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IS PROXIMITY ENOUGH? A CASE STUDY EXAMINING A COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM ON THE GROUNDS OF PUBLIC HOUSING ON THE WEST COAST

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IS PROXIMITY ENOUGH? A CASE STUDY EXAMINING A COLLEGE ACCESS
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ABSTRACT

IS PROXIMITY ENOUGH? A CASE STUDY EXAMINING A COLLEGE ACCESS

PROGRAM ON THE GROUNDS OF PUBLIC HOUSING ON THE WEST COAST

Nicole S. Berry

The issue of college access for students from low-income communities has been a
longstanding challenge in American higher education. Despite numerous efforts to address
the gaps in college attendance and graduation rates between students from low-income
and more affluent communities, the problem remains present. This has led to a need for
an in-depth analysis of college access programming explicitly tailored to low-income
communities, particularly those residing in public housing authorities. The Department of
Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2016) has recognized this need by funding and
piloting college access programs in several public housing authorities around the United
States. These programs aim to provide greater educational opportunities for residents of
closed communities with limited access to higher education, such as public housing
authorities.

This study examines the cultural capital students residing in public housing
authorities utilize to navigate a college access program on-site where they live by
employing a case study method highlighting their skills, knowledge, and resources. The
Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model, also called cultural capital, utilizes a non-
deficient view, highlighting the six tenets of capital possessed by Black and Latinx
students. Aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, linguistic, and social capital are

among the six tenets of the CCW model. The study's findings indicate that with access to resources and adequate support, students from low-income communities like public housing authorities can succeed in their college trajectories despite their environments. Staff from the PEER Program were also instrumental in the study's findings, demonstrating their support and guidance beyond the college access process.

The findings further revealed that modes of communication, program outreach, cultural support, self-efficacy, emotional state, and a holistic approach emerged as significant themes. Additionally, the participants benefited from encouragement, support, and resources from the PEER Program staff, family, community members, and school personnel extending beyond college access. A pivotal finding of this study is the resilience that kept participants motivated and focused. The study underscores the importance of providing culturally responsive and holistic support to students in low-income communities like public housing authorities by recognizing the importance of their cultural wealth.

DEDICATION

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all the outstanding people who have played an instrumental role in shaping my educational journey. I am immensely grateful to those who have selflessly supported and guided me along the way and who have always believed in me. With great respect and admiration, I dedicate this study to all of you.

To my mother, who encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone of "Marlboro Projects" and attend a five-week first-year orientation program when I was just 18 years old. Your encouragement helped me realize my true potential and paved the way for success. To my father, who has been an incredible source of support, always going above and beyond to provide for my needs. To my husband, Mr. Berry-Boone, who has been my rock throughout this journey, even during my moments of doubt. Your unwavering support and patience have kept me going.

To my daughter, Nia, my purpose, my best friend, my scholar, and the epitome of the best version of me but better. I am thrilled to graduate from college as you graduate from high school, as well as my son, Hunter, who has been with me from the beginning in the womb. We shared the same body as I went to class, studied, wrote, and cried. Today, you are my little genius!

My sisters, Michelle and Kim, have always been there for me. Kim ensured I graduated high school, and Michelle bought my first airline ticket to come home from college. I am grateful for the support and encouragement of my nieces and nephews, Tanisha, Shereen, Louis, John, Andrew, Marissa, and Jah, who have also been vital to my journey.To my friends who are family, Malisa, Sala, Naima, Chavonne, Joanne, Rheba, Nene, Shannon, Kirt, Dr. Brown-Pedro, Dr. McLean, Dr. McEwen, and my beautiful

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as American society's primary means of upward

social mobility. However, students from low-income communities face numerous

obstacles in accessing educational opportunities, such as college preparation, which is

vital for upward mobility (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McDonough, 2004). This results in

the perpetuation of income inequality, which has become increasingly concerning in

recent years. According to recent statistics, the poverty rate in the United States was 11.6

percent in 2021, with 37.9 million people living in poverty. This underscores the urgency

of addressing the educational disparities low-income students face to promote social

equality.

Families living in low-income communities often struggle with their children

attending schools that lack proper funding, resources, and opportunities for postsecondary

education. To address this issue, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) created a data-sharing plan to foster collaboration between schools,

educational entities, and public housing authorities(2022). The road map uses data and

strategic planning to tackle the academic achievement gap and promote equity in low-

income communities (HUD, 2017).

In the U.S., approximately 1.2 million families residing in public housing

authorities received HUD support. These housing authorities create tight-knit

communities that engage in tailored interventions to foster educational growth (HUD,

2017). Despite the program's well-intentioned efforts, there continues to be a gap in

addressing the educational outcomes of those living in public housing authorities.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics report by Cataldi et al. (2018), the growing number of financially disadvantaged undergraduates in the US has raised concerns about their academic persistence and success, urging colleges to extend their research on these students' postsecondary outcomes (p. 3). In her 2021 statement, Ladson-Billings highlighted the unequal distribution of educational resources in low-income communities, where students often face overcrowded classrooms, underpaid teachers, and limited access to learning materials. These challenges can perpetuate a "culture of poverty" that impacts students' educational experiences based solely on their school districts (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Inequitable access to educational resources and deficits remains a pressing concern in public schools in low-income communities (Ladson-Billings, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted this issue, with research conducted by Avanesian et al. (2021) indicating that 1 in 3 students in countries where remote learning was implemented lacked the necessary technological access. The pandemic has exposed and reaffirmed the disparities and inequities in access to technology and resources experienced by students in low-income communities and beyond (Fortuna et al., 2020).

Students from low-income communities often face a disadvantage when pursuing postsecondary education, stemming from a lack of social and financial resources. One possible solution is the implementation of college-access initiatives. Collaborative efforts between schools and federally funded programs, such as Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), have successfully improved the educational achievements of students residing in low-income communities (Bowman et al., 2018). Nevertheless, while these initiatives have proven effective in increasing

college enrollment rates, their impact on student persistence in higher education requires further investigation.

Location is crucial in various aspects, such as travel costs, familiarity with the community, safety, access to resources like family and friends, and shared language and traditions. A program like PEER, which operates in students' communities, can increase students' willingness to explore and learn about college and postsecondary opportunities. With PEER, transportation is not an issue, making it easier for students to access the help they need.

According to Farmer-Hinton (2008), students without prior college access preparation often rely on their school's resources to help with college exploration and access. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allocated 2.5 million dollars to nine public housing authorities to assist residents aged 15-20 with college readiness and postsecondary planning. While some programs had limited success, others were able to expand and achieve positive outcomes for participants (HUD, August 19). With funding from HUD, programs can help residents overcome barriers to education, employment, and healthcare while building social connections and accessing support at both the individual and community levels (HUD). These programs' success largely depends on the unique needs and concerns of each community they serve, as demonstrated in this study. Despite the numerous benefits of college access programs, little attention has been paid to the importance of proximity of location and contextual understanding when implementing such programs in public housing settings. This study aims to address this gap in research.

According to McDonough and Calderone (2006), students in low-income communities possess the same level of enthusiasm and perseverance as their counterparts in more affluent areas. The HUD's emphasis on enhancing these students' social and economic status underscores its dedication to the welfare of the students in these neighborhoods. Notably, around 1.2 million American families reside in public housing authorities that receive support from the HUD (n.d.).

According to Hillman's (2016) research, community support is crucial in facilitating college success for students. This support extends beyond geographic location and can include childcare, family access, and convenient resources. For low-income students, however, accessing college programs may prove challenging due to familial obligations or distance from home (Turley, 2009). Personal and familial responsibilities can also hinder progress toward a college degree, creating scheduling conflicts and an unstable home environment. A community-based college access program can provide invaluable support for students navigating their daily lives.

Local housing authorities in Tacoma, Washington, and Chicago, Illinois, collaborated with nearby colleges and public schools to purchase textbooks for students at risk of homelessness (Smith, 2018). The housing authorities in Tacoma and Chicago also provided funding to support residents in gaining employment and achieving self-sufficiency (HUD, 2023). This initiative is an excellent example of how grant funding can contribute to the social mobility of individuals in low-income communities (Smith, 2018). Public housing and local agency partnerships offer several programs that include technology and literacy workshops to support those in low-income communities. While some federal grant programs target specific characteristics, such as first-generation

students, it is essential to recognize that students from low-income backgrounds require additional assistance beyond academics.

More attention should be paid to students' educational aspirations and career paths in public housing. This study examined the impact of a college access program on students residing in public housing and how they leveraged their Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) to enhance the experience. By fostering collaboration between the students' community, family, resources, and program staff, the Providing Enriching Educational Resources Program (PEER) proved instrumental, convenient, and effective in facilitating their college aspirations and them receiving college access services on-site at public housing authorities. Additionally, the study examined the proximity to college access programming for low-income students and their sense of identity and strength of community.

The second chapter of this study delves into relevant literature concerning students' experiences in low-income communities, including topics such as college access, government-funded college programs, the role of school counselors located in schools in low-income communities, and the proximity to educational opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study examined the experiences of 10 Latinx and African American students residing in public housing authorities who participated in a one-on-one college access program. Utilizing Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model (2005), this study revealed that participants emphasized aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital, significantly facilitating their college access. The

researcher also explored how student interactions with peers, staff, family, and the community contributed to and reinforced their college access.

Residents in public housing authorities on the West Coast who participated in the PEER Program had the opportunity to connect with staff members who play a vital role in their communities. These staff members provided comprehensive support and assistance throughout the college application process and guidance on navigating students' college and career paths. The study highlighted the critical role that cultural assets play in educational spaces and emphasized the importance of community involvement in supporting students from LICs. Furthermore, the research shed light on how intentional programming and CCW can contribute to students' success in public housing.

As a part of the research, four out of the six CCW tenets (Yosso, 2005) utilizing a non-deficit framework influenced by Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1987) provide perspective to examine students living in low-income communities. It is important to note that this study did not cover the two remaining tenets of CCW as they were outside this research's scope.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is based on Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model, also known as community cultural capital, which comprises six tenets: aspirational, linguistics, familial, social, navigational, and resistance capital (see Figure 1). The CCW model spotlights the inherent strengths gained from the life experiences of Black and Latinx students used to navigate educational environments (Yosso, 2005). Professionals in educational and social settings can utilize the CCW

model as a teaching tool, recognizing, highlighting, and celebrating their strengths and culture. Using the CCW model, students can develop college awareness and learn how their capital can aid in the college-going process. This level of awareness can be shared with others, such as students, families, teachers, and friends (Perna et al., 2008). Students aspiring to enroll in college who lack direction could benefit from the aid of their communities, schools, families, and friends, enabling them to recognize and leverage their strengths and talents to achieve their goals.

Institutionalized practices in U.S. culture have long affected underrepresented groups such as Blacks, Latinx, and others (Yosso, 2005). Students have faced bias and inequities in their educational environments for years, affecting their opportunities and experiences. Hillman and Weichman (2016) noted that location could significantly impact equity and educational opportunities for students, referring to specific communities as "educational desserts" (p. 13), where students have limited college choices due to admissions processes and a lack of resources.

Figure 1

Community Cultural Wealth Model
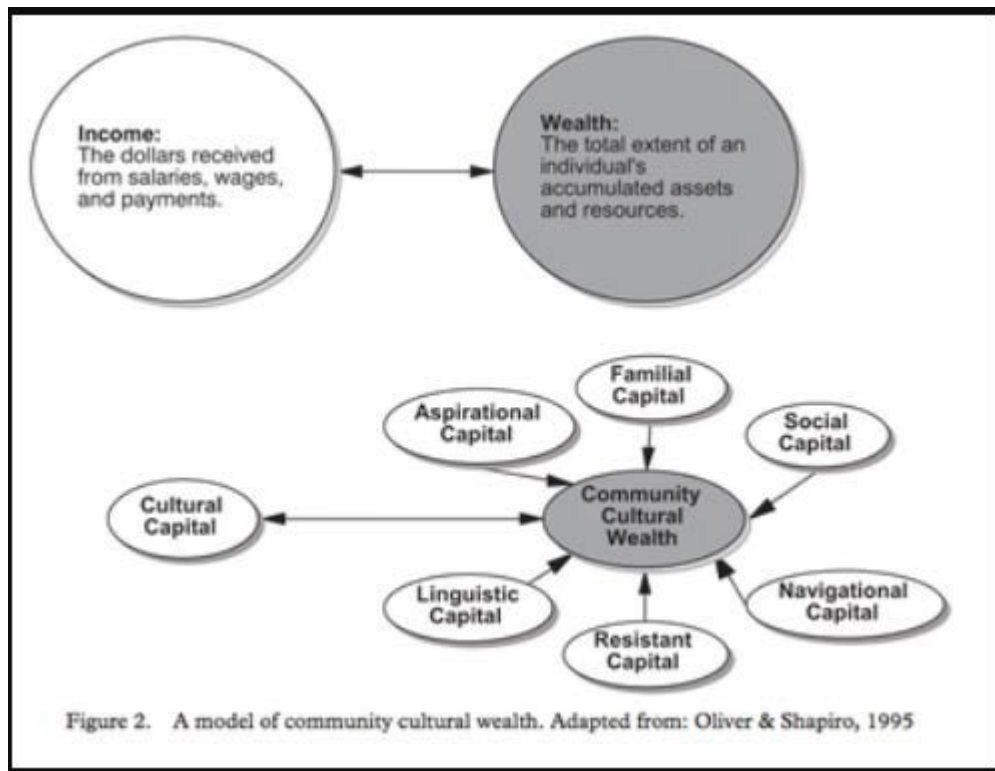
Figure 2. A model of community cultural wealth. Adapted from: Oliver & Shapiro, 1995

Note. From "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," by T. J. Yosso, 2005, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91. (https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006)

Significance

Previous research has explored the correlation between students from low-income backgrounds and obtaining a college degree. However, there has been minimal research on low-income students residing in public housing authorities and their post-secondary journey. It is essential to understand the cultural capital assets that students in public housing authorities possess and how they employ such assets to navigate college opportunities. Little is known about their daily responsibilities, how they balance their

lives, and what drives them to pursue higher education. Moreover, there has been

minimal research on the educational endeavors of students and the support they receive

from public housing authorities.

This study is noteworthy because it contributes to the literature on low-income

students and college access, specifically emphasizing an often-overlooked community.

Additionally, this study sheds light on the college access and post-secondary education of

students in public housing, providing valuable insights for educational programming,

policy, and practice.

As per the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2021), nearly a million public

housing units exist throughout the United States that are situated in areas lacking

adequate resources and plagued by racial segregation. This is partly due to a lengthy

history of discriminatory public policies and "biased decision-making" (p.1).

Students from low-income and urban communities are often unfairly stereotyped

as underachieving and in need of help. Unfortunately, this can lead to these students

receiving inadequate information from school officials (Nguyen, 2023). Those who live

in low-income communities and aspire to attend college face numerous challenges,

including poor schooling (Loprest et al., 2019). Additionally, students in these

communities may struggle with a lack of information about the college process, financial

literacy regarding college costs, and inadequate academic preparation (Loprest et al.,

2019; Owen et al., 2020; Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016).

In light of the disparities, this study has centered on an asset-based perspective

regarding the tenacity and perseverance of students living in public housing and the CCW

that contributed to their success. It is imperative to recognize that the educational

experiences of students residing in LICs may reflect their obstacles and not their academic capabilities. Providing a college access program where students live could enhance the educational opportunities for those who aspire to pursue further education and broaden their experience of educational inequity. Further elaborated in this chapter, the non-deficit lens focuses on the positive attributes that students residing in LICs bring to educational settings. This approach aims to highlight the assets and characteristics of students in low-income communities, particularly those in public housing authorities, to comprehend their pursuit of a college education. Additionally, this approach can help dispel any existing stereotypes about students from LICs.

This study's primary focus was on the Providing Enriching Educational Resources (PEER) program, which offers personalized guidance and support for college access and postsecondary planning to students residing in public housing on the West Coast of the United States. PEER operates within the public housing community to ensure accessibility for college-bound students who may face academic, economic, and social obstacles preventing them from attending college access programs at secondary schools or college campuses (Turley, 2009).

Research Questions

This study examined how 10 Latinx and African American students in low-income public housing authorities described their experience in a one-on-one college access program that employed the Community Cultural Wealth model.

The guiding research questions are below

1. How do students describe their experience in a college access program located in public housing?

2. In what ways are tenets of Community Cultural Wealth used to assist students in their college pursuits?

3. How do on-site services make a difference in sharing or receiving college access information in public housing authorities?

Connection to Social Justice and Vincentian Mission

Inequity in educational access is a pressing social justice concern in the United States. When students from low-income communities (LICs) lack equal opportunities to compete and access college and career programs, society suffers a loss of potential contributions. Furthermore, assistance programs for underserved communities are more cost-effective than prisons, public assistance, hospitalizations, and Medicaid.

Moreover, families in low-income communities often face unequal access to education, which can lead to marginalization and limited economic mobility. Despite access to college being a crucial factor, it does not necessarily equate to equality, per Cohen and Kisker (2010). Through a qualitative case study focused on public housing and students' college access in LICs, this research aims to align with the Vincentian mission of St. John's University by fostering social change, improving social mobility, and promoting educational equality.

Definition of Terms

AVID. A college readiness program that enables students with the potential and determination to attend college and achieve academically in the rigorous courses required to get into 4-year universities. The mission is to close the achievement gap by preparing all students for college readiness and success in a global society (AVID.org, n.d.).

College access. The coordination and offering of college readiness activities can include information on college admissions processes, college entrance exams, financial aid opportunities, and mentorship programs for college preparation activities (Pitcher & Shahjahan, 2017).

College readiness. Experiences that have prepared students for postsecondary education in college awareness, academic requirements for college eligibility, and at the high school level or through local programming (Baker et al., 2005; Payne et al., 2017).

Community. A geographic location where people share a common territorial area. (Merriam-Webster, 1999).

Cultural capital. Capital such as knowledge, credentials, skills, and abilities can be used to access and gain access to resources, information, and networks that can provide *opportunities for advancement (Strayhorn, 2010).*

Dual-enrollment programs. Programs that offer college courses for academic credit to high school students while simultaneously enrolled. Some dual programs partner with local education departments (e.g., the Department of Education and the City University of New York). Such programs are a gateway to college access (Williams & Perry, 2020).

First-generation. The "first generation" designation is based on parents' educational attainment. First-generation college students have parents who have not attended college (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Latinx. Those of Latin American descent who are Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, South or Central America, and other Latino ethnic identities. Not used in governmental documents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The "x" represents a gender-neutral option for those who do not wish to be identified by gender (Lozano & Salinas, 2017).

Low-income community (LIC). Per the U.S. Department of the Treasury, an LIC is a census tract with a poverty rate of at least 20% or a median family income of 80% or less than the area against which it is benchmarked (i.e., metropolitan area for metropolitan tracts, state areas for rural tracts; Abrahams, 2019).

Low-income. "The term "low-income" means a family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount" (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

One-on-one college advisors. For this study, education coaches work one-on-one with students from the college application process through enrollment and beyond.

Proximity. The nearness or distance from a location (Merriam-Webster)

Public assistance. Governmental assistance programs that provide cash assistance or in-kind benefits to individuals and families. (U.S.gov, n.d.)

Public housing authorities. A community of federally funded buildings, some as short as two stories and others as tall as 28 stories, in a low-income community occupied by marginalized families. Housing projects, as well as housing authorities, are pejorative and often have negative connotations. Therefore, this study will interchangeably use public housing communities and public housing authorities (HUD, n.d.). They are primarily located in areas with high poverty rates, crime, and vandalism (Marcuse, 1986). The name "housing projects" is what housing authorities are known as; however, the usage of housing projects became "pejorative," and for that reason, public housing communities, public housing neighborhoods, and public housing authorities will be used interchangeably for this study (Abrahams, 2019).

Remediation. Non-credit-bearing academic courses to strengthen reading, writing, and math skills. Due to the negative connotation associated with the word, developmental education is an interchangeable term (T. Bailey et al., 2010).

TRIO Programs. Three programs (Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Student Support Services) emphasize students from disadvantaged backgrounds for motivation and support in academics, tutoring, and mentoring funded by Congress under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965. (I/S/ Department of Education., n.d.). https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

Chapter 2 examines various topics, including college access programs, HUD-assisted housing communities, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), and the internal and external variables that impact students in low-income neighborhoods, particularly those residing in public housing. The chapter delves into the CCW model and the capital of marginalized students, exploring how it manifests itself. This study highlights critical factors such as CCW, place-based objectives, and experiences in college access programs, high schools, and colleges.

Students from low-income communities and first-generation students can face college access and degree attainment obstacles due to a lack of college readiness, financial literacy, family support, and socio-economic status. Structural barriers, such as inadequate funding for underserved communities, can further hinder college access (Atherton, 2014; Baum et al., 2013; DeAngelo & Franke, 2016; Ness & Tucker, 2008). Graduates of underfunded high schools who require academic intervention may struggle to enter college (Bowman et al., 2018; DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). High schools are under scrutiny for their ability to support students with limited resources (T. Bailey & Mechur Karp, 2003). Community colleges and for-profit organizations also face resource constraints, impacting their ability to provide adequate student services (Iloh & Tierney, 2013). School counselors in schools with limited resources may have high caseloads and numerous responsibilities, further exacerbating the challenges low-income students face (Belasco, 2013).

Marginalized students from low-income communities require information and guidance when deciding to attend college. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) identified three

stages of the college-going mindset: deciding to attend college, where to obtain college information, and which college to attend. While research has focused on college access, the literature should include access programs in communities like public housing. The following section presents literature on students living in low-income communities, a proxy for public housing authorities in this study.

Literature Review

In this chapter, the researcher explored the literature on the college access of marginalized students from low-income communities. As with many low-income communities, students living in public housing authorities face spatial disadvantages such as limited resources and inadequate schools. Therefore, the research on students in low-income communities may also apply to this population. Due to the minimal literature on students and public housing authorities, this study focused on various factors affecting college access, including federally funded programs, academic preparation, school counselors, and proximity to educational opportunities.

In addition, this chapter also delves into the intersectionality of various factors impacting college access and higher education for students from low-income communities. The researcher also presents the theoretical framework of this study. This chapter serves as a foundation for Chapter 3, which presents the methodology.

Literature Search Strategy

Research questions were developed to conduct a comprehensive literature search, and articles were collected from various sources, including EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Dissertations. The search was conducted without any time or location limitations. The search terms included social and cultural capital, low-income

students and college access, empirical studies on college access, empirical studies on community cultural wealth, community institutions, the geography of opportunity and college access, empirical studies on student's college access, low-income students, low-income communities, public housing, public housing authorities, poverty, and college access.

Given the vast amount of research on college access and the lack of existing studies on the college aspirations of students living in public housing, a broad search was conducted with public housing as a focal point. The articles related to the search terms were then carefully reviewed to determine their relevance and frequency of appearance. The literature review included relevant data from the studies, and saturation was achieved by checking references to ensure no repetition in studies with commonalities among critical terms and researchers.

Following a thorough search for relevant literature, an additional quest for up-to-date information from the corresponding authors commenced upon reaching a point of name saturation. This systematic review entailed identifying recurring themes and gaps in the literature to bolster the topic. The literature review encompassed research on the demographics of students living in public housing to establish a link between low-income community residents and capital.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of capital has been shaped by Bourdieu's (1987,1990) social reproduction theory, which identifies three key elements of cultural capital: field, habitus, and non-material capital. Bourdieu's (1987) work focused on the role of social interactions in shaping social mobility (Evans et al., 2009). Coleman's (1988) theory of

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human and social capital built upon this framework, emphasizing the importance of personal connections and interactions in acquiring cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

According to Bourdieu's (1987) definition, social capital refers to the resources individuals inherit from being part of the dominant society, such as educational opportunities, contacts, and access. This theory applies to people of all races and ethnicities. Still, Bourdieu (1987) did not address the issue of social capital for people of color since they are not considered part of the dominant society (p. 76). In contrast, Coleman (1988), a social scientist, defines social capital as the connections people establish within social structures, which he considers a public good.

This study utilized and analyzed Yosso's (2005) CCW model (see Figure 1). The CCW model offers insights into marginalized students' unique forms of capital, which can contribute to academic settings. This theoretical framework centers on the positive social capital that students, specifically those from underrepresented communities, bring to intellectual environments. Yosso's work challenges the deficit perspective that prioritizes material wealth and reinforces societal norms.

According to Yosso's (2005) definition, culture encompasses a group's acquired, communal, and demonstrated behaviors and values. CCW offers a means to shift the storytelling to accurately represent people of color and acknowledge how their experiences, which can be linked to affluence for some, shape their lives. The six types of capital relevant for students of color are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. This research delved into four capital forms (aspirational, familial, social, and navigational), as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Four Tenets of Community Cultural Wealth

CCW tenet	Explanation of tenet
Aspirational capital	Culture of possibility despite one's circumstances. "Maintaining hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).
Familial capital	Kinship focuses on traditions, family values, history, and support. It builds on interactions with a family that can extend beyond the biological family to include community members and neighbors.
Social capital	Social networks include peers, neighbors, teachers, family, friends, community, and others whom one deems close and whose opinions and input are valued.
Navigational capital	It can maneuver through social spaces "not created with communities of color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

Note. Adapted from "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," by T. J. Yosso, 2005, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), pp. 78-80), and "From Racial Stereotyping and Deficit Discourse Toward a Critical Race Theory in Teacher Education," by D. G. Solorzano and T. J. Yosso, 2001; *Multicultural Education*, *9*(1), pp. 2–8.

Yosso's (2005) study focused on Black and Latinx minoritized students. This study focused on low-income communities, specifically those living in public housing authorities (LIC), rather than on race. However, it is essential to note that Black and Latinx students represent a significant proportion of the population residing in low-income public housing across the United States. According to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), 43% of the families living in public housing are Black, 45% are Hispanic, and only 4.7% are White (2021). Among residents under 18, 46.31% are Black, 45.14% are Hispanic, and 5% are White. Similarly, the Ohio Public Housing

Authority (2021) found that 88% of residents were Black, 9% were White, and 3% were other, with 39% under 18.

Using the CCW framework, this literature review delved into capital as an asset in students' lives, including those in low-income communities and across various educational settings, such as high school and college. Despite the subject's significance, only a few researchers have explored the CCW of students living in public housing, mentorship, and college access, if at all. The review further examines the research of scholars who studied the diverse forms of capital influencing students' higher education pursuits, building upon Yosso's (2005) work.

Luedke's (2020) study focused on how first-generation students of color can positively impact their communities by promoting college access among young people of color. Through interviews with participants, the study found that college students of color drew on their experiences and backgrounds to inspire others to consider higher education. Luedke (2020) also discovered that the desire to "give back" was a form of "communal upliftment" (p.13). Despite being rooted in personal stories and aspirations, the hope for a better future knows no bounds (Luedke, 2020).

In their 2020 study, Crisp et al. delved into how Latino/x college students leverage social and familial capital through mentoring. The findings revealed that mentorship before and during college played a crucial role in helping students achieve their academic and professional aspirations. Additionally, the study showcased the advantages of combining aspirational, familial, and social capital.

Aspirational Capital

According to Yosso (2005), aspirational capital refers to a "culture of possibility" (p. 78) in which individuals can achieve their goals and aspirations despite facing adversity and challenging circumstances. Despite the inequalities faced by students of color, their families instill a sense of pride, reminding them of their potential even when they do not know how to reach it. When students successfully build their aspirational capital and achieve their goals, they serve as role models for others, regardless of their level of resources or privilege. Aspirational capital, also known as personal resources, can promote social mobility among underprivileged groups (Bahack & Addi-Raccah, 2022).

As with any valuable resource, aspirational capital begins at home, within the family. According to Yosso's (2005) definition, aspirational capital is the ability to persist in pursuing long-term objectives despite significant obstacles. Similarly, Bahack and Addi-Raccah (2022) discovered that first-generation and continuing-generation Ph.D. students relied on their families' support to complete their degrees despite challenges encountered along the way. Leath et al. (2021) utilized Yosso's CCW theory to investigate the college preparation experiences of Black women, the role their parents played in cultivating aspirational capital, and how their sense of identity helped them sustain their motivation and persistence at a predominantly white institution (PWI).

Researchers of both studies examined the role of capital and environmental and personal factors in college admissions. Their findings suggest that familial capital can act as a bridge to higher education, particularly for students of color. Drawing on both aspirational and familial capital, these students can benefit from the support and

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testimonies of family members who have faced adversity but remained resilient

(Martinez et al., 2020; Yosso, 2005).

Familial Capital

Familial support can take many forms, including access to educational resources,

exposure to enrichment activities, and familiarity with educational processes. All of these

require social and economic capital, often lacking in low-income communities (NCES,

2021). Familial capital is the knowledge gained through interactions with family and

friends, including experiences shared among relatives, friends, and community members

(Yosso, 2005). These relationships are built on a shared commonality of residence and

resources, such as helping a neighbor with babysitting or frequenting laundry facilities

during the same time (Bernal, 2002).

According to Bernal (2002), familial capital encompasses shared experiences

between immediate family members, aunts, uncles, and deceased relatives. Additionally,

familial capital may be derived from relationships with friends and community members.

These connections, built on a shared sense of locality and resource sharing (such as

neighborly babysitting or frequenting the same laundry facilities), can lead to enduring

relationships that resemble family ties.

When students form friendships based on shared interests in an educational or

program environment, they have the potential to develop a robust network of social

connections. In addition to these friendships, students rely on familial relationships and

interactions to inform their decisions about college. It is worth noting that the capital

gained through family connections is intertwined with social capital. Recent research by

Leath et al. (2021) has confirmed this idea of overlapping capital, as they used Yosso's

(2005) CCW model to explore the college preparation experiences of Black

undergraduate women and the role of aspirational capital and parents. The authors found

that familial capital played a crucial role in bridging the college admissions process and

instilling the belief that obtaining a degree was possible. Parents served as both a

presence and a source of support for their children, aligning with Yosso's CCW model

and the overlap and impact of capital.

Social Capital

Social capital plays a significant role in various areas, including education, social,

and political spheres. Social capital is the connection between people, their communities,

and their environments (Halpern, 2005). At a macro level, it extends far beyond as it

fosters lasting connections that can benefit people differently. For instance, individuals

who become part of sororities or fraternities as lifelong members, regardless of whether

they pay their yearly dues, can maintain their ties with the organization and its members

through the social connections they establish before, during, and after joining. According

to Yosso (2005), Community Cultural Wealth highlights social capital as the link

between individuals and their communities, resulting in support networks. Those who

acquire social capital can leverage it to propel their progress in "education, legal systems,

healthcare, and employment" (Yosso, 2005, p.80). Consequently, they can reinvest the

gained capital into their social networks through intangible resources, thereby supporting

their community's growth and development.

Researchers have examined the role of student involvement and engagement in

academic success. The social and cultural capital students acquire during their college

years has been shown to contribute to their ability to persist academically. Interestingly,

students can also draw on the social and cultural capital they have acquired before college to aid them in pursuing higher education. Volker's (2020) study utilized a fixed-effects model to explore "changes in individual social capital during adult life within 19 years" (p. 313). The results indicated that individuals maintain social capital throughout their lives and can continue accumulating it before and after college. Maintaining social networks largely depends on an individual's ability to navigate educational, social, and political spheres.

A narrative qualitative study explored how mentorship could benefit Latinx community college students as a form of social and family capital. The study involved 11 students in the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program and used an asset-based approach to counter the deficit perspective often associated with Latinx college students. The research was guided by the frameworks of Solorzano and Yosso (2001), and the data was collected through interviews and reflective notes submitted by the students over three semesters. The study demonstrated that mentorship before and during college can significantly contribute to students' success in achieving their educational and career goals. The findings also revealed that a combination of aspirational, familial, and social capital could be highly beneficial. Mentors in the students' community included "parents, siblings, extended family members, romantic partners, high school teachers, and religiously affiliated youth group leaders" (Crisp et al., 2020, p. 65).

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to the ability to navigate through places and structures that people of color do not frequently visit. This includes social institutions such as educational spaces (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). People of color may use navigational capital to

maneuver in unwelcoming and unsupportive environments. However, invulnerability gained through life experiences, such as family support and aspirations, provides a buffer for unwelcome environments, enabling people of color to thrive (Yosso, 2005). In a recent study by Cuellar (2021), the impact of cultural assets on Latino/a/xs' ability to navigate social spaces was investigated. The findings revealed that Latino/a/x students became more engaged in learning and student activities when enrolled in courses related to their culture, created clubs and organizations, and found mentorships.

Latino/a/x students have learned to utilize their navigational capital, which they have gained through social and familial connections, to develop social agency. However, the lack of representation of their culture in educational spaces and the marginalization they encounter can impact their social agency (Cuellar, 2021). Despite these challenges, Latino/a/x students can be empowered in schools where they establish groups and create safe spaces for themselves. While schools should provide a foundation for students to achieve academic success and upward mobility, they often perpetuate the oppression of marginalized groups (Bernal, 2002).

Structural barriers, such as inadequate school funding, can hinder students' college readiness in minoritized communities. School counselors can provide social capital and guidance in navigating the educational system, but high student-counselor ratios and heavy workloads may limit the amount of meaningful support students receive (T. Bailey & Mechur Karp, 2003; Bryan et al., 2017; Welton & Martinez, 2013). In many cases, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) principles can intersect and benefit students. Despite students' challenges in low-income areas, many possess a range of capital to aid their college access (Yosso, 2005).

Review of Related Literature

College Access: A Historical Perspective

Across the United States, several programs aim to assist low-income students in the college access process. These specialized college access programs focus on academic interests, specific populations (i.e., veterans), and locations (i.e., schools). Programs like College Possible, TRIO, and AVID share the goal of helping low-income and first-generation students pursue and complete a postsecondary degree (Inside Higher Ed).

Along with various college access initiatives and information conduits, funding commitments to improving college access options vary. The following list outlines a historical timeline of how HUD, alongside the college access trajectory, particularly in the United States (see Table 2).

Table 2

Housing and Urban Development Juxtaposed with College Access

Housing and Urban Development	College Access
President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Wagner-Stegall Act, often known as the Public Housing Act, into law in 1937 (von Hoffman, 2000).	The first Historically Black college was founded in 1837 (LeMelle, 2002).
	Before 1900, college was a mostly private experience restricted to White men (Cohen & Kisker, 2009).
1965: The Department of HUD was established to address the country's housing challenges, specifically the need to improve the nation's communities and enforce housing regulations (HUD, n.d.).	In 1944, the GI Bill provided college access to veterans, who were mostly White (Bennett, 1996).
1968: Despite the Fair Housing Act against housing discrimination, federal, local, and state government officials maintained de facto segregation (Massey, 2015).	In the 1960s and 1970s, there were efforts to enhance college access for high achievers, low-income women, and minoritized groups. Nonetheless, there was a fall in Black student enrollment throughout the 1970s, which gradually recovered in the 1990s (Cohen & Kisker, 2009).
	Before 1964, government officials created TRIO, the first federally supported college access program. TRIO initially had three programs but expanded to eight for specific student populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).
	2015: The National Bureau of Economic Research indicated a desire for college access programs to address the structural barriers to higher education for underserved students (Harvill, 2021; Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016).

While progress has been made, college access challenges persist, particularly for students from low-SES backgrounds (Heller, 2001, 2002; Perna, 2002). College access programs have the potential to address the under-enrollment of low-income first-generation students in college (Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002), with financial aid, academics, college readiness, and knowledge of the admissions process forming the foundation of a college access trajectory (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016; Perna, 2002).

Unfortunately, socioeconomic status (SES) remains one of the most common obstacles to college access (Ness & Tucker, 2008), with college costs presenting another barrier to postsecondary education for low-SES students (Terenzini et al., 2001). Although there is funding for college access, there is an inequitable distribution of program offerings. For example, federally funded college access programs like TRIO exist for students in low- income areas, but they do not address the nationwide issue of inequitable K-12 educational opportunities (Perna, 2015). Inequitable access to higher education has historically resulted from a lack of academic preparation and finances (Adelman, 2006; Belasco, 2013), with a lack of academic preparation being a significant factor impacting college access.

Research suggests that college access is a multifaceted process involving more than just academic preparation and social connections. High schools are critical in providing college access, particularly for underserved communities. To this end, Edmunds et al. (2022) examined the College and Career Readiness Expansion project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education implemented at the Columbus State Community College in Central Ohio. The study allowed students in grades 7-12 to enroll in dual-credit classes at the college level and earn college credits. Half of the students in

the study came from historically underrepresented populations, reflecting a focus on serving underserved communities.

The schools examined in the study prioritized a curriculum geared towards preparing students for college and careers and providing them with various forms of support. The quasi-experimental research revealed that increasing access to dual-enrollment courses was insufficient to ensure favorable state-level regulations were followed. Instead, implementing changes as part of broader school-wide initiatives, such as programs that foster students' interest in college and readiness for college-level coursework, was more effective. This study is particularly relevant in light of the relationship between low-income families and public housing. The following provides further context on the significance of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and its residents, especially post-secondary education programming.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

The PEER program was developed to cater to students' educational and career needs in public housing authorities. It was later incorporated into several communities in the East, West, and Midwest regions of the United States through grant funding. The program is in public housing to ensure that staff is closer to students' homes and can provide them with college and career information and guidance. Staff members of the program working in the students' community have a dual role. They are well-versed in the nuances of the students they serve, their professional position, and the environment (Ancona, 2012). The PEER staff provides information and guidance to the students with whom they share a community and workspace. HUD provides discretionary funding

through grant programs to address systemic poverty-related issues, such as educational opportunities, in low-income communities.

In 2016, HUD designated $2.5 million in grant funding for educational programs to three public housing authorities in the United States. These programs provided college access, postsecondary education guidance, and support to public housing authority residents. For context, it is essential to note that this study focuses on the role of HUD, its residential services, and educational programs geared towards college access for public housing residents. HUD serves as the governing body of public housing authorities across the United States.

History of Public Housing Authorities

In 1937, the Housing Act of 1937, also known as the Wagner-Steagall Act, was signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This act paved the way for establishing housing authorities (commonly known as and often referred to as housing projects) that would cater to the needs of low-income families, those with disabilities, and elderly individuals across the country (FDR & Housing Legislation, 2021; Friedman, 1966). The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines public housing as rental housing that varies in structure, ranging from high-rise apartments to single-family homes. The program provides grant funding to public housing agencies, which manage over 3,300 public housing residences (HUD, 2021). HUD's government-funded programs aim to empower residents towards self-sufficiency and upward mobility, including work development, literacy, technology, and college preparation, ultimately reducing public assistance (HUD, 2021).

Federal grant funds are received by public housing authorities, and in turn, the federal government generates income from tenant rental payments. In the past, after 15 years of residing in public housing, middle-class families often moved becoming homeowners in rural areas, allowing for greater access to public housing authorities by those in need (Friedman, 1966). Once the middle class moved on to homeownership, low-income families became the primary public housing residents.

Today, public housing is home to many low- to middle-income families. For instance, according to the HUD dashboard, around 318,000 individuals reside in New York City public housing, approximately 18,500 live in Washington State Public Housing Authority, and roughly 17,000 live in Oklahoma State Public Housing Authority (n.d.). Public housing was initially intended to alleviate slums and provide housing for the working class (NLIH, 2019). Consequently, further research is necessary on public housing and the college and career programs available to those residing in these communities.

Strength of Community, Culture, and Identity

Negative stereotypes have long plagued the concept of low-income communities (LICs), where marginalized students often reside. This stigma surrounding public housing can be traced back to the 1970s (Tighe, 2010). It has been noted that people tend to form opinions based on their perceptions rather than reality (Lippmann, 2017). This can result in stereotypes and assumptions that do not accurately reflect the reality of those living in specific communities (Tighe, 2010). Unfortunately, public input, the planning field, social policy, and the study of public opinion have all contributed to these misconceptions, leading to a lack of support and resources for these communities.

To combat this issue, the PEER program, now partially financed by HUD, provides community support services to foster the well-being of residents in public housing. Research has shown that familial and cultural capital plays a crucial role in the success of minoritized students (Waterman & Lindley, 2013; Yosso, 2005). One study highlighted the cultural strength of a community and the college access program's role in helping students achieve their college aspirations.

Communities create opportunities for people to build relationships, trust others, and receive daily assistance from those around them (Afzal, 2008). People often desire to remain close to their community due to the importance of identification in proximity.

Familiarity with family and friends is critical, and proximate people may belong to the same associations, such as church groups and tenant associations, or participate in the same activities. Communities are a way to identify people and offer a shared experience despite different values and beliefs. It is worth noting that identity and community differ in that communities indicate social processes, while individuals identify themselves based on their experiences and values (Afzal, 2008).

College Funding Sources and Government-funded Programs

Efforts to improve college access for minoritized students have been made through research and reform, focusing on academic and financial support. According to the Pell Institute (2019), approximately 42% of college students receive some form of Pell or other federal grants, while low-income first-generation students entering college have a 21% chance of earning a bachelor's degree (p. 1). The Pell Grant, formerly the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, was introduced as an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1965 to provide federal aid to students for increased equity and access

to higher education (Mumper, 1999). The grant is available to students who demonstrate a financial need and does not require repayment (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

However, the funding has not kept up with inflation and the rising cost of college tuition despite still being offered to eligible students (Nguyen, 2023). Disparities persist despite some efforts to increase college access for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Low-income students who receive grants for college often face obstacles such as paying for textbooks, transportation, childcare, and other essential expenses (Pierce, 2016). However, students who possess navigational capital, academic capability, and a determination to succeed can overcome social challenges and seek assistance from educational institutions (Yosso, 2005).

TRIO is a group of federally funded programs that can assist and support students in pursuing a degree. The first TRIO program, Upward Bound, was created in response to the Educational Opportunity Act of 1964. Upward Bound aimed to address students' academic needs and college preparation from low-income communities. The original TRIO consisted of three programs designed to support students with academics, career planning, and financial literacy for higher education. TRIO offers a range of services to students throughout the education pipeline, including tutoring, counseling, and mentoring (Perna, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Today, there are eight TRIO programs with different areas of focus: Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Veterans Upward Bound (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). TRIO programs provide services to low-income, first-

generation college students, individuals with disabilities, and veteran students. TRIO continues to be a vital resource for students. According to a study by Quinn et al. (2019), students who participated in TRIO support services programs described the staff's support as consistent and the tutoring and personal assistance as "a salient source of power" (p. 54).

AVID is among the federally funded programs that provide students with guidance in the college access process (Gullatt & Jan, 2003; Wilson et al., 2021). For years, college access programs such as AVID and TRIO have helped first-generation and low-income students achieve their degrees while addressing the achievement gap (Perna, 2015; Wilson et al., 2021). Previous studies on AVID have shown that participation in the program can improve students' organizational skills and self-efficacy (Huerta et al., 2013; Black et al., 2008). However, despite the benefits of such programs, low-income and first-generation college-age students are still impacted by federal, state, and local barriers such as increasing tuition fees and higher education budget cuts (Dyce et al., 2012; Cheslock & Riggs, 2023; Pierce & Siraco, 2018). These cuts to higher education undermine the purpose of college access programs, which aim to help students achieve their academic goals.

According to a recent report by the College Board (Ma, 2022), there has been a noticeable increase in revenue from 1990 to 2020. However, the average income for the top 20% of families rose by 57%, whereas the growth for the lowest 20% was only 12%. For at least the past 20 years, students from minoritized groups have been relying on financial aid to access higher education (Heller & Marin, 2002). Despite an increase in revenue, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who lack academic preparation

continue to face barriers related to their limited knowledge of college access programming and financial responsibility. As a result, socioeconomic status can be a disadvantage that prevents students from financing college unless they are adequately prepared and aware of college access (Mitchell et al., 2019). Unfortunately, even with federally funded programs for marginalized groups, inequities in college access persist decades later.

The desire to make higher education more affordable has a long history, dating back to the introduction of the Pell Grant in 1965. In recent years, however, this responsibility has fallen to the state. In 2017, former New York State Governor Cuomo implemented a "tuition-free" program called the Excelsior Scholarship for public colleges and universities in New York state. Eligible students could receive financial aid up to $125,000 based on family income, which covered tuition and additional expenses (McMahon, 2019). Although the Excelsior scholarship aimed to increase college access, it did not benefit low-income students as much as those already qualified for total financial aid.

The Excelsior scholarship was modeled after merit-based scholarships like Georgia HOPE, Wisconsin Covenant, and Indiana 21st Scholars. While these programs have different criteria, Excelsior followed their lead. However, the effectiveness of either program has not been proven successful (Pierce & Siraco, 2018). Although Excelsior is not merit-based, its academic criteria and residency restrictions after graduation still pose a challenge for some students seeking higher education (Pierce & Siraco, 2018).

According to a 2023 study conducted by Heo, college admissions offices tend to make different decisions regarding needs-based and merit-based aid depending on their

level of competitiveness. Less competitive colleges tend to enroll students with better academic averages, benefiting more from merit-based aid. The study also found that colleges offering more need-based aid tend to provide fewer admissions. In addition, the study analyzed colleges' financial aid packages and found that lower-ranking colleges offer more merit-based aid, while higher-ranking colleges offer more need-based aid. The study suggests that higher education institutions are factoring in the need for financial assistance when making admissions decisions. Heo (2023) states that students increasingly make college acceptances based on their financial aid packages.

Research has shown that college access initiatives can boost high school graduation rates by an average of 8%, regardless of a student's social or financial background or the availability of college access programming (Perna, 2005; Perna et al., 2014). Many studies have found that federal government programs like AVID, TRIO, and GEAR UP are effective in providing college preparation to students from low-income communities (J. Bailey, 2015; Black et al., 2008; Glessner et al., 2017; Hackman et al., 2018; Ohrtman et al., 2016; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011; Schaefle, 2018; Watt et al., 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013).

A study by Sanchez et al. (2018) utilized mixed methods to examine Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), a federal program authorized by the U.S. Department of Education in 1988. The study aimed to identify factors related to the performance and persistence of first-year college students previously enrolled in GEAR UP during high school. As the program began in middle school, data collection required several years to observe results, as reflected in the fall of

2012. The study used enrollment, parental education, and standardized testing data to measure academic progress and persistence.

The study found that most participants were from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds, primarily Hispanic or Latino/a/x ($p<.001$), with a higher proportion of Black students ($p<.05$) and a lower proportion of White students ($p<.001$). Pell grant recipients ($p<.01$) indicated low-income status. The study found that 93% of GEAR UP students were first-generation, compared to 81% of non-GEAR UP students ($p<.001$). Despite lower scores in each category, GEAR UP students were equally successful as their non-GEAR UP counterparts, contrary to previous literature.

The study also examined college access and persistence trends among minority groups and students of low SES who had participated in GEAR UP. Knaggs et al. (2015) discovered that, on average, students who had taken part in GEAR UP were more likely to attend college than those who had not, with a p-value of less than 0.5. The study's qualitative themes included personal growth, goal-setting, college choice, and major-specific decisions attributed to program participation. The students appreciated the program and developed college-focused goals. As stated by Sanchez et al. (2018), students from low-income communities consistently thrived in college access programs as in previous years.

Research suggests that students who face academic and financial disadvantages are at a higher risk of dropping out of college (Adelman, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Yeager et al., 2019). While the U.S. government provides financial aid to students, there is a greater emphasis on merit-based aid rather than need-based aid, with loans instead of grants or scholarships (Perna et al., 2014). Ultimately, the decision to accept aid or take

out a loan falls on the student rather than the government. The financial burden of attending college can be a significant obstacle for many students in the United States, particularly those who face structural inequalities and marginalization. To address this issue, government officials at all levels can work to provide more equitable opportunities, including preparing students for college before enrollment (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016). It is essential to recognize that factors such as academic and financial need play a crucial role in students' access to higher education and degree completion, extending beyond the college admissions process.

Academic Preparation

Since the 1970s, standardized testing has been used to promote high-quality education. However, students from low-income communities are held to the same standards as their high-SES peers despite often receiving inadequate academic preparation due to disparities in education quality based on geographic location (Condron & Roscigno, 2003).

In 2001, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to evaluate the effectiveness of schools in promoting student learning and development through testing. Initially focused on high school graduation rates, the NCLB Act assesses student proficiency collectively rather than individually. However, not all students receive the same quality of education, particularly those from low-income communities, and efforts to close the achievement gap have not been successful (Perna, 2002).

A decade after the NCLB Act was established and four decades after the implementation of standardized testing, Wiliam (2010) argued that there is a misalignment between education quality and exam outcomes. Additionally, differences in

SES and general intelligence cannot be separated from testing outcomes, and the variance in test scores can be attributed to disparities in school quality (Wiliam, 2010). Academic requirements, such as coursework, grade point average, test scores, and graduation status, can affect college access for some students (Atherton, 2014).

Research has shown that academic readiness plays a crucial role in the retention of first-year college students. DeAngelo and Franke's (2016) study, which used nationally representative data, found that less academically prepared students were more likely to experience financial disadvantages, leading to difficulties in maintaining college persistence. Additionally, the study highlighted the impact of family income and generational status on college access and degree attainment, particularly for less academically prepared students. Students from low-income families can benefit significantly from college preparation programs, improving their chances of college readiness and success (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016).

The implementation of Common Core Standards in public education is a current reform. Students are required to meet state standards in English liberal arts and K-12 mathematics, indicating their readiness for college. However, standardized ACT, SAT, and Regents test scores do not always align with college readiness standards. College readiness standards exceed high school graduation requirements (New York State Department of Education). Unfortunately, SES and systemic societal structures can still prevent low-income students from accessing college, with standardized testing adding a challenge. While low-income students are achieving academic, social, and personal success, further research is needed to understand the factors contributing to this success.

Rather than focusing solely on the obstacles they face, it is essential to take a more holistic approach to understanding the experiences of these students (Nguyen, 2021).

According to Fike and Fike's (2008) research, community colleges often attract minority and low-income students due to their open admissions policies and the students' lack of academic preparation. In contrast, 4-year colleges typically have strict admission criteria and require college readiness. While college accessibility and pre-college preparation can aid in degree attainment, the primary focus of institutions remains on student persistence (Fike & Fike, 2008).

Meanwhile, Means and Pyne (2017) studied low-income, first-generation students who participated in a college access program in high school through their first year. Their research found that students who felt a sense of belonging in college tended to persist. This particular cohort of students had already developed a sense of belonging before beginning their college experience.

According to Pyne and Means' (2013) study, the expectations of college staff did not match the experiences of low-income students. The study found that college personnel assumed that students had received adequate academic preparation before enrollment, including Advanced Placement courses. While it is true that colleges benefit from students who meet academic placement standards beyond remediation, many low-SES students lack foundational academic preparation due to attending under-resourced schools. This makes it difficult for them to persist in college (Pyne & Means, 2013; Cataldi et al., 2018). Standardized testing has been used to assess the academic preparation of students from low-income backgrounds, and in 2016, the Department of Education recommended remedial courses focused on college-level reading, writing, and

math to develop skills. Academic unpreparedness could be a significant barrier to college access and completion, but students can acquire the skills to prepare for college.

There are many ways for students to prepare for college, and one of those ways is through dual enrollment. An (2013) conducted a longitudinal study of 8,800 eighth-grade students from the 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS:88) to estimate how dual enrollment impacted college degree attainment. The findings showed that dual-enrollment programs provide students with momentum, positively influence college degree attainment, and do not hinder the degree attainment of students from low-income communities.

Although students may strive to achieve high standardized test scores, participate in advanced placement courses, or enroll in dual-enrollment programs, their income can still hinder their success. College access can take many forms, and student persistence has different definitions. Standardized test scores may assess student achievement and determine whether a student is accepted to college.

School Counselors and the Impact of School Funding

According to Wiliam (2010), school funding significantly affects the disparity between schools and academic achievement. School counselors, who play a crucial role in providing college access information and assistance with college applications to students, are considered social capital agents in schools (Gilfillan, 2017). However, they may have other professional responsibilities that limit the time they can devote to helping students and families with the college admissions process, as noted by Bryan et al. (2017) and McDonough (1997). This can create a dilemma for families and students who rely on school counselors.

Belasco (2013) studied 10th- and 12th-grade students to determine how student-counselor interactions affect college access and enrollment. The study focused on the student's socioeconomic status (SES) to determine if there was a difference in the frequency of student visits with the school counselor based on family income. The findings revealed that students from low-SES backgrounds turned to their school counselors for college access information and advice. Additionally, the study showed that school counselors positively impacted students with low SES when advising them on college enrollment. Belasco's (2013) study focused on student-counselor relationships and enrollment likelihood, demonstrating the importance of guidance and knowledge in enrollment.

Research suggests that there could be a link between college enrollment and the relationship between low-income students and school counselors (Kim & Schneider, 2005; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Belasco (2013) emphasized that counselor effects vary based on student SES, while Bryan et al. (2009) found that Black and female students were likelier to receive college information from their school counselors. Conversely, students in low-income communities, large schools, and schools with high counselor-student ratios were less likely to seek help from their counselors.

Cholewa et al. (2015) reported that first-generation, Black, and private school students were likelier to credit their school counselors with their college readiness.

Longitudinal studies have shown that school counselors can provide college information to varied student populations, but more analysis is necessary to fully understand the outcomes of these studies (Gilfillan, 2017). School counselors must possess the required college-ready skills to aid students in the college-going process

(McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Gilfillan, 2017). However, school counselors may be stretched too thin to provide the necessary support due to other job obligations (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001). Inadequate resources in low- SES communities can also limit students' college access to information (Adelman, 2006; Venezia et al., 2003).

According to Belasco (2013), the challenges facing certain students do not necessarily reflect an inability to succeed at the college level. Despite limitations, counselors play a vital role in supporting low-income, Black, and Latinx students through the college access process (Gilfillan, 2017). As evidenced by Bryan et al.'s (2022) longitudinal study, a culture of counseling in schools can positively impact seniors' college decisions. It's worth noting, however, that counselors with larger caseloads did not contribute to a positive college-going mindset among seniors.

Engberg and Wolniak's (2014) longitudinal educational study explored the relationship between high school SES and college enrollment, examining individual and school-level resources. While the study considered schools of varying income levels, the research consistently highlighted the importance of providing college access support to underserved populations, including those from low-income families. Unfortunately, students from low-income backgrounds who attend low-SES schools face a double disadvantage, as their schools may lack the resources necessary to provide college access information. As such, school counselors play a pivotal role in the lives of marginalized students (Bryan et al., 2011; Cholewa et al., 2015; Engberg & Gilbert, 2014; McDonough, 2005; Perna et al., 2008).

According to Engberg and Wolniak (2014), increasing college enrollment among students can be achieved by providing them with college access resources and financial aid information. Research has shown that this approach has been primarily focused on underserved populations, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, with high schools providing financial backing to aid in this effort. Students often rely on the guidance of school personnel to navigate the college admissions process and secure financial aid (Engberg & Wolniak, 2014). The support provided by these entities and individuals can make all the difference in the success of many students.

In addition to the financial assistance necessary for college accessibility, the role of college advisors - comparable to school counselors - is crucial in guiding students through their college preparation. Clayton (2019) conducted a cross-case analysis of college advisors in public schools, including those employed by GEAR UP, a federally-funded program to aid low-income students with grants for education and community partnerships. The study examined advising strategies employed by advisors in public high schools using different models. The findings revealed four themes: 1) a wide range of services offered, 2) the influence of high school curricula on their work, 3) the advisors' belief in the importance of their job, and 4) the need for additional training. The counselors provided students with more than just college readiness support. They emphasized their work's significance yet acknowledged the need for further training to better assist students with diverse needs.

According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC, 2022), the 2021-2022 academic year saw a concerning rise in the student-to-counselor ratio. On average, each counselor was responsible for 405 students, far

exceeding the recommended ratio of 250 students per counselor. Furthermore, counselors in public schools reported spending approximately one-third of their time on non-academic issues. In contrast, their private school counterparts spent 17% of their time on such matters. These findings support the conclusions of Clayton's (2019) study, which emphasized the importance of adequate financial support and counselor roles in ensuring equitable college access for all students, regardless of their school sector.

Low-Income Communities and Proximity to Educational Opportunities

Almost 20 years ago, Ainsworth (2002) conducted a study analyzing the impact of community characteristics on educational behavior and achievement among eighth-grade students. The study used Zip codes to consider school and family backgrounds, community features, educational outcomes, and student metrics. Ainsworth (2002) found that collective socialization, social control, social capital, percentage of opportunities, and institutional qualities were three mediators of community effects on youth in low-income areas.

Collective socialization, which involves modeling college-going behavior by mentors and leaders, can affect young people in low-income communities. Without adequate adult supervision and community engagement activities, young people may turn to their peers and lose focus on their education, ultimately dropping out. Social capital, or the positive resources, information, and opportunities social networks provide, plays a crucial role in youth behavior. Ainsworth (2002) notes that young people in more affluent communities have access to more social networking and educational opportunities.

Alongside community factors, institutional characteristics, such as teacher quality and credentials, also significantly influence students' decisions to attend school. It's

worth noting that students' needs, especially in low-income communities, should not be overlooked. Positive role models can profoundly impact students' learning and attitude, leading to a successful high school experience and academic achievement (Ainsworth, 2002).

Mentors and role models are essential for young people to have an example of desirable behaviors and their benefits. Lastly, institutional characteristics can directly impact student and teacher morale, which is crucial for motivating students. According to Ainsworth (2002), the significance of community characteristics in determining educational outcomes is still unclear compared to other factors such as "individual, family, and school factors" (p. 131). However, collective socialization mediators' processes are the most crucial variables associated with community effects on educational outcomes.

According to Harding's research in 2010, there are controversial perspectives on low-income communities. However, Nguyen's study in 2023 found that students living in these communities tend to thrive despite facing financial and social obstacles.

Unfortunately, the issues of discrimination, slavery, and immigration in the 19th century led to a lack of resources for low-income families, a problem that persists today.

Immigrants, such as African, Irish, Jewish, and Italian, sought refuge in the United States to escape poverty but found themselves living in substandard housing and searching for work in overcrowded, underserved neighborhoods. Despite these challenges, low-income families managed to maintain their lifestyles, but the conditions continued to worsen without adequate attention.

Jencks and Mayer (1990) discussed growing up in low-income communities:

If policymakers try to save existing public housing projects, residential segregation will be maintained or increased. If scattered-site housing is built or housing vouchers are provided, then residential segregation may be reduced, but there may also be less low-income housing. (p. 4)

Living in low-income countries (LICs) can present various challenges, including limited school funding, social resources, and educational opportunities. Additionally, the quality of teachers and government-assisted programs may be lower. Studies have shown that community conditions can impact the college aspirations of African-American children, particularly in LICs (Tate, 2008, p. 400). While living in low-income communities can have both positive and negative effects on developmental outcomes (Browning & Soller, 2014; Ellen & Horn, 2018; Hillman, 2016; Owens, 2018; Turley, 2009), it is essential to recognize that these communities are also rich in culture and capital (Yosso, 2005), rather than solely focusing on deficits.

According to Nguyen's (2023) study on students from low-income backgrounds, success in education was the primary focus. The study utilized data from a longitudinal constructivist qualitative study to explore how low-income students navigated thriving in an educational environment. The research identified three key themes: asking for help, integrating financial implications and knowledge, and seizing career-oriented opportunities (p. 6).

Despite their rich cultural and capital resources, low-income communities often lack social structures comparable to more affluent areas, particularly when accessing competitive schools and higher education institutions (Browning & Soller, 2014; Nguyen, 2023). Shared routines in low-income regions typically center around attending school,

church, and grocery shopping. Unfortunately, educational resources are often scarce in these communities.

The New York City Housing Authority (2022) aims to enhance the quality of life for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing secure and affordable housing and facilitating access to social and community services. Students living in urban housing often face substandard living conditions (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2008; Tate, 2008) and limited opportunities to attend college near their homes. The community's low socioeconomic status is evident in its social, cultural, and economic institutions, or lack thereof, present in these communities since the 1920s (Sánchez-Jankowski, 2008).

In low-income countries (LICs), the limited availability of financial and social resources can hinder the growth and development of individuals, as noted by Tate (2008). To improve students' academic performance from low-SES communities, addressing the factors that affect their learning is essential. Research into these communities can reveal students' challenges (Tate, 2008). While some students from LICs receive educational opportunities through support and guidance, many others do not have access to quality education.

According to Bassok et al. (2016), low-income parents often spend more on resources to help their children succeed in communities with poor school quality. This allows them to access spaces typically reserved for those with more financial means, as noted by Owens (2018). Meanwhile, school districts in affluent areas tend to provide more resources for students because high-income families can support their children in their academic pursuits.

According to Hillman's (2016) research on college accessibility, the number of local colleges available to a community varies based on its racial/ethnic and socioeconomic profile within a predetermined commuting zone. The study found that Asian residents often had access to nearby 4-year colleges, while Black populations had access to 2-year and moderately selective colleges. This is important because students are more likely to attend colleges convenient to their surroundings, mainly for financial reasons (Hillman, 2016; Turley, 2009).

Hillman (2016) also explored the concept of "distance elasticity and inelasticity," which refers to the spillover effect of convenient college access and increased enrollment due to proximity and outreach to the community (p.994). This effect tends to reflect the financial makeup of the population in the area. Interestingly, the study found that online college access does not necessarily mitigate the limitations of academic programming by the community.

Students with the most mobility tend to embrace online opportunities, while marginalized populations continue with traditional in-class instruction (Hillman, 2016). This is consistent with case studies in Washington and West Virginia, which found that a 1% change in distance from a nearby college reduced the likelihood of enrolling by a low of 0.4% to a high of 2.2% (Ali, 2003; Ullis & Knowles, 1975).

A study conducted by Ellen and Horn (2018) examined the quality of education in low-income communities, with a particular focus on families receiving government assistance. The authors analyzed data from 2008, including school attendance, boundary information, and test scores, in a follow-up to the Poverty & Race Research Action Council report. Their findings showed that in 2016, students residing in public housing

were more likely to have access to poor-performing schools than those who received other housing subsidies, such as Low -Income Housing Credit (LITCH), Section 8, and vouchers- housing subsidies that allowed for residents to choose areas where they prefer to live compared to those having to live in public housing authorities. Families with children living closer to low-performing schools were also found to reside in high-poverty areas. However, families with vouchers had more flexibility in choosing their living arrangements, resulting in a greater variety of income levels within their communities. The study revealed that the closest school for children in public housing was a lower-performing institution in the highest poverty areas at the 21st percentile.

On the other hand, households residing in areas with LITCH were near schools with lower poverty rates. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the median outcome data failed to consider the children from families excluded from the report. Those living in public housing were compelled to attend schools with poorer performance and higher poverty rates, leading to disparities in academic success.

Owens (2018) used a multilevel model in a quantitative study to examine income segregation between school districts and the resulting test score gaps among different income and racial groups. The study revealed that income achievement gaps were more pronounced in metropolitan areas and public schools, with income segregation significantly contributing to educational disparities. Owens further elaborated on the link between academic achievement and degree attainment, explaining that unequal opportunities in income and employment can have far-reaching consequences on one's health, place of residence, and likelihood of criminal behavior, particularly for students from low SES backgrounds.

In communities with high rates of homeownership and affluence, schools benefit from larger budgets thanks to taxes paid by residents of the town or county. Owens' research reveals that disparities in student achievement and spatial segregation contribute to income inequality between schools, leading to an income achievement gap (2018).

Owens' study also highlights how economically segregated metropolitan areas exacerbate the gap in academic achievement between Black and White students, with a broader gap present in these communities (2018).

Families often relocate to specific communities to pursue a superior education for their children. Local district schools often mirror the values and demographics of the surrounding community, which can significantly impact the quality of education and services (Owens, 2018). Unfortunately, the discrepancy between income levels and school resources can negatively affect educational achievement for local school students. This can be incredibly challenging for families who cannot afford the higher rent of moving to areas with better educational opportunities.

Communities with ample financing tend to exhibit higher academic achievement, greater access to education, and a higher number of qualified instructors. This funding is primarily generated by property taxes, which support local schools. However, in communities where the number of renters exceeds the number of homeowners, there may be a shortage of social resources for academic instruction and program development due to lower tax revenue (Owens, 2018).

While research and policy have opened avenues for college access for underrepresented students, such as those from low-income and first-generation populations, there has been a lack of focus on specific communities, particularly those

living in public housing supported by federal government funds. Moreover, students in low-income communities may encounter challenges accessing college access programs and external programs at schools and other institutions due to budgetary limitations. This study aimed to address this gap in the literature by examining the experiences of students living in public housing authorities in low-income communities. The study explored the impact of proximity to a college access program on college access and how students leveraged and built on community cultural wealth.

Summary

Students in low-income communities face significant obstacles when it comes to academic achievement, including inadequate school resources and unequal opportunities. While socioeconomic status and location can play a role in success, other important considerations exist. By receiving appropriate training and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, social network agents in educational settings can help provide students with college access information, as noted by Belasco (2013).

This chapter delved into the extant literature on college access and the factors impacting low-income students. The four main themes identified in the literature were government-funded programming for college access, academic preparation, the role of school counselors as navigators, and the proximity of educational opportunities to low-income communities. Additionally, the chapter introduced Yosso's (2005) CCW model, which served as the theoretical framework for the study, and the importance of strength of community and college access were shared.

Conclusion

This study was prefaced on the CCW model (Yosso, 2005) four forms of capital. Students' cultural capital is highly valued in society, as it provides a range of perspectives on opportunities and supports all students. Educators who incorporate cultural capital into their inclusion strategies can reduce barriers to college access for students in low-income households. The literature explains how students can use cultural capital to enhance their education and college access opportunities. College access programs and dual enrollment in high school can enhance students' abilities and increase their chances of attending college and being academically prepared. However, students from low-income households may find it challenging to participate in such programs due to other responsibilities, making location and time difficult. Despite their socioeconomic status, individuals in these households possess community and cultural capital. According to the research and the CCW model, overlapping capital contributes to students' chances of accessing college. However, few studies have examined public housing and students' educational aspirations. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring students' experiences living in public housing.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study's purpose, including examining students' experiences in a college access program in public housing. The chapter also explored the study's significance, theoretical framework, its relationship to social justice, and the research questions that inform the study. In Chapter 2, Yosso's (2005) theoretical framework on community cultural wealth and a literature review contextualized the study. Chapter 3 delves into the study's methodology, including its design and procedures, participant selection, data collection, trustworthiness measures, ethical considerations, and data analysis.

This study used a qualitative case study design and procedures as a guide. Such a methodology offers a detailed description and analysis of one or more cases within specific boundaries and limitations (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 121). In this case study, the researcher focused on the PEER program under the Union Housing Authority on the United States West Coast. The study was delimited to students participating in the PEER Program and the staff working at four specific housing locations. One of the defining features of this methodology is the careful definition of the parameters within which the case is analyzed.

Utilizing a case study method for this study was deemed appropriate due to the shared phenomenon among the program's location, students, and staff (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, case studies offer an opportunity to delve into real-life phenomena. In conducting a single study case, Yin (2018) recommended the case study method as the optimal choice for obtaining a deeper understanding of the issue at hand regarding the students (Stake, 2010).

By analyzing the experiences of students enrolled in a college access program in public housing, this research contributes to the limited body of knowledge on students who highlight their assets and contribute to the scholarship of underrepresented groups. This chapter delves into the research design and setting and provides a comprehensive overview of the data collection procedures, coding, and analysis of the case study employed in this study.

Research Design

This qualitative case study utilized a research design to examine the experiences of students in public housing who participated in a college access program. The method used was a descriptive single-case study, as Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined, focusing on understanding how participants experience the phenomenon. Case studies are valuable when researching programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). The study was conducted in the Union Public Housing Authority, where all program participants reside on the West Coast of the U.S. It involved four public housing locations, 10 students across four sites, and three staff members, including two college advisors and one program director.

Qualitative research involves posing questions and investigating them to gather data through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. This study utilized semi-structured interviews, multi-media content analysis of the program's website, social media pages, media articles supporting the program, and document analysis that included federal reports. According to Yin (2018), case studies utilize research questions that examine "why" and "how" and aim to comprehend a real-world scenario (p. 44). Stake

(1995) highlights the importance of understanding the phenomenon in a single case study by focusing on the individual case to provide valuable insights (p. 3).

Stake (1995) posits employing a case study approach based on the researcher's choice of the case and determining the study's focus and direction. The researcher chose the PEER program as the subject of study, aiming to understand its students' experiences and the program's impact on students receiving access information on the public housing site. Yin (2018) emphasizes the importance of identifying the case's boundaries and delimitations within its real-life context, reinforcing the suitability of the case study methodology.

In this chapter, the researcher has provided a detailed account of the study through a series of step-by-step descriptions. These descriptions encompass the study's setting, participants, and data collection process. The researcher has also emphasized the credibility of the design, research ethics, data analysis methodology, and her positionality on the topic. The next section of this chapter will delve into the research questions guiding this study listed below.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study are:

1. How do students describe their experience in a college access program located in public housing?

2. In what ways are tenets of Community Cultural Wealth used to assist students in their college pursuits?

3. How do on-site services make a difference in sharing or receiving information on college access in public housing?

The PEER Program received exclusive grant funding during the study's proposal stage and underwent a two-year pilot phase. It was implemented across nine public housing authorities, overseen by HUD. Since then, the program has evolved beyond financial aid assistance and adopted a more comprehensive approach to its services, reducing the number of available programs. Additionally, the program has become more inclusive, removing age restrictions for residents who wish to participate. The PEER program no longer relies solely on funding from HUD.

Setting

To ensure the safety and confidentiality of study participants, the PEER program's name and location at Union Housing Authority remain anonymous. PEER is in a low-income community and is one of 3,300 public housing authorities across the United States. The Union Housing Authority houses a diverse population, with 35% of residents identifying as African American and 65% Hispanic. Additionally, over 45% of families in the Union Housing Authority are considered low-income. As part of the study, four specific sites within the Union Housing Authority were chosen for research: North East, North West, South East, and South West.

This study used the secure virtual communications platform ZOOM, which has password protection. To accommodate the participants' schedules, interviews were arranged at their convenience. Originally, semi-structured interviews and observations were intended to be conducted in person at the Union Housing Authority (UHA) on the West Coast of the United States. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic during the data collection period, program policies prohibited in-person interactions, prompting a shift to online methods.

Observations were not permitted for this study, as some participants were under

18, and the Institutional Review Board had only approved data collection for those over

18. The study focused on the experiences of UHA resident students 18 or older in the

PEER Program. As a precautionary measure, the researcher prepared to pivot to a virtual

platform to conduct all interviews, which she did. However, as detailed in the participant

section, the interview procedures remained consistent. Table 3 displays the neighborhood

demographics. The diverse demographics in each area offered a comparative experience

for every student participant in the program and their communities. The researcher

selected these specific sites and regions because they had the necessary resources to

examine students' college and postsecondary opportunities.

Table 3

Neighborhood Demographics

Region	N of occupied public housing units	Community schools	Average Monthly Income	2- and 4-year schools	Demographic
Northeast	500	300	$2,000	Eight 4-year private colleges Five public 2-year colleges	90% Hispanic
Northwest	1000	300	$1,700	Twenty-one 4-year private colleges Nine 2-year private colleges Four public 2-year colleges	70% Black/ 30% Hispanic
Southeast	600	300	$2,500	Eleven 4-year private colleges Six 2-year public colleges	90% Hispanic/10% Black
Southwest	400	300	$1,800	One 2-year private college Six 2-year public colleges	65% Hispanic/35% Black

Participants

The researcher interviewed 10 students and three staff members for this study, including a program director and two college advisors. Participants were selected through a process known as purposeful sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals who have experienced similar phenomena (Vogt et al., 2012). All student participants were residents of the Union Public Housing Authority and lived in one of four separate housing projects under the management of UHA.

During the interviews conducted with the PEER Program under the Union Housing Authority on the West Coast, all staff members were employed by the program. Staff was included to analyze the findings' consistency, expansion, or refutation, which will be further discussed in Chapter 4. The participating students were intentionally selected due to their shared program workplace and interaction with the students.

According to Patton's (2002) theory, selecting a purposeful case for a qualitative study should involve choosing a case that contains a wealth of information. Purposeful sampling ensures a strong connection between the study's participants and the topic. In the case of Creswell and Poth's (2018) study, this meant focusing on students and staff affiliated with the same program.

Initially, this qualitative case study aimed to involve 15 students, with five students from three different sites aged 18 and above. However, identifying suitable participants posed a challenge in the beginning. Despite sending over 600 emails and utilizing TikTok for a social media post and personal video invitation, contacting potential interviewees in the Midwest remained unsuccessful. As a result, the researcher shifted her focus to the West Coast PEER Program, which fortunately is the same

program as in the Midwest, with the only difference being the location. To ensure that recruitment challenges were minimized, each participant was offered an incentive through a $25.00 visa e-gift card delivered via email.

The global COVID-19 pandemic restricted in-person recruitment and altered the approach the researcher planned for data collection in this case study. Recruitment proved challenging at the start of the data collection process. However, the researcher employed a purposeful sampling criterion, which allowed for recruitment through "snowball or chain sampling." As described by Patton (2002), this technique involves someone aware of the study and may have participated, informing someone else who is also experiencing the same phenomenon, thus influencing participation.

Although the researcher utilized snowballing or chain sampling to expand the number of participants, the researcher must note that this research's sample size and outcomes do not accurately represent all participants included in this criterion. The study included 10 students, three staff members, two college advisors, and one program director. The research participants reside in four public housing authorities on the West Coast of the United States: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Two student participants self-identified as Black/African American, while the remaining participants identified as Hispanic, and Mexican—staff identified as Hispanic, Oaxacan, and Filipino (see Table 4). Student participants were either previously enrolled in college or currently enrolled at the time of data collection.

Table 4

Participants

Participant	Time in PEER	Race	Years of age
Daisy	Seven months	Hispanic	21
Jessica	Four months	Hispanic	19
Adrian	Five months	Hispanic	18
Jennifer	Unknown	Latina	18
Sarah	Three years	Hispanic	20
Eric	Four years	Black	19
Maria	Three months	Hispanic	34
Kaye	1-year ½	Black/African Am.	19
Joe	Three years	Hispanic/Mexican	20
Daniel	Eight months	Mexican/American	21
Mel	Two years – staff	Hispanic	First-gen
Lizbeth	Seven months – staff	Oaxacan	First-gen
Frances	Program Director	Filipino	Not first-gen

The study was initiated by seeking permission from the Senior Director of PEER (SDP) two years before data collection. After reaching out, the researcher met with the SDP virtually to discuss her interest in conducting the study. At the time, the PEER program was experiencing a few changes, and the SDP introduced the researcher to the program in the Midwest. Although the PEER program in the Midwest approved the research request, recruitment posed some challenges, as previously mentioned. Hence, the researcher returned to the initial PEER contact on the West Coast.

To move forward without altering the purpose and significance of the study, the researcher sent a detailed proposal request to the SDP at the PEER West Coast location

via email, including an advanced organizer and interview questions, protocol, IRB approval, informed consent, and a sample recruitment flyer (See Appendix A). A meeting was held via Zoom with the SDP, program director, and researcher to discuss the study and the decision to conduct it virtually. Upon gaining approval from the SDP and program director, the researcher shared the recruitment flyer, a video introduction of herself, and the study details (See Appendix B).

The PEER staff gave the researcher a list of students interested in participating in the study and their contact information. The researcher emailed each student and included a recruitment flyer, an introduction video link via Dropbox, interview questions, and a consent form, which were also shared with the SDP in the request to conduct research with PEER. To ensure security, all documents were password-protected. As the program staff is small, they were invited to participate in the study through the SDP. The same recruitment materials were sent to staff members, with password protection. After making initial contact with the students and staff, interviews were conducted between April and May of 2023.

The PEER Program is spearheaded by a program director who participated in this study alongside two college advisors. Before participant interviews, demographic information such as age, educational background, school status, institution name, enrollment duration in PEER, and length of stay in public housing authorities preceded the interview protocol. On the other hand, the staff were asked to share similar information along with their tenure with PEER.

The study's focal point was the student participant's proximity to the program in which they were enrolled and their residential location. The program is located within their community and on public housing premises.

Data Collection Procedures

Acquiring high-quality evidence is a top priority for researchers as it accurately reflects the participants' perspectives and addresses the research questions that guide their study (Crotty, 1998). In line with ethical standards, the researcher obtained primary data by securing approvals from the St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Union Housing Authority (See Appendix C). With the consent of the participants (See Appendix E), the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the program director of PEER, two program staff members (See Appendix F), and 10 student participants who experienced the phenomenon being studied. The data collection took place during the spring semester of 2023.

In conducting a case study, researchers gather evidence from various sources, such as observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 163). In this study, the researcher utilized interviews and multi-media content analysis. However, limited access to observe the West Coast PEER program and fewer participants than anticipated required a broader reach for content. As Yin (2018) highlights, a good case study must incorporate multiple sources of data collection. Consequently, the researcher broadened the scope of data sources to ensure a robust study. To provide a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences in a college access program within public housing authorities, data was collected from multiple public sources, including the program's website, social media accounts, and federal reports.

The researcher gathered a variety of content sources of insights from the PEER program to support the research. The researcher then refined this chapter to incorporate these changes. The researcher needed to broaden her search and locate additional data sources to bolster the findings discussed later in this chapter. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002) and to gain an "in-depth understanding of the case" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 98), the researcher selected three or more data collection methods. This approach, known as triangulation, also enhanced the study's validity (Mathison, 1988).

To collect data through interviews, the researcher followed the 10 characteristics of a good interviewer described by Gibbs (2007). These include being knowledgeable, structured, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering, and interpretation. The main objective was to build trust with the participants, facilitating an open and safe dialogue that would provide valuable insights for the study. The researcher created a video introducing herself to the potential participants and a recruitment flyer to establish a personal connection before the interviews (See Appendix D). She is located on the East Coast, and they are on the West Coast. This video allowed participants to get to know the researcher and decide whether they felt comfortable moving forward with the interview. Happily, everyone did.

The researcher also considered content analysis as a means of data collection, which involves reviewing "national program reports, program videos, strategic plans, blogs, and archival information," as described by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 163). Table 5 outlines the methods of data collection used in this qualitative case study. While the intention was for all interviews and observations to be conducted in person, a virtual

option was also made available as outlined in the IRB in case in-person meetings were impossible.

Table 5

Data Collection Methods

Interviews	Multimedia content	Documents
Ten 45-minute one-on-one virtual interviews with students	Social media pages	Memos
	YouTube videos	Interview recordings
	Program website	Federal reports
Three 45-minute one-on-one virtual interviews with program staff		

The following steps outline the plan used for data collection:

1. The researcher received IRB approval from St. John's University.

2. The researcher contacted the UHA Senior Program Director (SPD) to seek approval from the Union Housing Authority to conduct research and included a proposal and an organizer.

3. The researcher met with the senior staff of UHA via Zoom and obtained approval to conduct the study.

4. The researcher shared the recruitment flyer, introduction video, interview protocols, and consent letters with the Senior Director at UHA via email.

5. The researcher received a list of students interested in participating in the study for recruitment.

6. The researcher contacted potential participants to confirm their interest, sent interview protocols (See Appendices G and H), consent, and researcher introduction video, and discussed meeting availability.

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7. The researcher communicated with participants to confirm dates and times of interviews once consent was received.

8. The researcher sent a secure password link to meet via ZOOM.

9. The researcher confirmed interview appointments a day before the scheduled interview.

10. The researcher recorded all interviews with consent and provided each participant with a copy of the consent signed by them and the researcher.

11. The researcher thanked everyone for participating in the interview and sent an electronic $25.00 VISA card for their participation

Interviews

Spradley (1979) notes that interviewing is crucial for gathering qualitative data. Kvale (1996) characterizes the research interview as a conversation between two individuals, with one person as the researcher and the other as the participant. The researcher responsible for conducting interviews in this study followed the guidelines outlined in the interview protocol.

As the interviewer, it was the researcher's responsibility to ask questions non-threateningly, as Yin (2018) noted. Before the interviews, the researcher informed the participants that she could not comment, agree, or disagree with their responses. Instead, she would only ask for clarification or expansion. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), interviews are a valuable method in qualitative research as they allow the researcher to gain insight into the interviewee's perspective and goals. The researcher could acquire a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied by conducting these interviews.

According to Kvale (1996), creating a comfortable and non-intimidating location for an interview is crucial. This allows participants to feel safe and at ease during the process. During the interviews, most participants were in the comfort of their own homes, in a quiet environment. Two participants were interviewed while at the library, while another preferred to be outside on their college campus. To ensure privacy, the researcher conducted the interviews from a quiet space at home.

In the past, interviews were typically conducted in person. However, new technology has made it possible to conduct virtual interviews, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explained. This innovative approach takes interviewing to a whole new level. To ensure that the interview meets the high standards suggested by Kvale (1996), the researcher provided the participants with an electronic copy of the interview questions before the virtual interview. The researcher also made the questions available in the chat for those who preferred that format.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative case study research interviews aim to understand the subject's perspective, unveil the meaning of their experiences, and discover their reality (p. 164). Kvale (1996) stresses the significance of acknowledging the researcher's role during the interview process. Staying present and attentive during the interview is crucial. Empathizing with research participants when creating research questions is critical, as highlighted by Creswell & Poth (2018), which is why the researcher shared the questions before the interviews, allowing the participants to read them at their own pace. Interview protocols for student and staff respondents were distinct.

Before each interview, the researcher read the consent form to the participants and addressed any inquiries they had. The researcher also informed the participants that they could stop the interview and skip any questions if desired. According to Spradley's (1979) research, the interview process aims to establish a connection, gather information, and cultivate a fundamental sense of trust. To comprehensively comprehend the workings of the phenomenon being researched, it is crucial to maintain objectivity throughout the study. Toward the end of the interview, participants could inquire about or add anything they deemed necessary (Vogt et al., 2011). Some participants took this opportunity to express gratitude for the researcher's efforts in raising awareness for public housing, while others shared their thoughts on participating in the study. A few participants had nothing further to contribute. The alignment between the interview and research questions is illustrated below (see Table 6).

Table 6

Alignment of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research questions	Interview Questions
How do students describe their experience in college access programs at a public housing authority?	How do you describe having a college access program on the grounds of where you live?
In what ways are tenets of community cultural wealth used to assist students in their college pursuits?	Who would you say is influential in your college or career aspirations? Can you tell me about a time when they encouraged you?
How do on-site college access services make a difference in sharing and receiving information on college access?	What has your assessment data revealed about your program's outcomes that may have surprised you?

Content Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman's (1994) methodology, content analysis involves systematically interpreting data from qualitative or quantitative studies. Considering changes to the researcher's observation plans for the PEER Program qualitative study, the researcher decided to use content analysis as an additional data source to support the interviews conducted. The PEER Program website, federal reports, YouTube videos, and other documents provided rich sources of multimedia content that could easily be accessed (see Table 6). Weber's (1990) defense of content analysis as a means of validating study inferences solidifies the value of this approach. By including texts that may not be part of the existing literature, content analysis offers a unique space for analysis (Weber, 1990).

The researcher enhanced the themes from the study by employing content analysis in conjunction with interviews. This method allowed the researcher to analyze documents for trends and patterns that may or may not have aligned with the interview findings (See Appendix I). As the information gathered is static, the researcher could compare the details surrounding PEER's implementation and program goals to the experiences of the students enrolled in the program.

According to Stemler (2000), analyzing content goes beyond word counting and involves coding and categorizing data. Weber (1990) adds that paying attention to synonyms is crucial to prevent misinterpretation of codes. When coding content, Stemler (2000) emphasizes the significance of examining the context in which words are used, such as distinguishing verbs from nouns. Stemler (2000) also notes that content analysis minimizes data, is non-intrusive, and helps code large amounts of information.

Documents

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), document analysis is an essential qualitative research method alongside interviews, observations, and audiovisual materials. Documents can take many forms, such as reports, strategic plans, blogs, and emails. The World Wide Web provided vast information in this research project, including student interviews, public conferences, program history, and a two-year review. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the researcher must identify the most relevant documents to their research questions. Furthermore, as Stake (1995) points out, document analysis allows researchers to capture participants' experiences that might go unnoticed.

Table 7

Content Analysis: Multi-Media Documents

Content	Code	Alignment to research questions
Program website	Outreach	RQ1
	Accessibility	RQ2
	communication	
Federal report	Communication	RQ1
	Success	RQ2
	Challenges	
	Support	
HUD postsecondary success report	Guidance	RQ2
	Rapport	RQ3
Program social media accounts	Kind	RQ1
	Helpful	RQ2
	Resourceful	RQ3

Trustworthiness of the Design

Trustworthiness in research requires ensuring that the study and its findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and conformable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve

this, it is essential to ensure the accuracy of the study process, reflect the selected study method, and use data relevant to the research question(s). Triangulation, a form of developing credibility, is crucial in building trust in the study and its findings. Mathison (1994) argues that triangulation is established by using several data collection methods to support the credibility of one's study.

This study's data collection involved interviewing and multi-media content analysis using program websites, federal reports, and YouTube videos. Triangulation was practiced by collecting data from students, staff, and multiple sources, providing a more robust and vital context and comprehension of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, 2012). To build trust, the researcher employed member checking of the interview data, allowing participants to review the study's findings and ensure they aligned with their research experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants could suggest changes or deletions to the transcribed data and share additional information. Two participants requested minimal corrections, which the researcher made accordingly to ensure that the interpretation reflected the content of the discussion.

Another approach to enhance trustworthiness is transferability, which involves utilizing thick descriptions, as Geertz (1973) suggested. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight the significance of thick descriptions in determining whether the research outcomes can be applied to other settings, people, and times. Including specifics in a case study description is beneficial for researchers when identifying themes from the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thick descriptions encompass details regarding the study environment, physical traits, and the characteristics of individuals involved or excluded

from the research. This links the raw data before developing themes, facilitating further analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher created thick descriptions of the findings to offer context before formulating themes from the data analysis. The richness of the details and their interconnectivity provided by thick descriptions contribute to a comprehensive study supporting trustworthiness (Stake, 2010).

Dependability, a crucial aspect of trustworthiness, ensures consistency and accurate data tracking throughout the study. Guba (1981) suggests that a study can only be considered credible if it is reliable. Researchers can use various data collection methods, including triangulation, to strengthen the study's dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 18). The researcher employed three data collection methods in this study: interviews, multi-media content analysis, and document analysis. This approach helped establish the study's dependability and, in turn, its trustworthiness. Additionally, the researcher provided detailed information on the data collection and analysis procedures used, allowing for replication of the study. Once dependability is established, readers can confidently interpret the study's findings and apply them to other populations, settings, and situations and their understanding.

Building trustworthiness in qualitative research involves four key components, with confirmability being the final. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability can be achieved by ensuring that the study's write-up accurately reflects the original data sources, including field notes and interviews. This helps to mitigate any potential researcher bias or assumptions. For this study, the researcher sought the input of her mentor to review the coded findings for consistency and to check for any potential

bias. The researcher enhanced the study's confirmability and overall trustworthiness by doing so.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress the importance of establishing trustworthiness in research. They suggest using a "reflective journal" as part of the research process, along with techniques such as "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (p.19). This can help control bias and improve credibility through triangulation (Mathison, 2012). However, even with triangulation, biases may still exist in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To address this, researchers can collect data from multiple sources to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, seeking publicly available data and reports can help further check for biases and validate findings, as was done in this study of the PEER Program.

Research Ethics

At each research stage, unique ethical considerations must be carefully addressed. To ensure proper procedure, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest obtaining permission from the research site before data collection. The researcher obtained approval from the St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to protect the rights of human subjects. Following this, the researcher received approval from the Union Housing Authority to research the PEER Program involving students and staff.

All participants were willing to participate, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews. Participants were also fully informed of the study's purpose to address potential ethical concerns. Interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom with a protective password and at a convenient time for all parties involved. The program name and community organizations mentioned during interviews were changed to preserve

anonymity, and participants provided pseudonyms. Finally, individual public housing authorities were also replaced to protect the confidentiality of participants. As Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended, pseudonyms were also used in document analysis to maintain confidentiality.

Before commencing each interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form with every participant and informed them that they could withdraw from the study at any time or choose not to answer any question(s) they wished. Participants were also told that there would be no repercussions for doing so and that all data collected would be kept confidential and stored on a personal computer that was password-encrypted and owned and operated solely by the researcher.

Given the challenges encountered during the recruitment process for the previous PEER program, as outlined in the settings section, an incentive was offered to students in the PEER West Coast program who agreed to participate in the study. After completing the interviews, participants were given a $25.00 VISA gift card as a token of gratitude, delivered to their email accounts.

Throughout the process of writing the findings, the researcher adhered to Creswell and Poth's (2018) "ethical compliance list" (p. 226), which included obtaining permission to use public documents and reports in the document analysis. The researcher expected to review a wealth of information available on the internet and information shared by the program. To address ethical concerns, as Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined, the researcher ensured that the information transmitted represented what the PEER program considers accurate and that the data was applied to the intended audience. Furthermore, pseudonyms were used to protect anonymity when referring to information from

document analysis. Document changes were made with the utmost care to preserve the integrity of the program's nature.

Data Analysis Approach

Data analysis involves more than just recording information - it also includes reflecting on the researcher's experiences. According to Gibbs (2007), there are various ways to approach this, such as through research diaries, field notes, and memoing. During the coding process, the researcher noticed that some transcripts did not match the exact words spoken in the interviews. Reviewing the audio compared to the transcripts was most helpful to ensure accuracy.

An inductive approach to coding allowed the researcher to gather data from the interviews and multimedia content, recognize patterns and outliers, and conclude codes. Coding during the research process involves developing a data bank to compare during analysis. The preliminary coding began with using the literature review's subheadings and theory. The researcher also kept a reflective journal to note perceptions and thoughts before, during, and after each interview. Additionally, the researcher manually transcribed demographic information for each participant before the interviews and compared it to the written transcriptions captured by Otter AI technology, translating speech to text.

Once all the data was transcribed and member checks were completed, the researcher aggregated it into categories based on the relationship of words corroborating the data (Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2014) explains that coding involves aggregating data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases used in the study, and assigning a label to the code (p. 184). Data were

classified and interpreted into initial codes in the researcher's review and notating of the

interview transcripts and multi-media content documents.

After identifying the initial round of codes, the researcher took a break to review

the data the following day for accuracy. For the second coding cycle, an in-vivo approach

was employed, which involved using the participants' exact words in their language

(Saldaña, 2016). The researcher compiled codes with excerpts from the findings, grouped

them into themes, and defined each theme. In the third coding round, memos that the

researcher had noted throughout the interview and data collection process were reviewed.

Similar themes emerged, with substantial findings included in the study.

Throughout this process, the researcher took steps to ensure accuracy, including

replaying audio while reading transcripts for illegible sections. Additionally, a codebook

was created, and the researcher wrote her thoughts about each code after the initial

coding round.

Upon conducting several reviews to identify common themes, the researcher

analyzed the data and examined the relationships between and across codes (Creswell &

Poth, 2018; Gibbs, 2007). Additionally, the researcher carefully reviewed and coded the

multimedia documents and documented their thoughts and reflections on the interviews

and content (Miles et al., 2014).

The researcher must begin writing before and during data collection (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). Field notes provide a way to document the environment before observation

and interviews, while descriptive notes help to capture contextual information on the

phenomenon. At the proposal stage of this study, Dedoose CAQDAS was considered a

tool to assist with data analysis and theme connection, along with manual coding.

However, upon reviewing and analyzing the data, the researcher used a descriptive coding process with the assistance of the research questions and Yosso's (2005) CCW model.

Memos were employed to enhance the interviews and document analysis as per Miles et al. (2014). The researcher utilized a variety of sources, including archived documents, government and PEER program websites, and YouTube videos, to code and triangulate the data.

According to Stake (1995), researchers should "validate key observations, gather additional data, replicating or triangulating" (p. 53). As this study relied on virtual data collection, the researcher incorporated public information that could not be directly observed. The preliminary codes were then categorized into concepts, themes, and semantic links to evaluate the data. Chapter 4 outlines the five themes that emerged from the findings in detail.

Researcher Role

The role of a researcher is complex, demanding a keen awareness of potential biases and a commitment to mitigating them throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, 2012). Memoing, or taking note of one's thoughts and feelings during interviews, is an effective method of practicing reflexivity. Collecting and analyzing data and presenting findings are critical components of a study. However, it is equally essential for the researcher to acknowledge the diverse experiences of the participants.

As Stake (1995) suggests, researchers should approach their work with an open mind and a genuine desire to learn about their subjects' daily lives and surroundings (p.1). The researcher practiced reflexivity and bracketing to evaluate her biases, which

involved suspending her opinions and beliefs about the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 314, 327).

As a former resident of a public housing authority in the New York City Housing Authority and someone from a low-income family, the researcher recognizes the need to check her biases continuously throughout the study. The researcher shares similarities with the participants, having lived in a public housing project in the past and lacking exposure to college access programs. Therefore, the researcher approached the study with high moral and ethical standards, ensuring that her personal experiences did not influence the outcome.

In this study, every student can express their perspective unless they opt out; these viewpoints are duly represented in the outcomes. As Banks (1998) advocates, "social science and educational researchers ought to aim for objectivity while recognizing the interdependence and interactivity of subjective and objective aspects of knowledge" (p. 11). Moreover, Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that researchers should "give back" by "being attentive to chances for reciprocity" (p. 55) while gathering and scrutinizing data. The researcher is dedicated to fulfilling this obligation.

Conclusion

This case study provided insight into the experiences of 10 determined students who took part in a college access program in public housing on the West Coast, along with three dedicated staff members who provided one-on-one support for students seeking college access. Using a qualitative methodology, the study explored whether living near a college access program in public housing could impact college access,

whether it could leverage community cultural wealth, and whether on-site services were

beneficial in the acquisition of this information.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This qualitative case study aimed to investigate the experiences of 10 Latinx and African American students living in low-income public housing authorities who participated in the Providing Enriching Educational Resources (PEER) college access program. The study utilized Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) model to understand how the students perceived the program. Additionally, the study examined the perspectives of staff members who worked with the PEER Program students. The research employed a case study methodology to investigate the on-site college access program where the students reside in the United States. The first three chapters of the study introduced the research, the literature about college access and students living in low-income communities, the theoretical framework, and the methodological design.

This case study involved 13 semi-structured interviews with 10 students, two college advisors, and one program director. The study considered the demographic data of each participant before it began.

Various public federal documents were examined for content analysis, including the program website, program Instagram page, program X page (Twitter), and HUD report on program design and outcomes. Through interactions with PEERs, staff, family, and community, students could express their experiences and thoughts on how they gained dominant cultural capital during their college enrollment/exploration. This chapter presents the results of this study.

Following the study's guidelines, the interview process, based on Yosso's (2005) CCW model and research design, mirrors the reliability outlined in Chapter 3, which is essential for this research. By utilizing the four principles of Yosso's (2005) CCW model,

participants in this qualitative case study emphasized the importance of aspirational, familial, navigational, and social capital in aiding their college access.

Description of Interview Participants

This study involved 10 college students, from first-year students to sophomores, who self-identified as Black, Hispanic, and Mexican. In addition, three staff members participated in this study, including two college advisors and one program director who identified as Filipina, Oaxacan, and Hispanic. All the student participants were the first in their families to attend college. They resided in four public housing authorities in different city areas: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest. Two of the students were recipients of a housing subsidy called Section 8, which provides financial rental assistance to families. The Union Public Housing Authority oversaw all the housing locations.

Among the student participants, four resided in the same public housing, varying in age from 18 to 34. Of the three staff members, two are first-generation college graduates, with one having proximity to public housing authorities. As all student participants come from public housing, the research findings pertain to all of them.

Additionally, the study utilized input from the staff and content analysis of federal reports to corroborate the results. Table 8 describes the study's participants, including their self- selected pseudonyms.

Table 8

Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Race/ethnicity	Housing Authority	Years in public housing	Enrolled in college
Lizeth	Oaxacan	*	N/A	No
Mel	Hispanic	*	N/A	No
Frances	Asian Filipino	*	N/A	No
Maria	Hispanic	Northeast	18 years	Yes
Daniel	Mexican/Hispanic	Southeast	10 years	Yes
Sarah	Hispanic	Northwest	3 years	Yes
Eric	Hispanic	Southeast	12 years	Yes
Jessica	Hispanic	Northeast	15 years	No
Joe	Mexican/Hispanic	Southwest	20 years	Yes
Kaye	Black/Afr. Amer.	Northwest	19 years	Yes
Adrian	Mexican/Hispanic	Southeast	18 years	Yes
Jennifer	Hispanic	Southeast	7 years	Yes
Emily	Hispanic	Northeast	16 years	Yes

Note: * indicates program staff who have worked across all Union Housing Authority locations.

Program Staff

Lizbeth

During the interview, Lizbeth shared their experience working as a college advisor for the PEER Program for the past seven months. Lizbeth worked with two public housing authorities under Union, despite never having lived in public housing themselves. Lizbeth explained that the students they work with come from a community with a strong sense of responsibility, mainly when supporting their families. Lizbeth is a first-generation college graduate and second-generation immigrant passionate about sharing knowledge and empowering their students. Lizbeth believes it is essential to let students know they are accepted and to ensure their voices are heard, especially given the history of suppressed voices within their community.

Mel

During the interview, Mel revealed that she had been a college advisor for the PEER program for the past two years. As a first-generation college graduate, Mel had never lived in public housing but had shared a community with many of the students in the program. In discussing the lives of these students, Mel noted that they often felt isolated, with little sense of community and concerns about safety. Additionally, students were usually focused on finding resources rather than connecting. As the interview ended, Mel expressed her fears that funding sources prioritized quantitative data related to the PEER Program's outcomes rather than listening to the valuable qualitative feedback provided by the students themselves.

Frances

During the interview, Frances shared that she had been serving as a program director for the PEER Program for the past 10 months, overseeing all public housing authority PEER Programs and holding offices at four sites. Despite not being a first-generation college graduate or having lived in public housing, Frances had observed that community life for the students in the program varied greatly depending on the site. She noted that some public housing authorities were livelier than others, with varying levels of interaction between residents, which was primarily influenced by the site management. Frances explained that livelier sites tended to receive more resources and support, ensuring that students felt safe and well-supported. Before concluding the interview, Frances expressed interest in identifying other students who might benefit from participating in the study, suggesting that students who feel accountable and believe in the program are more likely to respond positively to the call.

Student Participants

Sarah

During the interview, it was noted that Sarah had been a student of the PEER program for the past three years. Although she took a leave from college due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sarah intends to resume her studies in the fall of 2023. While Sarah is not a first-generation college student, she has resided in public housing authorities for three years. When asked about her community, Sarah spoke highly of her neighbors, describing them as "friendly, resourceful, and supportive." She also shared that her community is where she feels at ease and comfortable.

Daniel

At the time of the interview, Daniel had already been enrolled in the PEER Program for nine months. As a first-generation college student, he took a break from trade school due to the pandemic. For the past decade, Daniel has resided in public housing authorities. When asked about his community, he described it as "decent" and stated that he had no issues living there. He says his neighbors are amicable and do not cause any problems. Following our interview, Daniel had no further comments to offer.

Emily

During the interview, Emily mentioned being part of the PEER Program for seven months. As a first-generation college student, she had lived in public housing authorities for six years. Emily says her community is a welcoming and semi-calm, although it has some "gangsters." She also emphasized that it is not what people usually hear or assume.

Joe

During the interview, Joe shared that she had been a part of the PEER Program for three years. Joe has resided in public housing authorities for two decades as a first-generation college student. When describing her community, Joe emphasized the "close-knit nature and family-oriented" atmosphere, with everyone knowing each other and many family businesses present. After the interview, Joe expressed gratitude for allowing her to share her perspectives. She needed to know that her voice was heard, and she hoped the exchange also helped uplift the researcher's voice.

Jennifer

It is unclear how long Jennifer has been in the PEER Program, but she is a high school graduate and will be the first in her family to attend college in fall 2023. She lived in public housing authorities for seven years and has described her community as "close-knit and friendly." During our interview, Jennifer expressed her frustration with the stereotypes and prejudices her community faces, as she believes they are hardworking and have much to offer.

Kaye

During our interview, Kaye had actively participated in the PEER Program for a year and a half. Kaye has resided in public housing for 19 years as a first-generation college student. Kaye expressed concerns about safety and lack of peace when describing her community. Kaye did not offer any additional remarks toward the conclusion of our conversation.

Adrian

During our interview, Adrian mentioned having participated in the PEER Program for five months. As a first-generation college student, he has resided in public housing authorities for 18 years and described his community as "not necessarily dangerous" but still affected by the presence of local gangs. Adrian concluded the interview without any additional comments.

Jessica

During our interview, Jessica mentioned having participated in the PEER Program for four months. She has lived in public housing authorities for 15 years as a first-generation college student. Jessica expressed that her community has always made her feel secure and supported. During our conversation, Jessica expressed gratitude for discussing the topic and found it inspiring to see someone from the projects, such as the researcher.

Maria

During the interview, Maria shared that she had participated in the PEER Program for three months. Being a first-generation college student and having lived in public housing for 18 years, Maria expressed her feelings of insecurity in her community. Towards the end of the session, Maria expressed her concerns about transferring to another college. However, after a brief discussion, she said, "This was exactly what I needed."

Eric

During the interview, Eric, a first-generation college student, shared that he had been involved in the PEER Program for four years. For the past 12 years, he has resided

in public housing authorities and described his community as "a work in progress that has shown improvement." Following the interview, Eric expressed gratitude for the chance to contribute to the study. He noted that it was a powerful reminder of his voice and opportunities to make a difference.

The collective voices of the participants inform this study. During data collection, five key themes emerged that shed light on the student experience, with input from program staff (see Table 9). The first theme explored Modes of Communication and Program Outreach, including Verbal Communication, Visual Communication, and Convenience sub-themes. The second theme centered around You Got This! and the Impact of Cultural Support, further broken down into sub-themes: Aspirational Support, Familial Support, Navigational Support, and Social Support. The third theme that emerged was If You Can See It: Self-Efficacy, with sub-themes including Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Modeling. The fourth theme was Tell Me How You Feel: Emotional State, encompassing sub-themes such as Satisfaction and Gratitude, Confianza, and Sense of Belonging. The fifth and final theme was the Holistic Approach.

Table 9

Overarching Themes and Sub-Themes

Overarching theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme	Sub-theme
Modes of Communication and Program Outreach	Verbal communication (spoken or written-face-to face, text, email, phone calls)	Visual communication (images, videos, infographics, presentations, social media posts, advertisements)	Convenience (selective mtg points)	
You Got This: Influences of Cultural Support	Aspirational Support	Familial Support	Navigational Support	Social Support
If You Can See It: Self-efficacy	Intrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation	Modeling	
Tell Me How You Feel: Emotional state	Satisfaction and gratitude (acts of kindness, genuine interest, commitment)	Confianza	Sense of belonging	
Holistic Approach				

Theme 1: Modes of Communication and Program Outreach

One of the key themes that emerged in the data analysis was the various Modes of Communication and Program Outreach within the PEER program. For most participants and staff, the communication between them was beneficial. However, Joe had a different experience. She had to travel to another public housing authority to meet with her college advisor or choose an online option, which left her feeling disconnected. She stated that "everything is so digital with them" and missed human interaction. On the other hand,

Emily had a positive experience when she needed help with financial aid. She could not get the help she needed at her school, but the staff at PEER helped her "step by step," and she found them to be "very easy to communicate with."

Within the theme of modes of communication, data collection revealed three distinct sub-themes: verbal communication, visual communication, and convenience. These sub-themes shed light on the diverse methods employed by both participants and staff to communicate, the program staff's adaptability and availability, and the significance of their outreach efforts. By utilizing an array of communication modes, the program staff successfully enrolled several individuals in the PEER program.

While many participants found convenience to be a positive aspect of the program, Joe's experience differed. Despite appreciating the opportunity to participate in the PEER Program, Joe faced a challenge because it was beyond the public housing authority where she resided. To receive guidance from college advisors, Joe had to schedule a virtual appointment or travel to another public housing authority.

When inquired about her thoughts on a nearby college access program, Joe expressed:

> It is far. I feel like there's so much more barriers that you have to overcome to get there. Having the PEER Program kind of far away was a barrier, but I think it should empower people to like and be, you know, if you want something, you get out what you put in.

Joe encountered difficulties with the location of PEER. In contrast, federal reports on the program's early stages revealed that college advisors required assistance contacting students residing in public housing authorities (2021). Nonetheless, the

study's outcomes demonstrated that students and staff alike found the staff to be highly approachable, boosting students' self-assurance.

Following federal reports on the PEER Program and social media content, both students and staff participants have indicated that there is a comprehensive approach to supporting students in their college access journey. The program's social media pages are replete with a wealth of resources, disseminated through flyers delivered to students' homes and featured on the PEER Program's website.

According to the federal report, the impact of post-secondary outcomes was insignificant. However, all student participants were vocal about the valuable assistance they received from the PEER Program and its staff during the college access process and beyond. On the other hand, this study identified a strong presence of capital-aiding among college-bound students aged 18-34. Programs that have yielded the most success have involved youth in various programs focusing on work readiness, counseling, and tutoring (Loprest et al., 2019). This study's findings align with the expanded reach of such programs, which provide wrap-around services similar to AVID and GEAR UP.

Verbal Communication

Analyzing the data showed that verbal communication was significant among staff and PEER Program participants. Participants had multiple communication channels, including email, text, phone, and in-person meetings. In addition, the program offered virtual communication through platforms like ZOOM for those who preferred it. This streamlined approach helped participants access important information about college resources with ease. Emily, an "introvert," praised the program staff for their assistance. When asked about her biggest supporters for college preparation, she mentioned Noeland

Julie from the PEER program, describing them as "very, very, very helpful. Emily also highlighted how quickly they responded to her requests for help. While Emily preferred texting, Eric mentioned that the program staff even went the extra mile and visited his home to discuss program details and gauge his interest in the PEER program. He posited, "They came knocking at my door, and I wasn't going to go, but my Dad said I should. Because it was so easy that they came to me, I think that made me apply."

In line with Eric and Emily's feedback, the PEER website promotes a range of meeting options, including virtual, in-person, phone, and email. As Frances, program director, explained, PEER staff have collaborated with community partners to extend outreach efforts and provide additional resources to participants. Frances also suggests that the Union Housing Authority, which oversees the public housing locations in the study, invites PEER to community and resource events to reach residents directly.

Visual Communication

During the research, the second sub-theme that emerged was visual communication. The PEER Program staff utilized multiple methods to communicate with participants who needed assistance. One of the examples of visual communication used by PEER staff to attract potential and current participants was through social media. The staff created an Instagram page to share information about scholarships, food pantries, office hours, and mental health awareness. Jennifer discovered the PEER Program through their Instagram page. She said, "I saw their Instagram post and realized it was for public housing residents. I was interested in joining, so I signed up online." Sarah's mother learned about the program and encouraged her daughter to take an interest. Sarah said, "We would occasionally receive flyers about programs or workshops in the

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residence, and they would be applied to our door and my mom's mailbox." When Sarah's mother saw the flyer, she encouraged her to apply. Sarah recalls her mother saying, "Oh, look, this program is about this. You should check it out." Sarah added, "So, I did, and that's when I signed up for the PEER Program. Everything worked out from there."

Like door-to-door outreach, the PEER Instagram page and program website also mentioned home visits to communicate with participants. The staff also emphasized one-on-one meetings between staff and student participants on social media and the PEER website. Participants had the option to submit an inquiry of interest online, and they would receive a response from one of the counselors. The staff also displayed online images of infographics supporting various colleges on-site. Kaye shared a similar experience with Sarah in that she learned about the PEER Program from her mother, who received a program flyer at home. Kaye was initially unaware of the program, but her mother encouraged her to apply. She took her mother's advice, used it, and "got in."

Convenience

One of the recurring themes that emerged from the collected data was convenience. The proximity of the PEER Program has proven to be essential for many of its participants. The program's location near their homes has significantly benefited nine student participants. However, some participants mentioned that the location could be more convenient since the program is only available in select public housing authorities, even though it is open to all residents. Eric, who attended PEER, would bring his siblings along when he met with his college advisor. He appreciated how convenience played a role in his experience with the program. His siblings could attend a neighboring program while he met with his college advisor, making it convenient for him and his siblings.

Eric's response clearly indicates that convenience is important for program participants. Eric noted:

> It is so much nicer. I know, it's really a relief, honestly, especially with getting my younger siblings into the program, knowing that I can walk down the street and have them right there. It's really nice. It's nice to know that my counselors are close to me and I can reach them anytime. Quite relieving actually, and it feels as though, like they care enough and are invested enough in us to be there, you know.

The location of the PEER program holds a unique value for every participant. Sarah describes PEER as being "important to her." She compares it to another college access program she was familiar with, but it was far from her home. When referencing the PEER program, she emphasizes the convenience of its location. Sarah stated:

> The location to me is important. Because I mean, like I said before, 30 to 40 minutes is not as convenient as it would be like five minutes to get here, like just literally walking. I think having the option, though, to meet virtually or, or, in fact, if I can meet virtually with someone, that is fine, which is good, a good option to have. But it's not the same. I feel like because it's just in person, I feel like it's just different. So, I feel like just having the option of being in housing is as convenient as just seeing someone virtually and just traveling.

Even though Sarah acknowledged the convenience of the program being beneficial, she expressed her satisfaction with the option to meet virtually. However, Sarah mentioned that distance could be a potential barrier, but it would not stop her from involvement. She further noted:

Having PEER far away is, you know, a barrier, but also, like, I recognize that it is, it is just an opportunity still there. So, I can, you know, Zoom. I could do, like, text, call, find other ways, and find more accessible ways to involve myself in the program.

Sarah further defines the barriers some may experience when traveling out of one's community to participate in a program like PEER. Sarah exclaimed:

It's like you have the convenience of your home, the time, money. You don't have to spend so much money on gas just to go to an appointment. People, you know, sometimes use public transportation for it, which is inconvenient for them. And, yeah, I'm glad that we have the PEER Program here in our residence.

Although Eric and Sarah find the proximity of the program location to their home convenient, Joe has a different perspective. Joe currently resides in a public housing authority that does not have a PEER office. Therefore, she has to travel to another public housing authority site to meet with a college advisor. Joe finds the convenience of the program's location beneficial to some but not for her. Nevertheless, despite the lack of convenience, she expresses how the program's location impacts her experience.

Joe shares her perspective about the benefits of the program despite its location. Joe stated:

I think it's super important because it provides those, you know, those gaps and you know, where kids can feel empowered to go to college. I think that's, that's the, you know, the proximity part is feeling that you can you know, that it's attainable because it's right there.

Proximity to the program provides convenience for some participants but also creates a sense of community. Joe also describes how the program, being a community fabric, provides a sense of commonality among residents. She further shares her take on the location of the program. She stated:

It also, you know, the importance of it being close because, you know, people in the program are also a part of your community. So, in that way, you feel much more connected as well.

While Joe expressed her position on the convenience of the PEER Program, she also illuminated the importance of confidence in the staff. Joe exclaimed:

And so, I think the more they understand you and understand, like, their experience, you build kind of trust with them when they're close, because if they're if it's like a college access program that's far away, I feel like there's so much more barriers that you have to overcome actually to get there. And actually, you should be there and want to be there.

When speaking more on the program's convenience, Joe attributes one's potential success to being empowered by the opportunity to participate in the PEER Program despite the locations. Joe stated:

So, having programs like PEER kind of close; it takes some work to, you know, actually get there. But, I think something that should empower people to like is, you know, think about it: if you want something, you get out to get what you put in.

Contrary to what Joe expressed, who lives in a housing authority without a PEER Program site location, her acceptance of the distance of the PEER program aligned with

the disposition of Adrian, who also had to seek assistance from the PEER program at another public housing authority from his own. However, despite the distance, Adrian found the flexibility to engage with PEER staff beneficial.

Adrian experiences convenience differently from Sarah, Eric, and Joe. He can access PEER through various modes of communication. When asked about the importance of having a college access program on the grounds of where he lives, Adrian said:

> I think it is very convenient because of the location of PEER. They're mainly stationed in another project, but I could always make a video meeting. I could request that people from PEER come to me where I live, talk to me face-to-face, or help me with something. No matter where I am, they could always come to me. I feel like it is more convenient like that. Even if they're not here, I can request that they come over here to help me out with college or something like a form.

Through the analysis of collected data, which included semi-structured interviews and content analysis, it was found that participants receive program information in various modes, consistent with how PEER promotes their program on their social media platforms and program websites. Additionally, the program's convenience and outreach have generated students' interest in the program, leading them to apply. Initially, according to Federal HUD reports, PEER program locations were intended to be in public housing authorities. However, the number of sites was limited, so students had to travel to locations outside of their housing authorities to participate. Since the beginning of this study, PEER program locations have increased, and the program's outreach and

availability have gone beyond its primary goal. Accessibility via several modes of contact has allowed for further reach beyond the sites where PEER Programs operate.

Theme 2: You Got This! Influences of Cultural Support: Aspirational, Familial, Navigational, and Social Support

During data analysis, a second significant theme that emerged was the impact of cultural support. Responding to questions about life values and factors influencing their college aspirations, every participant cited at least one support. This support came from various sources, such as parents, siblings, teachers, friends, and PEER Program staff. Cultural support often intersected, assisting participants in multiple areas of their journey toward post-secondary planning.

Aspirational Support

One sub-theme that emerged from the data on cultural support is the concept of aspirational support. Specifically, two participants noted that they received aspirational support that helped them to stay committed to their objectives. Adrian, for example, shares the life lessons he gained that supported his journey towards achieving his career aspirations.

Adrian noted:

I think a life lesson was what my Dad told me. Was that we all fall down once, basically, no matter who you are or where you stand, and no matter what happens in your life, we all fall down. So, to shake it off like you fall. Just don't stay down. Just get up because no matter what, no matter what you do, you could be the best type of person in your field. There's always going to be a hiccup here and there, so use that. Just don't stay down, basically.

Adrian also received support from a teacher at his school who helped him

navigate the college process due to his aspirations and self-awareness. Adrian stated:

Someone influential in my college aspirations has to be my high school art teacher,

Mr. Martinez. Because at my high school, the programs have referred to actual

colleges, you know, like colleges and universities. It was only when he actually

talked to the counselors, seeing that it was not a route for me, that he actually

helped me get into a trade school. He played a big part because I probably would

have been struggling in a regular college, not knowing how to do all that stuff. But

now, due to him speaking up for me and telling me what to do, I'm able to, you

know, do better in college because it's a trade school, not a very traditional school,

but it is still college. I am still getting a degree stating I went to a college, so I feel

like he helped me a lot.

Joe, unlike Adrian, speaks about her parents wanting more for her. Her parents

instilled college in her from a young age. Her parents also encouraged her. When asked

about who influenced her to attend college, she attributed her college aspirations to her

Mom. Following in the direction of her parents.

Joe stated:

They really wanted that for me, and it was something that, you know, they, that fell

through the grasp of their hands. And they, it was something that, you know, they

introduced me to it, and at a very young age. So, it was always this, that looming

thing. But they literally did not know how to go about it. And, you know, that is

just due to the lack of, you know, just the education on, you know, how to prepare

kids for college. Like, there is no lead, but yeah, they definitely support it. They

really wanted me to go, and they were really excited. They are still excited for me

to know that I am here, and they want to learn about all the cool things and what

not.

Both Adrian and Joe mentioned school personnel and family who aided in their

college access navigation process.

Familial Support

The second sub-theme that emerged from the data collection is the significance of

familial support. Numerous participants credited their parents for their accomplishments,

determination, ambition, and encouragement. While some mentioned their fathers, others

discussed their mothers, siblings, friends, and extended family members. The participants

shared anecdotes about the instances when their families supported them. For example,

Kaye acknowledged her mother as her sole supporter in her pursuit of higher education.

Kaye said:

Of course, a lot of people say their mother. Yeah, it's my mother. It's times when I

don't feel like I can do things. She is the one to tell me, "I can do it." She

encouraged me multiple times.

Kaye further provides an example of a time when her mother encouraged her. She

stated:

It was this one time I had an exam, and I usually have this thing where I freeze up,

and I just be like, oh, I, I, I need more time. I can't. But you know how you have

the type of thoughts, and she would tell me, "You got this." And I ended up

passing with exactly a 75. You know when you got that type of support. She

pushed me to like do it. Go through it right now, you know.

Similarly, Sarah also attributes her support to her Mom. When asked about who supports her quest for college. Sarah shared:

Yes, I'm going to say that the person who supported me was always my Mom. Although she never attended college, she always wanted the best for me, even when I was feeling like I could never go to college, like I didn't live up to the expectations. And I was not feeling confident enough, I guess. My Mom was always there to encourage me.

In addition to Sarah's mother supporting her, she shared a story about her mother's work ethic and how she encouraged her. She stated:

A time she encouraged me was when I saw her working hard to get money and provide for us. She would come home so tired from being overworked and yet not being paid the minimum. One day, she was tired and sat us down. And she gave us a talk. And she said that even though she can't give what she would like, we can all still, as citizens here, have these opportunities. We can if we work hard to get a job in education, we can certainly do it.

Because Sarah observed her Mom, she was encouraged. She stated:

No excuse has made me start thinking negatively about college, living up to these expectations, and having the courage to put myself out there and find a career.

Contrary to Kaye and Sarah's experience, Jennifer's support comes from her brother, best friend, and sister-in-law. The support and encouragement they provided gave her a sense of inspiration. When asked about her support, Jennifer stated:

My older brother and my best friend are always pushing me. Like always, like

motivating me. And it has always really helped me see her, like, get somewhere

and like, her, like encouraging me to like, come on, like, do it, you got this.

Jennifer is encouraged by her brother and sister-in-law, who also encourages her

sister. She said:

Like, it's been very inspiring. And, my brother, like, always been, like, my number

one supporter. And as always, like, helped me, encouraged me, and my sister-in-

law his, his wife, she liked the both of them together, like are always there like

pushing my sister and I like, Oh, come on, like, get your permit or come on, like,

finish college and like, every time I have time with them, like they're always

inspiring.

Navigational Support

In cultural capital data collection, the third sub-theme pertains to navigational

support. Students were well-equipped to navigate the college admissions process and

sought guidance from the PEER staff. The services extended by the PEER Program staff

proved immensely helpful in steering the participants through unfamiliar processes,

particularly for first-generation college students. The navigational support played a

crucial role in propelling their progress. For instance, Jennifer found the PEER Program

location incredibly convenient for navigating the college access process. Jennifer

expressed her gratitude for having the PEER Program close to her home, citing it as a

helpful factor in her journey.

Jennifer stated:

Oh, it is, like, such a big help. And it was such a relief that I felt it was off my

shoulders. Being first-generation, I'm like the youngest of five older siblings, and

they didn't pursue college because they didn't have the type of resources that I

have, like, or the support that I have now. And so, I couldn't go to them.

As a first-generation college student, Jennifer relied on the PEER Program.

Jennifer further noted:

If I needed help, like filling out the application, like just going through the whole

portal, they wouldn't have been able to help me. And because of the PEER

program, I got help, as well as getting my essays together.

Like other participants, Jennifer sought assistance from the PEER staff for help

with college. Jennifer said:

I went to them. I like met with one of my college advisors like every week, just

going over so many drafts for my personal essay for like a private university. They

were such a big help. And I don't think I would have made it this far or even gotten

into some of the colleges I got into if it had not been for them.

In alignment with Jennifer, Daniel also attributes his success in the college access

process to the PEER Program. He stated his most prominent supporter was "PEER."

Daniel attributed navigating the college application process to the PEER program. Daniel

said:

I would say the biggest supporter has been the PEER program, mainly because I

said they helped me. During a time where I was lost in terms of what to do with my

life. They helped me go through the process of getting financial aid for scholarship

opportunities and school, even calling the school to ask a question that I did not know. I didn't really know how to contact them via email so that they give me updates whenever there was a lesson or an opportunity. I could never forget. I will always be grateful for their support.

Emily also credits the PEER Program for aiding her in the college application process. Emily noted:

I was very reserved in high school. When I was 18, I couldn't find the help for it. And I was in school, and the school had like 60 plus students that had been looking for help with the college application. I didn't know who to ask the questions to when I needed help because I felt like I had already been to myself. I honestly didn't know what I was doing. And I feel like the PEER Program helped me like do the application step by step.

Jennifer, Daniel, and Emily noted the PEER Program as aiding them in navigating the college admission process. Despite Emily being an "introvert," it did not hinder her success when allowing her to seek guidance from PEER.

Social Support

One of the key findings from the data collection is the importance of social support. Participants reported that their families, the PEER Program, and external organizations such as schools and community groups provided invaluable support. This support was a significant factor in their success. For instance, Kaye speaks highly of the PEER Program, which has provided her with multifaceted backing. Additionally, some participants, including Kaye, could interchangeably utilize various forms of support. In Kaye's case, she received social support from both her mother and the PEER Program.

Kaye stated:

I think everybody that's in public housing needs to be involved in PEER. PEER is

like top tier, as in amazing. They give out resources and do check-ins. It's not just

about the money, the money they give to you. They are really like there for you like

my college advisor is there for me, I know that for sure, like if I need them. But

once again, I would recommend this to all low-income public housing literally

because I have been recommending people to apply.

Although Jennifer credits several people as her support, she, like Kaye, notes the

PEER Program and their collaborators in public housing as her supporters. Jennifer said:

I feel like there's so many people. Like, I can't choose one because I was like

thinking about this recently to, like, people from the PEER Program, like, they're

always like on me about getting scholarships and telling me like to update them

whenever I get accepted into like a school. And then there are people from, like, my

housing authority, like the A and B Club, and college advisors like the staff there,

too. They're like, oh, like, where did you get into, or you should do this, you should

do that. It's just like my family.

Jennifer attributes her social support to PEER, whereas other students seek

assistance for college access and the college admissions process at their schools. She

stated:

I feel like I have a really good support system that helped me through this whole

journey with PEER. And, yeah, I feel like they're always there for me whenever I

need them. And they have been there for me throughout this whole college journey

and stuff. So, I feel like it's a lot of people. Like it's not just one person. And I feel

lucky to have that.

No age restrictions exist when it comes to assisting residents of public housing

authorities, particularly those enrolled in the PEER Program. The program caters to the

needs of public housing residents irrespective of their age or citizenship status. According

to federal HUD reports, some participants in the program are over 50 years old. Frances,

the program director at PEER, acknowledges a difference in the level of support needed

between older and younger participants. She notes that "the adults are really the ones who

rely on other adults in the community to serve as a support system." She posited that the

younger participants tend to stay to themselves.

Similarly, to student participants, the analysis of collected data, which included

semi-structured interviews and content analysis, revealed that support was obtained in

various ways. Participants received guidance from PEER staff, family members, and

friends. Their support went beyond college access and included assistance with job

searches. All participants in the study shared a common belief that PEER staff members

were always available to assist them whenever needed.

Theme 3: Emotional State: Satisfaction and Gratitude, Confianza, Sense of

Belonging

One of the major themes that emerged from the collected data was the emotional

state, which had sub-themes of satisfaction and gratitude, confianza, and a sense of

belonging. It was evident that all program participants had a deep appreciation and

satisfaction for the support they received from the PEER Program, its staff, and the local

community. The trust and confidence they developed in the staff made them feel at ease

while seeking assistance, resulting in a deep sense of belonging. As a result of this sense of belonging, participants were able to cultivate a newfound sense of confidence.

Satisfaction and Gratitude

A prominent sub-theme that surfaced during the data collection was centered on feelings of satisfaction and gratitude. The PEER Program extended valuable services to students, which involved working alongside others to provide extra resources whenever necessary. Jessica acknowledges the indispensable aid she has received from the PEER Program staff and the Educational Opportunity Program at her college.

Jessica pays homage to the programs by saying:

The PEER staff and the EOP program have helped a lot with any questions I had and every time I wanted to make an appointment. They were always very, very giving and always took more than just help. They really wanted to help you.

Like Jessica, Maria appreciated the PEER Program for the support and opportunities it provided her. She conveyed her thankfulness for the program and the accessibility of its resources to all individuals residing in public housing. Maria posited:

I'm glad that this program is available to so many residents because a lot of us are just clueless about college topics. And then this is a great way to become more informed and feel encouraged to pursue a higher education.

Jessica shares a similar experience to Jennifer, expressing that "she feels they are always there for her whenever she needs them." The PEER Program's primary focus is on college access and post-secondary planning, but research shows it has positively impacted at least one participant's mental health. Sarah attests to this, stating that "her anxiety has lessened since enrolling in the program," and she "feels comfortable relying

on staff to help guide her through her journey." Staff members also acknowledge the impact of the college advisors' work, noting that "they play an essential role in helping students navigate their college and career goals."

Frances, the program director, stated:

When it comes to resources offered by the program, students are more encouraged to act on them because the college advisors constantly remind them about them, like you know, Hey, did you do this? Hey, did you meet the deadline? Hey, do you know this resource exists?

The follow-up and follow-through were pervasive throughout the participants' responses to the findings of this study.

Confianza

Trust and confidence are prominent aspects of the emotional state that participants developed from the PEER Program. The relationships between participants and staff are built on a foundation of trust, further strengthened by their shared sense of community. Trust is a critical component of the positive experience that both staff and student participants derive from the program. Lizbeth aptly describes the concept of confianza as a pre-existing "sense of rapport and trust" that is integral to the program's success.

Joe expressed her confidence and trust in the program. She stated:

I feel like the staff more understand you and understand, like, our experience, and you build kind of trust with them when they're close, because if it's like a college access program that's far away, I feel like there's some, there are so much more barriers that you have to overcome actually to get there.

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Lizbeth, a college advisor who works closely with the participants, also agreed that a sense of "confianza" is what makes the program successful. Lizbeth posited, "If the community knows that, like, we're kind of like, associated with them, they already have that sense of trust, and like confianza, that trust. So that's something that's really cool.

The trust garnered by the staff has been exemplified by Mel, another college advisor in PEER who also believes trust is vital. She notes, "If the community members can trust you, then you can start creating a relationship with them."

At the heart of PEER lies the proximity to on-site programming. This allows participants to connect and engage with college advisors within their communities. The program's website and Instagram page showcase various highlights of recruitment events, college information sessions, and staff members interacting closely with participants, all in line with the study's findings.

Frances, the program director, expressed the role of PEER staff and the trust participants gain on the grounds of where they live. Frances stated:

I mean, part of being on-site, it's all about developing trust with the community. And that's a huge thing for them. Especially when we were launching the new or more sites. Like if it was an unfamiliar face coming to a housing site where this community knows what community-based organizations are on-site and who the staff is, and then you are this new face. So, part of being based on site is developing that trust with the community because if they see you as someone with their best interests and their community's best interests in mind, and if you're following through with the services and programs you're offering— If you're doing what

you're saying you're going to do, they're more likely to come back and refer other residents to the program.

This study revealed that trust can be established through various means. Jessica identified safety as crucial in building trust, recounting her involvement with PEER and her community. She elaborated, "This community has always made me feel secure and supported." Her confidence in the program and her community enabled her to access the resources provided by PEER.

Sense of Belonging

One of the themes that arose in the data collection was a sense of belonging. For example, Sarah shared that she "feels comfortable in the PEER Program," while Lizbeth leverages her linguistic skills to communicate effectively with families and fosters a sense of trust. Lizbeth can create welcoming environments that make others feel like they belong.

Lizbeth intentionally fosters a welcoming environment for families whose native language is not English. When Lizbeth identifies a language barrier, they employ their language skills to establish a connection with families and make them feel at ease.

Lizbeth stated, "I draw on my language to establish that connection so they feel welcome." This sense of belonging is also reflected on the PEER Program's website and social media platforms, managed by the staff and feature program participants representing their communities. These platforms demonstrate students' trust and satisfaction in the program by displaying the diverse population of participants and their successes. Their confidence and enthusiasm are evident in their social media posts and videos.

The data gathered through semi-structured interviews and content analysis revealed that the PEER Program provided exceptional services and assistance, leaving participants grateful and satisfied. They found a sense of belonging in the program and trusted the dedicated staff. Moreover, their needs were successfully met, reinforcing their sense of belonging. In contrast, according to HUD's federal reporting, college advisors had to establish a good rapport with public housing authorities to gain the trust of potential program participants.

Theme 4: Self-Efficacy: Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Modeling

The fourth theme from the data collection was self-efficacy, with sub-themes including intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and modeling. Participants in the study displayed a high level of motivation beyond simply attending college. Internal and external factors drove them to create better lives for themselves and their families, motivated by their surroundings, loved ones, and the success of those with similar backgrounds. Emily's motivation for applying to the PEER Program was purely self-driven, as she had been "feeling depressed" after repeatedly being rejected from job applications. Her sister's encouragement helped her change her perspective, and "she began to think about how she needed to take control of her life and strive for more." When asked why she applied to the program, Emily stated, "She took a chance and did it for herself, completing the application with a sense of self-empowerment."

Intrinsic Motivation

The first sub-theme in the data collection analysis regarding self-efficacy is intrinsic motivation. The analysis revealed that Eric's intrinsic motivation significantly impacted his success. He believed in his abilities and was determined to achieve his

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goals, which helped him stay focused and motivated. Eric also mentioned that he learned the importance of perseverance and hard work, which he applied in his academic pursuits and career planning. Eric's self-efficacy was positively influenced by his intrinsic motivation and life lessons learned. Eric talked about returning home from college and why he took a break. When asked about values and life lessons, he learned that they were helpful in college and career planning.

Eric stated:

One life lesson I have learned is that there are no right choices. There is no correct path, you know, and not like not to compare yourself to others because they didn't live your life or see the things that you saw. And I think that has especially been helpful for me coming back home. You know, I can't help but feel behind sometimes, but it's helpful to remind myself that, like, it's something I need to do because it's part of my story, you know.

In alignment with Maria's, Eric's intrinsic motivation is somewhat parallel in that they both decided to do what they felt was best for their well-being, including taking a break from school. When asked, Maria responded to obstacles that may have impacted her college and career goals. She stated:

I guess it has been time management, financial instability, and having to work while trying to go to college. And the way I overcame them is just by, you know, telling myself that it's okay. It takes longer to complete my education as long as I do complete it. I've taken fewer classes or sometimes no classes. However, I felt I needed, like whatever I needed to do, to not feel that pressure.

Like Maria's intrinsic motivation, Jessica shares her perspective about how people living in the "projects" are perceived. She stated, "We want to make it too, like we want to go to college. I feel like where we live doesn't like say anything about us, like a lot of us are motivated." Although Jessica doesn't specifically attribute her motivation to anything intrinsic or extrinsic, she has goals and aspirations like many others.

Contrary to the experiences of Eric and Jessica, Jennifer is intrinsically motivated by the external experiences around her. She posits, "I feel like I don't see as many people go to college in my community. So, I feel like I want to be one that person for someone else."

Extrinsic Motivation

The second sub-theme in the data collection analysis concerning self-efficacy is extrinsic motivation. When asked to describe what motivates him to pursue a college degree or career goals, Adrian is inspired by his community. He stated:

Alright, I must say this is gonna sound kind of like messed up, but I feel like just living in the community is what's driving me. It's not bad, but there are some nights that are not very good. I can't stand living here, so it's not having your own place. We still have like housing come in or can't go outside some days because of the little scuffles between gangs here and there. But, like, Oh, I'm driving myself to go to college so I can get a good career. So, we could find a better place to live, you know.

Like Adrian, Kaye is driven by her environment as well. She posited, "My community drives me. I am the first person in my family to attend college. I do not want to continue to go back to a community like mine. My family drives me to go to college."

Coming from similar communities, Maria is extrinsically motivated. She is "driven by the amount of youth in her community with the lack of guidance and support, which propelled her to "pursue her career goal." When reflecting on what inspires Maria, she draws from a prior experience while in high school where she felt "included" and gained "confidence." She further noted, "I want to do for someone what someone did for me."

Modeling

A notable sub-theme that surfaced about self-efficacy is the influence of modeling. The modeling of PEER staff, family, and community members has significantly impacted the participants' self-efficacy. The participants shared diverse accounts of social modeling. For instance, Sarah attributed her pursuit of higher education to her inspiration from observing a PEER staff member.

When describing the PEER staff person, Sarah stated:

She is one of the staff persons at PEER, and it is the way she carries herself. Because I know that she also does some college, or I am unsure if it is a university, but she also works here. And she balances that out. I am not sure how, but I respect that she can do both and still have such a positive attitude. Um, she carries a lot of things with her, like meetings, and I have seen her personally. She would be the one who inspires me and drives me to, like, well, I can do what she is doing. She has such a great personality. And I think she is a good inspiration.

As Sarah reflects on her admiration of the staff person at PEER, she also speaks about being that social confidant for her sisters. Sarah further noted:

Yeah, I want my siblings to have the same experience and help with what I have had. They're not in college yet, but some of them are going to be soon. So, people like her, who is inspiring and very kind, is someone who I would want them to go to.

PEER staff, family, and friends of the participants in the program have modeled the support systems of many participants. Eric attributes the person who impacted his life to a person in his community. Eric described a social influencer who influenced his life as a nun who ran the Catholic school he attended at a younger age. He said:

She was a very educated woman, and I was really being inspired by her because I remember she took walks around our neighborhood. Yeah, like she was a thing. I found it to be very admirable that she would stick with the community and work with it so much.

Mel, a PEER college advisor, credits the motivation of some of the participants to family. Although the positive aspect of motivation by family for some was inspiring, she says sometimes "family can also be kind of the barrier in the way of wanting to pursue post-secondary education." She noted some parents did not see the value in education because they needed their children to work and help support the family.

A thorough analysis of PEER's website and social media presence shows that the program has successfully supported students in pursuing higher education. The public videos highlight the program, featuring heartening images of student-staff interaction and collaboration at various events. Moreover, the testimonies of former PEER participants, captured on video, not only share their inspiring success stories and motivation but also dismantle stereotypes surrounding public housing and those who live there.

The PEER program's messaging and promotional materials effectively conveyed its resources and approach, as evidenced by its event postings, student testimonials, contact information, and motivational messages. In addition, many celebratory pictures of PEER-supported students were shared.

The data analysis, which involved semi-structured interviews and content analysis, revealed that students who came to PEER with self-efficacy continued to build it through the program. Some participants were intrinsically motivated to improve or make self-directed decisions, while intrinsic and extrinsic factors drove others. As Sarah mentioned, social modeling also played a role in encouraging students.

Theme 5: A Holistic Approach

Among the themes from the data collection, the holistic approach stood out as the fifth. Apart from college access support, the study participants received many services.

The PEER Program's website and their X and Instagram accounts displayed the abundant resources available to both residents in public housing and participants. Contact information was also provided to help individuals gain access to these resources.

Sarah shares her experience and recounts the diverse assistance she received from the PEER program and its staff. She stated:

> The PEER program has helped me so much, even with scholarships, workshops, financial aid, and college activities. They meet with you one-on-one, which is really, really nice, um, to the best of their abilities, like having a partner. And every time that I come in, they're always happy to help. They keep me updated with events happening around the housing site. And I really appreciate them a lot.

Jennifer, similar to Sarah, also finds the PEER Program and staff to be of great help if and when needed beyond college access. Sarah goes on to say:

I think anybody who was like a first-generation student, I think would have received the most help even if you're not. I think they just offer assistance for like anything and everything. You know, they're there for academics, but they're also there for like emotional support. If you need someone to talk to, they're going to be there as well. But If I feel like not feeling that good and feeling stressed out, they can help you as well. So, I honestly think like any student is welcome and can receive that type of support. Like they're there to help as well for college, or not even, just like to find out what you're gonna do after to kind of set you on a track. I feel like they can do that.

Emily describes an example of when she received holistic assistance with her EOPs and asked her PEER college advisor if she could help her. She stated:

They were very very helpful with the application. Not just application wise, they also helped me right now. They helped me reach out to the youth employment and helped me with doing my youth employment application.

In contrast, the PEER Program's federal report discovered that college advisors struggled to connect with students in public housing authorities during the study's early stages (2021). However, based on student and staff feedback, the results of this study demonstrated that students were highly receptive to staff members and developed a sense of confidence in them. These findings were consistent with federal reports on the PEER Program and social media content, emphasizing a comprehensive approach to supporting students in college access. The program's social media pages were filled with extensive

resources, shared through flyers delivered to students' homes, and featured on the PEER Program website.

Additional findings of the federal report indicated the effect of post-secondary outcomes was not significant. However, all student participants in this study expressed how much the PEER program and staff aided them in the college access process and beyond. Conversely, findings from this study show a strong presence of capital utilized by students aged 18-34 in the college access process and beyond.

The analysis of the collected data, which included semi-structured interviews and content analysis, depicted the services and resources available to participants in the PEER Program. Document analysis indicated several collaborative initiatives to aid participants' daily lives as they navigated the college and career process. Assistance was also provided through collaborative efforts with other community-based programs to assist in child care, online services for those without internet access, and paid internships, to name a few. Results of the federal evaluation of the PEER Program indicated there was flexibility in the services PEER Programs offered at each site, resulting in a variation of services provided to the residents in public housing authorities.

Research Question 1

The first research question explored students' experiences participating in a college access program in public housing. The findings revealed that the program's proximity to the students' homes was convenient and encouraged them to seek assistance.

Additionally, students expressed gratitude for the helpful support provided by the staff, who made themselves readily available to assist them. Comparatively, students found the program more responsive and consistent than those outside their

neighborhood. Furthermore, students reported feeling encouraged by the staff's positive reinforcement, indicating a culture of support and motivation within the PEER program.

Research Question 2

The study's second research question delved into the use of community cultural wealth tenets to aid students in their college pursuits. The results showed that students sought support from family, friends, and staff in the PEER program. Specifically, most students who relied on their families' cultural wealth mentioned support from their siblings, sisters, and brothers more frequently than their parents, with only three exceptions. Students also drew on the social capital they gained in the PEER Program.

When they had no one else to turn to, students relied on the staff for help with financial aid and other assistance. Under the guidance and leadership of the staff, they navigated the PEER Program with confidence and were eager to seek help navigating different situations, such as school requirements. Ultimately, students aspired to attend college and do more for themselves and their families. Their parents' hard work and their siblings' support catalyzed them to move forward, feel supported, and enhance their innate capital.

Research Question 3

This study's third and final research question was determining the impact of sharing or receiving onsite college access services in public housing. The results revealed that receiving these services in a familiar environment provided convenience and a sense of trust. Program participants felt comfortable with the staff and appreciated having access to expert guidance in pursuing higher education. The program staff also

emphasized their connection to the community and their commitment to fulfilling their promises to assist students in fostering long-lasting relationships.

Moreover, the PEER Program worked closely with other community organizations to provide outreach and support to current and potential students. This collaborative approach allowed program staff to distribute flyers and other materials directly to the Union Housing Authority residents, resulting in at least four students learning about the program through this medium. Additionally, three students heard about the program from family members or other external sources. The broad outreach efforts of the program demonstrate its ability to offer Union Housing Authority residents the necessary resources for post-secondary readiness and social mobility.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 offers a comprehensive summary of the study's findings. The data analysis yielded five overarching themes, each with its range of sub-themes. The first theme, "Can I Talk to You," explores modes of communication and includes sub-themes such as verbal communication, visual communication, and convenience. The second theme, "You Got This!" focuses on cultural support and includes sub-themes like aspirational, familial, navigational, and social support. Theme three, "If You Can See It," examines self-efficacy and includes sub-themes such as intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and modeling. The fourth theme, "Tell Me How You Feel," explores emotional state and includes sub-themes like satisfaction and gratitude, confianza, and sense of belonging. The comprehensive "Holistic Approach" emerged as the fifth and final theme. Chapter 5 covers the study's results and their relationship to prior research, limitations of the study, and implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

See, you wouldn't ask why the rose that grew from the concrete had damaged petals; on the contrary, we would all celebrate its tenacity. We would all love its will to reach the sun. Well, we are the roses; this is the concrete. These are my damaged petals. Don't ask me why, ask me how.

—*Tupac Shakur*

Introduction

This case study focused on students' experiences in a college access program in public housing. The research employed the community cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005) to examine the experiences of low-income students and identify how capital helped them navigate a college access program on site where they live. Furthermore, it examined how on-site college access programming impacted the students' access to college information.

The study included responses from staff working in the Providing Enriching Educational Resources (PEER) program and content analysis to validate the students' experiences in that program. Three research questions guided this study—the first question aimed to understand students' experiences in the college access program. The second question explored how cultural capital helped students pursue higher education. The third question investigated whether on-site college access programming impacted students' access to college information.

The researcher discussed the study's theoretical framework and how it aligned with previous research in Chapter 2. The methodology used in the study, including semi-

structured interviews, multimedia content analysis, and document analysis of federal

reports was described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 outlined the data collection process, which included interviews,

multimedia content analysis, and document analysis. In Chapter 4, the study's findings

were presented, with five themes emerging from the data analysis: modes of

communication, self-efficacy, emotional state, cultural support, and a holistic approach.

Modes of communication covered how students in the PEER Program communicated

with the staff and how they received pertinent information. Self-efficacy described by

participants included how they were self-motivated. The participants' emotional state in

the study demonstrated the gratitude students felt for the assistance they received from

the program staff. Cultural support described the support students had and received,

which closely aligned with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model explained

in Chapter 2. Lastly, a holistic approach represented how students received assistance

beyond college access.

The chapter concluded with implications of the findings, relationship to prior

research, study limitations, and recommendations for future practice and research, and a

conclusion. The study aimed to contribute to students' existing knowledge in low-income

communities by challenging the deficit framing perspective.

Overview of the Case

As a result of the inadequate college access programs that the researcher

experienced growing up in a public housing authority on the East Coast of the United

States (US), this qualitative case study was initiated. It aimed to contribute to the limited

research on college access programming among students in public housing beyond

educational settings in the U.S. The Department of Housing and Urban Development provided federal funding to support public housing authority residents with programming to enhance social mobility in the U.S., including literacy and technology classes and college access programming in selected housing authorities (2021). However, college access programs were not uniformly implemented throughout public housing in the U.S.

This study aimed to examine a college access program operated on the site of public housing authorities on the West Coast. The study was designed to explore how the students used community cultural wealth to navigate the college access program where they live. Furthermore, the study explored whether providing on-site college access information changed how students shared and received such information. As mentioned in Chapter 1, students from low-income families have lower post-secondary degree attainment rates. Unfortunately, some students in low-income communities avoid seeking assistance for college access guidance due to no fault of their own (Sard et al., 2018). The primary objective of the PEER Program was to increase the number of low-income students who obtain a college degree by providing college access programming on the premises where they live, specifically public housing authorities.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study are consistent with Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model examining students' experiences in low-income communities. Specifically, this study focused on four of the six tenets of the CCW model, evidenced throughout the findings of this study. These tenets included aspirational, familial, navigational, and social support. Yosso's CCW model confirmed students' cultural wealth and how their assets and cultural resources developed within their families and

communities empowered them. Students in the PEER Program who identified as Hispanic, Mexican, African American, Black, and staff, Oaxacan, Hispanic, and Filipino collectively employed all six tenets of cultural capital defined by Yosso (2005). Overall, this study provided valuable insight into how students in public housing authorities can use an asset-based approach to accessing and capitalizing on their cultural wealth for college access and beyond.

Research Question 1

The first research question examined how students described their experiences in a college access program in public housing authorities. Findings of the data indicated that students were grateful for the convenience of the program and found the staff to be accessible and available, as well as taking a genuine interest in helping them beyond the scope of college access. Students in the program also indicated that the college advisors provided a space to feel comfortable, allowing them to contact staff when experiencing problems with the college admissions process and beyond. Student participants trusted the staff and were vulnerable in the process, as the students and the staff attested.

Student participants indicated that the assistance they needed to complete college forms and financial aid information was also available via the college advisors.

Considering most student participants were first-generation college students, they struggled to obtain information from their parent(s) because they had not gone through the college experience. College advisors were accessible via texting, phone -calls, in-person, and via ZOOM, providing convenience to the students.

The findings of the study also included convenience. Students expressed the convenience of the location and the fact that they did not have to pay for travel. Some

students mentioned sharing a family vehicle, which could have hindered their access to the program. However, the location's being within walking distance allowed their parent(s) to use the family vehicle while they could still attend the program. Another aspect of convenience in the findings was collaboration with other programs that supported students who were parents or cared for younger siblings. During a discussion with some students, it was mentioned that a community organization located in public housing collaborated with the PEER program. This organization allowed students with siblings and parents with children to drop off their kids. This made it easier for the students to meet with the college advisors. Providing this type of support was convenient and eliminated the need for childcare.

The study focused on the college trajectories of student participants in alignment with Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model. The model highlights six tenets of CCW, out of which social and navigational capital were the two forms of capital utilized by the students. The PEER program advisors served as social capital for the students by guiding them through college admissions. The program location also made it easier for the students to navigate. The students also gained social capital through involvement in the PEER program, which provided childcare for their younger siblings and children.

Research Question 2

The second research question aimed to explore how the principles of community cultural wealth were employed to support students in their pursuit of college education. Those involved in the program attributed their desire to attend college to their aspirations, goals, and external factors, such as their concern for community safety. Some participants

expressed a desire to serve as role models for others, demonstrating that attending college is a feasible goal.

The study results revealed that some students were inspired by the work ethics of certain staff members and their parents. Several students mentioned that their parents' hard work and professional drive motivated them to aspire for more. Participants also pointed out that parents and staff members encouraged them and said, "They can do it" whenever they need support. One student was mainly motivated by the passion and perseverance of a staff member. She admired how the staff member was involved in the community and appreciated her professionalism. Additionally, the staff member lived in a nearby neighborhood, which created a sense of shared identity among the staff and students.

Many student participants were motivated and inspired by their siblings during the program. Some credited their brothers and sisters, while others thanked their mother, father, grandfather, sister-in-law, or both parents. These students used their family and friends' support and encouragement to help them pursue their college dreams. Some students also mentioned their school teachers as their source of motivation and drive to pursue higher education. Students' success in gaining awareness and support for college depends on different types of capital, such as familial and social capital. According to Yosso (2005), social capital refers to the network of peers and contacts students use to navigate social spaces, including college. Yosso (2005) also defines navigational capital as the ability to guide institutions and spaces not created with communities of color in mind (p.80). The student participants in the program utilized their skills and abilities to navigate social spaces and gain the access and information they needed. The program was

within walking distance of most students' homes, and the staff made themselves available to them. Even those not living nearby knew how and where to reach the staff.

Research Question 3

The final research question explores how on-site college access services impact the sharing and receiving information related to college access. In line with Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, social and navigational capital, two of the six tenets of CCW, were among the most prominent forms of capital in the results of this inquiry.

On-site access services provided by the PEER Program have proven beneficial to students, although some noted that external programs from PEER could have been more responsive. Students praised the program's staff, describing their interactions as inspiring, motivating, and hands-on. One-on-one assistance with college advisors was provided to students in the PEER Program, and staff went above and beyond to deliver accessible information via various channels, such as social media, flyers, and in-person meetings. Notably, students received not only on-site college access information but also scholarship information and, at times, emotional support. Students expressed that they felt comfortable discussing personal issues with staff when needed. Staff members also noted that they sometimes set aside college access matters to provide emotional support.

Finally, students emphasized the importance of having the program located on public housing grounds. They found it encouraging to have access to the program in their community, and it was convenient to receive college access information close to home.

Students were generally satisfied with the program's accessibility, noting that staff were always available to schedule appointments or walk-ins. The findings also revealed

that on-site accessibility helped quickly troubleshoot issues with students and their college applications.

The researcher found that although students lacked college access information to some extent, they did not complain. There was no indication of academic preparation or lack thereof; instead, students sought an opportunity to improve their lives through education. While Joe and Sarah mentioned the program being at a location outside their homes, they viewed having access to such an opportunity as more valuable than having no access. The students in the study showed a great deal of appreciation, and the staff recognized the needs of the students and prioritized the student's mental health before anything else. Jennifer felt a change in her mental health while interacting with the PEER Program. She expressed how she was able to come out of her shell. All the students who participated in this study were aware of their capabilities, but some needed direction, support, and reassurance.

Students in the PEER program also brought past experiences that they encountered and used them as leverage for motivation. Whether it was observing one's parent working to support the family or receiving the encouragement and support of siblings to move forward. The presence of selflessness was also prevalent as Maria and Jennifer expressed their wants for others to follow in their footsteps who, too, could benefit from the PEER Program. Staff in the program showed relentless commitment to the students and wanted to encourage more peer-to-peer interaction. The program director, Frances, mentioned that the older students tended to gravitate to one another.

In contrast, the younger ones, who often lived in the same public housing authority, do not know one another. Staff also held students accountable, showing they

cared by checking in on them and ensuring they were responsible for tasks. Neither students nor staff were hesitant about attending the PEER Program sites despite the concerns that sometimes made some students feel unsafe in their neighborhoods. Instead, the PEER Program and its staff took every opportunity to be present in such communities and online, showing their commitment to uplifting public housing residents and the students in their program.

This study unequivocally emphasizes the paramount importance of a robust partnership between public housing authorities, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and community organizations to support students in achieving success. Through the PEER Program, students have a unique opportunity to transform their lives, and the unwavering commitment of staff members is critical for forging successful outcomes.

This study also confirms that students residing in public housing have the potential and tenacity to succeed when provided with adequate resources, guidance, and intentional support. The findings undoubtedly reveal that students in public housing authorities leverage their cultural capital in a multitude of ways, and their environment does not dictate their college trajectories.

Furthermore, this study demonstrates the resounding success of having a program on the grounds where students live, which serves as a staple in their community. To ensure long-term success in these closed communities, it is imperative to have dedicated staff, community support, and intentional funding to provide comprehensive programming for students in public housing.

Relationship to Prior Research

The study's results supported the community cultural wealth theoretical framework. They built upon existing research on college accessibility for students in low-income neighborhoods, focusing on those residing in public housing authorities. Notably, the findings of this study were consistent with prior research on college access and the factors that impact it. It is worth mentioning that many of the participants in this study were first-generation students, often also from low-income backgrounds. As previous research has shown, students from low-income families require more support and guidance throughout the college access process (Browman et al., 2022; Conefrey, 2021; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Dyce et al., 2012; Heller, 2001; Perna, 2002, 2015; Sanchez et al., 2018).

It is important to note that this study used students from low-income families in low-income neighborhoods as a proxy. These students face many of the same obstacles as those in other low-income communities, including those residing in public housing authorities (Loprest et al., 2019).

Federal Funded Programs and College Funded Sources

Gateway programs like TRIO, AVID, and GEAR UP are available for low-income students to improve their academic preparation and college access. GEAR UP offers low-income and first-generation students a range of assistance, from mentoring to college preparation and tutoring (Knaggs et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2018). Similarly, AVID provides academic support to students from low SES backgrounds, crucial to their academic progress. The AVID program prioritizes executive function development of students from low-income backgrounds (Bernhardt, 2013; Wilson et al., 2021). Other

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factors GEAR UP considers to support students' college access include mentoring and advisement. GEAR UP staff aims to help students build their social and cultural capital to reduce perceived barriers compared to their more affluent peers (Sanchez et al., 2018).

Additionally, the PEER Program's findings in this study suggest that students benefited from social and emotional support and assistance with college preparation. GEAR UP and AVID take a holistic approach to supporting college access, similar to the PEER Program. However, GEAR UP and AVID are school-based programs, while GEAR UP has recently extended its services to students during their first year of college. Although PEER stands out for its convenience, all three programs show success in their efforts.

Low-Income Communities and Proximity to Educational Opportunities

The findings of this study indicated that the PEER Program's location, availability, and accessibility were convenient for participants. The program was located very close to where participants lived, making it easy for them to attend. Other federally funded programs, such as AVID and TRIO, provide underrepresented students the opportunity to increase college access, aiming to close the opportunity gap for college (AVID, 2021; Bernhardt, 2013; Knaggs et al., 2015; Perna, 2015). However, most are located in schools. This study also found that participants easily accessed college advisors through text, social media, ZOOM, and other platforms.

The study also found that low-income students and students of color tend to live in neighborhoods with limited educational opportunities, known as education deserts (Hillman & Weichman, 2016; Turley, 2009). Community colleges are often the only open-access colleges in these areas, making them the primary choice for those living

there. The study found that college access programs are not widely available in public housing communities. The study found that the location of the PEER Program was beneficial for participants, as it was similar to the benefits of attending college close to home.

The convenience of the PEER Program's location and accessibility of capital made it easy for participants to attend. Students who live in communities with limited educational opportunities tend to attend schools and colleges near their homes (Kim & Rury, 2011; Turley, 2009). Low-income students also tend to apply to colleges near their homes due to convenience, financial constraints, and the emotional and physical aspects of attending college (Hillman, 2016; Turley, 2009). The further a student lives from a college, the less likely they are to follow (Alm & Winters, 2009; Cooke & Boyle, 2011). The study found that the proximity to college access programming in public housing significantly benefited student participants. Participants also mentioned that they preferred the PEER Program's location due to the financial aspect of external college access programs, which would require them to travel. Although previous research emphasizes proximity to colleges, this study did not yield responses about proximity to college. However, the reasons behind attending the PEER Program aligned with the rationales of those who chose college due to distance elasticity, community ties, and spillover effects.

Finally, some participants were unaware of the PEER Program's existence until it was brought to their attention. The convenience of the program's location significantly influenced their decision to enroll. Although the study focused not on where students attend college, all participants were either registered or returning to college for the fall

2023 semester. The program also supported students who needed to bring their children or siblings to seek college access assistance close to home, which aligns with those who stay close to home for educational opportunities due to community ties.

Social Support

Student and staff participants held the social support they experienced and provided while in the PEER program in high regard. Parallel to findings in the study, prior research of a college and career readiness expansion program (CCRE) indicated the emphasis of the program was on providing wraparound services such as advisement on dual enrollment courses to encourage and increase college access, academic, emotional, and social support, as well as developing and sustaining relationships with students (Edmunds et al., 2022). Like PEER, the goal of the CCRE was to expand college access to economically disadvantaged students. Comparably, the support both programs provide is a collaborative effort. CCRE partnered with the Department of Education in Ohio to provide access opportunities to increase the number of students prepared for the workforce. Through collaboration with over 10 community organizations, the PEER program assists participants with summer youth employment, academic and financial aid assistance, and support for parents of college students. Aside from programmatic support, support of family and friends and social networks helped students from PEER in the college access process.

More than half of the participants in my study identified as Hispanic. They indicated that the encouragement and support from their social and familial connections helped them gain confidence in seeking a college degree. On the contrary, a study on the barriers and supports to college aspirations of Latinx students indicated that obstacles to

their college aspirations were attributed to a lack of confidence, lack of support, financial obligations, and demographics (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). Latinx students in the study indicated that the support of their families and friends inspired them to pursue higher education. Still, some students did not have the same experience (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). Like my study, students viewed guidance counselors, friends, and family as social capital colleges (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). However, prior research indicated that students' barriers to college aspirations outweighed support for Latinx students (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019).

At least two student participants in my study sought the help of their guidance counselor and teachers, but no one mentioned their level of discomfort. One participant expressed a plethora of support received at the college level, where she attends school and the PEER program. Joe said the companionship of her peers in college, advisors, PEER staff, and another external program provided her with social and academic support. Ironically, Joe is one of two participants who does not find the proximity of the PEER program convenient because her housing authority is not a program site yet. Adrian, on the other hand, does not mind reaching out to his college advisor to meet virtually, although his site location is also located at another location.

Prior research emphasizes reframing the perception of low-income students by highlighting the cultural wealth that has aided their academic success (Nguyen, 2023; Yosso, 2005). The focus on low-income students should be on something other than success metrics but on the struggles they overcome and how they thrive beyond them to succeed (Nguyen, 2023). The support and encouragement of the cultural wealth displayed through the support of parents, siblings, and PEER staff have encouraged students to

remain steadfast in their college endeavors. A prominent pattern that emerged in the findings was the influence of capital student participants utilized in social, emotional, familial, and navigational capital from their families, siblings, and staff in the PEER program. Several participants stated they were told, "You got this," by either family or PEER Program staff. Additionally, student participants were intrinsically and extrinsically motivated and felt a sense of belonging.

In this study, student and staff participants held the social support they experienced and provided while in the PEER program in high regard. The program was similar to a college and career readiness expansion program (CCRE) that aimed to offer wraparound services such as advisement on dual enrollment courses, emotional and social support, and developing and sustaining relationships with students (Edmunds et al., 2022). Both programs aimed to expand college access to economically disadvantaged students. The CCRE partnered with the Department of Education in Ohio to provide access opportunities. At the same time, the PEER program collaborated with over 10 community organizations to assist participants in various aspects of college access.

Over half of the participants in this study identified as Hispanic. They indicated that the encouragement and support from their social and familial connections helped them gain confidence in seeking a college degree. However, a previous study on the barriers and supports to college aspirations of Latinx students indicated that obstacles to their college aspirations were attributed to a lack of confidence, support, financial obligations, and demographics (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019). Although students in both studies viewed guidance counselors, friends, and family as social capital colleges,

prior research indicated that students' barriers to college aspirations outweighed support for Latinx students (Manzano-Sanchez et al., 2019).

In this study, at least two student participants sought the help of their guidance counselor and teachers, but no one mentioned their level of discomfort. One participant expressed a plethora of support received at the college level, where she attends school and the PEER program. Joe said the companionship of her peers in college, advisors, PEER staff, and another external program provided her with social and academic support. Adrian, on the other hand, is okay with reaching out to his college advisor to meet virtually, although his site location is also located at another location.

Previous research has emphasized reframing the perception of low-income students by highlighting the cultural wealth that has aided their academic success(Nguyen, 2023; Yosso, 2005). The focus should be on the struggles low-income students overcome and how they thrive beyond them to succeed (Nguyen, 2023). The support and encouragement of the cultural wealth displayed through the support of parents, siblings, and PEER staff have encouraged students to remain steadfast in their college endeavors.

A prominent pattern that emerged in the findings was the influence of capital student participants utilized in the form of social, emotional, familial, and navigational capital from their families, siblings, and staff in the PEER program. Several participants stated they were told, "You got this," by either family or PEER Program staff. Additionally, student participants were intrinsically and extrinsically motivated and felt a sense of belonging.

Limitations of the Study

This research study is subject to several limitations, which need to be acknowledged to ensure the validity of the findings. The first limitation is linked to the design of the case study, which was impacted by both time constraints and environmental factors, which hindered the opportunity to immerse oneself in the community's culture. The researcher's geographical location on the East Coast and the PEER Program's location on the West Coast prevented face-to-face interviews and in-person observations. These limitations could have impacted the ability to capture the participants' verbal and non-verbal cues, meet them in familiar settings, or immerse themselves in the program's culture.

The second limitation pertains to the study's ability to generalize its findings. The study's sample size was small, with only ten students and three staff members participating. A small sample size may result in the study's outcomes being perceived as non-representative of the population studied. Moreover, the study focused solely on student participants from the housing authorities where the PEER program was primarily housed and enrolled. This limited the possibility of measuring the program's effectiveness across various West Coast public housing authorities. A comparative cross-case study analysis could have been more representative of the phenomenon, including public housing authorities offering similar college access support and those not.

The third limitation is the potential for selection bias. The study participants were from a specific housing authority on the West Coast, and the governing rules and body may differ from those of the Mid-West and East Coast, where the two most prominent public housing authorities exist. The Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) governs all public housing authorities in the U.S., but local policies may differ in how the programs are run and funded. Additionally, as it was a purposeful study, selection bias may be a limitation since the student participants were not randomly selected.

A fourth limitation of the study is that it was conducted during the low point of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This may have impacted how students viewed a program close to home compared to how they would have done during a less restricted period when people had more freedom of movement.

The fifth and final limitation of the study is researcher bias. The researcher's personal feelings or assumptions may have influenced the study's research questions since she closely related to the topic. However, the researcher remained objective during the study by starting the interview with a broad question relevant to the community, allowing the participants to think more generally about their environment before moving on to more specific questions. The researcher also repeated some of the participants' responses to ensure their accuracy and clarity and shared the transcripts with each participant to verify their responses' accuracy.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The researcher recommends implementing practices in higher education and at the federal and state levels. The data collected from the study indicates that a college access program within public housing areas has played a significant role in facilitating college exploration and degree attainment in several public housing authorities across the United States. The study findings highlight the need for college access programs in public housing authorities and their impact on students who avail themselves of such programs.

The recommendations for future practice aim to introduce a bill that supports the need for more pervasive college and post-secondary programming in public housing authorities.

The first recommendation for future practice involves using the American Community Survey as a guide. Future recommendations for higher education practitioners in enrollment management leadership should consider research strategies, including creating spaces in communities like public housing to recruit potential students and creating a virtual space for college admissions advisement and preparation accessible to all residents in public housing authorities.

The second recommendation is to eliminate the barrier to access to technology by collaborating with HUD and higher education institutions. Creating a space in public housing authorities where residents can access technology to communicate with trained college counselors from colleges, universities, and technical educational specialists is essential. Collaboration between HUD, colleges, and universities in local cities can create technology satellites for admissions and financial aid processes on public housing grounds.

A third recommendation for practice under policy requires the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assess the labor needs of the community and meet with the residents of public housing authorities to gauge their interests and align programming at the collegiate and technical education level to create and provide opportunities for education and training, resulting in employment.

The fourth recommendation for practice requiring policy requires the Office of Field Policy and Management at the New York HUD to advocate for increasing funding and creating a 10-year college access program. The opportunity for renewal across public

housing authorities in New York to include on-site services for post-secondary and technical educational programming and one-on-one educational advising will be essential. Program evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative, will also be critical in the program's continued funding.

The fifth and final recommendation for practice would be creating a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) liaison position for HUD to develop post-secondary education policies and initiatives governing college and post-secondary planning programs and opportunities in public housing authorities. Collaborations between the City University of New York (CUNY) and the State University of New York (SUNY) can serve as the initial education systems providing collaborative services.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this qualitative case study provide insights into the college access experiences of students living in public housing. It highlights how these students use their cultural wealth to gain access to higher education. The study aims to contribute to the existing literature on public housing and how students from low-income communities utilize their cultural capital to succeed. The study raised awareness among policyholders, higher education leadership and staff, and community leaders responsible for teaching, guiding, supporting, and informing students from low-income communities.

The study suggests that Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework can be used to explore students' college access and the challenges they face in obtaining the skills needed to be college-level ready. Further research is recommended to inform policy and benefit families, extended networks, and communities. This topic can be studied further to include age, race, and ethnicity.

To aid the current PEER Program on the West Coast, a mixed methods study to operationalize the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework could be conducted to examine students' experiences in the program. The study's findings could support additional resources needed for the program's and its students' continued success. It could also lead to an increase in staffing for a broader reach.

Several recommendations for future research can be added to the literature on this topic, such as a quantitative regression study to determine if high school students who attended the PEER Program were prepared for post-secondary education before and if PEER propelled students to enroll in college. Another recommendation is to compare data between urban and rural areas where PEER is located.

A cross-case analysis identified by location (Midwest, West Coast, and East Coast) would allow for a better understanding of the program's structure and the variations of best practices. The results could inform a pilot program across all 3300 public housing authorities in the United States.

A longitudinal narrative study of students enrolled in the PEER Program is also recommended. The study could allow for a more in-depth look at how students experienced the program at various data points and whether it aided their college success. Findings could also inform program leadership of students' needs from the back end and implement them in their programming planning.

Finally, it is suggested that a qualitative study be conducted of the perceptions and experiences of residents of public housing authorities around the topic of college access and availability in their communities. Including residents allows for another perspective of the needs and perceptions of a college access program and the educational goals and

aspirations of others who reside there collectively. Findings could inform HUD for future programming and additional funding.

The researcher believes future research could support a request to expand and duplicate the PEER Program throughout public housing in the United States, beginning with a presentation to the Mayor's Office in New York State. Sharing the findings in a peer-reviewed journal would also inform and remind educators of the work in public housing and its students' success stories and cultural wealth.

Conclusion

This study begins with data on the degree attainment of students from low-income families and their college access. There is a lack of information on the college access process for students living in low-income areas, particularly those living in public housing communities, and this study aims to fill that gap. By understanding more about the experiences of these students, educators and policymakers can better appreciate the assets present in these communities rather than viewing them as deficient.

This study demonstrated that students in public housing communities benefit from the cultural capital they gain from their families, social networks, and community. This capital helped them gain college access. The PEER Program provided students with social, aspirational, and navigational capital aligned with Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model. The program's on-site services helped students gain information for post-secondary readiness and achieve college access. The study showed that students in public housing communities are equally intelligent and ambitious as their more affluent peers but face social barriers and structures that limit their access to higher education

preparation. Despite these challenges, students in public housing communities exhibit resilience and aspiration, making their dreams achievable.

Research has shown that programs that effectively engage young people in work readiness, counseling, and tutoring activities are most successful (Loprest et al., 2019). Offering a more comprehensive array of programming, this study highlights the provision of wrap-around services or a holistic approach to college access, which has proven advantageous. Investing in college access programs for residents in public housing communities throughout the U.S. can help address the social mobility gap among low-income families in these communities.

Epilogue

Through her research, the scholar discovered that individuals residing in public housing do not necessarily adopt the negative societal perceptions associated with their living environments. This study provided the researcher with a newfound appreciation for her background and a sense of pride in the inspiring success stories that arise from the resilience and determination of those who face economic disadvantages beyond their control.

APPENDIX A

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

St. John's University
8000 Utopia Parkway
Queens, N.Y. 11439

March 11, 2023

To: Union Housing Authority

Introduction

My name is Nicole S. Berry. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at St. John's University and the Principal Investigator conducting this study. I am seeking permission to conduct research at the PEER Program on the West Coast. St. John's University has approved my IRB (IRB-FY2023-65) to conduct research as of 11/29/22 (Appendix A).

I am conducting a qualitative case study to examine how students residing in public housing authorities experience a college access program on the grounds of where they live. This study also provides insight into how community cultural wealth appears or is affirmed in intention or experience while in the program.

Through my research and my professional role as a college administrator, I hope to examine and inform education advocates to engage in research-based decision-making practices to support students who reside in public housing. Specifically, I seek to inspire educators to intentionally promote college access programs to students living in public

housing and influence social change in public housing authorities by learning about the staff and student experiences connected to this study.

The information will be shared to improve my understanding of this phenomenon and to inform my work as a higher education leader. Results *may* be helpful to the project to illustrate the stated impact and benefits of the program.

Once students and staff indicate their interest in participating in the study by emailing or calling me, I will provide all study details, such as informed consent forms (Appendices B and C) to be signed and interview protocols (Appendices D and E).

Study Title: Is Proximity Enough? A Case Study Examining a College Access Program on the Grounds of Public Housing on the West Coast.

The method of this study (qualitative) does not require a hypothesis, but instead, a research question(s), which are:

1. How do students describe their experience in a college access program in a public housing authority?

2. In what ways are tenets of community cultural wealth used to assist students in their college pursuits?

3. How do on-site college access services make a difference in sharing and receiving information on college access?

I will meet the highest ethical standards to protect all participants and the program. Once students and staff indicate their interest in participating in the study, I will provide all details of the study and the protocols for informed consent and schedule a date and time conducive to the participants and the program.

Study Purpose and Plan to Protect Participants:

Research has shown that college access programs aid students in the college-going process. The work of the PEER Program is the impetus for my research as PEER employs a holistic approach to providing college access and resources for student success.

This research aims to examine the students' experiences in the PEER Program and the staff who provide services to the students and how a program tailored to the educational needs of students residing in public housing aids in college access and can build on community cultural wealth.

To protect the program and participant anonymity, I will use a pseudonym for the program name and specific residential location (PEER Program Union Housing Authority on the West Coast). Students and staff who consent to participate in the study will also choose a pseudonym to remain anonymous. To protect the participant's and program's privacy, information will be collected anonymously and stored in a confidential location to which I only have access. The study results will not use the participants' and the program's names.

Data Collection: Number of Interviews, Document Analysis, Observations:

I plan to conduct this research study through one-on-one interviews and document analysis (Appendix F) where applicable (documents published online by Union Housing Authority and anything the staff would like to share). I would also like to observe any events taking place (i.e., student orientation or student events using the attached observation protocol (Appendix G).

I want to interview students enrolled in PEER who reside in at least three distinct regions or housing authorities (i.e., North East, South East, North West, and South West) and college advisors who provide services in the program. I chose these areas for representation from different communities. However, I will interview students from all the locations if necessary. Moreover, I would like to interview the students to understand if participating in a college access program close to home makes a difference and how students utilize their skills, networks, and experiences within their community to navigate the college access process. Lastly, I aim to understand how staff experience being a part of the fabric of one's community where they serve students.

The total number of interviews I would like to conduct is 13-15.

- At least 10 students from NE, SE, NW, SW
- At least 3 staff persons

All students enrolled in the PEER Program and all college advisors and staff who work directly with the students are eligible to participate in the study.

How Union Housing Authority's Data Will be Used

Data for the study is for the sole purpose of the dissertation. Pseudonyms will be used for all information about the program, participants, and locations. The dissertation will appear in the electronic database Pro Quest, which is standard for most United States Universities. Again, all student and program information will also be identified by pseudonyms in this publication. To minimize ethical issues, I will ensure that the information shared represents what the program deems accurate. I will remove any personal identifying information when conducting the document analysis. I will not be using the program's name. Participants will also have the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interview responses.

To protect the program and participant anonymity, I will use a pseudonym for the program name and specific residential location (PEER Program Union Housing Authority on the West Coast). Students and staff who consent to participate in the study will also choose a pseudonym to remain anonymous. I am open to changing both if you have a preferred pseudonym for the program and the housing authority.

If approved, below is an outline of how I would like to move forward:

- I can provide you with a flyer about the study to be shared with all students and staff who meet the criteria, along with my contact information (Appendix H).
- I will conduct one-on-one virtual interviews. Each interview will be 45 minutes long. Details of virtual meetings will be discussed with participants who agree to participate in the study. Interviews can occur during the morning, afternoon, evening, or weekend; the participant and I will determine the timing.
- Once students and staff indicate their interest in participating in the study by emailing or calling me, I will provide all study details, including interview protocols, an informed consent form to be signed, and dates and times conducive to the program participants.
- If participants agree to be audio recorded, as outlined in the consent form, I will use my laptop and phone and take notes during each interview with participant consent.

After the study and dissertation completion, I can provide the staff with a white paper summary.

All participants will receive a $25.00 gift card for completing the interview. Staff are also eligible if it does not go against the policy on ethics.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you. I can be reached at

718-791-0669
Nicole.Berry18@stjohns.edu Nberry96@gmail.com

Sincerely,
Nicole S. Berry

AGREEMENT TO PARTICPATE IN STUDY

PEER Research Flyer and Video Attachments

Nicole S. Berry <nicole.berry18@my.stjohns.edu>

Tue 3/28/2023 10:50 PM

To: ████████████████████████████

Cc: Nicole S Berry < ████████████████ >

    1 attachment (289 KB)

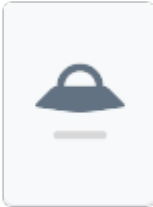Nicole Berry _Incentivized Research Study_West Coast_3_28_23.pdf;

Hi ████,

It was a pleasure virtually meeting you today (and speaking with ████). Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. I am excited about the opportunity to meet with the staff and students of ██████████!

As per our discussion, I have attached my flyer, additional information, and a blurb, should you need it. A short video introducing myself to the participants is attached as well. Anyone can click on the link (no downloads required).

I understand you will also share this information with the PEER Program ██████████

Lastly, please let me know if I can attend any upcoming virtual events. I do not need to participate or observe. If not, no worries.

https://www.dropbox.com/s/e9dq0mb3aaj2n4f/Project%20 ██████ %20Introduction%20Video%20%281%29?dl=0

████ ████ Introduction Video (1)

Shared with Dropbox

www.dropbox.com

Message to accompany the flyer for potential participants if needed

Hi. I am Nicole S. Berry, a Doctoral candidate at St. John's University from Brooklyn, New York. I invite you to participate in my research study about your experience in ██████ ██████ Your participation is private; you can use a pseudonym to identify yourself. Your participation offers insight into how students can benefit from a similar program. Participants who complete the interview will receive a $25.00 VISA gift card. Text or call me at 718-791█ or email me at nberry96@gmail.com to learn more. Texting, calling, and emailing are all acceptable. Evenings and weekends are welcome, too.

I would love to hear from you.

With gratitude,
Nicole S. Berry

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

IRB-FY2023-65 - Initial: Initial - Expedited - St. John's

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Tue 11/29/2022 6:21 PM

To: annunzia@stjohns.edu <annunzia@stjohns.edu>;Nicole S. Berry <nicole.berry18@my.stjohns.edu>

* External Email *

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Nov 29, 2022 7:21:43 PM EST

PI: Nicole Berry
CO-PI: Anthony Annunziato
The School of Education, Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2023-65** *Is Proximity Enough? A Case Study Examining a College Access Program on the Grounds of Public Housing in the Midwest.*

Dear Nicole Berry:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Is Proximity Enough? A Case Study Examining a College Access Program on the Grounds of Public Housing in the Midwest..* The approval is effective from November 29, 2022 through November 28, 2023.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study with details below. The study will be conducted by Nicole S. Berry, a doctoral student in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, School of Education, at St. John's University. Nicole's Dissertation Chair is Dr. Anthony Annunziato in the Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for participating or withdrawing. If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to sign this form. This form represents your confirmed consent should you agree to participate in this study.

TITLE OF THE STUDY: IS PROXIMITY ENOUGH? A CASE STUDY EXAMINING A COLLEGE ACCESS PROGRAM ON THE GROUNDS OF A PUBLIC HOUSING AUTHORITY ON THE WEST COAST.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to provide a deeper understanding of how students residing in public housing authorities experience a college access program on the grounds of where they live. The study also examines if attending a program on the grounds of where students live helps them develop skills they have gained through interactions with their community, program staff, family, and school.

This study will also provide insight into how social support can be developed to aid in college access and completion of college students.

PROCEDURES

Participation in this study will involve a 45-minute interview with the researcher. Participants will be asked questions about their experience in the PEER program and college aspirations. Answers to questions will be taped and recorded along with transcription of the responses with your consent. The purpose of tape recording and note-taking is for the researcher to transcribe the responses for accuracy and to ensure they are the participant's words. The researcher and PEER program staff will agree upon a location in the PEER program office to conduct interviews.

The researcher may also ask to observe an online meeting (e.g., student orientation). All information obtained will remain anonymous, including participants' names. The researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants of the study as well as a pseudonym for the program and location of the program.

POTENTIAL RISKS
There are no risks associated with participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS
The potential benefit will help the interviewer understand how a one-on-one college access program located on the grounds of public housing authorities can help future students enroll in college.
Another benefit is to help community members, parents, and legislators better understand how students feel about the location of a program close to home and how location can help a student decide to attend a program that prepares them for college. Such information can help fund and develop programs in public housing authorities to help with college preparation and how location and one-on-one help can aid in the success of its students and overall programming.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

Participants who complete the interview will receive a $25.00 gift card delivered via email.
CONFIDENTIALITY

All data collected in this study will remain confidential and be used solely for this study. St. John's University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the authority to access the data to ensure that the rights of participants are protected.
For this study, participants will be asked to create a pseudonym for the interviews; birth names, school information, program names, and personal information will not be shared. Data collected for this study will be kept in a confidential location, which only the researcher will have access to using a password-safe, protected external hard drive, which will be locked in a file cabinet. Participants will have access to review transcribed notes from interviews. As a requirement, data collected from the interviews will remain in the possession of the interviewer for three years. After that point, all data will be deleted.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

At any time, the participant may voluntarily withdraw from the interview. If participants become overwhelmed, participants may take a break or continue at their own pace. Participants may decide which questions they choose to answer.

Participants will be contacted with the dates and times for the interview. If participants have questions after reviewing this consent, please do not hesitate to ask. Participants may also direct further questions or clarification about the study to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Anthony Annunziato, via email at aannunzia@stjohns.edu or by phone at 631-218-

7775. All questions concerning participants' rights as a research participant should be directed to Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair of the University's Institutional Review Board, at St. John's University at digiuser@sthohns.edu or via phone at 718-990- 1955.

If participants have questions about the study or require clarity or further information concerning participation, they may contact Nicole S. Berry at 718- ███████ or Nicole.Berry18@stjohns.edu or nberry96@gmail.com.

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions and have received a copy of this consent document for my records. Please see my signature below.

<u>SIGNATURES FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AND TO BE RECORDED DURING INTERVIEW SESSIONS</u>

Please circle Yes or No for each question below that applies to you.

1. Do you agree to be audio-recorded for the study? Yes   No

2. If applicable, do you agree to meet via a virtual platform (Webex or Zoom) if you

   cannot meet in person? Yes   No

3. If you agree to a virtual platform (Webex or Zoom), do you agree to be audio

   recorded? YesNo

Please print your name (Participant):＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Date:＿＿＿＿＿＿

Please sign your name (Participant):＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Date:＿＿＿＿＿＿

Signature of Student Researcher:＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿＿Date:＿＿＿＿＿＿

STAFF INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a research study with details below. The study will be conducted by Nicole S. Berry, a doctoral student in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, School of Education, at St. John's University. Nicole's Dissertation Chair is Dr. Anthony Annunziato in the Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. There is no penalty or loss of benefits for participating or withdrawing. If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to sign this form. This form represents your confirmed consent should you agree to participate in this study.

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The purpose of this qualitative case study is to provide a deeper understanding of how students residing in public housing authorities experience a college access program on the grounds of where they live. The study also examines if attending a program on the grounds of where students live helps them develop skills they have gained through interactions with their community, program staff, family, and school.

This study will also provide insight into how social supports can be developed to aid in college access and completion of college students.

PROCEDURES

Participation in this study will involve a 45-minute interview with the researcher. Participants will be asked questions about their experience working in the PEER program and students' college aspirations. Answers to questions will be taped and recorded along with a transcription of the responses with participants' consent. The purpose of tape recording and note-taking is for the researcher to transcribe the responses for accuracy and to ensure they are the participant's words. The researcher and PEER program staff will agree upon a location in the PEER program office to conduct interviews.

The researcher may also ask to observe an online meeting (e.g., student orientation). All information obtained will remain anonymous, including participants' names. The researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants of the study. The researcher will use pseudonyms for all participants of the study as well as a pseudonym for the program and location of the program.

POTENTIAL RISKS

There are no risks associated with participating in this study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

The potential benefit will help the interviewer understand how a one-on-one college access program located on the grounds of public housing authorities can help future students enroll in college.

Another benefit is to help community members, parents, and legislators better understand how students feel about the location of a program close to home and how location can help a student decide to attend a program that prepares them for college. Such information can help fund and develop programs in public housing authorities to help with college preparation and how location and one-on-one help can aid in the success of its students and overall programming.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION

Participants who complete the interview will receive a $25.00 gift card delivered via email.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All data collected in this study will remain confidential and be used solely for this study. St. John's University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the authority to access the data to ensure that the rights of participants are protected.

For this study, participants will be asked to create a pseudonym for the interviews; birth names, school information, program names, and personal information will not be shared. Data collected for this study will be kept in a confidential location, which only the researcher will have access to using a password-safe, protected external hard drive, which will be locked in a file cabinet. Participants will have access to review transcribed notes from interviews. As a requirement, data collected from the interviews will remain in the possession of the interviewer for three years. After that point, all data will be deleted.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

At any time, the participant may voluntarily withdraw from the interview. If participants become overwhelmed, participants may take a break or continue at their own pace. Participants may decide which questions they choose to answer.

Participants will be contacted with the dates and times for the interview. If participants have questions after reviewing this consent, please do not hesitate to ask. Participants may also direct further questions or clarification about the study to the Dissertation Chair,

Dr. Anthony Annunziato, via email at aannunzia@stjohns.edu or by phone at 631-218-7775. All questions concerning participants' rights should be directed to Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair of the University's Institutional Review Board, at St. John's University at digiuser@sthohns.edu or via phone at 718-990-1955.

If participants have questions about the study or require clarity or further information concerning participation, they may contact Nicole S. Berry at 718- ████ or via email at Nicole.Berry18@stjohns.edu or nberry96@gmail.com.

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions and have received a copy of this consent document for my records. Please see my signature below.

SIGNATURES FOR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AND TO BE RECORDED DURING INTERVIEW SESSIONS

Please circle Yes or No for each question below that applies to you.
1. Do you agree to be audio-recorded for the study? Yes   No

2. If applicable, do you agree to meet via a virtual platform (Webex or Zoom) if you

   cannot meet in person? Yes   No

3. If you agree to a virtual platform (Webex or Zoom), do you agree to be audio

   recorded? YesNo

Please print your name (Participant):   Date:

Please sign your name (Participant):   Date:

Signature of Student Researcher: Date:

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study.

In our interview today, I am interested in hearing about your experiences related to your strengths and talents, including how family, community involvement, friends, socializing, and navigating in your community led to your participation in the PEER program. Before we begin the interview, please complete the following pre-study demographic questions and review the consent to participate in this study.

---

1. Name (Pseudonym) _____

2. Age _____

3. Email _____

4. Number of years in the PEER program _____

5. If enrolled, where do you attend college? _____

   or school? _____

6. Race/Ethnicity _____

7. First-generation college student Yes *or* No _____

8. How long have you lived in a public housing authority? _____

9. What is the best way to contact you? _____

Please note the following:

- Participation is voluntary
- If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to be excused or to pass on any question
- You may abstain from discussing specific topics if you are not comfortable
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable

- It is okay to take a break if needed
- You have the right to pass on a question
- There are no right or wrong answers.

General Questions

1. Can you describe the community where you live?

2. Using a song, can you describe your feelings about college and careers before enrolling in The PEER program and a song expressing your feelings now? Please explain why you chose these songs.

3. How/what college access programs do you know of, and where are they located compared to where you live? How long would it take for you to get there from home and school?

4. How would you describe having a college access program where you live?

Aspirational Capital

5. Who would you say influences your college and career aspirations? Can you tell me about a time when they encouraged you?

6. What or who encouraged you to apply to the PEER program?

Social Capital

7. How would you describe the support you need to succeed in a program such as PEER? Who or what would be involved?

8. Can you describe who or what in your community propels you to seek college or postsecondary programming?

9. Who do you find most helpful (aside from the staff) as you navigate the PEER program?

Navigational Capital

10. How important is the convenience of location to education and programs like PEER to you? Why?

11. What obstacles and difficulties have you encountered that have interfered with your college and or career aspirations? Please describe how you overcame them.

Familial capital

6. What values and life lessons have you learned that you can say have been helpful in your college and or career planning?

7. Who has been your biggest supporter in preparing for college and a career? How have they supported you?

Thank you for sharing your experiences and perspectives during this enriching conversation. Your responses will provide another perspective on a college access program close to students' homes. Your thoughts are valuable in helping me describe how students experience a college access program on the grounds of public housing authorities.

Are there additional comments or questions you would like to ask or share that have not already been said? If not, thank you again for your willingness to participate.

STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study.

In our interview today, I am interested in hearing about any experiences you have had with the staff and students in the PEER program that align with college access and students' skills and abilities gained through interaction with the community, family, friends, and school.

Before we begin the interview, please complete the following pre-study demographic questions and review the consent to participate in this study.

---

1. Name (Pseudonym) _____

2. Email _____

3. Number of years working in the PEER program _____

4. Race/Ethnicity _____

5. First-generation college student Yes *or* No _____

6. Have you ever lived in a public housing authority? _____

7. What is the best way to contact you? _____

Please note the following:

- Participation is voluntary
- If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to be excused or to pass on any question
- You may abstain from discussing specific topics if you are not comfortable
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable

- It is okay to take a break if needed
- You have the right to pass on a question
- There are no right or wrong answers.

Questions:

1. If you could describe your work with the PEER program using a song, what would it be and why?

Social Capital

2. Describe community life for the students who attend the PEER program.

3. Please share how the staff and leadership collaborate with others to help PEER participants.

4. Who are the collaborators?

5. What services are provided?

6. Describe how students build relationships within their communities.

7. What organizations or clubs are students affiliated with?

Aspirational Capital

8. Who or what do students attribute to their quest for a college education?

9. What led to the student's success in the program?

Navigational Capital

10. What are the student's motivation, and how do they use it to navigate their college and career goals?

11. How would you describe the functionality of a college access program close to where students live? What makes it work, and what are some challenges?

Familial

12. How has family impacted or not students' enrollment in the PEER program?

Other

13. What has your assessment data revealed about your program's outcomes that may have surprised you?

14. What drives you to do this work?

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study about a college access program on the grounds where students live.

Are there additional comments or questions you would like to ask or share that have not already been said? If not, thank you again for your willingness to participate.

APPENDIX I

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

1. Identify documents that are accessible via staff.

2. Develop an organization and management plan for documents.

3. Collect publicly accessible data and documents.

4. Make copies of documents for notations.

5. Assess the authenticity of documents.

6. Analyze the document's purpose and biases.

7. Explore images on documents if applicable.

8. Investigate documents to determine the author, date of publication, relevance of data, and information where applicable.

9. Data analysis through multiple rounds of descriptive coding

10. Analyze document content

     a. Memo techniques

     b. Develop theme codes

          i. Note patterns/themes

          ii. Make contrasts/comparisons

          iii. Counting technique

          iv. Clustering technique

Adopted from Gustavo M. Loor, St. John's University

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