local level, schools may want to collaborate with employers as an avenue towards reaching parents. Flyers in breakrooms about college nights, information for university admission staff, or helpful websites on college planning may benefit parents. In addition, parents discussed learning about the process through supporting their children, and often learning from prior mistakes. It may be optimal for schools to work with parents with experience of sending

their children through the college planning process and create parent resource groups to ease the burden on time-strapped counselors and provide more resources to parents and their children.

The timing within this process had important effects on the pathways of the children and has important future research implications. Life course theory notes the importance of timing in one negotiating the transitions into certain roles (Elder et al., 2015). Cultural capital theory posits middle- and higher-class parents know best when to utilize their resources to navigate institutions (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). In the current study, exhaustive parent research on admissions helped secure early admission spots into chosen schools. Other parents learned the rhythms of the process only after going through it once with a child.

Prior research emphasizes the importance of having college-going expectations before high school in order to best prepare for college, which most parents and children now do (Hossler et al., 1999; Mistry et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2011). It appears though it is more than just expecting to go to college that is important, but other details in the college planning process that only come with great effort – often by parents- or experiences with the process – such as launching an older child. Just as parenting practices may be changing over time, the almost universal expectation by parents for their children to go to college also suggests differences in pathways fall more in the negotiation of institutions. Similar to arguments made by cultural capital theorists (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005), those with more knowledge of the system and resources to understand it seem to benefit the most. School staff and non-profits need to continue to understand how to provide opportunities for all interested families to gain from policies and programs that make college more affordable and accessible. Parents' comments about how confusing the process was, even from those with time and resources to understand it, suggests simplification of the process and its policies might be a good place to start.

Parents' perceptions of costs and college support. The two manuscripts do not explicitly focus on final decisions and fine-tune details of paying for college. However, they did highlight the role of costs and family finances on expectations and support. Private colleges in particular may benefit from the current study's findings. Recent research has suggested families, including middle-income families, are struggling to meet monthly expenses, let alone afford to save and support their children to college (Napolitano et al., 2014). All families are more cost-conscious now (Eagan et al., 2013). Even for families making more than \$100,000 a year, more than half of colleges are not affordable (Poutre et al., 2017). This was evident in the current study as well. For example, Megan, a pharmacist and married to a real estate agent, discussed the frustration of her daughter Ruth missing a scholarship deadline at an in-state university. Their daughter applied there after receiving little financial support to attend private colleges. Private institutions might be particularly interested in understanding more of families like Megan's, who on paper should be able to afford private colleges. Many mid-tier private colleges are struggling with enrollments of late. One reason given is the lack of middle-income families being able to afford them (Clark, 2015). Only four students of the 35 children ended up selecting a private school, and parents of three of the four noted financial aid as critical in making those final choices. Many parents never noted discussing private institutions with their children. Given the struggles particularly of private institutions of late, further research on middle- and middle-high income families, once the bedrock of private institutions' student enrollment, may benefit our understanding of enrollment trends.

Finally, the degree to which parents were involved in college planning varied. Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues suggest parents are involved based on their own beliefs' on what they should be doing to support properly the development of their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al.,

2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Research on the college planning process has found some parents are heavily involved in all aspects, including filling out forms and having a hand in decisions. Some act more like consultants, and act as sounding boards for their children. Other parents are detached from the process, offering little support (Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Mullen, 2010). The parents appeared to take on their role based on their own conceptions of how they should be involved, as well as the characteristics of their children. Most parents took at least a consultant type role. Some children took the lead on planning, with a few floundering when given the task. Having a default by schools of providing both students and parents' information may help families negotiate who takes the lead, while ensuring the information is assessable to all.

Limitations

Despite the rich insights gained on the development of expectations and the support provided by parents to their college-bound children, some limitations need to be discussed. These limitations are prime areas for future research endeavors. Some limitations are referenced above. First, the study only sought parents' perspectives in a retrospective account. Other research has gained insights from studying parents and their children (Hamilton, 2016; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). The perspectives of their children would have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of the process. For example, what did the children see as important parts of their parent's involvement? How did they feel about the college planning specific support they received? Did their parents' expectations matter to them? Although some of these questions have been addressed elsewhere (Hamilton, 2016; Harris & Robinson, 2016; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997), no recent research has assessed both together.

Second, it would have been best to study these parents over time. This would have been able to better assess the interplay between expectations and support. For example, following children and their parents over time as they went through the process with older children could have brought insights as to how parents and children learn from the successes and failure of older children's process. Previous work have found important insights when studying families over time (Hamilton, 2016; Hossler et al., 1999; Lareau, 2011; McDonough, 1997). In particular, Hossler and colleagues found how expectations and schools deemed as top choices changed between years of high school. It is harder for people to recount retrospectively which schools were important when. The recommendations earlier about following parents and their children who are heading towards community colleges, vocational programs, private colleges, and other forms of postsecondary education means institutions and families all can benefit from this type of research.

Third, the study included only semi-structured interviews. Lareau (2011) gained important insights into family life by being inside the homes of families and following them to soccer practice and interactions with schools and other institutions. McDonough (1997) went to college visits and was present with the girls in her study. The current study found parents see the educational development early in life, the college visits and discussions of the 5th year program as important to one day getting their children to college. However, Lareau unearthed some aspects of family life not readily apparent to families, such as language and the interaction patterns between children and adults (Lareau, 2000, 2011). Future research on college planning should replicate past findings (i.e. McDonough, 1997) and follow families to understand how the process has changed and stayed the same since the 1990s.

Fourth, the study only included children who were college bound, meaning there were some parents who wanted their child to go to college that did not want to or could not go. It is important to understand the thoughts of parents who wanted their children to go to college, and perhaps made efforts to make that happen, but in the end the child did not go. It is important to understand why the child did not go, and ways in which the family could be better supported in the future to help the child find appropriate options following high school, for those in which postsecondary education is needed for career aspirations.

Fifth, the sample overall contains families more advantaged than others in their area and are not representative of families nationwide. The sample was more educated and had a higher income than their city, state, and nation as whole. The current study did gain some important insights into working- and middle-class parents. Insights gained from middle-high and high-income parents were also valuable in illuminating important struggles they have too. However, sampling more working class parents such as Laura, William, and Wesley is important for our understanding of this issue and a range of family experiences.

Sixth, the study was conducted in a town with a community college and was nearby to a four-year university. This no doubt influenced expectations and support, particularly relevant being the option of the 5th year program. These parents' perspectives were important in understanding how institutions close by may influence support and expectations, but further research should also include parents and their children whom do not live relatively close to institutions of higher education to understand how that may influence expectations and support.

Finally, the study was conducted in 2015, less than a decade after the start of the Great Recession. Research suggests families are more cost conscious now more than ever when it comes to college decisions and the importance of financial aid (Bound et al., 2009; Eagan et al.,

2013; Sallie Mae, 2014a). The current study did not ask specifically about the role of the Great Recession, although a few parents discussed the recession affecting their finances and/or employment. Given the study's focus on expectations and support, an event like this may have played into the minds of parents in terms of what were options and what support they could provide. Future research should address the role these major events have on the life courses of parents and how it influences college-going expectations and support.

Final Conclusion

Overall, parents' life histories, particularly in their historical and temporal locations, are important for their educational expectations for their children and the support they provide. Their educational and occupational experiences, and the experiences of those around them, brought them all to want their children to go to college. Those experiences gave them all distinct expectations of why they want their child to go to college and what they see it providing. The support they provided often was in the parameters of the resources they have and the feelings of the role they should take in their children's college planning. The reality that they often learn about opportunities and resources only after going through the process themselves as "non-traditional" students or with an older child have important policy and program implications.

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APPENDIX

Parent Involvement in Their Child's College Planning Process.

Interview Guide

SENIOR'S NAME: _____

As I mentioned before, this study seeks to learn more about your experiences with planning, preparing, and supporting your child towards college. First we'll talk about when you first thought of your child being college-bound and how you selected the school (NAME) will attend. Then we'll talk about factors that shaped why you want your child to go to college. Finally we'll talk about how you planned and supported your child towards their destination, including the barriers you have faced along the way.

Just a reminder, you can refuse to answer any question. If there is something you don't know, you can think about it and come back to it if you want. You can also stop the interview at any point you would like.

ASPIRATIONS AND PLANS

Let's start by talking about the aspirations and plans you have for (NAME).

- 1. When did you first think about (NAME) going to college?**
- 2. Why did you see (NAME) as potentially college bound?**
Probe: How old was (NAME); What was it about (NAME) that led you to see him/her this way? How did you communicate those expectations to him/her?
- 3. What is it that you hoped (or still hope) he'd/she'd become, and why?**
- 4. What kind of college (or even what particular college) did you think (NAME) might go?**
*Probe: Where will (NAME) go?
(If not yet known) When do you hope to decide?
Probe: How will/was a final decision be made?*
- 5. Thinking about your child, do you think that he/she is well matched to that institution? How? Or why not?**

ALTERNATIVE PATHS AND SCHOOLS

Now I'd like to know a little bit more about what other paths and schools (NAME) was considering.

- 1. Were there any types of schools that were put off the table from your vantage point as options?**

2. **Did NAME consider post-high school options that did not involve going to college? Probe: What were those options? Why did (NAME) not go with those options?**
3. **Did NAME consider schools other than (the one he's/she's going to)? Why did he/she consider and then decide against that option?**
4. **Were there options on the table that you lobbied against?**

PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND COSTS OF GOING TO COLLEGE

I'd like to turn now to your ideas about the benefits and costs of (X) going to college.

1. **What do you see as the biggest benefits of your child attending college?**
Probe: Better jobs? Better Salaries?
Probe: What do you see as the biggest costs? (Including non-financial costs)

INFLUENCE OF PARENTS' COLLEGE AND WORK EXPERIENCES

I'd like you to now think about your own education and job experiences.

1. **How did the fact that you went to college (or didn't) shape your expectations for (NAME)?**
Probe: Have your job experiences shaped your college expectations for (NAME)?
2. **What about the college or work experiences of (NAME)'s (other parent: father/mother). How have (his/her) experiences shaped expectations for (NAME)?**

INFLUENCE OF OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

1. **Are there ways in which other members of the family have influenced the college planning process? Who? How did they influence the process?**

EXPERIENCES WITH OLDER CHILDREN

1. **(If older siblings) What learn from older siblings' experiences after high school that shaped how you thought about college for X?**
(Probe): The financial support you can provide (NAME)?

SUPPORT AND PLANNING

I'd like you to now think about the ways you have supported (NAME) in getting to the point where they're entering college. I also want you to think about how your child and your family plan to meet the expenses related to (NAME) attending college?

- 1. Thinking about since you aspired and expected your child to go to college, can you tell me about the ways you've been able offer support to (NAME) in planning for college?**
Probe: selecting coursework, job shadowing, emotional support, financial support, discussing options with your child, reaching out to others for support/help
Probe: When did you start the process of supporting your child to this goal?
- 2. What strategies have you used to support (NAME)? Where do you go for information?**
- 3. How did you and your spouse decide how you would and would not support (NAME) in his/her college planning while he/she was in high school?**
Probe: What do you see at your role and your spouses in supporting (NAME) in their college planning?
Probe: (If applicable) What has been the role and influence of (Name)'s (ex-spouse's title) on the college choice process?
- 4. What have been the barriers to creating a plan for how (NAME) will get to college? (I.e. finding admissions, cost, financial aid information)**
- 5. At any point since (NAME) was born, have thought about how you might pay for college or about saving for additional education for your children?**
Probe: If yes, when did you start and what you did to do it?
Probe: If not, and if you wish you could, what have been barriers to doing so?
- 6. What have been your experiences understanding and dealing with the financial aid system?**
Probe: Have you completed the FAFSA form for financial aid? What was the process like?
- 7. Have you discussed paying for college with your child/children?**
Probe: (If discussed) When you discussed paying for college with your child, what specifically did you talk about?
- 8. By what means is your child's college education going to be paid for?**
- 9. What are the barriers to understanding how (NAME)'s college will be paid for throughout his or her enrollment?**
- 10. How do you anticipate supporting (NAME) as he/she makes his/her way through college? (financial and non-financial)**
- 11. How did you and your spouse decide how you will and will not support (NAME) while she's/he's in college?**

12. Are there any ways you won't support him as he/she makes his/her way through college, or would make you stop supporting him/her?

SCHOOL SUPPORT

I'd like to turn now to how your child's school has supported your child and your family through the college planning process.

1. How do you feel your child's school has supported you and your child in planning for college and life after high school?

Probe: What are the strengths to how your child's school has supported you and your child?

Probe: What do you wish the school supported you more with for this process?

FAMILY CONTEXT

Paying for a child's, or children's college education is often one of many responsibilities families must wrestle with. We know that rent/mortgage payments, day-to-day expenses, and other savings often come into play.

1. Where has college savings ranked in your priorities in how your family saves money?

Probe: What are your highest priorities for saving (retirement, general, college, etc.)?

Probe: what have been barriers to meeting your family's goals?

2. What every day demands, short-term goals, and/or long-term goals, conflict with the family's ability to financially support (NAME)'s future college expenses?

Probe: Rent/Mortgage, house repairs, vacations, retirement, other child's college funds, supporting another family member financially, debt

CLOSING QUESTIONS

1. Looking back on this process, what is one thing you wish you had known when (NAME) started the college planning process?

2. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences with supporting (NAME) to (INSERT SELECTED COLLEGE OR PLANNED COLLEGE LOCATION)?