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The Haves and the Have Nots: How Disparities in Social Capital Impact the Postsecondary Decision Processes of Seniors at a Midwestern High School

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

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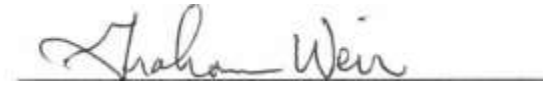
Dr. Raquel L. Farmer-Hinton, Dissertation Chair — Date



05/012020
Dr. Graham Weir, Committee Member — Date

Sherrie Wisdom

05/01/2020
Dr. Sherrie Wisdom, Committee Member — Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Patricia Michelle Closson

Signature: Patricia Michelle Closson Date: 05/01/2020

Acknowledgements

It can be said that we are our own worst critic, causing us to draw deep within our reserves to find lofty levels of courage, resolve, and perseverance where meager amounts existed before. On the notion of achievement, President Theodore Roosevelt said:

> It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again . . . who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while *daring greatly* . . . (Roosevelt, 1910, n.p.)

In order for my research to take hold and yield the answers to my questions, I relied on the students, staff, and parents within the Johnson City School District [Pseudonym]. I remain grateful for and appreciative of each participant for sharing with me their lived experiences and allowing me to capture their unique truths for the benefit of future students, parents, and school and district personnel.

Throughout my doctoral candidacy, I have been fortunate to be encircled by myriad forms and layers of support. The Lindenwood University School of Education faculty taught me, challenged me to think divergently, and bolstered my growth and initiation into academia.

My tremendous dissertation committee, comprised of Drs. Farmer-Hinton, Wisdom, and Weir, has been essential in helping me to arrive at this pinnacle. Through their guidance, reflection, and compelling conversation, I have developed a product of

which I am proud. I am deeply appreciative of and indebted to my committee chair, Dr. Raquel L. Farmer-Hinton, who has been a wellspring of kindness, unwavering support, knowledge, and resourcefulness. From the beginning of this work, through the completion of the defense, she has embodied the premise of my research and lived the example of what true social capital is. She never failed to set the bar high and while holding me accountable, has equipped me with the tools to meet the challenges set before me. I thank her for sharing her expertise and insight with me. As a highly respected and sought-after researcher in the field, I feel beyond blessed and fortunate to have had her leading my committee. I continue to be in awe of her brilliance. Dr. Sherrie Wisdom has been an ever-present source of encouragement and positivity, during some very unproductive times. She cannot be thanked enough for allowing me space to process, space to feel my frustration, space to grow, and investing her time and resources in me. Too, her persistent 'can-do' attitude and acknowledgement of my efforts truly helped motivate and encourage me. Dr. Graham Weir has proven to be an invaluable resource as it relates to the process aspect of my writing. I have found him to be both genial and supportive; his acuity as a former high school administrator has significantly helped to refine my writing. For all that they are and have been to me, I am profoundly indebted to them.

An enormous measure of gratitude is bestowed upon my amazing family to include: my supportive siblings, Anthony Starks, I; Jennifer Lewis-Watson, James Lewis, Jr., and Dr. Joi D. Lewis; my supportive step-father Calvin Payne; my beautiful children and cheerleaders, Jaden, Camdyn, and Zander; and my best friend, life partner, sounding board, and husband, Alan. Jaden, Camdyn, and Zander, I hope that through my intense

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factor, each person named in this acknowledgment and many others would share the space where my name is imprinted on my diploma.

Abstract

High school is the time when final preparations are made prior to embarking on postsecondary opportunities—enrollment in two or four-year colleges/ universities or vocational training programs, enlistment in the military, or employment. These decisions become based on resources, information, and networks—forms of social capital. By conceptualizing within-school differences among the student population, the experiences of the *haves* and *have nots* are shared to highlight the impact of social capital disparities on the postsecondary decision-making process. Through qualitative research, the researcher analyzed data culled from interviews with both student and parent participants in a medium-sized Midwestern high school by examining postsecondary planning and advisement through a social capital framework. Findings from 27 student and 11 parent interviews reveal the complexities of dismantling barriers to school-based social capital for all students. Finally, these findings problematize staff failure to leverage support, agency, and empowerment for a heterogeneous population of students in suburban contexts replete with resources.

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Chapter One — Introduction

Introduction

High school students and their families seek information during the senior year that helps shape their decisions concerning postsecondary plans. When there is a lack of access to information and resources, the result can negatively impact student postsecondary opportunities and outcomes (Ceja, 2006; Gast, 2016; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Holland, 2019; Jack, 2019; Oakes, 2005; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Vargas, 2004). Within the context of education, social capital is one theoretical framework that helps to illustrate how students experience open or closed postsecondary pathways (Coleman, 1988; Holland, 2019; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Lin, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Social capital includes resources that exist within networks of people and relationships among people. It is the presence or absence of these resources that can influence the postsecondary decision for high school students (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Roderick et al., 2011). There are many steps in this process that should be explored carefully in order for students to arrive at the best decision. Identifying the best fit and best match postsecondary option requires time, information, options, student self-awareness, and resources (Iloh, 2018). This is a period in the pre-adult life when the answers are not spelled out or readily known. For many seniors, the final year of school is filled with a variety of emotions, ranging from excitement to apprehension (Holland, 2019; Jack, 2019; McDonough, 1997). One component of that uneasiness is a fear of the unknown while trying to navigate previously uncharted waters. Some students determine early in their high school careers which path they will pursue

upon graduation. Yet for others, this postsecondary decision is unclear even up to as late as the second semester of the senior year. Enrollment in a two or four-year college/ university or community college; enlistment in a branch of the military; and employment in the work force are the primary choices available to students. To assume that a certain percentage of high school students will explore a specific postsecondary pathway is as arbitrary as assuming that college is the only viable postsecondary option. As Coleman (1988) noted, "It is one thing to take as a given that…a rising freshmen class will not attend college [but] to assign a particular child to a curriculum…closes off for that child the opportunity to attend college" (as cited in Kahlenberg, 2001, p. 76). Students who are able to access dense forms of social capital experience more exposure to better life options, opportunities, and overall guidance (Granger & Noguera, 2015). Their access includes capital both inside of and outside of the high school setting.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively investigate and evaluate the ways in which students make postsecondary decisions when levels of social capital vary. *Social capital* is a theoretical concept; however, it is also a pragmatic means of equipping students with the tools essential for plodding their way along the postsecondary-decision road map. As such, it is defined as resources appropriable from social relations that can contribute to a successful educational outcome, positive influence on societal circumstances, and community reform among other aspects after taking into account the efforts of individual students and their socioeconomic backgrounds (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Goddard, 2003; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2019; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1987; Smith, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997; Valenzuela &

Dornbusch, 1994; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). High school faculty and administration have focused the bulk of their postsecondary guidance efforts on funneling students toward ivy towers across America (Stockdill & Danico, 2012). They create college-going cultures; plan campus tours and visits with college admissions representatives; and administer college admissions assessments such as the ACT, SAT, and exams specific to community college entrance including the Accuplacer, a College Board assessment tool (Holland, 2015; Holland, 2010; McDonough, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001). On occasion, students are able to meet with recruiters representing branches of the armed forces. Rarely are students able to meet with employers who seek to place recent high school graduates in vacant positions and internships.

In the early 2000s, schools and school districts were primarily focused on making adequate yearly progress across the curriculum (Editorial Projects in Educational Research Center, 2011). Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education expanded that focus with their state-wide school improvement plan (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). Now upon the inception of its 6th iteration, schools garner data points based on the following performance indicators: Academic Achievement; Subgroup Achievement; College and Career Readiness; Attendance Rate; and Graduation Rate. One key aspect in ensuring that high school students are prepared for the rigors of college and career work is exposure to the information and resources that will assist them in selecting a college or career pathway. High schools place much emphasis on the celebratory aspects of college acceptance by hosting school-wide college signing days and decision days, with little recognition for students who make the decision to employ or enlist (Warren, 2017). From this view, college enrollment is the sole

postsecondary trajectory, despite the existence of additional postsecondary pathway trajectories.

With so many options available, it is often difficult for students to determine which path is the best one to pursue. Studies have shown that students from urban school settings lack extensive social capital networks due to fewer resources available at their schools, as well as being raised in families where previous generations have not matriculated to college (Choy, Horn, Nunez, & Chen, 2000; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, et al. 2003; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Noeth & Wimberly, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Socioeconomic background has the potential to positively or negatively impact students' educational experiences, postsecondary aspirations and access to pathways, cultural capital, peer networks, organizational ties, and trust (Hossler & Stage,1992; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Gonzalez et al., 2003; Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; McDonough, 2005; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2019). Further, schools in low income, resource-insecure neighborhoods also tend to lack networks inclusive of role models who attained college degrees (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). This weakened access to social capital concerning postsecondary planning is not endemic to educational settings marked by poverty and high minority enrollment. Similar narratives can be found in suburban high schools with heterogeneous demographic metrics, such as suburban students who are also first-generation college goers (Hill, 2008; Holland, 2019).

Research into the relationship that exists between social capital and the postsecondary decision-making process has largely focused on student access to and

interaction with their parents and guidance counselor (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Corwin et al., 2004; McDonough, 2005a; 2005b; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Tierney, 2002; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

Few studies have considered additional factors such as social capital extra-group ties (the community and intergenerational social capital—networks that exist among students and adults) and their impact on the postsecondary decision (Bourdieu, 1973; Coleman, 1987; Putnam, 2000; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Holland, 2019). Extra group ties as defined by Granovetter (1973) are connections and associations that occur less frequently, with less intensity, and with lower levels of reciprocity. The concept will be discussed in greater depth in the Chapter Two review of literature. While this research has unearthed important associations between students and the school system (though loose they may be) such as immersion in a college-going culture, peer-to-peer networks, occasional postsecondary-planning meetings with guidance counselors, participation in college and career activities (college fairs, financial aid workshops, and common application sessions), it ignores the necessity for additional information sharing, networks, and resources and the impact that a lack thereof can potentially have on decision making. Further, the extant literature persists in its underdevelopment of addressing the widening chasm between student knowledge gaps and the actions necessary to make informed postsecondary decisions. Where schools bar access to social capital and families lack forms of social capital, other adults such as neighbors, non-familial kin, and peers' parents can allocate their information and networks to narrow the divide (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000).

Making serious choices about the future and careers is not an easy task for the average high school student and when coupled with a barrage of trajectories from which to choose, the process can become even more daunting. To allay this pervasive sense of uncertainty, many students seek the guidance of parents, professional school counselors, siblings, and even peers. Other students, however, are forced to plot the course without having the information channels, networks, and resources available to their previously mentioned peers (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Holland (2015) concluded that students are in vulnerable positions because they cannot consistently depend on their parents for college-going guidance when applying to colleges. It is in this way that social capital (or lack thereof) impacts their postsecondary decision-making process. The resulting outcomes may be positive, negative, or a combination of both.

Johnson City High School is one school in Missouri that recognizes the importance of college-going advisement and in response, plans, advertises, and engages in some college preparatory activities as noted earlier. These actions are well intentioned; yet, are not intentionally or consistently targeted to reach all students regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic background, or academic track. Sometimes, these actions are woven into the school's curricula and culture. Other times, some students are able to gain much needed access and information, while other students are not. On the surface, it seems that students who actively seek advisement get it, leaving behind their peers who are less direct in their efforts to prepare for the next steps beyond high school.

This study considered the impact of disparities in social capital on the postsecondary decision-making processes of high school seniors from differing academic tracks. While some students have access to high levels of social capital, others do not. The *Haves*, as will be more closely examined in subsequent chapters, include White and African American students coming from median to wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds born to college educated parents and who are placed in regular or gifted education programs. In some cases, college has been a family norm for generations. The *Have Nots* are often White, African American, and Hispanic students from lower income backgrounds who are first-generation college students and quite frequently, enlist in the military or employ immediately following high school graduation as a result of having few options from which to choose after experiencing poor access to postsecondary planning information, social capital, and rigorous academic offerings. *Have nots* can be placed in regular academic tracks, but more often have IEPs and receive special education services. Yet, regardless of the level of social capital, all must ultimately make decisions concerning plans beyond high school.

The research from this study is distinctive in that it investigated the lived experiences of high school seniors representing a cross-section of race, gender, class, and academic track in a public, middle-class high school setting and their selection of a postsecondary trajectory, not solely college. Parent voices were also included in this exploration so that their postsecondary planning and advisement needs and knowledge gaps could be captured and included in suggested reform efforts. Previous educational researchers and scholars primarily investigated dynamics including: low socioeconomic backgrounds; elite academic settings; urban charter schools; immigrant student

populations (Latinx and Asian); and private Catholic schools (see, for example: Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stone & Jovel, 2003; Kao, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Perna, 2000; Peshkin, 2001; Ogbu, 1991; Stanton-Salazar, 1994; 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). Each of these studies examined the college search process. Little attention was given to student narratives in middle-class America in the Midwest paired with exploration of choosing a postsecondary pathway—college, military, or career. To further illustrate the impact on individual educational outcomes, this study explored how disparities in social capital influence the postsecondary decision-making process. It is for this reason that this study will be of benefit to school communities, communities at large, and state and national policy makers.

Statement of the Problem

The American educational system is comprised of degreed and certificated staff who are knowledgeable about various post-secondary pathways. As agents and advocates for high school students, they are charged with providing essential guidance and support for seniors as they choose between enrollment, enlistment, and employment. Despite the collective depth of knowledge that high school faculty and administration possess, some students and families report that their gaps in knowledge and information are sometimes addressed, while other students and their families experience a lack of access to the same knowledge and information (Ceja, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Holland, 2019; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). This unevenness has negatively impacted vulnerable populations including first generation college goers, minority students, students from low-income backgrounds, and other

marginalized populations because these student groups lack the social, human, and cultural capital necessary to inform their best fit postsecondary trajectory (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, et al., 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Possible causes of this inequality lie in the unintentional and intentional institutional neglect, barriers to access, academic tracking, and ineffective school structures to which students are exposed (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hossler et al, 1999; McDonough, 1997, 1999; Perna, 2006). Making postsecondary decision making and planning information and resources available to all students could be done more effectively and proportionately by dispatching these forms of capital across the high school setting. Accessing faculty-based social capital is one critical leverage point that could accomplish this goal (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Focused faculty advisement and guidance paired with familial and postsecondary social capital can serve to close knowledge and access gaps for all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic background, and academic track. That schools are unequally resourced and thus unequally able to provide support to students creates stratified systems where students unevenly benefit from relationships, tools, networks, and connections (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2011; Oakes, 1985). A qualitative investigation of this issue could yield very telling narratives that would prove useful in creating more rich and sustainable social capital that results in equal postsecondary decision-making experiences for all students and families. Generally, schools function as the great equalizer whose goal it is to provide equal opportunities to all learners. The reality is that terms such as “all” and “equal” remain elusive in the plight to provide access and prospect to every child.

Purpose of the Study

The public education system has a responsibility to its students, parents, and community to ensure that all students are well prepared to contribute to a global society. Part of that preparation involves assisting students as they prepare for postsecondary trajectories. This is a function that is typically fulfilled within the high school guidance department; however, the research shows that guidance counselors simply cannot effectively manage their caseload, while assisting graduating seniors with their exploration and initiation into postsecondary trajectories (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Corwin et al., 2004; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McDonough, 2005). Further compounding this issue are student feelings of lack of connection to staff, translating to fewer opportunities for interaction with staff and differently sorted peers (Gibson, Gandara, & Peterson-Koyama, 2004). For these reasons, the study will identify those areas with the greatest gaps in social capital, informing administrators and policy makers whose responsibility it is to devise school-based initiatives and resources to assist high school seniors (and high school students in general) with making better informed postsecondary decisions.

The purpose of this study was to qualitatively investigate and explore the ways in which students make postsecondary decisions when levels of social capital vary. Social capital includes information sharing, networks, and resources. It is these types of resources that allow students to make informed decisions regarding postsecondary trajectories, college choice, and career pathways—their futures (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Holland, 2019; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Qualitative analysis will afford school administrators, the

community, and policymakers the opportunity to evaluate the real impact of social capital on the postsecondary decision-making process. The research from this study differed from other empirical investigations in that it evaluated narratives representative of a diverse sample of students and families from a middle-class high school setting. Academic track and postsecondary trajectory were additional classifications that the researcher used to add to the depth of the participant perspectives. By capturing the varied perspectives of students and parents who span various socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of education, this study explored the role of social capital as purposeful decisions were to be made.

One decade ago, Johnson City High School boasted pride in sending many students to college, some to the military, and few straight to the work force. In their view, they were doing an effective job providing postsecondary advisement even if it meant just one or two 15-minute meetings with each student in the space of the senior year. From the school's lens, the possibility of more guidance and information was there, but the onus was on the student to seek it out. In instances where a student did not aggressively seek more and greater access, guidance counselors were required to do just one postsecondary exploration session which by design was more of a perfunctory, scripted check list. Students and parent study participants from various demographics—Black, White, Hispanic, AP (Advanced Placement courses) track, SPED track, regular education track, low income, median income, college-education, non-college educated—reported needing information, resources, and membership in circles that would afford them appropriate guidance. Johnson City's response came in the form of two college campus tours for select students meeting specific criteria, a metal file cabinet with college

and military enrollment and enlistment pamphlets, and occasional visits from college representatives. This example illustrates a traditional approach to linking students to college which creates systemic barriers for the *haves*, while facilitating access for the *have nots* (Hill, 2008). For those families who were intent on pursuing access to information and membership in networks, the result was a well-guided postsecondary decision-making process which was in stark contrast to the previous example. On the other hand, students who did not actively demand that the school support them in their postsecondary planning efforts received little support.

On the surface, it appeared that Johnson City High School was content to simply graduate its students from high school with no objectified concerns about their postsecondary matriculation, completion, or overall success. As a faculty member at this high school, the researcher was afforded a unique vantage point through which to view the problem being investigated based upon her interactions with students, family, and colleagues and contributed to the anecdotal data shared in Chapter Four (see the researcher positionality statement in Chapter Three concerning how her 10-year accumulation in the building led to the experiential knowledge that informed the design of this study). Adding to this investigation is an exploration of the ways in which familial social capital is strengthened and augmented by school social capital enabling students to achieve certain ends that would not otherwise be possible. Finally, the study explores the impact of the school system in the development and sustenance of social capital and how it works to foster a positive, supportive, and nurturing environment that encourages informed postsecondary decision-making for high school seniors from differing academic tracks.

My hope is that this study will provide an understanding of the interconnectedness of the home and school and how it can serve to benefit students as they progress through high school and make decisions concerning postsecondary trajectories. Future students and parents of the Midwestern suburban high school in this study would benefit from the results derived from this research in that the school serves a population with varying amounts of social capital and the decision-making processes that determine postsecondary trajectories are equally varied. Approximately 66% of the 2007 graduating class chose postsecondary education in the form of two-year and four-year colleges and universities, while the remainder of the class, 30%, was divided among additional postsecondary trajectories such as the military, the work force, or vocational training programs. According to core data statistics from the state's department of education website reported an increase in the graduation rate from 84% in 2007 to 89% in 2008 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008). With this increase comes the opportunity for more graduates of the school district in this study to choose an educational trajectory. In an effort to ensure that all children are prepared for the future, the District and the Midwestern suburban high school have a responsibility to provide resources and information that will assist students and their families in making educated, purposeful decisions and to expand access to the information and resources necessary to shape those decisions.

This study was devised to augment the education literature on the impact of social capital on the postsecondary decision-making process and to identify those forms of social capital that students and parents require in order to make informed postsecondary decisions. The intent was that this research will inform school faculty and administrators,

boards of education, and policymakers, inciting them to make substantial and sustainable reformations to the forms of social capital that exist within school structures. The research questions sought to identify:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the stages of the postsecondary decision-making process that students perceive they experience?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Who is involved in the decision-making process and what role do they play according to student perceptions?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What types of resources and information do students and their families report that they sought?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): What information do students and families share that they apply to decision-making?

It is plausible to suggest that students who have greater access to social capital make more informed, intentional decisions with regard to postsecondary trajectories than do their peers who are unable to access rich social capital networks. As schools serve to function as brokers and agents, they should exist to serve all in their charge. A qualitative exploration will serve to understand how families apply information and membership in networks to shape the postsecondary decision-making process.

Limitations of the Study

In conducting research of any sort, there is always the possibility of limiting conditions. As was the case with this study, there were elements and factors beyond the researcher's control which could potentially impact the results. Both qualitative and quantitative studies that centered on postsecondary planning through a social capital framework were available at the time of this study; however, the researcher elected to

examine the connection between high school seniors' access to social capital and the ways in which it impacts the postsecondary decision-making process through the narrative lens. Primarily based on James Coleman's (1988) social capital framework, this study explored a suburban Missouri secondary educational institution and to the research and development by the primary investigator. Because the scope of this research was intended to capture the varied perspectives of students and families navigating the postsecondary decision-making process, it was fundamental to apply an interview protocol that would be administered to all subjects in a consistent manner. In this way, it was plausible to assume that differences among subject perspectives as a result of each individual's unique experience. Employing a social capital framework for analysis limited the data that emerged in that certain phenomenon could not be observed due to this specific theory. As an example, associations between student skill set and selection of postsecondary institution were impossible to make without analyzing human capital capacities which was not a key element in this study.

In identifying ways in which this research differed from other investigations, the researcher selected a high school setting that was not characterized by wide-spread poverty, religion, nor elitism. What distinguishes this study from similar ones is the fact this involves just one high school, capturing the perspectives of a heterogeneous mix of students and parents, but not the faculty, professional school counselors, or administration who support them. While collecting survey data and generating a statistical profile can reveal a detailed investigational picture and demonstrate validity in the results, the researcher was more interested in learning about the lived experiences of students and parents by conducting qualitative research. The study sample did not

include the entire senior class; however, the sample was representative of the demographic make-up of the class based on heterogeneity in race, gender, socioeconomic background, academic track, and postsecondary aspirations. Emergent themes and patterns illustrated areas of strength and opportunity that could inform school improvement efforts and reformation. Additionally, the researcher triangulated study results via participant feedback discussion in order to seek trustworthiness and establish credible outcomes. Because this research was not an experimental design, there was no resulting causal data. Finally, the documents collected, presentations prepared, and research communicated were done solely by this researcher.

Threats to Internal Validity

In their discourse on internal validity and study outcomes, Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (1993) noted that, "many alternative hypotheses may exist to explain the outcomes . . . these alternative outcomes are often referred to as 'threats to internal validity'" (p. 221). To conduct this research, students from differing academic tracks (i.e. advanced placement/ college-bound, regular education, and special education) and their parents were studied. In some instances, students who initially expressed interest in study participation could not attend the scheduled interview sessions during the data collection window, resulting in a loss of that participant's perspective (mortality). One expected obstacle in working with high school students was the conflict between conducting after-school interviews and student involvement in extra-curricular activities and jobs—activities that take place after school. Additionally, conflicts between the availability of parents and the primary investigator also contributed to this threat. The school in this setting is situated in a working-class community which prevented some parents from

doing interviews in the afternoon or during the school day as a result of the work schedules.

Another threat of this type emerged as all participants in this study, both student and parent subjects, were required to submit consent forms. While some potential participants may have expressed interest in becoming involved in the study, only those who actually returned the required paperwork were permitted to become a part of the sample. This affected sample size and subsequently study outcomes as only those participants from whom data were extracted became part of the sample and could have produced bias in the data. For example, the study setting is best described as a predominantly white institution, with less than 12 percent of the student population classified as being in the racial minority (i.e., of African-American, Asian, or Hispanic origin). Based on the returned consent forms, some participants representing various racial, socioeconomic, or academic backgrounds were not represented in the accompanying narratives and that may have caused the appearance of overrepresentation of White, college-bound students or underrepresentation of minorities from all academic tracks, as well as underrepresentation of all students in the enlistment and employment tracks in the results. The potential participant pool size was impacted during the recruitment phase in that ten more students and four more parents expressed interest in the study than the number of subjects that actually became participants.

Students identified as qualifying for special education services and students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses comprised a portion of the study sample. Typically, these groups achieve at lower and higher levels, respectively, and thus, may respond in ways atypical of the expectation, though there are outliers in each group. The

scope of special education includes students identified as gifted—a distinction of students known to achieve at high academic levels. Conversely, special education students who have identified deficiencies in literacy and/ or numeracy may achieve at high levels based on ability, skill set capacity, and increased focus in weak areas. Further, students who took AP courses did not always achieve at high levels for various reasons (i.e., poor grades on assignments and assessments). To clarify, just because a student is identified as being a SPED student does not necessarily mean that they are of low cognitive ability in all academic subjects. Neither does an academically talented—gifted, student perform at high levels in all courses. Mere labels that distinguish students based on academic ability do not necessarily limit their capacity, aspirations, or outcomes. Another aspect of this study may have caused participants to behave in atypical ways. Some students felt that they were not where they should be in the planning process. As a result, the adjustment in natural behavioral patterns, known in research as the Hawthorne Effect, could have adversely impacted the qualitative outcomes.

Definition of Terms

The researcher found throughout the study that definitions, terms, and acronyms were used to describe students' postsecondary processes, actions, and participations. Creswell (2008) noted that investigators should use operational definitions to outline how terminologies will be used throughout the study. Those definitions are described as follows:

Actor: One who takes part in an action; an active participant.

Change Agent: A person whose presence or thought processes cause a change from the traditional way of handling or thinking about a problem.

College linking process: The process of planning, application, and decision making that culminates in enrollment in college (Hill, 2008).

Empowerment Agent: Adults who act on the behalf of others in ways that are counter to established hierarchical social structures; they facilitate and enable the creation of coping mechanisms to overcome institutional barriers and harmful ecological situations (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000).

Fictive kin: Peers who play a social support role that helps create a culture of success (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005).

Hawthorne Effect: Increased attention and recognition of subjects that creates a threat to internal validity (Creswell, 2002).

Intergenerational Social Capital: Resources, networks, and information channels that are transmitted between/ among parents and transmitted to their children/ children's friends (Granovetter, 1973).

Institutional Agents: High-status, non-kin agents who occupy one or more hierarchical positions in stratification systems; actors who are well-positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support; individuals who operate the gears of social stratification and societal inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Institutional Neglect: Experiences of exclusion in schooling which create stratification and marginalization (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003).

Postsecondary education: Attendance at a two- or four-year college, vocational technical school, or trade school marked by admission and enrollment after the completion of high school.

Protective Agents: Family and community-based networks inclusive of parents, grandparents, other relatives, neighbors, and prosocial peers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Social Capital: Broadly, social capital concerns the norms and values people hold that result in, and are the result of, collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships. This includes resources, information channels, and networks (Coleman, 1988).

Summary

Making choices concerning next steps beyond high school has been an inevitable action since the inception of the secondary school system in the United States. Postsecondary options have operated as sorting mechanisms in the past as evidenced by military enlistment patterns during world wars and other times of social unrest; college enrollment trends based on gender and wealth; and employment patterns based on economic needs. When this study was conducted, American high schools focused their efforts on notions of college for all and ensuring that high school graduation rates remained high (Carnevale, 2008). In its oversight of high schools, the state board of education included measures for assessing college and career readiness growth in their annual report; yet, failed to highlight the connection between decision-making knowledge and postsecondary trajectory fit (DESE, 2009). This gap in student knowledge and preparedness could be effectively remedied by allowing all students and families access to rich forms of social capital because every faculty member within a school attended and completed college, has worked outside of a school setting prior to becoming an educator, or has served in the military. In some instances, there are faculty members who have done all of these. The reality is that high schools are abundant with this invaluable

resource; however, the distribution of such is not equal across student populations. Institutional neglect in the form of unmanageable student caseloads, organizational brokering, and lack of currency and consistency in knowledge around enrollment, enlistment, and employment practices have created and perpetuated a system of the *haves* and *have nots* within the high school setting (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). While this neglect is unintentional in some aspects, yet intentional in others, the outcome has far-reaching and life-changing effects for students.

The purpose of this research was to capture narrative perspectives of a heterogeneous mix of students and families in a suburban Midwest community concerning postsecondary planning guidance, information, and support. Designed to understand how to best support students and families with the postsecondary decision-making process, this research was intended to close knowledge gaps, identify forms of participation, and effectively utilize the collective social capital that exists within the school community.

Chapter Two illuminates educational settings in the United States. and their effectiveness as conduits for sharing resources and information, while creating a vast network for the students and families they serve. It unearths those areas of greatest need that students experience during the postsecondary search process. This chapter synthesizes and analyzes the seminal and empirical literatures available concerning social capital and the role that it plays in academic settings at the high school level. The literature also includes details about the postsecondary search process, the role of school structures in postsecondary decision-making, and the role that trust and tracking play in

creating equity for students. Chapter Three discusses the study methodology; Chapter Four shares the results from both student and parent vantage points, and Chapter Five discusses the results, implications, and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter Two — Review of Literature

Background

High school is the time when final preparations are made prior to embarking on postsecondary opportunities—two or four-year colleges/ universities, the military, vocational training programs, or the work force. In making choices about which trajectory to pursue, students utilize various tools to assist them in this process. These decisions become based on access, information, and networks—forms of social capital (Coleman, 1996). Yet, students in a high school setting can have very different experiences concerning academics and making plans for their futures (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Gast, 2016; Goddard, 2003; Gonzales, 2010; Gonzales, Stoner, & Jovel, 2001; Holland, 2019; Holland & Farmer-Hinton 2009; Maier, Daniels, Oakes, & Lam, 2017; Oakes, 1985; Robinson, 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). This trend happens for a variety of reasons, chiefly staff motivations and actions and how students figure into this scheme (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Formally, administration and staff develop and implement systems for dividing resources and opportunities among the student body. These allocations take into consideration equity measures such as race, socioeconomic background, and academic ability. At times, staff work through a series of thinly veiled attempts to do what is best for all students while launching complaints about being expected to expend the same high levels of effort to support the *have nots* as they do for the *haves*, and in particular, those students they deem worthy of the extra attention (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). For example, a high-achieving African American student who is from a low-income household could be extended the opportunity to attend a weekend college visit at a small, private school

known for meeting 100% of the cost to attend college. Other examples are the case where students who meet specific academic criteria are offered applications to take the PSAT as a precursor to qualifying for the National Merit Scholarship or scores within a specific range on the ASVAB are afforded opportunities to enlist in the Armed Forces.

Informally, staff and students interact in ways that are predicated on relationships, network membership, or connections (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; Gast, 2016; Jack, 2019). In these less formal processes, a staff member who has worked with a student and feels that s/he demonstrates potential may work around more formal structures to create or open up opportunities for them. To illustrate, consider the case where an English teacher is also a volleyball coach who sees athletic promise in one of her players. Even though this student's English abilities may not be on par with AP-level course work, the volleyball coach talks to her colleague who teaches AP English, convincing her to approve of the student enrolling in the course because the class will look attractive on the student's transcript when college coaches begin their recruitment and selection process. Another example is a school administrator who contacts a military recruiter on behalf of a student who has expressed interest in enlisting in the Marines, but who missed the mandatory military club meeting. These examples are shared herein to illustrate actual experiences that the researcher encountered during her years as a high school classroom instructor and school administrator. Stanton-Salazar (2010) suggested that administration and faculty should focus on widening the pipeline by changing the environment of schools, rather than merely widening the pipeline. Regardless of whether a student is ranked within the top 10% of their graduating class, has assumed an active role in initiating the postsecondary decision-making process, or

comes from a marginalized or underrepresented background, resources should be equitably and fairly distributed among the student population through systems and structures that assist all students in making informed, intentional decisions about their futures.

Despite the need to create more equity among all student groups, there are specialized student groups with unique needs that require considerations endemic to this group. Not to be confused, equity and equality are separate constructs that operate to achieve fairness (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2015). Equity is providing to everyone whatever is needed to achieve success; conversely, equality is treating everyone the same including allocating the same distribution of resources. To illustrate, equity is administering the ACT free of charge to all students in a school as a means of ensuring that historically underrepresented student populations have access to postsecondary education. Latinx students, students from undocumented families, students whom are the first in their families to enroll in college (also known as first generation students), and students in situations with constraints such those who lack access to their parent's income tax returns belong to this category because of the attention, time, and careful handling that they require. To ignore their unique circumstances is both unfair and inappropriate given the charge of school faculty which is to ensure the success of every student and to do so from a place of equity. In instances where such students are left to their own devices without appropriate guidance and counsel from faculty the results include knowledge gaps, misinformation, missed opportunities, and stratification (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Farmer-Hinton & Rifelj, 2018; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Gast, 2016; Holland, 2019; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). As an illustration,

during the researcher's years as a teacher, she observed that these students are at a higher risk of falling into situations where they sign for private student loans at usurious interest rates, enroll in for-profit institutions which have been known to close without warning or recourse for lost tuition paid or assistance in applying to another institution, delay pursuing the postsecondary pathway of their choice as a result of not knowing all of the parts of the process leading up to it, and sometimes find themselves in spaces not best suited for them or their future goals. The onus is on schools to allocate human, financial, and material resources to support marginalized populations in the same manner they would for students that do not experience similar challenges.

Students and families view the school setting as a resource-rich environment created to develop and support students in becoming their best selves. While these resources should be accessible to all, it is a given that resources are unevenly distributed as a matter of circumstance, more specifically, membership in particular networks. The school system functions as a network abundant with resources that are accessible through formal and informal channels. Oddly enough, the formal channels are more widely known; yet, more difficult to gain entry to. Within these channels reside the norms, resources, trust, and relationships—provisions, which allow successful participation in school and navigating the pathways leading from high school (Coleman, 1990). Institutional agency, a paradigm coined by Stanton-Salazar (2010), includes those faculty and staff who are in advantageous positions to facilitate certain actions for students and families. Whether well-intentioned or not, institutional agents, through their actions and decisions in formal and informal channels, create access or barriers to the resources that all students, the *haves*, as well as the *have nots*, desperately need. Serving as teachers,

mentors, and trusting adults, their roles as gatekeepers can create clogs or access to resources and opportunities for students (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993). The result can be detrimental for the *have nots* and beneficial for the *haves*.

This literature review will first delineate the literature as it relates to social capital both theoretically and empirically, highlighting the role that social capital plays in the high school educational setting and the impact it has on postsecondary decision-making. Comparisons and contrasts are made among the empirical studies that address social capital and its function in high schools, while noting the impact of differential access to social capital for students. In the section that follows, institutional agency and neglect are explored by undergirding the ways in which school staff both help and harm students concerning the postsecondary decision-making process. This section also examines the concept of stratification within high schools, detailing the challenges inherent in meeting the needs of a racially, socioeconomically, and academically diverse student population from an equity vantage point. In the concluding section, college choice literature with respect to the relationship among the college choice process, the timing of the decision, factors that go into the decision, and individuals involved in the college choice are explored. An added component of this section presents parental and peer involvement as key factors in postsecondary decision making.

Through exploring the relationship between accessing forms of social capital and making the postsecondary decision, there exist multiple bodies of related literature such as the literature on the college choice, influences on the postsecondary decision, school-based forms of social capital, and stratification within schools. Pairing these literatures is appropriate given the need for schools to close gaps in access to the knowledge and

prowess that will allow all students to make informed decisions concerning their postsecondary plans. Too, harnessing these literatures allows for close inspection of the ways that disparities in social capital impact access and choice processes. Though seemingly unrelated in scope, coupling these literatures is appropriate due to the need for purposeful college and career advisement within the high school setting. Finally, by coupling these literatures, the reader can focus on the challenges of leveling the educational playing field for all students within suburban high school settings. This review has been compiled to authenticate how each area is mutually interdependent and impacts the postsecondary decision-making processes of high school seniors and their families.

Social Capital Theory

Several theorists talk about social capital as a good form of resource, information, or accessible network that allows individuals to achieve certain goals or acquire a certain level of status (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman 1988; Lin, 2000; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1995). Sociologist James Coleman often utilized the term *social capital*, using it to refer to the norms and information channels available through social relationships (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998). According to Coleman (1988), social capital evolves through "changes in relations among persons that facilitate actions" (p. 100). Just as other forms of capital make possible productive activity, so too does social capital. For instance, where there exists a group characterized by extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust, much more is likely to be accomplished than an analogous group devoid of that trustworthiness and trust (Coleman, 1988). By its mere definition, social capital is a tool that when used properly, can positively impact the postsecondary decision-making

process. Its utility is the reason that this research was framed via the social capital lens. Applying social capital theory posits that high schools serve to function as networks and centers of knowledge, information, and resource sharing among faculty, students, and families (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Coleman's (1990) conceptual work involved research around social capital and suggested that it was not just a good, but also important norms that allow students to access certain opportunities and spaces. His work suggests that differences among student outcomes and normative school structures and process are tied to the manner in which school faculty distribute and share various forms and degrees of social capital (Lee & Croninger, 1999). Sadly, some schools operate in ways that only cater to the needs of the *haves*, those students who possess the adornments and accoutrements that show them to be worthy of access and passion of social capital. In their analysis of social capital conceptualization across six American high schools, Lee and Croninger (1999) highlighted a critical element of social capital in their discussion of intentionality which they identified as one of "three qualities inherent in social capital" (p. 3). Their example further illuminates the role of faculty in social capital structures by noting that intentionality is a quality of social capital that can be consciously developed and nurtured in their relationships with students (1999). This acknowledgement is an important element for the *have nots* who are prone to falling victim of lacking access to dense social capital networks. It is this segment of the student population that is in need of school staff who are intentional in their efforts to close gaps and break down the barriers that obstruct opportunities. In applying social capital theory to Johnson City High School, it is the *haves* who are embraced and guided through the process and structures of selecting

a college or career pathway, while the *have nots* resort to trying to figure out this progression of steps based on the limited information and postsecondary planning resources they find on their own. Students who belong to networks abundant with social capital are in advantageous positions because their networks are multilayered, with far-reaching linkages because of their distinctions as the *haves*. Considering the formal and informal structure of high schools, social capital offers a frame to understand the experiences of the *haves* and the *have nots*. To be clear, the *have nots*, students who are not a part of such networks, lack membership as a matter of circumstance; not because they do not have the same goals and aspirations of their more well-connected peers, the *haves* (Coleman, 1990; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Social Capital Networks

Coleman is not alone in his perspective of social capital. Along these same lines, Bourdieu, maintained:

> the existence of a network of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given, constituted once and for all by an initial act…It is the product of an endless effort at institution…and is necessary in order to produce and reproduce lasting, useful relationships that can secure material or symbolic profits. (as cited in Granovetter & Swedberg, 2001, p. 103)

Relevant to network connections and links between people, Granovetter (1973) discussed the strength of interpersonal ties to define relationships and associations as "a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). In this work,

he conceptualized strong, weak, and absent ties as linkages among people in community settings (i.e., neighborhoods), noting that absent ties incorporate "both the lack of any relationship and ties without substantial significance" (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Drawing parallels between Granovetter (1973) and Coleman's (1988) social capital work, weak ties are connections and associations that occur less frequently, with less intensity, and with lower levels of reciprocity. However, Granovetter (1973) did point to the strength of weak ties in joining otherwise disconnected groups. Relying solely on the positive, "symmetrical side" of ties in outline his investigation, Granovetter (1973) went on to frame his perspective by explaining the omission of the negative side of ties in his conceptualization as being due to the potential for adding unnecessary complexity to an exploratory work (p. 1361). He used the strength of ties to explain why some communities were more successful than others, dispatching resources and advancing their purposes, while other communities struggled to achieve common goals. This articulation may be helpful for actors in educational settings to understand as they set about the important work of building strong communities that produce sustainable, successful student outcomes.

Bourdieu's (1986) investigations sought to understand how inequality is reproduced and maintained; he is widely known for his work on cultural capital theory and the notion that possession of such can facilitate certain actions or opportunities. Though his work focused on the larger society and its hierarchical layers, this research examined how the individual functioned and employed an array of strategies to achieve success despite differential access to social capital. His theoretical views on social capital are included in this research because of his focus on the reproduction of inequality

which helps to frame the problem being investigated. Here, his work helps to unearth the root causes for the experiences of the *have nots* by demonstrating the ways in which schools operate in service to the *haves*. Bourdieu (1986) saw the educational system as a mechanism for structuring inequality which contradicts the reason that the system, historically developed to serve a homogeneous, white male population, was created.

More closely tied to Bourdieu's habitus and how certain know-how, savvy, or symbols indicative of culture can allow students to function in certain settings, Coleman (1988) noted the importance of relationships, more specifically, trust, norms, and reciprocity—those things that relationships consist of. It is the presence of relationships that allow students to build social capital which then becomes accessible to them and their families while making decisions about postsecondary plans. Putnam (2000) tended to focus on the resources embedded within networks. Both, he and Coleman identified social capital as existing within the social ties between actors, as well as being an element of community networks (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). As such, social capital exists within relationships and is accessible to those who are enmeshed in the relationship. Though Putnam's research analyzed the decline of the American community, his views are relevant to this study in that the school system is a community in and of itself as well. Both share similar properties and thrive or fail based upon trust and reciprocity (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

Putnam (1993) maintained that social capital is a "feature[s] of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (p. 167). Though he and Coleman were not the originators of this concept, they are both referenced heavily in connection with social

capital theory among educational researchers (Goddard, 2003; Wall, Ferrazzi, & Schryer, 1998). Synthesizing the perspectives of Coleman, Bourdieu, and Putnam is appropriate for this study because of Coleman's conceptualization of social capital (norms, trust, reciprocity, obligations, and expectations), Bourdieu's examination of the reproduction of inequality, and Putnam's analysis of the decline of community structures. Each of these viewpoints provides the frame for the study in that the school as a community could withstand reform efforts to better support their students and families through the careful development and nurturing of relationships characterized by trust, expectations, and reciprocity. The end results would be indicative of the elimination of differentials in access to social capital. The *haves* and *have nots* would no longer be distinguishable because there would be equity for all students regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic background, or academic track.

Stanton-Salazar too (2010) sided with Coleman's views on social capital in that they both acknowledged the value of social capital and its existence within structures (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). This view aligns with Bourdieu's notions of societal stratification (Bourdieu, 1986). Coleman was known for looking at the more positive functions of social capital, while also maintaining that those without access to social capital can be exposed to negative effects (see also *The Coleman Report*, (Coleman, 1966)). Similarly, Stanton-Salazar (2011) conceptualized the notion of institutional agency to describe actors who reproduce inequality through voluntary action or inaction. Coleman (1966) and Stanton-Salazar (2011) explored the manner through which social capital can function within school settings, enabling the *haves* to replicate their positions of privilege, maintaining disparity in access for the *have nots*, or creating

equitable and equal experiences and opportunities for all students regardless of their group characteristics (Coleman, 1966, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

Concerning social capital and its function within structures, researchers pointed to notions of between and within group sharing and networks known as bridging and bonding social capital (Lin, 1990; Putnam, 2000). Defined as social capital within a homogeneous group of people, bonding social capital is indicative of individuals in a collective unit who share a sameness in demographic characteristics, information, resources, and networks. Conversely, bridging social capital is shared between groups with respect to race, socioeconomic backgrounds, or other heterogeneous demographic distinctions (Putnam, 2000). Putnam's (2000) research discussed the importance of bridging and bonding social capital, noting that bonding is good for getting by, while bridging is important for getting ahead. His perspectives on bridging social capital align with Granovetter's (1973) previously referenced research which suggested that bridging social capital was a form of a weak tie due to its ability to join networks that would otherwise not be linked. In opposition, Lin (2005) argued, "social capital does not bind or bridge. . . it is the nature of the social networks that bind, bond, or bridge" (p. 14). His discussion of whether binding or bonding created certain quantities of social capital was tied to "the purpose of the action and the richness of embedded resources" (p. 14). He further asserted:

> The relative advantage of networks that bind, bond, or bridge afforded to social capital depends on the purpose of action. For expressive actions, that seek

> solidarity and preservation for individuals or the collectivity, binding relations or dense networks benefit the sharing and mobilizing [of] resources. For instrumental actions that seek gains in resources, bridging relations or networks with linkages to the outer layers of networks offers possible needed different and better resources (p. 14).

For additional context and discussion, see Lin's (2005) conceptualization of the heterophily and homophily principles, which address the both the benefits and constraints of networks composed of people who are similar in background and make up (homophily) as opposed to networks of people with dissimilar make up and associations. Like Granovetter's (1973) discussion of strong and weak ties, Lin's (2005) notion of homophily and heterophily, respectively, operationalize social capital within and between networks. Lin's principles could help to explain why the *haves* navigate school systems with ease, while the *have nots* experience challenges and difficulties when navigating those same systems. In evaluating school systems, there are both bonding and bridging social capital examples throughout. It is important that all students, the *haves* as well as the *have nots,* are afforded equitable access to resources and collaborative activities through relationships built on trust and reciprocity.

Social Capital in the Reproduction of Inequality

James Coleman (1988) emphasized the notion that even those individuals living in marginalized communities with limited access or who were members of the working class could also benefit from its possession. He furthered argued that social capital "is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain

actions of individuals who are within the structure" (Coleman, 1994, p. 302). Social capital has both positive and negative effects contingent upon an individual's position within or outside the network. To add to this definition, Lin offers that social capital is conceptualized as (1) a quantity and/ or quality of resources that an actor (be it an individual, group, or community) can access or use through (2) its location in a social network (Lin 1999a, 2000). He furthers this discussion on resources by expounding on why the location of resources is important (1999). To assign value to resources embedded within a network is fruitless unless the value of the location of these resources is also stressed. In illustrating social capital in practice, it is feasible to understand how If students are able to identify the existence of embedded resources within their school setting, yet lack membership in certain networks, then they are unable to gain access to the resources. To illustrate, for example, successful attempts to remove these types of barriers become an exercise in futility for students who cannot find the information that explains the FAFSA submission process, materials to study in preparation for the ASVAB, or who are denied the opportunity to attend a school-sponsored college campus visit because their GPA falls slightly below the 2.5 requirement as established by their high school. Or, for example, another illustration is the case where a student expresses interest in seeking an internship with a local business, directing the student to search through filing cabinets of college and career-related opportunity materials could create frustration and eventually exasperation if the non-descript paperwork cannot be easily located.

As previously discussed, it is the intentionality of staff actions that create pathways for students to access the social capital necessary for their success (Lee &

Croninger, 1999). Faculty participation in mentoring experiences, providing additional instructional supports, and seeking out and sharing summer learning summits with students are examples of planned, intentional efforts that serve to clear clogs in the access pipeline (Farmer-Hinton & Rifelj, 2018; Holland, 2019; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2015). Alternately, the *haves* are keenly aware of ACT testing dates; who to connect with in order to obtain the upcoming college campus tour permission slip; how to complete the online FAFSA; and how much time must pass before retaking the ASVAB to improve their test scores. In cases where a *have* is unfamiliar with the aforementioned scenarios, they do know how to mobilize the adults within or outside of the school setting, those individuals who comprise their accessible social capital, to get the answers or support needed (Gast, 2015; Holland, 2015, 2019; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2015). Lin goes on to say that though bridging social capital could be indicative of weaker ties, it is positively associated with improved access to information (1999). By removing impediments to accessing resources through network location, the *have nots* are able to experience more equitable experiences when navigating various systems within high schools. Specifically, when high schools create networks and operations that allow students to easily access the resources and information they need, fairness and equality become a normative part of the system (Holland, 2015, 2019; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Lin's (2001) research supported this perspective by highlighting the utility of school-based social capital because of its ability to supplement the amount of social capital—great or small—that students possess.

If Bourdieu was guardedly realistic, Coleman was the perpetual optimist, acknowledging the worth of networks for all whether individual or group, privileged or

deprived. In his view, social capital was given to producing positive outcomes, whereas Bourdieu (1983) tended to look at the negative effects of the concept and also acknowledged that the richness of one's social capital was contingent upon the size of their network. Field (2003) notes the contrast between these two sociologists respectively by citing the positive qualities inherent in social capital (i.e., establishing norms and sanctions that encourage individual participation with few drawbacks), while undergirding the stark, realistic side of the concept—bleakness for the oppressed; hope for the privileged.

Additional debates on social capital are presented by theorists who see opposing sides of the argument. They counter Coleman's claims by refuting the notion that social capital has only good properties by acknowledging its potential for negative impact, as well as Coleman's research (1988) is indicative of his position that social capital is inherently good for the individual regardless of their status or background. This perspective is reflected in Bourdieu's view that this good existed to create a system of elites characterized by the perpetuation of social inequalities and stratification (1983). Social inequalities are reproduced in educational settings through various means. Kozol (1991) conducted investigations in school districts characterized by challenges of an academic, socioeconomic, and financial nature. Using schools in East St. Louis, Camden, Chicago, Cincinnati, New York City, and Washington, DC as a research backdrop, he noted the ways that inequalities were reproduced for certain groups of students based on class and race distinctions. Deemed to be short-sighted in his observations by some critics (Farmer-Hinton, Lewis, Patton, & Rivers, 2013), Kozol's (1991) findings point out key ways that schools and communities contribute to the

structural inequalities that further complicate the plight of the *have nots* making it more difficult for them to experience education and positive outcomes in the ways that their more affluent peers do. He also cites that the result of perpetual educational race and class inequalities is de facto segregation which allows the *haves* to maintain their position, while placing the *have nots* in a caste system with little hope of mobility (1991). Farmer-Hinton, Lewis, Patton, and Rivers (2013) also discussed social capital as a form of community wealth; a point which Kozol failed to note.

Another way in which schools reproduce inequality is through tracking systems. Oakes (2005) investigated tracking within schools and its impact on students, comparing the intent of tracking systems with the outcomes of its effect. Initially designed to analyze American high schools, Oakes' (2005) study involved 25 junior and senior high schools across the country and centered on the effects of tracking for students at the secondary level. Once engaged in this research, Oakes (2005) discovered degrees of equality as well as degrees of inequality for all children, regardless of the location of their schools or the demographics associated with each school setting. By her definition, tracking is the "process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes" (p. 3). This process happens in myriad ways to include: assessment placement; staff designation and recommendation; and student self-selection. Regardless of how tracking happens, its impact on students has specific, usually long-lasting effects during a child's schooling experiences as well as into their adult lives (Oakes, 2005; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). Despite being developed to help students, tracking, also known as sorting, in fact contributes to systemic school inequalities and widens the divide between the *haves* and *have nots*. The

effects of tracking are even more severe for minority students and those from impoverished backgrounds who are already considered to be at a disadvantage (Oakes, 2005; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Yonezawa et al., 2002). Such ill effects include: low self-esteem; decreased or absent attachment to schooling and school activities; stark differences in instructional practices from one classroom to the next; delinquent behaviors; increased risk of dropping out of school; inability to move in or out of a given track (analogous to a caste system; see also, Gamoran, 1995; Hallinan, 1994, 2004); and negative perceptions connected to track placements, (i.e., elitism or being viewed as dumb) (Oakes, 2005).

Concerning this study, tracking has detrimental effects for students relevant to their thoughts and actions about their futures and educational aspirations (Oakes, 2005; Yonezawa et al., 2002). Through this school structure, the *haves* and the *have nots* seem perpetually tied to their classifications. Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel (2001) concurred with this position in noting the negative effects of tracking and its impact on Latina students. They identified the concepts of institutional neglect and institutional abuse as impactful components of schooling in Latinx communities that affected female students' accumulation of social capital and subsequently, their opportunities to enroll in and attend four-year universities and community colleges (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2001). A more thorough discussion on institutional neglect and abuse will be delineated later in this chapter.

The Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966) is another set of findings that highlights the ways in which structural inequalities operate within school systems. Commencing in the fall of 1965, James Coleman and a team of researchers studied the effects of

inequality between schools. With an aggressive timeline for investigation, much exploration was necessary to understand the nuances associated with the schooling experiences of students across diverse backgrounds from racial, religious, and socioeconomic vantage points (1966). Data points such as per pupil expenditures, student assessment outcomes, and the like had been previously nonexistent because of the lack of attention paid to how Black children fared in comparison to their White peers. Once unearthed, this knowledge, highlighted some devastating realities associated with not only the stratified educational opportunities of minority students, but more importantly, whether the American educational system as a whole was just and fair (1966).

Formally entitled The Equality of Educational Opportunity report, this research was the first of its kind to point out obvious gaps in the academic performance of students across schools. By investigating how students were performing in schools, Coleman sought to explain what factors contributed to their success or lack thereof in a climate still deeply affected by the impact of school segregation (1966). While the research did not show much difference in resources allocated between schools in Black and White neighborhoods, it did indicate that familial influences and heterogeneity in school environments were important to successful student outcomes (Coleman, 1966). The latter finding supports Oakes' (2005) and Holland's (2015, 2019) supposition that forms of tracking that put students in the same classes with students of the same abilities is counterproductive. Despite existing to serve all students and creating spaces for all to grow and experience individual success, schools persist in maintaining a system of *haves* and *have nots*, both historically and in modern contexts. Previous explorations such as

The Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966), *Savage Inequalities* (1990), "Answers in the Toolbox" (Adelman, 1999) and *The No Child Left Behind Act* (2002-2015) each conceptualize the lingering disparities in public education. Failure on the part of school districts and policymakers to make sustainable revisions to current equity practices only serves to support the reproduction of structural inequalities.

To be clear, Coleman's groundbreaking study has existed in scholarship over time as the first major research to document that inequalities existed in educational settings; yet, according to him, these inequalities did not impact standardized test scores. In response to these inequalities, efforts were made to fix families and children, but not schooling systems and structures, which was the primary focus, ironically. Borman and Dowling (2010) replicated Coleman's (1966) original study but added another methodology, the two-level hierarchical linear model, to investigate school effects on ninth-grade students' verbal achievement. Their results uncovered not only a major methodology flaw, but also and arguably understandable, flawed results. Borman and Downing's (2010) research revealed that those differences and structural inequalities actually did affect students' scores. Consequentially, it is this flawed study that has had far-reaching impacts on education policy to this day. Done correctly, this important body of research could have diminished pervasive, culturally-deficient school reform efforts that have done little to appropriately meet the needs of a diverse body of learners. This discussion is shared in effort to offer some historical context around disparate educational experiences.

Relatedly, Bourdieu (1973) noted that those students whose perceptions and declining expectations foster the attitudes, aspirations, and activities consistent with

limited opportunities, and of how the class structure works. Oakes (1985) posited the same results consistent with the more negative effects of tracking in middle and high schools. This vantage point aligns with his focus of exploring how individuals are afforded unequal access to resources, networks, and differentials in power resultant in class formation and a system of elites. In his view, social networks, though undoubtedly of value, could also result in stratification, producing or reproducing inequality. Primarily focusing on structure and agency or the objective versus the subjective, his framework operates from the concepts of habitus. Specifically, Bourdieu (1986) claims that there is certain know-how, savvy, or symbols indicative of culture that can allow students to function in certain settings, yet also function in a manner that excludes them.

In all, in conceptualizing social capital, Stanton-Salazar describes individuals such as faculty who access their position, resources, and capacity to effect life-altering change for students in marginalized groups such as the *have nots*. These institutional agents are positioned to distribute social capital in spaces and among students who exhibit the greatest need, but whom are unlikely to receive it due to their low status (2011). Stanton-Salazar concurs with Bourdieu as evidenced in his views on the role of social capital and institutional agency. Based upon his divergent perspective, he reimagined the notion of social capital by creating a new definition that it is "resources embedded in social structure and in the possibility of acting counter to the structure (i.e., agency and counter-stratification as the counterpart to hierarchical and reproductive social structures)" (2011, p. 1085-86). Lin was on par with this view as he noted the ability of institutional agents to "act according to their own interpretations" (Lin, 2001, p.

34). Further, within his research, Lin identified various inequalities in social capital that exist across social groups.

Based on this spectrum of views on social capital, it is apparent that some discrepancy does exist among theorists. One point that remains consistent across theorists is Lin's assertion that there is a common understanding that "social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structure, which can be mobilized when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action" (Lin, 2004, p. 24). Stanton-Salazar (2011) and Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch (1995) agree with Lin's (2001) position on the leveraging abilities of status, power, highly-valued resources, and authority (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). His concept of institutional agency pairs well with Lin's (2001) argument regarding hierarchical positions influencing an agent's ability to act or facilitate certain actions that would not be achievable otherwise (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Acknowledging this invaluable good and the influence that it possesses is a consideration that administrators and faculty should be aware of if any sustainable progress toward creating equal opportunities among student populations is to occur. Dismantling the system of the *haves* and *have nots* can only begin once school administrators and faculties acknowledge the ways that their systems and operations give more to some groups of students than they do others. Once that acknowledgment happens, actionable steps to end these practices and processes can be implemented; it is at that point that sustainable change can take hold.

The Role of Institutional Agents

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar (2011) proposed a new means of conceptualizing the educational attainment and social networking patterns of low-status youth, specifically

Latino, African American, and Asian, from marginalized and economically challenged communities. His collaborative research efforts included an examination of 47 high school students and parents of Mexican origin to address a gap in the data concerning their social networks (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003). The results gathered through ethnography and social network data revealed that just 20% of the sample indicated that they had the support of a non-familial adult. An earlier study of 145 high school students and parents of Mexican origin was designed to analyze the presence and availability of school faculty who provided various forms of support (emotional, informational, and personal) (Stanton-Salazar, 1995). Here, the results showed just 6.2% of the sample as having identified at least one adult from whom they received emotional support (Stanton-Salazar, 1995). Tied to my study, Stanton-Salazar's (1995) exploration revealed that 71% of the sample noted having connections to staff members who could share different sorts of information, chief among them, guidance on academic decisions. His findings also illuminate the pervasive effects of racial and class differences. Specifically, those participants in his study who were bilingual and held high academic expectations also had access to more faculty support; whereas, the participants who were largely English Learners with low educational expectations had lesser access to school-based adult agents. These examples effectively depict stratification within the same demographic group (2011).

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001, 2004, 2011) coined the concepts *institutional agent* and *empowerment agents* to describe the abilities and capacities that school faculty possess which can create support, guidance, and access for their students with low levels of social capital. He explained that:

> while institutional agents within schools often function as conduits for reproducing race and class social inequalities, they also may function as "lifelines to resources and opportunities that allow ethnic minority students to overcome social structural barriers and experience school success and social mobility (p. 5)

All adults in a school system possess social capital of some sort and that capital is critical for a child/ren somewhere in the system. Institutional agents possess navigational prowess and should willingly extend it to those who need it most, in this case students and families and more specifically, the *have nots*. Aligning with the perspectives of Bourdieu (1986) and Lin (2001), Stanton-Salazar (2011) discussed that:

> teachers and others within the upper strata of society…act to maintain the advantages of other actors and groups who share similar attributes; high status positions and social backgrounds . . . Institutional agents operate the gears of social stratification and societal inequality. (p. 1076)

Stanton-Salazar (2011) acknowledges that it is sometimes difficult to straddle the formal structures within schools when working to support marginalized populations. As a result of their positions within school organizations, often institutional agents wrestle with internal struggles to choose the good and right thing for students versus choosing to support the bureaucracy that employs them. The acknowledgement of these competing interests prompted Stanton-Salazar (2011) to coin the term empowerment agent in reference to those adult actors "willing to go counter to the established and hierarchical social structures" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1089). Unsurprisingly, institutional agents typically operate through a system of polarities—competing interests, in order to maintain the leveraging positions of those in the upper strata (Stanton-Salazar 2011;

Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Doing what is right is not always seen as favorable, even from those in top tier leadership positions.

Oakes's (1985) seminal investigation supported this conclusion with her critique of the American schooling system's ongoing structural inequalities replicated by tracking:

> For in the tracking process, it seems the odds are not quite equal. It turns out that those children who have the least of everything in the rest of their lives most often get less at school as well…Those at the bottom of the social and economic ladder climb up through twelve years of "the great equalizer" . . . and still end up on the bottom rung (p. 4)

Contemporary research by Holland (2019) noted that the two schools in her study employed complex tracking systems that "attempted to bring students together in non-tracked classes at different points in their high school careers, but also included a fairly rigid structure that separated students" (p. 43). By comparison, both Oakes (2005) and Holland (2019) addressed the need for schools to mitigate the effects of inequities resultant of tracking in schools. Again, harnessing the perspectives of experts in the field, it is clear that high school principals, counselors, teachers, and other instructional faculty are in key hierarchical positions to advocate for the success of the students in their charge (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Oakes, 1985; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). By leveraging their upper strata institutional agency in support of lower strata students with differing stores of social capital, they are able to effectuate change. Faculty network location has the power to change trajectories and impact outcomes for all students;

however, those students who do not have much social capital are at more of a disadvantage for successfully navigating the postsecondary decision.

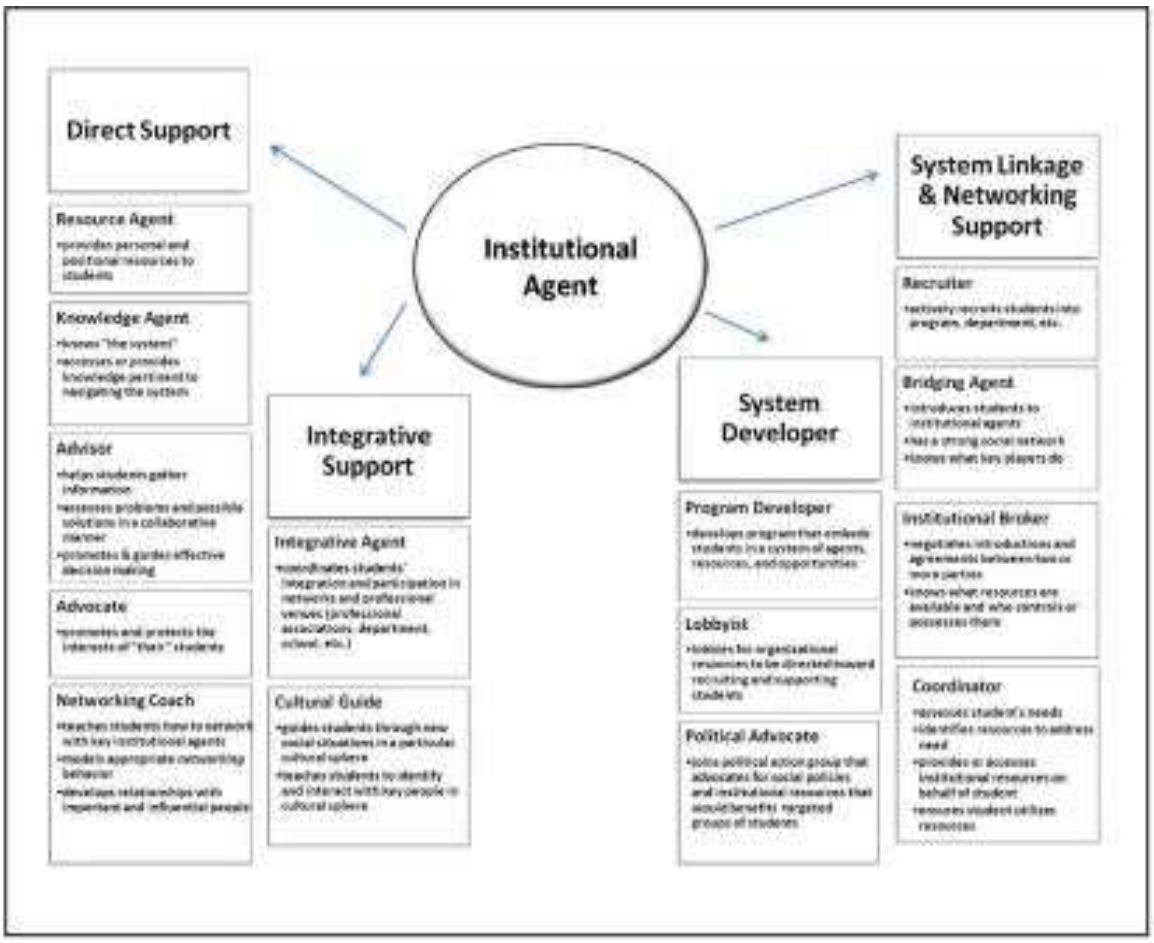

Figure 1. Roles of Institutional Agents. Graphic organizer depicting the roles and functions of institutional agents and types of institutional support. Reprinted from *A Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents and Their Role in the Empowerment of Low-Status Students and Youth,* by SAGE Publications, 2011, retrieved from http://www.journals.sagepub.com/ Copyright 2011 by SAGE Publications.

In his conceptualization, Stanton-Salazar organized the forms and roles of institutional agency in which staff can offer support. These classifications--Direct Support, Integrative Support, System Developer, and System Linkage and Networking Support—denote the ways that institutional agents function in various capacities to funnel resources, facilitate action, develop opportunities, coordinate provisions, recruit

students, bridge and broker connections, and the list continues (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). What is clear is that none of these roles are mutually exclusive and in actuality, they overlap to create greater access to social capital that may not have happened otherwise. School faculties indeed have a responsibility to provide support and guidance to students, as well as providing protection of various kinds. Just as faculty act as protectors during fire, tornado, earthquake, and intruder drills, so too should they protect them from forms of harm like allowing proprietary and for-profit postsecondary institutions to have access to students during their pursuit of postsecondary enrollment pathways. Without knowing the ways that these sorts of institutions could potentially harm them financially; students and their families could fall victim simply due to a lack of knowledge. Schools, as a body of institutional agents with an enormous measure of social capital, should leverage that capital so that all students have the knowledge, access, and experiences they need to become successful adults.

School Counselors and Trust

Concerning the adults with whom students interact and upon whom they rely for support, there are various institutional agents situated within high school settings to include school administrators, teachers, and school counselors (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The literature concerning school-based adults involved in postsecondary decision making underscores the role of guidance counselors, more commonly known as professional school counselors in contemporary contexts (Bergerson, 2009; Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Corwin et al., 2004; Farmer-Hinton, 2008, 2017; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2015; Holland, 2019; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; McKillip, Rawls,

& Barry, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Also critical in the postsecondary decision-making literatures are parents who provide support and guidance to their children in different ways (Bergerson, 2009; Hossler et al., 1999; Iloh, 2018; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006). Parents generally support their students and their pursuit of a chosen postsecondary trajectory; however, when it comes to seeking college admission, those parents who did not matriculate to college lack the knowledge necessary to assist with the application process (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). In response to this lack of knowledge and social capital, parents seek out the help of schools—generally school counselors (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2001; Holland, 2015; McDonough, 1997).

As the literature suggests, school counselors are greatly outnumbered by the students on their cohort caseload causing students to experience barriers to accessing their counselors for postsecondary support and advisement (Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; Holland, 2010; McDonough, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Noting his earlier conceptualization, Stanton-Salazar (2011) outlined the ability of institutional agents to serve multiple roles, including acting as empowerment agents who create social capital access for students. In this case, those school counselors who are willing to challenge the boundaries of their prescribed roles and responsibilities to support students by any means then make the transition from institutional agent to empowerment agent (Holland, 2015). Their decisions to act on a student's behalf could be a byproduct of that relationship (which could also be a form of unintentional neglect) or a deliberate attempt at bolstering the empowerment of marginalized youth through counter stratification (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Students navigating the postsecondary decision are in vulnerable positions because they have to share classified, sensitive information that is generally confidential such as GPA, college entrance exam scores, class rank, family income, and FAFSA details. In alignment with social capital theory, trust is an absolute if students are to be fully transparent with their counselor and other connected school personnel. As an example, a DACA (Deferred Action Children's Act) student could find themselves in precarious situations due to their and their parents'/ families' undocumented status. If trust is not an element of their relationships with the adults in school systems, it is unlikely that their interactions around postsecondary planning will net positive results, if these interactions take place at all.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Coleman (1988) posited that trust, along with information and norms, is a component that resides within the social capital framework and functions to accomplish certain ends. Goddard (2003) sided with Coleman's (1990) observations that solid connections and relationships between students and school faculty result in the forms of social capital that can generate academic success. Goddard's (2003) research concerning the structure and function of trust and social capital involved data collected from 52 elementary schools in a sizable urban Midwestern school district (2003). It is logical then that Coleman's (1990) research suggested that students, as individuals, do not achieve successful academic outcomes solely as a result of their own actions, abilities, and capacities. Instead, their success is the culmination of those characteristics harnessed with their access to the social capital embedded in school community networks and relationships with school-based institutional agents (Goddard, 2003). Consistent with other such studies (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gast,

2017; Gonzales, 2010; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2019; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011), Goddard's (2003) findings posited that students exhibit more successful outcomes when they attend schools that are "characterized by high levels of social capital than in [those] undermined by low levels of trust and the conspicuous absence of supportive adults" (p. 71).

In order to survive the potentially harmful effects of schooling structures such as tracking, differential distribution of social capital, and the reproduction of other school inequalities, students need assistance from adults within the school setting to provide closure to their knowledge and access gaps. Knowing that trust is an important factor in any relationship, it goes without saying that trust should be a feature in all school-based relationships. Stanton-Salazar (1997) explained that "barriers to trust can be institutionalized when the roles of school agents are inconsistent, contradictory, and ambiguous" (p. 18). As previously noted, counselor student caseloads are often too large to effectively manage (McDonough, 1997, 2005). In response, they may go about their work in ways that fail to provide service to all students as a result of approaching their work based upon what responsibilities are most urgent at that time (Corwin et al., 2004). This prioritization of tasks could cause students to slip between cracks and damage trust in cases where students feel that they are not given equitable treatment and attention (Holland, 2015). Holland's (2015, 2019) empirical study explored the nexus of trust and the school counselor role in response to gaps in the literature

Previous studies demonstrated the ways that trust functioned in high school settings relevant to relationships among and between students, teachers, and administrators (Bryk

& Schneider, 2002; Goddard, 2003). It was here that Holland's (2015, 2019) research extended other explorations and in particular, Stanton-Salazar's work around trust, institutional agency, and how these elements are dispatched within school settings characterized by racial and socioeconomic diversity. Focusing on research questions that involved trust, relationships, and school counselors, Holland (2015) interviewed 89 students between two high schools, identifying sample participants based on stratification factors such as racial background and grade level. Data collection centered on learning about their navigation of the college application process and gathering demographic metrics. Next, the researcher interviewed 22 faculty members who were linked to the school counseling role in an attempt to capture their perspectives about how students navigated the college application process (Holland, 2015, 2019). Selecting sample sites that were similar in the resources and supports available to students and families, Holland (2015, 2019) sought to compare how counseling staff worked with students representing differing backgrounds and characteristics. Noting that both sample schools possessed many features and resources critical to college-going culture, the key differences were the presence or absence of trust in student-counselor relationships and interactions among this group (Holland, 2015, 2019; McDonough, 1997, 2005; Roderick et al., 2011).

Despite possessing abundant stores of resources, optimal counselor-to-student ratios, and high graduation and college-going rates, specific groups of students lagged behind in their efforts to successfully navigate the postsecondary decision—most notably, those students with the least access to social capital, minority students and first generation college-goers (Holland, 2015, 2019). Her overarching findings suggested that school counselors do in fact impact navigating the postsecondary decision-making

process in significant ways (Holland, 2015, 2019). One important result of this study was that 'trust facilitates access to crucial college information, or social capital . . . [which] shows how students may avoid the counseling office and be cut off from information if they lack trusting relationships with their counselors," (Holland, 2015, p. 258). To further illustrate this landscape, her research unearthed critical discoveries such that a school's normative structures and systems dictated much of the manner in which counselors went about their work with students. The *haves* in that study often came to expect certain treatment and a great deal of attention in response to their positions within the school structure; the *have nots*, on the other hand, desperately needed high levels of attention and support, yet experienced shortages (Holland, 2015, 2019). In response, school counselors tended to provide both groups with loads of information, then waited for students and families to seek them out (Holland, 2015, 2019). The *haves* employed their navigational competencies and social capital to move through the college choice process; while the *have nots* felt as though they should receive more assistance and information, prompting them to become disengaged when their needs went unmet. Their individual reactions caused the counselors to form perceptions about each group's needs, persistence, and aspirations which were not necessarily based on fact, rather student reactions were based upon trust or mistrust and access or lack of access to social capital (Holland, 2015, 2019). Holland (2015) found that:

> Lacking shared expectations and role understandings led students to either not seek out the help they needed to navigate the college process or to feel overloaded with information and little practical assistance when they did ask for it. This made the college application process all the more difficult for students and diminished them

access to critical social capital from counselors. (p. 257)

Coupling Holland's trust findings with Stanton-Salazar's categories of institutional agent roles and forms of institutional support is appropriate in that school faculty will not be able to leverage their social capital to support students if trust is missing from their interactions and relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Holland, 2015, 2019; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). Stanton-Salazar's earlier (1997) research highlighted several factors that block students from accessing social capital, the basis of which is a lack of interpersonal trust. Gonzales (2011) agreed by positing that through "a student's ability to trust society's gatekeepers and agents [network orientation], some students are more willing to seek out and interact with institutional agents" (p. 472). Further supporting this argument, Coleman's (1988) conceptualization of social capital also incorporated trust as an integral element. An absence of trust also complicates relationships and rapport among adults as they go about their work concerning school improvement efforts and initiatives (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). When school leaders outline expectations for staff to act in collaboration to better support students academically and in ways that help them outline plans for their futures, they must also take into account how their leadership and intentions affect staff interactions. A lack of effort on the part of staff can subsequently impact the trust element in student and staff relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). In summation, students are a vulnerable population who require the assistance of faculty and administration to successfully navigate the structures and system created by adults.

The Roles of Institutional Neglect and Institutional Abuse

Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel (2003) conducted research to learn how varying levels of social capital affect the educational opportunities of Latina students. In that study,

they agreed with other authorities on the subject who posited that the postsecondary decision-making processes of marginalized students is "limited due to their lack of cultural and social capital" (p. 4). Utilizing life-history research methods, Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel (2003) explored the experiences of two groups of 22 low-status Latina students in primary and secondary educational systems. They sought to understand the following: "in what ways were the K-12 schooling experiences similar or different for these two groups of Latinas; how might those differences or similarities explain their college opportunities; and what role does social capital play in the primary and secondary schooling experiences of these two groups?" (p. 10). The first group was comprised of 12 female students who met the requirements necessary for enrollment in highly selective universities in California; the second group of 10 female students did not meet these admissions requirements and subsequently, 8 enrolled in community colleges in California (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003). Students who enrolled in selective colleges were known as the "university students" group, while their peers who attended community college were known as the "community college students" group. Despite attending K-12 public schools in the same state, the two groups had distinct postsecondary aspirations that were the culmination of factors including differential access to institutional agents in their schools (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003). Further complicating students' ability to gain access to opportunities and postsecondary education, the authors argued that while school settings can function as repositories of social capital, they can also operate as sources of "institutional neglect and abuse" (p. 12, 2001). Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel () define institutional neglect as the "inability or unwillingness of schools or its personnel to prepare students for postsecondary

education" (p. 12). They continue by defining institutional abuse as "those actions by institutional agents that discourage or produce barriers for college attendance" (p. 12). They also noted how the effects of exposure to social capital and institutional neglect and abuse can open up or close off postsecondary opportunities (2001). Agreeing with Stanton-Salazar (1997), Gonzalez, Stoner, and Jovel (2003) also acknowledged the positive and negative implications of institutional agency noting that for minority students and those from marginalized backgrounds, the absence of formal and informal social capital networks impedes their ability to gain membership in networks that could result in college enrollment (2001). Schools must become more responsive to specialized student populations by acknowledging that the volume of school-based social capital afforded to marginalized and underrepresented student populations is often scant. Failing to address and correct this disparity is indicative of institutional neglect.

Commonly acknowledged for its inherently positive qualities, institutional agency does not always generate equitable outcomes. To illustrate, consider an institutional agent, a high school counselor, who acts seemingly in the best interest of a small group of students by taking them to a student leadership summit. Here, they not only learn leadership strategies and meet other like students who contribute to their growing network of empowered youth, but they are also creating experiences and knowledge that becomes attractive on their impending college applications and personal resumes. This vignette depicts the brighter side of institutional agency, while masking the darker side where barriers to access exist. While the leadership summit became an ongoing collaborative group that met quarterly, the high school counselor only made the opportunity available to a select group of students who demonstrated certain academic

and behavioral characteristics. Any student who did not meet these metrics was not extended the opportunity. Though likely unintentional on the counselor's part, it is in this exclusionary act that stratification exists.

Unintentional institutional neglect can be just as damaging as intentional neglect. For example, the researcher experienced working in schools that encourage and make it easy for students to earn their associate degree at the same time that they earn their high school diploma because it looks good for the school's image and CCR data points; however, students and parents were not consistently educated on the fact that entering college with junior credits as a freshman has the potential to make the student ineligible to receive first-time freshmen scholarship awards. Care should be taken to educate and seek out ways around this knowledge barrier. As an entire system of institutional agents, the responsibility rests with the high school. Finally, telling all students that they can and should go to college and offering solely college preparatory curricula through a traditional school model is a form of institutional neglect (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2001). Carnevale (2008) disputes the Commission on the Future of Higher Education's (2006) vetting strategy of likening the concept of college for all to "postsecondary education and training" (p. 22). Marketed as a means of developing a sustainable, more educated supply of labor, realistically, "college for all" is a fairly recent byproduct of stratification within the educational system (Carnevale, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2011, 2017; Farmer-Hinton & Rifelj, 2018; McDonough, 2004). In Carnevale's (2008) view, college education and the upward mobility that it affords those who possess it are attempts by the middle class to maintain their hierarchical positions (2008). Schools that sell students and their families on the notion of college for all, yet fail to provide the

information, tools, and navigational capacity to get there, are exposing students to institutional neglect. This hypersensitive focus on the enrollment trajectory ignores the knowledge and navigational needs of students whose plan it is to employ or enlist following high school graduation.

Touted as a mechanism for positively impacting student outcomes and educational experiences, tracking is a form of institutional neglect aimed at those that it was intended to support by providing an unintentionally neglectful school experience (Holland, 2019; Oakes, 2005). Designed to create equality in educational experiences of all students, tracking forms segregation and silos where students are thought to learn better among peers who share similar learning needs (Oakes, 2005; Yonezawa et al. 2002). By acknowledging these unique needs, tracking and the school systems that engage in this practice ignore the ideology that differently achieving students deserve the same support, guidance, and opportunities as their peers with less academic gaps. In fact, it is this segment of student populations that deserves more if schools are to serve as spaces designed to support *all* students in the name of equity. Siding with other scholars, Gonzales (2010) shared the position that when students are limited by track placements and lack social capital, they must rely on connections to school personnel and other such adults who can facilitate certain actions and share resources that result in postsecondary pathway participation (Ceja, 2000; Farmer-Hinton, 2017; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; McDonough 1997; Oakes, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

To illustrate, recall Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel's (2003) empirical findings. Despite coming from similar economic backgrounds, the two student samples were subjected to institutional neglect by not being granted the same access to postsecondary

education. These differentials in social capital access were the result of student placement in gifted educational programs compared to student placement in ESL and SPED programs. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the effects of institutional neglect and abuse are far-reaching and long lasting. In this case, some students did not have access to the same selective universities that other participants did due to the insufficient academic preparation created by their track placements. There should be an obvious parity in a system built on the premise of equality for all students. Yet, there is a long history of inequality in the American educational system in terms of its treatment of low-income students, those who are differently achieving, and those from minority groups. Improved school-based systems of social capital are a must to tackle the effects of institutional neglect. In order to support all students and in particular, the *have nots*, it is necessary to acknowledge and own those narratives around who is voiceless, who is allowed to slip through the cracks, and who is allowed to fail before you can change practice and mental models.

Vestiges of Unequal Practices

To be clear, there are adults in schools who discriminate against students in overt and covert ways. At times, these actions are accidental and unintended; other times, these actions are willful and intentional. Serving as institutional agents, the adults in schooling systems should respect their influence and not intentionally use it to harm others; rather, they should take steps to protect the powerless (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003). Creating barriers to access without devising ways to dismantle those barriers is a practice that plagues high schools (Bryan et al., 2011; Ceja, 2000; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003). One such example lies in

allowing students to participate in a year-long early college advisement program contingent upon metrics including GPA, ACT score, cohort level, and other criteria that narrows access. Perhaps a student may not meet all outlined criteria at the beginning of the program; yet, they may raise their GPA or earn the 22 ACT composite score required for program acceptance. These forms of gatekeeping are harmful to student self-esteem and have the potential to be damaging to their postsecondary aspirations (Farmer-Hinton, 2017; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Oakes, 2005). Implementing acceptance criteria that include GPA and college entrance exam requirements may be in place due to specific college admission guidelines. The question then becomes what are school leaders doing to ensure that their D and F data decreases and positive student outcomes increase? In response, school administrators and faculty should take a provocative look at the interventions, approaches, and strategies they are prepared to employ designed to increase staff capacity around instruction, learning, and assessment practices.

Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel (2003) concluded that students who are exposed to low educational expectations as demonstrated in school programs (i.e., ESL/EL/SPED) experience feelings of "neglect and emotional abuse" suffered at the hands of their teachers (p. 26). No faculty member responsible for the education of children should allow students to fail by letting them sit in class doing nothing and not placing upon them the same high expectations she has of higher performing students within an academically rigorous curriculum complete with high-quality instructional supports and intervention. Also in this research, Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel (2003) and Stanton-Salazar (2011) noted the fragility of undocumented students who lack social capital and navigational skills, fill

the lower rungs of the economic ladder, and experience added layers of systemic barriers as a result of their 'nonlegal status' (p. 471, Gonzales, 2010).

School building and district level administrative teams that do not strive to develop the structures and processes for all students to successfully plan for their chosen postsecondary trajectories do so at the detriment of the students they serve. Tasked with ensuring that all students achieve at high levels, are prepared for the rigors of college and career pathways, and being in service to students and families, school faculty are responsible for having intimate knowledge of the community they serve and for having an awareness of their needs that are essential in supporting their children. The absence of structures to inform and support your parent/ guardian base is a form of institutional neglect. High school faculty are in highly advantageous positions to build systems; they must decide whether they will structure success or failure; barriers or access; opportunity or inopportunity. Without transparent acknowledgment and responsiveness to the vestiges of inequality mentioned above, the *have nots* will continue to lag behind the *haves*. From her perspective, the *haves* are entrenched in an information-rich transit system complete with the road map for navigating it successfully; whereas, the *have nots* encounter information deserts characterized by lack, disparity, and inequity. It is necessary to acknowledge and own narratives around who is voiceless and who is allowed to slip through the cracks in order to become of a solutions-oriented mindset and to strive towards creating more equalized school environments and experiences.

How Students Experience School Networks

Student access to school-based forms of social capital is critical during postsecondary decision-making and planning (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Choy et al.,

2000; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008). Additionally, the research illustrates that students are able to tap into these stores of school-based social capital through their relationships with instructional faculty and counselors (Ceja, 2000; Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). In some cases, access to social capital is affected by the size of the network, specifically, the size of the school (Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008; Holland, 2015). Farmer-Hinton and Holland (2008) sought to understand the ways in which school size figured into the postsecondary planning process by examining its utility as both a normative structure and system of information channels. They acknowledged that underserved populations, minority students and those students from lower income backgrounds, experienced differential and often disparate access to the institutional agents and support essential in navigating the postsecondary decision (Ceja, 2000; Corwin et al., 2004; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003). In response, the researchers developed a study where they utilized survey data from the Consortium on Chicago School Research's (CCSR) Chicago Postsecondary Transition Project which was a compilation of data culled from 9,723 Chicago public high school seniors representing 70 high schools (Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008). These schools ranged in student population sizes of 600 or less up to more than 1500. This study was designed to illicit information concerning school-size influences on students' perceptions about information access, postsecondary trajectory planning activities, college talk, and counselor advocacy (Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008).

Based on their findings, Farmer-Hinton and Holland (2008) argued that school size positively impacts postsecondary planning, activities, and information sharing in

those schools with smaller student enrollments. As Coleman's (1988) research suggested, students in smaller schools were afforded greater access to social capital due to network closure and density. In these environments, students and staff experience relationships characterized by supportive and trust which in turn helps to transfer to students' norms and cultural capital (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008).

Emergent research on the high school setting as a social capital network suggested that schools figure largely in providing access or barriers to the information and resources needed to pursue postsecondary education (Bryan, Farmer-Hinton, Rawls & Woods, 2017). In this context, schools serve as systems where administrators, teachers, students, and families connect around academics and aspirations (Bryan et al., 2017; Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). This research centered on the notion that "school networks that convey information and expectations about college going are more adept at sending their graduating seniors to college" (Bryan et al., 2017, p. 96). Their findings argued that there are two distinct ways in which students experience school networks—college expectations and college talk with school faculty. These two elements were critical influences on students' predisposition to enroll in college due to the relationships and interactions between students and college-educated school adults (Bryan et al., 2017). To support this argument, Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines' (2009) quantitative study investigated the dispositions and characteristics of students who actively pursue college-going guidance, information, and support of school counselors. Their study sample included 4,924 12th grade students representing U.S. parochial, public, and private high schools (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009). Using survey collected by the National

Center for Education Statistics and a national data set, their findings discussed that there was an absence of evidence to show that counselors provided college-going guidance and information to those students whom they perceived as not being college bound. To clarify, students tended to avoid contact with counselors if they felt as though their counselor did not expect them to pursue college. Those students who were the most likely to seek out school counselors for help were African Americans and female students, which is not inclusive of a heterogeneous mix, causing vulnerable populations to be left out (Bryan et al. 2009). They also argued that school counselors played important roles in postsecondary pathway planning because students from marginalized groups often see them as pipelines to social capital and providers of the information necessary to navigate this process (2009). Bryan et al. (2009) asserted that students from underrepresented groups relied more heavily on their counselors; however, those institutional agents were likely to have higher than optimal student caseloads, lacked the planning time and resources necessary for successful matriculation to college, and were responsible for performing many tasks that were unrelated to college advisement and counseling (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Corwin et al., 2004; McDonough, 2005). In cases such as this, it is plausible that students' postsecondary aspirations and self-efficacy were diminished in some ways due to exposure to staff that they felt did not believe in or support their future goals.

Rounding out the literature concerning how students experience school networks, Bryan et al. (2009) argued that their findings underscored several critical points as follows: school counselors should have an increased awareness of the ways in which class, race, gender, and socioeconomic background combine to impact their relationships

with students; given the degree to which specialized student populations and their families rely on counselors, they should be intentional in their efforts to serve as conduits of information and opportunities; counselors should work with school leaders to make counseling more manageable for the benefit of all students; and student perceptions of their counselors' aspirations for them was tied to their willingness to enlist their counselor's help with college going. They further stated that:

> school counselors must be mindful of the covert and overt messages that they send to students about their college readiness and abilities. . . school counselors must work to create school and counseling environments that nurture students' college aspirations and dreams (p. 290).

Based on the findings from these studies, it is apparent that schooling contexts and the ways that students experience these networks is integral to successful navigation of the postsecondary decision; the school context is a vital vehicle for transmitting college information and embedding college aspirations (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Hill 2008; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Perna, 2006). School adults, trust, normative structures, sharing of information and resources, transfers of knowledge, and relationships each factor into the complex network of school-based social capital that students and families must have access to if purposeful planning and decision-making is to take hold.

The Postsecondary Choice Process

Early literatures on the college choice process centered on a three-stage process model which situates college-going actions in the following categories: predisposition; search; and choice (Bergerson, 2009; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999;

Perna, 2006). These seminal investigations were novel in that they captured the ways that high school students decide what their postsecondary aspirations will look like (Hossler et al., 1999). Previous empirical studies focused on those factors that students and families take into consideration when exploring postsecondary enrollment and participation trajectories, in particular institution features, such as geography, size, cost, funding options, and degree programs (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; Paulsen, 1990). Additionally, these literatures suggested that parental influences such as income, level of education, and support, student factors such as academic track, race, and class, and institutional contexts such as campus life, reputation, cost of attendance, enrollment, and geography combine to create the most impactful factors affecting college choice (Hossler, 1989; Stage & Hossler, 1989; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Center on Educational Policy, 2012; Iloh, 2018). Finally, the research indicated that traditional models of college going showed students beginning this sequence of decision-making as soon as 7th grade and ending upon college enrollment (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Paulsen, 1990; Perna, 2006).

Contemporary research on the subject reimagined this model, proposing a revised framework that took into account, among other things, the ecology, the environment, surrounding this process as a factor in the postsecondary decision (Iloh, 2018). An ecological perspective takes into account the ways in which a student's environment shapes and influences the development of college-going decisions (Iloh, 2018). A large part of the college choice process involves student and family acquisition of knowledge of different sorts. For the *haves*, they not only possess certain stores of knowledge, but also have access to the agents and actors who can provide the knowledge that they may

lack. Conversely, the *have nots* not only experience gaps in their college-going knowledge, but also experience barriers in access to the institutional agents who can share knowledge and resources with them. In bringing currency to this body of research, Iloh (2018) coined the concept of information deserts characterized by spaces where it is "difficult to access or find contemporary and general college-going information" (p. 236). She went on to highlight the resulting unevenness of information sharing that occurs as evidenced by "pervasive inequities for some and privileges for others in college-decisions and trajectories" (p. 236). Referencing previous models of college choice, Iloh (2018) noted the intricacies of enrolling in college such as "opportunity, time, and information, and their interdependent relationship in college decisions and trajectories" (p. 228). In response, she posited areas of the college choice process that impact higher education in profound ways to include: non-traditional students, reentering and transient students, and less selective colleges/ universities (2018). This renewed perspective provided secondary and higher education faculties with innovative considerations about college going with respect to the interrelated frameworks of information, time, and opportunity (Iloh, 2018). Iloh (2018) notes that earlier postsecondary decision-making literatures centered on decision and enrollment patterns of high school students in contexts limited to specific segments of the population and types of educational environments. Consequentially, she identified three patterns that were frequently absent from the research as noted above—open admissions, reentering and transient students, and an emerging presence of non-traditional students (2018). This change in the college-going landscape called for an innovative reimaging which considered the "complex ecosystems and trajectories of the current college student and landscape" (Iloh, 2018, p. 233).

Figure 2. Iloh's model of college-going decisions and trajectories

Figure 2. Iloh's model of college-going decisions and trajectories. Iloh's graphic describing college-going decision and trajectory relating to the elements of time, information, and opportunity. Iloh, C. (2018). Toward a new model of college "choice" for a 21st-century context. *Harvard Educational Review: Summer 2018, 88(2): 227-244.*

The plight of specialized student groups including minority students, students from lower income backgrounds, and differently achieving students is often absent from the college-going literature (Iloh, 2018). Their needs with respect to college advisement, enrollment, and participation often go unnoticed due to underrepresentation in the literature. These voices, perspectives, and experiences are critical in response to developing the school reforms and initiatives that can remove structural barriers and inequities in educational settings, resulting in more even experiences and opportunities for both the *haves* and the *have nots* who do not experience the same benefits available in school connections and resources (Harding, Parker, & Toutkoushian, 2017).

Citing the interplay of contexts and individual student characteristics, Iloh's (2018) contemporary research challenged previous research notions of choice suggesting that the concept of choice is a "privileged" ideology (p. 239). Her findings indicated that "while higher education conversations might see choice and college-going decisions as one and the same, based on the context of 21st-century postsecondary education and prospective students" lives, choice can skew complex narratives. Noting flaws in the earlier college-going models (Bergerson, 2009; Ceja, 2006; Harding et al., 2017)

developed by researchers such as Hossler and Gallagher (1987), McDonough (1997), and Perna (2006), Iloh (2018) defended that by changing the method of analyzing this process, both the *haves* and the *have nots* and their complex narratives would be better served by the development of more innovative solutions. Understanding the nuances of college choice and access is critical to educators, policymakers, and higher education institutions that are charged with attracting, recruiting, enrolling, and retaining students.

Information Deserts

Within the college-going and postsecondary decision literatures, there are numerous studies that point to student and family needs concerning information (Ceja, 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gast, 2015; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Harding et al., 2017; Holland, 2015, 2019; Holland, 2010; Hill, 2008; Iloh, 2018; Perna & Titus, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). This need for information about postsecondary pathways and college going is additionally problematic in educational spaces known as information deserts, a "failure of society. . . to democratize and make college information accessible across diverse communities and contexts" (Iloh, 2018, p. 236). To further illustrate:

> The Iloh model considers the variability in the type of college information one possesses in their contexts. . . this contributes to information asymmetry in the higher education marketplace overall as well as pervasive inequities for some and privileges for others in college-going decisions and trajectories. (Iloh, 2018, p. 236)

Iloh (2018) argued that students in information deserts face structural barriers such as location, currency, and bias in cases where a student has narrow access to information

about select types of institutions. She went on to explain that receiving information from too many sources creates an additional layer of challenge (2018). Credible information is highly valuable during the postsecondary decision-making process; yet, the source is equally important because, "The wrong messenger can make the right information ineffective" (Baum & Schwartz, 2015, p. 42). Though this research speaks to the ways that non-first-time college students experience challenges during their navigation of pursuing postsecondary education, the same complexities can exist for traditional graduating high school seniors. Responsively, school settings should operate through the lenses of social capital and institutional agency to dismantle information deserts, providing the knowledge and resources that students and their families seek.

Timing of Postsecondary Decision-making

The postsecondary decision is an intricately involved set of factors that result in the identification of a pathway beyond high school. Included in this set of factors is academic preparation, student interest, parental influences, financial resources, and the list continues (Bergerson, 2009; Holland, 2015; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006). Some research showed that some students begin thinking about enrolling in college as early as 7th grade (Paulsen, 1990), while other research indicated 8th grade as the time when notions of college-going begins to take root (Harding et al., 2017; Hossler & Stage, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; Perna 2006; Bryan et al. 2017). Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) noted that programs and approaches designed to influence students' educational aspirations need to be introduced during 8th or 9th grade in order to effective. Their findings also determined that though early interventions do not guarantee college enrollment, intervention efforts are beneficial in that it helps

students carefully consider course-taking patterns and sequences, as well as helping filter the copious volumes of postsecondary planning information and materials that they will receive (1999). Iloh's (2018) model of college-going decisions and trajectories incorporated the context of timing in the choice to enroll. In this framework, the researcher expanded the concept of time by employing micro, macro, and meso distinctions to describe the timing of events, actions, and information gathering (2018). Iloh (2018) argued:

> Focusing on time . . . draws attention to the social, educational, and historical events that may have led to a particular college decision or path. [This] can account for the student who is going to college for the first time directly out of high school and for the older person with some college experience but no degree, now enrolling in their third college . . . The context of opportunity and information may look completely differently at two different points. . . producing potentially different college decisions and trajectories. (p. 237)

Contemporary researchers cited the importance of revisiting investigations into the when and how of college-going decisions (Harding et al., 2017; Iloh, 2018). One study stressed the importance of college talk and postsecondary planning efforts well before students enter high school if college-going is to become a normative action (Harding et al., 2017). The *have nots* who already lag behind their more social capital-rich peers need every opportunity available to begin getting ahead.

Parental Involvement in Postsecondary Planning

As previously observed, postsecondary planning is a process that may begin as early as the middle school years, lasting through 12th grade (Bryan et al., 2017; Harding

et al., 2017; Hossler et al., 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1987; Paulsen, 1990; Perna 2006). One influential aspect of this planning is the impact of parental involvement (Ceja, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Perna, 2002, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Viewed from the lens of social capital, Coleman delineated the ways that parental involvement can create social capital which can generate extended networks and resources that benefit their children (Dika & Singh, 2002). These extensions are the result of relationships between parents and other adults connected to school settings, as well as the relationship that exists between the students and their parents (Perna & Titus, 2005). Perna and Titus (2005) discussed the linkages between concepts presented by previous social capital frameworks. Their research highlighted: embedded resources in social networks (Coleman, 1988); intergenerational closure facilitating communication and maintaining one's position (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988); weak ties serving as bridges to resources that would not otherwise exist (Granovetter, 1973); and the constructs of homophilous and heterophilous (Lin, 2001).

Using data from the NELS, Perna and Titus (2005) employed a social capital framework to investigate whether parental involvement influenced their child's decision to enroll in a two or four-year college or university in the fall semester immediately following high school graduation. Focusing on only those students who were in the class of 1992 cohort, the study also controlled for student characteristics such as class, race, gender, and volume of various forms of capital (Perna & Titus, 2005). Their findings illustrated that student-level measures of parental involvement positively influenced student decisions to enroll in college immediately following graduation. They determined that Black and Latinx students experience stratification in navigating the

college-going decision because of their diminished access to rich social capital networks and resources critical to this process (Perna & Titus, 2005). They further concluded that in addition to involving parents in postsecondary planning processes, minority and marginalized student groups would benefit greatly from participation in early college preparation structures and early intervention structures that involve parents (Perna & Titus, 2005; Perna & Swail, 2001).

Similar to Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel (2003), Ceja (2006) conducted a study of first-generation Chicana students and their navigation of the college-going decision. These students from a large, urban Los Angeles high school faced structural barriers to social capital resultant of their parents' socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. As is often consistent with students in lower-income, under-resourced school systems, they experienced limited information and opportunities that were needed in order to actualize their postsecondary aspirations (Ceja, 2006). Consequentially, their participation and involvement in this important decision and accompanying process was restricted, though the parents supported their children's decision to enroll in college. Farmer-Hinton (2008) and Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009) expressed similar sentiments concerning lower-income Black students who experienced diminished access to social capital and college-going knowledge due to relationships with their parents and community members who lacked their own matriculation, participation, and completion of college. Despite their initial involvement in the predisposition phase, their influence becomes less apparent as peers, school faculty, and higher education representatives serve as strong and weak ties, networks, and bridges during the search and choice phases (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler et al., 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992). From these examples, it is easy to see how minority

students and those from lower-income, under-resourced backgrounds require the support of school-based institutional agents to supplement the gaps consistent with parents (protective agents) who are educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged.

College-going Culture and School Effects

A student's postsecondary educational aspirations and their school achievements are largely influenced by school culture (McDonough, 1997; Oakes et al., 2006). In response to the range of structural inequalities that students and families experience, researchers have investigated how schools might best meet the needs of those who need it most (Ceja, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzales, 2010; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2015, 2019; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Associated with this research is the role of school effects and contexts for student outcomes. Specifically, there is research centered on the college-going culture relevant to college-linking resources and school characteristics that endorse college-going decisions (Hill, 2008; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Roderick et al., 2011). Defined as the development of 'aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college" Corwin and Tierney (2007) explored the impact of college-going culture on college matriculation (p. 3). The research along this theme shared that the concept of college-going culture could be expanded to include systems, resources, beliefs, and norms within high school settings dedicated to the promotion and normalization of college participation. Both quantitative and qualitative research examined the ways in which school contexts and school counselors intersect to bolster environments that facilitate college access given opportunity structures, college-going

activities, and college-going curricular course sequences (McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

School settings characterized by well-developed college-going cultures differed greatly in comparison to those schools with less developed college-going cultures (Robinson & Roksa, 2017). To illustrate, those schools with more sophisticated college-going cultures, structural norms and expectations were in place in preparation for students to enroll in postsecondary education, such as the allocation of time and resources needed for college search and choice stages and more personalization and individualization in counseling was evident (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Hill, 2008; Holland, 2019; Roderick et al., 2011). On the other hand, schools with weaker college-going cultures, had much less intentional focus aimed at college advisement and participation (Corwin et al., 2004; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McDonough, 1997; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). As earlier mentioned in this chapter, school counselors devoted more time and effort in providing emotional and mental health counseling, career advisement, dispatching resources for insecure homes, conflict mediation support, and course scheduling in schools with lower college-going cultures (Corwin et al., 2004; McDonough, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Further, in these sorts of educational spaces, counselors tended to apply the same college planning 'treatment' to all students, rather than fashioning courses of action and information sharing designed for a student's specific aspirations, interests, academic ability, and unique student characteristics (Robinson & Roksa, 2017).

Robinson and Roksa (2017) investigated the impact of college-going cultures on students' college enrollment in an effort to add to the literature about high school

counselors and college going. Using the ELS database, they sought to examine the intricacies of social class, counselors, and high school college-going culture to gain insights into structural inequalities and the ways that counselors could decrease disparities (Robinson & Roksa, 2017). Their findings concluded that despite school background, resources, and contexts, consulting with school counselors generated similar outcomes regardless of how well develop the college-going culture was. While they asserted that the support of school counselors is positively connected to enrollment in four-year colleges and universities, like Roderick, Coca and Nagaoka (2011) they also found more exploration is needed in this area to more fully understand which indicators visible in a college-going culture result in actual student application, enrollment, and participation (2017). Lastly and perhaps more importantly, along with Perna and Swail (2001) they argued that early intervention and pre-college is beneficial not only for marginalized students, but also their families (Robinson & Roksa, 2017). In addition to highlighting the positive results associated with engaging students in college-going activities and preparation over time, Robinson and Roksa (2017) underscored that future research efforts should examine 'whether and how schools perpetuate or reduce inequality and what changes in the sources of information and high school contexts may facilitate more equitable college choices" (p. 244).

The college-going culture literatures revealed that the polarities of equity and disparity remained a constant within and between high school settings of different sorts (Ceja, 2006; Corwin et al., 2004; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Gonzales, 2010; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Hill, 2008; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2015, 2019; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2006; Stanton-

Salazar, 2011). Arguably, the *haves* and the *have nots* have unique postsecondary plans that must be navigated with respect to their individual student characteristics and accompanying needs. In response, schools should develop support and guidance strategies designed to provide what each student needs, not merely applying generalized, scripted responses to their individual circumstances. The literature also indicated that students with less social capital rely heavily on school counselors for college-going knowledge, information, and resources often times because they lack the connections, social capital, and networks inside or outside of their schools (Ceja, 2006; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2004; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Those schooling systems that are aware of this dynamic coupled with unbalanced counselor-to-student ratios should reform systems of support and the role of institutional agents by aligning staff responsibilities with the demands of providing high quality advisement, support, and information sharing about employment and enlistment as well as enrollment. In the age of 'college-for-all' initiatives (Carnevale, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Robinson & Roksa, 2017), high school faculty should become more responsible for knowing their student base and interests by building balanced career and college-going cultures aimed at navigating the range of postsecondary pathways, not focusing solely on the pathway to college.

Summary

If high school students are to make purposeful, intentional postsecondary decisions, they must be equipped with the tools, resources, knowledge, and networks essential for successfully navigating this piece of the crosswalk between high school and postsecondary trajectories. Because students come from different backgrounds and

possess varying levels of social capital, they are in precarious situations that require the assistance of adults in the school system who can provide effective guidance and share the knowledge they desperately need. Too, school administrators and faculty are in advantageous positions to leverage their agency to create equity among the student population. Whether through systemic changes or through individual actions, school settings are abundant with social capital because of the accumulation of this capital across the faculty.

Chapter Two offered diverse perspectives concerning the literature around this research. Beginning with an exploration of social capital and defining it relevant to this study, capital theorists and their perceptions were presented to show areas of overlap as well as areas of divergence. Despite being built on the premise of equality, schools often perpetuate and reproduce inequality (Oakes, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A glimpse into how schools operate as an organization was shared, noting how the structure and systems create access for the *haves* and barriers for the *have nots*. Extending to students' membership in social-capital-rich networks is one way that school systems can close gaps along these lines. Adding to the problem being investigated, the researcher highlighted Stanton-Salazar's (2011) concepts of institutional agency and institutional neglect as a means of framing a critical element that causes some students to experience the postsecondary decision-making process with less challenge than their peers who are negatively impacted by institutional neglect and a lack of connectedness to institutional agents and actors. In this discussion, closer inspection of the various ways that institutional actors can function revealed the following four roles: direct support; integrative support; system developer; and system linkage and networking support

(2011). Additional context was given to illustrate why this agency and advocacy is important to all students, particularly the *have nots* who often represent marginalized groups.

To further illustrate the impact of disparities in student social capital, the literature concerning postsecondary planning and advisement was shared to support the call for high school faculty filling gaps, breaking barriers, and leveling playing fields. Attention was given to postsecondary planning processes, school counseling roles in the process, and the larger school context as a college and career going culture. Finally, the researcher cited limitations in the literature concerning how disparities in social capital impact the postsecondary decision-making processes of high school seniors in a school characterized by diversity in race, class, and academic track in suburban, Midwestern settings. Much of the existent literature focuses on students who are minority, from low-income backgrounds or middle to upper class White students. A noticeable gap persists with respect to students in the middle as it relates to racial, class, and academic track differences, and especially the decision-making patterns for students who choose enlistment and employment pathways rather than enrollment. The researcher developed this study as initial step in closing this information gap and as a means of addressing student deficits in their access to social capital.

Chapter Three — Research Design and Methodology

Research Overview and Purpose

Exploration of the nexus between social capital and high school has surged in recent years, with much of it concentrating on the role that guidance counseling structures and college-going cultures play in student outcomes. Previous investigations explored social capital access within heterogeneous high school settings; yet, absent from these samples were student narratives of schooling in middle-class America in the Midwest paired with exploration of choosing a postsecondary pathway—enrollment, enlistment, or employment. As shared in Chapter Two, the literature illustrates the importance of providing students with postsecondary planning guidance and allowing them access to information-rich networks so they can make intentional decisions about their futures (Corwin et al., 2004; Gast, 2016; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Granger and Noguera, 2015; Holland, 2019; Jack, 2019; McDonough, 1997). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the impact of disparities in social capital on the postsecondary decision-making processes of high school seniors at Johnson City High School in a Midwestern suburban context. The qualitative nature of this research produced narratives and perspectives from a heterogeneous mix of 27 students and 11 parents representing an array of metrics to include academic ability, socioeconomic background, race, and gender. Further it allowed the voices of the voiced and the voiceless—the *haves* and the *have nots*—to be heard.

By utilizing a social capital framework for analysis, one is able to examine the nexus between access and institutional agency for students of differing backgrounds. As mentioned in Chapter One, the problem being examined is of significant concern to both

the secondary and higher education communities in that outlining the postsecondary decision-making process impacts college-going and career readiness for high schools. Admissions representatives in higher education are also affected by postsecondary decision-making patterns because this factor can inform marketing to and selection of prospective students. For both, this knowledge is instrumental in impacting vertical alignment with what information and resources graduating seniors need and the timeframe in which they need it in order to make postsecondary decisions. In high schools across America, students are faced with the daunting task of choosing a career pathway prior to graduation. For many students, the postsecondary decision-making process begins as early as the sophomore year in high school (Deciding on Postsecondary Education: Final Report, 2007); yet others may not begin until as late as the spring of the senior year. Regardless of when the decision-making process commences, students rely heavily on information, resources, and networks to make choices about their futures. The research questions that shaped this study sought to identify:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the stages of the postsecondary decision-making process that students perceive they experience?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Who is involved in the decision-making process and what role do they play according to student perceptions?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What types of resources and information do students and their families report that they sought?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): What information do students and families share that they apply to decision-making?

In order to examine these outlined questions, the researcher conducted a qualitative study to explore the impact of social capital on the postsecondary decision-making processes of high school seniors. These research questions guided the investigator during the study as it was believed that high school seniors who possess high levels of social capital make more informed, purposeful postsecondary decisions than do their peers with less social capital. Additionally, the researcher sought to explore the connection between parental levels of educational attainment and student levels of social capital because this also includes the social capital networks that students are able to access. As a means of examining these questions, the researcher interviewed 27 students and 11 parents comprised of a heterogeneous mix of race, class, academic track, educational attainment, and postsecondary aspirations to explore what parental/ familial involvement looked like for them. In developing this study, the researcher sought to understand their decision-making processes, as well as to what degree participants utilized various sources of social capital to inform their decisions.

Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative Research. Because high school seniors and families were the focal point of concern and thus, this study, the researcher employed qualitative methodology to accurately capture their perspectives on and experiences navigating the postsecondary decision-making process. The conceptual framework was grounded in social capital theory and focused on the previously noted research questions. In alignment with the myriad of sociological and educational definitions used to frame the notion, in this study, social capital is operationalized as a network, resource, and catalyst through which

students receive invaluable knowledge about postsecondary trajectories and decision making.

This research exploration was qualitative in nature and was conducted during the second semester of the student's senior year. Creswell (2008) defines qualitative research as research that, "relies on the views of participants, asks broad, general questions, collects data consisting largely of words from participants, and describes and analyzes these words for themes" (p.39). In developing this study, the researcher sought to obtain the unique perspectives of students and their families as it relates to the postsecondary decision. Using the vehicle of qualitative methodology, the researcher explored the guiding questions by working to understand the experiences of the 27 students and 11 parent participants, including 4 student-parent pairings. Throughout the study, the researcher assumed the role of observer, learning from the respondents in the process.

The qualitative nature of this research produced narratives and perspectives from a heterogeneous mix of 27 students and 11 parents representing an array of characteristics to include race, class, gender, academic track, educational attainment, and postsecondary aspirations. Further it allowed the voices of both the voiced and the voiceless—the *haves* and the *have nots*—to be heard. As a theoretical frame, social capital theory helps to shape the lens through which the data were analyzed and how the study was conducted. Examining access to social capital by qualitative research is logical because there are nuances that cannot be explained simply by looking at numbers or other indicators consistent with quantitative research. By capturing the voices of a diverse sampling of high school seniors and parents, it was the researcher's goal to explore the role of school-

based forms of social capital in postsecondary decision-making. Student voices were essential in this research because as the main consumers, at Johnson City High School, this education was happening to them. No one would be better able to articulate their experiences with the postsecondary planning process and the help that they did or did not receive than they could. As critical supports, their parents/ families also looked to the school to augment the home-based social capital that they could provide. Further, an overarching goal of this research was to understand how access to school-based social capital or lack of access affected the school's ability to provide equity for all students. Too, interviews with students and parents from diverse backgrounds could chronicle the ways that they received or did not receive support from school faculty relevant to postsecondary decision-making. Finally, allowing participants to share their experiences could help the researcher explore the notions of institutional agency, neglect, and abuse at JCHS. These reflections will be shared in the Chapter Five Discussion and Implications section.

The researcher was highly interested in exploring students' access to social capital via schooling structures and how their membership in networks affected their postsecondary decision-making abilities. As a result, a social capital framework was used for analysis. Included in this exploration are parent perspectives and the impact of their influence on postsecondary decisions and whom else helped shape student postsecondary plans. Relatedly, the researcher also wanted to understand how structural inequities, access, and barriers emerged at Johnson City High School. Specific barriers included not being able to participate in college-going activities in cases where students did not meet minimum GPA or ACT score requirements, not receiving information about

military enlistment because recruiter visits were very limited in comparison to college admissions representative visits, not receiving information and guidance concerning scholarships and completing the FAFSA, and insufficient time with counselors for postsecondary planning. Because some information and resources were shared with some students based on relationships with staff (enrollment in certain classes--ACT Preparation, AP courses, and college credit courses, and other factors such as academic standing, ACT scores, etc.) and not shared with others, school stratification was an element of the environment at JCHS. In response, the researcher designed an exploration which captured student and parent perspectives based on their diverse backgrounds with respect to race, class, gender, and postsecondary aspirations and unique contexts.

The theoretical frame for this study is social capital which relates to the norms and information channels available through social relationships (Burt, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998). This framework is useful according to Coleman in that social capital evolves through "changes in relations among persons that facilitate actions" (p. 100). Just as other forms of capital make possible productive activity, so too does social capital. For instance, where there exists a group characterized by extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust, much more is likely to be accomplished than an analogous group devoid of that trustworthiness and trust (Coleman, 1988). This frame underscores social capital as a tool that, when used properly, can positively impact the postsecondary decision-making process (Bryan et al., 2017-2018; Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008; Holland 2019).

As detailed below and due to the school structure, student participants were categorized into special, regular, and gifted education programs based on these distinctions

as outlined in the district student information system database Also, this allowed the researcher to have a means of capturing diverse student narratives which could also be a result of various social networks that students belonged or did not belong to. These academic distinctions were denoted by tags for students with IEPs; classified as gifted based on a battery of tests (IQ indicators and reasoning/ problem solving) and participation in gifted programming at the elementary and middle school levels; and regular education students were identified based on not having either of the two previously mentioned tags and according to their course schedules. Because special education and gifted students often perform at lower and higher levels, respectively, their experiences may not be truly indicative of the norm. For instance, gifted students in the study setting typically begin the postsecondary decision-making process earlier than their peers in regular education because of their access to teachers and counselors who encouraged their enrollment in rigorous courses and who exposed them to college-going activities throughout the middle and high school years. This perseverance toward postsecondary education may have allowed them access to high volumes of social capital. Actions of this sort could have created bias in student experiences. Conversely, one theme that emerged during the study was the case where a gifted student experienced a lack of assistance from their guidance counselor during the college admissions and scholarship application processes, despite their predisposition to pursuing college.

As shared in the Introduction and discussed in the Review of Literature, students across high school settings can experience very different postsecondary decision-making processes based on their membership in social capital networks. In the case of stratified educational opportunities and outcomes, analyses of social networks expose the critical

importance of forming resources and assets embedded within the construct of social relationships.

The Research Site and Participants

Johnson City High School. The researcher conducted this study in a school district located in a Midwestern city, a close-knit but thriving satellite community of a metropolitan area. Features that suggest the small-town feel of this area include: mom and pop businesses that have existed for decades, a town center complete with cobblestone streets lined by historic buildings; a courthouse; centuries old churches of various faiths; and families that have lived in this city for two or more generations. Within the area surrounding Johnson City School District is a medium-size private four-year university, as well as a community college, and two smaller, proprietary trade schools. Approximately 85% of the District is in the city, with the remaining percentage divided between an adjacent city and an unincorporated area. The District encompasses 17 square miles and is largely landlocked, which limits school district expansion efforts. This limitation has negative effects for growth in the school district in that families who want to build large homes for their families often go outside the district boundary lines to the county where there is land for new construction. The result has been consistent growth in the school districts that are in these areas compared to stagnation in the Johnson City School District. At the time of the study, there were approximately 5,300 students in this school district. Two 9th-12th grade comprehensive high schools served just fewer than 1700 students, with 912 students enrolled at the study school, 206 of whom were high school seniors; two middle schools comprised of one 5th/6th grade intermediate center and one 7th-8th grade middle school center with 1800 students; and

five elementary schools with a combined total of 1800 students in grades K-4th. Additionally, Johnson City School District featured a vocational technical program which serves students from neighboring school districts, as well as an alternative education school.

In many ways, the diversity within the study body at the 120-year old school paralleled the growth and racial and socioeconomic diversity that has come to Johnson City; it has tried to meet those challenges and those of the school district and the community. Improvement efforts such as adjusting grading scales and curricula, building renovations, and program revisions are some such methods used to meet the demands of the changing student population and mandates for increasing rigor and relevance in the educational program. An area of opportunity that remained is the lack of diversity among staff at Johnson City High School and the larger district. At the time of this study, the staff included two Black female teachers (one core subject teacher and one art teacher), while the remainder of the 83-person staff was White, among all administrators, teachers, guidance counselors, child nutrition staff, janitorial staff, and coaches. Twenty-three faculty members were alumni of the school. A closer disaggregation of the faculty at JCHS (Johnson City High School) revealed: one male building principal; two male assistant principals; one male guidance counselor; and two female guidance counselors. The building principal served in this role at JCHS for four years, while the two assistant principals had been in their positions for 11 years and nine years respectively. One female counselor served in this capacity for 24 years, while the other female and the male had each served for six years. All of these faculty members are White which brings to light the potential for students' feelings about the lack of staff racial diversity and their

treatment by a staff that does not mirror its student population. Enrollment within this school district, as well as the high school, saw marked differentials during the past three decades with senior students selecting among various postsecondary pathways to include college, the military, and employment. To illustrate, enrollment at both Johnson City High School and another high school within the district have declined; yet, the demographic make-up of both schools has expanded with respect to race and socioeconomic background. As a whole, total district enrollment is not increasing; yet, the district racial and class diversity continues to grow and evolve.

Students at Johnson City High School were afforded a wide variety of curricular choices including various academic tracks—regular, special, and advanced and dual credit educational programs. Additional aspects of the curricular program were: World Languages, FACS (Family and Consumer Science), Practical Arts (industrial technology, engineering, and business), Vocational Technical, and Alternative Education (education aimed at supporting credit recovery and long-term suspensions). The 24-Carnegie-credit model offered is considered to be largely college preparatory. Five-year longitudinal data collected from the years 2005 through 2009 reveals consistent growth in the number of JCHS graduates entering a four-year college or university. In 2005, 29% of graduates enrolled in a four-year college/ university; this number grew to 37.9 graduates enrolling in 2009. That same year, 34.5% of JCHS graduates enrolled in a two-year college/ university compared to 31.8 graduates enrolling in 2005. Essentially, these statistics pointed to approximately 70% of Johnson City High School graduates enrolling in a postsecondary institution (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009).

An analysis of the disaggregate data revealed growing minority populations (both Black and Hispanic) and a declining White population as evidenced by the following data points: Black student enrollment of 85 students or 8.2% in 2005 compared to 104 students or 11.4% in 2009; Hispanic student enrollment of 31 students or 3% in 2005 compared to 34 students or 3.4% in 2009; and White student enrollment of 904 students or 87.3% in 2005 compared to 762 students or 83.6% in 2009. Plausible reasons for these patterns include limited new construction in an already land-locked area and poorer minority populations migrating to government subsidized housing and low-income developments in the community. The analysis also reveals a 5.8% increase in the number of students receiving free and/ or reduced lunch during a five-year span. This number was 16.5% in 2005 and increased to 22.3% in 2009. One of the most compelling facets of this data is the creation of an emergent, underserved population within the high school based on increases in the number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, the increase in minority student populations, and the increase of first-generation students.

For many underserved students, access to cultural and social capital is vital throughout the postsecondary decision-making process (Perna, 2000). The need for this access is even greater for first-generation college students whose successful navigation of this process is of the essence. Though statistical data indicated that roughly 70% of JCHS graduates matriculated to some sort of postsecondary institution, there was a segment of the student population that was classified as first-generation. The empirical literature posits that these groups of students typically face barriers to the funds of knowledge and social capital of their peers who came from homes where college going was normative or whom had siblings, other family members, or peers who pursued

college enrollment at some point (Ceja, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gast, 2015; Perna & Titus, 2005; Perna & Swail, 2001). On a larger scale, disparate levels of social capital can have far-reaching effects to the detriment of schools and communities alike (Noguera, 1996). Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) affirm this argument by underscoring the critical role of supportive connections with institutional agents, citing that, "[they] represent a necessary condition for engagement and advancement in the educational system and, ultimately, for success in the occupational structure" (p. 117).

Student participants were enrolled in a high school that served as a cornerstone in the community it served. During the years 2005 through 2009, demographic data for the high school encompassed the demographics displayed in Table 1:

Table 1

Demographic Data, 2005-2009

	Johnson City High School					Missouri				
Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Total Enrollment	1,035	1,015	1,040	997	912	894,809	899,941	900,781	895,833	892,279
Asian (Number/Percent)	14	12	7	6	9	13,059	14,169	15,023	15,814	16,511
	1.4	1.2	0.7	0.6	1	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9
Black (Number/Percent)	85	87	110	102	104	160,618	162,895	162,743	160,507	159,066
	8.2	8.6	10.6	10.2	11.4	17.9	18.1	18.1	17.9	17.8
Hispanic (Number/Percent)	31	32	31	32	34	25,166	27,935	30,464	32,500	33,994
	3	3.2	3	3.2	3.7	2.8	3.1	3.4	3.6	3.8
Indian (Number/Percent)	1	2	1	1	3	3,444	3,640	3,739	3,913	3,952
	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
White (Number/Percent)	904	882	891	856	762	692,522	691,302	688,812	683,088	678,756
	87.3	86.9	85.7	85.9	83.6	77.4	76.8	76.5	76.3	76.1
Free/Reduced Lunch (FTE)* (Number/Percent)	169	235	242	247	198	364,441	367,462	366,547	367,720	380,376
	16.5	23.2	24.1	25.8	22.3	41.7	40.8	41.8	42.1	43.7

Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Core Data as submitted by Missouri Public Schools as of November 2, 2009; posted to the Web November 7, 2009. * January Membership Data is used as the denominator when calculating the percent.
** The actual name of the school has been changed to maintain anonymity.

Table 2

Graduate Analysis, 2005-2009

	Johnson City High School					Missouri				
Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of Previous Years Graduates	214	216	193	204	206	58,040	57,838	58,435	60,200	61,761
Percent of Previous Years Graduates										
Entering a 4yr. College/University	29	37.5	27.5	36.8	37.9	38.2	39.3	39.3	39.9	37.1
Entering a 2yr. College/University	31.8	31.9	33.7	26	34.5	26.4	25.8	26.2	26.9	26.2
Entering a Post-Secondary (Non-college) Institution	4.7	3.2	5.7	5.9	0.5	4.4	4.3	4	3.5	2.5
Entering the Work Force	28	23.6	20.2	23	20.4	19.8	19.2	18.9	18.9	18.8
Entering the Military	3.3	1.4	2.6	3.4	0.5	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.1	3
Entering Some Other Field	0	0	3.1	0.5	1.5	2.9	3.1	2.8	2.4	3.7
Status Unknown	3.3	0.9	2.1	4.4	4.9	4.9	5.1	5.6	5.1	7.5

Source: Missouri Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education Core Data As Submitted by Missouri Public Schools.
Data as of November 2, 2009. Posted to the Web November 7, 2009.

At the time this dissertation was drafted, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (herein referred to as DESE) published post-secondary pathway information comprised of the senior class educational and occupational trajectories during the years 2005-2009, as shown in Table 2.

In observing the 2009 cohort, which provided the student subject pool for this study, it should be noted that the data in Table 2 depicted a consistent college-going pattern for students entering four-year colleges and universities and nearly a 10% increase in enrollment rates for students opting for four-year colleges in 2009 as compared to 2005. Military enlistment declined from 3.4% in 2008 to 0.5% in 2009. An additional small decline was observed in the percentage of students entering the work force as the percentage dropped from 23% in 2008 to 20.4% in 2009. The number of students selecting vocational training programs waned from 5.9% to .5% in 2009 (Note: while this study does not specifically address why students choose one postsecondary pathway over another, the researcher suggests future investigation into enrollment pathway selection). Consistent enrollment in four-year post-secondary institutions and increases in two-year college attendance call attention to the import of adding and reinforcing school-based forms of social capital directed toward postsecondary planning for the high school.

Sampling and Participants

Sampling. Purposive sampling dictates that researchers intentionally select participants and settings to more fully understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). According to Creswell, selection of study participants and sites is contingent upon whether they are “information rich” (p. 204). One aspect of qualitative research is to

expound multiple perspectives of individuals in an attempt to epitomize the intricacies of our world. Of primary concern was when and how high school seniors and their families navigate the post-secondary decision-making process. The researcher wanted to afford participants, student and parent, the opportunity to tell their stories and reflect upon their experiences. By conducting qualitative research, study participants were given space and time to candidly discuss their postsecondary decision-making experiences and the networks and resources accessible to them during the process. Quantitative methods are focused on breadth, random sampling, and collecting survey data for statistical testing. Conversely, qualitative methods rely on depth, purposeful sampling, interviews and observation, and iterative analysis.

Defined as, "a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait (e.g., different age groups)", maximal variation sampling requires that the researcher identify the characteristic and then find sites or individuals that exhibit dissimilar dimensions of that characteristic (Creswell, 2008). The defining characteristic in this study is the level of social capital available to participants. More specifically, student and parent participants in this study had access to either low or high-volume social capital and that access impacted their postsecondary decision-making. The inclusion of these student and parent voices could help to define a clearer landscape of how stratification operates within a high school across all student groups, not necessarily in extreme environments, and not just across the *haves* or *have nots*, but across the *haves* and *have nots*. To demonstrate, the introduction noted and the review of literature detailed many studies that included samples and settings that centered on demographic extremes—low income, affluent background,

Black, White, Latinx, rural, urban, rather than a heterogeneous mix of these metrics as constructed in this study (Ceja, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2008, 2017; Gonzales, 2010; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Kiyama, 2010; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

Research Participants. The student study participants represented an array of academic track, post-secondary plans, gender, and socioeconomic status (here after referred to as SES). The reason for this assortment was to allow for diversity in perspective, as no two postsecondary decision-making processes are unerringly the same. Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board and before embarking on the selection process, the researcher first garnered support for this study by meeting with the Johnson City School District assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. After district-level approval was granted, the researcher met with the building principal in his office to outline the purpose and goals of the study, including the method of data collection and study duration. At the conclusion of this meeting, permission was granted to use Johnson City High School as the study setting and access to the senior class and their information was given.

The selection process began with the researcher making a visit to the 12 senior-level English classes (i.e., College Composition, Advanced Placement Language, Advanced Placement Literature, and Senior Writing) to conduct a short discussion of the study and its process. These push-in meetings happened after the researcher sent a communication to senior ELA teachers asking for 10 minutes to introduce the study to students and recruit participants. During these class presentations, the researcher discussed the rationale for the proposed study and the problem being investigated, shared

details concerning participation in the study, and distributed consent forms (see Appendices B and D). At the conclusion of the discussion, students were allowed to ask questions and consent forms were distributed. A total of 92 consent forms from a senior cohort of 206 were distributed to students who raised their hands to demonstrate their interest in being a part of the study. These 92 students represented the following: 82.6% White, 14% Black, and .03% Hispanic; 58.6% females and 41.3% males; 15.2% qualified for free or reduced lunch; and 33.6% were enrolled in AP or dual credit courses and 66.3% were in regular senior English courses. Letters introducing the study to parents were sent home with students; consent forms and parent permission slips were distributed as well. Students were given eight school days to return their participation and consent forms, with 27 students returning permission slips within the eight days. Once these documents were collected, student demographics were tallied and recorded to gain a sense of what groups were represented and missing from the sample. In response, the researcher made additional efforts to reach out to specific student populations that were underrepresented in the sample including: White students who qualified for free or reduced lunch, students who received special education services, and who were male; and the researcher also spoke individually with six Black male students in order to increase representation from all demographics.

The 27 students who made up the student sample represented these statistics: 63% were White, 33% were Black, and .04% was Hispanic; 33.3% were male and 66.6% were female; 22.2% were in gifted programs and 11% qualified for special education services; 92% aspired to enroll in college; and 30% qualified for free or reduced lunch. Too, they represented a heterogeneous mixture that was similar to the 92 students whom took home

study participant consent forms, specifically, most students were White, in the regular education track, and aspired to enroll in some type of college. The researcher's initial intent was to interview parents who also had a child in the study in order to explore connections between participants; however, this goal was only achieved with four student-parent pairings, in addition to seven parents who had children in the senior cohort, but whose children did not participate in this study. Their children did not become study participants because three did not return the consent form and the remaining four did not show up for their interview sessions, despite a reminder note being sent to them on the day before their interview slot. These five additional parents were recruited by letters that were distributed during senior English classes and brought home by their 12th grade children; two were recruited when the researcher made phone calls to two Black male parents as that voice was missing from the parent sample. Johnson City High School staff participated in the study as parents; however, it is plausible to expect that some of their responses could be tempered by their roles in the school. They included: one school administrator, one guidance counselor, and one core subject teacher. None of these parents' children were a part of the student sample. There was one additional parent in the study who also worked in an elementary school within the district. Her son was a part of the student sample. The researcher offered all participants a $5 gift card as compensation for their participation in the study. Each student participant readily accepted the gift card, while the parents largely expressed that compensation was unnecessary because they wanted to help future students and families going through the postsecondary decision-making process.

In order to accurately capture the widely variant stories of a cross-section of high school seniors, the investigator selected 27 students and 11 parents to interview during one-on-one, audio-taped interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes, with four student interviews and two parent interviews exceeding this duration. To be considered for selection, students had to be a JCHS senior enrolled in a 4th year ELA course (this criterion was for recruitment and identification purposes). Parent participants had to have a child who was in the senior class or a child whom was a JCHS graduate. These interviews, held on the high school campus either during the researcher's planning period or after school, were concentrated on the postsecondary decision-making process and how access to information channels helped shape the outcome of this practice. Table 3 and Table 4 are shared to disclose participant pseudonyms and category identities.

Table 3

Student Participant Characteristics Table

Student Subject	Gender	Race	Academic Track	Free/ Reduced Lunch	Have or Have Not Status
Peter	M	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Becca	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Jack	M	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Megan	F	White	Gifted	N/A	Have
Rebekah	F	White	Gifted	N/A	Have
Lisa	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have Not
Haley	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Joe	M	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Ryan	M	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have Not
Tara	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have Not
Shay	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Michelle	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have
Antonio	M	Black	Regular Ed.	F/R	Have
Amanda	F	White	Gifted	F/R	Have
Sarah	F	White	Gifted	N/A	Have
Bria	F	Black	Regular Ed.	F/R	Have Not
Jade	F	Black	Regular Ed.	F/R	Have Not
Trinity	F	Black	Gifted	F/R	Have Not
Hannah	F	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have Not
Oscar	M	Latino	Regular Ed.	F/R	Have Not

David	M	Black	SPED	N/A	Have Not
Kiah	F	Biracial	SPED	F/R	Have Not
Drea	F	Black	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have Not
Harper	F	Black	Gifted	N/A	Have
Trent	M	White	Regular Ed.	N/A	Have Not
Londyn	F	Black	Regular Ed.	F/R	Have
Jared	M	White	Regular Ed.	F/R	Have Not

Notes: * Denotes student has a parent in the study. Gender and race refers to the gender and ethnic background denoted in the demographic section in the Student Information System database. Students were not asked to self-identify. Academic track refers to the academic program (track) the student was placed into. Free and Reduced Lunch status refers to the students' socioeconomic background as a qualifier for free or reduced lunch prices. *Have* refers to whether the participant met at least five of eight indicators; *Have Nots* met four or fewer indicators as follows: parents attended some college; racial background; had a sibling that previously completed high school (navigated the postsecondary decision) and/ or matriculated to college; attended a college campus visit or met with a college representative or military recruiter; met with a school counselor, teacher, or other faculty member to discuss postsecondary planning; enrollment in AP (Advanced Placement) or dual credit courses (i.e., College US History, College Composition); and attended a college fair or FAFSA workshop; and socioeconomic background.

Table 4

Parent Participant Characteristics Table

Parent Subject	Gender	Race	Level of Education	Child in the Study
Fred	M	White	Doctorate	No
Jenny	F	White	Masters	Yes
Sherri	F	White	Masters	No
Joy	F	Black	Masters	Yes
Melissa	F	Black	Bachelors	No
Amy	F	White	Bachelors	Yes
Nathan	M	Black	HS Diploma/ Enlistment	No
Kate	F	White	Masters	Yes
Andrew	M	Black	Bachelors	Yes
Courtney	F	White	HS Diploma	Yes
Dana	F	Black	HS Diploma	Yes

Notes: * Denotes parent has a child in the study. Gender and race refers to the gender and ethnic background denoted in the demographic section in the Student Information System database. Parents were not asked to self-identify. Level of education refers to the highest level of education the parent participant completed. Child in the study refers to whether their biological or adopted child is also a participant in the study.

The Instrument. The body of qualitative research typically involves data collection using instruments and protocols with general questions that allow the participant to provide the response. The qualitative interview involves asking broad, open-ended questions of study participants. This method of inquiry allows subjects to openly voice their perspectives in such a way that they are in control of the response. This study utilized a qualitative interview protocol designed to elicit student and parent perceptions regarding the postsecondary decision-making process and access to forms of social capital—both interior and exterior to the school. Study participants had the opportunity to respond thoughtfully about their postsecondary decision experience and the networks and resources accessible to them during the process. A qualitative approach seemed to be the best fit because the researcher was more concerned about the participant's lived experiences, rather than the statistical data culled from quantitative inquiry.

Qualitative research offers outsiders shared perspectives, underpinnings, understandings, voices, and nuances where quantitative research is unable to give voice to these aspects of the narratives. Other like studies explored and investigated: the role of social capital in school settings; the role of institutional agents and their effect on student outcomes; the role of school counseling relevant to postsecondary decision-making; how parental and peer influences affect the postsecondary decision; and the impact of shortages of social capital on marginalized students and those from underserved backgrounds (Ceja, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2015; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). What previous studies have underrepresented in the research is exploration of: how differential

access to social capital impacts students' decision-making concerning enrollment, as well as enlistment and employment; how schools' postsecondary cultures support trajectories other than college enrollment; and how these factors comingle in suburban Midwest contexts.

The researcher adapted the Westat Protocols for Low-Income High School Seniors and First-Generation Parents of First-time College Freshmen in order to collect the data that would address the aforementioned research questions (see Appendices E and F, respectively). The rationale for selecting this tool was because the interview protocol presented semi-structured questions and allowed for follow up queues that could add to the depth of the narratives shared by participants. In adapting these interview instruments for this study, adjustments were made to the questions and probes to more easily extract student and parent frames of reference in relationship to navigating the postsecondary decision. The student interview instrument asked 17 questions that addressed the following strands: information gathering, accessibility and use of resources (both human resources such as family, peers, and school people and social capital), and process navigation (application to post-secondary institutions and securing financial resources). The parent interview instrument asked twenty-four questions tied to the same strands.

Researcher-created probes for most questions were available in the case where a subject may have given a yes or no response to a semi-structured question. The concluding question for both instruments asked the subject to provide any suggestions or recommendations that could be of assistance to future high school seniors and their families during their postsecondary decision-making process. Because the subject sample transcended many lines (i.e. race, gender, class, educational attainment, and

postsecondary aspirations), this question provided the researcher with valuable information regarding individual experiences and diversity within a select population.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data Collection. The researcher conducted interviews on the school campus that for students is an environment characterized by comfort and familiar surroundings. For parent subjects, the environment may have created a sense of apprehension as some tend to feel an aversion to school environments. However, the researcher did not observe behaviors that would indicate apprehension or uneasiness. The reason could be due to the fact that some parent subjects and numerous student subjects had relationships with the investigator because she taught English at the high school for the past several years. One parent participant was concerned about articulating her views and personal experience because of possible ramifications for faculty and the guidance department; nonetheless, she was comfortable in the interview setting which was the researcher's classroom. Two parent interviews, Andrew and Marcy, were conducted in the participant's homes due to work scheduling conflicts.

Table 5 summarizes the researcher's data collection and analysis actions.

Table 5

Researcher Data Collection and Analysis Actions

Timeframe	Data Collection Method (s)	Completed Steps
November	Met with District and Building Administration	-Was granted permission from Drs. D'Alessandro and Schroeder
January	Study Introduction to Students and Parents	-Distributed consent forms -Collected consent forms -Created participant pool
February-April	Interviews	-Conducted 27 audio-recorded student interviews -Conducted 11 audio-recorded parent interviews
February-April	Field Notes	-Noted participant behaviors and recorded notes on the printed protocols during the interviews; also reiterated their responses during interviews to ensure accuracy
April-May	Informal Discussion Circle	-Met with small groups of student participants and participants to engage in follow up dialogue about the interviews to ensure that their experiences and feelings were accurately captured
May-August	Transcription	-Contracted with an outside individual for transcription services
October-December	Document Analysis	-Read, analyzed, and coded transcripted narratives/ experiences shared by participants

Aside from data collected from the interview process, the researcher also recorded field notes by cataloging thoughts, patterns, wonderings, and observations into a notebook that had five colored tabs which helped organize information into the following general categories: *haves*, *have nots*, social capital (both human and material), postsecondary decision-making, and school supports. This running record helped the researcher recall information and participant actions that provided insight about the interviews.

Validity. The goal of any type of research (whether quantitative or qualitative) is to create a study that will yield accurate, reliable results. That researchers can deduce sustainable and logical inferences from data about a population is validity (Creswell, 2008). During this process, the researcher deems the findings to be accurate and credible by utilizing methods that include member checking and triangulation (Creswell, 2008). In qualitative research, the investigator triangulates the data in order to demonstrate that the study has generated reliable, valid results by combining evidence from different participants, forms of data, or methods of data collection. Corroboration is intended to ensure that research findings are representative of the participants' perceptions, not the legitimacy of their perspectives. The triangulation process facilitates accuracy and reliability because the data is derived from multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, triangulation gives credence to qualitative research in that it helps to flesh out what is common and pervasive within the scope of a study.

According to Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002):

> Qualitative research is iterative rather than linear, so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis. Data are systematically checked, focus is maintained, and the fit of data and the conceptual work of analysis and interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly. (p.10).

To this end, the researcher navigated the research process by employing repetitive procedures constructing the subject pool, collecting data during the interview proceedings, and conducting analyses. These verification strategies informed the study by helping the researcher to know when and if adjustments to research practices were appropriate. The result was reliable, accurate outcomes achieved through the systematic research methodologies that are consistent with triangulation processes. To illustrate, multiple data sources in the form of student and parent interviews were included in the sample to obtain perspectives about postsecondary decision-making. The student and parent interview protocols asked the same questions of both types of participants, and included an additional line of questions related to parent-centered actions and discussions in the parent protocol. This reason for this slight difference in protocols was to allow for closer examination of the parents' own postsecondary decisions and actions which understandably influence the normative structures and influences projected onto their children. Once transcribed, these interview documents showed alignment between the three student-parent pairings, as well as parent perspectives that emerged from students whose parents were not a part of the study sample. Specifically, parent perspectives were reflected in the voices, values, and actions of the three students who were linked to four

of the parents. There were also general thoughts expressed among students that echoed thoughts expressed by non-linked parent participants. The transcript coding process also revealed text segments and emergent codes that were common among participants Following the interview process, the researcher conferenced with 13 study participants--eight students and five parents representing a heterogeneous sampling of race, gender, track, SES, and postsecondary track, to ensure that the initial noticings and findings aligned with the perspectives they intended to share. In cross-checking the interview protocol sheets against the dialogue generated during the circle structure, the researcher sought to ensure that participant accounts of navigating the postsecondary decision at JCHS were thorough, realistic, equitable, and depictive of their realities. These small-group discussions took place in the researcher's classroom after the school day ended or during her planning period (she generally met with students after school due to their course schedules).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) defend that peer debriefing "is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). Throughout this study, the researcher sought the professional, objective perspective of colleagues, professors, and the dissertation committee to offer their discourse on the strengths and weaknesses of the research project. Peer debriefing is appropriate both during and after the study and generally addresses whether: the findings are grounded in the data; inferences are reasonable; themes are congruous; and to what degree there is researcher bias (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). Additionally, Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest that during this process,

colleagues and others external to the study can assist the researcher by devising new codes to enhance extant codes or checking the researcher's perceptions of his or her field-notes. Again, the researcher enlisted the guidance of colleagues and professors to become aware of her own biases toward the study, engage in meaningful discussions about the data, and provide an opportunity to dispose of weaknesses in the project. Much of this peer talk occurred during CORD (Conversations on Research Discourse) meetings at the researcher's university with committee members and in informal discussions with faculty at Johnson City High School. Thought partnership took place through dialogue with the researcher's doctoral committee chair and other doctoral candidates who were both in her cohort and in the field of education. Aside from these activities, the researcher created field notes that were generated during the interviews, added more noticings and wonderings to the transcripts during the coding processes, and evaluated these documents in order to understand the narratives and lived experiences that were captured.

Analysis Procedures. The researcher engaged in a multi-step procedure in order to analyze the data collected from student and parent participants. After recording participant narratives and responses to the interview questions, the researcher began the analysis process by providing the audio files to an outside transcriber who then produced written interview transcripts. Prior to starting the coding and analysis phases, the transcripts were checked against the audio files to ensure that the written document was accurate and exactly what the respondent expressed. Aligning with Creswell's (2008) qualitative research coding process, next, the researcher listened to each audio file twice to obtain a general sense of the details and perspective being shared, recording written

notes and observations in the margin. After these two listening sessions, the researcher then read each transcription twice for purposes of coding specific elements including: timelines for when thoughts of postsecondary aspirations began and timelines for selecting a postsecondary pathway; actions such as going on campus visits, taking college admissions exams, meeting with school counselors or other staff for college and career advisement; sources of information used such as materials posted and distributed via the counseling office, peers, faculty, siblings, parents, college admissions staff, and non-kin associations; staff member support; postsecondary trajectories; postsecondary decisions; financing postsecondary education; and outside resources and information accessed. This analysis was driven by alignment with the review of literature strands, paying specific attention to words and codes associated with social capital--trust, obligations, networks, and resources, and institutional agency—school-based supports such as guidance counselors, faculty, and administration, college choice process.

During the coding process, a set of multi-colored highlighters was used, with a different color assigned to each element noted above. In coding each interview transcript, the researcher used highlighters to identify words and trends across and between participants. When evaluating the results of the coding process, the researcher discovered that some words and trends became repetitious across transcripts. These words or text segments became codes that signaled segments connected to influences, sources and forms of social capital, finances, timing of actions and decisions, and such. Once the researcher went through this process with each interview transcript, after the initial coding, transcripts were evaluated again and the codes were re-analyzed to ensure that the assigned code was appropriate. It was at this stage that the researcher achieved

saturation, or the juncture at which major themes emerge, limiting the ability of new information to impact themes in a significant way. Saturation is critical to data reliability and validity.

The combined transcript strands and highlighter colors were aligned, creating a way to organize responses across students, across parents, between students, between parents, and between students and parents. To do this work, the researcher spread out sections of the transcripts that were arranged by questions categories according to the interview protocol layout. Each transcript page was marked with a generic participant identification number (student participants were assigned a 100 number, while parent participants were assigned a 200 number) and an H if the student participant was a *have* or an HN if the participant was a *have not*. Then, she divided the transcript pages into *haves* and *have nots* for purposes of comparison and contrast. The researcher continued by reviewing participant responses and using deductive coding and inductive coding to make sense of what the data revealed. In this way, codes developed based on what participant voices revealed and tied back to what the empirical literature outlined. For example, words and text segments that related to postsecondary decision-making or social capital were connected to the empirical studies around the same literatures in Chapter Two. Additionally, student participant perspectives on adult supports within Johnson City High School demonstrated an element that countered the literature in that lack of postsecondary planning guidance and support was not experienced by just students who were minority, low income, and/ or first generation. This was an experience that student participants of various backgrounds spoke of.

Once organized by *haves* and *have nots*, the researcher reread the transcript pages that were grouped according to highlighter colors in order to make sure that data were in the proper categories and not misplaced. The result of this coding process was the emergence of student and parent themes which included: institutional systems as barriers or conduits of social capital; influences on postsecondary aspirations (familial and peer); selecting a postsecondary trajectory and timing of the decision; external information sources; bonding and bridging social capital and network density; and feelings about the postsecondary decision. Additional parent themes that surfaced were: financial knowledge of postsecondary education, postsecondary planning process, and college-going knowledge. The table below outlines the progression of how the researcher analyzed the interview transcripts by moving from the macro to the micro level:

Table 6

Data Analysis and Coding Process

Data Source(s)	Codes	Theme
Interviews and Field notes details	College-going culture Guidance Office Counselors Teachers	Institutional Systems as Barriers or Conduits of Social Capital
Interviews and Field notes details	Parents Peers Non-kin Adults	Influences on Postsecondary Aspirations (Familial and Peer)
Interviews and Field notes details	College Middle school Specific year in high school	Selecting a Postsecondary Trajectory and Timing of the Decision
Interviews and Field notes details	College admissions reps Military recruiters Private college coach Institution websites	External Information Sources
Interviews and Field notes details	Peers' parents, siblings Connections to outside agencies	Bonding and Bridging Social Capital/ Network Density

	Relationships with adults who help	
Interviews and Field notes details	Words tied to fear, uncertainty, stress, excitement	Feelings About the Postsecondary Decision
Interviews and Field notes details	ACT/SAT College tours Admissions criteria Curriculum Matter	College-going Knowledge
Interviews and Field notes and details	FAFSA Grants Scholarships Private loans	Financial Knowledge of Postsecondary Education
Interviews and Field notes details	Who initiated the notion and discussion	Postsecondary Planning Process

Limitations

In research, participants sometimes alter their behaviors as a result of being observed or studied. As previously noted in Chapter one, the researcher outlined limiting factors that could have impacted the design of the study, as well as the participant sample. Combined, these elements created limitations that could affect study outcomes. For this research, student and parent subjects may have felt that the primary investigator would identify options to assist them in applying to college, locate scholarships, or search for employment. The researcher also noted that several subjects expressed concern and even a degree of urgency in beginning and/ or continuing post-secondary planning due to the questions asked during the interview. Many students stated that, "[they] should have begun planning a long time before now." This adjustment in natural behavioral patterns, known in research as the Hawthorne Effect, could have adversely impacted the qualitative outcomes. During recruitment, 10 more students and four more parents expressed interest in the study than the number of subjects that actually became participants. This decrease in number is the result of schedule

conflicts with respect to the interviews and potential participants deciding not to move forward with the study. Developing a sample that was large enough to capture diverse perspectives helped to address this limitation.

Researcher Positionality Statement

The researcher has many charges throughout a course of study to include: maintain neutrality; collect data; protect human subjects; preserve confidentiality; conduct thorough investigations of the proposed research questions; and add to their chosen field of study. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, the researcher is also charged with an acknowledgement of the self and the ways in which culture, mental models, and experiences shape the self. It is then this influenced self that the researcher carefully contains to prevent skewness and bias in the study. Kleinman (1991) states "our attitudes affect what we choose to study, what we concentrate on, who we hang around or interview, our interpretations of events, and even our investment of time and effort in the field" (p. 185). This study was of principal interest to me because of my past work as a high school English teacher and current work as a high school assistant principal. On countless occasions, I have surveyed the classroom environment, in query about the postsecondary fate of those students who lacked support, guidance, and access to information and networks. Undoubtedly, the students in my school were being immersed into rigorous academic curricula; conversely, preparing them academically speaks little as it relates to guiding them through the post-secondary choice process.

As the primary researcher and analyzer, it is critical to self-evaluate and clearly articulate the ways that my own biases and background could affect my research and accompanying outcomes. Here in the following section, I share the relationship with my

research concerning assumptions, biases, and blinders. Knowing these elements helps the reader to understand from a holistic lens why this background cannot be fully separated from the research subject. In assuming the role of researcher, I was afforded a multi-faceted scope through which I could examine and analyze my study and accompanying research questions. To outline my background, I grew up supported by divorced parents—a mother who attended two years at a selective state university and a father who completed undergraduate studies at a public state university. On the maternal side of my family, I was a fourth-generation college student whose ancestry included a grandmother with a graduate degree from a prestigious ivy-league university and a grandfather who attended one year of college prior to serving four years in the US Army during World War II. On the paternal side, I was a second-generation student whose grandmother had a 10th grade education and whose four older siblings had also matriculated to college and completed undergraduate degrees. One of these siblings earned a Master's degree and an ivy-league doctoral degree. As the time neared for me to select a postsecondary pathway, the decision centered on where I wanted to attend college, not whether I wanted to attend college. In my family, both maternally and paternally, it was normative to enroll in college and complete an undergraduate degree, minimally. Raised in two environments situated between a Midwestern backdrop marked by neighborhoods of low to median incomes in both a predominantly White and largely urban setting, I attended predominantly White public institutions at the primary and secondary levels. These were the same schools that my mother attended and closely mirrored the setting for this study. As a result of my mother's connections to the school and community (she worked for a large, locally owned community firm), in addition to

my maternal grandparents' social capital available through their civic engagements (i.e., Optimist Club, AAUW (American Association of University Women), etc.), I received attentions and support that was not made available to my seven Black peers in our graduating class.

During the 2009-2010 academic year, my role as classroom teacher afforded me insights into student dynamics as it related to race, gender, academic track, socioeconomic variables, and postsecondary trajectory options. Additionally, I had intimate knowledge of staff perceptions around postsecondary planning and efforts to equip students with the appropriate tools to make informed decisions about their futures. In the decade that I spent in this environment as an employee, I observed which sorts of students received high quality guidance and advisement and which students slipped through the cracks. At times this unevenness was unintentional; other times it was by the design of a system that did not support all students. I observed minority students underrepresented in gifted programs, Advanced Placement courses, and dual credit courses. Adding to this marginalization was an overrepresentation of minority students who qualified for special education services.

My previous knowledge and experiences as a student who enrolled in a four-year university immediately following high school allowed me to recall the sorts of information that I and my family needed, including the ways in which my school did and did not meet those needs. To illustrate, my counselor went through a perfunctory senior checklist during the first semester of my senior year which included whether I had identified a pathway after high school and what that pathway was. Once my counselor knew of my intentions, he gave me a brochure about Southwest Missouri State University

(where I obtained my BA in English), as well as the contact information for an admissions representative. The next time we met was in February and the basis of that five-minute conversation was to share that I could fail all of my courses for 2nd semester and still graduate. Knowing that my plan was to enroll in college, he did not ask if I needed information about completing the FAFSA or whether I had applied for scholarships. Further, instead of encouraging me to finish strong academically, he insinuated that I could coast along until graduation.

My role as a teacher afforded me intimate knowledge of Johnson City High School's college going culture and their practices around exposing students to the opportunities available with military enlistment. I understood the makeup of those students who would be considered as *the haves*; similarly, I knew the makings of the students who were *the have nots*. I acknowledged that despite a lot of effort, these classifications were akin to a Hindu caste system—extremely difficult to move in or out of. I saw the far-reaching impact of organizational brokering and institutional neglect, as well as the effects of relentless efforts by staff members aimed to help students succeed.

By serving in the researcher role, I maintained a neutral observer position and more importantly, I did not make suggestions about actions students should take along the postsecondary decision pathway. Instead, my efforts centered on collecting data from a wide variety of participants in an attempt to gain a better sense of their needs concerning planning for life beyond high school. Maintaining a sense of integrity and ethnicism, I protected the human subjects in my study by keeping the content of our discussions confidential. Researching this critical issue was important because I sought to identify those actions, structures, and resources that could positively improve student

life outcomes. In this case, I had a deeply rooted desire to support those students from my community because I often saw myself in them. I felt a moral impetus to identify ways to even out a systemically unleveled playing field.

Summary

Chapter three outlined the methodology used to analyze the impact of disparities in social capital on the postsecondary decision-making process at a Midwestern suburban high school during the fall and spring of the 2008-2009 school year. A qualitative methods approach was employed to study the role of social capital from multiple lenses. The researcher utilized an interview protocol to capture the narrative perspectives concerning the experiences of 27 high school seniors and 11 parents when navigating the postsecondary decision-making process. A summation was provided, in addition to specifications regarding the method of research design, instrumentation, administration, and briefings on data collection and analysis. A detailed discussion of the study findings is shared in Chapter Four, revealing the lived experiences and realities of study participants as it relates to the postsecondary decision. Further, Chapter Four addresses the research questions presented both in Chapters One and Three of this dissertation.

Chapter Four — Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of disparities in social capital on seniors in a Midwestern high school setting. To recap, researchers outlined social capital as resources appropriable from social relations that can contribute to a successful educational outcome, positive influence on societal circumstances, and community reform among other aspects after taking into account the efforts of individual students and their socioeconomic backgrounds (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Goddard, 2003; Holland, 2010; Holland, 2019; Hossler et al., 1987; Smith, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch, 1995; Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1997; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994; Zhou & Bankston, 1994). In short, social capital is resources that exist within networks of people and relationships among people. Study findings indicated that differential access to school-based social capital created inequitable postsecondary planning experiences for the 27 student participants and 11 parent participants that made up the sample. Additionally, these findings demonstrated the intricacies of accessing certain networks and forms of social capital within schools which further problematize staff failure to support and empower a heterogeneous student population in a resource-rich suburban context. The research questions that framed this study were:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the stages of the postsecondary decision-making process that students perceive they experience?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Who is involved in the decision-making process and what role do they play according to student perceptions?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What types of resources and information do students and their families report that they sought?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): What information do students and families share that they apply to decision-making?

As previously noted in Chapter Two, the major literature distinctions centered on institutional agency and postsecondary planning as explored through a social capital framework. Researchers have stressed the importance of student and family access to social capital, the resources, information channels, and networks that are the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Additionally, researchers argued that school faculty and administrators can serve as institutional agents who share knowledge, provide support and guidance, and empower students and in specific, those students representing minority and low income populations who historically experience diminished access to these forms of support (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gast, 2016; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In making decisions concerning postsecondary trajectories, high school students rely heavily on these institutional agents in order to enroll, enlist, or employ and they seek information, guidance, and resources to assist them in pursuing these options. For students who have access to high volumes of social capital, they experience this process differently than do their peers with less access to social capital, creating a system of *haves* and *have nots*. It is these disparities in social capital that have the potential to impact the postsecondary aspirations and options of students within a high school.

As discussed in Chapter Three, this research was limited to 27 twelfth grade students and 11 parents from one suburban, Midwest high school. These participants represented a heterogeneous mixture of race, gender, academic track, college participation, and socioeconomic background. Student and parent participant characteristics and pseudonyms are disaggregated and were shown in Chapter Three in Table 3 and Table 4, as well as in the tables below. Racial and gender constructs were assigned by the researcher as denoted in the demographic data stored in the Student Information System database. Students were not asked to self-identify.

This study included three phases and began with the researcher identifying those questions and prompts that would generate the rich discussions that would form the narrative voice for this study. An extant interview protocol was selected based upon the depth and breadth of questions it offered. Next, the researcher conducted a search to determine which 12th grade students and parents in the study setting would be interested in sharing their perspectives on and experiences with navigating the postsecondary decision. After obtaining permission, on-site qualitative interviews were conducted with a sample consisting of 27 students and 11 parents. Interview sessions generally lasted between one and one and a half hours per student and were audio recorded by the researcher. Finally, the audio-taped interviews were later transcribed by a third party who was not associated with the project. The qualitative structure of the interviews offered rich narratives and detailed lived experiences of 27 students in a low to middle-class, suburban public high school. The interviews took place at the beginning of the final semester of the senior year, a time when most students have firm plans in place regarding postsecondary trajectories. The interview protocol consisted of 17 open-ended questions, including a few that were multi-part. At the conclusion of the interviews, subject responses were reviewed generally, and then analyzed through close reading. After completing

the interviews, nine emergent themes surfaced. These themes include: 1) Systemic institutional stratification as a barrier or conduit of social capital; 2) Influences on postsecondary aspirations (both familial and peer); 3) Selecting a postsecondary trajectory and timing of the decision; 4) External information sources; 5) Bonding and bridging social capital/ network density; and 6) Feelings about postsecondary decision-making; 7) Postsecondary Planning Processes; 8) College-going Knowledge; and 9) Financial Knowledge of Postsecondary Education. These are discussed along with accompanying literature and excerpts from student responses. Further, the themes helped the researcher to organize and guide the discussion presented in Chapter Five. Just 27 students comprised this sample; yet, asking open-ended questions allowed for more data spanning additional topics relevant to postsecondary decision and process navigation.

Depictions of student and parent subjects are presented in this chapter, along with the emergent themes discovered during the interviews phase. In order to identify two distinctions of students and how they experienced postsecondary planning and assistance at Johnson City High School, the researcher distinguished them as the *haves* and the *have nots*. As defined in Chapter One, the *haves* include White and Black students coming from median to wealthy socioeconomic backgrounds born to college educated parents and are placed in regular or gifted education programs. For many *haves*, college has been a family norm for generations. On the other hand, the *have nots* include White, African American, and Hispanic students from lower income backgrounds who are first-generation college students and quite frequently, enlist in the military or employ immediately following high school graduation as a result of having few options from which to choose after experiencing poor access to postsecondary planning information, social capital, and rigorous academic offerings. *Have nots* could be placed in regular

academic tracks, but more often have IEPs and receive special education services. Each of these student participants was a class of 2009 second-semester high school senior at varying places in the continuum of the postsecondary decision. Some had already chosen a postsecondary trajectory and some were still making decisions about which trajectory to pursue. Some were first-generation college students, some were third-generation college students, and still others were not pursuing college at all. Their sights were set upon enlisting in the military, entering the workforce, or applying to vocational training institutions. Subsequently, their perspectives about the postsecondary decision and navigation may be incited by time constraints resultant of approaching graduation.

The major themes and the interview stories they are derived from offered a profound sense of the complicated nature and positive, yet often negative impact of the postsecondary navigational experience at one suburban, midwest high school. Present in each theme is social capital as a salient feature of this research. Too, this chapter exposes the thematic landscape relevant to the student subjects in this study. First, the study's major findings will be presented, coupled with accounts and details culled from the interviews in order to recount lived experiences of the student subjects and parents. A summation of this type also allows the reader to make sense of and give meaning to the thematic aspects of the study.

The students who were interviewed varied in terms of cumulative GPA, class rank, and ACT score; additionally, there were students in the sample who had not yet taken the ACT. Of the 27 student participants, three, Jared, Oscar, and Heather, had not taken the ACT. As expressed during their interviews, Jared and Heather were unsure of their postsecondary trajectory, while Oscar planned to employ directly following

graduation and had a job lined up with his father's roofing company. These metrics were made available to the researcher through reports and data stored in the school's student information system (SIS). One postsecondary pathway that participants referenced was Missouri's A+ Program which provides free tuition for 2 years at Missouri community colleges and a small number of colleges and universities contingent upon students meeting specific program requirements. For many college-bound JCHS students, this was a cost-effective transition step between high school and university enrollment. As expressed during their interviews, Jared was unsure of his postsecondary trajectory, while Oscar planned to employ directly following graduation and had a job lined up with his father's roofing company. Also included in the student sample was one of four class valedictorians and a set of twins. Of particular mention is the valedictorian because he demonstrated the highest level of academic achievement and was involved in two varsity sports which would be attractive to college admissions representatives and could likely earn him academic scholarships. However, because finances were tight for his family, he planned to enlist in the Navy as a means of funding his postsecondary education. The family's financial situation could potentially qualify him for Pell grants as well. Generally speaking, the respondents were honest and at times, quite candid during their interviews, noting particular examples and observations to support the account of their unique postsecondary decision-making process. Some spoke of specific teachers and counselors who guided them during the process and even influenced their postsecondary choice. They were honest about the work they had or had not done throughout the process; they were straightforward in what they believed about the contributions their school had or had not made; and they were genial in offering suggestions for what the

school and future students could do to yield better postsecondary planning. In sum, the student respondents gave profound voice to countless unvoiced students and provided enduring understandings that mere quantitative results could not.

As noted in Table 4, the parent participants in this study represented various racial backgrounds, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and levels of postsecondary education. Of the 11 parent participants, seven had children who were also in the study. Another unique characteristic of this participant group was that it contained an administrator, one classroom teacher, and one counselor who all worked at the setting school. There was one additional parent participant who taught in the district at an elementary school. As indicated in this chapter, the parents in this specific study undoubtedly supported Johnson City High School; however, what is echoed in their voices is that they needed more than what was being offered—more information, more access to resources, more networks, and more focus on pathways other than college.

Institutional Systems as a Barrier or Conduit of Social Capital

The first theme reflects excessive caseloads and unending lists of work responsibilities as factors barring deep staff involvement in navigating the postsecondary decision. This is indicative of what Stanton-Salazar (2011) considered institutional neglect on the part of faculty. The literature on the interplay of school counselors, school effects, and support for under-resourced students underscored this context based on counselor to student ratios and counselors performing a bevy of responsibilities that absorb much of their time and have little if any connection to college and career planning and advisement (Ceja, 2006; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Robinson & Roksa, 2017; Stanton-Salazar,

2011). Becca, a *have* with an older sister who was in college, expressed her frustration with the guidance departments' focus on tasks unrelated to postsecondary planning,

> Personally, the guidance office has no clue what they're doing. They, you can go in there and talk to them but they're not going to help you with anything. They're there to do what the principals tell them to do like whether it's report cards, progress reports, or, I mean, they're so wrapped up in all that, schedules that they don't have enough time for us students to go in there and talk. They're so focused on that because they have a timeline of things to get done and they can't take 10 minutes to help us out. When they do call us down, they come around and talk to us our senior year: 'What's your plans, did you take your ACT, what did you get on your ACT? You have this many credits, you need this many credits.' They come around and talk to us, but it's like a checklist of items. It takes like 30 seconds, but do you really sit down and talk to us about well, this is good, you know, 'The transition is going to be hard, you know, you're going to be away from your parents, more dependent; you're going to think for yourself.' I mean, they don't sit down and talk to us about that. How many students in our senior class have parents that will actually help them with that? Not very many and how many people like the guidance counselors help us out with that? Whether it's just calling us down for a surprise visit at the beginning of the year saying, 'What college are you planning on going to? The application process is here, how can I help you with it?' Instead of doing that, they do their checklist.

Based on the supporting literature referenced above, the circumstances Becca described are typical in urban, minority, under-resourced schools; however, Johnson City is none of

those things and yet, 21 of the students in the sample indicated that their school did an inadequate job of being resourceful and assisting with postsecondary plans. Peter, a *have* who had an older brother in college and whose family was well connected because of their family-run Johnson City business, agreed with Becca's perspective,

> I think if you're like a guidance counselor, if just the school in general made it a bigger deal what you're doing in life or what you're thinking of doing after high school that would help [kids] a lot. 'Cause, I mean, I didn't really hear about the, the planning night until like, it was like, last year? Yeah, I think I went to that 1st one. I mean, that was the only one and it was just like that was it pretty much cause my counselor wasn't, I mean, one time I went down there and she was like 'Oh, if you ever need help' but I mean it was just something quick . . . it wasn't anything. 'Oh, do you know what you're doing?'

For seven Johnson City student participants, their first exposure related to college-going aspirations and planning was when they began high school. This observation was important given that while Johnson City contained a large four-year university and a community college, this high school sent 72.4% of its students to two and four-year colleges and community colleges, many of whom were first-generation college goers. As indicated in the literature, all students and particularly first-generation college goers have a great need for college knowledge, prompting them to seek the assistance of institutional agents (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). To illustrate this need, Amanda, a *have not* who is gifted, said,

> The school could get more involved; our school could. Not downing our school at all, but I think they're not that involved in the college planning process like if

> your parents aren't on you to do stuff and get it done, I mean unless you just do it by yourself which not very many people do, you pretty much don't know what's going on [with] deadlines and stuff. You would have no idea; they don't tell you here at all when the deadlines are for scholarships and stuff. We have an intern this year working [in the guidance office] and she even said when she came here, she was surprised at how little information our school had about college and how little they help and stuff…the counselors and everything.

Amanda was highly intelligent and motivated to do well in her studies. Concerning plans for her future, she aspired to do something in biomedical science following a gap year abroad. Her lack of information about the college application and enrollment processes was not as result of laziness; instead, it was due to her being the child of parents who did not pursue college education. Because she lacked familial forms of social capital that would make college application easier, Amanda turned to JCHS but found that she had to really search for the information and resources she needed,

> Honestly, I think the counselors' office is extremely disorganized. I don't think that they really had prepared me all that well for my future because I had found out from somebody else just this year that, uh, there were certain classes I could have taken that would have helped me in my biology career and I didn't even know about it at all… Um, really I don't think I got any particular guidance from this school, anyway.

Not receiving college-related curricular advisement as illustrated above is an example of institutional neglect as outlined by Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel (2003). The fact that one student was aware of the biology course sequence, but not a student who planned to study

that field in college is indicative of stratified opportunities, created disparities in information sharing. Arguably, students and families seek direction and input from guidance counselors or the office of college and career planning. Realistically, not every child, and actually most students, are left to pilot the process on their own. Gaps in assistance were not necessarily intentional and could be observed in overt and covert forms as discovered in participant narratives. And, these barriers or conduits were not necessarily rooted in race or class as the research often points to as in the case of the Chicana students in Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel's (2003) examination of school influences on student college access or Farmer-Hinton's (2008) investigation of college counseling in urban school settings and charter schools (Holland, 2010; Holland, 2015; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). Regardless of the context, nature, and outcomes, systemic institutional stratification was reported as deeply upsetting and a major impediment for both the *haves* and the *have nots*, such as Amanda, Peter, and Becca.

Megan, considered to be a have as a result of her parents both having completed college, her mother working at a university, and her sister attending a state university, was of the opinion that she did not necessarily find what she needed at school, but it was okay because of the social capital she could access outside of school. She expressed that,

> I think the post-high school night was a great thing. It opened a lot of doors. Guidance-wise, you know I haven't really heard from my…I heard from my guidance counselor once about, where you going? And that's pretty much it. I wish there was more involvement, but I know they already have like a lot to do so . . . there should be like a college advisor, I think, at our school.

The postsecondary decision is one that is not only multi-layered, but is also comprised of copious parts that equal the whole (Hossler et al., 1999). To suggest that adolescent children should be able to maneuver the process unguided and unattended by educational professionals is not only unadvised, but also unfair. One analogy that undergirds this position is the case where a mother allows her toddling child to walk unsupported and undirected. Instinctively, children scoot, crawl, pull up on objects, and toddle as part of the walking process. Likewise, students require the same assistance when traveling the pathway to their selected postsecondary decision.

> I don't know that they could do anything that could make it easier, but they could talk more with seniors. I think they called me into the office maybe one time to say are you on-track with your school stuff. But, I think they should be a lot more involved like in personally, in talking to them and like a lot of students I know have no idea how to get money or how to go about even thinking about college.

Tara, a *have not* and first-generation college goer, asked for basic communication with counselors and faculty to make this process easier. Being raised by grandparents who did not attend college and whom were older than her peers' parents put her Tara in a situation where she had little access to planning resources at home. As a result, she could have really benefited from intentional, consistent advisement and exposure to college-going activities.

There were student participants who felt that Johnson City was helpful to their pursuit of postsecondary education. From their experiences, it appeared as though the faculty and administration served as conduits, rather than clogs in the pipeline to college

and career trajectories. Antonio, a *have* who had access to college-going information both at school and within his home, shared,

> The resources in our school are helpful because when we had the college night at the school, I got to see different colleges and stuff; even community colleges have certain classes. Ms. Warner, she helped me in deciding what subjects I should take; even Mr. Brown our computer aide, he knew more about Sysco than I did at the time so, yeah, he told me if I ever needed help, I could come to him.

In this example, not only did Antonio have the assistance of an institutional agent at school to help him seek out a best-fit college, he also had the support of another school employee who worked in his future career field who shared job-related requirements and employment avenues. These intentional actions and bonding capital offered Antonio the strong ties that were helpful in planning for his future beyond high school (Lin, 2001; Granovetter, 1973). Similar to the previously mentioned example, eight of the 27 student participants pointed to one specific faculty member who provided a high level of college-going assistance and guidance as outlined by Lisa and Jade who were both *have nots*,

> I think they [the guidance office] do a good job with in-state colleges 'cause I think they assume most people want to go in-state. I know when I mentioned going out of state, like I had so much support from all the teachers and guidance…oh, that's so neat and they really were supportive, but they didn't give me a lot of information on, like, I didn't really think they had any information really of any schools outside of Missouri, but they were…Ms. Neumann said that she would help me with scholarships and she was really, really good about keeping up with which schools I was looking at and all that . . . she helped me

> with that . . .The person that I think is the most knowledgeable about what we have to do after high school is you. You're the only person that has really talked about planning for the future and how to do it.

Lisa spent a lot of time in Ms. Neumann's office in the guidance counseling department and as such, it could be argued that the efforts directed toward Lisa's college search were a result of that investment. The literature showed that school counselors and faculty who support students based on worthiness and/ or relationships are exposing students to institutional neglect and potentially, institutional abuse (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Jade referred to a faculty member who was "the only person that has really talked about planning for the future" and that person was the researcher. While this study was underway, the researcher did not provide students with postsecondary planning and support in order to prevent bias in the results.

Three students explicitly faulted school administrators as the culprit for why guidance counselors and even teachers were not more helpful to the students and their families who most need assistance with the process. Rick, a *have not* and high achieving student who was intent on military enlistment as a means of funding his education, explained,

> I also think our principals need to get it together too. Personally, if our principals wouldn't just like say it, like let's make it the teachers' fault that the kids don't show up to class, that affects us students too. When you tell a teacher that it affects, that it's their fault the kids don't show up to class, it's their fault, they need to work harder, they need to pay attention to those kids that don't do their work, and you need to praise those kids. Well, what about us kids who are high

> achievers who do our work, who do well on tests? You're pushing us off to the side; you're doing this to the good kids to help the bad kids.

In Rick's particular situation, many colleges and universities would have offered him full-ride scholarships based on his academic achievements. Yet, no one, including his school counselor, directed him toward scholarship applications. Further, coming from a lower-income background could have qualified him for additional financial support in the form of grants. Being the child of parents who did not attend college placed him at a disadvantage for pursuing this pathway. Many adults at JCHS were in prime positions to support Rick; however, he experienced much of this process alone based on trial and error.

Familial and Peer Influences on Postsecondary Aspirations

The next theme closely positioned with institutional-based social capital is that of familial and peer-based social capital (Ceja, 2006; Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The parent participants overwhelmingly chose college as the pathway they felt would be best for their sons and daughters. In the sample of 11 parents, all 11 identified enrollment in college as the only choice. Both Kate and Sherri entertained community college as an option, while the other nine parents spoke only of enrollment in a four-year college or university. For many participants, the pathway they wanted their child to pursue was based upon the positives of their own experiences in college, the fact that they did not enroll in college, or thoughts about the financial benefits of having a college degree. Nathan, a *have not* and a Johnson City police officer discussed his goals for his son:

> Excited for him to choose college because I didn't get to attend college; I wasn't probably mature enough at the time and I chose to go into the military instead so I was excited for him. I made sure one of my top priorities with him was academics. I made sure from the time he started kindergarten, that the first thing he did when he stepped into that house was his homework because I wanted him to go to college. My dream was for him to go to college so I made sure that academically, all was correct, plus he plays sports and we were hoping that he could help himself go, you know, through sports.

Fred, a have who completed his doctoral degree and was a staff member at JCHS, expressed that he initially felt 'challenging' was the best way to describe navigating the postsecondary process. In order to meet those challenges and help his children achieve successful outcome, he:

> Talked a lot about just doing well in school, in the schooling process itself, since I was involved with schools. We talked a lot about the testing process so they were aware of what tests and the preparation for those. ACT, PLAN Test, Explore Test, things like that. [We] talked about courses to take during high school, planning a four-year plan that was, that they would feel good about, that when they got done, would prepare them for the next level.

Andrew discussed:

> Well, I think what you try to do is you try to live with every experience that you have in order to share. What could be valuable to your children so if from an educational standpoint , what I tried to share with them is the steps you have to take to really understand the way things work in life and how you can be, I don't

> want to mess with, I started to say successful, but functional because success is different, they're two different things, but you want to be able to function. You want to be able to cover all your social needs like you want to be able to feed yourself, clothe (maintain) yourself, maintain all those kinds of things, right. So, when you look at society today, you know, there is no absolute path; everybody can choose their own path, however, if you look at the characteristics of society as a whole, education is key in order for you to get to that functional standpoint where you can provide for yourself and potentially for your family going beyond.

His wife Joy, a *have* who was also college degreed, supported Andrew's perspective based on her own parents' meager background and the way that she was raised: Andrew also completed college and their postsecondary backgrounds were the basis for the norms they exposed to their children. Joy shared,

> Well, because I strongly believe coming from parents that weren't college educated, that it wasn't an option whether or not we went; that was just what you did when you got out of high school. I see the difference in my family. Then my mother comes from a family of 11 kids and I see the difference that education has done for her offspring as opposed to the ones who didn't have that. So, I know what a difference education can make.

As the parents of three daughters (their daughter Harper was a student participant) and one son, Andrew and Joy believed that college was the only route to being able to 'function' in life. They allowed their daughters to choose which colleges they applied to; however, there was no choice in selecting college compared to enlistment or employment. For Nathan, college was the only choice because he saw how limited his

career choices were without having a college degree. Considering his own lack of maturity and preparedness as a teen, he made sure that doing homework and taking care of the classroom were top priorities for his son from an early age. This structure and mindset helped prepare his son academically which was a critical part of the college-going equation. Fred also stressed the importance of good academic performance with his four children; however, that mindset was not apparent in the structures, supports, and systems at JCHS which he helped to implement as part of the school's administrative team.

As a single mother of four daughters and a college graduate, Jenny viewed postsecondary pathways from two views—enrollment and enlistment, as a result of having served the Air Force. Because she was also a teacher at Johnson City High School at the time of this study, she was mentioned as having been a trusted adult and institutional agent in five of the 27 student narratives that are offered in this chapter. She discussed college aspirations for her daughters:

> I have two daughters in college—one goes to [a four-year, public, mid-tier college]; she graduates in August. And then she's going to law school at [a four-year, public, mid-tier college] in the fall. Then another daughter who's at [a four-year, public, mid-tier college]; she's a sophomore. Then I have two daughters in high school—one daughter's a junior; she would love to go to medical school. She is, she won the [STEM Program Award] and so she'll be at Wash U for 8 weeks this summer. And, then a daughter who's a freshman. . . I let my girls know that I was a stay-at-home mom for many years and I was an older college student and how I was apprehensive of my scholastic abilities and how after

> taking a few classes and then building onto that, how it helped me feel better about myself and that if I didn't have a college education, I wouldn't be able to do the job that I'm doing now.

Jenny viewed postsecondary trajectories from two vantage points—enrollment and enlistment, as a result of having served in the Air Force. Equipped with both of these experiences, she encouraged exploring college enrollment with her children, two of whom qualified for gifted education services. She devoted a lot of time in her regular and gifted classes helping her students research opportunities that they were interested in, all of which involved enrolling in college. One student, Amanda, learned about gap year programs (which she actively pursued) as a result of her relationship with Jenny.

Student respondents discussed the effect of their families and peers on future educational and career pursuits, noting both positive and negative impacts. For 24 of the 27 student participants, their parents, siblings, and even grandparents functioned as well-springs of influence. Michelle, a *have* with plans to enroll in college in the fall (this would make her a third-generation college goer) and whose mother and grandmother were educators shared:

> I went through all my sister's stuff and, cause she kept a folder for me of all her essays she wrote for scholarships, and she kept anything she used to apply to or any package she got from any schools and then I went on visits to schools. . .

Jared, a *have not*, recounted a different perspective, but one that showed how his family tried to encourage his decisions about possible military enlistment:

My uncle said that I don't want to go in there just as an enlisted person. That's just not what you want to do, just enlist. 'Cause then you're in their [the military's] pocket and

you do whatever they want with you. Everybody I talked to for real just says get your education first. My dad didn't get his education; regrets it every day. My mom, same way. Everybody just really, everybody says get an education first.

Jared's family offered him advice from different lenses, but the goal appeared the same: control your outcomes regardless of the path chosen. These differing angles could have impacted Jared's decision-making because he still had not selected and pursued a postsecondary trajectory by his late-May graduation, stating,

> I think by the end of the summer, I'll have everything figured out. I don't have [the] money to just go out and visit colleges and all of that stuff. . . I have to work and it's hard to do all of that stuff. But, I think I'll have a decision by the end of summer.

Rick experienced similar advice because of his dad's challenges in the work place. Noting a sometimes-troubling economy, his father, who had no college in his background and who had not participated in postsecondary planning activities with his children, wanted Rick and his twin brother Trent to aspire to enroll in college. Interestingly, both twins are considered *have nots* because of the classification system noted at the bottom of Table 3 above; however, they were just one indicator away having met four of the criteria. The messaging they received at home was,

> They wanted [my parents] to make it [college] available as an option because they know how tough it is. Especially my dad. He works for [a local automobile factory]; he's struggling a lot; he's getting laid off a lot and he's just like, 'You guys need to get as much education as possible and you want to be as valuable to

> whatever company you work for as possible so you're going to have to get as much education and skills as possible.'

Conversely, three participants cited an absence of this form of influence families. Rather, the absence was the result of their feeling that college might not be the best option for them. In their rational thoughts, attending college is associated with good grades and interest in high school; if those criteria were not met, then college might not be the best pathway. For other families who did not enroll in college, they sometimes did not view college as necessary, particularly if they had earned a good living without having graduated from college. Jade, a *have not* discussed her familial involvement as:

> Well, my grandma just really, she wants me to go to college. Nobody really gives me any information or help…nothing. My mom? Not very helpful at all. She figures that I shouldn't go to college, that school's not for everybody . . . 'cause she just feels that since I don't like school, that I don't need to go to college.

If she enrolled in college, Jade would become a first-generation college goer. She is the same student who previously described her view of the study school as an institutional barrier, as described in Chapter Two, indicating that she perceived her teachers (excluding the researcher) as not wanting to provide assistance due to behavioral and academic deficiencies. Here, she argued that her mother did not provide support for her future aspirations which included college based upon a lack of academic performance and engagement with school.

Peter, a *have* who was first-generation college-goer with a high volume of social capital due to his linkages and connections to influential people in Johnson City as a result of his family-owned business and some participation in college-going activities,

experienced the opposite, yet unique reaction relevant to postsecondary educational aspirations. He explained how matriculation to college was not of significance to his mother; instead, she was merely concerned with his completion of high school as that was sufficient for planning for his future. Regardless of earning a college degree or having a trade, she knew that he could always work for her at their family business:

> My mom didn't go to college so she is just more of a motivation to me more than like first-hand experience. My mom is more involved in like getting me to graduate. Like about every day we talk about am I on track if not even for like a couple of minutes, at least every day she asks me. But as far as [post]secondary, like after high school, it's just a here and there type thing.

Parents are among the most influential individuals that impact a child's postsecondary aspirations and actions (Ceja, 2006; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2001; Holland, 2015; Hossler et al., 1999; Iloh, 2018; McDonough, 1997; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). As a result, parents should work with their children to plan for the best path forward, taking into consideration goals, interests, and skill sets. Jade may be the sort of student that Iloh (2018) described as one who's plans are impacted by timing. Perhaps with some time and careful decision-making, Jade's actions could lead her to enrollment in a community college to explore whether college is the best fit for her. Choosing a postsecondary trajectory is a progression of tasks, events, and experiences that will hopefully culminate in successful careers and lives.

Jack encountered an absence of familial influence on his post-secondary aspirations and is also a *have not*, but not a first-generation college-goer. His family

situation was one where although his father attended some college, there was little to no input that was preparatory in nature because a lack of deep experience in college-going knowledge barred these valuable conversations. During his interview, he highlighted the fact that his father and a few cousins went to college; however, no one became a college completer. For them, getting a job right out of high school was as automatic as tying shoes—a rote task done without thought. The quote below summarizes the interaction between Jack and his father concerning college going. He shared:

> My family didn't really give me advice…not really because not too many people in my family have gone to college besides my dad and didn't really go to a four-year school. So, my cousins . . . I don't talk to them very much…and they're the only kids who've gone to college so not too much on my family. They're just interested in what I'm doing, but they don't really give me much advice because they don't really know, I guess.

His family believed that because they did not complete college or a four-year degree, they had no input to offer. Instead of working as a collective unit to increase the density of this student's social capital network, his father and extended family unknowingly lessened familial social capital available. Additionally, they closed off the network, weak though it may have been. Some information and support are more beneficial than none at all, especially when institutional barriers to social capital exist. Without a conscious thought, the family displayed behavior which conflicted with the normative behavior displayed by the other 24 respondents' families. These outliers and their experiences described above proved that negative network density, negative forms of social capital, and network closures present a serious impact on the post-secondary aspirations.

As it relates to this study, 24 respondents of 27 experienced positive influences on their post-secondary aspirations. When asked to discuss the ways in which their families and peers influenced their plans beyond high school, their responses ranged from deciding for them that they were going to college to forcing them to initiate the search themselves. Michelle expressed:

> Well, for my family, it's like the only choice; my parents said we had to go to college, and I want to and the military is just not for me; I'm not a roughin' it kind of girl.

Becca could not recall a time when there were postsecondary options aside from college:

> From the time I can remember, my parents told me that I was going to college. I just assumed that was the next step like after high school, college was the next step. I just assumed that's what everybody did. I don't remember thinking that there was a choice not to go to college.

Throughout her time at JCHS, Becca worked her to maintain good grades and took the steps necessary to qualify for her state's A+ program—a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or greater, no major disciplinary infractions, and completion of 50 hours of student mentoring. From her parent's perspective, that program would pay for her first two years at any in-state community college; thus, they did not save for her college education though college was the only choice they wanted for their daughter. Becca relied on her connections at school to help support the aspirations that her parents outlined. Taking a rigorous sequence of dual credit courses, participating in college-going activities, such campus visits, and seeking assistance from the guidance office established her as a *have*. Because of the rigid plans that her parents envisioned, Becca needed additional social

capital sources to move her plans in the direction that she envisioned for herself. Not wanting to attend community college and lacking the financial support necessarily to enroll in a four-university, she sought help from the guidance office:

> And so, I was looking at stuff and there really wasn't all that much there and it was pretty much stuff from last year. Then a college event, I think a FAFSA Frenzy, had come up not that long ago and my mom said I needed to go down there and find information about that and I couldn't find it so I asked Mrs. Palmer the secretary and she was like, 'Oh, it's over in that corner,' and it was something that was easily missed. I think it took them 'til about the end of last semester to put out things for this year, but they had some information posted online.

Once Becca's postsecondary plans began to veer off from her parents' ideas, she still felt supported, but quickly discovered that much of the research and decision making would fall on her shoulders.

Finally, Michelle had many layers of social capital that she was able to access in her pursuit of college admission. Her older sister was already enrolled at a large state university and she was the third generation in her family to attend college. She also regularly visited with her school counselor, Ms. Neuman, to ask questions and get resources. Ms. Neuman, a friend of Michelle's family, also had a child enrolled at the school that Michelle wanted to attend. This working relationship demonstrated the complexities of bonding and bridging social capital functions and how intergenerational social capital, institutional agency, and strong ties intertwine to provide access for some students. Equipped with normative structures of college going from home and afforded

access to lots for information and resources at school, Michelle was responsible for much of her postsecondary decision-making process:

> They made me look everywhere, like they made me go on all the tours, just so I wouldn't just pick Mizzou, just because of what it is to me or what I think it is from what I've heard, but they pretty much let me decide what I wanted to do and they've made me like fill out the FAFSA and do everything with my A+ and get everything, like, I think they are trying to make me do it on my own more so that I'll like appreciate it more.

Michelle's experience was a positive one for her, but for many of her peers, their access to school-based social capital and networks did not always include the same level of support.

Selecting a Postsecondary Trajectory and Timing of the Decision

After accounting for influences on the postsecondary decision and feelings about the actual decision, the third theme that surfaced concerns student choice of a postsecondary pathway—enlistment, employment, or enrollment. Iloh (2018) discussed time as a critical element in the college-going decision process. In some ways, time is a variable because of one's status at a particular point in their lives which in turn drives their decisions and actions. Perna and Swail (2005) examined postsecondary decision-making and those elements that positively influence aspirations to matriculate to and participate in college, providing access to a college education. They noted that one effective way to ensure that students can make college enrollment a viable option is to participate in early college programs and interventions which is an investment in a

student's future that is tied to a time factor. This strategy not only serves as an information-rich network, but also develops normative structures for college-going.

While some students knew in middle school that they planned to enroll in college, some students had no solidified plans as late as 2nd semester of their senior year.

> I don't even know what I want to do. I don't even know if college is for me. Like I don't want to get to college and be like wow, this isn't it and just waste a whole bunch of money. But then I don't want to go to the service and be like, "What did I do to myself?" I don't know what to do with my life…

Jared, a *have not*, grew up in a working-class family with low social capital and without the financial resources to enroll in college. His parents were content with the fact that he was graduating; but as evidenced by Jared's words, he did not know what his next steps would be. At one point during the interview, his eyes watered and his usual joking demeanor faded as he considered the weight of not having any plans secured. One student who viewed time in a more pressing way was Antonio whose mother had a doctorate and a successful career as a college professor. As a *have*, Antonio was able to check all the boxes for a student with high volumes of social capital; yet, his decision to enroll in college was not firm until two years before graduation. Fearing that graduation would come before he finalized his decision, he expressed,

> I'd say my junior year was when I began. Cause, I mean high school is already half over and that's kind of a shocker and you're like Wow, you know, I don't have that much time left and I'd better figure out what's going on so I'm not last minute rushing around cause I've seen seniors that are like that and that's too much. . . that's a lot of pressure.

If Antonio began pursuing college during his junior year because he did not want to be left behind his peers or feeling stressed because he had no plans, Sarah began the predisposition and search phases during her junior year because of a different sort of pressure,

> The beginning of my junior year is when my parents started pushing it [college] on me and we hired these people that's helped me… a college company. They do like the ACT and worked with me on college applications and like so my parents and that company basically pushed it on me.

As a student who qualified for gifted services since elementary school, Sarah not only had the academic foundation that is important for college admission, but also the advantage of a private college coach to guide her along her unique pathway. Sarah was the only student participant who had this resource available to her; however, she felt some of the same pressures as her peers without this social capital. Being a *have* came with certain privileges such as access to experiences and opportunities; yet, this distinction was not always far removed from being a *have not*. Even Trent, a first-generation college goer, waited until nearly the end of high school to identify a postsecondary trajectory, despite being awarded athletic scholarships.

Joe, a *have* with older siblings and a college-educated mother who worked in the Johnson City School District, knew early on that a college education was in his future. Despite having resources such as his mother Kate who was both a college graduate and an educator and his sister who was a high school senior, he did not engage in some college-going activities until the end of his time at JCHS,

> My freshman year was when I began seriously thinking about my plans after graduation, but only because my sister was a senior and she was going through everything; so that's when I started thinking, well, what am I going to do, I have 4 siblings, money, stuff like that, but I didn't take my ACT until my senior year.

Joe's mother Kate saw college as an absolute and as such, college-going was normative among her children,

> Freshman year was when I started talking to Joe about college. All of their freshmen years I started talking to each of the kids, you know "you've got to do good in high school, you've got to get this, you've got to get these grades, you've got to take extra college courses if you can, you've got to prepare yourself for school", trying to give them the idea that the next 4 years are going to be a lot of fun, but they're preparatory years for college and you've got to make the most of them not that they did all of them, but I started speaking of college in the freshman year.

Marcy, a JCHS alumnus and single parent who was a college graduate, had a son who was a senior at JCHS and a daughter who graduated from there two years prior. With her daughter, she began college talk and planning shortly after she entered high school, but waited when it came to her son David,

> David and I began discussing college at the beginning of his senior year, and began planning the summer after he graduated so it was kind of a rush thing and he needed me to fill out paperwork, get my financial status, my financial data, and that was our biggest thing was just the rush, rush thing.

Both Kate and Marcy were college graduates; Kate actually earned a Master's degree plus an additional 45 hours. They both wanted college to be a part of their children's futures; however, they approached the process differently. Proceeding along the college-planning pathway in a hurried way could negatively impact the outcome resulting in misinformation, poor selection of a postsecondary institution, and missing out on scholarships, loan options, and grants.

Jack, a *have* who had an older sister in college and who was also a student athlete, spent most of his four years preparing for college,

> I was about to enter high school and I didn't want to get to my senior year and think, "Well, I haven't thought about what I want to do or where I want to go," so it was time to get the information and begin planning.

Jack and Joe both had solid support systems outside of school to help shape their thoughts about enrolling in college. Conversely, Drea, a first-generation college goer who began attending JCHS during her junior year, aspired to go to college, not because it was a normative family belief or because of encouragement from her family. She explained,

> I began thinking about college in middle school. They say the average teen don't get along with their parents so pretty much it was just the motivation of me trying to get out of my mother's house to make my own way in life, and do for myself, you know. My mom she has she has 3 kids and it seems like there was always a competition between the 3 of us. She didn't really for real give me the attention I felt like I should have received from a mother so that's why I had to do stuff on

> my own and that's how I became more dependent upon myself than most of my friends and other kids my age.

Drea's circumstances caused her to consider college as a means of doing something for herself that would allow her to feel a sense of accomplishment and freedom. The review of literature introduced Stanton-Salazar's (2011) concept of empowerment agents and their ability to influence students to become empowered, assuming positions that allow them to affect change in their lives and the world in which they live. The faculty and counseling staff at Johnson City High School could have simultaneously served as both institutional agents and empowerment agents.

An overwhelming majority of student participants, 20 of 27 students, expressed that their plans to consider attending college began during 8th or 9th grade. Five students, all of whom were *haves*, stated they began thinking about college in elementary school. Two students did not identify future plans beyond high school until their senior year and neither included college in their serious choice sets. As previously noted, Jared actually displayed feelings of despair about the looming decision and approaching graduation. Ten of the 11 parent participants discussed that they began exploring postsecondary options with their children during late middle school or early high school. Marcy knew that she wanted her son to attend college; however, no real search plans were outlined until his senior year. It goes without saying that the earlier that postsecondary plans are identified, the more time students and their families have to make informed decisions about the best trajectory for their unique circumstances. Making choices about a postsecondary pathway is stressful and intricate enough without adding the pressure of time constraints.

External Information Sources

Student and parent access to knowledge and resources outside of the school setting is an important means of reinforcing the social capital needed to inform their choice sets and decisions. Both students and parents commented that information sources exterior to the school were often more comprehensive than what could be accessed within the school. The student participants expressed that their interactions with the guidance office were not as helpful as they should be. On the other hand, the parent participants were not as negative in their thoughts about the guidance office. Their views could be attributed to how much or how little they interacted with this school structure compared to the students who frequented this office. And as the literature indicated, as students move into the search and choice phases, parents tend to be involved to a lesser degree (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler et al. 1999; Hossler & Stage, 1992). In fact, some participants noted that the information received outside the school was 'better'. Twenty-one of 27 students referenced using Google as a source of information at some point during their postsecondary search. One plausible reason for utilizing this source so frequently was how accessible it was along with how easy it was to navigate. Peter talked about why external resources were productive during his search,

> Outside of school I could look up what I wanted to know so it's more beneficial for me. And I could pick what schools, what locations, all that kind of stuff I was interested in. Like here [within the school] I'm exposed to what they want to tell us, what they want us to be exposed to.

He made a good point in noting that he and his peers were "exposed to what they want to tell us, what they want us to be exposed to." Johnson City High School stocked the

guidance office area with vast amounts of in-state university brochures and materials. What was underrepresented in these recruitment documents was sufficient military recruitment pamphlets and information. What was missing from the guidance office displays were flyers and brochures about HBCUs, colleges outside of Missouri and Illinois and employment and internship opportunities. Joy put a different spin on Peter's observations when discussing JCHS' efforts to bring outside information to students,

> My daughter came back from that post-high school planning night and said, 'Mom, look at the neat stuff we got.' She didn't look at the schools, she just looked at whether they got pens or pencils and stuff like stress balls that they're giving away. Yeah, that was pretty much it for the evening which tells me then that basically the school just has a rule; they just invite colleges to come in. 'Oh, yeah, come in and talk to the students.' They think that accommodates or that satisfies a requirement of we're providing your kids with enough information in order to make an assessment about what school to go to.

Hannah, a *have not* who had her sights set on enrolling in a state university shared these thoughts,

> I think the resources here are just pamphlets in our guidance office. They're not 'Hey, come look at the college information we have in the office.' They're just there. I mean if I didn't walk into the guidance office on a daily basis to talk to Mrs. Warner, I wouldn't even know they're there. There are shelves up against the wall; you walk by and you can't even see them. I mean, our guidance office needs to be more open in letting people come in and look around and see what's

> going on in our guidance office rather than saying well you need a pass to come in here, you know?

What is expressed in these words is Hannah's frustration with structural barriers to knowledge and information. As a preview to what will be shared in later participant narratives and dialogue, Hannah's perspective was that the guidance office should be a welcoming place, stocked with postsecondary information about all three pathways. Requiring a pass to gain admittance was part of the school's procedures for traveling throughout the building; however, from the student perspective, this was an uninviting part of an important process.

On the other hand, Amanda who planned to embark upon a gap year experience, described resources outside of school as,

> They were harder to find and harder to understand due to I didn't have the help that I need. I mean I did have my mom helping me out along the way but it was harder because I had to go find it myself. Then I have to figure it out for myself so I practically needed a decoder ring to figure it all out!

Another unique perspective was expressed by Michelle concerning higher education institutions and admissions representatives:

> Well, the information I found outside school is kind of like a sales pitch. They're trying to get you to go there, so they use techniques to reel you in. Inside school, they're kind of giving you the inside tips or the real knowledge.

Londyn, a *have not*, who was being raised by her sister had come to rely on the support structures at JCHS a lot. She remarked, "My counselor, Mrs. Redd, she helped me out a lot." She went on to say,

> Well, the resources on the outside, ‘cause I know a lot of things were sent to my house for me from different colleges, but it was just kind of like a little pamphlet or something and didn’t like really tell too much, but it’s been talking to people here that helped; it’s kind of verbal, it’s better.

However, once she made the decision to enroll at a small, in-state university, she leaned heavily on her college admissions counselor because,

> He called a lot to check in and stuff and if I have any questions, like I don’t feel a reason to hesitate to ask him “cause he’s there and always calls back or gets back to me if he’s busy.”

Parent participants needed as much information and access to resources as their children in some cases. For Andrew, his experience with school personnel, specifically the counseling office, was difficult to maneuver because he felt that no one did much information sharing and did not provide adequate guidance with a process as critical as choosing a pathway beyond high school. He argued,

> Who at my child’s school shared resources and was actively involved in this process? You’ve got to be kidding me, right? Zippo. Nobody. You know, for my oldest daughter, she had an art teacher that stressed that she should continue art no matter what she does. I think that’s more of a reason why a child should continue in a field of study as opposed to something else. But that art teacher gave her names of art institutes and discussed admissions criteria and things like that. I just want to preface that she had that kind of nurturing, but from the standpoint of how to pick the best school, or any school, and like if counselors

> were sitting down saying let's do this, let's do that, no, no, that wasn't happening for Harper.

Bonding and Bridging Social Capital/ Network Density

Apparent in both student and parent voices were examples and experiences that demonstrated how access to social capital within Johnson City High School was allowed or obstructed. One common element in high schools is networks that exist because of student or parent actions and activities. For example, students who participate in early college intervention or access programs, AP programs, military clubs or JROTC, work-based learning programs, and athletics are afforded membership in networks that are built on relationships. Parents who are a part of PTOs, booster clubs, and other school-based programs increase their knowledge which in turn supports their children concerning academics and future aspirations. By utilizing bonding and bridging capitals, students and parents become enmeshed in networks that allow them to receive information, opportunities, resources, and subsequently build additional social and cultural capital (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Lin, 2001; Holland, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Absent from the narratives shared in this chapter is the presence of student networks that function in productive ways to contribute to their stores of social capital. In response, participants shared ways that they accessed social capital through tight and loose associations, bonding and bridging capitals. Tara, a *have not*, couched this nuance by sharing,

> My friend Madison's mom works at [a medium-sized private university] and she gets a scholarship every year just because she's a teacher to give away based on personality and character and everything and she said that she would give it to me

> if I decided to go to [a medium-sized private university], so that was a big plus. And she's a psychology teacher so I'd have a personal connection with her; I'd feel comfortable calling her and being like I don't understand this assignment, what do you need me to do for this, or that would be the best deal, so I'll probably look into that.

Becca, a *have* whom was introduced earlier in this chapter, shared a different form of bridging capital that she accessed through her dad,

> My dad usually just went and talked to his co-workers and say, "Oh, is this a good school?" Usually what they said, he pretty much based his decision on and would give me that information. It didn't make much sense to me because my parents had made up their minds that I was going to just use my A+ money, then go to a university after that. . . Guidance-wise, you know I haven't really heard from my…I heard from my guidance counselor once about, where you going? And that's pretty much it. I wish there was more involvement and more help within our school, but I know they already have like a lot to do so…there should be like a college advisor, I think, at our school.

From these participant perspectives, both a *have* and a *have not* discussed similar experiences, noting that there was not much of a within-school network for them to access. Interestingly, each student participant mentioned at least one teacher, counselor, or support staff member that they could seek out for some assistance with postsecondary planning processes. However, based on their experiences, there was no identifiable network within the school with various layers of support to help students pursue the postsecondary trajectory of their choice.

An interesting parent perspective offered texture to the utility of bridging social capital. Despite being an educator, Fred explained how his son looked for input outside of college-educated parents,

> I'm talking about friends' parents. My last son had a really good friend's dad that gave Pete some real good advice., and that Pete listened to. So, yes, so if had had said the same thing or similar things. It came from another source that he respected and was meaningful for him.

While this example illustrates social capital accessed through one of Pete's connections, it also demonstrates intergenerational social capital which involves linkages between individuals of different generations (Putnam, 2000).

One space in the educational program at JCHS that did function as a college-going network was the ACT Prep class which was taught by the researcher for the two years prior to when this study began. There, students were afforded bonding social capital in the form of numerous types of information and resources that helped shape college search and selection processes, increased students' financial literacy, and taught them the structures and strategies that could help them prepare for college entrance exams. This semester-long course was open to any junior or senior; however, enrollment was capped at 25 students per section with just two sections taught each semester. Creating intentional, controlled access to these postsecondary knowledge pipelines for only 100 of 990 students per school year leaves an enormous divide between students. The researcher taught this course for one semester each in two different school years, sharing important knowledge and engaging students in postsecondary planning activities focused on enrollment and employment such as technical writing units where students

developed resumes and honed in on professional communication skills. Bria, a *have not* and first-generation student expressed her feelings about being left out of the communication loop,

> The person who knows the most about trying to go to college and all of the planning is you. The things that I do know about college I learned from you. It's pointless to even go to the guidance office 'cause it's not helpful at all. Because you have to like hound them down to ask questions, see when stuff's going on; they don't really like announce there's something, like they don't inform you.

Based upon participant responses, it appeared that four other students—Lisa, Hannah, David, and Jade—all *have nots*, agreed with Bria's feelings about ACT Prep class functioning as a network or sharing space. Two other students, Jack and Antonio, also mentioned staff members who helped them during their postsecondary search as a result of interest with the student's future plans or because they simply wanted to help. Antonio, a *have* who aspired to enroll at a state university with a strong engineering program, noted,

> Even Mr. Becker our computer aide, he knew more about Sysco than I did at the time so, yeah, he told me if I ever needed help, I could come to him. We also have occasional conversations about computer systems and engineering, so he knows that I have serious interest in that field.

Jack, a *have not*, added, "Mr. Harper loves researching this kind of stuff and he taught my older sister, so from making that connection, he just helps me search for the information that I need. Sometimes he tells me about upcoming application deadlines."

Based on the empirical literature and school policy reform efforts, the wave of college-for-all initiatives and strategies failed to acknowledge that not all children are destined to enroll in and complete college (Carnevale, 2008; Farmer-Hinton, 2017; Iloh, 2018; Robinson & Roksa, 2016). Our society requires that its labor force is a diverse one with people educated and trained to do an endless variety of jobs. The postsecondary culture at Johnson City High School was loosely designed to support college going and ignored students seeking to employ or enlist following high school. There were no career fairs, intern partnerships with local businesses, nor were there many opportunities to explore military enlistment. This is indicative of school culture that does not support its students from an equity stance. At JCHS, the primary distributions of postsecondary planning and advisement were aimed at the college trajectory. As the data show, this information sharing and guidance was sporadic, creating differential access for a diverse senior class cohort. To add, this disparity did not appear to be rooted in prejudices against race, class, or academic ability.

Feelings About Postsecondary Decision-making

In making decisions about the future, students and parents feel a range of emotions; those feelings impact the postsecondary decision in various ways including which postsecondary pathway a student selects, where a student enrolls in college, and whether a student views a particular pathway as a viable option or not. For many of the student participants, deciding whether to enroll in college, enlist in the military, or enter an employment opportunity right after high school was daunting and complicated. Without ever having gone through this process before, the majority of students were unaware of the many parts that contributed to the whole. To demonstrate, 19 of the 27

students or 70% used adjectives with connotations of fear, anxiety, or difficulty. Such words included: tedious, unsure, nervous, anxious, stressful, responsibility, overwhelmed, frustrating, nerve-wracking, and complicated. The words *stressful* and *overwhelmed* were used by multiple respondents. Positive words that students used to describe their feelings about decision-making were *independence*, *ready*, and *excited*, which was mentioned by six students. As a first-generation college goer, Peter felt that this process was *tedious*,

> If I had every question solved, it would be the easiest process ever, but it's a little overwhelming to try to decide…like the more you wait, pretty much, the less time you really have to really decide. Otherwise you're going to be one of those people who miss the cut-off dates for enrolling and then you have to get the motivation to go back and actually make the decision.

Joe, the youngest of seven children, stated that he felt this process was "stressful". He added that he'd "known basically my whole life that I was going to college. I saw who didn't go to college, who did go to college, and what their life is like now. That's how I knew." Tara had an older brother who was in acting school in California, but she would be the first in her family to enroll in a traditional college program. In fact, like some of her peers in the 2009 cohort, Tara planned to use her A+ eligibility to pay for two years of community college. As a *have not*, she relied on the supports in her school to supplement the help she was given from her mother and grandparents who helped her evaluate the financial impact of her decision to enroll in college and pitfalls to avoid by enrolling in large universities.

> Obviously, I wasn't . . . I didn't realize how much work it was going to be to go through. And I kind of, I always procrastinated. I put it on the back burner and I think I started a little later than I did; I didn't make my decision until about February and most people knew before 2nd semester had started.

Parent participants described their feelings about the postsecondary using the following words: *challenging*, *freeing*, *nervous*, *opportunity*, *apprehension*, *worrisome*, *worry*, *excited*, *finances*, *preparation*, and *concern*. Similar to the students in this study, eight of 11 parent participants or 73% used words associated with fear or complexity to describe how they felt about their child embarking on this experience. Even those parents who had gone through the postsecondary decision with an older child or children expressed fear or apprehension about the experience they were currently in. In this case, 73% of the parent participants were in this category. Marcy questioned:

> Being a college graduate myself, when I was in school it, was a lot differently; we had all kinds of grants and programs and minority scholarships, and that type of things that I know that is not as prevalent or relevant now as they were back in the 70's when I was in college, so, you know, my concern was what financial resources are available to you all here?

When asked for her thoughts on the same topic, Jenny stated that she viewed a college education as a form of "freedom…a necessity, but [I'm] concerned about affordability". Both Marcy and Jenny were single mothers and they stressed the importance of securing financial aid, loans, and or scholarships to fund their child's education. Nathan, a recent divorcee, was of a similar mindset.

> I wanted him to have career opportunities that I never had and to experience college life. And he knew that he was going to have to help out with the cost of his school and I suggested looking into some kind of work study. I did tell him that he didn't have to work freshman year because in that first year you need to get acclimated into being in college.

Fred, one of Johnson City High's staff members, outlined his suggestions about what parents should do to best support their children,

> Start early, start early. Get as much information you can; don't hesitate to ask. Call. Have a relationship with the high school guidance counselor. It has to be a very, very specific timeline with check-off dates in for parents to assist them with the process to be ready to go for fall of senior year.

It is interesting that he stressed the importance of having a working relationship with the guidance counselor and getting as much information as possible, given that many of the students in this school felt that there were barriers to them getting information from school. Further, some student participants expressed frustration in working with the guidance counseling staff and accessing much-needed support. Jenny agreed with this perspective and went a step further:

> I just wish schools, public schools 'cause I know that private schools have it, but public schools . . . I wish that they had a counselor who their job is to focus completely on college planning. Their job was to assist kids with testing, searching for scholarships, searching for this and that, you know, encouraging kids 'cause there's so many people out there who don't think they're, per se, college material when they really are. And, they just don't realize it… If public

> schools would employ, I don't know what the exact title would be, but say a college advisor or postsecondary advisor. Because you know, even if you don't go to college, it's like well, what are you going to do to support yourself so you're not living in Mom's basement with 13 cats when you're 40?

Her thoughts of a staff position whose responsibility it is to support students by helping them with the search and choice processes is logical given the work she did to help her students research colleges and universities, find scholarships, and prepare for standardized assessments such as the ACT and AP exams. Another staff member who played an important role in this college-going culture at JCHS was Sherri, a guidance counselor and parent of one JCHS alum and one JCHS senior. Her advice to parents who would soon embark on this journey was:

> The sooner, the better. Don't wait; we have way too many kids, I think, that wait until the beginning of their sr. yr. to even start thinking about taking the ACT or thinking about where they're going to go, and you need to be thinking about that when you're a freshman so you can map out your classes that you need. And, be thinking about, as far as finances, you need to be thinking about that when they're born, if not before. And, that's no kidding.

Fred, Jenny, and Sherri each shared invaluable perspectives about postsecondary decision-making; however, their influence was not readily apparent in various aspects of the college-going culture at Johnson City High School. Sherri was responsible for one third of the student population which were approximately 333 students, a number which exceeds national recommendations for student-to-counselor ratios. Providing focused, intentional, consistent postsecondary advisement and support for a number this large

would be impossible for one counselor, in addition to the other responsibilities associated with the role—student schedules, student emotional health concerns, graduation planning, coordinating state and national assessment administration. Whether single or married, college-educated or not, wealthy or low income, Black or White, every parent participant had a mix of feelings about the biggest decision of their child's life to this point. Each of these participants shared a responsibility with their child for ensuring that they found the best postsecondary pathway based on their unique needs and future aspirations.

Postsecondary Planning Processes

Planning for their child's enrollment, enlistment, or employment was the first emergent them among parent participants. Within this sample, each parent focused on enrollment over enlistment and employment. While responses indicated that parents' level of assistance with this process varied across student participants, all 11 parent participants demonstrated varying degrees of active roles in this important decision. Neither Nathan, Courtney, nor Dana matriculated to college; however, they each When asked for her thoughts on the same topic, Jenny stated that she viewed a college education as a form of "freedom . . . a necessity, but [I'm] concerned about affordability". Both Marcy and Jenny were single mothers and they stressed the importance of securing financial aid, loans, and or scholarships to fund their child's education. Nathan, a recent divorcee, was of a similar mindset.

> I wanted him to have career opportunities that I never had and to experience college life. And he knew that he was going to have to help out with the cost of his school and I suggested looking into some kind of work study. I did tell him

> that he didn't have to work freshman year because in that first year you need to get acclimated into being in college.

Fred, one of Johnson City High's staff members, outlined his suggestions about what parents should do to best support their children,

> their children to earn a college degree. In discussing the planning and actions that she engaged in to help her children, Courtney noted,
>
> I got involved in the process by making suggestions but they had both [my son and daughter] had already decided. They decided on their own where they were going. I mean they discussed it with me, but basically their decisions were already made.

Courtney's situation is not an uncommon scenario based on empirical findings related to parent suppressed roles concerning involvement in college choice processes (Gonzalez, Stoner & Jovel, 2003; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Parents like Courtney want to assist their children with this all-important decision and accompanying steps; however, they often lack the knowledge and savvy to navigate such a process due to a lack of a frame of reference. Nathan began thinking about his son going to college back during elementary school and began with academics in mind. In his view, an attractive high school transcript was the biggest factor in college admissions and it seemed logical to focus his efforts there,

> Well, I made sure; one of my top priorities with him was academics. I made sure from the time he started kindergarten, that the first thing he did when he stepped into that house was his homework, and play time and sports came afterward because I wanted him to go to college. Then in middle school, again it had to do

> with us picking his classes for high school because we were trying to plan out his, you know, [career] his high school career and what courses he would be taking in high school to help him prepare for college. Once he got in high school, I figured that his guidance counselor and track coaches would help out a lot and his counselor did in some ways, but I felt like I needed more information about how all the pieces of this puzzle fit. Never did I hear from his counselor directly, but she did work with him a little.

Opposite of parents who had not attended college are parents in the study who earned bachelor degrees up to doctorate degrees. Jenny took a unique approach in beginning the college planning process by encouraging her daughters to see the value in being college educated. She shared the following context,

> When my kids were little, I used to take them to McDonalds to the Play Place and we would go there if they got out early from school for ice cream and they would play. And I'd see these older women, grandma-esque-like wiping tables, emptying the trash. And that was my biggest fear that if I didn't have a college degree that I would end up like them. And so, I would tell the kids the same thing that, you know how important it is to have a college education. Maybe those women liked what they were doing, but I didn't want to nor did I want my children if that would be one of the few choices they would have. Really, the big thing is I just asked them what they would like to be when they grow up. And I would ask them if they could go to college anywhere, where would it be? What would they like to study in college? And, also I would always take them along with me to different college campuses 'cause I would go use college campus

> libraries to get information for different classes so then they could see how neat it was to be on a college campus.

This postsecondary planning strategy was effective for Jenny in that two of her daughters were attending college, with a third one graduating with the JCHS senior cohort. Even though her discussions with her children were crafted to result in college enrollment, she also encouraged her daughters to seek out the colleges and universities of their choice, keeping in mind their academic study interests. Being cognizant of the ways in which students can make missteps during postsecondary planning, Jenny played a very active role during this aspect of her children's high school experience.

> Yeah, I was very involved because I knew of students before my kids having lost out on opportunities because they didn't know that they were available. So, going online, researching, I think the other thing is, is because I went to college after I got divorced and so I researched every nickel and dime that was out there. And so, I kind of, I was disheartened because so many opportunities were out there but they were for students who were just out of high school, not an older person. And so that made me aware of well, when my kids are that age, you know, to do the same.

She used this same desire for successful outcomes in her work with JCHS students by helping students such as Amanda, a *have not*, in planning for a gap year following high school graduation. Joe, a *have*, with older siblings who had enrolled in college and his mother who also taught in the Johnson City School District, worked closely with Jenny when the time came to look for scholarships. Her students knew that planning for college was a passion of hers and as such, they often sought her out for help.

Fred was also a JCHS staff member and knew the importance of planning early for college, as well as the intricate parts involved in receiving a college admissions letter. In describing to the researcher through the process he used with his children, he explained,

> All the conversations are based on their interests and what they see themselves potentially doing. And then the conversations flowed out of that. Talked a lot about just doing well in school, in the schooling process itself, since I was involved with schools. Talked a lot about the testing process so they were aware of what tests and the preparation for those. ACT, PLAN Test, Explore Test, things like that. Talked about courses to take during high school, planning a 4-yr. plan that was, that they would feel good about, that when they got done would prepare them for the next level.

Like Jenny, Fred's postsecondary talks with his children were rooted in their interests and how those interests could be transferred to earning a college degree. However, he encouraged his children to take an active role in navigating the planning process,

> For me, looking back, it could have been more. I don't know too much, if I'd have done too much different, but it could have been more as opposed to less. I didn't want, well I wanted them to have responsibility for it, but I also wanted it to be their decision and take ownership for their process. So, I didn't end up filling in forms, you know, for kids; they did that stuff themselves.

While allowing students to assume responsibility for their life plans can be a good thing, they do need lots of supervision and guidance in preparing for and choosing a

postsecondary trajectory. This is a novel experience with many complex layers and one that is too important to leave to chance.

Finally, Amy outlined the planning process for her daughter Sarah, a *have* who was enrolled in AP courses and was also classified as a gifted student along with some regrets,

> Well, the 1st conversations were talking about planning, about preparation, about being sure that you put yourself in a position that has some options. The actual process questions probably didn't start until sophomore, junior year. I do feel bad that we didn't travel more with her like some people do, but actually, I, I didn't feel like it. I have weekend employment and she's seen a lot of universities in her life. We used to live in Connecticut; she saw Yale all the time. We've been to NY; she's seen Columbia; she's seen Queen's College; she's seen my husband's college; she's seen… My family lives in Minneapolis; we've taken her to the University of MN.

Amy's depiction unearthed an interesting reality that parents have busy working lives outside of parenting. Those pulls and demands of their time can negatively impact the time and attention given to selecting a postsecondary pathway and monitoring certain actions and decisions that their children make. This conflict becomes more challenging for parents who assume that the high school system and guidance office will provide sufficient individualized postsecondary planning advisement not knowing the ways that the system is understaffed and unable to meet the demands of consistently helping students with this multi-faceted process.

College-going Knowledge

Parents play integral roles in their child's development and through their perspectives, beliefs, and actions, parents are able to influence their mental models, plans, and decisions. For even the most involved parents, accumulating and effectively using college-going knowledge is not any easy task. As previously mentioned, eight of the eleven parents in this study earned at least a bachelor degree and were familiar with search, choice, and application processes. However, some aspects of college enrollment have changed in the time between their college attendance and their child's application. For example, when the researcher was enrolled in undergraduate study, the FAFSA process was done via paper format; yet now, this process is done electronically. Regardless of whether revisions in parts of the process have helped to streamline and simply the steps, there is much college-going knowledge to be acquired when helping students navigate the pathway to college. To illustrate, Fred discussed,

> They need to be educated early meaning freshman year about the whole process. How this is going to play out and actually, that the decision for the most part, a lot of times is made very early in their sr. yr. And for some of these schools, you know, Dec. 1 is a late date and that throws people way off 'cause that actually even threw me off with the first kids. How quickly it gets upon you. And getting parents to know what the time schedule, the process is, the tests they need to take, plans they need to have in place, the kind of conversations they need to have with their kids. All of this very important to know because if you don't know something, that can equate to missed opportunities.

To add to his perspective, Sherri, the mother of two JCHS students and also Fred's colleague, openly talked about the danger of not knowing critical details and timelines,

> I would say it's really important that they do a college visit with their child. Just because friends have gone to a certain place or it looks good on the internet, or it looks good in the brochure, it's really important that they visit the campus together so that the parent and the student can see exactly what that's like. How far apart are the buildings? What's going on in the town? Is there, you know, things to do socially? How far away? How's the drive from the college to and from home? We have way too many kids, I think, that wait until the beginning of their senior year to even start thinking about taking the ACT or thinking about where they're going to go, and you need to be thinking about that when you're a freshman so you can map out your classes that you need and be thinking about how that can affect what colleges will or won't accept you.

Andrew was in an advantageous position to provide guidance to his daughter Harper because of his own experiences as a college graduate and having recently gone through the experience with his older daughter who was in her second year of studies at a small, private liberal arts institution. Coupled with these experiences, his wife Joy was also a college completer and with their collective experiences, they were fairly knowledgeable in helping Harper proceed through the predisposition, search, and choice stages. Equipped with the tools of the trade, Andrew expressed,

> Parents need to know that everything is negotiable. Everything's negotiable. They need to know that if they really want to get their child, and their child really wants to go to a certain institution, that that's their dream and they worked hard and they might be, you know, a couple of ACT points short or, you know, they may not be in the top, you know, 5%, but if they feel that there's a, they have a

> good case, that they can petition for admittance, that they can petition for certain scholarships. Don't let the gatekeeper say no; they need to go directly to the department chairs.

In a similar vein, Andrew's wife Joy shared the types of college-going knowledge that she found to be of the most value based on knowing a child's strengths and academic abilities,

> They need to know the ratios. They need to know how things are going to be weighed. [Students] They need to know the freshman year they're in high school. They need to know that just because you have enough credit hours to graduate from high school, doesn't necessarily mean that because you graduated, doesn't mean that you're going to get into the college you want to get into. They need to know that for this grouping, maybe even break it up to this grouping of schools this is the type of things they require so if you are a middle of the road student, this is the kind of academic profile that you have to at least have aspired to do to get here. If you want to go to an ivy league college, these are the things that you have to do to even be close. I don't think that that information is easily accessible and for kids who want to go the selective college route, they must know these little-known factors or they just won't get in.

Mentioned earlier in this chapter, Amy, mother of three including Sarah, a *have*, admitted that she did not take her daughter on enough campus visits, but knew that Sarah was at least familiar with the notion of college education and degrees. This early exposure is what she felt led Sarah to ask questions, to navigate her own pathway to pursuing college admissions, and to ultimately choose a small private liberal arts school funded primarily

by a sizeable fine arts scholarship. Concerning the loose transfer of college-going knowledge to her children, Amy explained,

> Well, I there is this one thing that holds true in our country, which is sad for some people but it's how it is. And it's: if your mom and dad went to college, there's an expectation that you will also go to college. And that's why I think so many young men whose dads are in the military, they, you read about it all the time. Even if their dads don't think their sons should go into the military, that kid goes into the military. Our role as parents is plant the right seeds in our kids and along with that, we need to give them the knowledge they need to follow that path.

The perspectives echoed in these parent interviews shows a commonality relevant to college-going knowledge: there is much knowledge to be gained and even more systems to navigate at the university level if students are to find the school best suited for them and their unique situations.

Financial Knowledge of Postsecondary Education

The cost of attending college ranges from minimal, as in the case of community college courses, all the way to exorbitant, as in the price tag affixed to enrollment at an ivy league institution. With an ever-changing financial assistance landscape, acquiring important information about options for funding a college education is critical. Ask some students the difference between scholarships, grants, and student loans and they might not definitively know. It is also possible that prior to embarking on their college search, they were not wholly familiar with the cost of a four-year degree, including the college application fee and other incidentals associated with living away from home on a college campus or in other student housing. Parents however, generally know that college is very

expensive and plans to pay for it should begin when is child is fairly young such as during infancy, in an optimal situation. Sherri discussed how finance discussion took hold when her son prepared to enroll in college and during his freshmen year,

> Well, we talked about it and we, especially as scholarships and stuff became available, obviously we encouraged him to fill out and apply for as many of those as he could. He got a few just really basic couple hundred dollars local things. He got one scholarship from [State University], the Alumni Association Scholarship; he had to go for an interview and stuff for that, but, you know, we were able to pay for his college and so we talked about it a lot so that he was well aware of the cost and how privileged he is in order for that to happen. And we talked a lot too about the fact that my husband and I both paid our way through school all four years 100 %, so it's very different. And we had to work very hard; we had to work almost 40 hours a week while we were going to school at the same time and we didn't want him to have to do that. But, we also wanted him to appreciate the fact, and I think he does, and we didn't give him a ton of spending money. As a matter of fact, he ran out of his money about November in his first semester, so we said, "I guess you're eating peanut butter sandwiches and ramen noodle soup, I don't know, get a girlfriend, something." We didn't give him any more money and he had a meal plan so he at least had 18 meals.

While she and her husband were in position to offer their children a free education, they also felt it was necessary for them to understand that this is not everyone's story, including Sherri and her husband. Like Sherri, Amy had older children and was fairly knowledgeable of the costs connected to college enrollment,

> I think, considering Sarah is my 3rd kid, I understand financing college a lot and she has gone through a lot of things with me with their [her siblings] loans because we supported them. My husband and I, I think we're really just very frugal or something, we had enough money, we did not take out a Parents Plus loan which is something parents should probably check into too because with Parents Plus you sign your name to it and if your kid doesn't pay that loan, even if you make a bargain with the child that it's his responsibility, they can still come back to you. But the other loan is just the student's loan. And I wanted my children, since none of them really went out and got a job in the summers, to help pay for anything. I wanted them to have a loan that was their own. But Sarah is not going to have any loans because of her scholarship and us taking care of the rest.

Similar to Amy, Andrew and Joy planned for their children to go to college and saved money to ensure that their goals could become reality. Also, like Amy, they wanted their children to share the cost of their postsecondary education through solid academic records or other factors that could result in scholarship qualification. Andrew noted,

> We wanted them to split costs because they would be the ones who would have to do the work academically or they were Black and because they were Black they could qualify for certain scholarships, or they're going into the math and science fields and there are other scholarship awards specifically for that. Being female and entering those fields could help Harper pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

As the mother of seven children, finding funding sources for her children's postsecondary education was an absolute necessity. Academically, most of her children fared well in high school and were able to qualify for varying levels of financial assistance; however, relying on Johnson City High School to disseminate that information proved challenging,

> I think that was my biggest issue with the high school. They don't make near enough scholarship information available to kids. Nothing, I don't think, was given unless Joe went in and asked. Those scholarships need, the paperwork, and all these forms. I mean, I asked Ms. Saunders and she said "Oh, Mr. Thornton, I guess was working on it. He was getting it set up." I went to the guidance counseling website several times and there was nothing. Went to the site again when everything was up; it was all over the place. And, so I was, that was my biggest thing. I don't think the high school did a good job at all about getting scholarship information to kids. And some kids, I mean, the money makes a huge difference.

With so many financial options available for students to further their learning and education beyond high school, it is reasonable to hold secondary schools accountable for helping both students and parents to understand the complexities and intricacies of college degree financial literacy.

Disparity and Differential Access to Social Capital

Apparent in both student and parent voices were examples and experiences that demonstrated how access to social capital within Johnson City High School was allowed or obstructed. One common element in high schools is networks that exist because of

student or parent actions and activities. For example, students who participate in early college intervention or access programs, AP programs, military clubs or JROTC, work-based learning programs, and athletics are afforded membership in structures that are built on relationships. Parents who are a part of PTOs, booster clubs, and other school-based programs increase their knowledge which in turn supports their children concerning academics and future aspirations. By utilizing bonding and bridging capitals, students and parents become enmeshed in networks that allow them to receive information, opportunities, resources, and subsequently build additional social and cultural capital (Coleman, 1988; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Lin, 2001; Holland, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Missing from the narratives shared in this chapter is the presence of student networks that function in productive ways to contribute to their stores of social capital. One space in the educational program at JCHS that did function as a college-going network was the ACT Prep class which was taught by the researcher for the two years prior to when this study began. There, students were afforded numerous types of information and resources that helped shape college search and selection processes, increased students' financial literacy, and taught them the structures and strategies that could help them prepare for college entrance exams. This semester-long course was open to any junior or senior; however, enrollment was capped at 25 students per section with just two sections taught each semester. Creating intentional, controlled access to these postsecondary knowledge pipelines for only 100 of 990 students per school year leaves an enormous divide between students.

The wave of college-for-all initiatives and strategies fails to acknowledge that not all children are destined to enroll in and complete college. Our society requires that its

labor force is a diverse one with people educated and trained to do an endless variety of jobs. The postsecondary culture at Johnson City High School was loosely designed to support college going and ignored students seeking to employ or enlist following high school. There were no career fairs, intern partnerships with local businesses, nor were there many opportunities to explore military enlistment. This is indicative of school culture that does not support its students from an equity stance. At JCHS, the primary distributions of postsecondary planning and advisement were aimed at the college trajectory. Even then, this information sharing and guidance was sporadic, creating differential access for a diverse senior class cohort. This disparity did not appear to be rooted in prejudices against race, class, or academic ability. Instead, it was the interplay of several factors that were shared during collegial conversations with the researcher during the years that she worked at JCHS. Those factors were staff who were not knowledgeable of the different ways that they could provide postsecondary guidance and information to students, staff who felt that it was not their responsibility to serve as career and college advisors, staff who felt as though they were unable to reach all students, and staff who felt bogged down by their instructional duties and did not have time for 'one more thing' to be added. The school administration was partly responsible for these mindsets because they had not provided clear direction and expectations for faculty behaviors around creating, contributing to, and sustaining high-quality college and career going culture. They also failed to provide appropriate training and ongoing support in this area. As the lead learners in the building, this was solely their responsibility. Failing to provide access to all students creates and perpetuates a system of *haves* and *have nots*.

Summary

Chapter Four disclosed the school context, effects, and dynamics that shaped the postsecondary decision-making processes of a heterogeneous group of 27 high school students and 11 parents in a suburban, midwest setting. These experiences unearthed important trends and areas of opportunity concerning how disparities in social capital impact students' navigation of the postsecondary decision. The perspectives of the study participants clearly outlined that despite patterns in the literature about minority and underrepresented students being poorly supported during preparations for life beyond high school, the faculty and administration at Johnson City High School consistently failed to provide high quality support and guidance for both the *haves* and the *have nots*. As institutional agents who were in positions to leverage their knowledge and social capital for the benefit of all, students of varying backgrounds—racial, academic track, and socioeconomic status, were often on the receiving end of subjectivity. Their detailed narratives depicted an insufficient college and career going culture within their school. Those students and parents who did share positive aspects of Johnson City's college and career going culture acknowledged that the school as a system could provide more support, knowledge, and resources, noting lack in the areas of time, attention, and consistency. Related to the study research questions, connections between these corollary questions and the emergent themes are:

Table 7

Research Questions and Emergent Themes

Research Question	Emergent Theme
RQ1: What are the stages of the postsecondary decision-making process?	-Selecting a Postsecondary Trajectory and Timing of the Decision -Feelings about Postsecondary Decision-making -Postsecondary Planning Process
RQ2: Who is involved in the decision-making process and what role do they play?	-Familial and Peer Influences on Postsecondary Aspirations -Bonding and Bridging Social Capital/ Network Density -Institutional Systems as a Barrier or Conduit of Social Capital
RQ3: What types of resources and information do students and their families seek?	-External Information Sources -College-going Knowledge -Financial Knowledge of Postsecondary Education
RQ4: What information do students and families apply to decision-making?	-Postsecondary Planning Process -College-going Knowledge -Financial Knowledge of Postsecondary Education

In order to create more equitable and consistent treatment of students and families who are exploring postsecondary trajectories, it is necessary for schools to become much more responsive by dispatching institutional agency, leveraging social capital, providing equitable distribution of resources and information, and engaging in collaborative supportive efforts to help all students in their charge. Simply put, inaction is the ultimate injustice. With the absolutely rich stores of social capital, savvy, and resources available to school systems, it is inexcusable to leave the futures of vulnerable populations to chance. In response to the shared lived experiences of Johnson City High School students and parents, Chapter Five will provide a comprehensive discussion of these findings, followed by the implications and recommendations generated by this study.

Chapter Five — Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

High school students are the most important consumer in an industry based on service, guidance, and support. While attention, initiatives, and funding have been funneled toward children concerning: nutrition and wellness; vaping and smoking cessation; the war on the opioid epidemic; ensuring academic success for all; ending bullying and harassment; and improving college and career readiness attributes in students, more strategic approaches to assisting students with navigating the postsecondary decision must be developed and implemented. Through investigating the impact of social capital on the postsecondary decision-making processes of high school seniors, this study sought to unearth gaps in postsecondary planning knowledge and access that exist in high school settings, while highlighting ways and means of developing stronger, more connected school-based networks. In order to more fully understand the nuances of this complex decision process, the researcher conducted qualitative inquiry to explore the lived experiences of high school seniors and parents at a midwestern suburban school. During these hour-long interviews consisting of open-ended questions about postsecondary planning and social capital, the study was designed to identify: postsecondary trajectory selection; timing of the postsecondary decision; factors that helped shape the postsecondary decision; sources interior and exterior to the school that were utilized for information gathering; and postsecondary planning actions that students and families engaged in during the process. By conducting this investigation, the researcher sought to identify specific approaches, systems, and actions, in addition to modifications for extant structures, that would allow students and families

greater access to the postsecondary planning knowledge they desperately seek in order to make informed decisions. As shepherds and developers of school structures, policies, and practices, school administrators and faculty are in advantageous positions to craft the organizational norms that can result in successful postsecondary decision making for all students.

The review of literature revealed important associations among social capital, postsecondary planning, the college choice process, and equitable experiences and outcomes. While noting the negative impacts of social capital, the positive side was discussed as well; however, the literature undergirded the more negative aspect of social capital in terms of student support and guidance. In evaluating the notion of social capital, the researcher noted some overlaps in the way it was conceptualized among sociologists; conversely, there was some ambiguity in delineating how social capital functions across the field of education (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1987; Lin, 1999; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). There was an abundance of studies that investigated the decision to enroll in college in some form, whether a two- or four-year setting; however, the literature was deficient of any studies that evaluated student decisions to enlist in the military or become employed directly following high school graduation. Additional disagreements were noted in whether schools perpetuated inequitable access to social capital and whether these acts of neglect were intentional or unintended (Gast, 2016; Farmer-Hinton & Rifelj, 2018; Hill, 2008; Roderick et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Discussion

This study centered on four key research questions designed to illicit narratives about both the positive and negative impacts of social capital on postsecondary decision making. In exploring these implications, students and parents representing heterogeneous backgrounds and varying levels of accessible social capital were interviewed. Their narratives became the basis for the implications and recommendations of this research and will be shared later in this chapter.

Research Question 1: What are the stages of the postsecondary decision-making process? Through the review of literature, the researcher identified extensive studies that outlined the stages of the college choice process. Hossler, & Gallagher (1987) posited three distinct stages—predisposition, search, and choice—that make up this process; additionally, they noted several influences that impact college aspirations and factors in the search process previously discussed in Chapter Two. They included: timing of intervention efforts; encouragement from high school faculty and family; and student achievement and activities. Similarly, Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) suggested a 3-stage model; however, their timeline for beginning this process indicates an age cohort aligned with students in grade 7 and concluding in grade 12. Hossler et al. (1999) maintained that the majority of high school students identify a postsecondary pathway between grades eight and ten. Perna's (2006) proposed conceptual model for college access and choice delineated contextual layers as follows: habitus; school and community contexts; the higher education context; and social, economic, and political contexts. In this framework, analysis identified the ways in which students acquired and utilized information across the contexts mentioned above to arrive at their chosen postsecondary

institution. McDonough's (1997) investigations indicated that students' college choice process was tethered to their possession of cultural capital. Iloh's (2018) recent research shed light on knowledge gaps, coining the term 'information deserts', while acknowledging that this an issue on a global, societal level. In response to this element, she proposed a new model that challenged Hossler and Gallagher's (1987), as well as Perna's conceptualizations. She notes the importance of the ecosystem surrounding the student, while also highlighting the fact that for many students, college decision and application processes are not singular events given that students possess the potential to enroll in several colleges and degree programs throughout their lives. What is missing from the literature is the stages of postsecondary decision making with respect to trajectories other than attending college.

To gain an understanding of the process that students and their families navigate in selecting a postsecondary trajectory, the researcher posed a series of questions that would define the set of stages in the process. This line of inquiry was designed to identify what actions and activities initiated the decision-making process and which signaled the conclusion of the process. Outlining these stages allows school faculty and counselors to develop intervention efforts, timing them at optimal intervals that provide invaluable support along this navigation. Based on the participant responses, it is clear that thinking about postsecondary trajectories began prior to entering high school. In the case of a participant who was one of three class valedictorians, thoughts of enrolling in college began early in middle school, even though no work had been done to identify scholarships or alternative funding sources until senior year when he planned to enlist in the military as a means of paying for his postsecondary education. This sort of last resort

decision could potentially result in a highly qualified college candidate selecting a pathway that is not best suited for him or her. Without additional questioning, it is unknown whether this student had previous interest in military enlistment or if this path was chosen to simply fund his education.

For participants who reported having aspirations of enrolling in college while in middle school, specific distinctions of stages were outlined and mirrored the predisposition, search, and choice stages as determined by the empirical studies previously mentioned. One determinant that could not be easily pinpointed was a consistent timing of these stages. Specifically, some students were very clear about their chosen trajectory as early as the freshman year in high school, engaging in planning activities during the sophomore and junior years, including scouting for scholarships or other sources (one participant spoke of her parents looking at balances in their college savings plan). Still other participants had not decided upon an exact plan as late as the spring semester of their senior year. The researcher suggests that this situation creates an important window of opportunity for high school educators. By increasing the level of intentionality in postsecondary planning efforts, they are better able to act as institutional agents who can increase a student's accessible social capital, college and career going knowledge, and prowess concerning plans for their future beyond high school. Schools that do not allocate postsecondary preparatory experiences and knowledge from a place of equity for all do so at the detriment of those students who lack adequate social capital access outside of the school setting. Early information programs and intervention structures can help close knowledge gaps across schools so that students have similar information upon entering the predisposition and search stages.

Research Question 2: Who is involved in the decision-making process and what role do they play? Students are faced with a barrage of decisions to make throughout their high school stint. These decisions include: whether or not to take AP courses; which postsecondary pathway to pursue; whether to try out for a sport or become involved in a club/ extracurricular activity; and whether to take the ACT, SAT, or the ASVAB. As noted in the review of literature, students engage in discussions and dialogue with many individuals when making the postsecondary decision. Specifically, parents figure largely in these talks and processes, followed by peers, school faculty, school counselors, college and career advisors, mentors, military recruiters, and other adults who may or may not be of familial relation (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Ceja, 2006; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997; NPEC, 2007). Many of the individuals mentioned above serve as repositories of information that students can pull from; equally important, they function as thought partners who can help evaluate the pros and cons of a given postsecondary trajectory. During this study, the majority of participants who identified college as their chosen postsecondary pathway reported that their parents were their primary sources of support, information, and guidance in decision making. Those participants who elected to pursue a college education were more likely to rely heavily on their parents in cases where they also attended and/ or graduated from a college or university. It is important to ensure that students have access to the individuals who can assist them in selecting the best postsecondary pathway based upon their academic background, skills, and interests. In categorizing these different sources of help, it is advantageous for students to have access to various agents—institutional, empowerment, and protective--from various areas of the

network (teachers, school counselors, college and career advisors, peers, non-familial adults, and staff) who can help expand opportunities in their chosen postsecondary pathway(s).

Returning to the literature, individuals serving as institutional agents, empowerment agents, and protective agents are in advantageous positions to support and provide guidance to students (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001, 2011). Depending upon whether a student possesses a high volume of social capital, the *haves*, or possesses a low volume of social capital, the *have nots*, their dependence on the agents noted above can alter whether they select the best postsecondary trajectory for their individual interests, goals, and circumstances. Holding the hands of students in early college programs and walking them through the search, admission, and selections processes, while expecting differently achieving students to figure out what can work for them perpetuates a system of inequality. A football coach who accompanies a rising athlete on a college visit because his parent cannot miss work is working to dismantle institutional barriers to success. The history teacher who hosts after school and weekend study boot camps to prepare students for the upcoming AP exam is leverage working to dismantle institutional barriers to success. The college advisor who helps a first-generation college goer analyze and compare scholarship offers is working to dismantle institutional barriers to success. The work-based learning coordinator who helps a student identify potential postsecondary internship opportunities and also edits application materials and conducts mock interviews in preparation is working to dismantle institutional barriers to success. Allowing any student to suffer the effects of institutional abuse is not only inappropriate, but also unjust.

Research Question 3: What types of resources and information do students and their families seek? Respondents in this study overwhelmingly pointed to the knowledge gap and how the one thing they desperately need in order to successfully navigate the postsecondary decision-making process is information. For many students, both the *haves* and the *have nots*, emotional support is just as critical as tangible information and resources. The areas they identified as having the least amount of information about are the college application process, financial literacy and securing funding for college, and selecting the best postsecondary pathway. In this specific study setting, the high school had three guidance counselors and their role was to support a population of 997 students who represented various races, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and academic abilities. There was no college advisor on staff which meant that all of the postsecondary planning and advisement responsibilities rested on the counselors' shoulders. In occasional spaces across the school, faculty provided some forms of guidance and information sharing to students as they prepared for college entrance exams, prepared to write college essays, looked for scholarships, and sought out scholarships. However, this information sharing and access to resources was not consistently available to all students and it was not in abundant supply. Student participants spoke of being pointed in various directions in the guidance office when they came to get information; yet, this action was in no way supportive or intentional. Left to their own devices, study participants expressed feelings of frustration at having to seek out answers when they did not always know exactly what to look for.

Parent participants in this study were largely college educated with the exception of three. Regardless of their academic backgrounds, all parents expressed their views that

the school should play a significant role in preparing students for postsecondary trajectories, as well as supplying them with knowledge, information, resources, and guidance along this experience. Despite being college educated, some parents felt too far removed from their own experiences to be current with recent changes to applications and admissions processes. Those parent respondents who had not attended college shared that they tended to rely more heavily on the school system for postsecondary planning assistance because the steps along the college enrollment trajectory were mostly unfamiliar to them. While their sons and daughters had emotional access to this category of parents, they did not know how to support them despite strong desires to do so. Arguably, both students and parents depend on schooling systems to close gaps, to serve as resources, and to distribute information and knowledge to children and their families. As such, school faculties should serve as institutional agents and advocates who consistently and effectively allocate resources and facilitate the transfer of information for students and their families. For the *have nots*, their successful admission to a chosen postsecondary trajectory largely depends upon questionable and uncertain access to the help agents in their schools.

Research Question 4: What information do students and families apply to decision-making? Concerning the decision to apply to college, students and families consider an array of factors in selecting a college or university (Bergerson, 2009; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 1997). These considerations include: cost of attendance; degree program; geography/ location; admissions requirements; academic life; and school enrollment. What is absent in both this study and other empirical and seminal investigations is what information families apply to selecting postsecondary trajectories

aside from enrolling in college. The one study participant who identified enlistment as his chosen pathway after high school arrived at this decision in order to finance a college education. As a *have not*, there was no alternative in his mind because he had not received appropriate guidance about funding college, despite the fact that he was one of four valedictorians in his graduating class. His academic ranking alone would have qualified him for many scholarships; however, as a first-generation college goer, he had no idea of the access that could have been extended based on his academic performance. In many ways, a *have* in a similar situation would know that high academic achievement equates to scholarship offers. This type of knowledge is consistent with students and families who possess social and cultural capital.

Students who spoke of employing directly after high school are often already employed prior to graduation. And, in cases where they are not, applying for jobs is a much more familiar process than is enrolling in college or enlisting in the military. Another sentiment that was echoed from student and parent participants is selecting a trajectory based upon the future plans the parent selected for their child. Some students know as early as elementary school that they will attend college and subsequently do not consider alternate pathways. Along with this decision comes the creation of rich social capital networks that students easily access because of the plans that have always been a part of their future goals. In this sense, they become a *have* sometimes before they fully understand the notion of a college education. One challenge with this situation is the case where enrolling in college is not the best option for the student based on many elements and chiefly, academic potential or ability and student interest. Students who enroll in college under these circumstances could potentially do poorly in school; thus, wasting

financial resources and time. An additional consideration when choosing a postsecondary pathway is support services, particularly with college enrollment and military enlistment. Students entering those two trajectories face challenges that require wraparound services and navigational skill development (Jack, 2019). As an example, knowing where to go if a student is battling depression related to homesickness is vital to his or her successful initiation into college and the military. Whether choosing to enroll, enlist, or employ, making decisions about what to do after completing high school is among the most involved and important choices that students make. High school systems have the ability to complicate this process or make it less daunting for students and their families.

Implications for Educators/Policymakers

Stagnant enrollment at Johnson City High School created a potential opportunity to better connect with students due to smaller staff caseloads and increase the available social capital that they and their families are able to access. Too often there are thoughts in the ether that schools and school districts that are resource-rich, in suburban, primarily White contexts do not experience challenges in providing adequate support and guidance along the postsecondary planning pathway; however, my study illustrated that this notion is simply not true. Regardless of the school setting and context, this study has illuminated why equity, access, and education should remain at the core of how schools provide for children's learning and growth.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Educators. High school settings are rife with the resources, information channels, materials, forms of capital, and knowledge essential for successful student outcomes. Equally important is the capacity of school administrators

and faculty to act as institutional agents and protective agents who can leverage their agency for the benefit of all students. District and building administrators have set about the work of preparing students for the rigors of college and careers, without fully addressing the system of the *haves* and *have nots* as it relates to navigating the postsecondary decision. Student and parent participants shared narratives of their personal postsecondary decision-making processes at Johnson City High School through this study. Through capturing their voices and lived experiences, the researcher identified several areas for development and re-imagination in order to meet the postsecondary planning needs of the students they serve.

Prior to making revisions to existing college-going cultures and systems, schools should conduct a needs assessment that accurately captures student, parents, and staff perspectives. Within this survey tool, there needs to be an area where staff can identify their areas of expertise and interest, as well as those areas of opportunity that need development. As conduits of knowledge and social capital, they need professional development and ongoing support with respect to college and career advisement and the steps in the process. Within this professional learning, faculty and administration should embrace and understand the importance of adequate advisement for enlistment and employment and not solely enrollment. A common educator interview question is: How much do you want to know about your students? The expected response is, “As much as possible so that I will know how to best support them.” This mindset should not be left in the interview room; neither should it be mere words expressed in the ether because they sound student centered.

While teaching students their course curricula, high school faculty should also want to know what goals and interests students have beyond high school so that they can assist them in working toward and planning for those goals. Paired with this perspective is the need to develop branding and slogans such as E3 (enrollment, enlistment, employment) which is universal and normative among everyone in the educational community including students, staff, parents, district-level administration, and community partners. Another systematic revision involves the creation of PLTs (Postsecondary Leadership Teams) within high school settings so that postsecondary pathway work and advisement is universal and strategically organized. In bolstering college-going culture design and effectiveness, high schools should consider the development and implementation of early information programs, capturing student attentions about decision making prior to 9th grade when they are more easily influenced. Hossler and Stage (1987, 1992) stated this decision making happens between 8th and 10th grade. Hossler et al. (1999) were able to track shifts in student aspirations over time by beginning their longitudinal study during the freshman year.

The school guidance and college counseling literatures outlined a serious flaw in the counseling structure design concerning the ratio of students to counselors which is unequally balanced in most public high school settings (Bryan et al., 2009; Bryan et al., 2011; Corwin et al., 2004; Farmer-Hinton & McCullough, 2008; McDonough, 1997, 2005; McKillip et al., 2012). In the study setting, the three guidance counselors on staff each carried approximately 333 students on their caseloads. These numbers make it difficult to provide adequate postsecondary guidance and advisement in addition to their

responsibilities related to emotional and wellness support, student scheduling, and the like.

In Missouri, there is one university system that has created a near-peer partnership model for postsecondary advisement. In this design, a recent university graduate is placed as a full-time college advisor at a partnering high school. Typically, partner schools are required to meet racial and socioeconomic demographic criteria in hopes that underrepresented and marginalized student populations receive the access to social capital that they desperately need along the pathway to college. By providing intensive guidance and counsel students are more likely to be effectively supported when choosing to enroll in college. As noted earlier in Chapter Three, Johnson City School District and Johnson City High School have experienced a downward shift in their student enrollment. While declining enrollment is often not seen as favorable, in this case a smaller student population creates an opportunity for school counselors and faculty to work more intentionally in providing postsecondary planning, guidance, and knowledge by capturing more students, as opposed to small segments of students. In this way, equity increases and barriers to access decrease. And in turn, gatekeepers become institutional agents and empowerment agents. Johnson City is situated in a more affluent area with more college bound students enrolled than many of the partner high schools. The addition of a college advisor would be an important resource to support their college going culture. Many students in this setting are categorized as being first-generation college goers. As such, special attention and handling should be extended to them as they make up a specialized population. An additional strategy in the area of college planning and advisement includes coordinating college and career fairs during the evening and

possibly during the day, perhaps within early release schedules, so that those students who work or participate in sports and clubs have equitable access to this critical information. Too, the inclusion of FAFSA workshops for parents should be implemented in order to increase their college and career-going knowledge as well as bolstering their financial literacy.

Because parents and families are an invaluable aspect of a child's social capital network, developing and reinforcing their knowledge and protective agency is important. In schools that do not include platforms for parents to express their needs and to grow as sources of capital, PTO/ A organizations should be reimagined so that they function as a body of actors who can utilize their leverage in the creation of expanded opportunities for their children. School administrators should also implement parent universities and learning summit structures to better facilitate the sharing of information and resources. It is both widely known and apparent that school networks and districts systems are information rich, yet in some ways, information impoverished. Because some forms of social capital are hidden, and are thus, not available to all, one potential result is the creation of an uneven, inequitable playing field for students. By mobilizing systems and resources to form repositories of information, this structure can serve as an effective, more inclusive network.

Recommendations for Postsecondary Institutions and Policymakers

Paulsen (1990) suggests that postsecondary institutions spend time researching student characteristics and what type of student pursues college admission. This information could assist colleges and universities in their marketing and recruitment efforts. He also highlighted the value of understanding the factors that influence the

predisposition to seek college enrollment. Aligned with engaging in this effort, school districts and postsecondary institutions should begin the work of vertical articulation in grades P through 16, with more intense focus directed at the freshmen year of high school through the senior year in college. Additional focus and attention should be given to the enlistment and employment postsecondary pathways given that college enrollment is not appropriate for every student who graduates from high school. In response to modern job markets and the demand for employees to fill jobs that do not currently exist, high schools should engage in collaborative partnerships with the armed services and community-based businesses to educate students and their families about careers in the military, as well as developing work-based learning opportunities and internships. Knowledge along these trajectories provides more effective structures for match and fit concerning students' futures.

Recommendations for Future Research. In conducting this study, the researcher read a vast sampling of studies addressing the role of social capital and its impact on postsecondary decision making for students and families. During this mining of information on the subject, there were countless investigations that focused on students in predominantly minority (African American and Latinx) high schools, as well as White students in private school settings. One suggestion for subsequent studies is to add more learning disabled and demographically diverse minority participants (in particular, Asians and Hispanics) to the sample. The researcher could not identify clear reasons as to why more attention has not been given to more heterogeneous populations marked by diversity in race, socioeconomic background, and academic track. One probable cause is due to researcher interest. Additional gaps exist in the decision to enlist or become

employed upon graduation from high school. In response to elements such as the exorbitant cost of attending college, the college admissions scandal, stringent admissions requirements, and student interest, it is plausible to expect increases in trade school enrollment in coming years in addition to military enlistment. Researchers dedicated to understanding the nuances of high school students and their decision making should design investigations centered on more inclusive student groupings.

This study comprised an academic year, with data collection efforts conducted during one semester. For school districts who desire to make sustainable, intentional implementations and refinements to their postsecondary guidance and supports, it is suggested that they conduct a longitudinal investigation which follows cohorts of students in grades 8 through 12 and 12 through P16. Further, it is advisable that future studies be expanded to include data collection across academic tracks and postsecondary trajectories. A one-year study concentrated on a small sample size may not be telling enough of the dynamics at play or the adjustments necessary to adequately serve all students. An added means of bolstering the reliability and validity of the data would be to conduct a mixed-methods investigation, rather than one based solely on qualitative or quantitative inquiry.

The researcher embarked upon this study as a result of observations indicating that not all students experienced effective information gathering, guidance, and support while navigating the postsecondary decision. Prior to data collection, one potential lever for addressing these gaps would be to develop staff capacity in the area of postsecondary advisement expectations and practice. This approach could serve to reduce gaps in the social capital necessary to select a best fit trajectory upon graduation. Further, creating

more intentionality in staff action and information sharing and doing so from a place of 'success for all' would be a starting point for evening the playing field. One context for future investigation is the impact of a 'near peer' partnering program via a local college or university. The rationale for such a pairing is that recent college graduates are well-versed in application and admissions processes and can thusly serve as an effective conduit for college-going knowledge. Additionally, this sort of structure could influence matriculation to college, as well as persistence to completion. The two latter points of inquiry are tied to reinforcing social capital networks to better guide students and families. Consequently, one aspect of social capital that should be studied further is the notion of network density and its impact on the postsecondary decision.

Lastly, an ever-changing legislative landscape has contributed to uncertainty in postsecondary education for Latinx students. Previous studies have focused on this population (Ceja, 2000a; 2000b; Gibson, Gandara, & Peterson-Koyama, 2004; Gonzalez, 2010; Kiyama, 2010; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2010), noting the challenges and barriers to access and information they experience. Data from the US Department of Education shows that more Latinx students than ever are enrolling in college and becoming completers as evidenced by the growth in their college enrollment between 2000 (22%) and 2015 (37%) (NCES, 2017). As of 2018, 28% of the Latinx population has at least an associate degree which is an increase of 13% from 2000 (PBS, 2018). In light of impending revisions to the DACA Act and in response to the knowledge and guidance needs of Hispanic students, additional research is suggested to define specific areas of concern and approaches to clearing away the barriers that inhibit their successful decision-making processes.

Conclusion

During the past several decades, school administrators and policymakers have become increasingly more focused on equipping students with college and career readiness and postsecondary planning knowledge. Much of this increased attention came as a result of education reform efforts and legislation around improving student outcomes and achievement (see No Child Left Behind and the Every Student Succeeds Acts). In response to evolving college enrollment patterns and changes in the make-up of college students, policymakers and educators have partnered to make college more accessible to a more diverse pool of secondary school candidates. While there does exist a bevy of postsecondary planning effort and action within high schools across the country, more consistency in goals, planning, action, and results is necessary to ensure that all students and families have the knowledge and savvy essential in selecting the best fit postsecondary trajectory. High schools and the certificated professionals that staff them are in an advantageous position to serve as power houses and conduits for the transfer of the social capital that is critical to successfully navigating the postsecondary decision making.

Despite the fact that only a fraction of the study sample laid blame with building principals, it is plausible to suggest that they are in some respects responsible. School leaders are charged with providing direction, delegating tasks, and assigning leadership for a multitude of projects within schools. Additionally, they are charged with providing clarification for staff as it relates to their positions within the school. While preparing students for postsecondary trajectories is a priority for secondary school administrators, so too is overseeing the graduation, dropout, and attendance rates, managing discipline,

and more importantly, making AYP in order to prevent losing accreditation and the take over by an SAB (state-appointed board). When citing those elements of school reform that are specifically aimed at improving student outcomes, not enough attention is given to the issues of equity, access, and opportunity.

Findings from the interviews and observations suggested that high school students and their families desperately need information in order to successfully navigate the postsecondary decision-making process. Additionally, the desire to have their voices included within the context of their educational opportunities and plans for the future was apparent from this study. Despite that the setting for this study deviates from similar postsecondary planning studies, the researcher's goal was not to contribute to the deficit approach that has become characteristic of studies addressing access and equity in education. Rather, the goal was to give voice to the voiceless students who make up classrooms, schools, and school districts across this country. Their lives and subsequently their futures are intricately interlaced with the sociological frameworks that construct their schools and communities. This study underscored the why behind calling for school systems and faculty to leverage their agency through consistent, ongoing, intentional actions. The current pandemic has created a state of emergency for education and in response, schools, school districts, and state departments of education, on up, have developed innovative approaches in consideration of equity, equality, and access. The response should be just as swift, widespread, and equitable to ensure that disparities in social capital no longer impact a student's ability to make informed decisions about their futures. There is far too much at stake if reform and response efforts continue at the same pacing that has been well documented in the research and the empirical literature. We can no longer implement surface-level band aids to remedy the bleeding wounds created by an unjust and inequitable educational system. Basic norms

of ‘education for all’ and ‘every child every day’ have become tag lines that do not address all areas of the educational program. Now more than ever, educators are in an advantageous position to mitigate the effects of inequality, stratification, and differentials in equity, access, and education.

As one Johnson City High School student stated:

> I think if you’re like a guidance counselor, if just the school in general made it a bigger deal what you’re doing in life or what you’re thinking of doing after high school that would help [kids] a lot. ‘Cause I mean, I didn’t really hear about the, the planning night until like, it was like, last year? Yeah, I think I went to the first one. I mean, that was the only one and it was just like that was it pretty much cause my counselor wasn’t mean, one time I went down there and she was like, ‘Oh, if you ever need help’ but I mean it was just something quick…it wasn’t anything. ‘Oh, do you know what you’re doing?’”

What is articulated in the voice of this student is a desperate call for help and a more concerted focus on students' futures by school administrators, guidance counselors, and faculty members. In this voice, we hear one student verbalize the plight of many like her; the perceptions that staff are not placing enough emphasis on this important decision and the accompanying process surrounding the decision. Arguably, faculty may not be adequately trained to provide effective guidance and support relevant to navigating enrollment, enlistment, and employment processes; however, this adult knowledge gap presents a perfect opportunity for school districts to be good stewards of their fiscal resources by earmarking funds for professional development and ongoing support in the

area of postsecondary planning and advisement. One motto that is echoed in schools and districts across this Midwestern setting is ‘every student, every day’ or ‘each one as my own’. No educator would allow their own children to suffer the damaging effects of institutional neglect, barriers to access, or inequitable opportunities. Neither should they allow this treatment for their students who are most vulnerable and whom rely so heavily on the structure, the educational system, that was created for them.

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Appendix A

Lindenwood University
201 Kingshighway
St. Charles, MO 63301

November 2008

Dear Student:

You are invited to be part of a new research project at your school called "Student Social Capital Study." This study is about your access to networks and information channels while you prepare for career pathways. I am Primary Investigator Patricia Closson from Lindenwood University and I am asking 12th graders to participate in this research project. Through this research project, I am trying to learn more about preparing students for their futures. I do not know if this study will help you, but it will help teachers and administrators, at your school and other schools, better prepare students for their future careers.

If you agree to participate, your participation in the study will involve completing an audio-taped interview twice during the 2008-2009 school year—once in the January and again in the May. The interview should take you less than 45 minutes to finish. I want you to know that your privacy is very important to me and I will protect it by not using your name or student identification number. I will also keep your completed interview in a locked cabinet. Your identity will never be associated with your answers to the interview questions. After I collect information from the interviews and surveys, I will write reports about how twelfth graders used information and networks to make decisions about their future jobs and careers. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study. Your individual survey responses will be reported in groups of other students. For example, the reports may say, "Twenty-five percent of students had access to information channels/ networks."

If you agree to participate in this study, you also have rights. First, you do not have to complete the interview. It is up to you and no one will be upset with you. If you say yes, but change your mind later, that is okay too. Just let me know. Your choice will not affect your school grades or record. Also, your choice will not affect your current or future relationships with Lindenwood University. In other words, you will not be treated unfairly because of your choice. Second, there are no known dangers in participating in this interview. But, if you start to feel uncomfortable you can just skip questions that you do not want to answer or you can stop at any time.

<u>By turning in the interest form, you are agreeing to participate.</u>

Thank you for your time.

Patricia Closson, Primary Investigator

If you have any questions, you can contact Primary Investigator Patricia Closson by email at pclosson@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, by phone at (636) XXX.XXXX, or by mail:

Patricia Closson
XXXXXXXXXX High School, Communication Arts Department
XXXX5 N. XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX, MO 6X3XX

If you want to talk to someone because you have a complaint about your participation in this study, please contact:
Lindenwood University
Institutional Review Board
Education Division
209 S. Kingshighway, St. Charles, MO 63301
(636) 949.4987

Although the Institutional Review Board will ask your name, all conversations are kept private.

Appendix B

Student Social Capital Study Participation Interest Form

By signing this form, I _____, a student at XXXXXXXXXX **High School am agreeing to participate in the Student Social Capital Study. I understand and am aware that audiotaping will be used during the interview process. I further understand that Patricia Closson, the primary investigator for this study, will not use my name or any other identifying information in the research, reports, or published papers associated with this study.**

_____ _____

Signature of student **Date**

Appendix C

Lindenwood University
201 Kingshighway
St. Charles, MO 63301

January 2009

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Patricia Closson and I am a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University. Twelfth grade students at XXXXXXXXXX High School and parents are being invited to participate in a research study about their access to networks and information channels while preparing for career pathways because I am interested in how students are being prepared for their future careers. This research study is called "Student Social Capital Study".

I am writing to ask permission for your child to take part in a student interview. Participation begins with a selection process where students will be randomly chosen for the study. **The audio-taped interview asks students about their networks and information channels both within the high school setting and outside of school.** This interview is not only helpful for XXXXXXXXXX High School and the school district, but for other schools who want to help students prepare for their future career pathways.

> All students' answers to the interview will be kept in strict confidence; the results will be reported only for groups of students, such as: "The majority of twelfth graders had access to networks and information channels."

If you do **NOT** want your child to enter the random selection and possibly participate in the study, please fill out the attached information sheet and send it back to school by the end of the week. If you **DO** want your child to participate, please read the parental consent form on the next page, which describes this research study. Additionally, parents are being asked to participate in the study, as their input concerning access to information about their child's career planning is vital to this research. If you are interested in participating in this study, please complete the portion of the consent form that addresses parental involvement.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 636.XXX.XXXX or pclosson@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. You may also contact District Administrator, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for the XXXXXXXXXX School District, at XXXXXXXXXX.

Sincerely,

Patricia M. Closson, MA.
Primary Investigator

This research project has been approved by the Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects for a one-year period.

Lindenwood University Parental Consent to Participate in Research Form

My name is Patricia Closson and I am a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University. I am conducting a study on postsecondary (after high school) decision-making and planning because I am interested in how students are being prepared for their future careers. Twelfth grade students at XXXXXXXXXX High School are being asked to participate in a research study about their networks and information channels; the study is called "Student Social Capital Study."

The purpose of this consent form is to let you know about the research study in which your child and you are being asked to participate. The purpose of the research study is to understand whether and how their high school is preparing them for their future careers. An additional focus of the study is student and parent access to networks and information channels. With your permission, I would like you and your child to complete an audiotaped interview about his/her school experiences and access to information. **The interview will take less than 45 minutes.**

This is an anonymous interview. Your child's name or student identification number will not be used in any way. Only Primary Investigator Patricia Closson will have access to the completed interviews. Interview data will be stored in file cabinets with locks, and will only be available through Patricia Closson. All participant responses will be saved and added to a database with other XXXX students' responses to the interview questions. Once the study is complete, all data will be destroyed.

Data collected for this study will be used for public reports. Primary Investigator Patricia Closson will not use your or your child's name or any other identifying information in the reports or published papers. These reports should help teachers and administrators who are seeking to develop resources and initiatives to prepare students for their chosen career paths.

If you do <u>not</u> want your child to participate in this research, please fill out the information sheet included in this mailing. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice to have him/her participate has no consequence on their current or future relations or grades at Lindenwood University or XXXXXXXXXX **High School. There are no known foreseeable risks associated with their participation. However, if students start to feel uncomfortable about their future plans or if they decide not to participate any further, they can stop answering questions in the interview. They are also free to skip questions that they do not want to answer. There are no benefits or costs to you as the parent/guardian.**

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Primary Investigator Patricia Closson at pclosson@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx or (636) XXX.XXXX. Her mailing address is: Communication Arts Department, XXXXXXXXXX High School, XXXX5 N. XXXXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXXX, MO 6X3XX. Further, if you would like to contact someone because you have a

complaint about your child's participation, please contact the Lindenwood University's Institutional Review Board, Education Division, (636) 949.4897 or 209 S. Kingshighway, St. Charles, MO, 63301. Although the Institutional Review Board will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

PLEASE KEEP THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS!

Appendix D

Student Social Capital Study Participation and Consent Form

I _____ give my consent for my son/ daughter _____ to participate in the Student Social Capital Study. I understand and am aware that audiotaping will be used during the interview process. I further understand that Patricia Closson, the primary investigator for this study, will not use my or my child's name or any other identifying information in the research, reports, or published papers associated with this study.

_____ _____

Signature of parent/ guardian **Date**

Appendix E

Social Capital Interview Instrument for High School Seniors

Introductions and Warm-Up Questions

OK, let's begin our interview by introducing yourself. Please give your first name only and tell me:

- What is your favorite academic subject and what you like about it, and
- What is your favorite extracurricular activity/ hobby

Opening Questions

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about what you will do after high school? [*If they say "exciting" or "anxious", ask them what makes them say this or ask them to tell more about this]*

2. When did you first begin thinking **seriously** about postsecondary options? [*If they are unfamiliar with the term postsecondary, explain that you are referring to choices/ pathways to pursue after graduation such as college, the military, vocational training, etc.*] What was it about the conversation or situation that makes you say this was the first time you started thinking about your options **seriously**? (i.e., who raised it, what actions, if any, followed the conversation?)

3. Do you have some idea about which postsecondary option you will choose? Why have you chosen this path? [*If they choose college, ask if they know what they will major in, and if so, why they have chosen that major]*

Now let's talk about some of the information you were/ are looking for and where you are looking.

4. How did you get started on the postsecondary pathway planning process?

Probes:
- What was the first step you took?
- Who helped you?
- Where did you look?

5. What types of information did you use or are you using as you think about which pathway you are interested in pursuing?

Probes: *If they don't mention these, ask them, especially the first five bullets:*
- **Academic** (strong in major program, competitiveness, student to faculty ratio)
- **Environment** (proximity to home/ family; rural; urban, suburban environment; large or small campus or classes; campus safety)

- **Affordability** (cost, tuition, room & board, fees, financial aid; financial aid package, scholarships)
- **Admissions** (application process, interviews, essays, deadlines)
- **Social** (racial/ ethnic diversity of the student body, culture, campus life, proximity to city)
- **Personal** (prestige, religious, affiliation, family connection)
- **Athletic** (sports, division level, scholarship)
- **Residential/ Physical Plant** (size, location, housing, facilities)

Listen for references to the following.

- **Career:** (job prospects, income, placement rate in professional schools)
- **Graduation rates:** (percentage graduated within a specific period of time)

6. You mentioned several types of information you use/ are looking for. What type of information do you think is **most important** to you personally? [*Ideally, we'd like them to mention 3-4 types of information here for each]*

Probe on how financial aid and cost, location, and academic major, campus life figure into their priorities, if not mentioned.

Next, let's discuss the sources you used or plan to use in your search.

7. Where did you **first** look for information about your chosen pathway?

   7a. What other places did you look for this information?

   7b. How would you describe the resources available to you within this school? In the guidance office, from your counselor, college rep visits, college fairs, military recruiters, etc.)

   7c. How would you say these compare to resources you find outside of school? (e.g., websites, college guides, marketing/ recruitment materials directly from colleges and/ or the military, peers, and family members)

8. Did you use the Internet to look for information? If so, what are/ were your favorite websites? What is it about these sites that make them your favorite?

Probe: *Here we want to know generally if they looked at individual college sites, and/ or College NET, US News and World Report, Princeton Review online, Peterson's.*

9. Who spoke to you (or who did you speak to) about your chosen pathway?

Probes:

- What about parents, relatives, teachers, counselors, friends, etc.

- What information, if any, did they share with you? What advice, if any, did they give you?
- Did they talk to you about the application process and deadlines? What did they say?
- Who would you say was MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE about the search process?

10. What sources of information do you trust the most? [*If not mentioned, probe on people, print, and Internet sources*]

10a. What makes you say that about _____ source? [*Get at the notion of objective vs. subjective information and who they trust to provide it*]

Next, I'd like to ask you a few questions about information that either you could not find or you think would have been helpful to you.

11. So far, do you think you have found too much information, not enough, or just about the right amount of information you've needed to help in your search?

11a. Were you able to find enough information about the costs associated with your postsecondary option and how to go about pursuing that choice? If you plan to attend college, have you determined how much it will cost to attend colleges that you are applying to?

11b. Were there some resources (i.e. a person, a document, a website) you used numerous times? What was it about this resource that made you use it so much?

11c. Have you researched any information about financial aid or how to complete the FAFSA form?

11d. How do you feel about your postsecondary option search process thus far? Explain.
(i.e. overwhelmed, confused, excited, frustrated, interested, time-consuming)

12. Did you attend/ plan to attend the postsecondary planning night that our school hosted? If you did, what aspects of this program did you find most helpful?

We've talked about different types of information you look for and use, the sources you used, and what you could or could not find. The final set of questions focuses on how you are using or plan to use the information you are collecting.

13. How many postsecondary institutions have you applied to (college, the military, vocational training program)? Do you plan to apply to more? What made you decide to apply to these specific institutions?

14. Have you already chosen a postsecondary option? On what did you base this decision?

14a. For those of you who have not made a decision, how and when do you plan to narrow your options/ search?

15. What role, if any, did/ are your parents/ guardian play/ playing in the postsecondary option search process?

Probes:

- Specifically, what did they do or say?
- How would you describe their level of involvement?

16. Is there anyone else who is involved or that you plan to involve in helping you with your postsecondary decision-making process?

Probes:

- What about other family members, teachers, counselors, friends? How have they helped/ planned to help?
- Who was most influential in encouraging you to pursue your postsecondary choice? What did they do or say?
- If this choice was NOT college, has anyone encouraged you to enroll in college?

17. Given your experience, what would you say could make the postsecondary decision-making process easier?

Appendix F

Social Capital Interview Instrument for Parents of High School Seniors

Introductions and Warm-Up Questions

OK, let's begin our interview by introducing yourself. Please give your first name only and tell me:

- What is your favorite activity or hobby?
- If you have little or no time for hobbies, what would you love to do have time to do?

Opening Questions

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about your child attending college? [If they say "exciting" or "anxious", ask them what makes them say this or ask them to tell more about this]

2. Before you child started making postsecondary decisions, how did you use your experience to assist them?

Introductory Questions: Now, let's talk about some specific issues you and your child discussed about in choosing a postsecondary option.

3. When was the idea of choosing a postsecondary option first raised and by whom? How did the topic come up? What did you talk about? [Probe on disposition stage, if no response].

4. What questions did you ask your child about their postsecondary options?

Probes:

- What do you hope to get out of this option?
- Are you prepared for this choice?
- What do you want to do (work/ study)?
- Where do you want to go? Locally or out of the area?
- What is the cost of this option?
- Other specific information: application process, availability of financial aid, best schools in your major, job outlook, etc.

5. What questions did they ask you about their choice?

Probes:

- What options can they pursue (where can they go to college/ vocational training—in or of state)?
- Help in completing any forms, especially applications, etc.

- Can we afford this option?

6. Who at your child's school was involved in helping your child with the postsecondary option search?

Probes:

- Teacher/ guidance counselor
- Help with deadlines, finding information about postsecondary options, suggesting colleges to attend

7. Did the school provide information about postsecondary options to **you**? If so, what did they share with you and how was it shared (printed, in seminars, one-on-one with counselor/ teachers)?

Probes:

- Why is it important to go to college
- Information about different types of colleges (public/ private; 2 yr/ 4 yr)
- General information about how parents can get involved or what to expect
- Preparation: required courses and admission procedures to follow
- Specific types of information to search for and where to find it
- Important deadlines, help in writing essays, application process (admission or employment), financial aid workshops/ information, college fairs/ visits

7a. Did other community agencies, organizations, or programs your child was involved in provide information about postsecondary options?

Probe: If so, what specific type of information was provided? What agency provided it? Was it helpful?

8. Did the school or other organizations provide any information about how to decide which postsecondary option to choose? If so, was the information provided in English only, or was it also available in Spanish and/ or other languages?

Next, let's talk about your involvement in helping your child choose a postsecondary option. Parents are involved in helping their child choose a postsecondary option in a variety of ways, depending on their time and experiences. Sometimes parents help their child by generally supporting them in the process. Other times, parents are involved in more specific ways such as helping them complete forms, going with them to college visits, talking to counselors and teachers, etc.

9. When did your child first start thinking seriously about their options after high school? Do you recall how old s/he was? What specifically did you talk about? Who started the conversation? What actions if any did you take after this conversation?

10. How have you been involved in your child's postsecondary options search? What have you done? What kinds of things did you focus on?

Probes:

- Academic preparation (courses, taking tests)
- Career goals
- Types of postsecondary institutions they might consider
- Costs, financial aid; scholarship information

10a. Has your involvement changed over time? If so, how (i.e. more involved as child moved closer to decision, less involved over time, or about the same)?

If your child plans to attend college, what information about colleges did you review or see? [***If they cannot answer this question, ask: What information were you interested in?****]*

- Academic
- Location
- Type of institution
- Affordability
- Social
- Outcomes
- Personal
- Athletic
- Residential accommodations

12. Was there any information you were looking for, but could not find?

13. Was there any information you found confusing or hard to understand? What specifically? [Probe: application process, financial aid, cost information, forms, etc.]

14. What type of information about postsecondary options did you think was MOST IMPORTANT? What did your child think was MOST IMPORTANT?

15. Do you recall where you looked for information about postsecondary institutions?

Probe: school resources, resources at home, or resources other than school and home? What specific school/ home resources? Do you have a computer or Internet access at home?

16. Based on what you learned/ are learning as your child chooses a postsecondary pathway, what kind of information do you think parents like you need to see or know?

17. Do you have any other relatives (i.e. nephews, nieces, siblings, aunts, uncles, or parents) or friends whose children have attended, will attend, or graduated from college? Did they help your child with the postsecondary decision-making process? Tell me more about what they said or did.

18. Do you have older children who have already gone through the postsecondary decision-making process? If yes, did they help your younger child(ren) make the decision/ look for postsecondary institutions? In what ways did they help?

Probe: helping them with the Internet or other types of searches, application process, financial aid, college visits, writing essays, completing financial aid forms, encouraging your child?

Financial Aid:

19. Did you talk to your child about the cost of their postsecondary choice? How much did you understand about these costs?

Probes:

- How did the topic come up?
- Did you raise it or did your child raise it?
- When did you have this discussion—what year was the child in high school?
- Was this a hard topic to talk about or not?

20. Did you talk about how much the family was able to afford?

20a. Did the topic of sharing these costs come up?

20b. What did you decide about sharing costs? Is your child working full time or part time to assist with costs?

21. Did you help your child complete federal financial aid forms? What part did you do?

21a. What did you think about the forms?
21b. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being easy and 10 being most difficult, how easy or difficult
would you say it was to complete the form?
21c. Did you have any difficulty understanding the instructions? The questions?
21d. Did your child complete the form online or use a hard copy?

22. Do you think the form could be improved? How?

23. Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to share about the postsecondary decision-making process?

24. Complete this statement: The one thing that would make the postsecondary decision-making process easier for my child is _____.