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## Divergent Values: A Family Critical Race Theory Analysis of Families of Color and Their Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching as a Profession

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# Divergent Values: A Family Critical Race Theory Analysis of Families of Color and Their Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching as a Profession

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## Divergent Values

### A Family Critical Race Theory Analysis of Families of Color and Their Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching as a Profession

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#### Abstract

In seeking strategies for diversifying the U.S. public school teacher workforce, education policymakers and teacher education programs need to meaningfully consider input from the families of PK-12 Students of Color. Using a Family Critical Race Theory (FamilyCrit) analysis, this article examines the educational experiences and related perspectives of Families of Color about teachers and the teaching profession. Findings reveal that Families of Color perceive teaching as a form of caring and teachers as extended family members. Families of Color wrestled with a divergence of values in encouraging their children to pursue their passions, while concomitantly confronting economic injustices. Findings challenge dominant narratives that Families of Color do not have college or career aspirations for their children.

*Key Words:* families of color, racism, critical race theory, teaching career, college-going culture

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## Introduction

National- and state-level educational policy directed at creating a teaching workforce that mirrors the racial demographics of the U.S. public school student body reveal policymakers' failure to include the voices of Families of Color (Villegas et al., 2012; Yull et al., 2014). Herein we argue that research focused on Families' of Color experiences with schools, and how these experiences influence their children's college and career decision-making processes, can foster the development of culturally responsive educational policies and practices dedicated to strengthening college-going culture in public schools that also attracts Communities of Color into the teaching profession.

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) reflects on her schooling experiences in the apartheid South, including how Black educators not only centered the voices of Black families, but devoted their careers to nurturing Black intellectualism through their pedagogical practices, which included building and sustaining strong ties with their students' families and broader communities. hooks notes:

My teachers made sure they “knew” us. They knew our parents, our economic status, where we worshipped, what our homes were like, and how we were treated in the family. I went to school at a historical moment where I was being taught by the same teachers who had taught my mother, her sisters, and brothers. My effort and ability to learn was always contextualized within the framework of generational family experiences. (p. 3)

hooks' teachers embodied the characteristics of culturally relevant and responsive educators who saw the value of building relationships with families and in the communities in which they taught (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Educational research reveals that children whose families are engaged in, and hold high expectations for, their education, tend to earn higher grades, to graduate from high school, and are more likely to pursue higher education (Ceja, 2006; Knight et al., 2004; Matos, 2015). Although most PK-12 schools claim to value “parent engagement,” the nature of this engagement tends to be superficial or ill-conceived, revealing an overarching perspective of Families of Color and their children as deficient in social and cultural capital (Bettinger & Evans, 2019; Welton & Martinez, 2014). For example, the schools attended by the children of the family member interview participants in the study at focus in this article, often host FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Night events at which largely white, monolingual English-speaking school personnel typically engage in un-scaffolded college financial aid “information dumping” that overwhelms families in ways that actually depress college-going economic readiness for financial aid.

This study spotlighted in this article was guided by the following research questions: (1) *How do Families of Color describe the nature of the relationships they have with their children's teachers?*; (2) *How, if at all, do Families of Color experience and describe “care” as an element of their relationship with teachers*

and their children's college-going process?; and (3) *What are the perceptions of Families of Color about the teaching profession as a career option for their children?* By combining and then building off of aspects of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Race Feminism (CRF), and Critical Race Parenting (ParentCrit), we propose Family Critical Race Theory (FamilyCrit) in order to further/expose and challenge white-supremacist, capitalist, and heteropatriarchal definitions of parenting. The specific qualitative interview data on which this article is based was drawn from a broader three-year, state-funded, mixed methods research project. By focusing on listening to, and learning from, Families' of Color experiences with schools, our findings elucidate that these families think of teachers as an extension of the family, yet concomitantly recognize that most teachers do not care about their children. The families differentiated caring teachers as those who expressed love and held high expectations for their children, often jointly manifest in the time and attention these teachers put into providing information about postsecondary education and career options.

## Literature Review

### ***A Predominantly White Teacher Workforce: Repaying the Racialized Education Debt to Families of Color as a Pathway to Diversifying the Teaching Profession***

While the need to diversify the U.S. teacher workforce has been a persistent focus of research for decades, the need persists unabated (Burns Thomas, 2020; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Sleeter et al., 2015). Many educational scholars have presented decisive evidence that diversifying the teacher workforce not only has benefit for all students, it is also a means to reduce the racialized *educational debt* owed to Students of Color and their families (Gershenson et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Scholarship about this debt points to the negative effects, including the disproportionate negative economic effects, of structural racism on Students of Color and their families, and how persistent deficit narratives and ideologies about Students of Color and their families are continuously reified in and across educational contexts (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Kundu, 2020; Kohli et al., 2017). Scholars have also captured evidence of how Parents of Color experience racism in their children's schools (Caldas & Cornigans, 2015; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Yull et al., 2014; Yull & Wilson, 2018). Kohli et al. (2017) point to Families' of Color experiences of racism in their children's schools as a primary way that white supremacy is maintained in the U.S. educational system.

The implications of this literature are as broad as they are brutal, yet research on Families of Color in relation to schooling is extremely sparse. Even less literature exists on how Families of Color influence their children's decision-making about careers, in particular about careers in education, including teaching.

**Undervalued and Unrecognized:****How Families of Color Draw on Cultural Wealth and Funds of Knowledge in Resisting and Responding to their Educational Exclusion**

The *aspirational capital* dimension of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework helps demonstrate the importance of Family of Color engagement in schools, particularly as Family of Color engagement impacts Students' of Color "choice" to pursue teaching as a profession, including, if, how, and why this choice is made. Students' of Color educational and career aspirations are inextricably tied to the ways in which their families support their dreams for a yet-to-be realized future, even in the face of racial and socioeconomic oppression. For example, despite having some of the lowest educational attainment rates in the United States, Chicanx families still maintain exceptionally high aspirations for their children's future (Auerbach, 2007; Ceja, 2006; Solórzano, 1992).

When Students' of Color aspirational capital is recognized and affirmed in PK-12 schools, it can serve as a dynamic force connecting the experiences and funds of knowledge of these students and their families to teachers and schools in ways that bolster Students' of Color resilience in racialized educational and broader societal contexts (Farmer-Hinton, 2008; Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017; Kohli et al., 2017; Moll et al., 1992). However, Kiyama and Rios-Aguilar (2017) reveal how higher education culture perpetuates the myth that the "problem" of low educational participation and retention rests with under-represented students rather than with the inability of educational institutions, to even begin to mitigate structural racism and racial hegemony.

In order to combat deficit narratives and ideologies about Students of Color and their families, this research demonstrates how Families of Color positively influence the college and career decisions of Youth of Color despite their marginalization. In particular, scholarship must be prioritized that focuses on the assets of Families and Students of Color, and that seeks to disrupt narratives and ideologies that erroneously blame these families and students for problems that were created and are perpetuated by structural racism and classism, and, thus, can only be addressed through institutional culture shifts and solved by systemic transformation.

**Troubling the Single-Story:****(Re)defining Family Engagement Through the Lens of Families of Color**

Kiyama and Harper (2018) point to the myriad ways in which deficit narratives about parents of first generation college students, especially students from Families of Color (see also Harper et al., 2012) negatively affect families' engagement in schools. These deficiency perceptions have the unfortunate effect of limiting understanding of non-dominant family interaction to a *single story*, when, in reality, there is enormous diversity in these families' experiences (Adichie, 2009). Kiyama and Harper (2018) argue that broadening understanding of

marginalized families and the assets they bring can open up opportunities for systemically improving the culture of higher education for marginalized students and their families.

Identity among minoritized peoples is an ever-shifting part of fluid sociocultural evolution; for many identity is also inextricably linked to a communal experience or racial and/or ethnic community (Knight et al., 2004; Oliva & Alemán, 2019). Several critical scholars center the lived experiences of Families of Color—especially against the marginalizing effects racism and normative western culture—in order to reveal that it is the communal family unit, rather than individual fortitude, that is central in their resilience-building (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Matos, 2015; Marrun, 2020; Valencia & Black, 2002). This scholarship echoes hooks's (1994) characterization of the power of her teachers “knowing” her as something developed and strengthened over time through relationship building with her family. Engagement derived through work to build authentic partnerships with Families of Color can help educators understand how to better serve these families' collective goals. That said, the climate and culture of most schools is not conducive to building a Family of Color-centered educational community that recognizes as assets, and genuinely values and acts upon, the experiences, perspectives, and knowledge that these families bring (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Herrera et al., 2011).

The pervasive impact of what “normal” is in eurocentric scholarship has meant that the assets of families operating outside of the normative narrative are erased, ignored, or silenced (Welton & Martinez, 2014). A growing body of literature has sought to identify, and better understand, how distinct non-dominant cultural factors operate in Families of Color as assets against hegemony (Epstein, 2010; Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Knight et al., 2004; Kuperminc et al., 2008; Oliva & Alemán, 2019). For example, families from collectivist cultures tend to have more influence over youth career decisions than do families from individualistic cultures (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). In a *critical* quantitative study re-examining career prestige among Families of Color in the United States among whom collectivism is valued, Pérez Huber et al. (2018) found these families' rankings of career prestige to be quite different from previously-conducted eurocentric quantitative studies. Pérez Huber et al.'s analysis revealed that K-12 teaching was *the most* sought-after occupation for Latinx, African American, and Native American students. This finding is especially noteworthy considering the substantial attention in normativity-promoting literature bases being paid to closing the student-teacher racial demographic diversity gap through engagement of concerns about why more Students of Color are not choosing teaching as a career (Pérez Huber et al., 2018; Marrun et al., 2019). Accurately understanding what careers Families of Color most value and why and how they express this value is foundational to the success of any initiative designed to recruit more People of Color into the teaching profession.

***The Missing Puzzle Piece:  
Culturally Relevant and Responsive Family Engagement  
in the College and Career Decision-Making Process***

Scholarship that encourages scholars and practitioners to question assumptions made about the assets of Families of Color, enables vital critical reflection on the practices of school-based college and career advising documented in the literature. Perhaps unsurprisingly, remarkably little has changed in these advising arenas in the last century, despite the persistent *opportunity gap* for Students of Color (Barabasch & Dykeman, 2012; Kundu, 2020). The persisting barriers to effective school-based advisement for Students of Color and the lack of a collaborative college-going culture within many schools reveal that schools remain deficient in their engagement with families (Jarsky et al., 2009). When these barriers are considered alongside these students' broader racialized school experiences, the push-out of Families of Color, as well as of their experiences, values, and knowledge bases, from schooling systems exacerbates the dearth and inadequacy of college and career advising opportunities for their children (Kohli et al., 2017).

Despite the pervasiveness of push-out of Families of Color from most schools, models for culturally relevant and responsive family engagement (CRRFE) do exist (Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Liou et al., 2009; Welton & Martinez, 2014). *Co-operative engagement* with Families of Color in ways that value family voice and action in school communities, even when family voice and action are at odds with current school culture, policies, or practices, is a key feature of CRRFE models (Jackson et al., 2015; Yull et al., 2014). *Affirming community cultural wealth*, especially when this wealth is expressed outside of typical considerations of academic ability, is another important feature of CRRFE models (Watkins, 2006). *A collectively defined mission and vision for student success that acknowledges systemic failures and challenges posed by institutional racism* in another central feature of CRRFE models, and a feature that is often overlooked, but necessary to disrupt the more common and ineffective colorblind approaches to parent engagement (Yull et al., 2014). Racist- and color-evasive approaches ignore educational injustice and marginalization, thus result in surface-level interaction with families meant only to 'check the box' of parent involvement, rather than to enable authentic invitation of Families of Color into a process of democratic co-engagement with teachers and in schools (Annamma et al., 2017; Kuperminc et al., 2008; Yull & Wilson, 2018). However, building meaningful engagement with historically and persistently marginalized communities in schools is complex; more than encouragement to 'sit at the table,' it must result in collective partnership building with families and the broader communities from which they come in ways that lead to significant positive change in school climate, culture, and conventions (Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017).

Without CRRFE, educational practitioners working to build and retain a

more diverse teacher workforce are missing the piece of the puzzle that ultimately explains why Students of Color are not pursuing careers in teaching. While high schools are the primary brokers of college access information, across PK-12 school districts with exceptionally high college-going rates for all students (90% and above), information access is mediated by race and by class at all academic levels (Holland, 2019, p. 18).

Undocumented students often face multiple racial microaggressions during their college-choice processes, including: being expressly restricted from receiving information about college; being the target of insensitive comments and behaviors from peers as well as from educators; having to navigate around school personnel ignorance of various barriers faced by undocumented immigrants; and, having to overcome educators' lower or more narrow college expectations for them as a group (Nienhusser et al., 2016). While research in this specific area remains somewhat thin, these students' microaggressive experiences are echoed in empirical research about their experiences getting into and in higher education contexts (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Plachowski, 2019).

Understanding the complex history of the racial wealth divide in the United States (Lui et al., 2006) affirms the need for a Family Critical Race Theory (FamilyCrit) that centers as assets families' experiences, values, and knowledge bases in the work of dismantling structural barriers to building financial security. Shapiro (2004) explains the value of "transformative assets" or generational wealth passed down through 'gifting' of financial assets among family members, such as down payments for homes, cars, and money for college fees that occurs far more frequently in white families than in Families of Color. As a result of this divide, teacher compensation, which is lower than that of other careers with similar educational preparation requirements, becomes a career-choice tension for Students and Families of Color (Allegretto & Mishel, 2018). However, it is important to note that, despite this tension, Pérez Huber et al.'s (2018) study examining career prestige in Communities of Color found that the financial benefits of a career are not always the most important consideration when evaluating its prestige; students from collectivist cultures tend to value social service careers (e.g., social work, teaching, nursing) over careers that bring in individual higher pay but provided no community or social benefit (e.g., banker, corporate lawyer). These findings interrupt simplistic assumptions often made about why more People of Color do not choose teaching as a career (i.e., that it does not pay well).

Collectively this literature illuminates a clear need for a new framework that enables and requires practitioners and scholars to critically and self-reflexively examine their assumptions about Families of Color. This examination must not only (re)consider the role that these families play in college and career decisions, but also (re)consider what Families of Color value and how those values play out in pursuing dreams for their children's futures. An imperative understanding that educators must gain is that positive relationship building between themselves and

Families of Color is foundational to the disruption of the racialized school climates that serve as primary and persistent barriers to Family of Color engagement.

### **Theoretical Framework: Family Critical Race Theory (FamilyCrit)**

A growing number of research-based initiatives have focused on the recruitment of Students of Color into the teaching profession (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Sleeter et al., 2015; Villegas et al., 2012). However, Family of Color voices have been disregarded or devalued in educational policies directed at increasing teacher diversity, as well as in programs designed to actualize those policies (Gist et al., 2019; Valenzuela, 2017). Accordingly, we sought to develop an *allied* theoretical framework—one that centers the voices of Families of Color. In considering Critical Race Theory (CRT), Critical Race Feminism (CRF), and Critical Race Parenting (ParentCrit), we found that, individually, none was an adequate theoretical framework for this study, though elements of each worked well as beginning analytical lenses, and that elements of ParentCrit also provided further evidence of the need for a new allied framework.

CRT emerged from the Civil Rights Movement to critique the failure of even critical legal studies scholars to provide a legal analysis that was responsive to the lives of People of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Applied to education, *CRT challenges educational structures, policies, practices, and ideologies or master narratives that perpetuate deficit notions of Students of Color and their Families* (Dixson et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRF challenges mainstream feminism by examining how patriarchy intersects with other systems of oppression and privilege in an interlocking manner (Wing, 2003). As it relates to education, *CRF calls for the elimination of both gender, racial, and class oppression, while also critiquing the structures of domination and institutions of power—namely schools—that primarily blame and punish Mothers of Color for their children’s underachievement*. ParentCrit centers the *racial sensemaking* in which Parents of Color engage with their children to insulate them from internalizing racism and associated racialized narratives of themselves (Matias & Nishi, 2018). *ParentCrit also “centers the uniqueness of racial oppression’ as well as the myriad ways in which Whiteness is socially constructed within social relations,” including in education* (DePouw, 2018, p. 55). However, while ParentCrit claims an antiracist and counterhegemonic parenting praxis standpoint (Nishi & Montoya, 2018), ParentCrit research is centered on parentscholars, privileging the lived parenting experiences of Academics of Color, and, thus, failing to address the more complex realities of family life, including raising Children of Color, outside academia. Furthermore, by centering parenting, ParentCrit reifies respectability politics by invoking heteropatriarchal and false binary ideologies of the nuclear family legitimated by the state, including marriage.

We have opted to combine and, with respect to the limitations of ParentCrit, to also amplify, the aforereferenced elements of CRT, CFT, and ParentCrit, in consciously and intentionally codifying the tenets of a new framework, Family Critical Race Theory (FamilyCrit), for use in this study. Accordingly, FamilyCrit as we delineate and engage it in this work, is rooted in the following tenets: (1) centering the lived experiences of Families of Color through the prisms of race and racism; (2) understanding Family of Color dynamics through a lens situated in the intersections of especially race, class, and gender; (3) honoring Parent of Color racial sense-making with their children, and (4) challenging majoritarian narratives of parenting *and* related deficit perceptions of Families of Color as disinterested in education and unsupportive of their children's college-going process.

**FamilyCrit:  
Families of Color Challenging Hegemonic  
and Binary Definitions of Parenting**

Dominant narratives about how Families of Color “choose” to conceptualize the idea of family often characterize Families of Color as having “different” cultural patterns and values (Kim, 2009). However, race and racism have been constructed and institutionalized to exclude Families of Color from being a part of the heteropatriarchal middle-class model of the nuclear family. In fact, the middle-class nuclear family only exists and persists *because of* the gendered and racialized labor exploitation of Women of Color (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Wing 2003). So, though Women of Color have not always had the privilege to parent their children from within the dominant family structure, schools and policymakers have deemed them—not the systems that have excluded them from this privilege—as “dysfunctional,” “uncivilized,” “ghetto,” “pathological,” “deviant,” “lazy,” and simply uninvolved in, and unconcerned about, their children's education; these schools and policymakers have also deemed the children Women of Color give birth to as “low-IQ” (Moynihan, 1965; Richwine, 2009). But it is the lack of economic, legal, and sociopolitical protections afforded to Families of Color that has pushed them to rely on the extended family to raise their children. For example, in the Latinx community, there is no direct translation of the English word “parenting” in Spanish, thus no cultural value ascribed to it. At best, parenting translates to *crianza* meaning upbringing or nurturing.

Childrearing in Families of Color has mostly been perceived as a communal activity that includes biological immediate and extended family members, as well as kinship ties to others also deemed family that go beyond nuclear relations. Families of Color have survived systematic racism collectively: from Black enslaved mothers who witnessed their children being sold (Cowling et al., 2018), to the forced removal of Native American children from their homes and placement into state boarding schools (Child, 1998), to the imprisonment, without due

process, of Japanese American families during World War II, (Pak, 2001), to the on-going separation of Latinx and Black families from their children through mass arrest, detainment and deportation, and incarceration (Alexander, 2010; Rodriguez-Campo, 2021; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Just these few examples (of thousands that could be shared) surface how, over 500 years, U.S. institutions, including schools, have economically, socioculturally, psychologically, and legally profited and continue to profit, from the separation of Families of Color (Lui et al., 2006). When Families of Color resist hegemonic, falsely binary, deficit or otherwise limiting definitions of parenting, they challenge unchecked intersectionally racist, classist, and sexist assumptions of “parenting.”

One of the most prevalent, thus familiar, master narrative about Families of Color is that they do not care about their children’s education simply because they are not physically present in schools (Kim, 2009). Several deficit assumptions that are embedded in this master narrative connect back to the lack of support and mentoring that Students and Families of Color receive about college and career pathways (Liou et al., 2009). These deficit assumptions include that: (1) Students of Color cannot focus on their futures because they are being raised in disorganized and dysfunctional families; (2) Families of Color don’t show up to school events (e.g., College and Career Fairs), so they must not care about their children’s futures; (3) Students of Color do not participate in after-school college enrichment programs solely because their families expect them to take care of younger siblings and/or undertake other responsibilities in the home; and (4) Families of Color unilaterally expect children to work while in high school to contribute to the family income. Once again, suggesting that Families of Color don’t care about their children’s education, blames them for “failing” to raise their children in heteropatriarchal middle-class nuclear families, instead of recognizing how past and continuing structural racism, classism, and sexism has systematically excluded them from being able to form or maintain nuclear family constellations (Lui et al., 2006; Valencia & Black, 2002).

## Methods

The data on which this article is based was collected across six public high schools within a large, diverse, metropolitan school district in the urban Southwestern United States. At the time of study, 322,000 students were enrolled in the district, of whom 46% were Latinx, 25% were white, 14% were Black/African American, 6% were multiracial (more than two races), 6% were Asian/American, 2% were Pacific Islander, and 0.5% were Native American. Nearly 63% of these students qualified for federal free or reduced lunch programming (LASD, 2020, p. 1). In contrast, approximately 74% of the teachers employed in the district at the same time were white.

The lack of racially-diverse teachers limits both Students of Color and their

Families opportunities to learn about a career in teaching in a race-conscious culturally responsive way (Gay, 2018). Teacher pay is also a significant factor in presenting teaching as a viable career option where the national average starting salary for teachers is \$40,154, compared to \$40,190 in the local district (NEA, 2020), though this pay goes much farther in the local context than in many others.

At the time of the study, the local economy was dependent on the tourist industry with an estimated 42 million visitors annually (LVCVA, 2019). Most Families of Color are employed in the service industry working multiple shifts around the clock. In order to sustain the city's 24-hour availability, there are typically three shifts. The day shift starts from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., the swing shift is from 4 p.m. to midnight, and graveyard shifts are from midnight to 8 a.m. These different shifts make it challenging for households with multiple jobholders to be physically involved at their children's schools. Although these shifts are not typical across the United States, there is a growing labor force of the working poor that hold multiple jobs, but remain at or below the poverty line (DeSilver, 2019).

### **Data Collection**

This article draws on specific qualitative interviews from a broader three-year, state-funded mixed methods research project examining the perceptions and attitudes Families of Color, including high school and college Students of Color, hold about the teaching profession, especially why Students of Color are not pursuing teaching as a career in greater numbers. Focus group and individual interviews were conducted with a total of fifteen family members of Students of Color across the project's six partner high schools, chosen based the schools' percentages of Students of Color, and absence of any pre-existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) focused-program initiative (teaching or otherwise). Data collection was undertaken by a multiracial team of public research university faculty, graduate students, and staff. During the period the data at focus in this article was collected, the team consisted of one Latina, one Black American, and two white professors (all women); one Latina professional staff and one white administrator (a woman); and five doctoral students, two Black American, one Latina, one South Asian, and one white (one Black American man, the rest women).

The recruitment and selection of interview participants occurred in five phases. First, members of the research team met with school administrators (usually the principal and one-to-two assistant principals) at each partner high school to coordinate participant recruitment. Second, team members gave a thirty-minute PowerPoint presentation to 3,518 high school students across all six schools to introduce the study, and then to scaffold explanation and execution of the study assent/consent forms/process (students were provided copies of the forms in Spanish and English). During the presentation, students were informed that their parents/family members were also invited to participate in the study.

Third, research team members gave a fifteen-minute informal bilingual (Spanish and English) oral presentation about the study at one or more parent/family-focused gatherings, and posted bilingual (Spanish/English) flyers of the study, at each school site. Fourth, research team members returned to the schools to collect completed consent forms and then to administer the paper survey to eligible parents/family members. A total of thirty-six parents/family members completed the paper survey and received a ten-dollar cash incentive upon completion. As family members handed in their surveys, they were asked if they might also be interested in participating in a post-survey focus group interview; those showing interest were asked to complete a contact information and race/ethnicity demographics form. Research team members used purposeful sampling to identify and invite an equitable number of participants across racial/ethnic backgrounds to participate in the interviews (Patton, 2002). Afterschool focus group interview times and specific within-school locations were scheduled at each of the six high school sites and then shared, via text/email/phone, with selected parents/family members.

### ***Participants: The Families***

While all members of each selected family were invited to participate in the interviews, fourteen of the fifteen who participated identified as parents (mothers or fathers); one participant identified as an aunt. As discussed, master narratives, including in curricular representations, of what constitutes a family, made it difficult to engage non-parent members of students' families in the interviews (Marrun et al., 2020). These narratives powerfully perpetuate the false reality that all students are raised and supported only by biological parents (a mother and/or father); in so doing these narratives persistently ignore the important roles played by extended family members, like aunts, cousins, grandparents, and members of social networks (e.g., members of families' faith communities). See Figure 1 for an overview of the participants' self-identified demographic profiles.

### ***Focus Groups and Individual Interviews***

Focus groups were conducted after school in a private area of the school library or an empty classroom. Three focus group interviews comprised of two-to-four Parents of Color were conducted (one interview included one aunt and three parents). One of the focus group interviews was video-recorded and the rest were audio-recorded. Additionally, five Parents of Color participated in an individual interview because either only one parent showed up to the focus group or because one parent only spoke English and the rest felt more comfortable speaking Spanish.

Focus group interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Individual interviews lasted between 36 and 90 minutes. Nine open-ended questions guided the interviews (see Figure 2).

The same questions were asked for both focus group and individual interviews. As previously alluded to, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in Spanish and English based on the participant preferences/needs. Family members received a twenty-five dollar cash incentive for their participation paid at the conclusion of the interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and, as needed, also translated from Spanish to English.

### **Data Analysis**

Through thematic analysis, inductive and deductive codes were used to organize the data (Saldaña, 2016). Inductive codes, originally codified by research team members using Atlas.ti, were used to categorize the data into three overarching topics: aspirations, barriers, and the teaching profession. Deductive codes were initially developed from a review of the extant literature. Codes were added, adjusted, or consolidated throughout analysis. Through Atlas.ti three cycles of inductive coding were conducted. The first coding cycle involved identifying

**Figure 1**  
**Demographics of Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Relationship</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>
1. Clara	mother	Latina/Hispana
2. Emilio	father	Latino/Hispano
3. Claudia	mother	Mexican American
4. Dina	mother	African American
5. Lola	mother	Latina
6. Ximena	mother	Latina
7. Ana	aunt	Latina
8. Ramón	father	Latino
9. Luís	father	Latino
10. Malena	mother	Latina
11. Lucia	mother	Latina
12. Rosalinda	mother	Latina
13. Kara	mother	African American
14. Justo	mother	Latina
15. Zari	mother	African American

significant excerpts from interview data to which to broadly assign inductive code categories. During the second cycle research team members conducted deep data dives by further annotating significant excerpts in order to elaborate on identified codes. For example, “barriers” as a category was further broken down into: “access,” “finances,” “family,” “expectations,” and, “sociocultural factors.” The third cycle of coding enabled researchers to refine category language and, sequentially

**Figure 2**  
**Parent Focus Group Protocol**

Questions	Sub-Questions
What aspirations do you have for your child?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What college/university do you want your child to attend and why?</li> </ul>
What career do you hope your child will pursue and why?	
Of your child’s teachers, who has been your favorite and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did these teachers say or do to make you feel like they cared about your child as a person and/or a student?</li> </ul>
When you think about the teaching profession—can you describe the physical and educational characteristics of who you envision as a teacher?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why do you think people chose teaching as a career?</li> <li>• Why do you think few Students of Color are pursuing teaching as a career?</li> </ul>
Have you ever encouraged your child to pursue teaching as a career? If so why? If not, why not?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any teachers in your family? If so, what do you know about their experiences as teacher?</li> <li>• Are there any teachers in your community (e.g., church)? If so, what do you know about their experiences as a teacher?</li> </ul>
How important is it to you to that the teaching workforce at the PK-12 level become more racially/ethnically diverse?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has your child had any racially/ethnically diverse teachers? If so, what has been their experiences with these teachers?</li> <li>• When your child had racially/ethnically diverse teachers, what have been your experiences with these teachers?</li> </ul>
What do you know about the process to become a teacher?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you know about teacher preparation and where did you learn it?</li> <li>• Do you know how much schooling a person needs to become a teacher?</li> <li>• Do you know how much money teachers make? If so, what do you think about that salary?</li> <li>• Do you know much money you/your family would need to make annually to be considered middle class?</li> <li>• If you were a teacher, at what grade level would you teach (e.g., elementary, high school, college) and why?</li> </ul>
Have you ever thought about becoming a teacher yourself, why or why not? If so, has something held you back from pursuing this idea? If so, what? If not, are you still interested in becoming a teacher? If not, why not?	
What information/support systems would help you to encourage your child to pursue teaching as a career?	

coupled with member-checking, to achieve coding saturation. In sum, analysis of interview data identified three key factors that inform familial perceptions of the teacher profession: perceptions of caring, financial barriers, and student aspirations. These factors were codified into two themes.

## Findings

Two significant themes surfaced through the data analysis process: (1) teaching as a form of caring and teachers as extended family; and (2) divergent values between home, school, and society about college, career exploration, and the teaching profession.

### ***Teaching as a Form of Caring: Families of Color Perception of Teachers as Extended Family***

Critical scholars consistently point to caring relationships as key to improving the academic engagement of Students of Color, including through which a strong college-going culture can be built (Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ware, 2006). However, these scholars note that eurocentric educational research has privileged studies focused on the importance of building caring (but not often *critically* caring) relationships between students (sometimes specifically Students of Color) and teachers (sometimes specifically white teachers), while very scant attention has been given to understanding the perceptions of teacher care/caring teachers held by Families of Color. In response to, and to contest master narratives about Families of Color, Scholars of Color have captured the practices and characteristics of culturally relevant and responsive Teachers of Color who emphasize critical care and love for their students (Collins, 2002; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Lynn, 2006). These Teachers of Color take on the role of extended family members, “othermothers,” and “otherfathers.” Love (2019) provides a deep analysis of how white teachers proclaim to love *all* children, but often fail to meaningfully get to know their students and families, and the communities from which they come. Many white teachers conflate surface-level relationships they establish with students and families—for example by using a “getting to know you” survey sent home at the beginning of the school year—with authentic relationship building. Love’s (2019) work clarifies what authenticity in teacher-student-family relationships must look like using the words *justice*, *love*, *joy*, and *anti-racism* and defining them relative to Children of Color through an *abolitionist teaching* lens: “to love *all* children, we must struggle together to create the schools we are taught to believe are impossible: schools built on justice, love, joy, and anti-racism” (p. 18, emphasis added). Love stresses the importance of centering love in teaching, and making schools places that are inhospitable to teachers who express racism and other forms of discriminatory attitudes and behaviors, thereby also making schools spaces in which students’ humanity is restored and sustained.

The Families of Color who participated in this study consistently framed the role of teachers through anti-eurocentric paradigms that reimagined teachers as extended family members whose role it is to love—radically *care* for—each student *as they would their own child*. Unfortunately, the family member participants in this study expressed that most teachers did not express love for their children, nor concern for their children’s future; this lack of love and concern was most evident to participants in teachers’ failures to hold high academic performance expectations for their children. During interviews, Family of Color participants, including Ximena, Ana, Malena, and Lucia, all Latina mothers, consistently and clearly expressed an ideal standard of care for their children that they expected to see from teachers. Emilio, a Latino father, specifically described this standard as follows:

I see [the teacher] as someone that is part of the family, right? That is, not just a person who is going to teach you things like following rules. It used to be like that, (laughter). His teacher is always behind him. He sees him slacking, he calls us. He actually worries about his students. It’s what I like best about him because other teachers, sometimes I don’t even think they care.

Here, Emilio conveys the expectation that his son’s teacher would demonstrate the heightened sense of care of family member and that this care would be tied to high behavioral expectations. Emilio’s partner, Clara, a Latina mother, also spoke about teacher care as passing on important skills to their children, including empowering their children to become “independent” and “capable” in ways that would enable them to feel empowered to advocate for themselves. Another participant, Justo, a Latina mother, described teachers as extended family by equating teachers to *tías* (aunts) or *tíos* (uncles).

### **Demonstrating Authentic Care Through *Cariño*, Tough Love, and Warm Demands**

Black and Latinx family member participants in the study also perceived teachers as authentically caring in ways that are clearly aligned with the concepts of *cariño* (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010; Velazquez, 2017), *tough love* (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lynn, 2006), and *warm demander* (Ware, 2006) discussed in the related extant literature. Undergirding family member perceptions of teacher authentic care is the deep-seated belief that the teacher believes in the potential of each child—that every child can and will achieve in their classroom. For example, Justo, described the *cariño* her daughter’s teacher conveyed this way:

My daughter’s first grade teacher was amazing because you could see the love she had for the children and her passion for teaching. She wanted the children to be immersed in reading and so she put up a poster of a flower and every time they [students] read books she would make the flower grow. My other daughter has dyslexia and I’ll never forget her second grade teacher. She was very patient and was determined to make sure that my daughter learned to read.

In this example, the teacher's care is expressed through rigorous, thoughtfully scaffolded academic expectations for her students that mirror Justo's own expectations for her daughters; the teacher's expectations in this regard manifest in a *pedagogy of care*. This aligns with Gándara's (1995) findings that a significant persistence factor in high-achieving, low-income Chicana students is the strong influence of mothers with authoritarian parenting styles that disrupt traditional white middle class mothering norms in two key ways: being highly involved in their children's lives, and building and maintaining rigorous expectations for their children's success. In this regard, the conceptualization of teachers as extended family members requires that teachers adopt and maintain equally high expectations for their Students of Color.

Similarly, Kara, an African American mother, reflected on her own educational experiences with *tough* teachers—teachers that held high expectations for her during her education that she interpreted as conveying their sense of *loving* care. She shared:

We had some tough teachers back then too. Their shells were strong. I don't know if that's a bad thing to say, but their shells were much stronger than teachers now. They were like our moms. They were not playing around! Even if that's not your character. Google how to be stern and play it off!

In contrast to her own educational experiences with teachers, Kara viewed some of her children's teachers as not tough enough to establish and uphold the structure and rigor necessary to support her children's success. Ware (2006) posits that a *warm demander* disposition is grounded in African American traditions that produce a culture of academic achievement in African American students through enactment of culturally responsive “care, high expectations, and skilled pedagogy” (p. 452). While Kara saw this disposition in many of her own teachers, she did not see it in most of the teachers her children have had.

### ***Divergent Values Between Home, School, and Society About College, Career Exploration, and the Teaching Profession***

Family member participants also characterized authentically caring teachers as those who took the time to connect students with resources and information about postsecondary options, and to help students plan their next steps after high school graduation. The most salient message that Family of Color participants like Luis, a Latino father, wanted to convey to their children about education and careers was to pursue their passions and desires; however, this message did not necessarily include pursuing a passion for teaching or the desire to teach. Dina, an African American mother, described how she conveys this message as follows:

I told my sons, and all children, that the sky is not the limit. The limit is what they set for themselves. So that they understand what their purpose in life is: to

be productive, strong, and responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Justo shared that while home and school influences affected her daughter's aspirations, the bottom line was less about what she may have wanted for her daughter, and more about what her daughter was interested in pursuing.

However, while the Family of Color participants often described teaching as a "caring," "noble," "beautiful," "admirable," and "rewarding" profession for which they held great respect, in other instances their perceptions of "successful" careers often contradicted their expressed values of success, instead reflecting school and societal definitions of professional success. Yet, when asked how important it was to diversify the teaching workforce, the overwhelming majority of the Family of Color participants expressed the belief that having a diverse teacher pool is important.

Family of Color participants whose children expressed an interest in teaching responded with analogous encouraging attitudes. Ramón, a Latino father, shared that regardless of what his children chose to do, he hoped that his son would, "do it well and do it for the good of humanity and that's all." Zari, an African American mother of a high school student, and of a college student who had switched career paths from pre-med (wanting to be a pediatrician) to education (specifically, teaching) shared:

She became a lot more successful because it was something that she was passionate about. So, for me, just [wanting] them to be successful, just whatever it is. Just be passionate about it...don't worry about the money or the fame or any of those things. So, for me, I'm a hundred percent behind them and I will support them. And if it's dancing or skateboarding, watercolor painting, hey, I got you!

These participant insights reveal the aspirational capital that Families of Color develop in their children as they progress throughout their education, capital that ultimately enables their children's educational and career success (Yosso, 2005). Zari described how she motivated her children in this way:

You don't have to dim yourself so that your friends can shine. You guys can all shine together. You guys gonna all be stars. Like, everybody can be a freaking star, we can all be stars. They just all shine, light up the sky!

Regardless of the barriers and limitations imposed on/faced by Students and Families of Color, family member participants described relentlessly encouraging their children to pursue their aspirations, no matter what.

In response to questions about why so few Students of Color pursue teaching as a career, family members made two key points: teaching as a career is devalued, and schools overwhelmingly emphasize to students the importance of pursuing jobs (not careers). Similar to previous studies documenting Students' of Color attitudes about the teaching profession, Family of Color participants echoed students' attitudes about the teaching profession as vastly undervalued and underpaid (Marrun et al., 2019; 2021). Lola, a Latina mother, noted that the teaching

profession, “Is the most poorly paid salary and they are the ones who should have a good salary because they are the ones who train young people to be professionals.” Although teaching is not a high-earning field, in most states teachers receive additional benefits, including health insurance, a retirement package, and job security, which can provide greater long-term financial stability. Despite the potential appeal of these additional career benefits, including as a teacher workforce recruitment incentive, these benefits are hidden from, unexplored with, or unexplained to Students and Families of Color (Marrun et al., 2021).

When probed about their children’s and/or their own experiences at college and career fairs, Family of Color participants did not recall the presence of recruiters from teacher education programs and/or College of Education advising centers. This lack of presence and recruitment effort from the gate-keepers of teacher preparation reveals that Colleges of Education lack investment in diversifying the teaching profession. Justo captures this impact this way:

They are taught from a young age that it is the career or trade that is going to give you more money. It’s not really what you are passionate about doing. Then, you are given the idea or concept that it is more important to make money than to chase your passion. If a person who is going to be doing valet parking is going to receive \$16 an hour plus tip, then it won’t interest you to go to school.

Dina, who attempted to become a teacher herself but didn’t because of educational and related economic hurdles, elaborates further on this value disconnect:

Everything now to become a teacher costs money. Especially all the tests you have to take. When you first become a teacher you gotta pay back those student loans and it becomes challenging on a teacher salary. Some people don’t see it as an investment and if they see it as an investment, it’s one that’s costly and it’s a big sacrifice. So, it’s unfortunate that this society doesn’t value teachers as much as they do some other professions like doctors, lawyers, and engineers. But, you can be a custodian for a transit system and make more money [than] a teacher. You know, it’s like, who does that? And, where is the balance?

Negatively amplifying this messaging is Student and Family of Color lack of access to information about teacher salaries and benefits, which has the effect of almost entirely removing teaching as a viable career option from the purview of Students of Color (Pérez Huber et al., 2018; Marrun et al., 2019).

Families of Color, immigrant, poor and working-class families, and especially families concomitantly situated at the intersections of all of these identifiers, are often perceived by educators as unsupportive of, and as a barrier to, their children’s postsecondary education (Welton & Martinez, 2014); as a result of these deficit views, Students of Color are rarely viewed as college-ready, despite the fact that within most Families of Color, at least some college-going knowledge is typically acquired through informal educational experiences of older children/siblings and/or extended family members and intentionally passed down.

Again, it is the structural barriers, not lack of aspiration to higher education,

that impede the educational attainment of Students of Color. In particular, the increasing costs of higher education continue to be an immediate and difficult barrier for Families of Color to overcome. Claudia, a Latina mother, commented that her son has “the desire, but we do not have the financial resources to give him.” About all of her children’s educational futures, she explicates further, “I can’t help them pay for college. Everything else I can give them, I support by pushing my children to continue going to school.”

Family member participants demonstrated no shortage of will or desire for their children to pursue a college education, but expressed worry about the limitations their economic realities could place on their children’s educational opportunities. Regardless, they considered higher education to be an invaluable benefit to their children. In concluding her interview, Zari, an African American mother, expressed, “I have always stressed education to my children. I tell them, ‘You own it and it’s yours forever. No matter where you go, you get to keep it.’”

### Conclusion and Recommendations Through FamilyCrit Praxis

At the outset of this article we articulated that education policy has failed to produce educational practices dedicated to strengthening college-going culture in public schools in ways that also attract Communities of Color to the teaching profession. We close this article with a call to educators—especially white teachers, staff, and administrators—to right now, and from this moment forward, center FamilyCrit in their educational praxis through engagement of the following recommendations:

1. Shift terminology from parent involvement to *family engagement*, and expand definitions of family to be broadly inclusive of *extended* family members and other *deemed* family members of multigenerational households.
2. Build and sustain *critically* caring relationships *with* Families of Color, including by providing multiple opportunities for Families of Color: a) to share who they are, what matters to them, and what they are already doing to support their children’s college-going process; and, b) to become meaningfully and sustainably involved in the life of their children’s schools, *especially* if their involvement *disrupts normative* school climate and culture;
3. *With* Families of Color, develop, enact, and continuously extend college-going and career exploration-oriented pedagogies of care that provide: a) critically race-conscious financial literacy, integrated with, b) well-scaffolded information about college/career options, including what it takes *to become a teacher* (cost, time-frame, coursework, licensure

requirements), as well as the perquisites of *being a teacher* (pay, raises, leave, healthcare, retirement); and, c) regular opportunities for Families of Color to interact with and learn from Teachers of Colors about their educational and career trajectories.

In sum, FamilyCrit-informed analysis of the findings from this study definitively flip-and-dismantle-the-script on deficit master narratives about Families of Color by revealing their exceptionally high aspirations for their children's future. Through this and future FamilyCrit research, educators have a powerful new critically race conscious unscript for *engaging with* Students of Color and their *families*.

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