

# Like Father, Like Son? Reflections on Black Cultural Capital and Generational Conceptions of Work

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*This article extends our understanding of Black middle-class social mobility by examining successful cases of social reproduction. Specifically, using autoethnographic methods, two Black junior faculty reflect upon their fathers' uses of cultural capital and the generational differences in conceptions of appropriate work. For the first-generation middle-class Black fathers, material realities and the technocratic nature of their work influenced their interpretations of appropriate employment. In contrast, the second-generation's access to particular cultural and economic capital influenced the sons' conceptions of work, demonstrating generational differences in Black middle-class occupational ideology. Responding to deficit views on Black mobility, this article highlights the power and influence of Black fathers on mobility patterns and the resulting generational differences in appropriate work. Recommendations are presented for educators and parents in improving social mobility among young, Black middle-class males.*

Former Morehouse College president Benjamin E. Mays (1940–1967) noted in his autobiography, *Born to Rebel*, that his pursuit of education beyond the elementary level was delayed not only by the repressive racial social order of early 20th century South Carolina, but also by his father's insistence that he stay and work the farm. His father, a former slave, consistently stated, "Weren't there only two honest occupations for Negro men—preaching and farming?" (Mays, 1971, p. 36). Mays' experience is similar to the authors' experiences with our own fathers. As first-generation middle-class, our fathers were faced with the dilemma of determining the best way to transmit their class standing to their offspring. For Mays' father as well as the authors' fathers, certain occupational categories were seen as the surest path to reproduction of middle-class status.

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The growth of the Black middle class since the civil rights era has produced a significant body of literature on the conditions and effects of Black social mobility. This literature continues to grow and includes studies documenting many factors, such as mobility patterns (Cole, 2003; McBrier & Wilson, 2004; William Julius Wilson, 1978b), integration and assimilation (Banner-Haley, 1994; Lacy, 2004; Martin, 2008), occupational opportunities (Davis Jr, 1995; Gosa & Alexander, 2007), educational experiences (Allen, 2010; Posey-Maddox; Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent, & Ball, 2011), wealth accumulation (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Shapiro, 2004), neighborhood characteristics (Pattillo, 1998, 2005), Black middle-class ideology (Cose, 1993; Ginwright, 2002; Hochschild, 1995; Young & Tsemo, 2011) and the perils and privileges resulting from the unique intersection of race and class for affluent Blacks (Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Jackson, 2001; Lacy, 2007; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999a). Collectively, the growing body of literature provides insight into the opportunities and barriers of Black mobility and reproduction of middle-class status.

When class is defined by income, occupation, or education, approximately one-quarter of all U.S. Blacks fall within the middle class (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2004). The majority of Black middle-class families are first generation (Pettigrew, 1981; Wheary, 2006) and are economically defined as “lower middle class” (McBrier & Wilson, 2004; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999b, 2000). Many are employed in government jobs or occupations serving low-income communities (McBrier & Wilson, 2004; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999b, 2000). Attewell *et al.* (2004) identified increased educational attainment and occupational mobility for Blacks over the past 30 years, with more Blacks obtaining bachelor’s, graduate, or professional degrees, and moving into white-collar professional or managerial positions. Such increases in educational and occupational attainment have led to the growth of the Black middle class.

Despite increases in educational and occupational attainment, and increases in income, reproducing middle-class status for Blacks has been difficult. For many Black middle-class families, their offspring will be downwardly mobile, failing to achieve the same or greater educational and occupational attainment (Attewell, *et al.*, 2004; Davis Jr, 1995; Landry & Marsh, 2011). Attewell *et al.* explains that the Black middle class:

...is trapped in a game of chutes and ladders. While increasing numbers of African-Americans become more educated and climb upward occupationally, substantial numbers of children from black middle-class families slide back down. White families face these same possibilities, except that their chutes seem less crowded (p. 16).

However, not all Black middle-class youth are downwardly mobile. Research has shown improvement over the past 30 years in upward mobility patterns among Black males (Landry & Marsh, 2011; George Wilson, Sakura-Lemessy, & West, 1999). Yamaguchi’s (2009) analysis of Black male mobility concluded that 60% of the increase in upward mobility has resulted from increased educational attainment.

### **Purpose and Significance**

It’s encouraging that educational attainment has produced opportunities for upward mobility for Black males. However, as we have seen, the literature also identifies dilemmas of Black middle-class social reproduction. This essay seeks to add to our understanding of Black male mobility through examples of successful reproduction of middle-class status. If social reproduction is often difficult for Blacks, and many middle-class Black families will have

children who are downwardly mobile, how do we make sense of Black families who are successful in reproducing middle-class status?

This study explores how first-generation Black middle-class fathers influence their sons. In particular, we examine, through two case studies, the types of cultural capital transmitted from Black middle-class fathers to their sons, including how the educational and occupational expectations of first-generation Black middle-class fathers are interpreted by their sons.

We begin with a discussion of the theoretical framework, followed by an overview of our methodology. We then present two personal narratives, and conclude with recommendations for transformative practice.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1976, 1977; 1990) has often been used to describe the role that schools play in the social and cultural reproduction of society. In particular, his theory of cultural capital explains that certain knowledge, dispositions, orientations, goods, and credentials unique to dominant social groups are privileged within the context of school and are often used for social and cultural exclusion. Such cultural capital may include formal education, access to personal libraries, large vocabularies, participation in cultural outings (such as museums and vacations), as well as greater access to technology. Cultural capital may also include deep-seated cultural dispositions such as particular educational and occupational expectations (Barone, 2006; Bourdieu, 1990; Dumais, 2002; Morgan, 2005). Bourdieu argues that these forms of class-specific cultural capital are privileged within formal school systems, ensuring that dominant social groups who obtain and transmit these forms of cultural capital to their offspring will experience success in school, subsequently acquiring economic capital and continued social mobility. Social groups or individuals who lack such cultural capital will theoretically experience dissonances in school, leading to the reproduction of social inequalities.

There are many critiques to Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000; Kingston, 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Yosso, 2006), a few of which are worth noting. The first is that Bourdieu's theory appears to be deterministic, presuming that the transmission of intergenerational cultural capital is automatic and will lead to academic success. Bourdieu's work also presumes that both parents and children will actually activate their cultural capital, and that their forms of capital will be valued in any particular setting (Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau, 2001; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). As Lareau (2000) explained, "possession of high status cultural resources does not therefore automatically lead to a social investment. Rather, these cultural resources must be effectively activated by individuals, in and through their own actions and decisions" (p. 178). Thus, middle-class social reproduction must be understood as an "active process of negotiation and construction" (Kaufman, 2005, p. p. 246).

A second critique comes from critical race theory, which argues that Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital presumes White middle-class values and norms as the most appropriate and privileged forms of cultural capital. Certain forms of cultural capital common to middle-class families (such as certifications and access to technology) are seen as the only forms of useful capital, while non-White middle-class communities are seen as culturally deficient or lacking in cultural capital (Yosso, 2006). This narrow view of cultural capital perpetuates deficit models and dominant modes of thinking about people of color and impoverished communities. Deficit thinking places blame on marginalized groups for their poor educational and occupational outcomes without considering the limitations created by structural barriers (e.g. classism, racism,

etc.) (Foley, 1997; Payne, 2001). Critical race theory calls into question the hegemonic nature of cultural capital theory, arguing that marginalized groups also have cultural capital that is just as valuable as the cultural capital of Whites (Carter, 2003; Silva, 2005; Trueba, 2002). The legitimacy of the cultural capital of marginalized groups, however, is often disavowed. That is because within a racist system, Black cultural capital may fail to translate into the economic rewards that White cultural capital often produces.

In decentering White cultural capital as the norm, Yosso (2006) provides an expanded view of cultural capital to include the skills, knowledge, connections, and abilities used by communities of color to fight discrimination and oppression. This expanded view of cultural wealth includes the following:

1. *Aspirational*: the ability to maintain hopes and dreams despite racial injustice and structural inequalities (p. 176).
2. *Linguistic*: the ability to master more than one language (for example, bilingual or multivernacular) or communication style (such as storytelling, parables, or dance) (p. 177).
3. *Familial*: the knowledge created by families and passed down through generations (stories of history, struggles, and triumphs); also kinship and fictive kinships that create a feeling of community (p. 177).
4. *Social*: the networks of people and community resources that lead to success within the community and without (p. 178).
5. *Navigational*: the ability to maneuver through social institutions that were not initially intended for the inclusion of people of color (p. 178).
6. *Resistant*: the knowledge and skills learned in opposition to dominant ideology and structure. This is often accomplished through the preservation and use of the previous five types of capital (p. 179).

Yosso's expanded view not only broadens our understanding of cultural capital, but it also identifies the types of messages, knowledge, skills, and expectations that parents of color transmit to their offspring with the intention of resisting the reproductive nature of schools and increasing opportunities for social and occupational mobility. In this study, both Bourdieu's and Yosso's work on cultural capital will be used to understand the process of Black middle-class reproduction. In the next section we quickly review our methodology before presenting the narratives.

## Methodology

Over the past decade, there has been scholarly movement toward identifying Black male success stories (Graham & Anderson, 2008; Harper, 2012; Hrabowski III, Maton, & Greif, 1998; Jones, 2000) as a method of countering deficit discourses about Black male identity. As part of an underrepresented population working in the academy, the authors were interested in contributing to this literature. While there was some initial concern about sharing these experiences, not wanting to be perceived as egotistic or narcissist, we were encouraged by mentors that an analysis of our experiences could provide useful counternarratives to popular discourse on Black males. We were also inspired by the narratives presented in a previous issue of this journal (James & Lewis, forthcoming).

Our data collection was informed by autoethnographic and counternarrative methods. Autoethnography is defined as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and

systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 273). The “ethnographic explanation” is what differentiates autoethnography from simply an autobiography, in that personal stories and experiences are made sense of within larger cultural, social and theoretical contexts (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography also allows researchers, and particularly researchers of color, to draw upon “epiphanies” (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Denzin, 1989) that only result from being part of the culture. In addition, autoethnographies such as indigenous or native ethnographies allow marginalized groups to disrupt dominant narratives by allowing cultural “others” to construct and analyze their own realities (Ellis, et al., 2011).

This approach is similar to the use of counternarratives in critical race theory, as popularized by legal scholar Derrick Bell (1987, 1992) and used by many others (Harper & Davis III, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner IV, 2008; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Like autoethnography, the use of counternarratives provides a tool for examining the experiences of a marginalized group by the group itself with the intent of contesting majoritarian stories. As Delgado (1993) explains, majoritarian stories are the “bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant race bring to the discussion of race” (p. 462). This is exemplified within majoritarian metanarratives of Black male deviancy, unintelligibility and inferiority (Ferber, 2007; Noguera, 2003; Rome, 2004; Saint-Aubin, 1994). Three types of counternarratives are outlined by Solórzano and Yosso (2002): personal stories, other people’s stories and composite stories. We chose the use of personal stories, collected using a method influenced by autoethnography.

To construct these stories we began our data collection by first identifying the topic of study, the academic and professional trajectories of two Black male professors. Using personal memories, and “recalling” particular events, we started by chronicling our educational and professional histories, creating a chronological timeline of events, rituals, people and contexts involved in our life history (Chang, 2008). Self-observations were conducted by observing our present behaviors, thoughts and attitudes pertaining to our work. We also collected self-reflective data identifying personal and cultural values, and the intersectionality of our cultural group memberships (e.g. race, class gender, geographic communities) (Chang, 2008; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). We organized these memories, observations, and reflections into narratives, written separately, and then came together to compare our stories, finding common themes and points of departures within our respective experiences. We found that the role of our fathers became a prominent theme, prompting us to share and validate these stories with our respective parents. Indeed, the process of writing, sharing, dialoguing, and critically analyzing our stories was a therapeutic experience (Ellis, et al., 2011). We can only hope that our stories resonate to some degree with our readers.

In the next section, we provide two narratives written in the first person describing our respective academic and professional trajectories. In particular, we focus on the role our fathers played in our overall success and the reproduction of middle-class status, as well as ideological fractures in the Black middle-class, as reflected in our personal experiences.

### **Social Mobility and the Transmission of Cultural Capital: From Father to Son in the Family of Dr. Quaylan Allen**

I love my father. Without question, he has been the most influential person in my life, and I’m thankful for that. My father’s story is like the stories of many others in this country. He

was one of 13 children, born to hard-working but poor parents. His father was a Jamaican immigrant, and his mother was an American-born Black woman who migrated to California with her family from Oklahoma during the 1940s. Both of my paternal grandparents worked long hours, usually employed at multiple jobs. Education was valued in the family; but because few people within their circle completed high school, there was little knowledge on how to use education as a vehicle for social mobility.

My father attended working-class schools, and along with my mother, had aspirations to attend college. Because there were few college-educated people within his social network, getting to college took the combination of personal resilience as well as caring teachers who could guide him through the application and enrollment process. As first-generation college attendees, my father and mother graduated with degrees in criminal justice and finance respectively. My mother began her career as an entry-level collections agent for the Internal Revenue Service; she eventually became a high school teacher. My father's career started

at a correctional facility as a correctional officer. Due to his education, he eventually transitioned into a managerial-level parole agent, demonstrating his ability to use education to move from blue-collar work to white-collar work. My parents' educational and career trajectory into the middle-class was typical of Black social mobility during the 1960s and 1970s. The expanded opportunities in education and government employment provided a pathway to the middle-class for many Black families (Collins, 1983; Hout, 1984; William Julius Wilson, 1978a). As first-generation middle-class, my parents undoubtedly sought to secure middle-class status for their children through the transmission of their cultural capital.

As a result of my parents' educational and occupational journey (and the social context in which my childhood took place), my upbringing was ideologically middle class and materially working class. My college-educated parents impressed upon me the value of education and the expectation of college attendance. My parents did their best to provide me with educational opportunity and advantage. My parents regularly monitored my schoolwork, emphasizing that video games and basketball couldn't start until homework was completed. My father was particularly visible at school, volunteering in my classes and attending after-school events. He was always present at my football games and track and field meets. One of his traditions was to take the first day of school off work so that he could take us to school and be home when we returned. At the time, I rarely thought much of this practice, but looking back, I realize that it sent a strong message about how much he sought to be involved in our education. Despite the dilemmas of Black male parental involvement (Garfinkel, Huang, McLanahan, & Gaylin, 2003; Johnson Jr., 2001), my father's presence in my school life was impressive, and certainly contests popular views of Black male parental non-involvement.

My father also drew upon other forms of cultural wealth, including aspirational, navigational, and social capital (Yosso, 2006). Though my parents were college educated, their education had yet to produce meaningful economic gains during my childhood. Like many first-generation and lower-middle-class families, we lived in working-class neighborhoods (Adleman, 2004; Pattillo, 2005). I attended schools serving high-poverty populations and our family was not immune to the perils of urban street life. In response to these conditions, my father held exceptionally high aspirations for me and impressed upon me the need to be successful despite the barriers that our social location could present. He often talked about my needing to "go above and beyond" in school to ensure that I would be successful. He knew that I had a competitive spirit, and he would challenge me to take on school activities that I wouldn't otherwise have taken on. He knew that I would want to prove to him that I could do these things.

The nature of his work also provided him with valuable navigational and social capital. His work in law enforcement brought him into contact with many Black men, including family friends and even friends of my own. I believe that this experience motivated him to keep me off the streets. We had many conversations about the nature of the legal system, about the problematic “objective” nature of the law, and about the law’s impact on the overrepresentation of incarcerated Black males. Through his stories I became educated about the legal system and certainly could have navigated this system if need be.

Even more influential was the social capital he obtained through his work. I always felt that he had “eyes” on the street because of his connections within law enforcement; I regulated my behavior in public spaces because of this belief. In fact, I never feared the police, but I did fear my father. I believed that nothing the legal system could do to me would come close to what my father would do if I found myself in trouble. This speaks greatly to the respect and admiration I had of him.

The cultural diversity of the communities I grew up in presented a diverse array of views and paths towards mobility, of which college was just one option of many. Though I knew my parents expected me to attend college, I was also aware of the many other educational and occupational pathways that were available to me. Harding (2011) suggests that adolescents in culturally heterogeneous and disadvantaged neighborhoods are faced with a wider array of educational and occupational pathways than homogenous, middle-class neighborhoods. Adolescents in heterogeneous neighborhoods are also exposed to more social support and respect of both mainstream *and* alternative occupational pathways; in my neighborhood, drug dealers were just as celebrated as college attendees. Harding goes on to explain that “one consequence of greater cultural heterogeneity is that there will be less information about how to follow a particular goal or strategy to completion” (p. 328), which was certainly the case in my neighborhood. However, my parents were able to help me navigate school and prepare for college attendance, demonstrating their own navigational and social capital—capital that not everyone I attended school with had equal access to.

### **Variation in Conceptions of Work**

My father was also influential in the development of my educational and occupational goals. When I was accepted into college, I was interested in photojournalism. I felt it was the ideal career that meshed two of my interests, writing and photography. But on the matter of occupational choice, my father and I did not agree. His view of appropriate work differed from mine. My father would assert, “You won’t make any money in that career,” arguing that a photojournalism career was unstable and uncertain, and would most likely would fail me. I remember feeling disappointed at his assertion; but with little concrete idea about my occupational choices, I trusted his judgment and instead chose a major that he felt would produce an ideal economic outcome.

Considering that I grew up in proximity to Silicon Valley and attended college during the dot-com boom, the intersection of time and location made computer science the most functional career I could choose, according to my parents. Of course, this career stands in stark contrast to the perceived “creative” work I wanted to engage in. To some extent, this contrast reflects occupational fractions within the middle class, viz. technocrats vs. cultural specialists (Güveli, Luijkx, & Ganzeboom, 2012; Kriesi, 1989).

My father could be considered a technocrat, having the strong managerial skills needed for his work in government, a sector most commonly associated with technocratic work (Goyette & Muller, 2006; Savage, Barlow, Dickens, & Fielding, 1992). The inflow into technocratic positions is less dependent on educational requirements, making access from lower-status origins more possible (Güveli, et al., 2012). As Goyette and Muller (2006) assert, college students from working-class backgrounds are more likely (compared to middle-class students) to choose technocratic fields (such as business) or other administrative fields. The prominence of first-generation Blacks employed in government positions is a representative indicator of this inflow into technocratic positions (McBrier & Wilson, 2004; Pattillo-McCoy, 1999b, 2000).

The work that I was interested in, photojournalism, and the position that I eventually arrived at, of college professor, could both be considered “cultural specialist” work. They both require more intellectual, creative, and communicative skills than are often needed in technocratic fields (Bourdieu, 1984). Entrance into cultural-specialist positions can be more difficult than in technocratic occupations because such positions often require stricter educational requirements (Güveli, et al., 2012). This may favor middle-class students who have access to certain forms of cultural capital needed to access these positions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The differing conceptions of work held by my father and me demonstrate these occupational fractions in the middle class, and also differences in our occupational habitus.

My father understood the precarious nature of lower-middle-class life. He knew that we were always one paycheck away from being poor; thus, occupational and economic stability were of high importance. To my father, the realities of life in poverty were still too familiar. In her research on various Black middle-class neighborhoods, Lacy (2007) studied middle-class Blacks in Riverton and Lakeview, finding that work for them was a moral obligation needed to live comfortably. My father felt the same way. As a child this was of little concern to me. From my perspective, I wasn't poor in the way that many of my relatives and friends were, though I also knew we weren't wealthy. As second-generation middle-class, my realities were painted with less fear of downward mobility, and this allowed me to develop occupational interests that were less certain than my parents'. Achieving economic stability was not as important to me, and I saw work as a pathway to independence, as opposed to a moral obligation. My view was in deep contrast to my father's but also similar to the Sherwood Park middle-class Blacks whom Lacy (2007) observed in the same study. In this sense, I believe the cultural and economic capital that my parents provided to me was a privilege, and this capital accounts for the differences in occupational ideology between my father and me.

My career trajectory took me from the tech industry to the business world, through secondary education teaching and eventually into higher education, where I am currently a junior faculty member. My occupation continues to illuminate differences in conceptions of work between my father and me. The work of an academic is often asynchronous and driven by results, meaning that schedules and timetables are often fluid and depend on how one executes one's teaching, research, and service. As a “cultural specialist,” the academic profession requires creativity and a great deal of cultural and social skill, such as navigating the political climate of a university or working across disciplines with other faculty in teaching and research. Additionally, it would be hard for an outsider to quantify the work I do. Because of the autonomy of the position and the absence of constant supervision, which is common to cultural specialist occupations (Güveli, et al., 2012), an academic must demonstrate one's productivity and progress toward tenure through annual documentation and explanation of scholarly duties. These aspects of my profession are foreign to my father.



As a technocrat, my father's work was regulated by timetables, had high levels of supervision and consequently was much easier to monitor and quantify. His workday had a clear beginning and end. To some extent, the same could be said about my mother's work as a high school business and computer technology teacher. One can easily quantify the numbers of hours a high school teacher is present at school. This difference in measurement creates a discontinuity between my father's understanding of work and mine. My father sees my work as somewhat easier than his or my mother's. For example, his clearest understanding of my work is through my teaching. His view is that my teaching load appears to be lighter than my mother's. Thus he assumes that I work fewer hours than she does. In my father's occupation, "face-time" is evidence of hard work. I believe this perception of my occupation also reflects an incomplete understanding of academic work, particularly regarding the role research development and service commitments play in overall workload.

However, being a college professor is the type of work that my co-author and I enjoy, work which requires more intellectual, creative and cultural skills, is dependent on strict educational requirements (doctorate), but provides less guarantee of employment than the technocratic work of my father. Our conceptions of employment demonstrate occupational fractions in the middle class, but also how our generational class status and material realities have influenced our conceptions of appropriate work.

### **Summary of Dr. Allen's Family Reflections**

My father's educational and occupational journey provided me with a diverse array of cultural capital that was used to provide opportunity for my siblings and me. His ability to navigate various institutions (including school) was certainly of benefit to me. The motivational techniques he used with me were a success, as I have surpassed his educational status and experienced social mobility. However, the transmission of cultural capital is rarely neat or automatic. The realities and motivations for the acquisition and employment of cultural capital are dependent on many factors. There were many opportunities in my childhood for me to reject his cultural capital. For instance, I could have chosen an "alternative" occupational pathway, as many of my friends did. Yet, my father's involvement in my life and the cultural capital he provided may be understood as one model of Black male parenting and reproduction of Black middle-class status.

### **Social Reproduction from Jim Crow to the 21st Century: The Journey of Dr. Travis Boyce's Family**

I am fortunate to have two supportive parents who strongly encouraged my brothers and me to value education. The popular narrative about the state of the Black family (and particularly the narrative about the state of Black males) tends to focus on dysfunctionality and underachievement. At times, this gloomy narrative overshadows the middle-class Black experience (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). In fact, this negativity often characterizes the study of social-class reproduction, irrespective of race. According to Kaufman (2005), the body of literature that examines social reproduction has focused primarily on the working class, as opposed to the middle class. Although marginalized and ignored by many, the Black middle-class and its social mobility have been in existence in the United States since the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Moreover, there was a significant increase of the Black

middle class during mid-nineteenth century; particularly after the American Civil War (Bowser, 2007).

My childhood experiences growing up in a middle-class Black household contradict the popular image of Black families. My hope in sharing the story of my upbringing is to contribute to the narrative of the Black middle class, as well as to our understanding of middle-class social reproduction.

Both of my parents hold advanced degrees. I grew up in a home that my family owned. My parents provided my brothers and me with rich cultural capital opportunities. For example, we took part in summer camps, Boy Scouts, competitive sports, speech and debate, and church youth groups. These experiences served us as well when we became adults. My parents understood, having themselves grown up in the segregated South, which their children needed to be prepared to function in an integrated society of the 21st century.

Although this essay specifically focuses on the influence of fathers on second-generation Black middle-class sons, I also want to mention the influence of my mother with regards to my educational journey and identity. My mother's middle-class family lived in Greenville, South Carolina, during the early 1950s, and her family was afforded numerous cultural, social, and educational opportunities. My maternal grandfather (A. J. Whittenberg, Sr.) did not have a college education. However, he was a small business owner and community leader. In 1963, my grandfather successfully filed a lawsuit in federal district court that ultimately led to the desegregation of public schools in Greenville County. My mother, along with 54 other Black students, was in the first wave of Black students to desegregate the Greenville County Public Schools (Huff, 1995). My mother earned a bachelor's degree and then a master's, and was the first person in her immediate family to obtain a college degree. She worked for the South Carolina Employment Security Commission (SCESC), where she met my father, Dorie N. Boyce, Sr.

My parents had philosophical differences when it came to education and career choices, almost comparable to a modern-day Washington–Du Bois debate (Fairclough, 2007). My mother, who came from a relatively comfortable, middle-class Black family in an urban area, subscribed to the notion that a traditional liberal arts education was essential to success in a post-Civil Rights era.

My father, on the other hand, took a pragmatic approach to education. Although he valued higher education, he believed that one could be successful (both satisfied and financially stable) through the military or blue-collar, skilled jobs. He was the first person in his immediate family to graduate from college and obtain a white-collar job. As such, he believed that one could not go wrong with a degree in education, as he had chosen for himself. He felt that this conception of appropriate work would be best for me.

Clearly, my father's working-class roots and the context of the time in which he grew up influenced his approach to education and career preparation. My father was born near the end of WWII to a large, extended family in Fort Mill, South Carolina. Although his family was poor, they embodied the values of the middle class. His mother ensured that her children represented their household well. Her children were always polite and well dressed, and all of them finished high school.

Unlike my mother, my father did not cross the color line in his youth. He grew up in a rural area outside of Charlotte, North Carolina, where racial segregation was stringent. My father was not interested in crossing the color line because (as he recalls it) the Black community functioned relatively well in a segregated society. As noted by many scholars who study the

Black community in the segregated South, segregation (although ultimately damaging) allowed the Black community to flourish within limits. Black business owners prospered, and Black children in segregated schools were shielded from the hostility of White administrators and teachers of integrated schools (Daniel, 2000; Fairclough, 2007; Walker, 1996). My father, as a youth, attended segregated schools and ultimately graduated from an all-Black high school. He attended a Black junior college and later to Claflin University, a private, historically Black college (HBCU) in Orangeburg, South Carolina. My father recalls that at the schools he attended, the administration, faculty, and staff cared about the well-being of all of their students. He felt lucky to be in such caring environments, as opposed to the many negative experiences of Black students who attended integrated schools during this time.

My father grew up in a segregated society and working-class family. As a youth, he worked at the local textile mills during high school and summer breaks in college. Because he earned an undergraduate degree and then a master's, he was able to move away from blue-collar jobs. But he still valued blue-collar jobs as an opportunity for those who did not have immediate access to higher education. Based on his experiences as a youth in the segregated South, my father took a pragmatic approach to the concept of appropriate work.

### **Variation of Conceptions of Work: “Get a Degree in Education”**

As previously noted, my father attended a historically Black university in Orangeburg, South Carolina during the 1960s. At the time, although Jim Crow laws were being challenged, small southern towns like Orangeburg remained segregated (Bass & Nelson, 1984). For Black college students in the South during the era of Jim Crow, career choices were limited primarily to the field of education (Anderson, 1988; Fairclough, 2007). My father received a bachelor's degree in social studies education and was on his way, like many Black college graduates at the time, to the classroom. My father's career prospects were briefly interrupted when he was drafted into the army. Upon his return from Vietnam, he was hired as a career counselor for the South Carolina Employment Security Commission, where he served in various positions for the next 30 years. I don't think he was particularly content with his job. But, as usual, my father's approach to work was functional and pragmatic. Later, after he earned a master's degree, he was promoted to various positions in the agency. My father saw that his conception of work was a sure way to provide for his family.

As a youth, I had high hopes of attending a large university such as the University of South Carolina or Duke. I wanted to be a lawyer. While my father was supportive, he was apprehensive about what opportunities there might be for a young Black male interested in the law. He constantly urged me to consider attending an HBCU, to pursue a major in education, and to work my way up to becoming a school principal and superintendent. His conception of work was based on his experience as a college student, at a time when career choices for Blacks were limited to teaching. Of what he proposed, I was open to attending an HBCU. After all, the demographics of my middle school and high school were predominately Black. I grew up in a mostly Black neighborhood and attended a primarily Black church (where fellow parishioners, including my pastor, were graduates of HBCUs).

During my senior year in high school, I decided to attend Claflin, my father's alma mater, and major in history. Although he was proud that I was following in his footsteps with regards to attending his alma mater, my father was not happy with my choice of major. He often asked me, “What are you going to do with a degree in history? Get a degree in education.” I got good

grades, but my father and I still battled over my choice of major and my conception of work. During my collegiate years, my career choice shifted from law to academia. I explored graduate programs that offered degrees in history. Ultimately, I decided to pursue an MA in history and later a PhD in cultural studies. During my seven years of graduate study, my father continued to encourage me to get certified as teacher. I resisted this idea, feeling that completing my dissertation was more important.

My father was still skeptical. He grew up in the Jim Crow South, and he worked for a state agency where he saw the impact of Black unemployment. He wasn't sure that faculty jobs were available. My reality was different from his, because I was a member of the post-civil rights generation. I could understand his skepticism, but I felt that I would be limiting myself if I followed my father's advice.

### **Our Agreement: Train the Next Generation of Black Educators**

In the spring of 2009, I was welcomed to “the community of scholars” after successfully defending my PhD dissertation. I accepted a position at the University of Northern Colorado. I was hesitant in committing to the tenure-track position, which was 1,700 miles from my parents. After all, the school was in an area where I knew no one. I didn't even have any nearby extended family. Ironically, it was my father, along with a PhD advisor, who encouraged me to take the position. The job market was shaky; and in retrospect, I was fortunate to be offered a position straight out of graduate school. Although my father would have wanted me to work in K–12 education, he was happy that I was able to find a job where there was career advancement. This factor, I think, fits with his conception of work, because it was a way of remaining self-sufficient and sustaining my middle-class status.

Part of my current job description is to coordinate the secondary teachers' education program for the Africana Studies Program. My father was elated to hear that I would directly work with education majors. We have come to an agreement: My father would no longer ask me to pursue a career in K–12 education, if I were to “train the next generation of Black educators.”

### **Summary of Dr. Boyce's Family Reflections**

I understand how circumstances of the era shape how people view themselves, their outlook on life, and their view of world. This fact is evident if one examines the lives of African Americans who grew up in the Jim Crow South (Mays, 1971). My father grew up in the segregated South and had limited opportunities. Therefore, his conception of appropriate work is different than mine. Although I did not follow his idea of appropriate work, my attainment of a PhD and my status as a university professor reflects social-class reproduction. My achievements contradict the trend of children who slide down into working-class status after having been raised by educated, middle-class Black parents (Attewell et al., 2004).

### **Recommendations for Transformative Practice**

The successful reproduction of Black middle-class status provides an opportunity to nuance society's understanding of Black middle-class life. In particular, it allows us to grasp Black middle-class occupational orientations. Because the replication of middle-class status for Blacks has been difficult, the changes in ideology between generations often go unnoticed,

resulting in the continuation of the popular, stereotypical narrative about the state of the Black family. However, when ideological changes do occur, one can see how material and social context can influence these changes.

This understanding is particularly critical for educators in P–20 settings, in which it is dangerous to assume that the Black males they encounter have the stereotypical experience. To prepare themselves, educators can now look at the growing body of literature examining mobility patterns of Black families, including the barriers and opportunities to the reproduction of Black middle-class status (Bowser, 2007; Cole, 2003; Graham, 2000; Shapiro, 2004; Young & Tsemo, 2011). Teachers' awareness of this available research could be achieved in various ways: special course topics for pre-service and professional educators, continued publications on this topic, and consistent interactions with their students.

It is also important for Black parents who are raising young men to understand how the material and social context may influence changes in a young man's ideology. As noted by Corbin and Pruitt (1999), the Black male image is presented to the mainstream in a negative manner. Therefore there is a tendency for young Black males (despite socioeconomic status) to compensate for their insecurities by subscribing to the cool pose: the antithesis of conformity and academic achievement. Parental role models are essential to the overall development of young Black men, with culture and structure utilized to reinforce a sense of self (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999; Majors & Billson, 1992). Thus, it is critical for Black boys' parents to understand the situation: There are material and social issues that may have a negative effect on social and academic performance. Poor performance could subsequently lead to downward mobility.

We've discussed our personal upbringing—that our parents were raised working-class and achieved first-generation middle-class status. Our fathers' material realities and the technocratic nature of their work surely influenced their views on what constitutes appropriate employment. We are second-generation Black middle-class children. We were given rich cultural and economic capital that was not afforded to our fathers in their childhoods. Our view of appropriate work has developed differently, because we are less worried about occupational and economic stability, and more interested in occupational creativity and autonomy.

Taken together, the lives of our fathers and our educational journeys highlight the power and influence of Black fatherhood. It is possible in these stories to see different elements at play. First, one can see the various forms of cultural capital accumulated and employed. Second, our emerging middle-class status is clearly shown to play a role in our conception of appropriate work. Finally, these reflections provide two examples of successful reproduction of Black middle-class status.

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