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Guided by Ogbu's and Tudge's cultural-ecological frameworks, I explored Black parents' values for their children and parents' perceptions of their children's expression of gratitude. The sample consisted of 15 Black parents (14 mothers, 1 father) of elementary aged children ( $M$  age  $\approx$  11.3 years; 40% girls), the majority of whom (87%) had some college education or less. I conducted a narrative analysis of in-home semi-structured interviews with parents. Findings suggested that overall, these Black parents held both other- and self-oriented values for their children. However, some parents expressed wariness of their children being too other-oriented as this may lead them astray from achieving their goals. Linkages between other-oriented values and cultural/religious practices were also evident. As it relates to gratitude expression, children were most likely to express verbal gratitude, followed by concrete gratitude, and lastly, connective gratitude. Instances of failure to express gratitude on the behalf of children were described along with teaching strategies that parents engaged in to help their children become more grateful. Finally, suggestions for future directions and implications for culturally-relevant interventions were discussed.

PARENTS' VALUES AND CHILDREN'S  
GRATITUDE EXPRESSION  
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN  
FAMILIES

by

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To God first and foremost, and my endlessly supportive family to whom I have so much to be grateful for. I love you all more than words can express.

APPROVAL PAGE

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that gratitude contributes to positive outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. In adolescence, gratitude has been linked to higher levels of optimism, content, and school satisfaction (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008). For example, adolescents who exhibit higher levels of gratitude experience greater school satisfaction, which in turn, may be related to their academic achievement. Gratitude has also been shown to encourage prosocial behaviors, such as helping and sharing (Tsang, 2006). It can even decrease levels of materialism, which has positive implications for the ways in which people interact with the environment and their life satisfaction (Froh, Emmons, Card, Bono, & Wilson, 2011; Kiang et al., 2016; Tsang, Carpenter, Roberts, Frisch, & Carlisle, 2014). Ultimately, gratitude has the potential to strengthen social bonds between people and communities through the harmonious cycle of giving and doing for others (Freitas, Pieta, & Tudge, 2011; Tudge, Freitas, O'Brien, 2015).

With regard to its conceptualization, scholars have defined gratitude as an emotion, character trait, or moral virtue. In the *Raising Grateful Children* study, Halberstadt and colleagues (2016) conducted focus groups examining the role that parents play in fostering the development of gratitude in their children, which they believed to be a socio-emotional process that becomes more mature over time. Similar to the perspective of the authors, parents who participated in the focus groups also

expressed gratitude as the *feeling* one experiences when something good happens to them (i.e., happy, thankful, appreciative). However, these parents also noted that negative emotions such as envy and guilt were opposites of gratitude in that they can get in the way of one being able to fully experience it. These ideas have been partially supported by scientific research, which suggests that gratitude is a positive emotion that arises in a beneficiary when a benefactor does something kind for them (Algoe, Kurtz, & Hilaire, 2016), but there have been mixed findings that suggest negative affect is counter to gratitude (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2009).

Gratitude, as a character trait, has been said to involve a tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the benefits that one reaps as a result of someone else's doing (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). It includes, but goes beyond, the emotion approach in that as a result of feeling grateful one actually does or says something (e.g., "thank you") to the benefactor. In addition, a feeling may be experienced in the moment, but a character trait or disposition endures across time. Research has suggested that people who possess a grateful disposition also tend to be more religious (Rosmarin, Pirutinsky, Greer, & Korbman, 2016), experience more intimacy—particularly within the context of romantic relationships—and exhibit less anxiety (Murray & Hazelwood, 2011). In terms of its lasting existence, having a disposition of gratitude fits well with the definition that some scholars have argued is the most appropriate: gratitude as a virtue.

According to Cicero (54 BC/2009), gratitude is "not only the greatest, but is also the parent of all the other virtues." Gratitude as a moral virtue is a disposition or a way of



being and doing that persists across situations, unlike a mood or emotion, which can be fleeting or inconsistent (Annas, 2011). A virtue is not a skill, but it can be compared to a skill in that the more you practice it the better (i.e., more competent) at it you become. Tying Annas' explanation of virtues to cultural-ecological theory, virtues are learned by children from more experienced others who they trust, such as parents or teachers, but children also bring individual characteristics (e.g., motivation) or "personal culture" (Tudge, 2008, p. 76) to the interaction that shape the learning process over time. However, practicing gratitude as a moral virtue involves being grateful not just because children are told to do so by others, but because they genuinely believe it is what they ought to do. That being said, gratitude is considered a virtue when (a) a benefactor intentionally provides a gift or help to the beneficiary, and the beneficiary (b) recognizes the intentionality of the benefactor, (c) experiences a positive emotion, (d) provides something of desire or need to the original benefactor, if and when the opportunity presents itself, and (e) the beneficiary responds this way consistently when appropriate and as a part of his/her disposition (Tudge, Frietas, & O'Brien, 2015). This perspective combines the emotional, dispositional, and behavioral aspects of gratitude, with an emphasis on reciprocation. It is believed that through this reciprocity, social bonds between individuals may be strengthened above and beyond the effects of just saying "thank you" or experiencing a positive emotional response to the benefit (Vo, 2014). According to this definition, if the beneficiary recognizes that something has been given or done for him or her freely and does the same for the benefactor if possible, then the benefactor will feel more inclined later on to help the beneficiary again.

Proponents of studying gratitude as a virtue argue that the typical ways of expressing gratitude, such as saying “thank you,” or the typical synonyms discussed in the literature, such as appreciation, are actually not gratitude (Freitas, Pieta, & Tudge, 2011). On one hand, verbally expressing thanks may not involve any desire on individuals’ part to give back to others who have helped them when they were in need, and instead, may represent the practice of a taught social norm (i.e., manners). On the other hand, appreciation, though it includes positive affect, also does not require that individuals reciprocate to others who have done good deeds for them; nor does it require that the positive affect be felt toward another human being. In the case of appreciation, positive emotions can be felt towards inanimate or abstract entities, such as flowers or sunsets (Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). For example, if a person failed to acknowledge or appreciate a beautiful sunny day, it is unlikely that anyone would accuse them of ingratitude. Nonetheless, as Aristotle stated, exhibiting a virtue takes *phronesis* or “practical wisdom,” so it is essential that youth develop an understanding of when and how it is appropriate to express gratitude and why they are doing so. That being said, even though children are able to say “thank you” or feel appreciative of a beautiful day, they are not yet capable of engaging in gratitude as a moral virtue. However, by studying children and adolescents, scholars can gain an understanding of the precursors to becoming a virtuous adult.

As it pertains to the assessment of gratitude, researchers have utilized a variety of measures that are unfortunately often not in line with how they define it; many of these measures aim to capture the emotion and appreciation aspects of gratitude, and have little

or nothing to do with reciprocity toward another person. One of the most popular measures used in the literature is the Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (GQ-6), which was created by positive psychologists, McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang (2002), and it consists of six items around individuals' thankfulness, gratefulness, and appreciation for their lives and the people in it. In addition to the GQ-6, McCullough, Emmons, and Tsang also developed the Gratitude Adjectives Checklist (GAC: 2012). The GAC consists of three adjectives: grateful, thankful, and appreciative, which participants rate on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = inaccurate to 9 = accurate based on how well the adjective fits them. Another measure commonly used to examine gratitude is the Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test (GRAT: Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). Examples of items on the GRAT include: "Every spring, I enjoy seeing the flowers bloom," "I couldn't have gotten where I am today without the help of many people," "Often I'm just amazed at how beautiful the sunsets are," and "I think it's important to appreciate each day that you are alive."

However, though the GQ-6, GAC, and GRAT are commonly used measures in the literature, there is inconsistency in the ways in which scholars define gratitude and the measures available to assess it. For instance, according to McCullough and colleagues (2002), gratitude involves not only recognizing that something kind has been done, but it also involves *responding* to what has been done. Interestingly, only three of the GQ-6 items, zero of the GAC items, and four of the GRAT items mention anything about someone else's actions being the reason for feeling grateful or the desire to repay back a kind act or gift. As can be seen from the previous examples from the GRAT, many of the

items on these measures are actually assessing appreciation (e.g., for flowers and sunsets), and not gratitude as a moral virtue.

Unlike the GQ-6, GAC, and GRAT, the Wishes and Gratitude Survey (WAGS: Freitas, Tudge, & McConnell, 2008) is one measure that takes into consideration how one would repay another who has done a kind deed for them and comes the closest—out of the previously discussed measures—to assessing gratitude as a moral virtue. The WAGS was adapted from Baumgarten-Tramer’s (1938) study, and consists of four open-ended questions:

- 1) What’s your greatest wish?
- 2) What would you do for the person who granted you this wish?
- 3) Is there anything else you should do for the person who granted you this wish?  
Why?
- 4) Who is this person?

Specifically, the first question ties children’s responses to a benefactor that has done something for them that they especially want (i.e., their greatest wish). Unlike, for example, the GQ-6, the WAGS assessment is related to receiving a benefit from someone else. Participants’ responses to these questions are coded based on the type of gratitude expressed—verbal, concrete, and connective. An example of verbal gratitude would be saying “thank you;” concrete would involve repaying someone with something you like without taking into consideration what they may want or need; connective—which is considered the most sophisticated form of gratitude—would involve repaying someone with something that is of benefit to them in a time of want or need. While the GQ-6, the

GAC, and the GRAT all look at *levels* of appreciation (i.e., being more or less appreciative), the WAGS instead aims to assess gratitude as a moral virtue which involves reciprocation toward people who do nice things for us, and it examines *types* of gratitude.

Integral to the concept of gratitude as a moral virtue is the existence of a sense of moral identity. Moral identity is a form of self-identity that encompasses how important it is to behave morally; in other words, how well people are able to distinguish between right or wrong, and live their life in a way that exemplifies what is right (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). Smith (1790/1976) argued that experiencing and feeling gratitude, and responding in grateful ways is ideal for promoting and maintaining strong social foundations and goodwill among people of the world, which ties back to the idea of building social bonds through reciprocity and being there for others in times of need. Although moral identity is not a specific component of the original Positive Youth Development (PYD) model (Bowers et al., 2010), its significance has been described in a more recent and culturally-relevant model: the Empowerment-Based Positive Youth Development model (EMPYD: Travis & Leech, 2014). The EMPYD serves to challenge the deficit-oriented approach (too often taken when studying African American youth), which focuses heavily on their shortcomings and the negative aspects of their development—lower academic performance, exposure to more violence, greater aggression—and instead encourages researchers and other professionals to adapt a resilience-oriented approach, which focuses on the positive experiences of these youth. Travis and Leech (2014) suggest that through the *recursive processes* or interactions of

connection, caring, character, and sense of community, African American youth are able to develop their moral identity and contribute to the advancement of a moral community.

Despite evidence to indicate that morality is an important aspect of Black youth development, there has been very little research examining the role gratitude may play in Black families. Much of the current work has involved samples of middle-class White families, with a few exceptions, including Jackson (2016) who offered theoretical contributions with regard to the benefits and costs of gratitude in populations that have experienced social injustice and inequality. Tudge and colleagues have also studied gratitude from a cross-cultural perspective, in societies such as China, South Korea, Brazil, Russia, Turkey, and the U.S. (Mendonça, Merçon-Vargas, Payir, & Tudge, 2018). Ma and colleagues (2013) investigated gratitude as a protective factor for low-income African American adolescents, and to my knowledge is the only study that has empirically examined gratitude in African Americans. Despite these expansive contributions to the literature, there has been almost no work done that examines how parents' values for their children are related to their children's expression of gratitude (O'Brien, Liang, Merçon-Vargas, Price, & Leon, 2017), and none specifically examining these constructs in Black families. Therefore, this study aimed to understand Black parents' experiences with their children around socializing values and gratitude, which will help to inform culturally-relevant interventions around parenting and fostering gratitude.

## CHAPTER II

### RELEVANT FRAMEWORKS

#### **Cultural-Ecological Frameworks**

In order to understand parents' values for their children and their perceptions of their children's gratitude through the lens of these Black parents, I used Ogbu's (1981) cultural-ecological *model* and Tudge's (2008) cultural-ecological *theory*. These frameworks allowed for the experiences of these families to be the primary focus of study without comparison to the standards of other racial/ethnic groups. Furthermore, they allowed for the consideration of the roles race, culture, time, daily interactions, and individual characteristics may play in these social processes.

Ogbu's (1981) cultural-ecological model allows for an understanding of Black parents' values for their children and their attempts to socialize gratitude using a perspective that is not based on the standards of the majority group (i.e., Whites), and highlights the lived experiences of these families as valid and meaningful. It acknowledges that as a result of the racism and discrimination that exists in the U.S., the daily experiences of Blacks—whether its parents at work or children at school—will look differently than those of Whites; so, scholars should not try to understand the former group from the latter's perspective. Black parents not only have to prepare their children to competently navigate Black culture, but they also have to help them navigate the

dominant culture of Whites, which is structurally set up to oppose Blacks' attempts to successfully do so.

Based on this model, the values that Black parents attempt to pass on to their children are rooted in cultural beliefs and involve an awareness of their social position as belonging to a “minority” group in America. The goal of these messages are to best prepare children for the hostile interactions they may have with others due to the color of their skin and to ensure that they have the strength, confidence, and knowledge to be able to overcome those difficult situations. As it relates to gratitude, Ogbu's (1981) model helps to uncover these Black parents' meaning-making around gratitude, what it looks like, the purpose it serves in contributing to positive development, and the means by which they socialize their children around being grateful.

Tudge's cultural-ecological theory, which falls under the contextualist paradigm, acknowledges that there are multiple realities or lived experiences that are shaped by people's perceptions, which are based on power, historical time, and culture (Tudge, 2008). Power differentials shape perceptions of reality, because those with power in a given society are able to control the narratives around what is right, what is wrong, what is true, and what is false, while those who lack power often are expected or assumed to fall in line with these established narratives. According to this paradigm, historical time does not necessarily mean time or events that have occurred in the past, but it also involves present events that are happening in everyday life or during the current time period (Pepper, 1942). In fact, the everyday interactions—or what Bronfenbrenner (2001, 2005) would call “proximal processes”—that children engage in with others



(particularly more experienced others) are the most important aspect of this cultural-ecological theory.

According to Tudge (2008), culture is defined as a group that generally shares the same values, beliefs, practices, institutions, access to resources, and sense of identity. Culture is influential to development in that cultural practices and values may be linked to children's outcomes over time and are meant to teach them what they need to know in order to be successful in the settings they occupy. Parents try to convey these cultural practices, beliefs, and values to their children explicitly or implicitly; however, culture can change from generation to generation (Tudge, 2008).

Further, in the context of cultural-ecological theory, parents' values for their children are individual characteristics that are also shaped by cultural factors (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class, and religion), their daily interactions with their children around gratitude through socialization and teaching practices, and the time period in which they were living when they reported on their values (i.e., Obama's presidency or the recession). For instance, during that time, if Black parents felt particularly optimistic and encouraged about their children's futures due to having the first African American president in U.S. history, then they may have been more likely to endorse values around being ambitious, self-confident, and independent than they would have otherwise. Similarly, how and when children express gratitude is also shaped by individual characteristics (i.e., age and gender), culture (i.e., race/ethnicity and social class), time (e.g., the holidays), and their daily interactions with their parents or caregivers—who are more knowledgeable—and who guide them firsthand in developing this virtue.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Parents' values for their children and gratitude expression have not yet been examined together in Black parents or families. The current scientific discourse around parents' values for their children takes into account contextual factors, such as social class, but it would benefit from additional consideration of how the inclusion of Black parents' experiences can add unique insight to our understanding of the topic at hand. With regard to both parental values and gratitude, considering the roles religiosity, spirituality, and faith play in these processes may get the field even closer to uncovering the potential associations between the values that parents hold for their children, how they go about socializing gratitude, and to whom parents and children express being grateful.

#### **Gratitude**

Gratitude involves a cycle of giving and strengthening of social bonds in which (a) a benefactor intentionally provides a gift or help to the beneficiary, and the beneficiary (b) recognizes the intentionality of the benefactor, (c) experiences a positive emotion, and (d) provides something of need or desire to the original benefactor, if and when the opportunity presents itself (Tudge, Freitas, & O'Brien, 2015). Unlike most definitions presented in the literature, this definition of gratitude goes beyond the happiness or appreciation we feel when someone does something nice for us or when we

get to enjoy a beautiful sunny day. It involves a genuine consideration of the other person who went out of their way to provide the kind act, and wanting to reciprocation if and when we are able to. Guided by the work of Baumgarten-Tramer (1938), the More than Thank You research group has examined gratitude in a number of cultural groups, across and within societies. Specifically, three types of gratitude have been of focus: verbal, concrete, and connective. However, the term “gratitude” for the first two types should be used with slight caution, because they do not fit the definition of gratitude that has been discussed (i.e., they do not necessarily involve thinking about the benefactor or repaying with something he/she would like or need). Connective gratitude is the only type that includes the necessary components of the previously stated definition; although it does not encompass gratitude as a moral virtue entirely (particularly the dispositional aspect). Studies conducted by this research team examining gratitude in children and adolescents have found variations in expression by cultural/ethnic groups.

**Cultural/ethnic variations.** Studies have indicated that cultural groups vary in the types of gratitude that are most expressed. Specifically, South Korea, China, Russia, and Turkey have been characterized as having (moderately) higher rates of connective gratitude, while Brazil and the U.S. have higher rates of concrete gratitude (Leon et al., 2018; Liang & Kiang, 2018; Mokrova, Merçon-Vargas, & Tudge, 2018; O’Brien, Mendonça, & Price, 2018; Palhares, Freitas, Merçon-Vargas, & Tudge, 2018; Payir & Zeytinoglu, 2018). However, in comparison to the other societies, Guatemalan youth have expressed higher rates of verbal gratitude and lower rates of concrete and connective gratitude (Poelker & Gibbons, 2018), which may be related to the fact that

those youth were of higher social class than the youth of the other cultural groups. These variations in results challenge the implicit—but common—notation in science that the United States (and Whites) are the norm or standard to which other ethnic/racial groups should be compared.

### **Parental Values for Children**

According to Schwartz and Bilsky (1990), values are entities that vary in their importance to our lives, but are trans-situational in that they are present across situations or experiences. Values help us to determine, in a given circumstance, what the best decision is to make or what behavior or attitude is the most appropriate, while they also help shape those very three things (i.e., decision-making, behaviors, and attitudes) (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Schwartz (e.g., 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012) also proposes that values exist on a *motivational continuum*, which acknowledges that different values may at times take priority depending on the goal at hand, but these values though different are not necessarily separate entities.

**Social class.** One of the most prominent scholars to examine parents' values for their children and their relation to social class was Melvin Kohn. In 1959, Kohn conducted a study in which he investigated the values of middle-class and working-class parents and how their values may be linked to the kind of paid work each group of parents performed and the education that they had received. Overall, his findings suggested that middle-class parents were more likely to value autonomy and self-direction in their children, while working-class parents were more likely to value obedience and conformity in their children (Kohn, 1959, 1979; Pearlin & Kohn, 1966).

Interestingly, Kohn also found that even when the two groups of parents rated the same value highly there were still differences in the meaning-making attributed to the value. For instance, both working-class and middle-class families identified *honesty* as the value of most importance to them (Kohn, 1959, 1963). However, for working-class parents, honesty was seen as a way of being for their children, whereas for middle-class parents it was seen as an act that their children were supposed to engage in. This suggested that social class has an influence on the values that parents have for their children and the meaning-making they attach to those values.

In addition, later work conducted by Kohn discussed the association between parental values, parenting practices, and parent–child relationships. He acknowledged that social class is embedded in a system of power, privilege, and prestige, and not simply a category of strict lines used to differentiate people (Kohn, 1979). This system also has shaped—through work experiences—the cultural practices of middle- and working-class parents, specifically in terms of how they interact with their children and the values they attempt to pass on to them. For example, in his investigation of when and why parents use physical punishment as a disciplinary strategy, Kohn (1963) found that working-class parents are more likely to punish their children if their behavior is perceived as having extreme—and immediate—negative consequences (e.g., horse-playing in the house that leads to a broken lamp); whereas middle-class parents are more likely to respond with punishment based on the perceived intention of their children’s behavior (e.g., horse-playing due to lack of self-control). If working-class parents tend to value obedience and

middle-class parents tend to value high standards of conduct (Kohn, 1959), then these differences in disciplinary strategies by social class are to be expected.

Findings have indicated consistency in the link between social class and parental values across cultures, such as Germany, Ireland, and Italy (Kohn, 1979); however, Kohn's work with U.S. samples was limited in a number of ways. For one, he primarily focused on White Americans and excluded other ethnic/racial groups in the U.S. (i.e., choosing to not collect data from areas in D.C. that had a certain percentage or more of "Negroes") (Kohn, 1959). In addition, although he included families with both husbands and wives and sons and daughters in the study, he did a poor job of fully considering females. One of the ways in which this is evident is in how all of the items on his parental values measures are written using the pronoun "he" (e.g., "That *he* has good manners..."). He also based the families' social class on the qualifications of fathers, even though much of the data collected in his work was from mothers (Kohn, 1959, 1963). Considering the historical context of Kohn's time, none of these limitations should come as a surprise. Nonetheless, his findings established the foundation for how many scholars thought about values as they relate to social class for many years.

To add, work conducted since Kohn's (1959) study have also suggested that there is a link between parents' values for their children and their social class. Specifically, results have shown that overall, middle-class parents value autonomy for their children, while working-class parents value conformity (Alwin, 1984; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These differences in values by social class may be explained by parents' level of education, occupation, and their perceived purposes associated with schooling.

Historically, the purposes of school have been to teach students to be obedient and conforming to established rules and legislations (Labaree, 1997, 2010). However, the more schooling or education that people received (e.g., a 4-year college/university degree) the more likely they were to move away from those values. This can be seen, for example, in middle-class parents, who received higher levels of education than working-class parents and went on to earn jobs that encourage and prioritize values around autonomy and self-direction (Kohn 1969, 1980). As a result, these parents, in turn, expressed these values to their children, who grew up and also worked similar types of jobs.

However, this association between parental values and social class has not always been supported. For instance, Grimm-Thomas and Perry-Jenkins (1994) utilized a mixed methods approach to examine the linkages between 59 working-class fathers' work conditions and parenting styles, and how they may be mediated by their self-esteem. Their findings suggested that the nature of fathers' work (e.g., physical comfort, co-worker relationships, and work clarity) was more important in determining their parenting style than their status as working class. Although scholars have generally argued that working-class parents value conformity and obedience for their children due to their experiences on the job, interestingly, Grimm-Thomas and Perry-Jenkins (1994) found that these fathers categorized a positive work environment as one high in autonomy and innovation, similar to that of middle-class parents.

Even more directly, Wright and Wright (1976), in a partial replication study, questioned Kohn's (1959, 1969) social class argument by pointing attention to his lack of

consideration of non-social class factors, such as race/ethnicity, religion, and geographical location. The authors claimed that by not considering these other factors, Kohn may have statistically and theoretically overestimated the influence of social class on parents' values for their children. Concern was also expressed around Kohn's usage of occupational status as an indicator of SES in his earlier studies when in fact, educational level/attainment may have been a more effective choice for the research questions at hand (Alwin, 1984; Kohn, 1969; Wright & Wright, 1975). However, it is important to note here that in his subsequent work (e.g., Kohn, 1963, 1995), he did also consider the influence of parents' educational level on their values. Lastly, the authors sought to include mothers' perspectives on the values that they held for their children, due to Kohn originally focusing on fathers, who during that time were the only ones working in their households. With regard to fathers' value of self-direction, Wright and Wright showed that depending on when social class was entered into the model (first or last) determined how much variability it accounted for. For example, when social class was entered last, they found that it only accounted for about 9.7% of the variance out of 23.5%. Similarly, with mothers, they found that although social class accounted for the greatest amount of variability in self-direction values, when other factors such as location and ethnicity were included in the model it became stronger. These findings suggested that social class was an important part of why parents held certain values, but perhaps not as important as Kohn had proposed.

**Social class barriers as they relate to parental values.** It is also essential to acknowledge that parents' attempts to pass on values to their children may not



necessarily operate in the same way for working-class parents as they do for middle-class parents, which supports both cultural-ecological frameworks' proposition that there is no single measuring stick by which scholars should assess different cultural groups. Variations in the sharing of values are particularly evident in parents' interactions with the education system (Lareau, 2000).

Although both groups of parents value education and their children's academic success in school, working-class parents lack the social position or resources to effectively influence or navigate the school arena (e.g., advocating for their children when issues arise with teachers) (Auerbach, 2007; Cooper, 2009; Lareau, 1987). As a result, these parents are often regarded by the governing society as "bad parents," who simply do not participate in their children's schooling, because they do not care (Lightfoot, 2004; Ogbu, 1974). Though this labeling of working-class parents is often misguided, it is the dominant narrative that prevails due to being constructed by those with power and influence. People who make these assumptions often fail to acknowledge the structural and institutional factors that create barriers between working-class parents, particularly those of color, and the school setting, which are not as prevalent for those higher on the totem pole of social hierarchy (e.g., middle- or upper-class White parents) (Crozier, 2000, 2001). Despite this fact, it is not shocking that these issues around disadvantage versus privilege exist for parents of different racial/ethnic and social class backgrounds considering that educational values (e.g., curriculum construction and teachers' expectations of what makes a "good" parent) are predominantly Eurocentric in nature (Donovan, 2017; Ware & Ware, 1996).

Nonetheless, from both Tudge's and Ogbu's cultural-ecological perspectives, though these processes of communicating values to children may not look the same across the working class and the middle class that does not mean that one approach is superior to the other. Working-class families are often presented with obstacles that are more difficult to overcome due to their overall lack of resources (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002), but they are still putting in the effort day in and day out to ensure their children are well-fed, well-dressed, and successful in school (e.g., getting good grades) (Freeman, 2010; Lareau, 2000).

In a qualitative study conducted by Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2015), 19 low-income, African American mothers discussed their involvement in their children's schooling. Despite their socioeconomic status, *all* of these mothers reported being actively involved in making sure their children did well in school through both home-based (e.g., helping with homework) and school-based (e.g., going to parent-teacher meetings) strategies. Furthermore, mothers were engaged whether or not their own parents—or extended kin—had been supportive of their schooling when they were younger, which the authors identified as “intergenerational (dis)continuity” (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2015, p. 460). This indicates that working-class parents do in fact participate in their children's schooling, and in ways that are both similar to and different from, but not less than, those of middle-class parents, which falls in line with the cultural-ecological frameworks' proposition that various lived experiences are acceptable and that though culture is an important influence on practices, they do not determine them.

**Racial socialization.** In addition to social class, it is crucial to also consider the impact of race and ethnicity on parental values (Wright & Wright, 1976). Most of the literature on values—as is the case with many other areas of study—has focused on White families and children. Less acknowledged are the values that Black parents hold for their children and the methods through which they try to pass on these values, despite work suggesting that approaching values from a moral perspective is an important part of understanding Black youth (Travis & Leech, 2014).

Certain values that Black parents hold for their children and adolescents may differ from those of White parents in both content and purpose. Specifically, due to institutional and structural racism, Black parents have to go above and beyond the typical values and concerns that most parents share, in order to protect their children mentally, physically, behaviorally, and emotionally. Research suggests that African American parents prioritize values and beliefs around being Black and what that means in the context of American society, which has a history of racial/ethnic inequality and injustice that continues to pervade the lives of families of color today (Azevedo, Jost, & Rothmond, 2017; Huber, 2016; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyễn, & Sellers, 2009; Neblett, Chavous, Nguyễn, & Sellers, 2009). The process by which Black parents convey these value messages to their children is called *racial/ethnic socialization* (Dunbar, Leerkes, Coard, Supple, & Calkins, 2016; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). Coard and Sellers (2005) offer a more expansive definition of the use of racial socialization in African American families as being a process whereby parents and/or extended family members transmit inter- and intra-generationally developmentally appropriate messages

regarding the significance and meaning of race and ethnicity. Furthermore, it involves teaching youth values and norms associated with race/ethnicity, and equipping youth with developmentally appropriate problem-solving skills that enable them to be flexible in their approach to race-related situations and effectively negotiate and navigate intergroup and intragroup race relations.

Nonetheless, though racial/ethnic socialization encompasses values, there are a variety of ways by which African American parents make an effort to convey these values to their children. Research examining racial/ethnic socialization has proposed that there are five main types: *cultural socialization*, *preparation for bias*, *promotion of mistrust*, *egalitarianism*, and *silence about race* (Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006). All of these types of messages are often shared with children intentionally by parents, but they can be shared implicitly as well. Cultural socialization involves educating children about their cultural history, customs, and traditions, and encouraging them to feel proud about their heritage. Preparation for bias—a form of racial/ethnic socialization that has become increasingly more popular—is exactly what it sounds like; it entails preparing children for the prejudice and discrimination that they will likely face in America as a Black person and how to handle it (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). Promotion of mistrust is to be reluctant or skeptical regarding interactions with White people. Egalitarianism emphasizes individual qualities over one’s racial group (Hughes et al., 2006). For instance, egalitarian parents encourage their children to ignore race (i.e., color-blindness) and instead focus on values such as ambition, determination, and self-confidence, which

are all thought to be related to success (at least by middle-class White American standards) and are self-oriented. Lastly, silence about race is the absence of racialized discussions in the family entirely. Black parents may engage in one or more of these types of racial/ethnic socialization practices, implicitly or explicitly, depending on their own personal experiences and the current social context.

**Religiosity and spirituality.** In the specific context of faith-based practices, the belief in God has served as a source of resilience and coping for Black families for centuries. Since the slavery era, attending church services, praising God, praying, reading scripture, and singing hymns has helped people of African descent maintain their strength and overcome the hardships and hatred they faced—and continue to face—in the U.S. (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). However, the faith-based practices that Blacks have engaged in are not limited to these more religious activities; there is a spiritual component as well. Spirituality differs from religiosity in that it involves an intimate connection with a Higher Power that *goes beyond church affiliation*; it guides the way in which believers go about living their daily lives and continues to exist even after death (e.g., the belief in Heaven) (Jagers & Smith, 1996). Nonetheless, for Blacks in particular, the endorsement of both religious and spiritual attitudes is considered an essential source of empowerment (Chatters, Taylor, Bullard, & Jackson, 2008).

Therefore, parents' socialization around religiosity and spirituality can be viewed as a tenet of racial socialization (Stevenson, 1994), in which Black parents may try to pass on values to their children around having faith in God, finding their strength, wisdom, and identity in God, and treating others with the kindness and grace with which

God treats His children. Parents may also share these religious and spiritual values with their children in hopes that they will help prepare children to navigate experiences of racism and discrimination in the broader society effectively. There is reason to believe that these values are in fact useful based on research with African American children and youth suggesting that higher levels of spiritual belief in God and engagement in religious practices is associated with higher academic performance, psychological functioning and well-being, optimism, and fewer behavior problems and peer conflict (Christian & Barbarin, 2001; Utsey, Hook, Fischer, & Belvet, 2008; Walker & Dixon, 2002).

However, no research has investigated the linkage between African American parents' values for their children and children's gratitude expression to God or others who have done kind deeds for them. Though there has been work that has examined the association between religiosity and gratitude in adolescence and adulthood. For example, Kraus, Desmond, and Palmer (2015) found that people who are more religious report higher levels of gratitude. Considering that God, and the Christian faith in particular, encourages being grateful to the Most High for His blessings and calls for prosocial behaviors among people (e.g., compassion, forgiveness, empathy) (Mattis & Jagers, 2001), perhaps religiosity and spirituality may be a missing link between understanding the connection between parents' values and gratitude in Black families.

### **The Current Study**

Given the gap in the literature, this study sought to understand the values that Black parents hold for their children and their perceptions of their children's expression of gratitude. I was also interested in parents' meaning-making of gratitude, how they go

about inculcating gratitude and the developmental aspects of gratitude that they identify (if any).

## CHAPTER IV

### METHOD

#### **Participants**

Data used for this study came from a larger study conducted by Tudge, Frietas, and colleagues examining gratitude in six societies: China, South Korea, Russia, Turkey, Brazil, and the United States. Participants from the U.S study—conducted in Greensboro—were recruited from six public and private elementary and middle schools.

Of the 65 families that participated in the in-home interviews, 15 self-identified as Black or African American, and they comprised the sample for the current study. Specifically, the sample consisted of 15 Black parents (14 mothers and 1 father), who based on their level of education were classified as working-class (some college or lower;  $n = 13$ ) and middle-class (completed college or higher;  $n = 2$ ). Regarding the gender of their children, there were nine boys ( $M$  age = 11.5 years) and six girls ( $M$  age = 12.0 years), who ranged from 8-14 years old.

#### **Procedure**

Schools were selected to reflect the SES demographics of the city where the study took place. Students were asked to take home, and return, a parental consent letter concerning participation in the research. Children could receive permission from their parents (and give their assent) to participate in the school-based portion of the study, the home-based portion, or both. Parents also provided their consent to participate solely in



the home-based portion. Regardless of whether parents granted their children permission to participate, teachers received \$2 for each child who returned the consent letter to school. After the home interviews, each family received a gift card worth \$10.

## **Measures**

**Parents' values for their children.** Among other measures, parents completed the Parents' Values for their Children measure (PVC: Tudge & Freitas, 2011) to determine the characteristics they wanted their children to possess into adulthood. The PVC (see Appendix B) included 27 items to which participants responded using a Likert scale of 1 = Not at all important, 2 = A little important, 3 = Somewhat important, 4 = Important, and 5 = Very Important. There were also four additional questions at the end of the measure to capture which of the values parents thought were the most and least important for their children. These questions were as follows:

1. Which are the three most important to you?
2. The single most important one is...
3. Which are the three least important to you?
4. The single least important is...

This line of questioning allowed parents to conduct a Q-sort rating to identify their three most and three least important values, which they then shared with the interviewer when asked.

**Gratitude parent interviews.** After completing the Parents' Values for their Children (PVC) questionnaire, parents participated in an interview that took place in their homes with a trained interviewer from the research team. All of the interviewers were

women, who held graduate-level degrees (i.e., Ed.D., M.S., Ph.D.). The racial/ethnic backgrounds of the interviewers were as follows: Jamaican American, European American, Brazilian, and Chinese. However, a majority of the parent interviews were conducted by the Jamaican American interviewer, who established a particularly positive and engaged rapport with these parents.

Interviews were semi-structured in that all parents were asked the same basic questions, but follow-up questions were based on the unique answers that each parent gave. Parents were asked for basic demographic information, such as their education level, occupation, birth place, and the primary language spoken in the home at the beginning of the interview. The remainder of the questions (see Appendix A) focused on parents' values for their children (based on their responses to the PVC questionnaire), their experiences with a kind act someone had done for them, their gratitude expression, their children's experiences with a kind act and expression of gratitude, and how parents supported their children in learning how to be grateful. Specific questions regarding racial socialization, religiosity, and spirituality were not asked during the interview as it was not a focus of the study at the time of data collection; nonetheless, parents were not prohibited from raising any of these topics if they felt them to be relevant.

Interviews ranged from about 30 minutes to 1.5 hours to complete, and they were primarily conducted one-on-one with the parent who expressed being most responsible for the focal child. However, since they were done in open spaces in parents' homes (e.g., the living room or kitchen), interviewers often witnessed the typical happenings of the home while visiting and speaking with the primary parent. For example, sometimes

children would be speaking or playing in the background, dishes would be getting done by another family member, or spouses/partners would jump in and share their perspectives or thoughts on the questions being asked.

### **Analysis**

In order to examine the in-home interviews conducted with Black parents regarding the values they hold for their children and their children's expression of gratitude, a classic narrative analysis was used (Dorries & Haller, 2001). This allowed for parents' conversations and contributions to serve as the unit of analysis and helped to shed light on the ways in which Black parents make meaning of values and gratitude in their lives and socialize their children around these meanings. Considering that no study has yet investigated gratitude in Black families, the current study sought to understand what gratitude meant to this group, what it looked like, and how it manifested in their children's lives.

With these goals in mind, a deductive approach was utilized, along with a semantic/manifest approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joffe, 2012). Scholars have suggested that using more than one approach when conducting qualitative analyses strengthens the quality of the work (Joffe, 2012). The deductive approach included acknowledgement of Ogbu's and Tudge's cultural-ecological frameworks in understanding gratitude in Black families and the existence of multiple realities, and also allowed for the potential influence of previous literature on gratitude during the analytical process. However, I also allowed for the extension of the approach to consider nuances and new information that arose from these particular parent interviews. The

semantic/manifest approach allowed for the establishment of codes based on parents' explicit contributions during the interview.

To start, I began by reading and rereading the transcripts in order to familiarize myself with the data. During this process, I also assigned a pseudonym to each parent in the study. The purpose of using the pseudonyms was to maintain parents' confidentiality. It is important to note that any similarity between parents' actual names and the pseudonyms assigned to them was a mere coincidence, as the only other identifying information I had for them was their ID numbers. Once I established familiarity with the data, I then began reading the transcripts again, but this time, I also began coding them based on parents' contributions. During the first round of coding, I coded everything that parents discussed pertaining to their values for their children (e.g., the level of importance and the reasoning behind holding those values), gratitude (e.g., expression, teaching, developmental aspects), and what they perceived as ungratefulness (e.g., failure to acknowledge the good things in life).

The established codes were then organized into a manual that I created, which was used to train an undergraduate research assistant on how to code the transcripts. The purpose of this training was to prepare for the reliability analysis that would eventually take place. However, the research assistant was first given transcripts to practice on, so that she could develop an understanding of the coding process.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

#### **Parents' Values for their Children**

**Other-oriented.** Other-oriented values included those that focused on thinking about others. Examples of the specific values parents mentioned were: respectful (to elders), humility, kindness, and politeness, the most common one being respectful. Specifically, parents expressed that they wanted their children to respect their elders, which sometimes seemed to be tied to cultural practices. For example, Melissa said:

Respectful because I always tell him respect your elders uhm that's one of my big peeves I like for him to say yes ma'am I know a lot time they don't do that now but I guess from my growing up. Yup I like for him to be that way.

Nairobi also indicated, “respectful, in my culture we are taught to be respectful so I expect my children to also be respectful.” However, other parents wanted their children to be respectful to others in general, not just their elders. Nicole explained:

You get a lot further by being respectful to people cause at the end of the day you don't know who you gonna see again or what you might need from them as well as what they may need from you in the future and you might [regret it] if you weren't as respectful as you coulda been in the beginning.

In addition to respect, a few parents mentioned how the other-oriented values that they held stemmed from their religious beliefs. As it pertains to her belief in Jesus, Faith wanted her child to be compassionate because:

I have very strong uhm values well more Jesus follower values than necessarily Christian traditional values and...that's just what you're here for that you should love others that you should serve others and so compassion kinda encompasses all of that you show compassion then you're not doing the wrong thing...compassion means a lot to me.

These links to religiosity/spirituality were only found for other-oriented values, not self-oriented ones, which makes sense, considering that when referring to a higher being, these parents often did so in the context of the Christian faith, which encourages prosocial behaviors and attitudes.

However, not all parents were proponents of prosocial behaviors, or at least felt that other-oriented values should be exhibited in moderation, because too much focus on other people is not beneficial to their children's development. For example, Rochelle explained it well when she said:

Sometimes being too social can lead you to trouble and sometimes if you're focusing on your goals or whatever it is you're working on sometimes you have to know hey I can't hang out with my friends today I have to focus on my own goals.

Antoinette expressed a similar sentiment: "...so if he gotta keep it like where he don't need [to] socialize with everyone that's fine because you can get trouble being sociable dealing with others a lot." Parents who endorsed this belief were not necessarily saying that their children should not be sociable or other-oriented at all. Instead, they believed

that it should be done in moderation and that there was a time and place for such behaviors, so that children did not get “too caught up” or distracted from their goals.

**Self-oriented.** Values were considered to be self-oriented when they involved prioritizing the self. Examples of the specific values parents discussed were: self-confident, ambition, determination, leadership, and assertiveness. The most common one was self-confident. The primary reason that parents gave for valuing self-confidence in their children (along with some of the other self-oriented values) was that it would allow for children’s self-advancement in terms of high achievement, getting ahead, and standing out from the crowd. Regarding her son’s individuality, Erica stated, “I just want him to have his own confidence so he won’t have to you know try to be like another child...” Bionca also described how being assertive is associated with accomplishing and how it would help her son avoid being looked over for opportunities:

Well with the competitiveness in the world today that’s from point you’re born up until to the point you find out what you want to do in life you have to be assertive, you’re not assertive you have the opportunity for someone to overstep you in the sense of opportunity...If I put this in front of him or her will they get this done.

In general, the more self-oriented values that parents reported having for their children, the less other-oriented values they reported, and vice versa. However, the distinction in importance was not so set in stone for all parents.

**Continuum.** Multiple parents in the study when asked to list their three least important values expressed difficulty with doing so, because they felt that all of the values provided were important in one way or another. Nicole explained:

Because they are all very good valid morals to have and you need them to be prosperous in life so it is hard to pull out negativity [in] some situations you have on there cause they are all positive situations.

While Tamika simply stated, “No, I think they’re all important.” Furthermore, some parents claimed that they only picked three least important values, because they were encouraged to do so: “Uhhh I don't exactly agree with that [they’re least important] but I had to choose” [Rochelle], and “Uhm those are also important \*laughs\*. I picked them as least important just because...” [Dejah]. The fact that parents hold both other- and self-oriented values for their children depending on the context or setting is well in line with both cultural-ecological frameworks—which acknowledge the influence of context on value and belief systems.

### **Parents’ Thoughts about Gratitude**

As Roberts (2004, p. 65) stated, “If we are going to have a science of something, we had better have a pretty clear idea what that thing is and be careful not to confuse it with other things that are a little bit like it.” Gratitude, as I have defined it, involves the experience of a positive emotion when someone does a kind act for us, but it goes beyond that positive emotion to include a consideration of the other person and a willingness to reciprocate when, and if, the opportunity arises. However, parents in this study discussed or thought about gratitude in ways that were at times different from my definition. Specifically, during the in-home interviews, parents were asked to elaborate on their thoughts and experiences around gratitude, and what it meant to them.



**Meaning-making.** Parents described gratitude as appreciating or feeling thankful for what one has and recognizing that life could be much worse. For instance, Rochelle expressed:

It's just being grateful and just appreciative of whatever the situation may be you know if you're living with family hey you're not living out on the streets. So you know it's just looking at the situation and saying hey you know this is where I was this is where I'm at and just be grateful for the journey along the way.

Similarly, Lailah noted, “Gratitude means to me, not taking anything for granted. It means being thankful for what you have instead of complaining about what you don’t have.” Gratitude was also defined broadly as a positive emotional experience. As Mike explained it, “[Gratitude is] When you’re uhm when you're happy with everything that's around you...and you're not worried about what the general just got.” So, in these cases, gratitude involved being aware of and content with one’s social and economic position with the understanding that the focus should not be on comparing oneself to others (particularly others who have more), but instead being thankful that the situation is not as bad as it could be.

In addition to expressing gratitude for the good things in their lives, parents also thought that gratitude could be expressed toward others. For example, Bionca talked about feeling grateful for people in her life who have helped mold and shape the woman she is today, such as her parents:

Gratitude [is] when somebody does something for you or somebody acknowledges the fact that hey I just want to check up on you... I'm grateful for those that are in my life that have shared my experience and have guided me in a better direction uhm no I don't know everything. Am I willing to learn it?

Absolutely, and I get gratification in the fact that I watched my parents, the things that they went through in order for me to be successful, for me to have access to resources.

**Connection to religious/spiritual beliefs.** Furthermore, parents articulated an existing link between gratitude and their religious/spiritual beliefs. In particular, they believed that gratitude could be felt and expressed to God for the blessings that he has bestowed upon them and their children. For instance, Bionca expressed her gratitude for the smarts God has given her, “I get gratification...to be able to use the brain that God gave me...instead of letting my environment take control of me,” while Tamika stated with regard to her son, “...he has a lot to be grateful for. If he wakes up every morning, that’s the number of days you live for, life. God gave it to you.” These parents acknowledged that the positive things in their lives come from a higher power that is bigger than them, and they also engaged in reciprocation to God for those blessings through their prosocial behaviors with others (e.g., treating others with compassion) and they participated in praise and worship. As Faith put it, “I do gratitude, and praising and singing and just praying and just being thankful to God and to whoever else...”

**Importance.** When asked how important gratitude was to them, all of the parents described gratitude as an important or “very” important value for their children to hold. The reasons they gave for why generally had to with the necessity of acknowledging what someone has done for you, what has been given, and what you currently have. However, there were a few parents who went beyond those common reasons and talked about specifically how gratitude builds character. For example, Rochelle expressed:

It helps with character it speaks to who you are so when you possess these things you know you're rich you know you may not be rich materialistically, money wise and everything else but you're rich in character and you know it just make you uhm a better person uhm in general.

This is particularly insightful as it relates to gratitude as a moral virtue, which includes the development of gratitude as a long-term character trait or disposition.

**Gratitude strengthens bonds.** When discussing their feelings toward someone who had done a kind act for them, parents indicated that gratitude has the potential to improve relationships between people, create a cycle of giving, and/or it could involve doing something kind for someone else if the opportunity to do something for the original benefactor does not present itself (i.e., paying it forward). While discussing her gratitude toward her best friend, Shanelle described the two as having “*a closer bond more like a sister bond*” as a result of kind act. As it pertains to the cycle of gratitude, Nairobi articulated it well when she said:

It's just not right not to be grateful. Especially if you have been helped in one thing or another by somebody and I think that gratitude is the seed for more. Because if somebody does something to you or for you and you are very grateful, they are more likely to go the extra mile for you the next time, you know?

In addition, Lailah shared how she and her children work together to pass on items to those in need as an expression of gratitude: “We don’t throw away clothes...we donate them or we give them to friends and family that are smaller than them.” The presence of these themes suggest that these parents consider gratitude as involving more than just a “thank you.” It goes even further by considering others while strengthening social bonds between people in the process, which is more in-line with gratitude as I have defined it.

## **Parents' Perceptions of Children's Gratitude Expression**

**Verbal.** According to parents' narratives, the most prominent way in which children expressed their gratitude was verbally, particularly by saying "thank you." This may be due to parents' encouragement of mannerisms around giving thanks and being polite, which will be discussed in more depth in the last section. In addition to "thank you," kids also expressed other forms of verbal gratitude, such as: "...usually...[she says] 'I love you'" [Camilla], and "...she talked about it for a long time even just out of the blue she just talk about the puppy Uncle Charlie gave us" [Patty]. Obviously, it can be argued that there is a difference between a rote "thank you" in response to a kind act versus an "I love you, mommy" or going on and on about a kind act and telling everyone you know. Nonetheless, all of these gratitude expressions involve verbal acknowledgements and do not include any reciprocal action.

**Concrete.** The second most popular expression of gratitude by children was concrete in nature. Parents discussed how kids would respond with behaviors, such as a hug, kiss, or handshake. For instance, in response to receiving money from a family friend, Antoinette shared that her son responded with "'thank you man' and gave him a handshake." Faith also talked about her son's idea to show gratitude to his teachers: "On like his birthday he wanted me to go get donuts so he could pass them out and things like that." Often times children's concrete gratitude was expressed along with some verbal acknowledgement (as can be seen in Antoinette's quote), which was not surprising since as previously stated, verbal was the most common type of gratitude expression.

However, there were some instances in which concrete gratitude was children's sole

response, as shown in the latter example. Either way, in these general instances, kids responded beyond words and engaged in some action, but their action did not necessarily seem to take into account or require substantial thought about the benefactor.

**Connective.** Lastly, parents shared situations in which their children expressed connective gratitude to someone who had done something nice for them. All of these circumstances involved children reciprocating in a way that was desired or needed by the original benefactor, and doing so freely. So, if parents stated that children did something because they were told to (i.e., the act was one of the kids' chores) then that was not considered connective. To start, Tamika described how supportive her son had been of her during her recovery from surgery:

He--um a lot of times you know--you know lot of times people don't always--um do anything necessarily have to do anything at the moment when you're doing it for them but it's--it's times like these when you need them and they're there. And he has been very helpful to his mama since I've been down.

Similarly, Bionca discussed being in-sync with her son: "If I ever have a hard day [at] work 'mom you look a little tired come on and sit down we got dinner ready let me take your shoes off.' Rub my feet and I'm just like wow this kid is really in tune with me."

Another parent shared a time when her daughter was there for a friend who had been there for her in a similar situation:

We had a death in the family then one of her friends or a group of her friends made a uhmm basket or whatever and then one of her friends uhm one of their loved ones passed away and we took snacks and stuff over there...like just a lot of her favorite little things [Nicole].

In all of these instances, kids went above and beyond polite mannerisms (e.g., “thank you” or “I appreciate you”) and quick, more self-focused responses (e.g., giving a handshake or sharing donuts with teachers because that is the kid’s favorite snack), and genuinely reciprocated in ways that the original benefactors found helpful or supportive. Clearly, these children understood what the benefactors wanted or needed and were there to deliver when the opportunity presented itself.

### **Failure to Acknowledge the Good Things**

In addition to discussing moments when their children were grateful, it is worth noting that parents also discussed the moments when their children were being ungrateful, as they perceived it. There were a number of ways in which parents felt that children failed to rise to occasion, such as engaging in upward social comparison (e.g., “...he might say or such and such somebody else got this and I say you have to appreciate what you have so it's things like that sometimes” [Erica]), taking things for granted (e.g., “Uhm a lot of times I--I--I might take him out to eat if he has--you know, a good report card or what have you and uhm I don’t think that a lot of the time they realize the value of the dollar and it’s kind of like ‘You should do these things, Mom’ you know that kind of thing” [Dejah]), entitlement (e.g., “I think he feels like he’s privileged...he feels like things are just some type of way...” [Mike]), and constant wanting, for example:

I’ll put it like this with shoes or something like that you know how kids get a pair of shoes then two weeks later they want another pair of shoes: ‘well why do you want another pair of shoes?’ I said. ‘now but you don't need another pair of shows right now you just got a pair.’ I think in that way he was not as grateful [Melissa].

In response to children's failure to acknowledge, parents often reminded them that there are others out there who are less fortunate than they are (e.g., "Because some kids don't have a roof over their heads and food to eat] some kids don't have what she has" [Patty]).

Nonetheless, based on (in)gratitude as I have defined it, children would have had to intentionally choose to not reciprocate to someone who had done a kind act for them. So, children who felt entitled to receiving kind acts and did not show any interest in reciprocating to the benefactor when the opportunity presented itself would be considered ungrateful. Comparison to others who have things that children wish they had too, for example, would not be considered ingratitude according to the definition. However, if children did not reciprocate to the original benefactor it was often attributed by parents to obliviousness and not because they just did not want to do anything for the other person.

### **The Road to Gratitude: Getting There is a Process**

**Teaching strategies.** In addition to referencing the less fortunate, parents also engaged in teaching strategies with the hope of fostering gratitude in their children, as they recognized that developing gratitude takes time and guidance. Specific strategies included: reflecting with children regarding a time when they were not grateful and talking them through better responses (e.g., "Yea we would talk about it like okay at this point you need to be thankful because this didn't have to happen or do you think that you need to say 'thank you' or did you appreciate that?" [Nicole]); encouraging manners (e.g., "He'll say, 'Gee thanks mom!' You know and it's kind of because he's obligated to say 'Thank you' because that's what I taught him" [Lailah]); modeling (e.g., "From his home training I think from watching his mom and how she reacts to certain things...I try

to tell him I try to set an example for him..." [Melissa]; and punishment (e.g., "Yeah I punish him [when he's ungrateful]" [Mike]). Encouraging manners was a common approach that parents expressed utilizing, and it was evident in the amount of verbal expression that children engaged in that this approach is serving its purpose. However, from Tudge's (2008) cultural-ecological theory, broader societal norms around being polite and saying "thank you" have likely influenced these particular parents' endorsement of values and practices that emphasize manners.

**Developmental aspects.** Parents recognized that due to their age, children have not yet reached their full potential to be grateful beings. Specifically, the following developmental aspects were identified: kids just don't get gratitude yet (e.g., "...he don't really understand the responsibility a parent has so a lot of the time it seems like he's ungrateful..." [Erica]), but they will over time (e.g., "I think the more he realizes the things that he gets the more grateful he'll become so it's just always growing" [Faith]); kids are limited in how they can reciprocate (e.g., "well you know she can't do much she is young so I don't expect her to you know do too much other than [helping me and her brother out]" [Camilla]); and that even when kids are grateful, there is always room for improvement (e.g., "I wouldn't say 5 [extremely grateful] because that's just like perfect and there's no room to grow but uhm for the most part other than that she is grateful for all the things" [Rochelle]). These developmental notions suggest that the parents in this study are especially aware of their children's position, and perhaps this reinforces their willingness to work with their children to help them achieve a grateful disposition, as shown in their teaching strategies.



## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

The majority of the research examining parental values and gratitude has done so with White parents or families. Nonetheless, from Ogbu's and Tudge's cultural-ecological perspectives, one must be open to the possibility that these constructs may play out differently based on cultural factors, such as race/ethnicity or social class, as well as individual characteristics (e.g., personality), daily interactions (e.g., trying to foster gratitude in their children), and time. This study is the first of its kind to examine the values that Black parents hold for their children and their impressions of their children's expression of gratitude.

Findings suggest that overall, these Black parents held both other-oriented and self-oriented values for their children, and sometimes found it difficult to say that one type was more important than the other. This supports the idea that values exist on a *continuum* (Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2012), and so even the seemingly competing values that parents hold (e.g., respect for elders and self-confidence) can still be considered important to them. In particular, Black parents may not exhibit an "either/or" mentality regarding self- and other-oriented values due to having to successfully navigate both White culture and Black culture, which call for different values and behaviors, depending on the context. For example, when children are at home, parents may expect them to be sociable and cooperative, but when they are

at school, parents may place more emphasis on independence and ambition. Therefore, both types of values (self and other) are necessary for Black parents to try and convey and for Black children to understand.

Furthermore, these Black parents tended to relate their values of other-oriented traits (e.g., compassion and respect) to their cultural upbringings and religious practices. Specifically, respect was particularly important, and may stem from cultural beliefs around reverence for elders, who are esteemed in Black families and viewed as sources of wisdom and guidance. However, some of the parents indicated that self-oriented values (e.g., self-confidence and ambition) were ideal in terms of helping their children to thrive now as it pertains to school and later as it pertains to their careers. These same parents were also more likely to believe that being too other-oriented could actually be detrimental, as it may distract children from achieving and reaching their goals or get them into trouble. Values are not only shaped by people's social experiences, but they also shape how people interact and respond to their environmental circumstances (Schwartz, 1992). So, the conveying of messages from Black parents suggesting that being too prosocial is not beneficial may stem from an awareness of their position in America's hierarchical system. Specifically, these messages may serve as a protective mechanism for Black children, considering that in school, for example, these students are more likely to get in trouble for talking in class or their social behaviors may be misinterpreted as threatening or aggressive (Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley, & Zamel, 2009).

Parents also expressed the view that gratitude was indeed an important value for their children, and some even thought that gratitude required some form of reciprocity or paying it forward. Specifically, they discussed how if someone does something kind for you, you have a duty to do something for him/her in return or, if that is not possible, to do something for someone else in need. Parents at times also noted that failure to reciprocate may result in the original benefactor not feeling inclined to help you again. These parents' initial thinking suggests that though it has not been examined until now, the idea of connective gratitude is a concept that resonates with Black parents and is a part of their socialization with their children.

As it relates to Tudge's (2008) cultural-ecological theory, this process of parents engaging in socialization or teaching practices with their children in order to help them become more grateful is a prime example of their daily interactions with one another. These everyday interactions are also influenced by the families' culture, the time period in which they are living, and the individual characteristics of the children. As previously discussed, parents mentioned how their values for their children were linked to cultural expectations, such as being respectful toward elders and saying "thank you." They also recognized their position in society as ethnic/racial "minorities"—and in most cases as working class—which also shaped parents thinking about what values may be dangerous or a hindrance for their children. Parents' frequent endorsement of self-oriented values, such as self-confidence and ambition, may also be associated with the fact that their children were growing up under the first African American president of the United States, Barack Obama, at the time that the interviews were conducted. This presidency may

have provided parents with a sense of hope for a brighter future for their children despite America's history of discrimination and racism. Additionally, some parents discussed how their children's age and temperament played a role in their ability to engage in gratitude as they expected or how they engaged in it. For example, regarding his son's temperament, Mike said:

Well he doesn't express feelings around adults, he express his feelings around kids like his sibling he talks more to them more openly like he will let it all out on the line...he won't ever express [gratitude] with me.

The associations between parents' everyday dialogues about gratitude with their children, culture, time, and children's individual characteristics shaped the process of parents' attempt to foster gratitude in their children.

Interestingly, the majority of the parents in this study were classified as working class based on their education level (i.e., some college or less), but of the working-class parents who were asked, four stated that they had autonomy and did not take orders from a boss. In addition, working-class parents in general stated that they held self-oriented values for their children around getting ahead in society. These findings indicate that despite their social position, Black parents desire better for their children and convey that to them, instead of just accepting being at the bottom of the totem pole and encouraging children to follow suit. As Antoinette said:

With me being a single parent at one time and struggling with his father I was not determined so I had to...force myself to be determined...I do like him to do it start now and don't wait till he get older to try to be determined.

From the perspective of Ogbu's (1981) cultural-ecological model, these sentiments, which may have only been captured using a qualitative analysis, also contribute to the dismantling of traditional (and often negative) stereotypes and narratives created by those in power that lower class African American parents are not invested in their children, do not care about their success academic- and career-wise, or are solely collectivistic.

Traditionally, researchers have suggested that individualism and collectivism are opposite entities that are the root of differences between cultures, and have described societies as either being one or the other (Hofstede, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001). Specifically, those of African descent have largely been categorized as being collectivistic in nature. However, recent work has indicated that the individualism–collectivism dichotomy is not appropriate for describing cultural groups. In particular, findings from Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) support what I have found here, which is that parents of ethnic/racial minority groups often hold both “collectivistic” and “individualistic” values for their children.

In addition, parents shared their perceptions of their children's expression of gratitude. Findings indicated that verbal gratitude was expressed the most, followed by concrete gratitude, and lastly, connective gratitude. Based on the emphasis parents placed on being polite and having manners, it makes sense that they also reported that all of their kids responded to acts of kindness with a “thank you.” This verbal acknowledgement was often the bare minimum in that parents expected children to at the very least say “thank you.” Children also engaged in the expression of concrete gratitude (often simultaneously with verbal gratitude) by giving hugs, kisses, cards, or their

favorite snacks to the original benefactor. Nonetheless, there were some children who according to parents went above and beyond and truly thought about what the benefactor may want or need and reciprocated appropriately when the opportunity presented itself (i.e., connective gratitude).

Many of the kind acts done for children came from people who were close to them (e.g., parents, aunts, uncles, “church families,” and friends), and so all of the instances of gratitude expression involved those people. There were no circumstances in which gratitude was shown to a stranger. There also did not seem to be an association between parents’ values for their children and children’s expression of gratitude. As previously stated, all of the parents reported that gratitude was (very) important to them. This means that whether they were more self-oriented or more other-oriented, when it came to gratitude, their thoughts were still the same: children should be grateful, and at the very least, express “thank you.”

Given that gratitude was so highly valued by these Black parents, it is not surprising that they felt that the failure to acknowledge the good things in life, particularly from their children, was not acceptable. For example, parents discussed how their children sometimes engaged in comparisons between themselves and others who had something they wanted (i.e., upward social comparison), seemed entitled as if the world owed them something, and/or always wanted more and more material possessions. The most common response that parents gave to their children’s lack of appreciation was by reminding them that there are people who are less fortunate than they are and who do not have as much as they do.

To add, parents also described the teaching strategies they utilized to help steer their children away from what they perceived as an attitude of ingratitude. These teaching strategies included participating in moments of reflection with their children in order to get them to see when they missed an opportunity to express gratitude and how they can do better next time; encouraging manners (which has previously been discussed in the context of verbal gratitude); punishing their children when they failed to rise to the occasion (e.g., taking away toys or privileges); and modeling how gratitude should be expressed—according to their standards—for their children to see.

Parents exerted these teaching and socialization efforts while also recognizing that gratitude is a developmental process in which kids may not yet have the capacity be virtuously grateful. For instance, many parents indicated that due to their age, children are naturally going to miss opportunities to express gratitude to a person who did something nice for them. That is why they felt it was their responsibility as parents to guide their children in the right direction, which is in line with the cultural-ecological frameworks' proposition that children learn about cultural values and how to do well in their society from more knowledgeable others. Parents also expressed the belief that though their children may not fully understand gratitude at the moment, eventually they will over time, and how during the process there is always room for improvement. These contributions also complement Annas' (2011) view that more knowledgeable others, such as parents, try to encourage virtuous characteristics in their children by modeling those behaviors for them to follow, with the hope that children will eventually take on those virtues as their own. Lastly, a few parents claimed that kids are limited in terms of their

resources and so there is only but so much that they can do to reciprocate, especially when the original benefactor is an adult. This is partially true as adults definitely have access to more resources than children do. However, it is evident from these findings that there are children who do express connective gratitude, and in most of the instances in which they did so, the reciprocating act did not involve material gifts that would cost money. In fact, most of these children's connective gratitude expressions involved them giving time and help to someone in need who had helped them before. That being said, connective gratitude is by no means only for those who have the financial or material resources to reciprocate. Everyone—young, old, big, small, rich, or poor—has access to time and can be helpful to others.

Although this study offers valuable insights into parental values and gratitude expression in Black families, there are some limitations worth noting. First, this study only consisted of Black parents from a specific geographical location in the U. S., and so its findings cannot and should not be generalized to all Black families in the country. Second, the majority of the parents in this study were mothers and working class. Third, the criterion by which parents' social class was determined (i.e., education level) may not have been the most appropriate considering the cultural-historical factors that have limited Blacks' access to higher education and the consequential need for them to make a living via other avenues. Fourth, children's gratitude was reported on by parents and was not reported on by the children themselves or observed, which means that it is not known for sure how these children actually express gratitude. However, there is also no reason to doubt that these parents know their own children, so the findings are likely to hold



some value in terms of understanding gratitude in these families, especially considering that data were collected via interviews versus surveys or questionnaires.

Future studies should expand upon this research by examining parental values and gratitude in Black families who live in other areas. For example, would variations in parental values in terms of orientation and expressions of gratitude exist for those living in fast-paced urban cities in comparison to those living in slow-paced rural communities? Future work should also aim to include samples of both mothers and fathers, as they may have different perspectives regarding the values they hold for their children and how grateful they want them to be. For instance, the one father in this study, Mike, offered a unique perspective with regard to his perceptions of his son's exceptionally ungrateful behavior and his lack of tolerance for that behavior. At first, it seemed that Mike's intolerance and frustration with his son's ungrateful attitude was linked to him being a man, but with further thought, it may be that what his son is bringing to the table in terms of failing to be as grateful as he should be is what is driving Mike's responses. The bidirectionality of parent-child relationships regarding gratitude socialization is worth more consideration. Moving forward, samples should also be more comparable in terms of social class. Are there some values that Black parents share in general, but have other values that may vary according to social class and, if so, what are those values? Are parents' socialization of gratitude and their responses to ingratitude (i.e., the unwillingness to reciprocate to someone who has helped in a time of need) different based on social class? These are all interesting questions that could be answered with a more balanced sample.

Regarding implications for application, the current study has the potential to serve as the starting grounds from which researchers and practitioners can either develop or tweak parenting and gratitude interventions to be culturally relevant and relatable to Black families. Though Black cultures are often portrayed in the literature as being predominantly collectivistic, it is clear that these parents also value autonomy, ambition, self-confidence, and independence in their children, which are typically categorized as individualistic traits. In addition, many of these parents expressed gratitude to God or Jesus, which is outside the bounds of how gratitude has been defined in this study, since one arguably cannot reciprocate to God because He is not a human being—He is omnipotent and all-knowing. However, Christian values promote being there for others and reciprocating to those who have helped us when we needed or wanted it. It encourages the strengthening of social bonds through its emphasis on being kind toward other people and engaging in prosocial behaviors. So, in terms of being virtuous, believing in God or the Christian faith supports the development of a genuine way of being and living that involves reciprocating to those who do kind acts for us. If this form of gratitude serves an important purpose in the lives of Black families and communities (i.e., provides a source of resiliency, strength, hope, and compassion), perhaps it is worth considering how it can be incorporated into gratitude interventions aiming to strengthen social bonds between people.

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APPENDIX A

PARENT INTERVIEW

**The Development of Gratitude Interview**

Thank you for being part of our study. First, for our records, are you the parent most responsible for raising [child's name]? \_\_\_\_\_ [If not, who is, and do you think that he/she would be interested in participating?] Who else is responsible for raising [child's name]?

I know that we already asked this information, but we'd just like to check:

Could you please tell us your highest level of education? [Appropriate levels for the given society]

\_\_\_ less than high school; \_\_\_ high school; \_\_\_\_\_ some college, including Associates (2-year) degree; \_\_\_ a college (4-year) degree; \_\_\_ some graduate study; \_\_\_ MA/MS; \_\_\_ PhD

Ask the same question for the person who is next most likely to be responsible for raising the child.

\_\_\_ less than high school; \_\_\_ high school; \_\_\_\_\_ some college, including Associates (2-year) degree; \_\_\_ a college (4-year) degree; \_\_\_ some graduate study; \_\_\_ MA/MS; \_\_\_ PhD

And your job? \_\_\_\_\_ What do you do typically at work? [ask questions to be sure about the likelihood of needing to obey a boss, or being able to use self-direction, etc.)

And the other person responsible for raising your child? [Go over education and occupation in the same way, unless it's clear that there isn't anyone who is also responsible.]

And where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_ How long have you lived in [this city]? \_\_\_\_\_

[For those who were born in another country, ask how long they've lived in this country]? \_\_\_\_\_

And the other person who's responsible for the child? [Same questions]



What other languages, besides [the language that's being spoken during the interview] do people use at home?

Thanks for filling out the Parents' Values for their Children (PVC). You think that these three characteristics are the ones that you'd most like to see your child develop. Why did you choose these particular ones? And you listed these three as the ones that you least value. Can you explain why? [Follow up where necessary, so that you get a good sense of why the parent values these a lot and a little.]

In the recent past, can you recall a situation or an occasion in which someone helped you to do something that it might have been difficult to do alone or gave you something of value? What did the person do for you or give you? Can you remember what your feelings were towards that person at that time? And since then, do you feel anything for that person? [Probe with questions such as: What did the person's kindness mean to you and how did you feel (or do you still feel) about that person?]

Can you sum up in one word how you felt about that person?

I'm particularly interested in your thoughts regarding gratitude. I noticed that in your set of most important values, you circled "gratitude" as \_\_\_\_\_. Can you explain why? What does gratitude mean to you? [In case gratitude wasn't mentioned before: Is it different from the feeling you described above?] In what situations do you think it is appropriate to feel gratitude? How would you express that gratitude? Is there anything else you might do? Are there situations or occasions in which you might do something different? Why or why not?

Are there things that you think [child's name] should be grateful for? Why?

In what situations or occasions do you feel it is appropriate for [child's name] to express gratitude and how does he/she typically express that gratitude? [Probe: What does he/she say or do or feel in those situations or on those occasions?] Is the response different in other situations or on other occasions? How, or how not?

In what situations or on what occasions is [child] **most** likely to show gratitude? What does s/he say or do or feel in those situations? [Why do you think that s/he does/says that? Do you try to influence him/her in any way? If "yes" ask how.]

In what situations or occasions is [child] **least** likely to show gratitude when you think that he/she should? Why do you think that is? [If the parent says that the child always shows gratitude, ask what the parent would do if the child did not: "Suppose [child] did not show any gratitude and you thought that s/he should, what, if anything would you do?"]

Do you think [child's] response of gratitude depends upon the act, or the benefactor (the person who helped or gave something), or on both? In other words, does it depend upon what was done for [child] or who was doing it, or both? Does this ever vary (for example, if a relative that [child] doesn't like very much gives him/her a nice gift)? [If it's not yet clear: Do you think that s/he's more grateful for the present or the help (in other words, what s/he's gained) or more grateful for the person who gave or helped him/her.]

Are there situations in which you think [child] should be more grateful than [he/she] is? Can you give some examples of these situations? Why did you think that s/he should have been more grateful? Did you do or say anything to him/her at the time or afterwards? [If the parent has already said that the child is always grateful, ask something like: "I know that you said earlier that if [child] didn't show gratitude when you thought s/he should you might say/do xxx; is there anything else that you might say or do?"]

Can you recall an event or incident in which [child] remembered a kind or generous act and talked about it to you? Did [child] express a need to do something for that person? What did he/she do or say or feel? Is this typical for how [child] responds to this type of act, or was this event something special? [In case the parent can't remember any situation: Even if [child] hasn't actually talked to you about this type of act (kindness or a generous act), do you think that s/he feels a need to do something in return for the other person? Can you think of any examples?] [If the parent has only mentioned the child saying "thank you" ask whether the child ever says anything about doing something for the person, and if there have been no examples at all, try "Suppose [child] had received some help or a very nice gift, would s/he ever think of doing anything for that person?"]

Thinking about [child's] life this past year, would you say that he/she had:  
1 nothing to be grateful for; 2 not much to be grateful for; 3 a little to be grateful for; 4 a lot to be grateful for; 5 an awful lot to be grateful for. [Unless the parent has made very clear why s/he has answered this way, ask for the reason.]

If you had to express how grateful [child] is, and 1 means "not at all grateful" and 5 means "extremely grateful", where would you put him/her on the line between 1 and 5? [Unless the parent has made very clear why s/he has answered this way, ask for the reason.]

APPENDIX B

PVC QUESTIONNAIRE

PVC

Tudge & Freitas, 2011

We would like to know which of the following characteristics are important for your child when an adult. We'll then ask you to choose the 3 characteristics that you think the most important of all (including the absolutely most important), and the 3 that you think are least important (including the absolutely least important). **There are no right or wrong responses—we are simply interested in what you think is important for your child when an adult.**

<b>For each of the following questions, please respond with one of the following: Not at all important (1); a little important (2); somewhat important (3); important (4); very important (5)</b>	Not at all important	A little important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very important
1. How important to you is it that your child be ambitious?	1	2	3	4	5
2. How important to you is it that your child be assertive?	1	2	3	4	5
3. How important to you is it that your child be compassionate?	1	2	3	4	5
4. How important to you is it that your child be cooperative?	1	2	3	4	5
5. How important to you is it that your child be determined?	1	2	3	4	5
6. How important to you is it that your child respects elders?	1	2	3	4	5
7. How important to you is it that your child be empathic (easily understands others' feelings)?	1	2	3	4	5
8. How important to you is that your child be fair?	1	2	3	4	5
9. How important to you is it that your child be generous?	1	2	3	4	5
10. How important to you is it that your child be grateful?	1	2	3	4	5
11. How important to you is it that your child be honest?	1	2	3	4	5
12. How important to you is it that your child be humble?	1	2	3	4	5

13. How important to you is it that your child be independent?	1	2	3	4	5
14. How important to you is it that your child uses his/her initiative?	1	2	3	4	5
15. How important to you is it that your child be kind?	1	2	3	4	5
16. How important to you is it that your child be a leader?	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all important	A little important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very important
17. How important to you is it that your child be loyal?	1	2	3	4	5
18. How important to you is it that your child be obedient?	1	2	3	4	5
19. How important to you is it that your child be persistent?	1	2	3	4	5
20. How important to you is it that your child be polite?	1	2	3	4	5
21. How important to you is it that your child be respectful?	1	2	3	4	5
22. How important to you is it that your child be responsible?	1	2	3	4	5
23. How important to you is it that your child follows your rules?	1	2	3	4	5
24. How important to you is it that your child be self-confident?	1	2	3	4	5
25. How important to you is it that your child be sociable?	1	2	3	4	5
26. How important to you is it that your child be presentable?	1	2	3	4	5
27. How important to you is it that your child be tolerant?	1	2	3	4	5

Which are the three most important to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

The single most important one is: \_\_\_\_\_

Which are the three least important to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

The single least important is: \_\_\_\_\_