Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

The Postsecondary Future Selves of Black and Latinx Boys: A Case for Cultivating More Expansive Supports in College-Going Schools

ABSTRACT

Black and Latinx adolescent boys from economically stratified communities face pervasive societal inequities and, therefore, deserve more responsive school supports to determine and actualize postsecondary pathways. For insights into how such students conceptualize their futures, and their school's role in facilitating this process, this ethnographic study investigated one urban school's college-going culture and its impact on shaping what the author calls participants' *postsecondary future selves*. This theoretical approach encompasses three domains: *college* (i.e., postsecondary education); *career* (i.e., post-college employment trajectory); and *condition* (i.e., expected financial stability, relational and familial prospects, future living arrangements, happiness, and joy). Implications suggest that college-going school practitioners widen supports so students can imagine and envision how college ambitions align with career and condition goals.

Keywords: Black males, college access, future orientation, Latino males, urban education,

"So, what happens next?" This question both haunts and excites many high schoolers as graduation nears. While they envision and strategize next steps, they often do so in relation to their postsecondary educational ambitions, career aspirations, and other life goals (Carey, 2022; Oyserman, 2015; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Yeager & Bundick, 2009). Yet few groups face more barriers in this process than adolescent Black and Latinx boys from low-income communities. Their encounters with racial and ethnic stereotyping, negative media portrayals, and hypercriminalization constrain their ability to fully imagine and actualize bright futures on their own accounts (Carey et al., 2022, Howard, 2014; Polite & Davis, 1999; Rios & Vigil, 2017).

Educators work to help Black and Latinx boys persevere despite such barriers by implementing "college-going cultures" to inspire *all* students to view themselves as "college material" (Howard et al., 2016; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). Schools with these cultures deploy college-going imagery and experiences to spark and sustain students' postsecondary educational

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

aspirations (Farmer-Hinton, 2011; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019). Yet within these "college-for-all" schools, scholars also find negative unintended consequences of such intense efforts. In these schools, racially and ethnically marginalized students report clashes between their worldviews and those of their school (Noll, 2022), and describe feeling stressed and fearful of retribution from educators for not meeting college-going expectations (Martinez et al., 2020). In addition, attending college is but one domain of a broader interconnected adult life that drives adolescents in making future choices (Cooper, 2011; Nurmi, 1991; Oyserman, 2015). Myopic college-going cultures, which ignore other possible ventures that drive Black and Latinx adolescent mindsets, may discount larger realities facing youth as they conceptualize future lives. For instance, racially and economically marginalized students strategically weigh college against familial and neighborhood factors, career interests, and other life goals (Carey, 2019, 2021; Huerta et al., 2018; Rosario-Moore & Colar, 2022; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Vega et al., 2016). However, for the most precise interventions, more insights are needed about how they conceptualize their futures and their school's role in facilitating this process.

Postsecondary future selves is a concept I developed prior to data collection at a pre-K-12 charter school in an urban U.S. context, using psychological theories about how adolescents envision their future in terms of college, career, and life condition (see Carey, 2015, 2022). In addition to ethnographically investigating how Black and Latinx boys experienced the college-going culture at their school, I employed postsecondary future selves as a conceptual approach to elicit understandings of the content of participants' ambitions. I also used it to explore how participants interpreted their prospects given the college-going culture at their school.

As "college-for-all" increasingly shapes educational landscapes, a college degree has shifted from being a means to an occupation for the socially advantaged (Goyette, 2008) to more

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

of a steppingstone on the young-adult life course for growing numbers of socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically diverse youth (Johnson et al., 2011; Spencer et al., 2023). Yet both foundational work on adolescent ambitions (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) and more recent studies with adults (Silva & Snellman, 2018) have shown that "college-for-all" discourses can leave adolescents unmoored for linking present decisions to life prospects beyond college. This reality poses risks for jeopardizing the economic and social futures of racially and economically marginalized adolescents. Students may uncritically adopt their school's college focus without fully assessing college in light of their other goals (Noll, 2022), risking their time and resources. Supporting Black and Latinx youth in envisioning and planning pathways toward ideal futures – on their own terms – is a paramount social justice issue that this study addresses.

This study's significance resides in five areas. First, it shows how nonadult adolescents – a surprisingly understudied group for this line of inquiry – engage in not just future planning, but also less-studied future envisioning processes within their school's context. Second, instead of more common quantitative depictions of future selves, this study harnesses youth narratives as they talk back to school practices that may uplift or limit their thriving. I do so with deeply nuanced attention to the voiced narratives of often misunderstood racially and ethnically marginalized boys. Third, this study joins a growing chorus of scholars, mainly from sociology (see Gast, 2022; Noll, 2022; Silva & Snellman, 2018), in critiquing one of the most widely adopted urban school reform practices: college-going cultures. It does so with psychological suppositions infrequently used in this inquiry line, instead of sociological ones. It shifts the gaze from structural macro-level critiques to the mindsets youth uphold at the micro-level that govern their decision-making and actions. Fourth, this study's theoretical insights amplify its contribution. I activate the postsecondary future selves framework and provide an empirical

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

warrant for it, by showing its usefulness for studying youth outlooks and the contexts within which they form. Lastly, this study argues for the utility of postsecondary future selves as a heuristic that is portable to other contexts and can support more precise, responsive, and developmentally attuned educational policies and practices.

Theoretical Approach

Postsecondary future selves are what students conceptualize as possible, likely, and expected for their lives after high school graduation given three domains: *college* (i.e., postsecondary education, be it through advanced vocational training or 2- or 4-year colleges or universities), *career* (i.e., occupation and employment trajectory), and *condition* (i.e., expected financial stability, relational and familial prospects, future living arrangements, happiness, and joy; Carey, 2022). The concept of postsecondary future selves is informed by *future orientation* (Nurmi, 1991) and *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Future orientation involves dreams, thoughts, and expectations for possible events that motivate, influence, and guide goal attainment (Nurmi, 1991). It comprises the expectations (i.e., content of future orientation), how far into the future these will occur (i.e., temporal extension), thoughts about factors that influence futures (i.e., control beliefs), and tools adolescents use to attain their goals (i.e., skills). Family, peers, educators, and community members influence how youth envision postsecondary future selves (e.g., formulate visions, crystallize expectations, and make decisions in relation to college, career, and certain life condition goals). Adolescents weigh and interpret such messaging against their own interests and self-assessments to determine their own ideal postsecondary future.

Also, postsecondary future selves are drawn from *possible selves*, a concept based on how individuals think about their present potential and what they deem likely for their futures (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2015). Representing specific, individually significant

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

hopes, fears, and fantasies, possible selves reflect varying yet complementary levels of the self-concept: the feared, hoped for, and expected self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2015). Adolescents may be motivated toward or away from college, career, or certain life conditions owing to the *feared self* (e.g. I dread what will happen with my life if I do not choose college), *hoped for self* (e.g. I wish to play professional football and earn a lucrative salary), or the *expected self* (e.g. I anticipate that I will attend college; it will contribute to my career and life goals). Importantly, future orientations reflect an adolescent's perceptions of an expansive prospective outlook, while possible selves represent or project the adolescent in that future.

Given their newfound developmental ability for abstract thinking and need for future life-goal setting (Nurmi, 1991; Smetana, 2010), adolescents are primed to think in terms of three interrelated domains: college, career, and condition (the 3Cs). Their motivation for school may come from perceiving "education usefulness" (Brown & Jones, 2004) and viewing their present academic engagement as relevant for actualizing desired outcomes (Kerpelman et al., 2008).

Adolescents can conceptually link attending college with career aims in light of other goals (Hill et al., 2018). Yet they must also devise *aligned ambitions* (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). When adolescents misunderstand how one goal contributes to achieving another, their ambitions reflect misalignment or incongruency, decreasing their likelihood of goal attainment (Chavira et al., 2016). This risk is especially acute for Black and Latinx boys from low-income communities. With limited access to role models for ideal postsecondary future selves, some Black and Latinx boys must deploy substantial cognitive labor to envision themselves into unseen futures.

Envisioning comprises adding clarity and shape to future imaginings. Envisioning lends to adolescents solidifying or crystallizing what they expect; it couches that which is creatively

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

and radically imagined, but also tangible. Educators give clarity and shape to what adolescents imagine, and help youth sustain effort, delay gratification, and thwart barriers to realizing goals (Nurmi, 1991). Educators do so by building college-going "communities of possibility" (Gibbs Grey, 2022) or academic programs that stir the "vocational hope" (Diemer & Blustein, 2007) for career dreams. But school influences on what I call the condition domain remain underexplored.

Condition takes up two facets of "psychological well-being" (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). It draws out the weight adolescents place on 1) expected positive relationships with others (e.g., future family prospects), and 2) environmental mastery or managing one's life and surrounding worlds effectively (e.g., future living arrangements, financial stability, happiness, and even joy). Since collectivist familial norms often govern how Black and Latinx adolescent boys envision their future, when determining pathways, they weigh personal desires against familial needs (Carey, 2018, Howard et al., 2019; Lateef et al., 2023). Hence, when Black and Latinx youth consider plans for college and career goals, their psychological well-being, which underscores their life condition, is contingent on links between positive relationships with family and their own self-management.

Black and Latinx boys rarely get to imagine futures – radical, thriving, flourishing, liberatory futures – on their own terms and within schools (Grant, 2012; Love, 2019). Educators often measure the prowess of Black and Latinx children against White and certain Asian groups, with urging to mirror White middle-class, status quo, capitalist sensibilities "…regardless of how healthy, whole or just the White community in question might be" (Woodson & Love, 2019, p. 93). Educators push such values onto Black and Latinx boys without regard for their families' cultural commitments to collective uplift over individual pursuits (Carey, 2016; Cooper, 2011; Howard et al., 2019; Lateef et al., 2023). If spurred to imagine, their results may be unhooked

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

from a status quo based on neoliberal accumulation logics or "American Dream" illusions. Their goals may reflect Black or Latinx futurities unfathomable to educators. Their wanted lives may exist beyond current realities and ascend into unthought-of possibilities (Carey, 2020; Toliver, 2021). To foster the empirical space for this level of future envisioning in this study, I purposefully kept the condition domain as an exploratory, speculative, and imaginative venture.

Research in Context

Complicating the Impact of College-Going School Cultures

Underscored by a policy push to ensure students are college and career ready (Conley, 2017; Desimone et al., 2019), educators in low-income urban communities often incorporate "college knowledge" (e.g., application procedures, academic criteria, and financial aid requirements) into academic courses and school processes (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Educators reinforce such knowledge with "college-going cultures" by encouraging college for all students through frequent messaging, signage, decorum, and experiences (e.g., on-campus college visits, field trips) (Achinstein et al., 2015; Noll, 2022; Welton & Martinez, 2014).

When analyzing the effectiveness of college-going cultures, two issues emerge. First, while these cultures support students to see themselves as potential collegians, schools that overwhelm students with college messaging may obscure the nuanced ways students interpret college-going information and apply it in their decision-making (Bryan et al., 2023; Gast, 2022; Martinez et al., 2020). Hence, college-going cultures are starting points for widening students' ambitions, not definitive solutions to the challenges some youth face in determining future pathways. When counselors and educators uniquely tailor college-related "talk" with individual Black and Latinx students about their future goals, they are more likely to ensure students take steps to apply and enroll (Bryan et al., 2017; Knight & Duncheon, 2020).

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Second, my prior research from this data set has shown that while college-going cultures focus intensively on the "what" and "how" of college access (i.e., what is a college degree? And how do I secure one?), educators spend less time on "why" (i.e., why attend college versus other life pursuits?). Overlooking "why" might contribute to what I term "college-going dilemmas" that emerge from both family- and school-based influences (Carey, 2018, 2019). When schools compel Black and Latinx boys from low-income communities to attend college, they do so while encouraging them to delay possible earnings and perhaps assume substantial loan debt (Carey, 2018). Some weigh college against social pressures for more immediate financial gains within informal street-level economies (Payne & Brown, 2010) and competing responsibilities to their families' social and financial well-being (Carey, 2018, 2021; Brooms, 2022; Huerta et al., 2018; Patrón, 2020). Also, schools that profess college for all, while implementing subjective grading policies that uphold White middle-class norms, risk convincing Black and Latinx students that they are not "smart enough" for college (Carey, 2019). Schools that implement grading policies open to bias, ignore students' unique future aspirations, or decentralize the "why" run the risk of offering imprecise college-going supports for this vulnerable group.

Uncovering School Influences on Career Aspirations

The second domain of postsecondary future selves takes up the ways youth are oriented toward their career (e.g., occupation and post-college employment trajectory). Research on how Black and Latinx adolescent boys determine career aspirations or "work goals" within non-vocational schools is limited (see Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Yeager & Bundick, 2009). More studies consider racially and ethnically marginalized boys' career aspirations in after-school programs and summer camps that foster career-based academic skills and vocational identities (Basile & Lopez, 2018; Coleman & Davis, 2020). Some promising school factors shown to

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

inspire careers for marginalized youth include family partnerships, counseling, experiential learning, and creative classroom interventions (Storlie et al., 2019; Stipanovic & Woo, 2017).

Research on the career goals of Black and Latinx boys compared with girls, White students, and other students of color has returned mixed, even conflicting, results. Generally, studies find Black and Latinx girls have higher career aspirations than boys (Perry & Vance, 2010) and seek careers entailing more intensive postsecondary training (Howard et al., 2011). Some ascribe these career goal disparities to gender socialization practices favoring girls more than boys in school (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Other scholars document disparities that weaken the likelihood that Black and Latinx boys will ascend to college-based careers. Findings show they face harsher disciplining (Welsh, 2022), lower-tracked courses (McCardle, 2020), and other exclusionary measures that bar them from school success (Howard, 2014; Polite & Davis, 1999). Such experiences decrease adolescents' school attachment, diminish their interest in a college education, and foreclose the likelihood of college-based futures (Hill et al., 2018).

Studies comparing boys across racial groups reveal concurrently troublesome and promising results. In their study of eighth graders' STEM-related career aspirations, Riegle-Crumb et al. (2011) found that despite their lower levels of school achievement, Black and Latinx boys maintained similarly high career aspirations as their White male peers. While Black and Latinx boys have high aspirations, they may find their dreams thwarted by not meeting the academic demands required for their desired career. This finding points to how academic factors, beyond misapplied college-going supports, impede college and career goal actualizing (Hill et al., 2018; Knight & Duncheon, 2020; Perry & Vance, 2010).

Black and Latinx adolescents may also lower their aspirations because they anticipate social and school barriers to college and career goals (Carey, 2019; Means, 2019; Means et al.,

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

2016). Means and colleagues (2016) revealed that Black boys in low-income rural communities bounded their aspirations after witnessing limited career opportunities firsthand. They also resisted certain college-based career pathways after observing how racial oppression led to negative outcomes for other similarly raced boys and young men in their community (Means et al., 2016, Means, 2019). These findings signal how salient the "geography of opportunity" (Tate, 2008) and gendered racism are to barring career futures in adolescent minds.

Revealing the Content of Adolescents' Future Life Conditions

Many adolescents conceptualize goals and ambitions in an orderly sequence (e.g., "I'll go to college, find a good job, and secure a desirable life"; Nurmi, 1991). But few inquiries exist into how Black and Latinx adolescent boys imagine fulfilling and healthy life conditions. Studies often focus on how future orientations buffer youth from community violence (So et al., 2018) or other risky behaviors (e.g., sexual encounters, delinquency, substance abuse; Jackman & MacPhee, 2017; Prince et al., 2019). Few school-based studies explore the content of their imagined lives beyond college and career goals; those that do often returned mixed results.

In a mixed-gender study of mostly Black early adolescents, McCabe and Barnett (2000) found participants were more realistic about career plans and "more in control of their future career outcomes than their future family and romantic relationships" (p. 68). No major difference along gender lines emerged. But results show the greater ease early adolescents have in planning achievement goals (e.g., going to college, securing a career) than non-achievement goals (e.g., being in romantic relationships, starting a family). Another study found that boys focus more on occupational aspirations, while girls are clearer and more realistic about futures linked to family or the household (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). These findings reveal how gender socialization practices steer boys away from envisioning prospects other than college and career goals.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

With few school-based supports available beyond the bounds of college and career, researchers have advocated for college-going aids that are more encompassing of youth's futures. Cooper's (2011) asset-based model builds on how racially and ethnically marginalized youth forge pathways between college, career, and cultural identities. Promising research also links Afrocentric cultural values to higher educational and career aspirations for men of color (Lateef et al., 2023). Other research on Black and Latinx boys' conceptualizations of success yield insights into youth outlooks beyond college and career. Howard and colleagues (2019) examined how Black and Latinx adolescent boys (*N*=200) described success. One responded, "Becoming financially stable, get a career, start a family, and . . . get a part of the American dream." Another said, "As an older individual, having a home, being able to pay your bills… graduating from college is being successful" (Howard et al., 2019, p. 22). So, in addition to attaining career and college goals, evidence shows Black and Latinx boys also link their success with starting a family and finding happiness.

In sum, studies show the role of schools in steering Black and Latinx boys toward college (Knight-Manuel et al., 2019) and careers (Diemer & Blustein, 2007). Analyses of college-going schools have focused on their organizational structures (Farmer-Hinton, 2011; Knight & Duncheon, 2020; Welton & Martinez, 2014), assessing their effectiveness based on college acceptances instead of responsiveness to students' broader goals. The current study contributes in other ways. I look to school factors that influence how Black and Latinx boys conceptualize college goals in relation to complimentary career and life aims. Most research on factors shaping adolescents' future selves is conducted quantitatively and may overlook misunderstood, unheard, or unimagined dreams and ambitions. This ethnographic study uncovers contextual processes shaping Black and Latinx boys' perspectives, offering precise and holistic accounts.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

The Current Study

This study uncovers how adolescent Black and Latinx boys conceptualize their futures given the influence of their school's college-going culture. The following questions guided it: How do these Black and Latinx adolescent boys experience and interpret their school's college-going culture? How do they describe the content of their postsecondary future selves? In what ways, if at all, did their school's college-going culture influence how they conceptualized their postsecondary future selves? For answers, I drew on ethnographic case study data from three Black and two Latinx boys in 11th grade at an urban school in the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. Data was gathered during one school year at Metropolitan Collegiate Public Charter School (pseudonym), also referenced as Metro Collegiate or Metro, which operated in a fiercely competitive neoliberal public-school climate.

Neoliberalism is an ideology that assumes elements of the public sector, like schools, improve when infused with free market economic logics (DiMartino & Jessen, 2018). Emerging after the damning 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report, which in essence blamed U.S. economic problems on the quality of public schools, national and local policymakers enlarged prospects for new stakeholders (e.g., industries, philanthropists) to intervene into the business of school reform (Castillo, 2020; Scott, 2009). Neoliberal logics underscored school reformers' strategies for "fixing" public urban schools by way of high-stakes accountability measures, competition, and choice (Au, 2022; Buras, 2014; Scott, 2009). Within neoliberal schooling climates, charter schools, many founded by progressive idealists to advance opportunities for children within low-income Black and Latinx communities, are forced to compete with other schools for student enrollment and resources (Buras, 2014; Castillo, 2020). Such was the case for Metro.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Metro Collegiate was among the city's first charter schools. Founded in 1999 by teachers and parents, and led by a volunteer board as opposed to corporate entity, it opened its doors in 2000 in a predominantly Salvadoran neighborhood. Its progressive mission, stellar academic program, and reputation for safety made it one of the most sought-after city schools for nearly a decade among not only Latinx and Black families from working-class communities, but also those from the middle- and upper-middle class, including Asian and White families.

After the 2007 mayoral takeover of its school board, the city closed many under-enrolled and underperforming schools. This move coincided with rapid growth in newly established charter schools. During the 2013-2014 school year, Metro competed for students alongside 61 other public charter schools and 49 traditional public schools. Charter schools often deployed unique branding and innovative learning options. Some offered students opportunities in niche fields like hospitality or vocational and technical training. But most were college preparatory and enticed new families with a 100% college acceptance rate. This meant Metro's college-going focus was not just a hallmark of a progressive mission and stellar academic program; its success in meeting families' college expectations was also capital that officials used in marketing to maintain viability in an extremely competitive educational marketplace.

This study was part of a larger investigation into family and school factors influencing Black and Latinx boys' postsecondary future selves. Prior findings from this data set show that despite familial encouragement, some participants were hesitant to endorse the worth of college going due in part to its high cost, or their prospect for making friends. Others doubted their likelihood for academic success due to their grades. I refer to these and other trepidations or concerns as "college-going dilemmas" (Carey, 2018, 2019). However, participants also questioned the germaneness of college going for their hazy, unarticulated, or even unimagined

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

life goals. If educators broadened college-going supports to make affordances for imagining career and condition, would it help students crystallize more comprehensive future goals? This study spurs the creation of more expansive college-going supports that nurture youth's future mindsets for thriving lives.

I was interested in unearthing how nuances of Metro's culture shaped specific individuals (e.g., 11th grade Black and Latinx boys), given a particular phenomenon (e.g., postsecondary future selves), within a set time frame (e.g., nearly an entire school year). Such goals led me to bridge ethnographic and case study methodologies. The study ran from November 2013 through June 2014, thus meeting case study parameters as an "in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Further support for this approach related to the type of questions (e.g., typically requiring deep descriptions), a focus on a specific setting (e.g., Metro Collegiate was a bounded system), and interest in links between participants and their immediate context (e.g., how the boys formed postsecondary future selves in relation to school influences).

Methods

Research Setting

Metro Collegiate served 1,000 linguistically, racially, and ethnically diverse students in grades pre-K-12. I chose it for its large Latinx and Black student body and college-going culture. I spent almost an entire school year (i.e., eight months) studying participants' experiences in its 337-student high school. In addition to the demographics in Table 1, 16% of students were first-generation immigrant emergent bilinguals. Students, who were not mandated to wear uniforms, came from across the city. Seventy-nine percent qualified for free and reduced-price school meals, qualifying Metro for federal Title 1 funds, which supplement state and local education funding for low-income students. Metro, whose faculty and staff were predominately White, was

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

located in a residential middle-class neighborhood in a comparatively racially and ethnically diverse city zone (see Table 1).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Most high schoolers were from the working-class Salvadoran neighborhood where the school opened initially. After fundraising to renovate a defunct public-school building, Metro moved 3.2 miles north to its current location in 2012. Most of Metro's students continued to the new location, which preserved its high population of Latinx families. Students were admitted by random lottery if they met eligibility requirements (e.g., lived in the city and completed the prior grade). Families also had to volunteer 20 hours of yearly service to the school community.

Procedures, Recruitment, and Participant Descriptions

By 11th grade, students begin to formalize plans for postsecondary educations, engaging in the "college-preparation" process by gathering information needed to facilitate college choice and readiness (Griffin & Allen, 2006). As they were steeped in future planning, 11th graders were an ideal population to study postsecondary future selves. Once I gained University of Maryland College Park IRB approval and Metro's administrative endorsement, I met a Black male history teacher who welcomed me into his classroom, invited me to chaperone field trips, oriented me to Metro's students, and helped me plan for recruitment. I first presented the study to 11th graders during a November 2013 class meeting. I introduced the topic (e.g., "Who wants to discuss your visions for life after high school?"), time commitment (e.g., three after-school interviews and observations), and incentives (e.g., University of Maryland T-shirt and restaurant gift card). I distributed parental consent forms and child assent forms to those interested. Lucas and Malik (pseudonyms) returned their forms days later. I recruited King, Samuel, and Perdido (pseudonyms) after chatting in classes, hallways, and on a field trip. We built a rapport. I was

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

intrigued by their diverging outlooks and thought their perspectives would add texture to the study. I solicited their participation and provided permission forms; all three, like Lucas and Malik, agreed to be interviewed and observed.

[Insert Table 2 here]

As described in Table 2, participants were mostly all 17 years old, working/middle class, and born and raised in the same mid-Atlantic city where they attended school. Malik, Samuel, and King were U.S.-born Black or African American; Perdido and Lucas were U.S.-born Salvadorans. They chose their own pseudonyms, and they did so for various personal reasons. For instance, Malik based his on ancestral ties to the country Mali. Perdido (Spanish for "lost" or "astray") said his pseudonym echoed his uncertain path.

Data Sources and Analysis

I deployed numerous modes of data elicitation. I observed each participant in academic classes at least three times to deepen understandings of their experiences and refine interview protocols. Given the small school size, I observed two or three participants in the same class. I also spent one hour weekly (i.e., 30 hours during the eight-month study) observing the boys in informal environments (e.g., gym, cafeteria, hallways, Dean's office) and school events (e.g., assemblies, class meetings). I also observed them as a chaperone on three local field trips. In all, I spent approximately 150 hours in an observational capacity. I also mined Metro's website for insights on its values, recorded voice memos on my hunches after my visits, and took field notes that I coded along with interviews and other data sources, such as photos of posters and college pennants. These artifacts gave insights into "school culture," or what governs the values and arranged meanings that count as common sense in a school (see Anderson-Levitt, 2006).

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Findings draw heavily from voices gathered during semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006). They revealed participants' school experiences, the content of their postsecondary future selves, and school-based factors that fostered their conceptualizations. Questions related to each domain of the 3Cs (e.g., college, career, and condition) were in all protocols, with interviews occurring over multiple one-on-one meetings (see Table 3).

[Insert Table 3 here]

The interview protocol was devised prior to the study, and I crafted follow-up questions in the field to tease out specific participant experiences. Given our rich exchanges and meeting time limits, I added a fourth interview so participants could respond fully to all prompts. I interviewed all but one participant four times, each session lasting 45 to 60 minutes. I interviewed Lucas only twice, as his extensive extracurricular involvement made scheduling tough. His second interview lasted 90 minutes to cover all interview questions.

Given the dynamic process of ethnographic data collection and analysis, I collected and analyzed some data simultaneously to triangulate initial findings. In addition to observational field notes, I jotted down interview "aha moments" and recorded voice memos of my impressions following school visits. Data files were uploaded to a secure server, transcribed promptly by a third party (Ubiqus On Demand), and printed. Participants were interviewed with two- to four-week breaks between meetings. The breaks afforded me time to edit transcripts, revise follow-up interview prompts, speculate on emergent patterns, and determine avenues for observations. *Respondent validation* (Merriam, 2009) occurred when I elicited participants' feedback on my hunches and encouraged them to review, clarify, and correct errors on interview transcripts.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

When the study concluded, I used Atlas.ti (qualitative data analysis software) to code the data with a multilayered deductive and inductive process. A priori codes were defined with the theoretical suppositions of the postsecondary future selves framework and scholarly descriptions of school culture. I organized these in a code manual. Initially, I deductively coded participants' articulations of postsecondary future selves, or rather their college, career, and condition ambitions. I also coded with categories that captured participants' perspectives or experiences with Metro's school culture alongside of field notes (and photos) from 150 hours of observations. Specifically, I coded interviews and field notes for instances where Metro's culture emphasized and overlooked students' college, career, and condition prospects.

I then ran a frequency count to calculate the total of excerpts for each coded category. I reinspected high frequency codes to determine phenomena unaccounted for in prior categorical descriptions. This made apparent which a priori codes were too broadly applied to gauge the richness and range of participants' experiences. Next, I conducted additional rounds of inductive coding, thus growing my code book. For instance, I initially coded anything college related with the *college* code. I eventually delineated this code into over 20 sub-codes including *early family influences on college, college counselor*, *college choice*, *college preparation,* and *college major interest*. Similar processes occurred for codes that categorized the career and condition domain, as well as school culture. In total, I used over 200 codes after three rounds. This deepened my analysis of this robust data set and expanded interpretative possibilities that led to findings for other publications. For instance, while this article explores *Metro's* influence on postsecondary future selves, other work explores how participants' *families* do so (see Carey, 2022).

I reanalyzed excerpts for code co-occurrences, noting alignment between participants' ambitions for each postsecondary future selves domain (college, career, and condition). I also

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

looked for how participants' postsecondary future selves were influenced by or related to facets of Metro's culture. I noted overlaps and inconsistencies across participants' accounts and distilled these into themes that best answered the research questions explored in this article.

Limitations and Positionality

Postsecondary future selves, and the findings herein, potentially can illuminate and shape the practices of other schools serving Black and Latinx youth. I realize this study's small sample size of cisgender boys – not girls or nonbinary youth – limits what we glean from it. Moreover, its focus on a college-going charter school versus other types (e.g., vocational or traditional public) affects the scope of what this study teaches us. Yet, ethnographic work should not seek generalizability. Instead, I aim to create an "illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation" (Schofield, 2002, p. 174). Ideally, what we learn "can be transferred to some extant to other situations or settings that are similar enough to warrant it" (O'Reilly, 2008, p. 24). Achieving external validity is less vital than attaining internal validity through acknowledging how the researcher's positionality shapes what is described and emerges as transferable (Lincoln, 1995; Milner, 2007). I do that here.

My interpretivist critical stance fosters my awareness of how my identity as a Black man sets me in relation to the participants. While we shared similar experiences maneuvering Black and Latinx stereotypes, intersections of my age, education, and class fueled distinctions and even departures, such that I did not assume I intuitively "got" their lived experiences. I refused any deficit assumptions about the participants. To challenge colonialist research urges, I also refused to pathologize participants in ways that rendered them, and not the oppression they faced, as problematic (Patel, 2014). I sought to expose their imaginative brilliance by showing their adroitness at envisioning beyond worlds not created for their thriving.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

My prior role as an English teacher with Black and Latinx youth in similar college-going urban schools in the same city as Metro sparked my interest in this study and keyed me into the competitive school market. As a teacher, I saw the trials youth faced imagining bright futures. Yet, I compartmentalized the familiar. Respondent validation processes helped ensure I did not misinterpret participants. As the study progressed, our interactions evolved with increased respect, trust, and admiration, which afforded authentic accounts to emerge. Revealed here are their generously shared interpretations of postsecondary future selves. By centering accounts that came from "being-in-relation" (Patel, 2014, p. 372) with participants, I positioned myself as a steward of knowledge that we created in careful, even loving, community with each other.

Findings

The current study sought to accomplish three overlapping goals. First, to investigate how Black and Latinx boys experienced and interpreted their school's college-going culture; second, to elicit understandings of the content of Black and Latinx boys' ambitions; and third, determine which elements of participants' school and its college-going culture influenced their postsecondary future selves. I deployed insights from ethnographic observations, which reveal evidence of Metro's college-going culture, and I featured participants' voiced experiences captured during interviews. Observational and interview data are interwoven throughout three sections and framed by the following themes: College Over Everything Else; College Going For What, Though?; and Envisioning a Good Life Condition Without School Support.

College Over Everything Else

Metro's college-going culture was infused with a palpable "college-over-everything - else" belief system. Driven by neoliberal pressures, Metro educators devised a culture through expectations, assumptions, symbols, and experiences that emphasized college-going (i.e.,

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

preferably a bachelor-degree-granting institution) as the only acceptable postsecondary outcome. This reality was positively or negatively interpreted based on students' feelings and aspirations.

As the students walked Metro's hallways, they encountered ample signage. Signs promoted an empanada and lemonade sale to benefit the 11th grade; a poster featured cultural icons for Latinx heritage month; a Gender & Sexuality Alliance poster welcomed prospective new members to their lunch meetings. While signs appeared and then disappeared throughout the school year, the college-going signage remained untouched. College-going optics underscored what mattered most at Metro; everything else was ancillary.

Rich visuals enveloped students to ensure they saw themselves as "college material." Throughout Metro appeared glossy posters with smiling college students sitting on pastoral campus greens, reading in gothic buildings, and conversing in dormitories and dining halls. These were flanked by pennants featuring renowned colleges and universities. Interspersed were beckoning messages: "You Belong Here" or "See Yourself Here." Fliers with SAT and ACT registration deadlines appeared alongside scholarship competition announcements on hallway bulletin boards. Teachers decorated their classes with their own college's colors and mascots. Each Friday teachers wore paraphernalia from their alma mater or Greek-letter organization. College posters cascaded down the walls in the college placement office, which was equipped with comfortable sofas, and teemed with the energy of students coming in and out with brochures and other forms in folders tucked under their arms. The most impressive display adorned the hallway wall facing this office. After a senior was accepted to college, their achievement was memorialized with a six-inch-long college pennant, cut from colored construction paper, and taped to this wall. On the paper pennant was written the college or university and the student's name. As the school year progressed, some seniors' names appeared

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

on over a dozen pennants. By spring, this wall morphed daily; it was alive. More and more colorful triangles started to overlap, some jutting outward, and this once modest display widened and grew taller until it disappeared the white wall behind it with a vibrant testament of the class's accomplishments. This imagery, combined with messages from Metro's teachers and counselors, and various college-going experiences, contributed to emphasizing college-going for all students.

Participants like Lucas and Samuel perceived of Metro's college-going culture and college-over-everything-else belief system mostly positively, because such an emphasis aligned with their postsecondary future selves. Lucas, the top student in his class, was determined to attend college: "Yeah, that's my main goal, man. Like here at [Metro], they really try to help you. Like, if you put effort into it, and that's your goal, they try to make you go to college." Samuel, who also performed well academically, believed Metro's role was to "push you to go into higher education... and make you into an image that they feel is good for you." Other participants challenged the narrowness, singularity, and even the genuineness of this approach.

Malik articulated the salience of college for his postsecondary future self but felt the college-over-everything-else belief system stifled students' agency for determining other paths. In addition to wading through all-encompassing college imagery, by the time they reached 11th grade, students were mandated to attend college tours seasonally, meet visiting representatives from colleges throughout the year, and venture to local and regional college recruitment fairs. Malik said:

> I think they expect too much from some people. I know some people who don't wanna go to college. They still like shove college tours down your throat… I think it's up to the decision you wanna make 'cause it's your life ahead of you, and the school can't make apply to college if you don't wanna apply.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Malik believed Metro force-fed college-going ideologies to students not only through its imagery, but also its programming.

Metro's two college placement officers (pseudonyms used) led its college-going programs and advocated its college-over-everything-else belief system. They were critical to students' experiences starting in 9th grade. Ms. Diggs, who headed the college placement office, worked mainly with current Metro students. Mr. Rodríguez, a Latinx man who spoke Spanish, worked mostly with emerging bilingual Latinx families and alums. Ms. Diggs was a dynamic and enthusiastic Black woman who spoke persuasively and wore business attire elevated from that of teachers and administrators. She frequented the 11th grade class meetings to announce college programs and remind students of upcoming SAT and ACT dates. She wielded a college-going "tough love" rooted in the seriousness of her job, which was to ensure 100% of seniors got into college. King referred to her "like a mother figure." Perdido, who vacillated about whether or not college was best for his postsecondary future self, interpreted Ms. Diggs as the primary agent of a nearly obsessive enterprise. In describing the pressure he felt, Perdido boldly said:

> This school really wants you to go to college, really badly. Like college to this school is like crack to the crack head… When you're in 12th grade, Ms. Diggs gonna have you signing college applications…and then you get accepted and then you go. All those grade level meetings, college is mentioned at least twice. College, college, college, college!

At times, Metro's overzealous college-over-everything-else belief system brought on counterproductive feelings from students. In a junior class meeting, Ms. Diggs had students share their college hopes. When one student remarked, "Harvard!" Ms. Diggs jokingly retorted, "When I win the lottery!" While some joined in laughing, other students appeared sullen. A student next to me said, "She kills the mood in these meetings." During an academic honors assembly it was

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

revealed that only 24 of 337 students earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Of these 24, one Asian boy earned 3.75 or higher, and one White girl scored 3.5 or higher. Of the remaining 22 honors students, four were Latinx boys, one was a Black boy, and the remainder Latinx girls. Metro urged all students to see themselves as college material, but this assembly proved most did not have competitive grades for four-year college admission. This assembly also revealed a severe disparity at the nexus of race, ethnicity, and gender. Not only did Metro create conditions where Latinx and Black boys underperformed, it unintentionally sensationalized their struggles through spectacles such as the assembly. This event embittered certain students, especially boys, to the prospect of college, even as nearly every inch of Metro's walls was covered with college imagery.

King offered a critique that brought this point to bear. He saw a false sense of access to the most desired, popular, and elite schools whose images appeared in the halls, on classroom walls, and on his teacher's shirt on Fridays. Metro's teaching force was predominantly White women. Based on observations of their classrooms, they attended mostly selective colleges and universities that were out of reach for most of Metro's students due, among other things, to their low GPAs. King wondered, "Why wear the T-shirt of a college that you know a kid here can't go to…?" While some Metro graduates attended top-tier colleges and universities with instant name recognition, most did not. King said, "I mean they got all them posters and the little flags and all that. But haven't nobody went to none of them schools for real. It's just fake." King's critique underscores the wariness some students harbored about the genuineness of what their school's culture purported as possible for elements of their postsecondary future selves.

Participants' summations widen interpretative possibilities for understanding not only why Metro's students experienced its college-going culture as they did, but what motivated its

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

fervent college-over-everything-else belief system. Black and Latinx families from low-income areas benefited from Metro's ability to propel their children's futures toward a "better" outcome by readying them for college. Metro accomplished this through the wide-reaching supports key to its culture. But also underscoring its emphasis was pressure to maintain its desirable positioning in a neoliberal charter school climate that vied for families in a stratified market.

Since Metro faced steep competition for families, its competitive edge relied on maintaining its 100% college acceptance rating. This yearly accomplishment was plastered on school advertisements throughout the city and on Metro's website. Since Metro required students apply to at least one noncompetitive college or one with open admissions, like a local community college, Metro's coveted 100% acceptance rate comes into sharper relief. Metro acted in part to meet the market-based need of maintaining viability in a competitive charter school market. It kept up appearances for the sake of being responsive to students' desires for their unique postsecondary future selves. King articulated what Metro forfeited with this emphasis. He said,

> They focus most on the people who want to go to college, but I mean most of the school want to go to college, so that's the majority of the school. But for those who don't, they don't do nothing for them. They just like, "Oh you graduate," and they not interested in what they want to do when they get out that doesn't rely on college.

Here, King reveals how Metro responded myopically to the needs of college-destined students and, in turn, withheld supports from those who questioned college or desired other future paths. What mattered at Metro was that students desired to go to college and acquiesced to the academic rigor and requirements to successfully matriculate. By zeroing in on "college going over everything else," Metro educators forfeited their ability to provide equitable, responsive supports so that students envisioned postsecondary future selves on their own terms.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

College Going For What, Though?

A second theme revealed Metro factored less into how participants conceived of career and condition domains. In analyzing which factors influenced elements of participants' postsecondary future selves, I found not all were clear about how college aligned with other areas of their lives, leaving some to question: college going for what, though?

Participants did say some coursework aligned with career aspirations. Samuel, the future computer hardware engineer, said, "physics, algebra II, financial literacy, all my math classes and science classes line up because I want to be an engineer." Malik, who aspired to be a mechanical engineer, said physics was his favorite class and fostered his career aims: "We do a lot of hands-on experiments and [it] helps me figure out how I wanna go in life, like what kinda career I wanna do in physics like within the general subject of mechanical engineering."

Perdido and King did not think Metro influenced their career hopes. Perdido criticized Metro for limited course offerings and unresponsiveness to students' career interests. When I asked why he wanted to go to college, Perdido said that unlike Metro, colleges offer classes directly related to his career interests and had "a wider range of choices to study in and things to look into." When I asked King how Metro supported his athletic career goals, he was adamant: "Nothing… this school don't have no classes to prepare me for what I want to do when I get out, maybe fitness [an elective]. That still don't have nothing to do with football, maybe running … but that's it." Neither Perdido nor King saw links between academic coursework and their postsecondary future selves. Besides Samuel and Malik, who found some curriculum alignment, participants struggled to connect present school experiences with future careers. Samuel offered a unique perspective on course relevance. He said:

I'm in the financial literacy class... it helps you become more aware; it changes your

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

> decision-making; it helps you to not slip up in any type of way… Any class reforms your thinking. If it's not directly connected to what you want to do, it gives more possibilities in wanting to do a career. It also makes you find yourself, because you get to explore, you start to realize things, and connect pieces together. It just helps you mold as a person.

Even if coursework was not directly career related, it widened exploratory routes to formulate interests, develop aspirations, and achieve one's potential. In sum, participants held varied (mis)understandings of the alignment between college and career ambitions and Metro's role in shaping these processes for students. I describe Metro's influence on participants' college and career aims more in two sub-themes: *college and career clear* and *college and career unclear.*

College and career clear. Lucas, Samuel, and King were college and career clear. They aligned their college of interest and an academic major to a desired career. While Lucas, Samuel, and King were more certain of such linkages than Perdido and Malik, Metro's culture factored less in shaping their goal alignment than did other influences. The academic success Lucas, Samuel, and King found, and their goal clarity suggests, that Metro's culture ministered most effectively to students who garnered support, knowledge, and inspiration for envisioning viable college and career pathways outside of Metro. Students did not arrive at Metro as "blank slates." They embodied an array of college and career knowledge from their family, community, and extracurricular involvement. Thus, some of participants' college and career emerged because of middle-class social mobility logics they acquired elsewhere. Metro reveled in taking credit for sending 100% of its mostly Latinx and Black students from the city to colleges and universities. But Metro did not play as much a role in fostering students' futures as it garnered credit for. Its influence on the boys' college and career clarity was dwarfed by the influence of other factors. Knowledge of self-interests drawn from experiences beyond Metro's walls combined with

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

insights on specific careers and majors to unify participants' postsecondary future selves.

For instance, Lucas was active in multiple out-of-school science-based career exploratory programs that fostered his interests and and helped align his college and career objectives. Lucas wanted to major in "biology or something in the science field," with the expectation of becoming a "doctor or a scientist." Samuel, whose sister was recently enrolled in college, acquired college and career clarity from his grandparents, both of whom were college graduates. He said, "I want to study computer engineering because I want to be a computer hardware engineer when I grow up." Also, while King conceptualized an irrefutably more complex and riskier path than Lucas and Samuel, he did so while posing notable college and career clarity.

King, whose father attended college and stepmother earned a graduate degree, also grasped linkages between college and career from his athletic coaches in a football community recreation league, since Metro did not have a team. King wanted to earn a Division I football scholarship and ultimately "make it" in the National Football League (NFL). If not Division I, he hoped for an athletic scholarship to a smaller school to major in sports management or physical therapy, and later work as sports agent or physical therapist as a "fall back plan." Of his college major interests, King said, "like sports management." He continued,

> That's what I wanna do. But if I make it, I make it. Like, a lot of people say, "Oh yeah, you got it, you could play." But like, one out of every thousand kids makes it to the NFL. But I'm a student athlete. I'm smart, but at the same time I'm athletic. And I think they come together. Hopefully I'll get drafted to the NFL. But nothing really catches my attention but sports. I mean math, money, but other stuff like psychology and all that, it just sound boring. Maybe law school…like, I wanna be surrounded by sports, so not only like me being a football player, but like being an agent for somebody.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Metro could have done more to help King forge college and career linkages that built on his intellectual and athletic prowess. He acquired some knowledge of college majors with Metro's supports. Yet, his knowledge of careers emerged from his experiences on football teams and his exposure to the NFL on media outlets.

The college and career clarity expressed by Lucas, Samuel, and King underscores how Metro's culture might have "worked" for supporting them more than others. They had higher GPAs than Malik and Perdido, may have had more positive experiences at Metro, and found more academic motivation to pursue clear goals than their counterparts. But importantly, Metro did little to foster their clarity between college and career goals. Instead, findings suggest that Lucas, Samuel, and King had decent footing in understanding their own unique "college for what." They were college and career clear, because of pre-existing understandings and belief-systems that Metro's culture supplemented and reinforced.

College and career unclear. Malik and Perdido were college and career unclear. They had misunderstandings about either the actual work entailed in their desired career or the role of college in actualizing that career. They also had "college-going internal dilemmas," questioning their academic preparedness and wondering if they were "smart enough" for college (Carey, 2019). Understanding these dilemmas provides insights into why they were college and career unclear, and thus harbored misaligned postsecondary future selves.

These internal dilemmas emerged in part from what Metro signaled to Malik and Perdido through their grades. Malik had difficulty meeting Metro's academic and social demands, earning a below-average GPA (2.28). Under Metro's grading policy, teachers used both formal assessments (e.g., quizzes, tests, projects) and subjective appraisals of behavior through "Practices of Work" (e.g., organizational skills, personal accountability) and "Practices of Mind"

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

(e.g., goal setting for future learning, willingness to produce multiple drafts). This meant students' academic products were scrutinized alongside teachers' more subjective interpretations of behavior. This policy worked doubly against Malik. He admittedly struggled with writing, turned in assignments late, and often appeared bored or fidgety in class. I observed him in more than one class with his head on his desk, which he credited in interviews to "staying up late, playing the [video] game." Malik was intrigued by the prospect of "working with [his] hands and like building stuff and taking stuff apart." He sustained an interest in math and science and wanted to attend college to major in mechanical engineering. When I asked him what a *mechanical engineer did*, we realized he grasped what an *auto mechanic did*; his uncle's job as a subway mechanic informed his career interest. Malik did not know what a mechanical engineer was. Beyond misunderstanding his desired career, Malik did not have the GPA for many colleges or universities of interest to him (see Table 2). His skewed ambitions revealed a lack of supports from Metro for inspiring higher academic achievement or realistic college acceptance goals.

Perdido, like Malik, struggled to meet Metro's academic and social rigors, earning a below-average GPA (2.44). He also had internal dilemmas about if he would excel in college, but not necessarily because of his GPA. Perdido believed in his intelligence; he resisted what grades and others said about him. Perdido noted,

> You can still be learning and not get good grades. Grades are just grades. Like that's what says either you can move on to something more challenging or you stay here because we think you're not ready… So good grades are just a way of like separating people.

Perdido resisted the story his grades told about his learning capacity but knew college would be difficult given his inability to quietly sit and listen attentively in class. Perdido was vocal and well-liked by peers. He raised his hand and participated regularly. Sometimes he "mouthed-off"

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

to teachers, as he put it, who redirected him when he spoke with peers. While I thought Perdido to be brilliant and engaging, his interpersonal skills seldom translated into academic success. He also admittedly never studied, rarely submitted homework, was late to school and class, often finding himself in trouble. During one observation, the Dean of Students delivered an "Admin Detention" notice to a student, and Perdido said, "You have one for me?" The Dean said, "Not today, *actually*." The Dean, Perdido, and the rest of the class laughed, signaling his disciplining for minor offenses (e.g., not fighting) was so frequent, it ventured into the realm of the absurd.

Perdido wavered on attending college directly after high school. He valued college but was wary of repeating the drudgery he met at Metro. He considered working "with his hands" for a few years before going for a degree. Perdido found no supports for non-college postsecondary pursuits at Metro. He considered himself a wanderer, partly from Metro's inability to meet his needs – hence his pseudonym choice. Perdido was unsure about his career, at times wanting to be a gardener like his father, and other times pondering law enforcement. While unsure of a specific career, he did have insights into how it might unfold. "I don't expect being a gardener would be a long-term thing, just something that I could build up off of." Perdido resisted a straightforward high-school-to-college-to-career pathway for his postsecondary future self, revealing a tailored approach to making a career from several jobs, using the skills gained in one to land another.

When Perdido did consider college for his future, he expressed interest in a philosophy or astronomy major, given his long-held intrigue with the solar system and his analytical skills.

Roderick: What type of college would you want to go to?

Perdido: Well, philosophy involves a lot of thinking, right, and a lot of writing, which expresses your thoughts. So, if a college offers philosophy I might look into it. Each time we go to college fairs I ask about like astronomy or philosophy and sometimes sports too.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Roderick: …What would you do with that, with a degree in philosophy?

Perdido: You can become a doctor with that, right? Like don't you get the title of doctor?

Roderick: PhD? Well not just out of college. You would have to go and get a master's degree and then you have to go and get a doctorate degree... It would take another at least seven or eight years of schooling, plus the undergrad.

Perdido: That's a long-ass time!

Roderick: [Laughter] Not so much.

Perdido: [Laughter] Yeah, but what do philosophers even do?

Perdido was unsure what career he could attain with a philosophy degree but had some awareness of advanced degrees. Although Perdido connected his present intellectual interests to a subsequent college major, he struggled to make the conceptual and practical leap to uncover a college-based career of interest. With few college-educated or career role-models, participants like Perdido used their beliefs about the nature of the work in certain careers and their perceptions of their academic talents to conceptualize alignments between college majors and career aspirations. In sum, findings suggest that Metro best fulfilled the needs of students who met its subjective demands and arrived already with aligned ambitions between college and career. Though Lucas, Samuel, and King revealed ample preexisting college and career knowledgebases, Metro could have done more to crystallize such linkages for Malik, Perdido, and others like them.

Envisioning a Good Life Condition Without School Support

A third theme showed that when conceptualizing their postsecondary future selves, participants envisioned judicious and modest life conditions hallmarked by minimal stress,

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

financial stability, and ample satisfaction. This theme also touches on another latent reality; Metro missed key opportunities to help participants crystalize their envisioned condition goals.

Upon prompting participants to describe what a good life condition as an "official adult" would look like, they offered insights that centered among other things, personal responsibility. Malik remarked that adults need to "be on time." When I asked Malik, who was often late to school, to discuss how Metro fostered his condition goals, he said his teachers modeled "time management," because they were "always here before everybody else, setting up their class to have their instruction ready for the whole day." Although Metro's teachers role-modeled elements of his condition goals like timeliness, its college-going culture offered no space to bring shape to other facets of what their adult life conditions would be. Malik further noted, "I don't know how the school itself helps you be an adult." Metro's fostered students' pathways to college, but not other crucial facets of their adult lives. Generally, participants struggled to clearly articulate their imagined lives at age 23, 24, or 25. Eventually, responses to questions about their perspectives of "a good life," were both generative and revealing of all that Metro could have done to support students' postsecondary future selves in the condition domain.

What is a good life? Participants shared similar sentiments about what a good life entailed: freedom from economic stress and worry, evidenced by the ability to pay bills, take care of family responsibilities, enjoy their career, and relish in the satisfaction of living within their means. Interestingly, Perdido, who offered hazy concepts of his postsecondary future self in the college and career domains, offered a clear depiction of a good life condition.

> I would say stress-free…you can't ever be stress-free, 'cause you'll always have that one thing that's bugging you…But a good life – it's a steady life... You're not backed up on any payments.... You're actually advanced! Your cable bill isn't really much to you. You

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

> have a good car; it could be newer, or it doesn't matter, as long as it's in good shape, and not always breaking down... You've got a family, 'cause you need somebody to support you when you doubt yourself, and good friends when you feel like your family isn't enough... So, a good life for me would be just, ya know, a steady life.

Perdido admitted that while a stress-free life was impossible, achieving financial security would decrease stress. This and social well-being, contingent on support from both family members and friends, were key in his beliefs of a good life. Similarly, Samuel highlighted the lack of worry and the importance of family in his vision of a good life. I asked him to elaborate on "worry."

> I meant not being able to worry about a lot of things. Being able to help out other people. And yeah, being able to also help family when it comes up because I'm big with family…Do the things that you want to be able to do in life.

Participants mostly grew up in ethnically and racially isolated communities, where families and neighbors struggled to overcome economic barriers. Many boys from their city, without clear paths for their futures, grew into young men who relied on underpaid jobs and, sometimes, street involvement to survive. It makes sense that living "stress free" or free of worries was salient for a good life. Participants anticipated helping people, particularly family, with bills or other needs.

Stability and satisfaction were also elements of a good life. Lucas said,

> A good life could be, like, I mean nowadays all people think about having is money and cars and everything. But I think it's like having a stable job. Like having a stable career and loving what you do. Let's say you buy a big house and then a lot of things and you keep on moving forward. And let's say you earn more money, and then you want a bigger house; like, you shouldn't get too ambitious. Like, you know, be proud of what you have.

For Lucas, a good life meant not only a stable and personally rewarding career, but a sense of

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

satisfaction in what he earned. Avoiding materialism was key for Lucas and other participants. I asked them to imagine their lives at 25, an age where they likely would have finished their undergraduate degrees, be in their career of interest, and living a semblance of the good life they described. King believed he would be playing in the NFL or working in some a sports-related field and living modestly. When asked about his life, he said,

> It depends. If I'm in NFL, I want like a little house, like a little apartment or something. I don't want no big ole' [house], 'cause that's how you waste all your money. And you never know if you're gonna get replaced or even if you're gonna get drafted, so I just want something small that I could pay for no matter what job I got.

King's response shows how the career and condition domains of his postsecondary future self overlap. Instead of the flashy or lavish lifestyle associated with NFL players, he expected to live modestly in case the high-paying NFL career he imagined ended. King's reflection counters the materialism that may captivate adolescents who seek professional athletics. In sum, participants had relatively modest aspirations and judicious expectations for their future homes and possessions. Purchasing within their means was an essential component of a good life, so money could be devoted to more important matters, like caring for family members. Overall, however, findings also show that so much was absent from participants' depictions of a good life condition. I explore these chasms, and speculate on why they existed, in the Discussion.

Discussion

I investigated how Black and Latinx boys interpreted their high school's college-going culture as a source of inspiration for conceptualizing future pathways. Specifically, I focused on understanding the role Metro's college-going culture played in cultivating not only participants'

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

college mindsets and preparation processes (Griffin & Allen, 2006), but also their career and life condition ambitions, notions enveloped in a concept that I call "postsecondary future selves."

Metro's college-going culture mirrored schools with similar foci (e.g., college imagery, messaging, etc.; Achinstein et al., 2015; Gast, 2022; Noll, 2022). It prided itself on a 100% college acceptance rate, fulfilled through a college-over-everything-else belief system that withheld supports from those who pondered vocational paths, the military, or pre-college breaks. Its myopic focus on the "what" and "how" of college access (i.e., What is a college degree? How do I secure one?) came at the cost of conveying "why" (i.e., Why should I attend college?), which would have required attending to the role college plays in students' postsecondary future selves. By isolating supports on college, Metro overlooked other future realms (career and condition) that adolescents consider (Chavira et al., 2016; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999).

Metro students were required to apply to at least three bachelor-degree-granting colleges or universities and a community college that granted associate degrees. This requisite ensured students had at least one educational path at graduation. But Metro also benefited in many ways. By forcing students to apply to an open-enrollment community college, Metro kept its 100% college acceptance record, which it needed to compete in a neoliberal schooling market.

Metro upheld prestigious and pricier bachelor-degree-granting institutions as desirable, despite the economic stress faced by its families. While two-year colleges have low Black and Latinx transfer rates into four-year programs (Jain et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2018), they offer a more affordable option. Moreover, since students were steered away from vocational programs, those like Malik and Perdido were rudderless for determining paths to work with their hands. Research has shown the lengths "college-for-all" schools will go to pursue ambitious organizational goals for college acceptances (Noll, 2022). Findings here similarly reveal how Metro prioritized

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

amassing bragging rights at the cost of risking students' future educational and financial well-being. Though Metro's focus on college inspired some students' ambitions, it failed to cater to others' needs, owing to organizational goals for meeting neoliberal school market pressures.

Findings also show that participants were either college and career "clear" or "unclear," with varying ability to abstractly align college majors with desired careers. When analyzed with grade reports (see Table 2), Lucas, Samuel, and King – those who were college and career clear – had higher GPAs than Malik and Perdido, who were unclear. This reinforces findings that link adolescents' K-12 school experiences with goal setting (Hill et al., 2018; McCardle, 2020). Malik and Perdido were less incentivized to sustain school effort or overcome barriers, such as negative teacher encounters, due to perceiving school's irrelevance for certain future goals.

I found no evidence that Metro Collegiate worked to intentionally spark students' career aspirations. This is particularly unfortunate given that prior research shows how important it is for Black and Latinx adolescents from low-income homes to develop "work goals" (Yeager & Bundick, 2009) or "vocational hope" (Diemer & Blustein, 2007) to transcend barriers to attain their future aims. By fixating on college without aligning students' educational ambitions with career goals, Metro missed an opportunity to foster the holistic development of their postsecondary future selves.

Martinez and Huerta (2020) found that after weighing college against career, Latinx young men resolved the military was the best route to social mobility for their family. Similarly, a key reason Perdido sought to delay college was, like other Latinx boys and men (see Howard et al., 2019; Martinez & Castellanos, 2018), he sought to "foreground family" (Carey, 2021), and not risk precious family resources on college costs unless success was certain. These notions

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

show the complex negotiations Black and Latinx boys make, and the circuitous routes they can take, to achieve goals responsive to personal desires and family needs (Payne & Brown, 2010).

Participants struggled to envision their life condition after the age of 23, about when they graduate from college. This elucidated how hard "temporal extension" (see Lessing, 1972) – the ability to perceive the near or distant future – was for the boys. Though adolescents are poised for future thinking (Mello & Worrell, 2015), participants might have anticipated life changes so distinct from current realities that they tampered prospects for predictive precision. They might have also bounded their aspirations, due to anticipating inopportunity like the Black boys in Means and colleagues' (2016) study in rural contexts. Given how youths' temporal thinking is tied to social marginalization in both urban and rural contexts, findings show that geographic opportunity mapping (see Tate, 2008) is merited to shape youths' present and future endeavors.

Participants may not have fully ascribed to the linear temporalities governing White middle-class logics in Western cultures (see Houdek & Phillips, 2020), and upheld through an "organizational habitus" in schools (Kolluri, 2019). Perdido had the haziest college and career goals. But he clearly envisioned his desired adult life and backwards mapped his college and career aims. His non-linear temporal thinking circumvented the immediate for the distant future in ways sensitive to familial, not just individual, goals. Metro missed a chance to increase his prospect for goal actualization by not fostering his unique collectivist mindset.

Participants also expected modest life conditions with low economic stress. They aspired to attend to familial responsibilities and find joy from working in a career of interest instead of necessity, realities beyond the grasp of their family members. Findings also show that when participants conceptualized their post-college life condition, they centralize positive relationships (e.g., family prospects) and environmental mastery (e.g., living arrangements, financial stability,

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

happiness, and joy). Absent were hopes for ample materialism, owing to risks of greed. Thus, findings uphold work by Howard and colleagues (2016, 2019) showing that contrary to common portrayals, Black and Latinx boys are aware of, yet resist, masculinist norms of success (e.g., rugged individualism and consumerism). Findings challenge stereotypes that Black and Latinx boys seek grandiose lifestyles or material riches in place of attending to familial responsibilities.

Results point to what participants overlooked when determining a "good life" condition. They made no mention of future hobbies (e.g., videogaming), recreation, spiritual/religious participation, or organizational involvement. Possibly their economic subjugation made them direct energies solely toward envisioning upward social mobility instead of what would bring joy beyond college and career. Although family duties were central, they voiced no expectations or aspirations for spouses, romantic partners, or parenting. Findings here echo prior gender research showing boys as less inclined than girls to immediately envision intimate partnering or shared households (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Such inarticulations are gripping since Perdido, King, and Lucas lived in homes with their fathers (Malik and Samuel did not) and had positive relationships with them. This reality may also point to the lack of agency boys often have for envisioning or voicing life condition goals.

Findings show both the range and limits of youths' creative future imaginings. For instance, participants desired freedom. But their freedom renderings were more so a sovereignty from economic stress, fueled by White middle-class self-discipline norms and modest material aspirations. Missing were radical visions of collective liberation for Black and Latinx social futures. Although this was partly due to familial beliefs (see Carey, 2021, 2022), this finding can also be attributed to Metro's practice of (re)inscribing individualistic middle-class values – a complacency with status quo social arrangements – into its students' aspirational thinking. This

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

draws attention to the need for radical and critical educators to help students embrace "social dreaming beyond the constraints of current institutional bounds" (Mirra & Garcia, 2022, p. 347) so youth can imagine past existing, seemingly immovable, oppressive social arrangements.

Participants' altruistic and civic leanings were geared more toward home and family functioning, not broader community uplift. Yet racial and economic subjugation delimit routes for Black and Latinx *boys* to grow healthily into flourishing and liberated *men* (Grant, 2012; Love, 2019). When merely imagining futures, or insisting on seeing themselves in social futures, they exhibit a radical civic engagement rooted in resistance (Woodson & Love, 2019). Thus, when Black and Latinx boys conceptualize and plan for healthy lives that are mindful of family, they also fortify their communities and give back to them in their lifetimes and everlastingly.

Implications and Conclusions

Supporting Black and Latinx students' postsecondary educational access is key. Yet educators must widen the scope of college-going cultures to help all students – boys, girls, and nonbinary youth – form linkages between college, career, and their eventual life condition. To help, this study poses implications for researchers, educators, and other school service providers.

Postsecondary Future Selves for Research

As researchers explore students' college or career readiness, or general ambitions, extending inquiries to include the condition domain widens scholarly possibilities and prospects for intervention. When researchers investigate adolescents' ambitions through the lens of only one domain, they may miss accounting for other expected life aspects shaping their mindsets.

Behavioral research often emphasizes the role of Black and Latinx adolescents "possible selves" and "future orientations" in deterring negative social and academic outcomes (Prince et al., 2019; So et al., 2018). Less attention is given to how stakeholders can support youth in

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

imagining and envisioning flourishing futures. Postsecondary future selves ushers interventions aimed at not just buffering youth against what they should avoid, it fosters discoveries into what adolescents should embrace to actualize best versions of their lives.

Needed are more school-based qualitative studies on marginalized adolescents' futures. Researchers often study youths' futures with surveys and scales for quantitative analyses (see Jackman & MacPhee, 2017; Prince et al., 2019). Such approaches overlook the voices of youth themselves and the realities that shape them. In affording boys the space to discuss school practices as experienced, this study elicited complex insights on specific contextual phenomena. In addition, studies on youths' futures must account for broader oppressive mechanisms (Hines et al., 2023). Marginalized youth, who expect barriers at the nexus of gender, race, ethnic, and economic marginalization, may forgo ambitious college and career goals at the sake of attending to more immediate financial needs. Researchers must be attuned to youths' lived realities with subjugation or run the risk of advocating imprecise and circumstantially myopic interventions.

Ample retrospective studies of racially marginalized adults have uncovered pre-college and pre-career school factors that shaped their eventual life outcomes (Lateef et al., 2023; Patrón, 2020; Silva & Snellman, 2018; Warren, 2017). More studies are needed of youth as they formulate, rather than reflect on, elements of postsecondary future selves. Determining what does or does not work from student perspectives offers candid, raw, unbiased glimpses into ways forward for school policies and practices.

Postsecondary Future Selves for School Practice

Postsecondary future selves (e.g., the 3Cs) offers practitioners a heuristic for helping youth – especially high schoolers – determine "what happens next?" While applicable across school settings, it especially holds potential for building more robust, student-centric college-

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

going cultures. When educators in college-going schools deny supports to those uninterested in college, students may question the legitimacy of their aspirations, feel ostracized, and detach from school altogether. Practices based in the 3Cs may loosen such inflexible cultures by building on students' interests or inspiring them to imagine their lives unfolding in other ways. I am not advocating that educators prioritize career preparation and overlook college for Black and Latinx students. To the contrary, postsecondary future selves considers both as interlocking domains that should align and guide students' pursuits. As some students may be more excited about career than college, or more certain about the life they want than their educational or vocational path, educators can help students align ambitions and strategize to achieve their goals.

Vitally, adolescents rightly vacillate between interests and change their mind on college, career, and condition goals often (see Conley, 2017). Postsecondary future selves should not guide rigid interventions that box students prematurely into certain pathways. Stakeholders using the 3Cs must do so mindful of youths' evolving interests and passions and create interventions that are both pliable and responsive to students' changing ideas.

Postsecondary future selves challenges stakeholders to unhook from social biases. If educators view Black and Latinx boys as anti-academic or view them only capable of fulfilling stereotypical roles, how can they steer youth toward finding paths that seize their potential and lead to thriving lives? When educators utilize postsecondary future selves with marginalized students, they must simultaneously adopt asset-based, antiracist, and anti-oppressive mindsets.

Importantly, relationships between students and counselors matter tremendously in determining college going pathways, especially for boys (Bryan et al., 2023). However, counselors cannot be the only ones tasked with cultivating students' futures. Needed are responsive, whole-school approaches (Hines et al., 2023). Teachers can deploy postsecondary

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

future selves in lessons to crystallize youths' visions for what success or joy looks or feels like for them and map out steps to attain it. Educators can deploy postsecondary future selves in curricular experiences using literature, art, or even STEM-related materials so students can dream, design, and creatively build optimal futures (see Marciano et al., 2020 for an example).

Speculative education scholars and Afrofuturists propose metaphors and models to foster transformative, radical future thinking. Drawing from literacy scholar Rudine Sims Bishop, Toliver (2021) posited that not only should texts be mirrors (reflecting human experiences back to the reader) or windows (offering views into unfamiliar worlds), but also telescopes (allowing views into futuristic and fantastical worlds that are closer than they appear to be). As Black speculative texts can serve as telescopes into an "unseen existence of Black people" (Toliver, 2021, p. 30), so can reimagined school cultures help youth envision their own futures by looking "beyond what is and imagine what could be" (p. 30). Postsecondary future selves is a scaffold for youth to imagine and envision themselves, and us all, into new realms of possibility.

More attention is needed on the role schools play in restricting or widening what Black and Latinx boys imagine for their futures. Preparing and readying students for college and career is key, but there exist other robust possibilities for broader life aims, lives that creative educators and researchers must support marginalized adolescents in imagining and actualizing.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

References

Achinstein, B., Curry, M. W., & Ogawa, R. T. (2015). (Re)labeling social status: Promises and tensions in developing a college-going culture for Latina/o youth in an urban high school. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(3), 311–345. https://doi.org/10.1086/680407

Anderson-Levitt, K. M. (2006). Ethnography. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Moore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in educational research* (pp. 279–298). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Au, W. (2022). *Unequal by design: High-stakes testing and the standardization of inequality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Basile, V., & Lopez, E. J. (2018). Assuming brilliance: A decriminalizing approach to educating African American and Latino boys in elementary school STEM settings. *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, *24*(4), 361–379. https://doi.org/10.1615/JWomenMinorScienEng.2018020378

Brooms, D. R. (2022). 'I didn't want to be a statistic': Black males, urban schooling, and educational urgency. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *25*(3) 351–369. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1803821

Brown, W. T., & Jones, J. M. (2004). The substance of things hoped for: A study of the future orientation, minority status perceptions, academic engagement, and academic performance of Black high school students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *30*(2), 248–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798403260727

Bryan, J., Farmer-Hinton, R., Rawls, A., & Woods, C. S. (2017). Social capital and college-going culture in high schools: The effects of college expectations and college talk on students' postsecondary attendance. *Professional School Counseling*, *21*(1), 1096–2409.

https://doi.org/10.5330/1096-2409-21.1.95

Bryan, J., Kim, J., & Liu, C. (2023). Black males and school counselors: Do they experience the culture in counseling programs and departments differently from Black females?. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *51*(4), 233–254. https://doi.org/10.1002/jmcd.12282

Buras, K. L. (2014). *Charter schools, race, and urban space: Where the market meets grassroots resistance*. Routledge.

Carey, R. L. (2015). "Making our lives": The contributions of urban high school cultures to the future selves of Black and Latino adolescent boys [Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland]. https://doi.org/10.13016/M2005J

Carey, R. L. (2016). "Keep that in mind… You're gonna go to college": Family influence on the college going processes of Black and Latino high school boys. *The Urban Review*, *48*, 718–742. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-016-0375-8

Carey, R. L. (2018). "What am I gonna be losing?": School culture and the family-based college going dilemmas of Black and Latino adolescent boys. *Education and Urban Society*, *50*(3). 246–273. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517713112

Carey, R. L. (2019). Am I smart enough? Will I make friends? And can I even afford it? Exploring the college going dilemmas of Black and Latino adolescent boys. *American Journal of Education, 125*(3). 381–415. https://doi.org/10.1086/702740

Carey, R. L. (2020). Seeking resistance and rupture in "the Wake": Locating ripples of hope in the futures of Black boys. In C. Grant, A. Woodson, & M. Dumas (Eds.) *The future is Black: Afropessimism, fugitivity, and radical hope in education* (pp. 89–94). New York: Routledge.

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Carey, R. L. (2021). Foregrounding family: How Salvadoran American boys interpret and formulate college-going mindsets at the nexus of family, school, and the self. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *52*(3). 294–314. https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12372

Carey, R. L. (2022). Whatever you become, just be proud of it. Uncovering the ways families influence Black and Latino adolescent boys' postsecondary future selves. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *37*(1). 59–97. https://doi.org/10.1177/07435584211018450

Carey, R. L., Polanco, C., & Blackman, H. (2022). Black adolescent boys' perceived school mattering: From marginalization and selective love to radically affirming relationships. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *32*(1). 151–169. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12706

Castillo, E. (2020). A neoliberal grammar of schooling? How a progressive charter school moved toward market values. *American Journal of Education*, *126*(4), 519–547. https://doi.org/10.1086/709513

Chavira, G., Cooper, C. R., & Vasquez-Salgado, Y. (2016). Pathways to achievement: Career and educational aspirations and expectations of Latina/o immigrant parents and early adolescents. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *15*(3), 214–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2015.1131693

Coleman, S. T., & Davis, J. (2020). Using asset-based pedagogy to facilitate stem learning, engagement, and motivation for Black middle school boys. *Journal of African American Males in Education (JAAME)*, *11*(2), 76–94.

Conley, D. T. (2017). The new complexity of readiness for college and careers. In K. Larsen McClarty, K. D. Mattern, & M. N. Gaertner (Eds.), *Preparing students for college and careers* (pp. 9–22). Routledge.

Cooper, C. R. (2011). *Bridging multiple worlds: Cultures, identities, and pathways to college*.

Oxford University Press.

Desimone, L. M., Stornaiuolo, A., Flores, N., Pak, K., Edgerton, A., Nichols, T. P., Plummer, E. C., & Porter, A. (2019). Successes and challenges of the "new" College-and Career-Ready Standards: Seven implementation trends. *Educational Researcher*, *48*(3), 167–178. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19837239

Diemer, M. A., & Blustein, D. L. (2007). Vocational hope and vocational identity: Urban adolescents' career development. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *15*(1), 98–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072706294528

DiMartino, C., & Jessen, S. B. (2018). *Selling school: The marketing of public education*. Teachers College Press.

Eccles, J. S., & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *53*(1), 109–130. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135153

Farmer-Hinton, R. (2011). On being college prep: Examining the implementation of a "college for all" mission in an urban charter school. *The Urban Review*, *43*(5), 567–596. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-010-0168-4

Gast, M. J. (2022). Reconceptualizing college knowledge: Class, race, and Black students in a college-counseling field. *Sociology of Education*, *95*(1), 43–60. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407211046053

Gibbs Grey, T. (2022). Reppin'and risin'above: Exploring communities of possibility that affirm the college-going aspirations of Black youth. *Urban Education*, *57*(7), 1177–1206. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918804020

Grant, C. A. (2012). Cultivating flourishing lives: A robust social justice vision of education.

American Educational Research Journal, *49*(5), 910–934. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831212447977

Griffin, K., & Allen, W. (2006). Mo' money, mo' problems? High-achieving Black high school students' experiences with resources, racial climate, and resilience. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 478–494. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40026816

Goyette, K. A. (2008). College for some to college for all: Social background, occupational expectations, and educational expectations over time. *Social Science Research*, *37*(2), 461–484. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2008.02.002

Hill, N. E., Liang, B., Bravo, D. Y., Price, M., Polk, W., Perella, J., & Savitz-Romer, M. (2018). Adolescents' perceptions of the economy: Its association with academic engagement and the role of school-based and parental relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *47*(5), 895–915. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-017-0802-5

Hines, E. M., Mayes, R. D., Harris, P. C., & Vega, D. (2023). Using a culturally responsive MTSS approach to prepare Black males for postsecondary opportunities. *School Psychology Review*, *52*(3), 357–371. https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2021.2018917

Hooker, S., & Brand, B. (2010). College knowledge: A critical component of college and career readiness. *New Directions for Youth Development*, *2010*(127), 75–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.364

Howard, T. C. (2014). *Black male(d): Peril and promise in the education of African American males*. Teachers College Press.

Howard, T. C., Woodward, B., Navarro, O., Huerta, A. H., Haro, B. N., & Watson, K. (2019).

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Renaming the narrative, reclaiming their humanity: Black and Latino males descriptions of success. *Teachers College Record*, *121*(5), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811912100504

Howard, T. C., Flennaugh, T., & Tunstall, J. (Eds.). (2016). *Expanding college access for urban youth: What schools and colleges can do*. Teachers College Press.

Howard, K. A., Carlstrom, A. H., Katz, A. D., Chew, A. Y., Ray, G. C., Laine, L., & Caulum, D. (2011). Career aspirations of youth: Untangling race/ethnicity, SES, and gender. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *79*(1), 98–109. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2010.12.002

Houdek, M., & Phillips, K. (2020). Rhetoric and the temporal turn: Race, gender, temporalities. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *43*(4), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2020.1824501

Huerta, A. H., McDonough, P. M., & Allen, W. R. (2018). "You can go to college": Employing a developmental perspective to examine how young men of color construct a college-going identity. *The Urban Review*, *50*(5), 713–734. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-018-0466-9

Jackman, D. M., & MacPhee, D. (2017). Self-esteem and future orientation predict adolescents' risk engagement. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, *37*(3), 339–366. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431615602756

Jain, D., Herrera, A., Bernal, S., & Solorzano, D. (2011). Critical race theory and the transfer function: Introducing a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *35*(3), 252–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2011.526525

Johnson, M. K., Crosnoe, R., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2011). Insights on adolescence from a life course

perspective. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *21*(1), 273–280. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00728.x

Kerpelman, J. L., Eryigit, S., & Stephens, C. J. (2008). African American adolescents' future education orientation: Associations with self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and perceived parental support. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *37*(8), 997–1008. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-007-9201-7

Knight, D. S., & Duncheon, J. C. (2020). Broadening conceptions of a "college-going culture": The role of high school climate factors in college enrollment and persistence. *Policy Futures in Education*, *18*(2), 314–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210319860987

Knight-Manuel, M. G., Marciano, J. E., Wilson, M., Jackson, I., Vernikoff, L., Zuckerman, K. G., & Watson, V. W. (2019). "It's all possible": Urban educators' perspectives on creating a culturally relevant, schoolwide, college-going culture for Black and Latino male students. *Urban Education*, *54*(1), 35–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916651320

Kolluri, S. (2019). Reconsidering organizational habitus in schools: One neighborhood, two distinct approaches to advanced placement. *Harvard Educational Review*, *89*(1), 109–131. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-89.1.109

Lateef, H., Gale, A., Jellesma, F., & Borgstrom, E. (2023). "The belief to aspire": The association between Afrocentric values in the educational and career aspirations of young Black males. *The Urban Review*, 1–16. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-023-00680-7

Lessing, E. E. (1972). Extensions of personal future time perspective, age, and life satisfaction of

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

children and adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, *6(3)*, 457–468. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0032576

Lincoln, Y. S. (1995). Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *1*(3), 275–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049500100301

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. Beacon Press.

Marciano, J. E., Watson, V. W., Beymer, A., & Deroo, M. R. (2020). Examining moments of possibility toward college readiness in a literacy-and-songwriting initiative. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *63*(6), 615–626. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1049

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, *41*(9), 954–969. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954

Martinez, M. A., Lewis, K., & Marquez, J. (2020). College ready at a cost: Underrepresented students overwhelmed, scared, increasingly stressed, and coping. *Education and Urban Society*, *52*(5), 734–758. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124519887713

Martinez Jr., E., & Castellanos, M. (2018). Catching them early: An examination of Chicano/Latino middle school boys' early career aspirations. *The Urban Review*, *50*(3), 378–401. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0438-5

Martinez Jr., E., & Huerta, A. H. (2020). Deferred enrollment: Chicano/Latino males, social mobility and military enlistment. *Education and Urban Society*, *52*(1), 117–142. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124518785021

McCardle, T. (2020). Race tracks: Career aspirations and feelings of isolation in the mainstream classroom. *Education and Urban Society*, *52*(2), 284–311. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124519846277

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

McCabe, K., & Barnett, D. (2000). First comes work, then comes marriage: Future orientation among African American young adolescents. *Family Relations*, *49*(1), 63–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2000.00063.x

Means, D. R. (2019). Crucial support, vital aspirations: The college and career aspirations of rural Black and Latinx middle school students in a community-and youth-based leadership program. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *35*(1). 1–14.

Means, D. R., Clayton, A. B., Conzelmann, J. G., Baynes, P., & Umbach, P. D. (2016). Bounded aspirations: Rural, African American high school students and college access. *The Review of Higher Education*, *39*(4), 543–569. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2016.0035

Mello, Z. R., & Worrell, F. C. (2015). The past, the present, and the future: A conceptual model of time perspective in adolescence. In M. Stolarski, N. Fieulaine, W. van Beek (Eds.), *Time perspective theory; Review, research and application: Essays in honor of Philip G. Zimbardo* (pp. 115–129). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-07368-2_7

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(7), 388–400. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309471

Mirra, N., & Garcia, A. (2022). Guns, schools, and democracy: Adolescents imagining social futures through speculative civic literacies. *American Educational Research Journal*, *59*(2), 345–380. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312221074400

Noll, L. A. (2022). Accountability and (in) congruence in a no-excuses school college-going culture. *American Educational Research Journal*, *59*(1), 112–145.

https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312211057303

Nurmi, J. E. (1991). How do adolescents see their future? A review of the development of future orientation and planning. *Developmental Review*, *11*(1), 1–59. https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(91)90002-6

O'Reilly, K. (2008). *Key concepts in ethnography*. Sage.

Oyserman, D. (2015). *Pathways to success through identity-based motivation*. Oxford University Press.

Oyserman, D., & Fryberg, S. A. (2006). The possible selves of diverse adolescents: Content and function across gender, race, and national origin. In C. Dunkel & J. Kerpelman (Eds.), *Possible selves: Theory, research, and application* (pp. 17–39). Nova.

Patel, L. (2014). Countering coloniality in educational research: From ownership to answerability. *Educational Studies*, *50*(4), 357–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2014.924942

Patrón, O. E. (2020). "The revolution begins at home:" exploring educational aspirations between Latino male collegians and their families through a reciprocity of relationships. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *33*(4), 446–464. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2019.1681545

Payne, Y. A., & Brown, T. M. (2010). The educational experiences of street-life-oriented Black boys: How Black boys use street life as a site of resilience in high school. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *26*(3), 316–338. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986210368646

Perry, J. C., & Vance, K. S. (2010). Possible selves among urban youths of color: An exploration

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

of peer beliefs and gender differences. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *58*(3), 257–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845316670032

Polite, V. C., & Davis, J. E. (Eds.). (1999). *African American males in school and society: Practices and policies for effective education*. Teachers College Press.

Prince, D. M., Epstein, M., Nurius, P. S., Gorman-Smith, D., & Henry, D. B. (2019). Reciprocal effects of positive future expectations, threats to safety, and risk behavior across adolescence. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, *48*(1), 54–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2016.1197835

Riegle-Crumb, C., Moore, C., & Ramos-Wada, A. (2011). Who wants to have a career in science or math? Exploring adolescents' future aspirations by gender and race/ethnicity. *Science Education*, *95*(3), 458–476. https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20431

Rios, V. M., & Vigil, J. D. (2017). *Human targets: Schools, police, and the criminalization of Latino youth*. University of Chicago Press.

Rosario-Moore, A., & Colar, B. K. (2022). "Make sure we don't lose who we are": Young Black men navigating the college choice process at majority Black high schools. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 1–22. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2022.2047634

Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(4), 719–727. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719

Savitz-Romer, M., & Bouffard, S. (2012). *Ready, willing, and able: A developmental approach to college access and success*. Harvard Education Press.

Schneider, B. L., & Stevenson, D. (1999). *The ambitious generation: America's teenagers,*

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

motivated but directionless. Yale University Press.

Schofield, J. W. (2002). Increasing the generalizability of qualitative research. In A. M. Huberman and M. B. Miles (Eds.), *The qualitative researcher's companion*, (pp. 171–203). Sage Publications.

Scott, J. (2009). The politics of venture philanthropy in charter school policy and advocacy. *Educational Policy*, *23*(1), 106–136. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808328531

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers College Press.

Silva, J. M., & Snellman, K. (2018). Salvation or safety net? Meanings of "college" among working-and middle-class young adults in narratives of the future. *Social Forces*, *97*(2), 559–582. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soy050

Smetana, J. G. (2010). *Adolescents, families, and social development: How teens construct their worlds*. John Wiley & Sons.

So, S., Gaylord-Harden, N. K., Voisin, D. R., & Scott, D. (2018). Future orientation as a protective factor for African American adolescents exposed to community violence. *Youth & Society*, *50*(6), 734–757. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X15605108

Spencer, G., de Novais, J., Chen-Bendle, E. C., & Ndika, E. (2023). A dream deferred: Post-traditional college trajectories and the evolving logic of college plans. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 1–23. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2023.2216611

Stipanovic, N., & Woo, H. (2017). Understanding African American students' experiences in STEM education: An ecological systems approach. *The Career Development Quarterly*, *65*(3), 192–206. https://doi.org/10.1002/cdq.12092

Accepted Manuscript
Version of Record at: https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312231214477

Storlie, C. A., Albritton, K., Cureton, J. L., & Byrd, J. A. (2019). African American and Latino male youth: Perceived strengths in career exploration. *Journal of Counselor Practice*, *10*(2), 22–50. https://doi.org/10.22229/aal1022019

Tate IV, W. F. (2008). "Geography of opportunity": Poverty, place, and educational outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, *37*(7), 397–411. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X08326409

Toliver, S. (2021). On mirrors, windows, and telescopes. *Council Chronicle*, *31*(1), 29–30.

Vega, D., Hines, E. M., Mayes, R. D., & Harris, P. C. (2016). Preparing Latino students for life after high school: The important role of school counselors and school psychologists. *National Youth Advocacy and Resilience Journal*, *2*(1), 70–82. https://doi.org/10.20429/nyarj.2016.020107

Warren, C. A. (2017). *Urban preparation: Young Black men moving from Chicago's south side to success in higher education*. Harvard Education Press.

Welsh, R. O. (2022). Overlooked exclusionary discipline: Examining placement in alternative schools, expulsions, and referrals to hearing in an urban district. *Educational Policy*, *36*(3), 550–586. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904820901481

Welton, A. D., & Martinez, M. A. (2014). Coloring the college pathway: A more culturally responsive approach to college readiness and access for students of color in secondary schools. *The Urban Review*, *46*(2), 197–223. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-013-0252-7

Woodson, A. N., & Love, B. L. (2019). Outstanding: Centering Black kids' enoughness in civic education research. *Multicultural Perspectives*, *21*(2), 91–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/15210960.2019.1606631

Xu, D., Ran, F. X., Fink, J., Jenkins, D., & Dundar, A. (2018). Collaboratively clearing the path

to a baccalaureate degree: Identifying effective 2- to 4-year college transfer partnerships. *Community College Review*, *46*(3), 231–256. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552118772649

Yeager, D. S., & Bundick, M. J. (2009). The role of purposeful work goals in promoting meaning in life and in schoolwork during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *24*(4), 423–452. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558409336749