Undergraduate Students of Color Raising Children and Persisting in Higher Education

Kimberly Denise Alvarez
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, and the Education Policy Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation
https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.3780

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.
Undergraduate Students of Color Raising Children and Persisting in Higher Education

by

Kimberly Denise Alvarez

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership: Postsecondary Education

Dissertation Committee:
Karen Haley, Chair
Christine M. Cress
Martín Alberto Gonzalez
José Aguilar-Hernández

Portland State University
2024
ABSTRACT

Millions of undergraduate students have been identified as parents across the United States. Of those millions, a majority have been identified as undergraduate students of Color who are pregnant, parenting, frequently underrepresented, and often not equitably supported toward degree completion. The purpose of the qualitative single-site case study was to learn what undergraduate students of Color who are parenting have experienced, in terms of support for their continued enrollment, while earning baccalaureate degrees at Portland State University. Through an asset-based approach, this study elaborated on three key findings which include the persistent aspirations of undergraduate Students of Color (USPs of Color), despite the challenges they have faced, their resistance strategies, and their experiences with resources and resourcefulness. Recommendations offered in this study for future practice can be adopted by postsecondary education leaders, and community service leaders alike, to develop resources, improve current efforts, or amend policies and practices to equitably serve USPs of Color toward degree attainment.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all Students of Color raising children while navigating a multitude of responsibilities within systems that were not designed to equitably support access and professional growth for all. In addition, the effort taken to complete this academic journey is dedicated to my babies. They are my daily motivational force to do good for others and contribute to efforts that impact generational growth. The work produced and what I will continue to develop is also my personal attempt to pay forward the kindness, guidance, and assistance provided to me by family, mentors, faculty, and staff who assisted me as a Student Parent of Color.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest appreciation and gratitude go to Drs. Karen Haley, Christine Cress, Martín Alberto Gonzalez, and José Aguilar-Hernández for their guidance and support throughout the development of this study. I would not have been able to complete this journey without the mentorship and inspiration of teachers who have cared about students. Additionally, I am thankful for my colleagues who encouraged me through the doctoral program and dissertation process. I have also been blessed with supportive relatives and friends who are part of my chosen family. Although some of my family members have passed, they continue to light my path and fortify my heart. Family is such an important factor in my life and these people have offered me space, time, and so much love without which I could not have completed my academic aspirations.

My grandmother, Ana Sanchez, was a seamstress. Growing up I sat next to her as she used her talent to sew garments with meticulous care and patience. She has inspired and empowered me to be creative and sew what I have learned over the years to produce this dissertation. Words can not express how thankful I am for my grandmother.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... i
Dedication ...................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................... iii
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... vi
Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................................................... 1
  Background of the Problem ....................................................................................... 2
    Undergraduate Student Parents and Undergraduate Student Parents of Color ....... 5
  Overview of Lens and Frame .................................................................................... 8
Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................................... 9
Overview of Methodology .......................................................................................... 11
Educational Significance ............................................................................................ 12
Summary and Organization of the Dissertation ....................................................... 13
Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................. 16
  Theoretical Frames .................................................................................................. 16
    Critical Race Theory .............................................................................................. 17
    Community Cultural Wealth ............................................................................... 20
  Figure 1 .................................................................................................................... 21
State-Level Policy ....................................................................................................... 25
  Senate Bill 794 (2019) ......................................................................................... 25
  Senate Bill 564 (2021) ......................................................................................... 26
USPs and USPs of Color ......................................................................................... 27
  Financial Assistance ............................................................................................... 28
  Engagement ................................................................................................................ 29
  Time Management .................................................................................................... 30
  Supports for USPs ................................................................................................. 31
  Childcare .................................................................................................................. 31
  Family Friendly Campuses .................................................................................. 33
  Concepts for Support ............................................................................................. 34
  Community Support ............................................................................................... 34
Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 35
Chapter Three: Methods .......................................................................................... 37
  Paradigm .................................................................................................................... 37
Study Design ............................................................................................................... 39
  Population .................................................................................................................. 40
  Site Selection ............................................................................................................ 40
  Sample ....................................................................................................................... 42
Data Collection Methods ......................................................................................... 43
  Interviews ................................................................................................................... 44
  Focus Group ............................................................................................................... 45
  Analytic Memos ....................................................................................................... 46
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data Analysis ...........................................................................47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initial Codes ..........................................................................47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of Themes ................................................................48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portraiture ..............................................................................49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positionality ............................................................................52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion ................................................................................53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter Four: Results ..................................................................54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Polaroids of USPs of Color ..........................................................55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentional Beginnings and Arduous Journeys ..................................59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Goals ............................................................................60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenges to Academic Capacity ................................................61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toldered Pathways ........................................................................63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare Challenge ....................................................................65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Socialization Challenges ............................................................68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encounters with Bias and Racism ..................................................70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed Experiences with Bias and Racism .......................................70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Root Languages and Racism ..........................................................73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies to Combat Racism .......................................................76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive Connections ................................................................78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Connections ......................................................................78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community Connections ..................................................................80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Referrals to Resources ................................................................82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paving Pathways ..........................................................................85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivated to Persist .....................................................................87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter Summary ..........................................................................89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications ...................................91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation of Findings ..........................................................92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspiration Despite Challenges ....................................................93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resistance Strategies ....................................................................98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resources and Resourcefulness ...................................................101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recommendations for Practice ....................................................104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USP of Color Support Framework ................................................105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Figure 2 ....................................................................................106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future Research and Limitations ..................................................110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion ..................................................................................112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References ..................................................................................115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix A: Announcement of Study ..............................................123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix B: Informed Consent Form for PSU Student Interviews ..........124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix C: Interview Protocol ...................................................127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix D: Interview Protocol ...................................................128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix E: Focus Group Protocol ...............................................131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Asset Lenses ........................................................................................................21
Figure 2 USP of Color Support Framework ...................................................................106
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Historically postsecondary institutions have not equitably addressed the retention needs of all students through their policies, practices, or programs. While, many postsecondary institutions publicize a student-centered mission and claim to align their policies and programs to facilitate the academic development and degree attainment of all their students (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006), previous research has revealed that postsecondary students with dependents often navigate academia with needs unmet by their campus policies, practices, and programs (Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). In fact, the Lumina Foundation and Gallup (2020) partnered to survey 6,005 undergraduate students and found that the top four reasons they considered no longer continuing their enrollment were due to the global pandemic, emotional stress, cost of attendance, and caregiving responsibilities. Research affirms that intentional support of undergraduate student parents to attain their educational goals positively impacts the socioeconomic growth of multi-generations and promotes future college attendance (Cruse et al. 2022, Manze et al., 2021). Postsecondary institutions have the ability to influence the lives of many through intentional practices to equitably assist their students.

The support of students who are simultaneously raising children is particularly important to the researcher because she recognizes how her academic experience was influenced by her salient identities. As a first-generation Latina student, the researcher encountered numerous challenges within campus environments while pregnant, postpartum, and later while raising her two children. The challenges the researcher
experienced while in pursuit of multiple degrees and raising children ultimately prompted her to search for support both on and off campus. While multiple resources existed on campus and within her local community, not all were intentionally developed with student-parents in mind and therefore lacked policies, processes, and practices to equitably support students who identify as parents among other salient identities. Due to such experiences, the researcher was inspired and grew dedicated to a life of advocacy in support of Students of Color who raise children.

**Background of the Problem**

The goal of most undergraduate students who attend a baccalaureate awarding institution is to attain a degree within a career field of their interest. Due to varied reasons some students earn their degrees at a later date than originally intended, which is why referring to baccalaureate awarding institutions as “four-year colleges” is avoided throughout this study. However, not all college students graduate, therefore, several research studies have attempted to understand why students defer or stop out instead of persist. Persistence is defined as a student’s ability to start and continue their enrollment through degree attainment from any postsecondary institution (Gardner, 2022). Retention, however, is defined as a postsecondary institution’s competency to admit and support the continuous enrollment of their admitted students through degree completion (Seidman, 2012). Research has affirmed a correlation between a student’s level of engagement with their academic community and their persistence (Tinto, 1993; Astin, 1984). For example, studies have shown that affinity spaces allow students to develop a sense of community,
which assists students with their persistence and by extension supports their retention (Plaskett et.al., 2018; Rendón, 1994; Simmons & Smith, 2020). However, previous research also asserts that low rates of academic achievement by Students of Color have been attributed to a lack of skills and engagement, while postsecondary policies, practices, and programs are rarely critically analyzed for racist and inequitable efforts (Harper, 2012; Harper et. al, 2018). Researchers have shown that institutional retention efforts have held a deficit perspective when their directive has been to fix Students of Color, rather than the organization and management of institutions that marginalize their students (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016).

According to Gardner (2022), out of 2.3 million postsecondary students that pursued their postsecondary education within the United States in the fall of 2020, approximately 1.7 million persisted and were retained through the fall term of 2021. More specifically, 66.4% were retained by their first postsecondary institutions and 8.6% transferred but persisted in their enrollment at a different college campus (Gardner, 2022). While there are limitations in national data that does not disaggregate enough detail to reflect varied subgroups within reported categories, data can be looked at as a general guide. For example, disparities by gender (female/male binary) have shown that females persisted and were retained at public baccalaureate awarding institutions at a rate higher than males (84.4% and 82.3% respectively) (Gardner, 2022). In addition, aggregated data based on race and ethnicity of students enrolled in public baccalaureate awarding institutions showed that students identified as Asian held the highest
persistence and retention rates (93.1% persisted and 86.7% were retained), White students came in second (86.4% persisted and 76.8% were retained), Latinx students third (79.3% persisted and 70.6% were retained), Black students fourth (75.3% persisted and 64.7% were retained), and Native American students reported the lowest persistence and retention rates (62.6% persisted and 53.8% were retained) (Gardner, 2022). Subgroups within categories representative of race and ethnicity presented by Gardner (2022) may reflect varied percentages that were not offered. Additionally, undergraduate students of Color raising children may be accounted for in the persistence and retention rates discussed, however, such data is not specific to the population and lacks their voice and experience with regard to their persistence and possible encounters with institutional retention efforts.

Across the nation 2.7 million postsecondary students identified as mothers, 1.1 million identified as fathers, and a majority of said students identified as postsecondary students of Color (Cruse et al., 2022). Moreover, White et al. (2021) found that most postsecondary students raising children across the nation identify as Students of Color, are first-generation college students, and are employed in low-income positions. Furthermore, recent research has shown that the pandemic has exacerbated the many challenges previously experienced by postsecondary students with dependents (Cameron et al., 2021).

According to the 2019-2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study on the impacts of COVID-19 on undergraduate enrollment, 65.6% of married undergraduate
students with dependents and 73.3% of unmarried undergraduate students with dependents experienced a disruption to their enrollment (Cameron et al., 2021). In addition, Kienzl et al. (2022) found that Student-Parents of Color suffered from wage reductions and job loss during the pandemic at a rate much higher than their white student colleagues. As a result, 25% of Student Parents of Color reported not being able to afford to feed their children as they also navigated additional living expenses and a postsecondary education (Kienzl et al., 2022). While research makes clear that postsecondary students with dependents face multiple challenges, many continue their enrollment in pursuit of their academic degrees (Cruse et al., 2019; Dayne et al., 2021; Gault et al., 2020).

Undergraduate Student Parents and Undergraduate Student Parents of Color

Much of the literature that centers on the experiences of postsecondary students with dependents refers to such students as “student-parents.” While there are student-parents in pursuit of both undergraduate and graduate degrees, the proposed study will focus on undergraduate Students of Color who are parenting. Use of parenting throughout this dissertation is used intentionally to include all who are active guardians or caregivers of children. Scharp et al. (2020) focused their study on undergraduate student-parents and referred to this population of students using the acronym “USP.” As a result, and since this paper will focus on undergraduate students who are parenting, the student population will be referred to as USPs (plural) of Color or USP (singular) of Color. Despite the acronym used to refer to undergraduate student-parents, the title
denotes only two roles these students experience simultaneously and does not encapsulate all salient identities that may intersect to inform their lived experiences or the number of their responsibilities.

According to previous research, USPs of Color face multiple responsibilities and challenges that impact their persistence and degree attainment such as finances, access to campus community engagement, and time management among others (Cruse et al., 2019; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). A recent study found that only 18% of students who identify as parents or guardians of children earn their associate or baccalaureate degree within six years, as opposed to 51% of their colleagues without children (Cruse et al., 2022). Several authors have conducted research studies in an attempt to understand the challenges USPs overall have experienced and their needs for retention through degree attainment via interviews and surveys (Dayne et al., 2021; Kienzl et al., 2022; Manze et al., 2021; White et al., 2021). Furthermore, researchers argue for the necessity to develop and implement varied forms of support for this student population through policies, practices, and programs across postsecondary institutions (Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019).

Research has frequently utilized a deficit perspective while pinpointing challenges Students of Color and USPs have faced or resources they lack. There are also a lack of studies that focus specifically on USPs of Color. Despite identified deficits, USPs have continued to persist within postsecondary institutions (Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). As a result, higher education as a field will benefit from this
study which offers an asset-based approach in an effort to understand what currently supports the persistence of USPs of Color toward degree attainment. This asset-based research approach does not negate the challenges USPs of Color have experienced, rather the study places an emphasis on current systems of support that have influenced their persistence as a means to empower current and future USPs of Color in their academic pursuits. At the same time, this study serves as a reminder to postsecondary leaders and community service administrators who are accountable for continued efforts to assist USPs of Color toward degree attainment of the need for equitable policies, processes, and programs to support their persistence toward degree attainment.

Interestingly, data representative of USPs within postsecondary campuses across the United States is scarce and rarely up-to-date. For example, in 2021 Contreras et al. (2021) estimated that 15,540 undergraduate students within the state of Oregon are single mothers. However, Contreras et al. (2021) did not provide an estimate for undergraduate parents that did not identify as single mothers. Current data representative of USPs across public postsecondary institutions within the state of Oregon may soon become available as a result of Oregon Senate Bill 564 (2021). Oregon Senate Bill 564 (2021) prompts Oregon public colleges and universities to determine the number of students who identify as parents or guardians. Such data may influence postsecondary institutions not only to collect disaggregated term-by-term data on the number of USPs they serve, but also to reflect broadly about diversity, equity, and inclusion goals to include USP’s, their intersecting identities, voices, and needs. This timely study may also influence
developments prompted by Oregon Senate Bill 564 (2021). While Senate Bill 564 (2021) will produce yearly quantitative data representative of USPs enrolled in public postsecondary institutions in the state of Oregon, this study centers the voices and experiences of USPs of Color enrolled in an Oregon public university. Consequently, the study provides valuable insight into their persistence, which may prompt developments in equitable retention efforts and simultaneously contribute to the continued evolution of higher education and community support at large.

**Overview of Lens and Frame**

The asset-based research study utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) as an overarching lens and Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a guiding framework. CRT, which stems from critical legal theory, asserts that power differentials exist and racism is a reinforced endemic within our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Yosso, 2005). In addition, when applied to studies focused on education, CRT challenges systemic racism and its impact on students and academic structures, among additional aspects of society, and centers the lived experiences of Students of Color (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Similarly, Yosso’s (2005) theory of Community Cultural Wealth combats deficit perspectives often associated with communities of Color. Community Cultural Wealth highlights varied forms of community engagement and collaborative efforts often experienced within communities of Color as a means to assist the growth of knowledge among people of Color (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing CRT as an overarching lens and Community Cultural
Wealth as a guiding framework for this dissertation study has assisted in understanding not only the marginalization USPs of Color have experienced but also the community cultural wealth they are a part of and experience (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

**Purpose of the Study**

Research has shown that USPs of Color often navigate college as a marginalized community due to race, ethnicity, low-income background, first-generation college student experience, and parental responsibilities among additional lived experiences influenced by systemic oppression and the recent global pandemic (Kienzl et al., 2022; White et al., 2021). The purpose of this study was to explore how USPs of Color have experienced support from their university and extended community. Formally arranged programs and support services funded through and administered from within postsecondary institutions are to be considered internal forms of support for the purposes of this study. Forms of support that students experience outside of postsecondary institutions, such as assistance from one’s personal connections with family and local community, are to be considered external to postsecondary institutions. This study has highlighted varied forms of support USPs of Color access and experience at Portland State University and through their community connections.

Due to multiple deficits that previous studies have identified with regard to the experiences of USPs of Color, future practice will benefit from the asset-based approach to the exploration of their experiences. While the following research explored the
experience of USPs of Color with systems of support that have contributed to or reinforced their persistence, the study did not seek to negate or minimize the challenges that previous research has identified. Rather, postsecondary institutions and society alike can expand their understanding of USPs of Color beyond the challenges they have faced through this study. Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth was applied as an asset-based framework to explore varied forms of support USPs of Color experienced as they persisted in postsecondary spaces toward degree attainment. The application of Yosso’s (2005) framework also supports the outcome of the proposed asset-based study, which is for postsecondary institutions to consider the study’s recommendations and reflect on their current policies, practices, and programs to determine what may be further advertised, developed, or amended to equitably assist the retention and degree attainment of a frequently marginalized student population. Such a reflection, can prompt postsecondary institutions to recognize the significance of cultural capital, which currently serves to sustain the persistence of USPs of Color, and encourage the development of inclusive family safe spaces on campus sites. The following is the overarching research question for the proposed dissertation study. How are undergraduate Students of Color who are parenting experiencing support from their postsecondary institution and their extended communities to persist toward degree attainment?
Overview of Methodology

Utilizing a transformative paradigm, the qualitative single-site case study sought to contribute to a body of literature focused on USPs by centering USPs of Color and the varied forms of support they have experienced while in pursuit of their postsecondary degrees. Through the use of semi-structured individual interviews, questions were posed to USPs of Color to learn about their experiences with support from their postsecondary institutions and their extended communities. USPs of Color were also asked how their experiences with campus resources or community support have influenced their persistence in enrollment toward degree completion. Additionally, a focus group allowed the researcher to understand the varied forms of policies, programs, and practices that USPs of Color as a group have found helpful and those they have not. Furthermore, the researcher utilized analytic memos to reflect and analyze the information gathered during individual interviews and focus group. Once analyzed, emergent themes were presented as a cohesive story inspired by portraiture and focused on the lived experiences of USPs of Color. Portraiture is an asset-based method that prompts qualitative researchers to use descriptive storytelling to challenge deficit perspectives and incite change. By employing the methods briefly discussed, the dissertation study highlighted resources utilized by USPs of Color, which have assisted their persistence in enrollment toward degree attainment.
Educational Significance

Previous research asserted that by postsecondary institutions intentionally supporting students with dependents to attain their educational goals, they also positively impact the socioeconomic advancement of families (Gault et al., 2014; Manze et al., 2021). Those who earn a baccalaureate degree may seek employment that contributes to their community and society at large, while also establishing their family’s financial stability. In addition, student-parents that become alumni may earn leadership roles and relate to colleagues who seek to balance their salient identities and varied responsibilities to achieve a cycle of work-life balance. Also, in a recent study, Lindsay and Gillum (2018) found that student parents sought to be role models for their children to develop guiding principles, which may assist behaviors that facilitate academic development. Children may benefit from observations of their parent’s reading and writing as they seek to develop skills to mirror their parents. In addition, children may have early introductions to college campus environments and establish a sense of belonging as they may aspire to attend college in the future. The experiences of students raising children provides a guiding lens to the intentional development of policies, practices, and programs of postsecondary institutions. The collaborative efforts of those who serve USPs of Color within and outside of postsecondary institutions have proven to be significant, not only for student-parent retention and degree attainment, but by extension their children and our extended communities.
Summary and Organization of the Dissertation

Despite the fact that there are millions of USPs enrolled in baccalaureate programs across the United States, this student population is often referred to as “untraditional” or “atypical” as opposed to their undergraduate colleagues without children as dependents. Moreover, postsecondary policies, programs, and structures were historically not intended to serve undergraduate students who are simultaneously raising children. Interestingly, USPs typically require a longer investment in time to earn their baccalaureate degrees compared to their colleagues without children. Subsequently, USPs overall can be viewed as a marginalized undergraduate student population that is not equitably assisted by postsecondary institutions. The marginalization USPs have experienced is further complicated by the systemic oppression USPs of Color have faced within and outside of a postsecondary education environment. Despite the challenges that have been identified as experiences of USPs of Color toward degree attainment, research reveals their continued presence and persistence throughout postsecondary institutions across the nation.

Rather than adding to the identified challenges USPs of Color face, this study aimed to determine how USPs of Color have experienced varied forms of support from within their campus and extended communities to concurrently aid their persistence in consistent enrollment toward degree attainment. The identification of challenges experienced by USPs of Color is essential to learn from by all those held accountable for their support; however, this research is inspired by Yosso’s (2005) framework of
Community Cultural Wealth as the researcher sought to highlight the support in existence that USPs of Color have experienced from the cultural wealth of their communities. By illuminating the impact of systems of support that USPs of Color have experienced, this qualitative single-site case study serves to empower current and future USPs of Color who aspire to persist in their enrollment to earn their baccalaureate degrees. This research study is also helpful for postsecondary institutions and community programs alike who are interested in learning what types of support have assisted the persistence of USPs of Color toward degree attainment and recommendations for future practice. In addition, this research contributes to the expansion of knowledge about USPs of Color to assist postsecondary institutions' evolution toward equitable policies, practices, and programs inclusive USPs of Color.

The upcoming chapters serve to provide further knowledge about the population of focus and the design of the study. More specifically, Chapter Two will provide a knowledge base about applicable theoretical frameworks that help center USPs of Color, offer insight as to what has been found about USPs and USPs of Color, and suggested practices that scholars of previous research have recommended. Chapter Three will discuss the design of the proposed study in detail. Furthermore, Chapter Four features a cohesive story inspired by portraiture and the experiences USPs of Color have had with systems of support. Lastly, Chapter Five delivers three key findings, a framework dedicated to USPs of Color to help inform best practices, and discusses limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research. All five chapters of the study have been
developed with the intention to uplift USPs of Color, illuminate systems of support that may sustain their continued persistence, and underscore the importance of equitable policies, practices, and programs to assist USPs of Color toward degree attainment.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter highlights the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) as the overarching lens for this study. CRT was used purposefully to emphasize the importance of efforts dedicated to challenge the marginalization of undergraduate student parents of Color (USPs of Color). In addition, Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) functions as the asset-based framework used to explore the experiences of USPs of Color. In addition, the chapter will highlight newly enacted legislation that addresses the need for Oregon public colleges to determine the number of student parents enrolled in coursework (SB 794, 2019; SB 564 2021). To follow is a review of previous literature that has addressed some of the challenges undergraduate student parents (USPs) have faced such as finances, community engagement, time management, and inadequate resources as they have attempted to persist in their enrollment to earn their desired credentials (Cruse et al., 2019; Dayne et al., 2021; Lovell & Scott, 2020; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). The challenges presented are not comprehensive of all challenges USPs of Color have faced, however, through an analysis of previous work centered on USPs in general, the obstacles presented here are overarching themes identified in the literature. Literature focused on USPs in general is sparse, however, there is even less research specifically dedicated to USPs of Color.

Theoretical Frames

Theoretical frameworks are utilized within qualitative works as lenses from which researchers may analyze a problem of practice and draw inspiration for the design of their
study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Together CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) were applied as lenses to analyze the lived experiences of undergraduate Students of Color raising children.

These lenses challenge deficit perspectives, and helped to determine implications and future research needs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gonzalez, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) stems from critical legal theory, which challenges the interpretation and application of law by centering race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Similarly, mandated policies, practices, and programs that are employed within a postsecondary institution may similarly withstand review to determine how they influence the experiences of Students of Color. To support the application of CRT in studies focused on populations found within systems of education, Solórzano (1998) suggested the following five elements, (1) the intersection of race and racism, among other marginalized identities, should be analyzed, (2) research should illuminate and challenge practices that serve to reinforce white privilege or dominant ideology, (3) studies should aim to contribute to the abolishment of racism and subjugation based on sexual orientation, gender, or class (4) works should value the experiences of People of Color, and (5) such research should include interdisciplinary methods. Previous research focused on USPs in general offer color-blind results and suggestions should be critically
analyzed to determine how such communication addresses the marginalization of postsecondary Students of Color raising children amongst their additional identities. CRT affirms that conceptualized equity efforts may only address blatant acts of oppression, which fails to account for layered forms of subjugation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In addition, CRT includes feminist influences, which encourages researchers to evaluate the association between power and normalized social roles (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Within postsecondary institutions faculty and administration exert power through their authority, which may directly or indirectly impact the experiences of their students. Furthermore, postsecondary environments reproduce normalized hierarchical social roles (Manning, 2018). An example of how power and normalized social roles interact in a postsecondary environment may be observed when an USP of Color who is pregnant or parenting feels pressured to ask their instructor for permission to miss a lecture, or request an extension on a deadline, or an alternative date for an assessment due to a parental responsibility. CRT encompasses several concepts that, when utilized as a lens, may help assess an association between the power of those that enact postsecondary policies, programs, and practices and USPs of Color who are pregnant or parenting as a community.

CRT supports the empowerment of historically oppressed communities, which includes those who occupy more than one marginalized identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) define intersectionality as a combination of marginalized identities an individual may simultaneously occupy, and how said
disadvantaged intersectional identities influence their lived experiences. For example, an USP of Color may associate with a race or ethnicity that has been historically oppressed within the United States and underrepresented in their postsecondary institution. Furthermore, the same undergraduate may earn minimum wage and identify as occupying a low socioeconomic background while raising children. The disadvantaged identities that intersect for the student in the provided example may influence their experience within a large public postsecondary institution. CRT as lens may be applied to qualitative studies interested in learning about the lived experience of those that identify with marginalized intersecting identities and aims to empower said people (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of storytelling as a CRT method of engaging with a population and presenting data may serve as a bridge of understanding (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). There is much to learn from USPs of Color who are pregnant or parenting. The empowerment of this historically marginalized community may support the retention of a student population, the financial stability of families, and benefit the local workforce (Gault et al., 2014; Manze et al., 2021). Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework underscores the significance of community and counterstorytelling as a means to empower those that have historically been perceived as lacking in wealth through a deficit lens.
**Community Cultural Wealth**

Influenced by CRT, Yosso (2005) challenged assumptions that a student’s marginalized race and class have caused a lack of cultural capital, knowledge, and social skills. Previous research has identified a multitude of challenges that act as barriers for USPs of Color who aspire to earn their degrees (Dayne et al., 2021; Kienzl et al., 2022; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). To combat the focus on what communities lack, Yosso (2005) asserts that there is value in centering the voices of marginalized people, such as USPs of Color, as a means to empower individuals to participate in transformative resistance from deficit perspectives. More specifically, Yosso (2005) promotes the use of storytelling, which is consistent with CRT. Storytelling encourages the empowerment of communities of Color and simultaneously challenges deficit mindsets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Through the use of storytelling communities of Color may highlight an abundance of cultural assets and resources while also advocating for change to end practices that perpetuate racism and oppression. Figure 1 illustrates the intersection of the two asset-based lenses, CRT and Community Cultural Wealth, to help center the voices of marginalized populations and advocate for change.
Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth is the guiding framework for this study, which was utilized to create interview questions, analyze data, and reveal how varied forms of resources assisted the experiences of USPs of Color as they persisted in enrollment toward degree attainment. Community Cultural Wealth is a combination of assets and resources said to be accessible by communities of Color to combat forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005). A brief description of Community Cultural Wealth is discussed below to support an understanding of Yosso’s (2005) framework.

Yosso (2005) identifies differences between monetary and relational wealth. For example, monetary wealth comes from income received as compensation for services one has provided. On the other hand, relational wealth stems from interpersonal connections one may employ as resources. In addition, Yosso's (2005) theory encompasses six forms
of capital that help make one’s community cultural wealth, and by extension one’s cultural capital. Yosso (2005) asserts that the six forms of capital (aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic) influence one another. For example, a USP of Color’s aspiration to earn their degree may be facilitated by the familial and social support they receive at home and on-campus as they navigate and resist policies, practices, and programs that exclude their intersectional needs.

Yosso (2005) notes that individuals with aspirational capital maintain their hope and ambition despite varied barriers. Familial capital encompasses the cultural knowledge of one’s family (biological or chosen family), their cultural connections to their community, and an understanding of their family and community’s histories (Yosso, 2005). Social capital refers to one’s connection to community resources and people that may assist with one’s endeavors via referrals to assistance programs, information, or emotional support (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital describes one’s ability to navigate environments that were not intended for people of Color via varied resources and competencies (Yosso, 2005). Resistant capital encompasses skills an individual has developed to challenge inequalities and varied forms of subjugation caused by racist systems of oppression (Yosso, 2005). Lastly, linguistic capital refers to the language(s) and style of communication of an individual (Yosso, 2005). Yosso’s (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth has been applied to a number of studies to combat deficit perspectives, address how communities of color persist, and how campuses may enhance their programs and practices to retain historically marginalized student populations.
(Gonzales, 2019; Jain et al., 2011; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016).

**Persistence**

Yosso’s (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth has been utilized by researchers to highlight the impact community has had on the persistence of undergraduate postsecondary students of Color (Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). For example, Samuelson and Litzler (2016) cited the use of Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth to identify ways in which community made a difference in the persistence of African American and Latino students within their undergraduate engineering program. In addition, Matos (2015) employed Yosso’s (2005) framework to highlight ways in which families and communities have supported the persistence of Latina/o students towards degree attainment. Aspects of cultural wealth that previous studies have identified as contributors to student persistence are not static, in fact, for many participants they intertwine (Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). As an example, participants of previous studies have expressed how familial and aspirational capital contribute to their persistence because their families believe in their self-determined aspirations (Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). The use of Yosso’s (2005) framework serves to combat cultural deficit perceptions about communities of Color and by extension the resiliency of undergraduate Students of Color (Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016).
**Familial Inclusivity**

The application of Community Cultural Wealth in previous research has illuminated ways in which historically marginalized students, their interpersonal communities, and educational institutions may benefit (Gonzales, 2019; Jain et al., 2011; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). Gonzales (2019) revealed there is a connection between Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) and belonging. In particular, familismo (an aspect of Community Cultural Wealth) encapsulated a sense of kinship, trust, and cultural intuition that when applied to college programs and practices may reinforce student’s sense of belonging and campus retention efforts (Gonzales, 2019). Furthermore, Samuelson and Litzler (2016) found that familial capital influenced the development of values held by students of color, which helped to motivate their participation in mentorship opportunities. Mentorship programs provided students of Color an opportunity to help guide prospective and current postsecondary students as they may assist their younger family members (Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). The persistence of postsecondary students who participate in mentorship programs is supported through community building, their interpersonal communities may also look to them for insight, and colleges benefit from their continued enrollment toward degree attainment. In a different study that also applied Community Cultural Wealth as a guiding framework, Larrotta and Yamamura (2011) found that familial capital inspired communication among family members that prompted students to learn from the learned experiences and histories of their parents. Utilizing Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso,
2005), Jain et al. (2011) also identified a connection between family and belonging. As a result, Jain et al. (2011) acknowledged the significance of physical spaces where family members of postsecondary students of Color are welcome as a means to develop a sense of belonging.

State-Level Policy

Many postsecondary student affairs professionals and faculty believe that college students who raise children are a small niche student population, however, research studies show otherwise (Contreras-Mendez, 2021; Cruse, 2022; White, 2021). Advocates determined to collect data representative of the number of postsecondary students raising children enrolled in public Oregon college institutions developed a political strategy to get campus administrators to collect data about their student-parent populations (SB 794, 2019; SB 564, 2021). As a result, Senate Bill 794 (2019) and Senate Bill 564 (2021) were proposed to Oregon legislators for review. The following will discuss advocacy efforts intended to support awareness of postsecondary students raising children.

Senate Bill 794 (2019)

In 2019 Senate Bill (SB) 794 was introduced to Oregon legislators in an effort to get public colleges to survey their student populations to determine how many students with dependents are enrolled. SB 794 (2019) was approved by the House and Senate education committee, but was sent to Ways and Means (a department that discerns methods and resources required for the implementation of a proposed bill) for evaluation and was ultimately pocket vetoed. In addition, there were internal challenges with the
articulation of the question or questions set to be posed to college students in order to
determine the number of all students who are parenting. Some advocates of SB 794
(2019) wanted the proposed survey to only gather data on the number of students who
have children, while others wanted data gathered to include students who are pregnant
and raising children. Careful consideration of words used to articulate a question is
important so as not to leave anyone out that associates as part of a particular identity. For
example, a first-time parent may not perceive themselves as a parent until the birth or
legal adoption of their child, however, if an individual identified themselves as a student
without children on an annual survey meant to collect data representative of enrolled
student parents, then their lack of participation may negatively influence the data
gathered.

**Senate Bill 564 (2021)**

Advocates of SB 794 (2019) determined that proposing SB 564 during 2021
would assist in a second attempt for Oregon legislators to get public colleges to survey
their student populations to determine how many students with dependents are enrolled.
Several advocates endorsed SB 564 (2021). For example, national advocate of students
with dependents, Lindsey Richlen Cruse endorsed SB 564 (2021) to require public
Oregon postsecondary institutions to collect data reflective of their student parents. In
addition, student parents were also invited to submit letters and/or provide oral testimony
(SB 564, 2021). SB 564 (2021) passed in the Senate, was sent to the House, and the
House requested an amendment to provide colleges more time to revise applications and
forms to collect student parent data. The amendment to SB 564 (2021) was made and the bill was passed. The bill authorizes The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) to develop and revise the question or questions that Oregon public colleges may pose to their student parents in order to collect student parent data (SB 564, 2021). A coalition of Oregon postsecondary constituents have collaborated with HECC to develop the question public college campuses must ask their students in order to obtain the necessary data representative of student parents. Starting in the academic year 2022-2023 Oregon public postsecondary institutions were required to determine the number of enrolled students with dependents they serve (SB 564, 2021). SB 564 (2021) has the potential to broaden future strategic equity efforts to become inclusive of a historically marginalized student population, undergraduate student parents of Color, which is the focus of the study.

**USPs and USPs of Color**

Contreras et al. (2021) have estimated that there are 42,000 undergraduate students within the state of Oregon who are raising children. Kienzl et al. (2022) reported that one in five postsecondary students are responsible for dependents. In addition, 55% of enrolled students with dependent children were reported to be employed in full-time positions while in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree (Sallee & Cox, 2019). Notably, previous research also shows that USPs of Color typically earn and sustain higher grade point averages than their non-parenting colleagues (Cruse et al., 2022). Furthermore, prior to the pandemic, Goldrick-Rab et al. (2017) reported that as many as 63%
community college students with children lacked personal living necessities including food and 14% reported housing insecurity among other essentials. Prior to COVID-19, Cruse et al. (2019) also reported that USPs have had to contend with rising prices of tuition, cost of childcare, and living expenses, which has influenced some USP’s choice to work towards their income needs rather than to pursue a postsecondary degree. Despite the financial challenges USPs of Color have faced, many have chosen to continue their pursuits toward a postsecondary degree from institutions that must prioritize their multifaceted needs, which include but are not limited to financial assistance, engagement opportunities, and the number of responsibilities that compete for priority of their time.

Financial Assistance

A major factor many students contemplate, before and during their attendance of a postsecondary program, are costs associated with attendance. Previous studies have discussed the need for equitable financial support of USPs (Cruse et al., 2019; Gault et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2013). During 2015-2016 Cruse et al. (2019) found that USPs averaged $4,000 more in school loan debt than their colleagues without children. In addition, Nelson et al. (2013) observed that three-fourths of the USP population identified as low-income. Furthermore, Kienzl et al. (2022) asserted that USPs of Color suffered from wage reductions and job loss due to the pandemic and as a result, Asian, Black, and Latinx USPs often suffered from food and housing insecurities. As previously addressed, some USPs have deferred or stopped their educational pursuits due to financial insecurity (Nelson et al., 2013). Moreover, Dayne et al. (2021) have noted that USPs must often
consider the cost of childcare and academic expenses among additional financial responsibilities in pursuit of their degrees. In previous studies, researchers have encouraged college institutions to offer USP scholarships as a source of funding academic aspirations (Peterson, 2016; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Postsecondary institutions may play an important role in the support of USPs beyond academic assistance.

**Engagement**

Researchers have noted that USPs of Color typically earn high grade point averages and value opportunities to engage with the campus environment (Cruse et al., 2022; Lovell & Scott, 2020; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Postsecondary institutions often promote programs and practices that assist their students in developing a sense of belonging and motivation toward varied academic achievements and degree attainment. However, previous studies have found that programs that offer targeted support and inclusive engagement for USPs are poorly advertised and often result in low participation due to the demanding schedules USPs navigate (Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). In a recent study by Dayne et al. (2021), USPs asserted that they came to learn about student support services they utilized by chance, and declared that had they known of such services prior to their initial enrollment they would have sought assistance promptly. In addition, studies have found that USPs have benefited from brief interactions with student colleagues, administrators, and professors, which led to referrals to campus and community resources to enhance their learning or gain assistance with additional needs (Lovell & Scott, 2020; Manze et
al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Opportunities for USPs to engage with their communities, however brief, have proven to be helpful for referrals to campus and community support services to assist with their continued enrollment toward degree attainment.

**Time Management**

While USPs of Color may value time to engage with their campus environment, several research studies indicate that USPs exercise strategic time management in an effort to tend to their multiple responsibilities including but not limited to academic and employment related tasks (Lindsay & Gillum, 2018; Manze et al., 2021; Peterson, 2016). As established in previous studies, many USPs work to afford living and academic-related expenses (Cruse et al., 2019). Reporting to a job does not always include the flexibility to tend to personal or academic obligations (Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). USPs must also be mindful of the hours of operation for their childcare facilities or caretakers, which do not always coincide with the availability of their courses (Dayne et al., 2021). In addition, the time commitment for commuting purposes (car or public transportation) must be accounted for between home, work, college, and childcare. Not all USPs have access to consistent or personal transportation. Furthermore, consideration should be given to the time spent attending lectures and completing course assignments. Manze et al. (2021) found that due to the influence of the recent pandemic, many USPs have had to also manage their time to support their children’s remote learning, complete employment related tasks from home, and meet their academic responsibilities while sheltering in place. Peterson (2016) affirmed that many USPs become skilled at efficient
time management as a means to accomplish and meet the varied requirements of their responsibilities. USPs must navigate through multiple changing time commitments throughout the terms they persist toward their goal of earning a baccalaureate degree.

**Supports for USPs**

There are suggested practices for postsecondary institutions to equitably support their USP populations in general (Dayne et al., 2021; Lovell & Scott, 2020; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019). These practices correlate directly with what previous researchers have found as challenges USPs experience. While the following includes a number of well thought out strategies with the intention to assist the persistence and degree attainment of all USPs, these studies suggest further research is necessary. More specifically, several researchers have expressed difficulty in gaining the perspectives of USPs who identify as fathers to gain insight into their experiences (Manze et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Additionally, most studies have not solely focused on the experiences of USPs of Color. Points of focus have included USPs needs for childcare, the importance of family-friendly campuses, institutions that require data to develop support, and the significance of community support.

**Childcare**

In addition to the financial support postsecondary institutions may provide their USPs, many would benefit from childcare assistance. One characteristic that sets USPs apart from their colleagues without children is that USPs often require childcare to be able to attend courses. Access to childcare is crucial for many college students who have
young children (Cruse et al., 2019; Dayne et al., 2021; Peterson, 2016; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Previous research has revealed that many postsecondary institutions do not offer on-campus childcare or referrals to affordable options within the surrounding community (Dayne et al., 2021). Those who do offer on-campus childcare have reported long waitlists for USPs to qualify for care (Cruse et al., 2019; Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021). USPs who are able to secure on-campus childcare must consider the hours of operation of on-campus childcare facilities when determining their schedule of courses (Dayne et al., 2021; Lindsay & Gillum, 2018). Research shows that many USPs are unable to enroll in evening courses due to their lack of childcare (Dayne et al., 2021). Contreras et al. (2021) reviewed state policies, conducted interviews, and surveyed postsecondary institutions throughout Oregon to assess the accessibility of affordable, quality, and dependable child care for college students. As a result, Contreras et al. (2021) found that since the 2010-2011 academic year Oregon postsecondary institutions have reduced their on-campus childcare centers from 19 to 12 sites (as of 2019). As a state, Oregon offers limited public support programs to assist with childcare. Examples of limited assistance include Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), which is a statewide child care assistance program, and Campus Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), which is a federal program that currently assists four Oregon postsecondary institutions as of 2020 (Contreras et al., 2021). Research implications suggest that innovative support services may greatly support USPs and by extension their children (Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021).
Family Friendly Campuses

Research has highlighted the importance of family friendly campuses, which include accessible sanitary and private lactation spaces available throughout the duration of course availability (Dayne et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Furthermore, researchers have identified USPs need for a designated campus space where they may bring their children in order to participate in USP study groups, which previous research has discussed as a benefit (Dayne et al., 2021; Lovell & Scott, 2020). In addition to child friendly campus spaces, Lindsay and Gillum (2018) noted that on-campus family housing is valuable, however, often the cost associated with such housing and the waitlist associated with such accommodations prevents USPs from taking advantage of such a resource. To address the needs of USPs Manze et al. (2021) and Dayne et al. (2021) found that USPs would benefit from the implementation of a USP resource center that refers students to on-campus and community program referrals. As a program for USP support services that postsecondary institutions could strive to emulate, Nelson et al. (2013) and Dayne et al. (2021) call attention to efforts made by Portland State University and Portland Community College, which provide designated centers for USPs to seek student support services. Future family friendly improvements to postsecondary institutions may consider previous suggestions by USPs to address the needs of future USP populations.
Concepts for Support

Cruse et al. (2022) have developed and proposed a college promise program model dedicated to support the needs of postsecondary student parents through wrap-around services. This model is composed of childcare care services, health and wellness support, inclusive campus practices, and financial need support (Cruse et al., 2022). Furthermore, the college promise model for student parents may be utilized as a blueprint for intensive case management to assist student parents in their retention and degree attainment (Cruse et al., 2022). A second concept to consider is the Pregnant & Parenting Students Belonging & Thriving Framework, which was developed by Cheuk (2022). Cheuk’s (2022) framework suggests USPs should be surrounded by opportunities to engage in community, healing, self-determination, mutual power, and shared access to opportunities. A blend of concepts may promote a welcoming environment that purposefully considers USPs of Color inclusion in efforts to build a sense of belonging and support services for their retention and degree attainment. Through the use an inclusive model or framework to support USPs of Color and data reflective of postsecondary students raising children while enrolled in college, higher education institutional leaders may develop and implement support services to aid student needs, reinforce their persistence, and retain students through degree attainment.

Community Support

Systems of support extend beyond student support services available on college campus sites, and include community support from family, friends, childcare centers,
local schools, and organizations that assist students via funds for their academic pursuits (Dayne et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). For example, research shows that USPs have benefited from their connection with family members and peers, as part of a student’s community, which have assisted the need for consistent and affordable childcare (Dayne et al., 2021). In addition, research has shown that students have benefited from the emotional support and communication they maintain with their extended community (Dayne et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). For instance, research has reported that USPs have experienced stress, exhaustion, and depression due to multiple responsibilities and challenges they navigate, however, their family and peers have provided emotional support through encouragement of their academic pursuits (Dayne et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018). The efforts USPs have made to pursue and obtain their academic goals have also been sustained by community support in the form of local and national scholarships and grants (Sallee & Cox, 2019). A recent study found that a Latina/o cultural center at a Midwestern postsecondary institution welcomed the attendance of extended family members, combining campus and community support for students in one space (Gonzales, 2019). However, there is limited research focused on off-campus or community supports that specifically assist the persistence and retention USPs of Color toward degree attainment.

**Conclusion**

The use of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) as a theoretical framework and Yosso’s (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth provide lenses
that support both the existence of the challenges facing USPs of Color and a way to strategically consider ways to improve their retention and persistence in higher education. USPs of Color require further advocates and institutional change agents to assist in steering higher education toward equitable practices in support of all students. Previous studies inform of some of the challenges USPs in general have faced while they have strived for degree attainment. The global pandemic, known as COVID-19, has added additional barriers to academic and professional development through remote coursework, lack of childcare, at home instruction for children, and possible changes to employment to mention a few challenges. Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth in combination with Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) has assisted the following study to center the voices of undergraduate students who were pregnant or parenting to learn further from their experiences.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Millions of undergraduate student parents (USPs) are raising children and previous studies have illuminated multiple challenges these students have faced in pursuit of their postsecondary degrees while balancing parental responsibilities and navigating additional facets of their lives (Cruse et al., 2019; Dayne et al., 2021; Lovell & Scott, 2020; Manze et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019; Cruse et al., 2022). Despite the identified challenges USPs have faced, many continue to persist and earn their baccalaureate degrees. The following research sought to expand the focus of previous studies on parenting students, to include not only the challenges USPs of Color have faced, but more importantly examined how campus and interpersonal connections to communities have assisted the persistence of USPs of Color toward degree attainment. The focus on systems of support was not intended to dismiss challenges experienced by students, rather, the goal was to empower current and future USPs of Color through narratives of persistence with the assistance of the student support services and their extended community. As a result, the overarching question for the study was as follows. How are undergraduate Students of Color who are parenting experiencing support from their postsecondary institution and their extended communities to persist toward degree attainment?

Paradigm

Scotland (2012) notes that research strategies, also known as methodologies, and the way in which data is gathered, or methods, are influenced by a researcher’s ontology and epistemology. Researchers assert that ontology is what a researcher may perceive as
reality and epistemology is how a researcher assumes knowledge is taught, learned, and what more can be known (Pretorius, 2018; Scotland, 2012). In combination, a researcher’s ontology and epistemology reveal their paradigm or worldview and help shape the development of their methodology (Flores, 2017; Saldaña, 2021; Scotland, 2012). A researcher’s methodology is comprised of a theory or theories used to frame their study and the methods, or tools, selected to collect data (Flores, 2017). In particular, researchers with a transformative paradigm or worldview share the ontology that each individual has their own perspective of reality and the epistemology that knowledge is comprised of the interpretations of an individual's experiences acknowledging the existence of social constructs that serve to oppress many while benefiting others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Pretorius, 2018). Transformativists seek to document the lived experiences of marginalized groups as a means to address inequities and advocate for change (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, scholars assert that studies that seek to learn about the lived experiences of people by centering their voice often develop qualitative research designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The following study was developed through a transformative paradigm or worldview. The researcher sought to center the lived experiences of USPs of Color, which have historically been marginalized and viewed through deficit perspectives, and advocate for change. Furthermore, utilizing a transformative paradigm, the researcher chose to employ a qualitative research design. A transformative paradigm and qualitative approach allowed the researcher to document and learn about the lived experiences of
USPs of Color, challenge deficit perspectives by illuminating ways in which varied systems of support have reinforced their persistence toward degree attainment, and highlighted the need for equitable practices to be inclusive of USPs of Color. Postsecondary education leaders and community resources alike stand to learn from the experiences of USPs of Color to reflect on their responsibility to equitably assist this student population through degree attainment.

**Study Design**

A qualitative approach to research allows researchers to contribute to literature through the exploration of participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, a case study research design allows the researcher an opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon set in a real-world context through the narratives of participants (Yin, 2011). A case is typically bound by space and time and examines a community, organization, or event where people share similar experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2011). In addition, the application of a theory may further support the development of methodological steps (Yin, 2011).

In an effort to contribute to literature centered on the experiences of undergraduate students who are raising children while in pursuit of their academic degrees; the researcher developed a qualitative single-site case study specifically focused on the experiences of USPs of Color that have had the support of their campus and extended communities toward degree attainment. The study was bound by location, Portland State University (PSU), and time, within the Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 academic
school year. The population of interest were undergraduate parenting students of Color enrolled at PSU. While Critical Race Theory (CRT) was utilized as an overarching lens for this study, Community Cultural Wealth was applied as the framework to support the methodological steps (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group. During and shortly after each individual interview and focus group, the researcher kept a record of reflective memos. Once data was collected, provisional and thematic coding was utilized for data analysis. This qualitative case study sought to understand and respectfully empower USPs of Color through the narratives they courageously shared along with additional data collected.

**Population**

The following research study focused on USPs of Color enrolled at PSU and their experiences with campus and extended community support that have contributed to their persistence toward degree attainment. As a result, the population included all enrolled undergraduate students who identified as students of Color in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree at PSU. These students simultaneously engaged in parenting responsibilities while having received support from their college institutions and extended communities to sustain their persistence.

**Site Selection**

In an effort to learn from the experiences of USPs of Color, PSU was selected as the campus site from which data was collected for the following qualitative single-site
case study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a case study involves a case to be studied within a bounded system. PSU was the ideal location for this qualitative case study because previous researchers have recognized PSU as an exemplar college site due to the support services they offer to students raising children (Dayne et al., 2021; Nelson et al., 2013). Since its inception in 1946, Veterans of World War II, which included student-parents, were supported at PSU with access to family resources to help them pursue a postsecondary education (PSU, 2024). PSU is an urban research public university located in the heart of Portland, Oregon, with a student population size of about 22,014 (PSU, 2023). Recognized as a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), designated as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) campus, and an emergent Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), PSU’s student body possesses a wealth of racial and ethnic diversity. Of that student population, 25% have been identified as students with children, 78.3% are undergraduate students, and 39.4% are recognized as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (PSU, 2023). In addition, each academic year PSU enrolls about 3,000 transfer students (PSU Transfer Students, 2023). Approximately 78% of students commute to campus via public transit or personal transportation and about 18.7% complete coursework remotely (PSU, 2023). The diversity present within the student body at PSU is rich with varied experiences, backgrounds, and modes of attendance.

To support the retention of students with varied backgrounds and experiences, PSU offers students multiple resource centers and programs, including Services for
Students with Children. The parenting community of Color enrolled at PSU has access to family-friendly study spaces, varied on-campus childcare options, and childcare subsidy assistance among additional services (Resource Center for Students with Children, 2023). Due to the aid and amenities provided by PSU the campus site offered an ideal location to meet enrolled USPs of Color.

Sample

To support the research, a sample of enrolled USPs of Color at PSU were recruited to participate in this study. More specifically, the study employed convenience sampling to recruit USPs of Color who were parenting, in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree, and were willing to talk about their experiences at PSU. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the staff at the PSU Resource Center for Students with Children, a research announcement that described the study and participant criteria was made available (see Appendix A). USPs of Color who continued to persist in enrollment were encouraged to contact the researcher via email to set-up individual semi-structured interviews. Once participants who self-identified as meeting the aforementioned criteria contacted the researcher, additional participants were identified through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allows a researcher to identify participants and then ask if they can refer additional contacts that meet the criteria of the sample population to potentially participate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Through this method, students who did not have contact with the resource center for students with children and did not read the announcement about the study had a chance of being
included. The study included seven USPs of Color participants as a sample population. By gaining insight from students the qualitative case study gained rich data from their perspectives and experiences. Their contributions led to the development of an in-depth understanding of what strategies and efforts were helpful to promote the degree attainment of USPs of Color within PSU and extended communities.

**Data Collection Methods**

The qualitative single-site case study attempted to thoroughly understand undergraduate Student Parents of Color within a bounded system through careful data collection. In an effort to address validity and reliability, the case study benefited from sources of evidence to support triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation allows researchers to cross reference and compare data collected to develop an understanding and interpretation of a problem of practice in a particular context based on the experiences of their participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Methods for this study included semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The researcher also maintained personal memos during and after engagement with participants. These individual interviews, focus group, and personal memos from the researcher served as reflection sources for triangulation. Data collected for this study was solely gathered by the researcher as the primary instrument in collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the methods selected supported the intention to understand how varied forms of community support systems assisted the persistence of USPs of Color in enrollment toward degree attainment.
Interviews

In order to learn about systems of support that USPs of Color utilized, the study made use of semi-structured interviews to collect data. Interviews provided the researcher with firsthand interactions with USPs of Color, and through such engagement the dialogue collected added richness to data collected and provided direct answers related to the purpose of the study in context of the bounded single-site case study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Seven USPs of Color were asked to participate in individual semi-structured interviews. All participants were asked to carefully read the consent form, IRB approved, in order to provide written or verbal consent before the start of their individual interview (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions and included follow-up questions for clarity and context (Adams, 2010). Each individual interview was scheduled for one hour to avoid the participant’s and researcher’s exhaustion (Adams, 2010). Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that qualitative researchers may engage in semi-structured interviews with several open-ended questions to learn about participant experiences or opinions. As a result, one-on-one interviews with students led to insights about systems of support USPs of color experienced within and out of their postsecondary institution.

The development of interview questions utilized during interviews with student participants was influenced by Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth, which is the study’s analytical framework. Community Cultural Wealth includes six capital factors that served as themes that helped guide the development of the interview protocol
(Yosso, 2005). Each capital factor, featured as a theme in the interview protocol, included one overarching question that illuminated the capital of focus, and follow-up questions to assist the momentum of the conversation to cover the scope of each capital (see Appendix C through D).

**Focus Group**

In order to learn more about the experiences USPs of Color have had with varied systems of support, a focus group was conducted. Researchers affirm that a focus group is similar to a group interview and those chosen to participate share comparable experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Focus groups lend themselves to a more relaxed discussion than individual interviews and often allow a more in depth conversation about a specific topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interactions within a group interview often allow participants to share their personal opinions, discuss what influences their opinions, share differences in perspectives, and explore thoughts they have about a shared topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Contributions made by participants within a focus group offer rich descriptions of their experiences. Focus groups are preferably comprised of participants who are knowledgeable of the subject being discussed in a group interview and when no one knows each other (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This particular method was selected to collect rich descriptions of participant experiences.

The focus group conducted for this study met online for one hour and included four USPs of Color who had previously met the criteria for participants. After individual
interviews were conducted with seven USPs of Color, the researcher emailed all participants who expressed an interest in participating in a focus group to confirm their willingness and availability. Of those emailed, four participants responded and expressed an interest to participate. The researcher set a date and time to meet with the four participants online and asked that they change their names or use initials before logging on. Before officially starting the focus group, the researcher asked all participants to carefully read the IRB approved consent form and provide their written or verbal consent (see Appendix B). Participants of the focus group focused on one question that helped guide the conversation, however, the researcher had follow up questions prepared to help facilitate the conversation and gain clarity (see Appendix E).

**Analytic Memos**

Analytic memos written during or shortly after data collection may be reflected upon to develop a deeper understanding and explanation of what was learned via interactions with participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout each interaction with participants the researcher maintained analytic memos to help support the interpretation of experiences USPs of Color shared. Memos also helped remind the researcher of feelings and expressive gestures participants had during individual interviews and focus group. These analytic memos also allow researchers an opportunity to capture internal thoughts during data collection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). For example, during data collection the researcher reflected on ways the experiences of USPs of Color were similar or different. Analytic memos also function as an opportunity for the
researcher to contemplate the experiences participants shared, examine patterns, and explore areas where further information may be needed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). These memos collected in between data collection, influenced the follow up questions the researcher asked. Researchers also affirm that during analysis of data collected, analytic memos can function as a tool to help develop codes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The researcher found analytic memos to be helpful during the analysis of data collected.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis of all information collected supported the contributions of this study. Before analyzing the data, researchers are encouraged to reflect on the purpose of their research, consider the frameworks that act as lenses to inform their understanding, code data, develop themes, and examine the connections between codes and themes to create axial codes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, the data collected was examined thoroughly by the researcher through multiple coding cycles. Initially, data were coded using a provisional and *in vivo* approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Later, codes were grouped into further categories to create axial codes for an in-depth analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saldaña, 2021). Once data were analyzed, the researcher employed portraiture to respectfully present a cohesively developed story inspired by individual interviews and an intimate focus group.

**Initial Codes**

Scholars encourage at least two cycles of coding in order to develop an in-depth analysis of their data (Saldaña, 2021; Saldaña & Omasta, 2022). Researchers may
combine coding methods to review their data and ultimately reveal the complexities of lived experiences (Saldaña, 2021). For example, for the purpose of analyzing the data for the study the researcher utilized provisional and *in vivo* coding methods. Provisional codes, also known as *a priori* codes, are determined by researchers prior to data collection (Saldaña, 2021). These predetermined codes may stem from conceptual frameworks or the researcher’s lived experiences (Saldaña, 2021). Since the proposed study is framed by Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth, provisional codes included the six forms of capital (social, navigational, resistant, linguistic, aspirational, and familial) that were incorporated within the interview protocol for students. In addition, the researcher made use of the *in vivo* coding method. *In vivo* coding requires researchers to utilize the words used by their participants to label codes as a means to capture their meaning or process and honor their experiences and voice (Saldaña, 2021). Provisional and *in vivo* codes were amenable in that they were easily altered, fused, or deleted as the analysis process progressed and relevancy was determined (Saldaña, 2021).

**Development of Themes**

The benefit of analyzing data in more than one cycle is the development of synthesized and descriptive themes (Saldaña, 2021). Through axial coding, researchers may reduce the number of provisional and *in vivo* codes originally determined (Saldaña, 2021). Axial coding allows researchers to group similar data, each group is considered an axis, and all groups or axis are related to the larger focus of the study (Saldaña, 2021). The process of determining the relevancy of codes and grouping them allows researchers
to document their thoughts, also referred to as analytic memos (Saldaña, 2021). Within analytic memos researchers should consider the context of the data collected, the conditions of where the study is set, the types of interactions participants describe or a researcher observes, and the outcome of all three factors described (Saldaña, 2021). Diagrams are also encouraged to help the researcher visually determine categories the development of stories (Saldaña, 2021). The study utilized the axial coding method to assist in the analysis and synthesis of data collected through interview and a focus group. Through the process of axial coding, the researcher triangulated data to support validity and develop a cohesive story representative of the participants of this study.

**Portraiture**

Portraiture is a qualitative method that incorporates art, experiences, and observations in an effort to describe the complexity of lived experiences through stories (Flores, 2017; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraiture resists research that focuses on deficits and highlights resiliency (Flores, 2017). Portraitists note that research focused on deficits may provide scholars the ability to produce results at a quicker rate, then those focused on assets, because negativity can be easier to identify and document as opposed to experiences with resiliency and success (Dixson et al., 2005). The use of portraiture for this study was appropriate because the focus was placed on support systems that have helped reinforce the persistence of USPs of Color despite a number of identified challenges. Like CRT and Community Cultural Wealth, which framed the proposed research, portraiture is an asset-based framework that may be utilized to address
issues of race, class, and gender in academia to advocate for necessary change (Chapman, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Flores, 2017; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). After the analysis of data collected, a recommendation for practice dedicated to support USPs of Color was developed. Portraitists support their findings through a triangulation of data collected (Dixson et al., 2005). The proposed study utilized data collected through individual interviews, a focus group, and personal memos written by the researcher to engage in triangulation and develop a story that centered the voice of USPs of Color.

Similar to scholars that have used CRT or Community Cultural Wealth to present the analysis of their data, portraitists have utilized descriptive stories to present their findings (Curammeng, 2020; Dixson et al., 2005; Flores, 2017). Each story includes aspects of portraiture that create an “aesthetic whole” (Curammeng, 2020). The five elements of portraiture include context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, which all help to create an aesthetic whole (Flores, 2017). The consideration of context includes a researcher’s reflection of the space in which the study takes place, the geographic location, the historic time period or nature of the subject matter being studied, and cultural connections to the setting or topic (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Also, while the cohesive story featured centered the voices of USPs of Color, portraitists understand that a researcher’s interpretation of experiences also reveals their ontology, epistemology, and voice (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As a result, portraitist’s stories feature as much about their collaborators as they do about themselves (Lawrence-
Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Additionally, in order to gain awareness of personal experiences, portraitists seek to build relationships based on trust, reciprocity, and empathy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Through a thorough analysis and synthesis of data collected, emergent themes become evident to portraitists that notice repetition in findings, metaphoric or poetic expressions, significant rituals, and disparate information (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The goal of portraiture is to create an aesthetic whole, which portraitists understand as the process of weaving the overall story, the sequence of themes, the organization, and continuity of the narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Each element of portraiture helped support the development of a cohesive story after data was collected and carefully analyzed as part of the study.

Inspired by portraiture, the researcher utilized this study as an opportunity to contribute to literature focused on USPs of Color through a well thoughtout cohesive story. During the development of the story presented in the following chapter, the researcher attempted to incorporate the five elements of portraiture context, voice, relationships, emergent themes, which help to create an aesthetic whole (Flores, 2017). For example, the researcher reminds readers that USPs of Color who participated in this study were enrolled at PSU which provides geographic context within the story presented. Additionally, the story notes that participants were interviewed after COVID was considered at a heightened state of emergency to support further context of their engagement on campus and within their local communities. The cohesive story featured also centered the voices of USPs of Color as interpreted by the researcher to discuss their
experiences. For example, at beginning of the story the researcher offered introductions of each participant by conveying a snapshot of each individual and how they became participants of the study. Such experiences were shared after a bond was formed between the researcher and participants. The researcher established a bond of trust with participants by being transparent about the purpose of study, openly discussed their positionality, and empathized when participants shared about their experiences with challenges. Once data was collected, the researcher developed emergent themes through a thorough analysis which helped to create an aesthetic whole also known as a cohesive story.

**Positionality**

I am a Latina, guided by elders from El Salvador, a first-generation college student, and a mother of two amazing children, among other roles and appellations. My experience as a postsecondary student affairs professional spans over ten years at West Coast postsecondary institutions within the United States of America. The focus of my research are undergraduate Students of Color who are raising children, which stems from my personal experience as a parent enrolled in several postsecondary programs while pregnant and parenting. During my undergraduate program, I raised two little ones alongside their father, family, and friends in California. As a graduate student enrolled in a doctoral program I continued to raise my children in Oregon. While I searched for participants of similar backgrounds, I understood that their experiences were not to validate my own, but rather to identify and highlight what undergraduate Students of
Color who are raising children have recently experienced in terms of support. As I began the research process and interviewed participants, I worked as an Admissions Counselor at PSU. However, during the participant recruitment period I transitioned into the role of Director for Services for Students with Children at PSU. Several deficits have been identified as challenges and barriers that postsecondary Students of Color raising children face, however, we continue to persist.

**Conclusion**

Chapter Three outlined the methodology rationale, the method procedures, the data analysis process, and the researcher's positionality. The researcher conducted semi-structured individual interviews, gathered a focus group, and employed the use of analytic memos. Through a transformative lens and methods utilized, this study sought to understand the lived experience of USPs of Color as they persisted in enrollment toward degree attainment. As a result, this study helped to illuminate varied forms of support in existence and argued for the development of intentional programs, policies, and practices to equitably serve the retention and degree attainment of USPs of Color.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This research examined how Undergraduate Student Parents of Color (USPs of Color) have experienced support as they have continued to persist toward degree attainment. Seven USPs of Color agreed to contribute to this research through individual semi-structured interviews and four of them also participated in a focus group. As each participant met with the researcher individually, the researcher attempted to respectfully establish a bond of trust as she informed them about the intent of the research, gained their consent, and explained her positionality. As a result of the mutual respect and trust participants and the researcher shared for one another, the researcher was able to learn from the lived experiences of USPs of Color. These seven USPs of Color shared time and information about their personal stories to help the researcher understand how their persistence has been supported from their postsecondary institution, family, and extended community. Through the use of portraiture, the researcher interpreted their shared experiences to develop the following emergent themes within a story focused on the journeys of USPs of Color. The three themes explored include intentional beginnings and arduous journeys, encounters with bias and racism, and supportive connections. Each theme throughout the story provides insightful quotes from USPs of Color, which center their voices and help frame the portraits of seven persistent USPs of Color. The following section will provide brief introductions of each participant.
Polaroids of USPs of Color

The following brief descriptions of each participant are similar to polaroid pictures in that they capture information at the moment of individual interviews and the focus group. Each participant is more than just a brief moment in time, however, for the purposes of this research, their experiences as Undergraduate Student Parents of Color (USPs of Color) were the main focus. Further context about their experiences as a USP of Color will follow as emergent themes are explored.

Sandra was the first USP of Color to reach out to the researcher after she reviewed the research flyer that was distributed by the Resource Center for Students with Children. When Sandra contacted the researcher, she explained that she self-identifies as biracial with Colombian and American roots and found the topic of this research interesting because of her own college experience while raising her child. During a virtual individual interview, Sandra explained that after earning her high school diploma she attempted to go to college several times, however, each time she was admitted she felt conflicted and decided to defer her pursuit.

Once I got everything settled, I applied to PSU and got in. I knew about PSU because I would take road trips from Medford, Oregon to Centralia, Washington and my halfway point would be Portland where I would stop to get food. I saw these college students and thought, “Oh, this is cool.” Two or three years later, or something, I'm going there.

Sandra has now attended PSU for a few years and anticipates earning her bachelor’s degree by 2026 or 2027.
Yesenia was the second student who contacted the researcher once she learned about the research topic from a mentor. Yesenia’s mentor read the flyer that the Resource Center for Students with Children at PSU distributed and informed her of the study because she fit the description of participants of interest. Yesenia explained that she understood how difficult the research process may be and wanted to help, which prompted her to contact the researcher. She shared that she once worked on a group research project and assisted with transcription in Spanish. During an individual interview online, she also informed the researcher that she identifies as Mexican and is a mother of three children who have made her college journey fun. Yesenia said that after earning her associate’s degree at a local community college, she deferred her pursuit toward a bachelor’s degree for eleven years.

It took a year for me to finally decide to come back to school, and when I turned in the application it felt like, okay, here it goes. We also did the FAFSA. I thought, “Lord if this is your will, it's gonna happen. If it's not, then I'll get flags along the way.” Then it happened, I was accepted. I was at Portland State campus and I thought, “This, is it!”

Yesenia shared, she is a transfer student who anticipates earning her bachelor’s degree by 2025.

Monica was the third participant to contact the researcher after reviewing the research flyer distributed by the Resource Center for Students with Children. She offered to meet with the researcher to talk further about the purpose of the research. Once the researcher explained that the study intended to learn how the persistence of undergraduates raising children has been supported, she agreed to share about her
journey. Additionally, she offered to speak with her friends who were also undergraduate student-parents as a means to help the researcher gain participants. Monica informed the researcher that she self-identifies as Filipina-Mexicana and is raising one child. She transferred to PSU from a local community college where she earned an associate’s degree and anticipates earning her bachelor’s degree from PSU in 2024. Monica is looking forward to celebrating her academic achievement at PSU with her son and family.

Shania contacted the researcher after learning about the study through a friend of hers. During their in-person individual interview, Shania told the researcher that she was interested in participating in the research project because she identifies as Indigenous Alaskan Native, is raising one child, and is an undergraduate student. She informed the researcher that she had previously attended three other colleges before transferring to PSU. Shania noted that the scholarships she was offered when she became admitted to PSU ultimately helped to support her decision to attend. Additionally, she has two older sisters who have successfully earned their bachelor’s degrees from other institutions, which has made her feel that they have paved the way for her to earn her degree. Shania will earn her bachelor’s degree from PSU in 2024.

Shannon also contacted the researcher after a friend showed her the research flyer. Similar to other participants, Shannon met with the researcher online and explained that she was interested in the research topic because of her lived experience as a Black American, mother of two children, and an undergraduate in pursuit of a bachelor’s degree
at PSU. Shannon transferred to PSU and anticipates earning her bachelor’s degree in 2024. As Shannon introduced herself to the researcher her two children hugged her and wanted her attention. She graciously tended to her children’s needs and spoke with the researcher as she balanced two different interactions.

The sixth participant was Sebastian, who met the researcher while at the Resource Center for Students with Children. Sebastian entered the resource center in search of diapers and baby wipes. While there, he was introduced to the researcher by a staff member who helped Sebastian with the resources he requested. The researcher then informed Sebastian about the study and asked if he would be interested in participating. Sebastian said he would be happy to support research that could help efforts to assist student parents in the future and offered time to be interviewed that same day. Sebastian identified himself as a Mexican father of two children and an undergraduate transfer student set to earn his bachelor’s degree from PSU in 2023.

Similar to Sebastian, Sarah also visited the Resource Center for Students with Children to seek support while the researcher was present. She wanted to know if the resource center had any gently used clothing for infants. While Sarah looked through the clothing options, the researcher introduced herself to Sarah and informed her about the study. Sarah expressed an interest in participating in the study since she had just given birth to her firstborn child three weeks prior and could talk about her experience attending courses while pregnant. Sarah shared that she is a Japanese international
undergraduate student, a recent mother of one, and anticipated earning her PSU bachelor’s degree in 2023.

The researcher is humbled by the opportunity to help portray the stories participants shared to help impart knowledge of how institutional and community support has aided the persistence of undergraduate student parents of Color (USPs of Color) in pursuit of their bachelor’s degrees. Although participants expressed some similarities in experiences, each participant in this study had a unique personal narrative and the following emergent themes are the researcher’s attempt to develop a cohesive story of their recollections. In a sense, these stories are like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that have been assembled to reveal a map of experiences with various stops, or themes, along intertwined pathways. The story developed is intended to be a counterstory to narratives that have highlighted what USPs of Color lacked without intentional focus on what qualities they possess and how their access to resources support their endeavors. As this chapter progresses the researcher will explore each stop on the map starting with the academic goals of the participants and ending with the source of their persistence.

**Intentional Beginnings and Arduous Journeys**

Participants of this research study were all in pursuit of their bachelor’s degrees at Portland State University (PSU) when they met with the researcher. During individual interviews each participant informed the researcher that they intended to earn their degrees to be able to enter a career field of their choice, which would grant them the ability to provide opportunities for their children that they did not experience as children.
Additionally, participants described challenges they have navigated and some have continued to face as USPs of Color during individual interviews and a focus group session. These challenges are not intended to highlight what they lacked, but rather to inform of their fortitude despite obstacles they experienced. USPs of Color have continued to persist toward degree attainment.

**Academic Goals**

All participants had an intentional academic goal, objective, or mission, which ultimately led them to attend PSU along their respective pathways. During individual interviews, participants were asked to discuss their academic goals. Not surprisingly, all seven undergraduate students stated that they were currently in pursuit of their bachelor’s degrees at PSU. Impressively, three participants stated they would like to earn their master’s degrees and one out of those three was also interested in pursuing a doctoral degree. While each individual described personal and physical challenges they have navigated or currently face, which will be discussed further along, all USPs of Color attributed their goal to earn their degrees to ultimately benefit their children. For example, Monica shared the following.

I actually was not planning on going back to school until I found out I was pregnant and that made me think, “well I need to lead by example and I need to be able to show my son that his parents are educated and can give him opportunities that my parents and my husband's parents weren't able to give him.” I wanted him to have a good start in life, even though he's three now, by the time it makes a really big difference I'm hoping we'll have my degree all in order and I'll be moving up the career ladder.
Shania also emphasized the significance of her degree attainment in the following quote, “My son motivates my persistence because he is completely reliant on me to make sure that I'm successful so that I can provide for him. And so, there's just absolutely no room for failure.” These quotes capture similar sentiments all USPs of Color interviewed shared. Participants expressed a direct relationship between their academic goals and their children, which helped to reinforce their motivation to persist toward degree attainment. Each USP of Color participant said that their children, and by extension connections to others, helped to support their academic aspirations despite multiple challenges.

**Challenges to Academic Capacity**

As USPs of Color individually shared about their academic goals, they also recounted challenges they have faced, and some have continued to navigate, as they have pursued their degrees. For example, Yesenia shared that while she was not employed her husband’s salary was significantly reduced. As a result, Yesenia sought support from family and on-campus resources for basic needs.

> Once a week I’d go and get food from the food pantry, and that helped a lot. They had masa [dough typically used to make tortillas] there, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, even meat, and sometimes even dairy. So, I'd come home with like a gallon of milk and a block of cheese and say, “All right, quesadillas for lunch all this week.”

Yesenia noted that without consistent meals, concentrating on school work would be difficult to manage. Similarly, Shania found assistance on campus through the Student Legal Services office. While Shania continued to navigate her academic pursuit, she also
coped with a custody battle with her previous partner. Shania explained that such a challenge impacted her finances, housing, and ability to concentrate on school work, however, Student Legal Services offered her a portion of the support she needed. In addition to on-campus support, Shania was also encouraged to continue on her academic journey by her family. Her sisters in particular reminded her of the importance of obtaining a college degree. In a similar fashion, Sandra also expressed difficulties with her ability to focus on assignments and attend course lectures regularly due to the lack of consistent childcare she has experienced in her journey.

I know that when my daughter is in class, that is my time. That is my time, because once I have her it's all me. I don't have any help. I don't have anyone or anywhere to take her. I don't have the money to do so, nor would I want to do that after such a long day in school. I want to be with my kid. So, I just have to figure it out.

Sandra shared more about her experiences with childcare both on and off campus, which will be discussed further along, and highlights how a lack of consistent care presents a significant challenge to completing academic work for students. With regard to academic capacity challenges, Sarah also spoke about how early in her pregnancy she worried that physical symptoms of morning sickness would impact her ability to attend classes. Luckily, Sarah said that while she did feel ill beyond mornings and while in class, she was able to attend most lectures and completed all of her assignments. Sarah noted that she did not feel comfortable seeking support for morning sickness on campus, however, did meet with her healthcare provider regularly. While USPs of Color experienced several challenges that impacted their capacity to complete academic responsibilities,
they sought help from a variety of sources. While parental responsibilities and health are just two examples of challenges participants discussed, they also discussed financial challenges of being students.

**Tolled Pathways**

Costs are a major factor that USPs of Color have had to contend with in order to persist in their academic journeys. All USPs of Color that participated in this research said that they received financial assistance to help pay for their tuition and associated fees from either financial aid, scholarships, or grants. However, Sandra discussed her frustration with the cost of parking and the reduced public transportation options available at PSU.

I’m all for public transportation, not just because of the cost, but also environmental factors and everything like that. If I could be riding a bike everywhere I go, I would if I could. But I can’t be on a bike or the Max with a giant project and my kid and feel safe. So, I feel like I’m really forced every term to spend $400 on a parking pass. I gotta spend $400, because my classes are spread out so far that I have to have the option for all three parking garages at all times of the day. It would really be appreciated, and it would make sense to me if student parents specifically had some sort of discount on these parking fees. There are people with multiple children, too. Are they gonna bike with two kids every single day? I get so frustrated that I’m paying this much for parking. I don’t feel like public transportation options as real options for me.

Within this quote, Sandra referenced the PSU electric bike share program and TriMet bus pass, which are public transportation systems that run throughout Portland, Oregon that students can opt to use at a reduced price. However, as Sandra noted, USPs who commute to campus may not find these public transportation options feasible as they navigate their way to campus with young children. As a result, some USPs, like Sandra,
opt to commute to PSU utilizing their personal vehicle and have had to purchase a
parking pass each term. Despite funds to help cover tuition, USPs are responsible for
their commute and needs of their families.

Participants of this research are all employed which has helped them afford and
contribute to their families cost of living. Additionally, USPs of Color participants all
discussed familial and community resources they have used within and outside of PSU to
support their needs. However, they also noted that PSU student resources in particular are
not equitably supportive of USPs and require further funding to offer sufficient care. For
example, Shannon expressed her frustration with the distribution of funds PSU gathers
through mandatory student fees and offered the following suggestion.

Being able to pick and choose what student services get our mandatory fees can
help improve certain areas, especially childcare. I know I would rather my money
be going towards childcare, then going towards things that I've never stepped foot
in. I'm not saying that those other places don't deserve those fees, but I just feel
that if we're paying for them, yes we have access to them, but how many of us are
actually using those?

Shannon’s suggestion captures one of the challenges USPs identified with regard to on-
campus childcare. She and other USPs of Color affirmed that PSU on campus childcare
lacks sufficient funds and staff to provide consistent and adequate care, which will be
further discussed. Shannon proposed that if USPs were provided the option to indicate
how much of their mandatory student fees were to be allocated to childcare, and other
resources they frequent, then PSU student resources could be funded differently. USPs of
Color agreed that academic expenses and inequitable support contribute to additional
challenges.
Childcare Challenge

One prevalent challenge that has made the journey toward degree attainment arduous for some USPs of Color has been childcare. Three USPs of Color expressed frustration due to insufficient on-campus childcare services. Notably, four out of the seven participants had infants or school-aged children, who have not received childcare services on campus due to their ages. However, the three USPs of Color who have sought care or utilized on-campus childcare services reported their dissatisfaction with long waitlists, a lack of consistent care, and staff. For example, Sebastian expressed annoyance with the long waitlist he was informed of when he inquired about childcare on campus. Since learning about a long waitlist, he did not pursue on-campus childcare. In contrast, Shannon shared that her child did receive care at an on-campus childcare center until her child turned three. Although her child did not exceed the age restrictions of the childcare center, Shannon stated that due to a shortage of staff, which she believes is due to the rate of pay for student teachers, the center has been unable to care for preschool-aged children since 2023. As a result, Shannon had to make alternative childcare arrangements. Shannon had the following suggestion to help solve the deficiency of staff in the childcare centers.

PSU should find ways to allocate funds to bring people in to work at the campus childcare centers and make it worth their time. That can definitely help. I know for myself, and I'm pretty sure a lot of others, once children get to a certain age where they can’t be taken care of on a campus childcare center because of a staff shortage for older kids it threw us for some sort of a loop. We had to try to hurry up and find childcare within a matter of weeks to be able to continue on with their education.
An interruption of childcare caused Shannon and her family to quickly search for a replacement of care and educational instruction for her child. As a result, her child had to adapt to a new school environment and teachers. Sandra had a similar circumstance when the ASPSU childcare center closed. Luckily, Sandra was able to transfer her child into one of the existing childcare centers and has maintained fairly consistent care since.

Furthermore, both Sandra and Shannon discussed their concerns about student teachers at the on-campus childcare centers.

There are younger college students who are trying to pay for their college to get through school. They pick up a job in one of these daycare centers and there's probably some anxiety in that, not just because they may not have experience dealing with children, but there's also all these things happening in the world. Staff really have to protect these kids on a new level from outside influences. You can definitely see the fear on the new student workers faces at these campus childcare centers.

Shannon reported that student staff members located in childcare centers have earned low wages as they have simultaneously pursued their degrees at PSU. Additionally, both Shannon and Sandra shared similar concerns with regards to student staff members that may not have children of their own and limited experience working with kids. They also recognized that these student staff members have been entrusted to protect children from harm and that can be an overwhelming responsibility. The three USPs of Color that have interacted with on-campus childcare had similar childcare needs, however, PSU on-campus childcare services were not able to assist each individual.

Conversations about on-campus childcare services led USPs of Color, that have utilized such assistance, to discuss their concerns about safety with regard to the location
of these centers. These parents expressed their concerns during a focus group, which
allowed them to identify similar concerns. Shannon noted that both childcare centers are
not centrally located within campus grounds, which compromises the safety of families
who drop off and pick up their children.

The area where Little Vikings and Helen Gordon are is not safe. I just think that
those areas are far more unsafe than a lot of other areas in the school. One reason,
just simply being that there's not a lot of foot traffic. So, if something were to
happen, you have very little chances of yelling out and somebody being able to
help you. When you're towing your little one, carrying your backpack, and you
have their bags, and so on it doesn't really give you the opportunity to fight and
your fight or flight skills are really put to the test. With all the houseless people
and just all the different crazy things that I've seen walking across the street, from
where I’ve parked, to the centers I don’t think the area is safe.

In this quote, Shannon described how the location of the childcare centers have caused
her physical reactions as she recognized that her fight or flight responses have been
tested. Additionally, Shannon said that she has witnessed events of possible concern as
she walked between her car and the childcare centers. While Shannon did not say these
concerns stemmed from the houseless encampments that surround both childcare centers
in existence, she did acknowledge their presence. Similarly, Sandra discussed her safety
concerns about one of the childcare centers on campus.

At Little Vikings there's a lot of glass windows and this is straight up on a corner
on the bottom floor of a building. I've seen enough car crashes where people just
go straight into buildings and that is really nerve wracking for sure.

Sandra’s concerns called attention to the structural features and the location of one
particular childcare center. She stated that these features and location have also caused
physical reactions of fear due to potential harm such as car accidents. Both parents
brought to light significant concerns about PSU childcare centers which seemed to connect them during the focus group activity. USPs of Color expressed several challenges, however, despite their on-going persistence.

**Socialization Challenges**

As USPs of Color continued to recount experiences from their academic journeys, they all discussed the importance of time and social connections. Despite connections to family and community resources, USPs of Color acknowledged that time constraints have an impact on their potential to expand their social spheres to prevent feelings of loneliness. Shania shared a perfect example of how USPs of Color expressed an interest in connections with others.

It's really hard to try to make friends with other parents while you're in school because all you're focusing on is providing for your family and getting good grades. I feel like that's all of us and so I can understand that but right now, there's no community like that here. I know there's the parent support group and all of these other cool different things. Sometimes we just don't have the time to attend events like the online student parent group sessions. So, there's not a place where I can just go and like hang out and talk to other parents, it's never been that way for me all these five years.

Shania recognized how time constraints have influenced the tasks she has prioritized.

Like Shania, all USPs of Color participants expressed an interest in socializing with others, student-parents and students without children alike. However, dedicated time to socialize has not typically or consistently been prioritized as USPs of Color have placed significant importance on family maintenance, course attendance, assignments, and grades. As a result, USPs of Color expressed feelings of loneliness due to a lack of social interactions. Yesenia said that she has experienced social interactions while in classes,
however, has been met with a lack of understanding that has resulted in her feeling isolated.

In my classes it’s been mostly students who live on their own or people who are older and already have grandkids. I usually think, “Oh, am I the only one with little ones? Wow, okay.” I find it hard connecting with other people to talk about kids. I could connect with them on a student level, but then, on a parent level, it’s a little bit more challenging. I usually hear, “Oh, well, I don't know how it feels to have kids. I bet it must be hard.” That is usually the comment that I get.

Comparatively, other participants also described a sense of loneliness, isolation, and yearn for social connections. They also noted that their time constraints have stemmed from their work shifts, commute to and from campus, coursework, and childcare hours. Despite the connections USPs of Color have with their families, campus resources, and extended community they have all expressed an interest in expanding their social circles to combat feelings of loneliness. Some USPs of Color have also expressed a sense of isolation due to the lack of representation, which brought to light the following theme focused on racism and bias.

USPs of Color expressed hope when they described their academic goal of earning their bachelor’s degrees. They were hopeful as they believed degree attainment would lead to their ability to provide their children with fruitful opportunities as they continue to grow and develop. Their motivation to obtain their degrees has reinforced their persistence despite the arduous journeys they have experienced. Academic and non-academic challenges were revealed during individual interviews and a focus group session. Challenges included financial barriers, pregnancy symptoms, insufficient and inconsistent on-campus childcare, and feelings of isolation among others. All USPs of
Color have experienced, and some continue to navigate, varied challenges on their route toward degree attainment. Despite identified obstacles, these USPs of Color continued to persist, focused on their main objective to obtain their degrees while they simultaneously challenged biased perceptions of their capabilities.

**Encounters with Bias and Racism**

Participants of this research have set clear academic goals for themselves, to earn bachelor’s degrees, which means they embarked on their academic journeys with intention. Although these USPs of Color have encountered challenges along their journeys with expenses, childcare, and feelings of loneliness, some also recalled experiences with bias and racism. During individual interviews, participants were asked to describe negative or positive experiences they have encountered as USPs of Color. Additionally, they were asked to discuss how they have been supported as USPs of Color who have navigated an academic system that was historically not built for individuals raising children or Students of Color. For most, connections with family and spaces where they could relate to others of similar cultural backgrounds proved significant in persisting despite bias and racism. This section is focused on the bias and racism USPs of Color have encountered along their journeys and how they have been supported to persist toward degree attainment.

**Mixed Experiences with Bias and Racism**

All participants of this study recognized that PSU’s student body is composed of diverse students; however, some reported that the campus environment is not void of
prejudice and racism. Three USPs of Color recalled circumstances when they experienced both bias against their parental and cultural or ethnic identities. For example, Monica shared that while on an outing off campus, she grew uncomfortable by the discriminatory comments against parenting individuals and racist remarks made by a white peer mentor.

They talked about how they look young because they don't have any kids, and proceeded to mention how all of her friends that have kids look like the life has been drained out of them. I felt uncomfortable because that person was way older than the two young freshmen girls that they were talking to. The same peer mentor was next to me and two other Latinas when we got stopped by a photographer who asked me if they could take our picture so they could submit it and maybe it could go on the website for that place. The peer mentor proceeded to say, “Oh, yeah, probably they need more brown faces because they're tired of white old people on the website.” As the photographer was leaving the peer mentor said, “I hope you find more brownies!” I was so shocked because to be honest, I have never confronted that sort of racism. So outwardly, that sort of like, bias behavior. So outwardly up in my face, I was so shocked, I didn't even know how to react.

Monica later said that she connected with the Director of the program she is a participant of to address the bias and racist experience she encountered. The Director informed Monica that they would meet with the peer mentor and the individual would be held accountable for their actions. Similarly, Sandra discussed an interaction with a classmate who blatantly shared their bias against her parental status.

I gotta advocate for myself. There's this one girl, she just says things like, “Oh, but you can't do that because you're a mom.” One of the last things I said to her, after making such comments, I said, “Girl listen, listen to what I'm telling you. This might blow your mind, but listen very carefully. I can do whatever the fuck I want.” She just frustrates me so bad because I think, “Girl, you have no idea what's coming for you. The moment you have a kid, you're gonna look back on these conversations and think about how you were an idiot.” I wish I could say it didn't happen in any other program, but it does.
Sandra felt confident in advocating for herself and reported that discrimination against parenting students is not expressed in just one major or degree program. Prejudice and racism, no matter how long standing, are not always as blatant. Shannon stated that in her experience as a USP of Color at PSU, she has rarely seen cultural representation she has resonated with throughout campus.

I remember I wrote a paper about how my professors didn't look like me, and neither did anybody in the class. I have taken like four or five classes every term, and except for one class during my first term, there has never been another black person that looked like me in my classes. It can be kind of discouraging at times, because people could say, “Oh, yeah, you know, I definitely understand you. I understand you.” And it's like, yeah, you kinda don't cause you walk into the classroom, and you're instantly able to connect, because there's somebody who looks like you. There's somebody who understands things, you know, because you connect about things. I'm not saying that in order for you to connect, you have to have the same skin color, same background, or ethnicity, or anything like that. But it makes it a lot easier because a lot of the shared experiences that we've had as a community.

Shannon emphasized that representation matters to help foster a sense of community and belonging. Despite the number of USPs of Color within PSU’s diverse student body demographics, bias and historical racism continue to influence the lived experiences of these students.

Not all USPs of Color shared similar experiences with bias against their parental status or racism at PSU. For example, Yesenia, Sebastian, Sarah, and Shania said that they have not encountered discrimination at PSU. On the contrary, these participants shared that they have enjoyed the diversity that comprises PSU’s student body. Sarah in
particular shared that in contrast to a previous institution she attended, PSU had a more diverse student population. I was in a different college for my freshman and sophomore years that was way more white dominant. I was pretty much one of the only students of color. I am so comfortable being at PSU compared to the other college because of past experiences. When I came to PSU as a transfer student I thought, “Oh, this is very diverse.” Although maybe some students don't feel the same way.

Sarah acknowledged that not all USPs of Color would resonate with her feelings of comfort at PSU with regard to diversity. Despite variances in experiences with diversity, bias, and racism, these USPs of Color have all continued to pursue their degrees at PSU. Similar to the varied experiences with bias and racism, some bilingual USPs of Color described the significance of their root languages and how racism has influenced their use of such communication.

**Root Languages and Racism**

Bilingual USPs of Color who discussed the importance of their root languages, or native tongue, reflected on the role their families played in their communication. These bilingual participants shared that early communication with their families has influenced their speech patterns, favorite phrases, stories that stand out to them, and prayers they value. For example, Yesenia shared that her parents taught her Spanish as a child and recalled the following examples of her family’s communication.

―Echale ganas y no te rindas.” [try hard and don't give up]. As far as stories, I remember La Llorna, Chancalas, and El Cucuy. I remember people saying, “El Cucuy ahi viene si no te portas bien.” [The Cucuy will be coming if you don't behave well]. Other than getting scared all the time, a lot of the dichos [sayings], music, or stories I remember with a lot of positivity. For example, “Dios esta contigo donde quieras que tu vayas. Acuerdate que no estas sola. Acuerdate que el
es tu fuente de paz, de amor, de gozo.” [God is with you wherever you go. Remember that you are not alone. Remember that he is your source of peace, love, and joy]. A lot of what has motivated me is faith-centered.

The stories and sayings that Yesenia was exposed to as a child have continued to encourage her as an adult. Monica and Sebastian shared similar sentiments about their upbringing in bilingual households and informed that they are also teaching their children their family root languages. Bilingual participants recognized the benefits of understanding more than one language, however, stated that most of their interactions with others are communicated in English. They also noted their preference to speak their root language with peers of similar cultural backgrounds. Historically, racism has influenced many to assimilate to white dominant culture and adopt English as their main language.

Historical consequences of racial subjugation, which has influenced many families to assimilate for survival, have influenced linguistics. Yesenia noted that due to assimilation she has predominantly engaged in conversations in English while at PSU, unless she is among a familiar group of peers that also speak Spanish.

I don't have to engage with another language, unless I'm hanging out with the GANAS group. Then we'll go into this English mode where we're speaking English and Spanish. But really, I think it's part of that assimilation, right? Because everything is in English.

The GANAS group, or Gaining Access & Navigating for Academic Success program, promotes the retention of newly admitted undergraduate Latinx students as they transition to PSU through peer mentorships and a stipend. Yesenia told the researcher that she feels comfortable speaking in Spanish with peers she has met through the GANAS program
because they share cultural similarities. In contrast, Sarah stated that she has not met many Japanese speaking peers at PSU and does not care to do so, since she prefers to speak Japanese at home with her partner. Shania, on the other hand, recalled her grandmother praying over her and her siblings in their native language, however, due to intergenerational trauma, her grandparents did not teach their native language to her parents.

Because of intergenerational trauma, and boarding schools and stuff, my parent’s parents thought they were protecting their kids by not teaching them our native language. And so in turn, they took that and didn't teach it to us either. So, it trickles down from generation to generation. The language kind of gets lost that way, because if they spoke that language in the boarding school, then the nuns would slap students with a ruler or wash their mouths with soap. It's really heartbreaking that I didn't get to grow up with my native language in my home as much as I'm sure my grandparents did. They're fluent and walking in a white world. They didn't want to teach their kids the language because they felt they were protecting them. I don't know a lot but I do enjoy hearing or did hear my grandmothers speak in their native language and pray over us.

Shania shared that she has visited campus and community events that celebrate Native American culture and strongly desired to be able to speak to others using her native language. Familial phrases, music, and stories are motivational to some USPs of Color, and others long for such a connection. Participants of this study made very clear that the United States' longstanding history with racism continues to impact their lived experiences. As a result, USPs of Color provided guidance for future USPs of Color to consider as a means to find representation to help gain a sense of community.
Strategies to Combat Racism

To combat disheartened feelings due to historical impacts of racism, USPs of Color offered words of advice to newly admitted PSU USPs of Color. They highlighted the significance of spaces on campus that allowed them to authentically present themselves as who they are. They are parents raising children; however, they are also students cohabitating an academic space with other students of Color. USPs of Color participants discussed the importance of feeling a sense of community through representation on campus and interactions with other students. For example, Shannon emphasized the significance of sharing space and time with people of Color, which has helped to affirm her sense of community.

Having places like the Black Student Union really does validate that you are important and you have a space. There is a space specifically at this campus for you, for people who look like you, for people who may not think like you, but have the same shared experiences as you. It just helps to be able to walk down the hall and see that there's another black person. I don't know if there's any black professors, I can't tell you, but it helps to see that there are others that look like you and can share those experiences. And you can go into these spaces and just let loose. You don't have to code switch. You don't have to sit proper. You don't have to. You can say things that people who are from your culture say and you don't have to explain it and be like, no, no, no, this is what I mean, or, this is what this word means. They're like you and you don't have to do any of that. You are just you the same you that you are at home not out in public and I love that.

Shannon has appreciated the Black Student Union and expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to connect with others who have shared similar lived experiences and culture. Representation matters and Shannon’s quote captures the significance spaces on campus dedicated to varied cultures and affinity spaces were to USPs of Color. Likewise, Yesenia affirmed that cultural representation and spaces dedicated to students of similar
backgrounds or experiences have helped to support the navigation of such a large institution.

The environment that's created in La Casa Latina is really inviting. The music going on, the people there, it's like you feel welcome. So, I'm in this huge campus but I know at least there's that one space that I'll feel like I can identify myself with the rest of the students there. So, it feels like, okay, we have a space. In between classes I don't wanna go to Starbucks. I'm just gonna go to La Casa Latina to hang out and see who's there. I've actually had students from one of my classes go there and meet me. They didn't know about the space and they welcome everybody.

As Yesenia was prompted to share advice for future USPs of Color based on ways she has navigated her own academic journey at PSU, she smiled as she spoke about La Casa Latina as an example. Her example also notes that she has previously referred La Casa Latina to former classmates who were unaware of the space as she encouraged future USPs of Color to visit as well. Admirably, both Shannon and Yesenia acknowledged that the cultural centers they referenced welcome all people. USPs of Color who participated in this research recognized the importance of representation and interactions with others who share similar backgrounds for support and a sense of community.

USPs of Color shared their experiences with bias and racism and ways in which they have prevailed in their journeys. While not all participants articulated direct experiences with bias or racism on campus, those who were bilingual did discuss their comfort and longing to speak their native language with those of similar cultural backgrounds only. Assimilation stems from racism, which has influenced many to predominantly speak English. However, USPs of Color did discuss their appreciation for spaces on campus where they could identify with people of similar cultural backgrounds.
and present themselves as they authentically are. Connections with family and community were significant to USPs of Color. The next theme is focused on salient connections that have helped USPs of Color to persist as they have navigated their academic journeys at PSU.

Supportive Connections

While USPs of Color have experienced academic challenges and racism, they also discussed ways in which they have been supported in their journeys by various sources. In particular, the connections USPs of Color have maintained with their respective families and extended communities have supported their persistence toward degree attainment. Whether through encouragement, childcare, or specified assistance, USPs of Color provided insight into ways they have been supported. Additionally, these students recounted the joy they have experienced as they too have contributed support to other USPs of Color. Due to the assistance they have received and provided, USPs of Color have remained inspired to persist in their pursuit to obtain their bachelor’s degrees.

Family Connections

Although the academic goals of USPs of Color are largely motivated by their children, they each expressed their appreciation for the support they have experienced through their connections to chosen and biological family members, who motivated them to continue on their academic journeys. For instance, Yesenia recalled how helpful her parents have been throughout her college experience.

Sometimes I'd get up, and the car was already full with gas. That's twenty minutes I don't have to take to go and do that. Or, my dad would make me a cup of coffee
with pan [a pastry dessert] to go along the way. I was raised to appreciate the small things. These little things family did always meant a big deal to me. My dad and my mom just supported me and made me lunch, so I didn't have to go and spend my money to go buy lunch. Or they would put $10 in my wallet before I had to leave, and I'd be stressing out throughout the day saying, “oh, I don't have any money, because you know my check won’t come in until the weekend.” Then I would look in my wallet and I would find ten dollars! I was always surprised.

Kind gestures, such as those recollected by Yesenia, showcase the supportive impact families have had on USPs of Color. USPs of Color affirmed that the support they have experienced has nourished their motivation to pursue their academic goals. For example, Sandra expressed similar appreciation for the support she received from her aunt.

Before she passed away, she had given me one thousand dollars. My first year of college was really difficult, financially. That gift was just like her way of saying, “do this, you have to keep doing this.” I was telling her how scared I was that I wasn't gonna be able to go to class because I couldn't pay for it. She's gone now. I think about that day because it was more than just money. She literally invested in me and she's done it in so many ways. Her being gone makes me think about those investments that she's made, and I don't want to put that to waste.

Sandra expressed sadness as she recalled her aunt’s investment in her education.

However, she also smiled when remembering her aunt and emphasized the sentiment of not wanting to squander such an emotional and monetary investment. Sandra and others also noted the significance of friends who have become synonymous to chosen family members and perform similar acts of support for their academic pursuits. These family friends provide encouragement, offer childcare, and are present for the needs of USPs of Color. Family connections overall were expressed as tight-knit, supportive, and considerate of USPs of Color needs.
Four USPs of Color said that their family connections have been pivotal in providing childcare outside of campus beyond the time needed to attend lectures. These USPs of Color noted that the need for childcare outside of their course schedule allows them time to address chores, course assignments, and their self-care needs. For example, Monica smiled when she shared that her family has consistently supported her with childcare.

My in-laws will take our son one day out of the weekend, so Saturday or Sunday, and that gives me a chance to sort of unwind and catch up on stuff. My grandma only takes care of him two days a week. So, I'm with him the other days.

Monica happily expressed gratitude for the care her family has provided her son. She also discussed how important her mental health is to her and how the one day a weekend she has had to herself has provided much needed rest or time to catch up on assignments, which has prevented her from feeling overwhelmed during the week. Similarly, Shannon shared that her eldest child has played with their younger sibling as a way to assist Shannon when she has needed to focus on assignments or tasks at home. Sandra’s best friend, as her chosen family, has also offered to assist her with childcare when she is not in classes. As responsive as family connections have been to the needs of USPs of Color, they have also experienced support from community connections.

Community Connections

Beyond family bonds, which were invaluable, USPs of Color also discussed the formation of fruitful community connections within and outside of PSU that have assisted them in their journeys toward their academic goals. More specifically, USPs of Color
utilized PSU student services such as on-campus childcare centers, and resource centers. Outside of PSU, USPs of Color discussed their participation with government assistance programs, non-profit organizations, religious affiliations, community organized extracurricular groups, and others. Participants affirmed that community resources have supported them in varied ways, which have contributed to their motivation to persist. For example, Sandra smiled when she recalled her transition into PSU and how teachers within the Associated Students of Portland State University (ASPSU) children’s center provided her information to help fund her academic pursuit.

The ladies at ASPSU Child Care Center really reassured me that all will be well. It was a good transition to PSU for sure. Just those teachers saying, “Hey, you might not know about this resource or this grant, or this scholarship.” These teachers are a part of my community, which is really important to me.

The ASPSU children’s center has been closed, however, Sandra has happily continued to stay in communication with the previous child care teachers she built community with. Similarly, Shania expressed gratitude for the connection she has built with a family housing advocate within the Native American Youth Association (NAYA) Family Center. Shania shared that the housing advocate has helped her apply for programs that have assisted with the costs of rent, food, bills, custody support, and has consistently informed her of community events that she and her son have enjoyed. While these are only two examples of the ways in which USPs of Color have experienced support through PSU and their extended community connections, others have acknowledged similar experiences that have supported their academic goals.
Similar to the childcare assistance family members have offered, USPs of Color appreciated the abundance of care their community has extended to them. For example, Yesenia’s community has offered to assist with childcare as she has continued her academic pursuit.

Recently too, people from church will say, “If you need a babysitter to take time for yourself or if you need to write a paper, let us know so that way you’re not distracted by them, or you don't feel guilty because you have to divide your attention between your paper and your children.” They will help me that way. This quote captures the appreciation Yesenia felt for the care her community expressed. Additionally, during an individual interview, Yesenia explained that sometimes student-mothers feel a sense of guilt for temporarily prioritizing their attention on their academic responsibilities rather than the immediate needs of their children. As a result, Yesenia has appreciated that her community has offered childcare support so that she may continue her studies while her children’s immediate needs are looked after. Whether familial or community support, USPs of Color have identified the need for childcare and have appreciated the assistance that has been offered by their connections. USPs of Color recognized that childcare has allowed them the time necessary to focus on personal needs and tasks, which by extension have helped to support their academic journeys. Participants also acknowledged that other USPs of Color and peers could benefit from the support they have experienced from family and community connections combined.

**Referrals to Resources**

The support USPs of Color have gained from their family and community of resources has also benefited others. Participants expressed joy in informing their family,
friends, other USPs of Color, and students in general about the community resources they have had access to. Yesenia shared a perfect example of how USPs of Color have supported others by sharing about their experiences, “I've kept a long-distance friendship with the college student who's now a parent, too. I think just being able to talk to her about certain things like resources helps since she became a parent while going to school.” Similarly, Monica communicated her delight in sharing resources with another USP of Color that was newly admitted to PSU and recently had their first child.

The resource center for students with children had their winter wonder application open and I told a student parent who just had a baby. He was also wondering about all the lactation rooms, all the child family rooms, and things like that, so I gave him the rundown. I also helped him apply for the winter wonder fund because babies are very expensive. I also got him to sign up for the resource center’s newsletter so he can get more info especially about the Jim Sells subsidy and things like that.

To provide further context, Monica shared information about Winter Wonder which is a scholarship that the Resource Center for Students with Children (RCSC) at PSU offers to USPs each Winter term. Additionally, Services for Students with Children at PSU offers a child care subsidy known as Jim Sells. The RCSC offers multiple support services and distributes information tailored for USPs on multiple platforms, which is why Monica suggested for the USP of Color to sign up for their newsletter. USPs of Color have helped to inform others that may be interested and could possibly benefit from the support of resources; however, they have also recognized that not all USPs have qualified or received the same assistance.
While sharing information about resources is abundantly kind, USPs of Color also acknowledged that assistance is scarce, limited, and not always family friendly. For example, Shania expressed frustration and sadness when she recounted an interaction with a USP who asked her about what resources she has used.

There's one parent I talk to, he has a young son that's a couple years younger than mine, and I'm actually gonna be giving some of my son’s clothes to him for his son. It's kind of nice exchanging, having the space to kind of collaborate, and talk about how you know to parent your child because there's no one way to do it correctly. I try to help student parents and I feel like when navigating this world being poor right now, you have already utilized every single resource out there. So, I will try to help because I have done SNAP, I've been TANF, and I've done all the government assistance programs. Student parents I talk to say, “Yeah, I've done that. I've checked all these waiting lists for these daycares, I've done everything to try to get my child into daycare, I’ve tried all these different scholarships, and nothing has helped.” I just say, “Yeah, I'm sorry. I feel your pain.”

Shania expressed a sense of happiness as she spoke about passing along clothing her son has outgrown and as she recalled sharing parenting topics with another USP. Soon after, she grew disheartened as she talked about the government assistance programs that she has utilized and how some of the USPs she has interacted with have not been able to gain similar assistance. Likewise, during a focus group of four participants, both Shannon and Sandra expressed dissatisfaction for the lack of family friendly events hosted on campus.

Flyers that promote specifically family events, for all ages, would really help build community. And not only that, but if an event is in person also having a way for parents who would like to participate with their children remotely would be great. Maybe having a way that either the parent can pick up supplies for the event, or it can be sent to the parents. So then, that way, they're on Zoom with all the rest of the parents, and they can see what's going on, and they're participating along the way and not feeling like they don't have a sense of community.
Shannon and Sandra acknowledged that there have been programs hosted on campus that they would have liked to participate in, however, they both proclaimed feelings of frustration because flyers or similar information distributed about events have not disclosed whether they are family friendly or not. Additionally, Shannon proposed that campus events should offer on-campus childcare if programs are not family friendly or only for specific age ranges. USPs of Color have generously offered others information about resources that they have gained assistance from, however, they have also affirmed the existing shortcomings of such services. While some shortcomings have potential solutions, USPs of Color have limited time to wait for services to change and acknowledge the impact of insufficient support.

**Paving Pathways**

USPs of Color who participated in this study have navigated their educational journeys toward degree attainment within a system of inequitable conditions. Inequities such as a lack of sufficient childcare, family friendly programs, and under-representation are just a few examples of what USPs of Color have described about their experiences at PSU. Despite these inequitable experiences, USPs of Color have utilized resourceful skillsets to persist and resist stopping out. When prompted to talk about what advice she would give to a newly admitted USP of Color based on strategies she has used to navigate her journey to persist, Yesenia stated the following.

I would tell a Student Parent of Color coming into PSU, “you've made it this far. You've made it this far even with systematic oppression and all these things. You're gonna get further along. Just don't let it get you. Try not to let it get you down. If you can’t find a friend or someone you can confide in, reach out to your
church. If you’re a person of faith reach out. Reach out to the SHAC center if you need a counselor. Deja tu huella. [leave your mark]. Don’t let people try to put you down, because honestly, a lot of the times when someone tries to put you down it’s because they’re dealing with their own stuff, and you just happen to be the one in front of them.

This powerful quote captures Yesenia’s acknowledgement that newly admitted USPs of Color possibly have and may experience racism and discrimination. To combat such brutal treatment, Yesenia suggested community oriented navigational strategies to aid the persistence of USPs of Color. Similarly, Shannon suggested strategies for USPs of Color to persist on-campus with the support of community resources.

Go and join programs like the resource center for students with children, the black student union, the cultural sororities or fraternities. Look for spaces that can help you be who you are. Check out on-campus childcare centers to get childcare while going to school. Talk to your professors, they know about resources. Be truthful about your income because there are people out there to help you. There are people that are willing to help not because of charity but because they believe in you. However long it takes for you to finish your degree, it’s a goal that you will work to reach. Work at your own pace, don’t compare yourself to others. You’ll find a space for you. Use the resources to help you. Use them to help you succeed. Speak with your professors and let them know what your needs are. Speak with others and connect with them. We have outside community too.

Shannon’s guidance encourages USPs of Color to seek community through campus resources such as resource centers, cultural centers, student organizations, faculty, and external support services. She emphasized the importance of identifying spaces that can help USPs of Color feel a sense of belonging through cultural representation and parenting status. Furthermore, Shannon recommended that USPs of Color not compare the time necessary to accomplish their goals as opposed to others. In addition, Shannon asserted that there are people willing and able to assist USPs of Color as they make
efforts to accomplish their academic goals, because these people have confidence in
USPs of Color. Despite inequitable conditions, USPs of Color have utilized varied
strategies to navigate their academic journeys and have shared strategies to inform others
of approaches they may attempt as they set out to pave their own way. These students
affirmed their motivation to persist has been assisted by the family and community
support they have received.

**Motivated to Persist**

Participants of this study have all recognized their academic goals and described
the assistance they have experienced from several familial and community resources. As
a result, USPs of Color reported feeling motivated to persist so they could accomplish
their goals and reciprocate the support they have received from others. USPs of Color
communicated that they did not want previous experiences or sacrifices go in vain. For
example, Sebastian recalled his previous work experience and noted why he has
continued to persist toward degree attainment.

I grew up poor, and as a first gen student I have to earn my degree. I need to have
the discipline and determination to do it. I had a crappy childhood. I want to give
my kids a better life. I started working in the fields here in Oregon every summer
at the age of 11. At 15 I worked 12-15 hours a week in a canning factory. I
remember thinking, “I don’t want to do this for the rest of my life.” Later, in high
school I worked 50 hours a week. I’m earning a degree so I can give my kids a
better life.

Like all USPs of Color, Sebastian has committed to earning his college degree with the
hope of providing opportunities to his children that he did not have as a child. While part
of his motivation to earn his degree is to provide for his kids, Sebastian also shared about
his early work experiences as a child and how such circumstances inspired him to commit
to a different means of income. Three other USPs of Color described that their parents
and other family elders experienced similar work experiences as Sebastian. These USPs
of Color communicated that they have remained motivated by the sacrifices their families
have made in order to offer them opportunities. For example, Yesenia shared of the
sacrifices her parents made and how that has influenced her persistence toward degree
attainment.

I think my number one supporters for persistence have been my mom and dad. They immigrated over here from Mexico. They were undocumented for about 5 or 6 years and when they got their green cards they really challenged me. I'm the oldest, so they really challenged me to contribute to society in some way whether it was being a janitor or anything there was no shame. It didn’t matter to them what job I would get. They said, “Never stop learning, that's gonna help you in your future. Just give it your best, we don't expect A's just give it your best.” But I feel like I had to prove myself because they immigrated over here. They crossed the river, they worked in the fields for so many years, and so in the back of my mind that's always been there. I need to do this, not just for them, but for myself.

Yesenia attributed her persistence to earn her degree to her parents as she reflected on the challenges her parents faced as they immigrated to the United States, the arduous work they experienced in crop fields for years, and the encouragement they provided her to pursue her education to ultimately contribute to society. She acknowledged that she has had a desire to prove herself due to the sacrifices her parents made and this has motivated Yesenia’s persistence. USPs of Color, like Sebastian and Yesenia, have helped to highlight how previous experiences and sacrifices have helped to motivate their persistence toward degree attainment and resistance to stopping out. Perhaps future
generations will also attribute their motivation and persistence to the sacrifices they are currently making.

USPs of Color have appreciated the support biological and chosen family members have extended to them. From sacrifices, kind gestures, childcare, and more, the support family has provided to USPs of Color has continued to motivate and facilitate their academic journeys. Similarly, community support such as religious groups, community organizations, and on-campus resources have assisted USPs of Color with childcare, monetary assistance, and family programming. However, participants also expressed frustration from the limitations of community resources and the scarcity of support some of their colleagues have experienced. As a result, USPs of Color provided strategies they would provide to other USPs of Color to help them persist toward degree attainment. USPs of Color who participated in this study remained motivated to earn their degrees and have had to persist despite the challenges they have faced in order to accomplish future aspirations such as career entry and contributions to their families.

Chapter Summary

The researcher is honored to have met each USP of Color that has contributed to the understanding of how their persistence has been assisted as they have made their journey toward degree attainment. Each individual has shared such personal details about their experiences as USPs of Color at Portland State University, however, the researcher acknowledges that there are more to their respective life stories than one dissertation can illustrate. What participants did share is similar to a polaroid snapshot of themselves
while on their journeys toward degree attainment. After students participated in individual semi-structured interviews and four of them met as a focus group, the researcher attempted to develop a story that centered their voices and experiences.

The story developed from emergent themes inspired from what USPs of Color reported as part of their journeys. To begin the story, the researcher provided a brief background of each participant followed by the identification of their academic goals and challenges they have faced. This discussion led to the exploration of bias and racism that some USPs of Color have encountered along their journeys. Once academic goals and challenges were identified the researcher discussed the significance of family and community connections. The story went on to describe how participants have enjoyed sharing resources with others, however, they recognized that not all USPs of Color have experienced the same assistance. Ultimately, the story discussed how their lived experiences, support from family, assistance from extended community, have combined to assist their persistence. From this story the researcher aimed to promote knowledge about how USPs of Color have experienced support to persist and respectfully center the voices of those that contributed to this research as they continued on their journeys.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research study sought to discover how Undergraduate Students Parents of Color (USPs of Color) experienced support from their postsecondary institution and their extended communities to persist toward degree attainment. The researcher concluded that a qualitative approach to this study would contribute to literature in existence through an exploration of experiences as told by USPs of Color. More specifically, the researcher chose a single-site case study research design to develop an understanding of USPs of Color experiences who attended Portland State University (PSU). Semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group were utilized to collect qualitative data. Once collected, data was coded using provisional and *in vivo* codes, which were analyzed further utilizing axial codes to develop emergent themes. These themes were later woven to produce a counterstory inspired by portraiture. Through the contributions of seven participants that supported this study, the researcher was able to produce the following three key findings to enhance knowledge of how the persistence of USPs of Color has been supported by their college and extended community to attain their degrees. Based on the themes identified in Chapter Four, the first finding identifies their aspiration despite challenges, the second informs of resistance strategies, and the third finding defines their experiences with resources and acts of resourcefulness.

USPs of Color share similar motivations and experiences of support to pursue their degrees despite the challenges they have faced. While portraiture and counterstory telling inspired an explanation of positive experiences, the study also necessitated an
explanation of struggles they have faced. These students have had to be resourceful as a direct result of the circumstances they have had to navigate, which has required them to anticipate challenges that could pose as barriers to their pursuits. Leaders within higher education and community support services stand to gain an understanding of the challenges USPs of Color have faced, and some continue to navigate, which calls all to reflect on their accountability to support this particular student population. A review of policies, programs, and practices can help to amend or develop efforts to assist in the removal of potential barriers so that USPs of Color may focus less on building their resourceful skillsets to resist stopping out and more on their academic development toward degree and career attainment. Reflections of accountability and a review of policies, programs, and practices can benefit from the recommendations of practice explored in this chapter. More specifically, a framework dedicated to support USPs of Color may help with the intentional development and implementation of efforts to assist USPs of Color and by extension their families. While this research is intended to contribute knowledge to support USPs of Color, there were some limitations that will be later addressed. Future practices will benefit from additional research to help learn more about USPs of Color and efforts that can be made to support equitable access to postsecondary education and support toward degree attainment.

**Interpretation of Findings**

According to USPs of Color who attended PSU, their postsecondary institution and their extended communities have assisted their persistence in various ways. The
exploration of how the persistence of these students has been assisted differs from studies that have identified a lack of support for this student population. Although some experiences described by participants of this study reflected what previous literature has captured, they also offered additional perspectives unique to this study. As a result, postsecondary institutions and communities alike may learn further about USPs of Color through this study, which counters previously identified deficits of USPs in general. The following offers connections between the findings derived from the data and current literature. Additionally, distinctive key findings developed from the data are further explored. Such insights may steer postsecondary institutions, and possibly community resources, that intend to support USPs of Color to reflect on their policies, practices, and programs to potentially improve efforts to equitably assist their retention toward degree attainment.

Aspiration Despite Challenges

The researcher noted a clear connection between the aspirations of USPs of Color and their families, more specifically their children. The theme of intentional beginnings and arduous journeys encompassed data that highlighted the academic goals USPs of Color aspired to achieve despite challenges they faced because of the perceived opportunities they could offer their children through degree attainment. Similar to Aspirational Capital, as explained by Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), participants of this study maintained their academic aspirations despite challenges such as inconsistent childcare, cost of attendance, time constraints, and other factors that served
as obstacles toward their degree attainment. The persistence of USPs of Color toward their academic aspiration, or degree attainment, was in large part maintained by their ambition to provide prosperous opportunities for their children once they enter their career field. Entry into a career field does not always mean a person will earn a lucrative salary, however, USPs of Color maintained the hope that they would be able to offer their children opportunities they did not experience as children after earning their degrees. As previous studies have suggested, aspects of cultural wealth often intertwine in support of students (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Matos, 2015; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso; 2002). For example, this study captures a connection between Aspirational Capital, as previously described, and Familial Capital which addresses a person’s connection to biological and chosen family members that helps to foster their cultural knowledge, history, and sense of community (Yosso, 2005). USPs of Color recounted sacrifices their families made, such as immigration and monetary contributions, and employment struggles they have experienced, such as a reduction of wages or working in unideal environments. Participants acknowledged that the sacrifices and struggles endured, as a means to make a living or contribute to their future, enhanced their desire to reciprocate the efforts their families have made and also not allow their own experiences to be in vain. The acknowledgement of sacrifices and struggles, helped to motivate USPs of Color in pursuit of their academic aspirations. While in pursuit of their aspirations, USPs of Color discussed how they prioritized their time in an effort to attain their degrees.
Time constraints are a challenge that all USPs of Color experienced and the theme of intentional beginnings and arduous journeys helped to emphasize this. Similar to previous studies (Cruse et al., 2019; Sallee & Cox, 2019), all participants of this study worked to maintain their standard of living and academic needs. As a result, USPs of Color had to be mindful of their work schedules, lectures, assignments, and more. To support their attendance in lectures and academic needs, three out of seven participants attempted to secure on-campus childcare assistance, only two were able to obtain care temporarily, and one has continued to be eligible for such assistance during course attendance. Similar to participants of a previous study (Dayne et al., 2021), the USP of Color that utilized on-campus childcare was mindful of the hours of operation of the center in order to attend courses and complete assignments. Also, although not the cheapest option, all USPs of Color commuted to campus and utilized personal vehicles due to the inconvenience of traveling with children on public transportation.

Despite the time constraints they experienced, USPs of Color who participated in this study expressed feelings of loneliness and a desire to meet others. Regardless of feelings of loneliness, participants prioritized class attendance and completion of assignments over opportunities to socialize, such as on campus programs that they may have found beneficial even though they were not advertised as family friendly. This result is similar to studies that found inclusive engagement opportunities were attended poorly due to time constraints of USPs frequently experience (Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). While some of the challenges with time
constraints from this study are similar to previous studies, there are other comparisons and contrasts that can be drawn from studies completed during the height of the global COVID pandemic.

USPs of Color who participated in this study endured several challenges at the point this study was conducted, however, none were greater than the recent global COVID pandemic. For example, Kienzl et al. (2022) noted that USPs of Color suffered from wage reductions during the pandemic and that is what one USP of Color participant experienced after their significant other’s wages were reduced. As a result of wage reductions, the student-parent attended the campus food pantry to support their family’s nutritional needs. However, in comparison to previous research (Manze et al., 2021), USPs of Color in this study did not discuss the need to support their children or employment responsibilities remotely because neither parent or child remained sheltered in place. Additionally, while previous research discussed a lack of on-campus childcare or referral options (Dayne et al., 2021), PSU did offer USPs of Color on-campus childcare and access to additional resources. However, similar to previous studies with long childcare waitlists (Cruse et al., 2019; Dayne et al., 2021; Manze et al., 2021), one participant was deterred from seeking on-campus childcare after being placed on a waitlist. As COVID cases have subsided and the public state of emergency has been lifted, PSU has encouraged students to attend courses on-campus. However, in 2023 the university closed the Associated Students of Portland State University (ASPSU) childcare center. This closure reflected the trend that one study captured about the closures of on-
campus childcare centers across Oregon postsecondary institutions (Contreras et al., 2021). One of the USPs of Color who participated in this study was impacted by said closure, however, they were able to secure childcare at one of the two remaining childcare centers on-campus. This student also expressed frustration over the inconsistent childcare they have experienced due to a lack of staff at their current on-campus childcare center.

Counter to previous studies that have focused on the lack of resources USPs have experienced, USPs of Color who participated in this study explained that their academic aspirations have been assisted by their families, community services, and campus resources. The assistance USPs of Color experienced from their families ranged from kind gestures to childcare. Such acts of care, show that family connections contributed to the support USPs of Color have experienced while in pursuit of their degrees. Additionally, campus and community resources have supported USPs of Color through services such as childcare, housing insecurity, and other basic needs. USPs of Color expressed appreciation for the support they received from campus and community resources alike. Despite their connections to such support, USPs of Color expressed feelings of loneliness and desired social connections with others, however, time constraints due to course attendance, childcare hours of operation, and employment responsibilities were prioritized. As a result of such time constraints, USPs of Color have opted out of using local public transit and instead have commuted to campus utilizing their personal vehicles. Due to their use of personal vehicles, USPs of Color have had to
contend with high prices of parking on campus rather than navigating public transportation with their children. USPs of Color have also expressed frustration due to the insufficient care they have experienced or witnessed. For example, on-campus childcare did not provide care to the child of one USP of Color due to a shortage of staff. Another USP of Color, temporarily lost on-campus childcare due to the closure of a center. Also, one USP of Color did not seek on campus childcare due to a long waitlist. A USP of Color also noted that community services such as TANF, SNAP, scholarships, and other resources involve lengthy processes, numerous restrictions, or have a limited capacity to serve others. In addition to the difficulties USPs of Color experienced with childcare, among other obstacles, some discussed their encounters with bias and racism in pursuit of their postsecondary education.

Resistance Strategies

Three participants experienced bias against their identity as parents and racism due to their race or ethnicity. Four USPs of Color did not report such encounters, rather, they discussed the importance of spaces in which they felt comfortable speaking with those who share similar cultural knowledge and the significance of their root languages. There is a connection between Community Cultural Wealth’s (Yosso, 2005) explanation of Resistant Capital, which describes skills an individual possesses to challenge discrimination, and the appreciation USPs of Color shared for spaces in which they can express their identities. For example, Monica and Shania valued the Resource Center for Students with Children because they visited the space and accessed services tailored to
their student-parent identities. Similarly, Shania and Yesenia discussed their appreciation for Cultural Resource Centers on campus because of the cultural knowledge, language, and comfort they shared with people in those spaces. Also, Sebastian and Sarah, noted that they only felt comfortable speaking their root languages with their loved ones. A resistant strategy USPs of Color practiced to combat the discrimination they faced due to their parental status, race, ethnicity, or lack of comfort has been for them to frequent spaces in which they feel free to express their identities without fear of bias or racism.

All participants shared a fondness for their root, or native language and those that were bilingual preferred to speak with those of similar cultural backgrounds. This preference proved similar to Yosso’s (2005) Linguistic Capital, which acknowledges the influence language has on communication. While preference for speaking root languages with others of similar backgrounds does not prove that they did so due to racism, there may be a connection. Two USPs of Color discussed the influence assimilation has had on their use, or lack thereof, their respective root languages. These same two participants, along with one other, shared that they felt most connected to those that speak and share similar cultural backgrounds. This sense of connection was consistent with previous examples of Familial Capital (Gonzales, 2019; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005;), which helps to affirm community among those that share cultural knowledge. One student who discussed their experience with assimilation and preferred to speak their root language with people of similar cultural backgrounds also expressed their appreciation for their participation in a mentorship program. This student said the
mentorship program they were a part of is dedicated to the retention of first-generation Students of Color and has helped them develop a sense of community that they felt comfortable using their root language with. This example aligns with Critical Race Theory (CRT), which asserts that equity efforts should take into account historic forms of oppression such as assimilation.

USPs of Color utilized spaces where they could present themselves as authentically themselves ethnically, culturally, and as parents. These spaces proved significant in their strategy to resist stopping out within an academic system that was historically not established for students raising children or Students of Color. Participants shared the gratitude they felt for the Resource Center for Students because of the services they offered specifically tailored to student-parents. Additionally, USPs of Color enjoyed spaces such as Cultural Resource Centers in which they could interact with others of similar cultural backgrounds and speak their root languages. While some USPs of Color reported experiences with bias and racism against their parental, ethnic, and cultural background, others only acknowledged the effects assimilation had on their use of their root language. Those who only identified experiencing the impacts of assimilation affirmed the effectiveness of Cultural Resource Centers and shared their appreciation for their connections to others who they felt comfortable speaking their root languages within other spaces. USPs of Color resisted the impacts of an academic system that was not intentionally developed to provide access to higher education by those raising children or
Students of Color. The strategies USPs of Color discussed led to an exploration of their experiences with support.

**Resources and Resourcefulness**

Participants of this study were motivated to obtain their degrees to make progress in their career field of choice, afford opportunities that their children could benefit from, and to honor previous sacrifices they and their families made for them. Despite their motivation, all participants of this study discussed varied forms of support they experienced from their families, biological and chosen, campus, and their local community as they progressed toward degree completion. Resources, such as those mentioned by USPs of Color in this study, echo what previous research has found as systems of support both off and on campus (Dayne et al., 2021; Jain et al, 2011; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019; Samuelson & Litzler, 2016). These systems of support proved critical to the persistence of USPs of Color, which coincides with Navigational Capital (Yosso, 2005). Navigational Capital (Yosso, 2005) describes the ability of those who progress through journeys within environments not intended for them via resources and resourcefulness. Examples of how resources have helped USPs of Color to progress in their journeys toward degree attainment include assistance with childcare, they have supplemented basic needs, and provided culturally relevant connections. However, USPs of Color also found that resources they have utilized, or attempted to, have long waitlists, insufficient funding, or are temporary. To access these resources students have had to navigate a campus environment that was not built to address their multifaceted needs. As
a result, USPs of Color have had to be resourceful and develop strategies to persist through degree attainment. For example, USPs of Color shared that the cost of attendance and living expenses have been a challenge, however, they have been resourceful through their connections with other student-parents. These connections have led to clothing swaps, discussions about parental experiences as students, and shared knowledge about resources. Unlike studies that have focused on what student-parents lacked, this study highlights ways in which they have been supported through family, community, and their resourcefulness.

Access to invaluable resources, such as family and community, contributed to USPs of Color feeling supported and encouraged to pursue their degrees. The experiences of USPs of Color have contributed to the art of counter-storytelling. While previous studies have focused on what student-parents lacked in terms of support, these USPs of Color identified family and community resources that have helped them advance on their journeys toward degree attainment. Access to such resources corresponds with what previous research has identified as Social Capital, which also combats deficit perspectives of Students of Color who have been depicted as lacking said assets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

As a result of the support each participant experienced, they also contributed advice to assist future USPs of Color. Participants encouraged USPs of Color to persist and to seek access to support services to assist in their pursuit of degree attainment. USPs of Color emphasized the importance of seeking community to find kinship with others who share
similar backgrounds or identities and to help navigate an academic system not built for their access to a postsecondary education. Connections to family and community have supported USPs of Color, however, their resourcefulness has also assisted their academic aspirations. USPs of Color have experienced support from their families and extended community, which they were appreciative for and encourage others to seek.

USPs of Color have had to be brave and resourceful to develop bonds with others and mutually supportive strategies with people they may not have known otherwise. Unlike previous studies that have focused on what student-parents lack, this study focused on how systems of support have assisted USPs of Color in obtaining their degrees. Their counter story includes a focus on the support they have experienced from their families, campus, and extended community. UPS of Color have a social capital that has helped them in pursuit of their degrees. As a means to pay forward the support they have encountered, these same USPs of Color have encouraged future USPs of Color to confide in others, build bonds, and develop mutually supportive practices as a means to be resourceful and learn of additional resources that may assist their academic aspirations. USPs of Color have shown that they have social capital, however, such bonds were not transactional. In contrast, USPs of Color are active participants in spaces where they feel a sense of community such as resource centers, community services, and campus centers. As a result, postsecondary institutions and community resources should be compelled to learn of best practices to intentionally develop and implement equitable support for USPs of Color.
Recommendations for Practice

Future USPs of Color, the field of higher education, community services, and others dedicated to intentional equitable support efforts dedicated to USPs of Color will benefit from this research. The following framework dedicated to supporting USPs of Color has been developed for implementation within postsecondary institutions, however, community services and other resources may also adopt the recommendations for practice as applicable to their organization. Moreover, Oregon public postsecondary institutions, such as PSU, will benefit from the use of data generated from Senate Bill (SB) 564 (2021) and this framework for practice.

SB 564 (2021), has prompted Oregon public postsecondary institutions to gather data on the number of USPs enrolled. The data generated at each institution may be leveraged by those dedicated to supporting the retention and degree attainment of USPs of Color to request that policies, programs, and processes be reviewed for potential amendments or innovative implementations such as those offered through this study. Additionally, the framework dedicated to USPs of Color and proposed as a comprehensive recommendation for practice will help to foster a collaborative effort between staff, faculty, and students. The contributions drawn from this study, a state policy that mandates institutions to generate data on USPs, and previous research have been combined to support the following recommendations for future practice.
**USP of Color Support Framework**

In this study, USPs of Color expressed motivation and described how their persistence was reinforced through the support they received from their connections with family, their campus, and extended community. However, they also discussed the challenges they faced along their journeys toward degree attainment. Challenges included childcare, representation, parking costs, and more. As a result, USPs of Color and their children will benefit from innovative efforts to maximize intentional equitable support for their retention toward degree attainment. To support such developments, the use of previously designed concepts and data gathered from this study was used to generate the following USP of Color Support Framework. More specifically, Cruse et al. (2022) proposed a college promise program model to offer wrap-around services to support student-parents. Wrap-around services in the college promise program model include childcare, health and wellness support, inclusive campus practices, and financial assistance (Cruse et al., 2022). Postsecondary institutions that implement the college promise model are encouraged to document their support for students as intensive case management practices would to track the assistance provided through degree attainment (Cruse et al., 2022). Similarly, Cheuk (2022) developed a framework, the pregnant and parenting students belonging and thriving framework. Cheuk’s (2022) framework suggests that student-parents benefit from collaborative engagement opportunities to help foster community, healing, reinforce self-determination, share mutual power, and access to resources. A blend of Cruse et al.’s (2022) model, Cheuk’s (2022) framework, and
what the researcher has learned from USPs of Color has led to the development of the following framework recommended for future practice. This framework was developed intentionally to support the needs of USPs of Color and can prove useful for organization and guidance toward intentional practices within postsecondary institutions and other resources.

**Figure 2**

*USP of Color Support Framework*

![Diagram of USP of Color Support Framework]

The USP of Color framework centers parenting Students of Color and those dedicated to assist this postsecondary student population through degree attainment as collaborative partners. For example, PSU houses a Services for Students with Children (SSWC) department where staff and student-parents interact collaboratively. While postsecondary staff entrusted to support parenting students have a shared responsibility to
support these students, they must work collaboratively with students to determine their needs for retention and degree attainment. The first finding of this study addressed the academic aspirations USPs of Color maintained despite their experiences with challenges. For example, USPs of Color who participated in this study shared how helpful they found the food pantry on campus. This framework shows that USPs of Color are central and collaborative partners of the staff members who serve them. These staff members must collaborate with campus partners, such as the on-campus food pantry, to inform of what may be helpful for parenting students to ensure options inclusive of their needs become available during hours they can access such services. The second finding of this study acknowledged resources that supported USPs of Color to combat bias due to their parental status and racism as a result of their race or ethnicity. The USP of Color framework requires staff to develop programs in collaboration with cultural and affinity resources. Such partnerships assist USPs of Color and their families engage in reflective discussions about their identities and provide space where they can authentically exist safely. The third finding discussed how resources have been helpful to USPs of Color, however, there are some limitations. These insufficiencies, have led USPs of Color to be resourceful and prompted them to cultivate a supportive community within family-friendly spaces. This framework recognizes the importance of structures that are family-friendly and insits that staff dedicated to USPs of Color collaborate, maintain, and reserve space accessible to the parenting student community. For example, USPs of Color described how helpful they found their interactions with other student-parents at the
Resource Center for Students with Children. Spaces on campus that are dedicated to USPs in general help to establish a family-friendly environment. The use of the USP of Color Support Framework will help support ongoing efforts to assist the retention and persistence of USPs of Color.

Staff dedicated to the support of USPs of Color must work directly with parenting students to learn about their collective needs, develop and implement intentional policies, processes, and programs, and cyclically assess how campus efforts support the retention and degree attainment of student-parents. After a review of data, student-parents should be informed of what realistic implementations can be accommodated and how they may be a part of such developments. Intentional attention should be taken by these staff members to promote the inclusivity of those whose intersectional identities have historically, and in many ways continue to be, underrecognized and underserved. PSU has garnered an esteemed reputation for a student body that is racially and ethnically diverse. Having been named a Minority Serving Institution (MSI), designated as an Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) campus, and an emergent Hispanic-Serving Institution (HIS), PSU has a responsibility to provide equitable access to services that support the retention and degree attainment of students with multifaceted needs and intersectional identities. USPs of Color, and USPs in general, should not only inform staff of what their needs are, but rather have an active participant role in the development of inclusive policies, processes, and programs. For example, parenting students could form a campus collective alongside campus staff to
help organize efforts to improve representation, inform best practices for campus partners, and address campus leaders to advocate for their needs. After an allotted time, the implementation of the USPs of Color framework should be assessed cyclically to foster ongoing collaborations and improvements.

Through collaborative efforts between parenting students and postsecondary leaders and the use of data generated by state policy, such as SB 564 (2021), spaces may become further receptive of USPs, and in particular of USPs of Color whose existence in academia was not planned for at the inception of higher education. For example, postsecondary leaders tasked with the responsibility to develop and uphold policies, practices, and programs should implement the following recommended practices. First, policy should require faculty to include contact information for campus resources or departments that support parenting students. For example, students should be informed of who to contact should they require temporary accommodations due to pregnancy, postpartum, or childcare assistance. Secondly, policy should require programs to advertise family-friendly options that parenting students may attend with their children. For instance, communication that advertises workshops or information sessions within inclusive spaces that children may safely attend should include a family-friendly notice. Lastly, policy should mandate postsecondary leaders to invest in the structural needs of parenting students. In particular, campus parking must include designated spaces for pregnant and parenting students with young children, buildings should have ramps and elevators to support use of strollers, and childcare centers should have security measures
installed within and outside of the structure to assist with safety. Further studies may
develop additional recommendations of practice that could prove beneficial toward
equitable policies, programs, and processed within postsecondary institutions and
community services alike.

**Future Research and Limitations**

Research is never perfect. There are always limitations to research studies.
Qualitative research, while not generalizable, has the power to model and transfer ideas
to different settings or populations. Semi-structured interviews are time intensive and
may not represent the full experience of the population of interest (Adams, 2010).
Despite what critics may claim as subjective and therefore unreliable, the researcher
collected data as neutral as possible via multiple methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By
including interviews, a focus group, and a review of analytic memos, data was
triangulated to increase reliability and validity of the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
Based on the sound research methods and the resulting recommendations, PSU may
leverage the results from this study to advocate for changes to policies, programs,
practices, and physical structures. Other institutions may also use this research and the
suggested framework for practice, dedicated to USPs of Color, as a starting point to
develop their own services for parenting students. Future studies may also benefit from
this study by expanding what was done and addressing the limitations experienced.

Future research can offer continued support to improve practices to help reinforce
the persistence of USPs of Color. This study centered the voices of seven USPs of Color,
which included one parent that identified as a father of two children, one international student that identified as a mother to a newborn infant, and a mother that navigated her college journey with three children, a mother who also persisted through college with two children, and three mothers that simultaneously raised their own individual children. The recruitment of participants and organization of individual interviews were difficult to solidify, which led to an intimate focus group. Future studies could potentially meet with more participants and host larger focus groups to gather data. Additionally, while this study gathered the perspective of one USP of Color that identified as a father, future studies could focus on advancement of knowledge focused on the perspectives of undergraduate student parent fathers. Several researchers have expressed difficulty in obtaining participants who identify as undergraduate student parent fathers (Manze et al., 2021; Roy et al., 2018; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Similarly, this study gathered just one perspective of an international USP of Color. Future studies could place an emphasize on the importance of learning from international USPs of Color and their experiences while in the United States. Studies may also highlight the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ USPs of Color. By learning from varied perspectives, postsecondary leaders and community services alike may continue efforts to improve services in support of parenting students.

This study explored how USPs of Color experienced support in pursuit of their degrees. Portland State University was an exceptional site to situate this study because there is a dedicated department focused on the support of parenting students and the
student body is racially and ethnically diverse. As a means to highlight resources that USPs of Color have access to, this study applied Community Cultural Wealth as a guiding framework (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, portraiture, an asset-based qualitative method, was applied to help develop a cohesive story that highlights the lived experiences of USPs of Color. The benefits of Community Cultural Wealth and portraiture is that they are both asset-based approaches which facilitate a focus on what USPs of Color have rather than what they lack. The application of this framework and method may not function as well on a college campus that does not have student resources dedicated to parenting students. Instead, a future study may involve the implementation of the suggested framework dedicated to USPs of Color within a site that does not have organized resources to specifically assist parenting students. Future application of the framework could help further expand components that may prove crucial to the support of undergraduate and graduate parenting students of Color. While the current study experienced some limitations, the contributions participants made are not to be diminished. Future studies may also experience limitations, however, with each contribution efforts can continue to be made to learn more about student-parents and ways in which their aspirations may be assisted.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to learn how Undergraduate Student Parents of Color (USPs of Color) experience support from their postsecondary institution and their extended communities to persist toward degree attainment. A qualitative approach was
intentionally selected to contribute to literature in existance through an exploration of experiences as told by USPs of Color. Seven individual interviews and one focus group generated qualitative data that was utilized to develop themes. These themes were woven into a counterstory inspired by portraiture. Additionally, the themes developed inspired three key findings. The first finding identified the aspirations of USPs of Color despite challenges they have faced, the second informs of their resistance strategies, and the third explored their experiences with support and resourcefulness. Participants of the study shared similarities including their motivation to obtain their bachelor’s degrees despite the challenges they have faced. While portraiture and counterstory efforts inspired an explanation of the positive experiences USPs of Color have had with support, the study also necessitated an explanation of the struggles they have faced in order to highlight areas that can stand improvement or further development. Higher education leaders and community support services should seek to gain an understanding of what has worked for USPs of Color, what challenges persist, and use this information to reflect on their accountability to support this important student population. A review of policies, programs, and practices can help to amend deficiencies, develop intentional equitable efforts to support USPs of Color, and amplify communication to inform of resources that have been helpful. Future practice may benefit from the framework dedicated to USPs of Color, which was developed to encourage engagement between parenting students and staff entrusted and held accountable to assist them. This study served to contribute to literature in existance and inspire future research to support parenting students in pursuit
of academic degrees, entry into career fields, and the best interest of their children and families.
REFERENCES


https://sites.google.com/view/tinacheuk/home


https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED612580

https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12350


https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2019R1/Measures/Overview/SB0794

https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Analysis/SB564


https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-020-09516-8

https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085901363002


APPENDIX A: ANNOUNCEMENT OF STUDY

Are you an undergraduate Student Parent of Color enrolled at Portland State University? My name is Kimberly Alvarez, I am a graduate student within the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Portland State University (PSU). I would like to invite undergraduate Student Parents of Color who are currently enrolled at PSU to meet with me individually for a one-hour interview. During interviews, I will ask questions to learn about the experiences of undergraduate Student Parents of Color and the systems of support that are or have assisted in their academic journey at PSU. If you are a student interested in sharing a bit about your experiences, please consider participating in this project by contacting me via email at KDA6@pdx.edu to schedule an appointment in-person or online via Zoom at your earliest convenience.

For questions and additional information, please contact the principal investigator: Kimberly D. Alvarez at KDA6@pdx.edu.

Dissertation Chair:
Dr. Karen Haley
khaley@pdx.edu

Portland State University IRB Approval Number: 238174-18
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PSU STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Consent to Participate in Research (No Signature)

Project Title: Undergraduate Students of Color Raising Children and Persisting in Higher Education

Population: PSU Undergraduate Student-Parents of Color/Interview

Researcher: Kimberly D. Alvarez, College of Education, Educational Leadership Portland State University

Karen Haley, College of Education, Educational Leadership Portland State University

Researcher Contact: KDA6@pdx.edu/ 626.560.6125 and KHALEY@pdx.edu

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The box below shows the main facts you need to know about this research for you to think about when making a decision about if you want to join in. Carefully look over the information in this form and ask questions about anything you do not understand before you make your decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Information for You to Consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voluntary Consent.</strong> You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to involve yourself or not. There is no penalty if you choose not to join in or decide to stop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose.</strong> The purpose of this study is to explore your experiences with support services from PSU and your extended community. The proposed study seeks to illuminate ways in which varied forms of support may be assisting the persistence of undergraduate student parents of Color at PSU. Further, this study will value student parents of Color resiliency as they pursue a baccalaureate degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration.</strong> It is expected that your part will last approximately one hour in-person or online via Zoom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures and Activities.</strong> You will be asked to engage in a one-on-one individual interview with the researcher. During the interview, you will be asked to answer a series of questions about your experience with support from PSU and your extended community. Your responses will be audio recorded to assist with the transcription of your interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risks.</strong> I do not anticipate any risks or discomforts to take place during your participation in this study. However, you will be asked a series of questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that will have you recall your experiences with systems of support. If recalling
events evokes strong emotions and you are at any point uncomfortable, you can
stop the interview, reschedule, or cancel your participation all together.

- **Benefits.** There are no direct benefits that you will receive from this study.
  However, your participation will help fill the gap of research studies on
  undergraduate student parents of Color within higher education.

- **Options.** Participation is voluntary and the only alternative is to not participate.

**What happens to the information collected?**

Information collected for this research will be used as part of the researcher’s
doctoral dissertation within the College of Education at Portland State University. The
dissertation will be published by PSU’s library. No identifiable information from
participants will be included.

**How will I and my information be protected?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study that can identify
you will remain confidential. Information will be disclosed only with your permission or
as required by law. The researcher will take measures to protect your privacy by
assigning a pseudonym to any information you provide and not sharing your personal
information with anyone. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy, a researcher can
never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected.

To protect all of your personal information and maintain confidentiality, the
researcher will maintain all recordings and transcripts in a locked USB flash drive that
requires a password for access to files. The locked USB flash drive will be kept in a
locked drawer that only the researcher has access to. Despite these precautions, the
researcher can never fully guarantee that all your study information will not be revealed.

**What if I want to stop being in this research?**

You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time.
You have the right to choose not to join in any study activity or completely stop your
participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefits you would otherwise get.
Your decision whether or not to take part in research will not affect your relationship
with the researcher or Portland State University.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

There is no cost to taking part in this research, beyond your time.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

Participants will not be compensated for their participation.

**Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions or concerns, contact the research team at:
Kimberly D. Alvarez  
626.560.6125  
KDA6@psu.edu

Karen Haley  
KHALEY@pdx.edu

Who can I speak to about my rights as a research participant?

The Portland State University Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to make sure the rights and welfare of the people who take part in research are protected. The Office of Research Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Office of Research Integrity  
PO Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207-0751  
Phone: (503) 725-5484  
Toll Free: 1 (877) 480-4400  
Email: psuirb@pdx.edu

Consent Statement

I have had the chance to read and think about the information in this form. I have asked any questions I have, and I can make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions anytime while I take part in the research.

☐ I agree to take part in this study  
☐ I do not agree to take part in this study
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Interview Participant Intake Form

Before scheduling an interview, students will be asked the following questions to gather preliminary information to determine if they meet the desired criteria for participants of this study.

Are you an undergraduate student?

How many kids are you raising?

What is your relationship with the child or children you are raising (i.e. mother, father, step-parent, etc…)?

What is your racial and/or ethnic background?

What languages are you fluent or proficient in?

Did you start at PSU as a first-year student with no previous college experience? Or, did you transfer to PSU with college course credit from a different institution?

How long have you attended PSU?

When do you anticipate earning your degree?

Do you have a preferred pseudonym?
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Participant Interview

Interview Sequence:

- Hello student, thank you for voluntarily participating in this study.
- First, I will give you an overview about the purpose of this study. Next, I will provide you with a consent form for your review and personal choice to continue or not.
- Do you have any questions about the purpose of the study or the consent form? [Yes/No]
- If not, please sign or verbally provide your consent to be part of this study.
- As noted in the consent form, I will be audio recording our conversation to assist with transcription and analysis.
- As you answer primary questions, I may ask for more information (e.g., tell me more about, can you give an example of, etc.). These follow-up questions will only be asked if needed to gain clarity or more information.

[Aspirational Capital]
What are your educational and career aspirations?
How has your campus supported your educational aspiration?
How has your extended community (i.e. family, friends, affinity groups, etc…) supported your educational aspiration?

Follow-up Questions:
- Who or what inspires your aspirations?
- What do you hope to accomplish once you reach your academic and career goal?

[Linguistic Capital]
Will you tell me about how you have learned about support services on campus or in your community?

Follow-up Questions:
- Have you seen or read communication about student services in languages other than English? If so, what languages?
- If you speak a language other than English, how often do you engage with campus or community services, events, or childcare assistance in multiple languages? Can you give me some examples of some interactions you have had?

[Familial Capital]
Persistence has been defined as a student’s ability to start and continue their enrollment until they earn their degree from any college or university. Can you describe how your campus, family, friends, or extended community have supported your persistence?
Follow-up Questions:
  • What, if any, cultural sayings, phrases, or short stories that you learned during your upbringing motivate your persistence?
  • What are some ways you maintain your relationship with family, friends, and members of your extended community?

[Social Capital]
In what ways have you received support from your campus or extended community to address emotional or essential needs?
Follow-up Questions:
  • If you have ever felt stressed, uncertain, anxious, or alone as you have navigated multiple responsibilities, exams, deadlines, etc., may you please tell me who assisted you and how?
  • If you have needed emergency childcare, food, transportation, funds for academic or personal needs, or tangible support, may you please tell me who has assisted you and how? If you have not, do you know others who have and who helped them?
  • How have you helped future or current PSU students, including other undergraduate student parents of Color, that may benefit from information about campus resources and community support that has assisted you?

[Navigational Capital]
Can you tell me what has helped you navigate your experience as an undergraduate student raising a child or children at a predominantly White college?
Follow-up Questions:
  • What are some positive or negative experiences you have had as an undergraduate student parent of Color at PWI?
    o How are you doing academically? What study habits do you use to complete your assignments with the time you have dedicated to studying?

[Resistant Capital]
What advice would you give to an undergraduate student parent of Color that may be thinking of stopping out due to others doubting their resilience and other systemic forms of oppression?
Follow-up Questions:
  • Who or what inspires your resiliency in spaces that were not originally designed for undergraduate student parents of Color?
  • What improvements can be made to the campus environment to help students stay enrolled?
  • Are there any community resources to assist undergraduate student parents of Color from stopping out?

[Wrap-up]
Are there any resources you are interested in learning more about or currently seeking that may assist your persistence?
Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as an undergraduate student parent of Color?
APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group

Focus Group Sequence:

- Hello student, thank you for voluntarily participating in this focus group.
- First, I will give you an overview about the purpose of this study. Next, I will ask if you agree with the consent form you previously signed before our initial individual interviews and remind you of your personal choice to continue or not.
- Do you have any questions about the purpose of the study or the consent form? [Yes/No]
- If not, please verbally provide your consent to be part of this study.
- As noted in the consent form, I will be audio recording our conversation to assist with transcription and analysis.
- As you answer the primary question that guides this focus group, I may ask for more information (e.g., tell me more about, can you give an example of, etc.). These follow-up questions will only be asked if needed to gain clarity or more information.

Discussion Question:

What are some improvements PSU can make to support the experience of students raising children?