"RECOGNIZING THE UNRECOGNIZED" IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: UNDERSTANDING SINGLE WORKING

MOTHERS' ROLES IN THE EDUCATION OF THEIR ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: "Recognizing the unrecognized" in parental involvement: Understanding single working

mothers' role in the education of their elementary-aged children

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Parental involvement has been identified as a targeted strategy to improve the academic

achievement of children, and thus, educational reform policies and efforts have been created and

implemented within the schools in order to bridge the achievement gap. Most educational reform

efforts concerning parental involvement have focused on the involvement of parents from lower

socioeconomic status and various ethnic and racial groups, including single mothers across these

categories.   The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand how single working Black

mothers became involved in their children's education, the reasons why they were involved, and how

they constructed their identity and meaning of an involved parent in their children's education. In an

attempt to move beyond the traditional models of parental involvement that place heavy emphasis on

the presence of parents within the schools, this study aimed to recognize the efforts of mothers as they

relate to their children's overall growth and development within their homes and community in order to

reconceptualize the meaning of parental involvement.

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Chapter Five: Conclusions and Discussion

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

Educators, parents, government officials, and educational reform policymakers believe parental involvement is an essential component in promoting academic achievement in children's education. Legislators have instituted policies and reforms that mandate schools' efforts to involve parents in their children's education as a means to increase academic achievement through district-wide programs, many of which have targeted historically marginalized groups of individuals. However, despite the governmental reform policies and the vast amount of literature that has focused on parental involvement in children's education, some issues and questions have been left unaddressed. How do all individuals involved in the educational process (i.e. parents, teachers, administrators) define *involvement*? What activities constitute *involvement*, and what values are placed upon the various types of *involvement* by both parents and teachers in the context of educating the whole child? This interpretive qualitative study was an attempt to understand the actions and meanings placed on parental involvement by single working Black mothers whose children are enrolled in an elementary school.

Background of the Study

Prior to the common school era (1820-1860), parents were the primary individuals responsible for the education of a child. The sources of education encompassed the entire surroundings of the child's life, including, but not limited to, the role of the church and the

duties and activities required to maintain the household. Most learning occurred in the homes,

as mothers and fathers passed down values, manners, literacy, and vocational skills to their

offspring (Gaither, 2008). While the benefits of extending the education of a child outside of the

home through the establishment of public schooling cannot be dismissed, the role of education

in the life of the child shifted away from the home and community environments to the school,

and thus, the role of the parent as the primary provider of education was diminished. The

mantra of 'education is life' was removed and replaced with a 'schooling' mentality.

However, in the past 40 years of public education, calls have been set forth by

educational policies, scholars, and government officials to promote parental involvement in the

schools. Legislation has been passed to promote the involvement of parents in their children's

education. During the Clinton administration, precisely within the Goals 2000: Educate America

Act, funds were distributed to schools to address parental involvement, towards the

establishment and building of partnerships with parents in an effort to promote the social,

emotional, and academic growth of a child (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1993). Various

programs were also put into place in order to help develop the relationships with parents,

create stronger communication pathways, and provide opportunities for parents to have an

active role in their children's education. The passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 brought

forth other obligations upon K-12 schools that were intended to have a direct effect on the

means schools take in order to improve children's academic achievement.   The legislation also

mandated that schools have written parent involvement policies and programs. All schools

receiving Title I funds are "responsible for holding parent meetings to discuss parent

involvement strategies and for helping parents to better understand school standards,

assessments, and report cards" (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009, p.688). The act also requires schools to

conduct annual evaluations of parental involvement programs to determine the extent and potential barriers that prevent or hinder parents' participation (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The imposed mandates on schools have forced schools to reconsider how and in what ways parental involvement can be addressed and increased within their districts.

It is argued in the literature that parental involvement in K-12 has a direct impact on the growth and academic achievement on an individual child. Specifically, studies have shown the benefits to students whose parents are involved in their education in regard to higher achievement in specific content areas, greater aspirations, better attendance, fewer behavioral problems, and higher graduation rates (Epstein, & Voorhis, 2010; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002; Mo & Singh, 2008; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005).

The majority of research dealing with parental involvement builds upon the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), which approaches parental involvement from a perspective that aims to build relationships between teachers and parents. Bronfenbrenner (1979) developed a social ecological model that encompassed a larger context of society, which included interactions between the individual and her environment. His model entails five systems - microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem - with each system embedded within the other like a Matryoshka doll. Bronfenbrenner's work (1986, 1994), specifically that which deals with his social ecological model, has focused on the development of the child within three spheres – home life, other developmental contexts, and the connections between them. The attention of Bronfenbrenner's work has dealt with the relationships that are developed within the schools, such as parent-teacher relationships, in a child developmental context.

Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) parental involvement framework contains six categories, or types, of parental involvement in their children's education: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Although her framework involves the three overlapping spheres - community, school, and home - the emphasis of parental involvement deals primarily with the role of the parent and her engagement within the context of the school. A second traditional model of parental involvement was developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005), in which the focus of parental involvement was placed on reasons as to *why* parents become involved in their children's education through the context of parental motivation and life contexts. Again, like Epstein's model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model is concerned with understanding why parents become involved in their children's schooling and targets strategies to get parents involved in school-based activities

The categories within Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) parental involvement framework and the factors affecting parental involvement in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) model deal explicitly with the parent's role inside the school, requiring a *presence* to signify *involvement*. According to Auerbach (2007), the traditional models of parental involvement have "been socially constructed to privilege White, middle-class norms" (p. 251) and thus, parental involvement has been privileged to those able to be actively engaged in the activities taking place in the school. Reay (2008) has also classified the parental involvement discourse as a "white, middle-class monopoly" (p. 643). Those parents, particularly single mothers, lower socioeconomic status and/or working class individuals, are less likely to become involved as defined by teachers due to a number of reasons, including conflicting schedules and resources (Bloom, 2001). However, despite the inability to become involved and engaged in their

children's education through school-based activities, parents engage in other activities that oftentimes go unrecognized outside of the school (Auerbach, 2007), and therefore, Auerbach suggests, we need to "reconceptualize parents' roles in education" (p.251).

Parental involvement is conceived to be those actions of the parents that primarily occur inside the school, such as volunteering for school functions, participating in a PTA/PTO organization, or attending "Meet the Teacher" night (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Other literature that addresses the actions of parental involvement at home deals specifically with involvement in terms of helping with homework, communicating with the teacher, or motivational encouragement (Auerbach, 2007). While the activities identified as parental involvement that take place in the school have the potential to be active forms of involvement, the forms of involvement that take place in the home typically assume a passive role on the part of the parent, one that minimizes the engagement opportunities and voice of the parent in the involvement actions. An important component missing from much of the literature to date is a consideration of how and in what ways do parents outside of the "White, middle-class monopoly" (Reay, 2008, p.643), particularly single Black mothers, become *involved* in their children's education and how they make meaning of parental involvement? What forms of involvement are single mothers engaged in both in and out of the school setting, and what value, if any, do they place upon such involvement?

Study Purpose

This study was an attempt to explore what insights might be gained by moving beyond traditional models of parental involvement, such as Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) frameworks with a focus on involvement *within* the school towards a model that encompasses a reconceptualized expectation of parental

involvement, one that acknowledges the activities parents engage in outside of the context of the school and within the home and community environment that contributes to the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of the child. Specifically, this study sought to understand what single working Black mothers in one community do to be involved in their children's education, the value they personally place upon the actions, and how they constructed their identity and meaning of an involved parent in their children's education.

Research Questions

The research questions to be addressed in this study are as followed:

1.) How are single working Black mothers involved in their elementary school aged children's education and why?

2). How do single working Black mothers construct their meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education and why?

Significance of the Study

Within the literature, there have been many studies that identify the need for parents to be involved in their children's education and the resulting benefits of that involvement (Desimone, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006). However, to gain a better understanding of the ways in which *all* parents are currently involved in their children's education and how to strengthen those connections that allow parental involvement to occur, it is necessary to broaden the notion of parental involvement. Insights gained through this study of the actions and meanings attached to parental involvement by single working mothers will provide schools, administrators, teachers, and educational reformers the opportunity to better understand parental involvement beyond the White, middle-class monopoly. Schools may

thereby begin to identify a broader array of approaches to partnering with parents in their

children's education.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative inquiry was grounded in a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009),

which places significance on the lives and experiences of individuals who have historically been

marginalized. From the epistemological standpoint, a transformative paradigm recognizes the

social and historical 'situation' of knowledge, and that knowledge is neither absolute nor

relative but rather constructed within a context of powerful and privileged social forces and

relationships within society. Within the transformative paradigm, this study was also

approached through two theoretical perspectives – the critical and feminist lenses – which were

used to interpret the interactions with and experiences of the participants in the study. This

study utilized the critical perspective within the transformative paradigm, as described by

Mertens, (1999), by first recognizing the asymmetric power relations within parental

involvement, seeking ways to change the social inquiry into social action, and then beginning

the inquiry into broader questions of possible social inequities and social justice.

The second theoretical perspective to shape this study was the feminist perspective.

Feminists make sense of the world in a variety of ways, even conflicting at times with each

other, to their work and efforts in research. However, according to Esterberg (2002), all

feminists share in common an understanding that traditional research has not taken into

account the presence and experiences of women.   Olesen (2011) identifies the dominant theme

in feminist qualitative research as the issue of knowledge - "Whose knowledge? Where and

how obtained, by whom, from whom, and for what purposes?" (p. 129). Of the different

varieties of feminist theories, this particular study is drawing on the works and perspectives of

standpoint feminist theorists. Standpoint research recognizes that a 'universal' woman does not exist, and instead, embraces the idea of a situated woman surrounded by her experiences and knowledge specific to her place in society.

Finally, this study was framed within Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994) social ecological model, specifically within the mesosystem. The microsystems of a child's life involves the immediate environments within which a child lives and interacts, including the child's home, the school, and community-based organizations. The mesosystem encompasses the microsystem and focuses on the interactions and connections between the microsystems. Bronfenbrenner's work focuses on the development of an individual child within three spheres – home life, other developmental contexts, and the connections between them. Given that the study of parental involvement and the development of a child cannot occur in isolation, this study was framed at looking at those connections and interactions created on behalf of the mother for her child to effect positive growth and development within the child, and it was within this conceptual framework, that parental involvement was situated.

Researcher Position

As the researcher, I am a white 35-year old woman who was a former middle and high school science teacher in a public school. I neither had any direct connection to the participants in the study nor to the school district and community in which the participants and their children reside. I am also not a single working mother who has had a first-hand experience of managing a household and children without a support system. In many aspects of this research study, I have been positioned as an outsider in terms of race, socioeconomic status, marital status, and even on religious matters to some extent. I am, however, the oldest daughter of three to a single working mother, who I witnessed navigate systems of sexism in the social,

corporate, and educational realms of society over the course of many years. I am also a mother myself, who neither fits nor aspires to the ideal involved parent, but still manages to go to great lengths to educate my children. I have experienced barriers, both implicit and explicit, that prevents and/or hinders my participation in my own children's schooling as expected by administrators and teachers within the school, and in these regards, I am very much an insider within the research study.

Summary of Methodology

This study initially began as a pilot case study during the fall semester of 2012, involving five single working White mothers who have a child enrolled in an elementary school within one community. During that time, I conducted two interviews with each mother of approximately one hour, totaling ten interviews. The findings of the study included a mix of emerging themes, including a blurred line between parenting roles and the imposed expectations of parental involvement, and a sense of empowerment of the part of the mothers to enhance the whole child curriculum of the child by exposing their children to a variety of free-choice learning environments (Falk & Dierking, 2002) with a heavy emphasis on creative-based curriculum. In order to further explore and explain single working mothers' involvement in their elementary school aged children's education, I chose to continue the study utilizing the same research question, albeit, in a different community. The community within which the pilot study was conducted consisted of a fairly homogeneous population. In order to gain a broader perspective of parental involvement among single working mothers, I felt it was imperative to move to a community with a more diverse population base along both racial and socioeconomic status lines.

The continuation of the pilot study was a qualitative research design that utilized an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). Yin (2009) indicates a case study should be utilized and is the preferred method of choice when the research is attempting to discover "how" and "why" questions, when the researcher has little to no control over events, and when the researcher is dealing with a contemporary phenomenon within the context of real-life. The research questions posed for the current study specifically are 1). How are single working Black mothers involved in their elementary school aged children's education and why? and 2). How do single working Black mothers construct their meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education and why? Both questions sought to understand a complex phenomenon, parental involvement, at an in-depth level in order to construct a deeper description of parental involvement in children's education.

The selection of the participants involved in this study was purposive and through the process of snowballing by gaining access through a local community-based organization. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgment sampling, is the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Purposive sampling allows qualitative researchers to choose a case, a bounded system, according to the preferred characteristics being studied. This study sought to understand how single working Black mothers, as defined as those mothers who self-identify as 'single', Black, and who are employed in one full-time employment position, made sense of their experiences with being involved in their elementary school-aged children's education. Those individuals who fit within the stated parameters *and* could best add to the understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement were selected.

The study utilized qualitative methods, primarily in-depth interviews with six mothers and nonparticipant observations of interactions between the mothers and their children, the mothers and their children's teachers, the mothers and the directors of the local afterschool program, and the mothers and their pastors and other members in their faith-based organizations. Documents obtained from the mothers regarding communication between the mothers and the teachers, their children's schoolwork, updates on school events, and the school's website, which including parental involvement policies and guidelines, were also gathered for additional data.

General Assumptions

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding on how and why single working Black mothers become involved in their elementary-aged children's education and their construction of the meaning of their role of involvement. The focus on the meanings the mothers constructed on parental involvement in their children's education and the experiences they had within this particular role situated this study within the body of qualitative research, specifically case study methodology. All research contains general assumptions that must be recognized, and thus, there are assumptions within this qualitative inquiry design as well. It is assumed with qualitative inquiry, particularly within the constructionist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 2003), that there are multiple and dynamic realities among individuals and social groups in which qualitative research seek to understand. The research is process-oriented and -driven in order to collect data that not only precede theories, but also are rich, thick descriptions. The findings of the qualitative research, particularly with case studies, are not generalizable to a population. The goal of the research, however, is not to generalize the

findings, but rather to gain insight and an in-depth understanding of single working mothers and the meanings placed upon parental involvement in their children's education.

Organization of the Study

This research was organized into five chapters. Chapter one includes the problem statement, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, and a summary of the methodology. Chapter two is comprised of the literature review, which looks at the historical perspective of parental involvement, the current definitions and models that are shaping educational reform and policy, the proposed benefits of parental involvement, and the involvement of parents from historically marginalized individuals that currently go unrecognized from the traditional models of parental involvement. Chapter three describes the research methodology, including the theoretical framework, participant selection process, data collection and analysis procedures, limitations, measures of quality, and ethical considerations. Chapter four presents the findings of the study structured according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994) spheres of involvement in the home, school, and community. Finally, Chapter five includes a review of the study, conclusions of the study, and future research recommendations on parental involvement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Parental involvement has been a target strategy in educational reform policies and programs as a means to improve test scores and bridge the achievement gap. The picture of parental involvement has taken on characteristics and expectations typically associated with traditional White, middle-class parents leaving little to no space for the involvement activities of parents from different racial and ethnic groups and/or socioeconomic status (Auerbach, 2007; Reay, 2008). This literature review looks at the historical perspective of parental involvement, the current definitions and models of parental involvement, and the involvement of parents from various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic statuses, including single working mothers who may fall in many of the identifying categories.

Historical Perspective of Parental Involvement

The idea of parental involvement in a child's education has existed prior to the colonial period, during a time when tribal members – a child's family – served in the educating process of the individual. During a period in which everyone shared in similar values, beliefs, and even language, the entire tribe shared in the role and responsibility of helping the youth acquire

certain skills and gain understanding in the tribal heritage (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). The expectation of parents, as well as the extended family and tribal members, was to become involved in the children's education. Beginning in the colonial period (1607-1776) and continuing to present day, the concept of education has changed as well as the idea of parental involvement, especially in regard to who is responsible for the child's education. As the role of education shifted from that which could be learned in the home or community to that which could be obtained at 'school', the responsibility of the parent in a child's education, as well, shifted and transformed.

The movement of building a new nation was directly tied to educating the masses, and if society was to ensure its populace was educated, then the need to educate everyone to the same standards was necessary. An educational system embodied with democratic and meritocratic principles to produce an educated public no longer needed, or welcomed for that matter, the input of the parents. To Thomas Jefferson and other political leaders, "The education required for participation and leadership in the new American social order was far too important to be left to chance, parental whim, or restricted to a traditional elite" (Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p.84). The idea of creating and moving a public educational system into the lives of the youth resulted in the movement of the parent out of the child's educational life, and to some extent, as Spring (1994) has noted, an entire move to isolate the child from the possibility of parental influences.

During the Progressive Era, a pivotal time of change for the American culture, major political, economic and social changes took place through mass immigration and industrialization. According to Tozer, Senese, and Violas (2006), the "new American" (p.90) no longer resembled that of Western Europe, but rather transformed into that of Asian and

southern and eastern European. The new immigrants were viewed as inferior to the old

immigrants; inferior in terms of intellectual, financial, and even moral standards. The experts

believed that the only way to ensure a more educated populace -a more American populace-

was to remove the children from their homes, minimizing the children's exposure to their

parents' belief and value systems.   The idea of controlling a child's exposure to his/her home

environment was catalyzed by deficit thinking based on the idea that families, particularly those

of low socioeconomic status, of color or single-parent families, have internal defects that thwart

the learning process of their children (Valencia, 2010). Rather than analyzing the institutional

structures that are possibly inhibiting the learning process, deficit thinking tends to blame the

children and the families. As suggested by Gollnick and Chinn (2013), Oakes (2005), and Rury

(2009), many of the ideas surrounding deficit thinking theories began during the Progressive

period; however, the thoughts have carried through into today's culture, permeating many of

our institutions, including the schools.

It was not until the educational reforms within the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act of 1965, specifically Title I, when ideas of involving parents in their children's education were

initiated. By targeting children from low socioeconomic or 'at-risk' homes and their parents, it

was hoped that the achievement gap between lower and middle-class students would be

diminished. Involving parents in their children's education began to pick up momentum during

the Reagan administration and the release of the National Commission on Excellence in

Education, *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983 when direct links were made to improving student

achievement scores on standardized tests through the involvement of a parent (Seginer, 2006).

Throughout the reports, it is unclear as to what parental involvement entails and how schools

are to create programs to involve parents; however, it is evident that the idea of parental

involvement being associated directly to a student's achievement scores continued to be made.

From the Clinton administration through the most recent legislation of the No Child Left

Behind Act, the drive behind the educational reform efforts has continued to link parental

involvement to standardized testing scores. Funds have been made available for schools to

create and implement programs that promote involvement as a form of partnership, bridging

the gap that exists between schools and homes. Although the acts call for the involvement of

parents, they do so with the ideas of deficit theory laced throughout, as Auerbach (2007) has

noted, by claiming to *train* parents and *provide them* with the skills necessary to ensure parents

are able to assist with their children's education.   Reay (2008) claims the private sphere of the

home has become less private and more public with each additional educational reform policy,

blurring the boundary lines between home and school. Although educational policy is directed

at the schools and what schools need to strive for in an effort to increase academic

achievement, legislation also has a rippling effect in the homes as well. The schools, then, as

Standing (1999) claims, infringe on the parents' time, specifically mothers, by expecting school

work to be accomplished during after school hours. Past and recent policies, programs, and

literature dealing with parental involvement, either explicitly or implicitly, intrude on the home

sphere in the vein of parental involvement.

Existing Models in Parental Involvement

The majority of the literature addressing parental involvement is primarily based on the

theories developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986), which deals with the various aspects of

human development, and through the works of Epstein (1990, 1995, 2011) and Hoover-

Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005). In order to gain a more nuanced view of how

parental involvement is conceived and employed in policy and practice, it is important to understand the underlying theories upon which the prominent models of parental involvement are based.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994) theory of spheres of development has been heavily emphasized in studies dealing with parent-teacher relationships, claiming that human development occurs in a variety of settings. The social ecological model of development consists of five embedded spheres. The microsystem is the innermost sphere encompassing the child, her family, neighborhood, and school; essentially any system or structure with which the child has immediate and direct contact to build and maintain relationships and interactions. Encircling the microsystem is the mesosystem, which provides the connections between the various structures of the child's microsystem. The third layer of Bronfenbrenner's model is the exosystem. The exosystem outlines the larger social system in which the child may not have direct contact with some of the structures within the exosystem, however, the structures may have an indirect effect on the child's development. Systems and structures within the exosystem may include district-wide administration, health agencies, or the parent's employers. The fourth layer of the system is the macrosystem, which not only includes the other systems, but also entails the cultural values, customs, and laws of the larger society, and finally the chronosystem is the outermost layer of the model to merely illustrate that the others systems interact and shift within the space of time.

Within Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994) mesosystem are the three components of Bronfenbrenner's developmental theory – home life, other developmental contexts such as the school, and the links between them - are each an embedded aspect of the human development

model. Bronfenbrenner's home aspect of the model involves activities that constituent basic

requirements - food, clothing, and shelter - parents provide to help children develop.

Bronfenbrenner (1994) also claims the quality of the interactions within the home aspect,

primarily the quality of mother-infant interaction, "emerges as the most powerful predictor of

developmental outcome" (p. 38) in a child. School is identified as the other developmental

context and is perceived to be an environment that provides children with various activities and

opportunities to continue development. The link between the two, the third component of

Bronfenbrenner's theory, bridges the home-school spheres, potentially symbolizing the

partnership and collaboration of parents and teachers towards the promotion of human

development in children (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). The interactions and the symbolical bridge

between the home and school systems has contributed significantly to the discourse of parental

involvement and corresponding models. One such prominent model is Epstein's Model of

Parental Involvement.

Epstein's model of parental involvement.

Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) work on parental involvement builds on Bronfenbrenner's

theory of human ecological developmental model, with a particular focus on the microsystems

and macrosystems of the developing child. Epstein, specifically, looks at the overall 'overlapping

of spheres of influence,' in which the spheres are the contexts of family, school, and community

with the student embedded within the center of all spheres. All three spheres, according to

Epstein, are interconnected, and through these connections and collaborations between the

school, families, and communities, partnerships are developed, sustained, and strengthened to

ensure academic success for students.

Epstein (1995, 1997, 2011) identifies six different types of parental involvement;

parenting at home, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and

collaborating with the community. The model, which incorporates the six different types of

parental involvement, is presented in a way that directly attempts to aid schools in the design

process of parental involvement policies and programs. Based on the needs of a school in terms

of parental involvement, Epstein's model explains how a particular type of involvement can

produce results that best target the needs of the school. "The success of a school's partnership

program to affect student achievement may depend on the degree to which the activities that

are implemented to meet serious challenges…" (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005, p. 197). The model

does not create a hierarchical relationship among the various types, but rather the types of

parental involvement have equal importance placed upon each one and serve different

purposes with varying expected results for the schools. The emphasis of involvement within the

continuum – moving from Type 1 to Type 6 – moves away from the home and towards the

community serving to bridge the spheres of family, school, and community (Barge & Loges,

2003).

Briefly, Epstein's (2011) six types of involvement are:

Type 1: Parenting – helping all families understand child and adolescent development

and establishing home environments that support children as students

Type 2: Communicating – designing and conducting effective forms of two-way

communications about school programs and children's progress

Type 3: Volunteering – recruiting and organizing help and support at school, home, or in

other locations to support the school and students' activities

Type 4: Learning at Home – providing information and ideas to families about how to

help students with homework and curriculum-related activities and decisions

Type 5: Decision Making – having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives

and leaders on school committees and obtaining input from all parents on

school decisions

Type 6: Collaborating with the Community – identifying and integrating resources and

services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students and

their families, and organizing activities to benefit the community and increase

students' learning opportunities (p.46-47).

Within the 'parenting' type of involvement, the focus and role of the parent deals with

helping families understand adolescent development and create home environments that foster

learning. Some examples Epstein (2011) provides within the 'parenting' category include

workshops for parents on health issues, peer pressure, drug use, and parenting and child rearing

practices. Such information is important for parents to know in relation to the development of

their children; however, these types are just one aspect of involvement within the many

possibilities embedded in 'parenting.'

The second type of involvement in Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) framework is

communicating. The idea of involving parents through communication about their children's

progress centers on designing effective lines of communication from the home to the school,

and vice versa. Examples of communication involvement include scheduling parent-teacher

conferences, providing language translators, and offering weekly or monthly updates of student

progress (Epstein, 2011, p.395).

Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) third type of involvement is volunteering, which aims to recruit and organize parent help and support within the school. Sample volunteering practices schools can utilize are providing school and classroom volunteer programs to allow parents to help teachers and allow parents to volunteer in a shared community family center created through the school. Encouraging parents to volunteer is seen as a means to help build relationships among the parents and to improve the academics in the classroom (Epstein, 2008).

The fourth type of involvement within Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) model takes place outside of the context of school - the 'learning at home' category - and primarily deals with motivational strategies parents can use to motivate children in school and assignments prepared by the child's teacher that promote the opportunity for parents and children to work together. Teachers play an important role with this type of involvement, because they are in charge of schedule and content of the homework and are the key figures to encouraging parent participation in the learning process.

Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) fifth type of involvement – decision making – involves including parents in school decisions on curriculum, safety, and leadership programs, and developing parents into parent leaders and representatives. Schools can engage parents in decision making roles through district-level and community-level committees and through active PTA/PTO organizations and advisory councils.

Finally, the sixth type of involvement deals with collaborating with the community. Epstein (2011) suggests that schools find the means to identify and integrate community resources and services into the school in order to strengthen programs that involve families and their children. Sample practices include providing families with information on summer

programs, recreational and social support services, and other community-based organizations

that promote the growth and development of the child.

Epstein's types of parental involvement tend to favor 'traditional' forms of parental

involvement, primarily those activities that involve a parent's presence within the school

performing duties designated by the school or the teacher to be beneficial to the student. The

intent behind the model is to focus on the work parents do or can do in the school or at home

that strictly align with the goals of the school. Epstein's model recognizes the role of the parent

within the home environment as a vital force in the development of the child and proposes ways

in which schools can include parents in the governance aspect of school policy development.

Epstein's model also places some of the responsibilities on the schools, shifting the total

responsibilities off the shoulders of the parents, and begins to analyze the institutional practices

that can occur in order to increase parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of parental involvement.

The other model that is prevalent within the parental involvement literature is Hoover-

Dempsey & Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) model. Through hierarchical relationships and levels,

the model provides a framework to examine predictors of parental involvement. The model is

useful to gain an understanding as to *why* parents become involved and their perspectives on

their roles and the actions they should take for their children. The original model identified two

major predictors of parental involvement: parental motivational beliefs and contextual

invitations. Parental motivational beliefs included parental role construction, the degree to

which parents believe becoming involved is a part of their responsibility as a parent to the child,

and parental self-efficacy, the level of confidence on the part of the parent in their ability to

help their children in school (Hoover-Dempsey, 1995, 1997). Contextual invitations refer to

general opportunities for parental involvement made available and made known to the parent either by the school or the child. In the revised model (2005), a third source of motivation for a parent to become involved in their children's education, life context variables. Life context variables deal specifically with the parent's skills and knowledge to become involved as well as their time and energy they are willing and able to become involved (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011).

Through the various levels, the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's Model (1995, 1997, 2005) is said to have a direct effect on student achievement. Levels one and two, those dealing specifically with the why and how parents become involved, is demonstrated to have an effect on the children's perceptions of parental involvement (level three), which is claimed to influence the children's attributes that lead to academic outcomes (level four), which leads to student achievement (level five). The ultimate goal of the model is student achievement, which is, of course, one of the reasons it plays such a prominent role in the parental involvement literature.

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) work is based on an extensive amount of research over the course of the past few decades, and has made contributions in bridging the home and school spheres. However, despite the positive effort on their part of developing a strong theoretical framework to determine motivational factors in parental involvement, there are weaknesses within the model. Like many other mainstream approaches to parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler take a conventional middle-class norm approach to the expectations to parental involvement, basing their manners of involvement in terms of parents reinforcing school-related behaviors, which may not be practical expectations of parents who have significant life context variables that create obstacles and barriers to such involvement. Auerbach (2007) claims that the model "...assumes a level playing field of

voluntary parent action, understating the constraints of class, race, culture, and school structure

on what they term the involvement choices…"(p. 225). The model needs to be adapted if

applied to marginalized groups of individuals, including single working mothers.

Despite the many benefits to the models, even in relation to student achievement

(Lopez & Donovan, 2009), the models fail to allow parents to actually have a voice within the

school by truly empowering parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 2004). Further the models still only

address traditional ideas of parental involvement, requiring the parent to be present *within* the

school – a "school-centric" presence (Lawson, 2003), utilizing resources, such as time and/or

money, to volunteer, attend school programs, or donate classroom materials. While both

models have provided a foundation to ideas on bridging schools and homes, and acknowledge

the responsibility of parental involvement as that of a "shared" responsibility between parents

and schools rather than solely placing the responsibility with the parents (Williams & Sanchez,

2012), both models continue to stress the importance of the parental role as a supporting

cooperative role and/or the parent maintaining a 'presence' within the school. Kohl, Lengua,

and McMahon (2000) claim the focus of the models is on school-initiated rather than parent-

initiated behaviors. A growing body of scholarship is showing that for parents who do not quite

fit middle-class norms, specifically parents of single family homes, the working poor, diverse

races and ethnic groups, and even families in which English is not the primary language,

modifications and adaptations to the current models need to be considered in order to

recognize these families efforts and engagements as parental involvement (e.g., Auerbach,

2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

Defining Parental Involvement

The discourse of parental involvement entails a wide range of definitions and expectations, and demonstrates a lack of agreement among scholars, policymakers, and teachers; however, the literature tends to be in agreement in terms of the benefits parental involvement has on student's academic achievement (Epstein & Voorhis, 2010; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2005; Mo & Singh, 2008; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). The majority of the literature that has a direct effect on school programs tends to focus on parental involvement in a traditional manner; focusing on the activities parents engage in at the school and at home that are directly linked to the activities taking place at school.

The idea of parental involvement surrounding the schools and educational policies tends to embrace what Auerbach (2007) identifies as a 'white middle-class' ideal. The defining attributes of parental involvement - those that are recognized by members of the educational field - are those that entail and require parents to communicate with teachers, volunteer to chaperone field trips, attend programs at the school, such as Back to School (Meet the Teacher) nights (Lopez & Donovan, 2009) and parent-teacher conferences, and even requires parents to supply snacks and treats for the classroom (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Outside of the school, activities expected to take place in the home, identified in the models as home-based parental involvement, comprise of merely ensuring completion of or helping children with their homework. These are just a few of the examples deemed acceptable as parental involvement in the schools, and they assume that all families have the means to cooperate with such expectations. The models assume that at least one parent, typically the responsibility of the mother (Bloom, 2001), either stays at home or is employed in a position that allows flexibility in her work schedule to attend all events. The models also assume all parents have access to transportation and daycare in order to attend school-sponsored events. According to Bower

and Griffin (2011), the mainstream literature and parental involvement models require parents

to invest resources - time, money, and energy - in order to become *actively* involved in their

children's education, all of which may be in short supply on the part of the majority of our

parents with children in the school systems.

Teachers and administrators place a high priority on and emphasize parental

involvement that is school-based; that is engagement and interactions that take place within the

school or activities that may take place at home that align with the events taking place in the

school. Pena (2000) claims that administrators and teachers have more respect for parents who

are involved in the school because the parents' presence within the school signifies an increase

support of the teachers, school administrators, and the school's programs.   As required by

legislation, such as No Child Left Behind, schools are required to create and implement

programs that focus on involving parents (No Child Left Behind, 2001), many of which have been

geared towards either increasing involvement at the school in events similar to 'Family Math

Nights (Lopez & Donovan, 2009), or involving the parent in activities at home through what

Townsend (2010) defines as 'learning projects'. The programs have taken various forms;

however, many take on a deficit mentality towards the parents by attempting to 'train' or

'teach' the parents the 'right' way to practice reading and math for reasons as Auerbach and

Collier (2012), Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005) and Larrotta & Yamamura (2011) claim are

geared towards increasing the standardized test scores of the children of these parents. Those

parents that do not or cannot attend organized events at school are oftentimes viewed as

apathetic or not involved in their children's education (Valencia & Black, 2002). "Just as these

parents' nontraditional strategies are often invisible to schools, so too are their roles largely

outside the partnership model" (Auerbach, 2007, p.251). Anything that a parent engages in,

other than that identified as parental involvement by the schools or models, simply goes unrecognized, and deficit thinking and myths continue to be perpetuated within the schools.

The idea of parental involvement within mainstream schools and rhetoric is a concept assumed to be commonly understood - an empty signifier (Chandler, 2007). Rather than recognizing parental involvement as a socially constructed phenomenon, schools unconsciously expect that all concerned within the boundaries of school know what is meant by parent involvement, parental engagement, and even the parent-school 'partnership'. The parental involvement models, the expectations of the school and teachers, and even the educational policies intended to *help* parents become involved assume that all parents have an equal amount of Bourdieu's (2007) capital – social, cultural, and economic – *and* are fully aware of how and when to activate and/or convert each type within the educational institution.

Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999) have demonstrated that parents of higher socioeconomic status often play a more active role in their children's education - typically in the form of managing and intervening on the part of their children- 'activating' their capital to promote personal values and goals for their children. Lower socioeconomic status parents tend to play a more 'hands-off' role, which tends to be in the form of support and/or encouragement for their children's education. In a study analyzing parent-teacher conferences and the interactions between teachers and parents of various socioeconomic status, Weininger & Lareau (2003), found that middle-class parents tended to talk more, controlling the conversations, challenging the pedagogical decisions of the teacher, and advocating for their children more than the lower socioeconomic status, suggesting that the interactions that take place between parents and teachers signify the amount of capital each class brings to the table and how various classes activate the capital to secure advantages to their children.

According to Bourdieu's (2007) theory, all individuals within society have social and cultural capital to invest or activate in a variety of social setting; however, what happens in the event that their form of social and cultural capital is not recognized or accepted? What shape does social and cultural capital take, through the concept of parental involvement, for historically marginalized individuals, specifically single working mothers?

Race and ethnicity considerations.

As the definitions of parental involvement vary greatly among scholars, policymakers, and teachers, the idea of parental involvement also fluctuates greatly among parents of different racial and ethnic groups. There is a wide range of beliefs in the roles and responsibilities the schools are expected to uphold and those in which the parents should assume. Despite Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, and Mason's (2008) findings that indicated all parents report a desire to be involved in their children's education within the school, some studies indicate that a small minority of parents, particularly African American families, preferred a clear distinction between the roles of the parents and those of the school. In a study conducted by Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001), 48 percent of African American parents surveyed expressed that the school is in charge of the academic aspect of a child and the parents should be responsible solely for the child's moral education. Thus, extremes of beliefs and values need to be considered when attempting to involve parents in strategies that target ways to improve children's academic success. Standing (1999) also found that some single mothers, primarily of African American descent, felt that school time ends when school is released and should not carry into the home environment. Despite the differences in beliefs and values expressed in these studies, the majority of literature expresses an active involvement

among parents of diverse racial and ethnic groups in their children's education, albeit in a different form from that which is the traditional view of parental involvement.

Particularly among Latino, migrant, and English as a second language families, parents have been shown to be heavily involved in the education of their children (Auerbach, 2007; Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 2004). Due to social and cultural barriers, including language barriers, these parents tend to avoid being present within the school and have a tendency to avoid communicating with the school unless in such cases when a translator, or what Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) call a 'cultural broker' was present. Their silence, oftentimes, is interpreted as apathetic or uninvolved in their children's education; however, these families tended to be involved in what Auerbach (2007) identifies as the behind-the-scene work of preparing children for success in the educational institution.

Auerbach (2007) conducted a case study with Latino parents to determine exactly how this historically marginalized group of individuals became involved in their children's education. Although there was a wide range of involvement among her sample, all of the Latino parents provided moral and motivational support for their children by speaking words of encouragement to their children's academic efforts, expressed high educational expectations, and even served as a model for why their children should value education. By serving as a 'negative example', the parents hoped their children would use education to advance in society rather than settling to work in the fields (Auerbach, 2007). Many of the Latino and migrant families were more apt to respect the role of the school and teacher. This 'trust' varied based on educational level; however, the majority of parents believed that the school and teachers were preparing their children in the best way needed to ensure future success. Due to this trust

factor, few parents actually contacted the school or questioned the school's authority in

decision making processes that involved their children.

Henry, Plunkett, and Sands (2011) discuss the importance and emphasis placed on

family connectedness within the Latino families sampled in their study. McClain (2010) found

that many of the parents tended to make sacrifices for their children in order for them to attend

a better school, or provided opportunities for them to focus on school work rather than

requiring them to work part-time or help with siblings. Many of the parents viewed school as

the children's *job* and they were expected to work hard 100 percent of the time at that specific

job (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Recognizing their own missed educational opportunities, many of

the parents tried to provide as much opportunity for their own children and hoped their own

children would seize the opportunity for academic growth (Auerbach, 2007). Lopez, Scribner,

and Mahitivanichcha (2001) found that many migrant families, lacking resources to become

involved by traditional means, sought to contribute to their children's academic growth through

nurturing parenting, providing the *basics* – food, clothing, and love – for the children, and by

transmitting cultural values. Many of the activities that take place in the homes of these

families are oftentimes unrecognized, are difficulty to measure, and even more difficult for

school to create programs to target, but nonetheless, important to consider in terms of factors

that contribute to a child's growth and educational achievement.

The literature specifically dealing with African American families and the roles parents

play in their children's education varied a bit from that which was described of Latino families;

however, there still was an emphasis on the family support system, as the case with many of the

Latino and migrant families. Fields-Smith (2007) describes that African American parents

accentuate the interactions and engagement opportunities extended to their children with their

families and their church. These parents, again, are involved in their children's education, taking a whole child approach, as Fields-Smith describes as the spiritual, social, and intellectual development, to educating their children through instilling values of respect, cooperation, and responsibility. Hill and Craft (2003) also found that the support for parental involvement was through home-based activities such as monitoring homework and arranging tutoring services. Maintaining the idea of educating the whole child, African American parents also were more apt than others to set clear and consistent behavior rules for their children and encouraged independence (Bower and Griffin, 2011).

The majority of Lareau's (1987, 1992, 2002) work with African American families and their involvement in their children's education has intersected both racial and socioeconomic status. However, in Lareau and McNamara-Horvat's (1999) work dealing with social capital and black families, they found that whites typically were able to navigate and be more cooperative, in terms of parental involvement, more so than black families.   Based on the institutional standards of the schools, teachers expressed a positive relationship with parents who were viewed as cooperative and supportive of the decisions made by the schools. The white parents, more often than the black parents within the study, were seen as active and supportive even in the event of expressing discontent with a school's decision. The approach to intervene on behalf of their children taken by the African American parents was seen as undermining authority rather than being a supportive parent. Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999) describe situations as this as merely a difference in the activation of capital. They explain,

"…one needs to look at the context in which the capital is situated, the efforts by individuals to activate their capital, the skill with which individuals activate their capital, and the institutional response to the activation" (p.38).

African American parents accept the responsibility of being involved in their children's

education, and at times take on the stance that they need to stand up for their children

(Weininger & Lareau, 2003). As the case with other forms of involvement among parents of

different racial and ethnic groups, this form of involvement among some African American

parents is going unrecognized, or is rather, delegitimized as parental involvement in their

children's education.

Schools become a 'discontinuous process' (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) when a student from

different cultural or ethnic groups with varying beliefs and values (and capital) enters a

traditional white middle-class approach to policies and programs. In a society in which the

minority is becoming the majority, an achievement gap among the white children and minority

children is ever-increasing, and minority groups are still overrepresented as dropouts and

underrepresented as college students, it would seem that schools must adapt their approach to

parental involvement. If schools are to continue in their effort to use parental involvement as a

strategy to increase student achievement scores, then it is imperative for teachers and

administrators to consider the cultural capital various racial and ethnic groups bring in their

efforts to be involved in their children's education.

Socioeconomic status considerations.

As evident in Lareau's studies (1987, 1992, 2002), the lines between race and

socioeconomic status oftentimes get blurred; however those member of society in the lower

socioeconomic status, the "other America" (Harrington, 1997), are oftentimes not only

marginalized, but downright invisible within our society, and specifically within our middle-class

value-laden schools. Many individuals within the lower socioeconomic status face issues of

merely daily survival, lack transportation, and lack the financial means to be involved in the

schools in any form at all. Williams and Sanchez (2010) found that parents belonging to the

lower socioeconomic status and/or receiving governmental assistance are oftentimes

immediately viewed as "unconcerned parents" who are unemployed, have substance abuse

problems, and view the school as a babysitting service. Such perceptions placed upon

individuals, whether consciously or unconsciously, create additional barriers to prevent

involvement within the school. However, like many other parents, Lopez (2001) found parents

living in poverty and those within the lower SES, still value education and express high

educational aspirations for their children.

Bower & Griffin (2011) indicate that parents of lower socioeconomic status rarely

engage in activities that take place in the school beyond activities that involve attending school-

sponsored programs and parent teacher conferences. Rather their engagement in their

children's education typically takes on a more informal, less structured manner. Like the Latino

families in Auerbach's (2007) study, these parents assume the role of providing support at home

through motivational and encouragement means and place a great amount of trust in the

schools (Vincent & Ball, 2006; Vincent & Martin, 2000, 2002). Oftentimes, parents are hesitant

or simply refuse to engage in activities within the school, because they feel that school meetings

and functions, such as parent forums, are not for 'people like us' (Vincent, 2001). Due to a

variety of barriers and obstacles that exist, parents living in poverty or within the lower

socioeconomic status view school and home as two different spheres.

Despite their reluctance to become involved *in* the school, research indicates low-

income parents acknowledge their responsibility of being involved in their children's education.

Their involvement typically includes providing the basic necessities for the children, such as love,

food, a home, and safety (Lareau, 2002). Lareau also found parents of lower socioeconomic

status instilling in their children particular values and expectations, including respect for familial

ties and authority figures. Due to a lack of financial means, lower socioeconomic status families

typically do not extend opportunities for children to engage in a variety of extra-curricular

activities as the case with high socioeconomic status parents; however, children are still exposed

to a variety of neighborhood and community-based activities that contribute to the "natural

growth" of the child (Lareau, 2002, p. 748).

Even though many parents recognize their own weaknesses to help their children

academically, Cousins and Mickelson (2011) claim that many low-income parents still attempt to

help their children with homework or, at a minimum, ensure it is complete. Delgado-Gaitan

(1991) also found that many low-income parents try to engage in learning activities with their

children when provided the opportunity. Many of the parents claim the opportunities present a

chance to strengthen relationships with their children and to learn something new. As

demonstrated and addressed in the work of Delgado-Gaitan (2004), Auerbach (2007), Warren et

al. (2009), and Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) schools need to recognize the obstacles and

barriers, that hinder or prevent parents of different cultural, racial, and lower socioeconomic

status groups from becoming involved, by providing realistic opportunities for parents to

become engaged and/or recognizing the efforts they currently put into their children's

education.

Considerations for single working mothers.

It is important to consider the implications of parental involvement for single working

mothers. Falling into either or both of the categories mentioned above, single working mothers

tend to face several aspects of marginalization within society. As parental involvement has been

constructed as a target strategy in efforts to increase standardized test scores to bridge the

achievement gap, the policies of parental involvement are also seen as a means to solve societal

problems as well. As a historically marginalized group of individuals, single working mothers are

positioned within a discourse that views them as the cause of a societal breakdown in which

they are also expected to correct through 'good mothering' (Bloom, 2001).

When educational policies and school reform efforts place emphasis on parental

involvement in children's education, the idea of 'parent' insinuates 'mother' whether in a single

or intact family structure. Standing (1999) explains,

> "The ungendered rhetoric of parental responsibility and involvement hides the
>
> gendered nature of the debate: that it is women who 'parent'. It is primarily mothers
>
> who are involved in the day-to-day work of their children's schooling, regardless of their
>
> marital situation…" (p. 481).

Single working mothers are faced with not only providing economically for their families, but

also responsible to be involved in their children's education, and as indicated throughout this

review, in a way that aligns with the traditional perspective and expectations of parental

involvement in schools. Bloom also discusses the expectations on mothers' interactions in and

with schools in the parental involvement discourse, and highlights the tensions mothers face

with being present in a career while simultaneously attempting to be present in their children's

educational lives.

The range of activities in which single mothers engage depends largely on

socioeconomic status and race and ethnicity, spanning the continuum of involvement activities.

Oftentimes their involvement takes on the "complex blend of cheerleading and protectiveness"

(Auerbach, 2007, p.270) and is demonstrated through close communication and strong

emotional ties. Several single mothers simply view 'education' as their job, and their

involvement in their children's schooling as a requirement to be a good mother (Standing, 1999). Faced with the constraints of resources, taken in the form of time, money, energy, and capital, the perceptions of deficit parenting and home environments, the incongruent involvement expectations, and a discourse that stigmatizes them as the breakdown in society's morals, single working mothers still manage to become involved in their children's education; however, it appears that little exists within the parental involvement literature that solely focuses on the efforts of single working mothers, whose efforts oftentimes fall outside the traditional measures of parental participation and tend to go unrecognized.

Conclusion

It is evident through the current literature that meanings contained in the concept of parental involvement vary among all groups of individuals and need to be unpacked for further dialogue. Little is known specifically in regards to single working mothers and their involvement in their children's education, and most of the parental involvement literature and models consider intact families' perspectives along diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic status groups. In order to extend parental involvement models beyond merely recognizing the traditional activities typically associated with White, middle-class parents to acknowledging the wide range of efforts on the part of all individuals, an in-depth understanding must be gained on how diverse groups of individuals, specifically single working Black mothers, make meaning and navigate parental involvement and the corresponding policies and programs within our educational systems. If the proposed benefits of parental involvement have a relationship on the academic achievement of students, we need to consider the various practices and efforts of

all members of society to develop an educational system that truly aims to provide all children a

meaningful education. This study is an attempt to do just that.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Designed as an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), this qualitative inquiry was an

effort to seek understanding of how single working Black mothers in one community become

involved in their children's education, the reasons why they become involved, and how they

construct meaning of becoming engaged in their children's education. Specifically, this study

was an attempt to address 1). How are single working Black mothers involved in their

elementary school aged children's education and why? and 2). How do single working Black

mothers construct their meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education

and why? Through the use of semi-structured open-ended interviews, nonparticipant

observations, and document analysis, an in-depth perspective on the unique real-life context

and interactions of mothers and their children as they engage in the 'involvement' of their

children's education was gained.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative inquiry was grounded on a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009),

which places significance on the lives and experiences of individuals who have historically been

marginalized. From the epistemological standpoint, a transformative paradigm recognizes the

social and historical 'situation' of knowledge, and that knowledge is neither absolute nor

relative but rather constructed within a context of powerful and privileged social forces and

relationships within society.

According to Creswell (2013), the transformative paradigm emerged partly out of the

need to advocate for individuals and evoke social change. Post-positivists tended to impose

theories and structures that failed to take into consideration commonly marginalized groups,

and the constructivist, although recognizing that meaning was constructed socially, failed to

recognize issues of power and to advocate for the participants.

The features of the transformative paradigm typically involve participatory action

research by allowing marginalized individuals to play a collaborative part in designing the

questions, collecting the data, and even shaping the final research project (Creswell, 2008). In

addition, the overall goal of transformative research is to create an action agenda for reform or

a specific plan for addressing the injustices of the marginalized group.

However, due to time and resources, this particular study maintained the

transformative 'spirit', as suggested by Kemmis (2006), but was not approached as a

participatory action study. Mertens (2009) notes many studies can be transformative even if

approached as informative. She explains, "If the goal of a descriptive research and evaluation is to provide a picture of current conditions, then that exercise in itself can be the impetus for transformational change" (p. 146). This study, then, was a descriptive inquiry in order to get an overview of parental involvement in children's education for single working mothers as a starting point to affect future change in the educational policy realm.

Approaching the study from as a transformative paradigm places principle demands on the researcher and how she positions herself with the participants. It is of utmost importance to avoid further marginalization with the participants, and therefore, the researcher must adopt the role of a learner within *their* community. The researcher must also situate herself as "other" and question her own identity and privileged position within society (De Jesus and Lykes, 2004). Mertens (1999) cautions that researchers need to consider who they are excluding and who they are including in their efforts to empower individuals. Researchers are still 'situated' within their own perspective, and therefore, must examine the inclusiveness of the samples and the barriers erected to exclude others. From the epistemological and methodological, and in my opinion ethical, standpoints within the transformative paradigm, it was paramount for me, and all researchers, to avoid deficit thinking and understand culture through the recognition of my own privileged position in society and through my efforts to advocate *with* those members of society who have been identified as marginalized.

Theoretical Perspectives

In qualitative inquiry, it is known that researchers as well as the participants are objects of study, which means that objectivity is impossible to achieve. Qualitative researchers do not attempt to suppress their feelings and opinions in the research process. In fact, it is oftentimes said that qualitative researchers have a vested interest in what they study. Fully acknowledging

interests and priorities, qualitative researchers understand that one's paradigm – worldview –

shapes the methodological choices of the research design and the relationships one 'sees' in the

data (Esterberg, 2002).

Mertens (2009) specifies particular theories as commensurate with a transformative

paradigm, and this study utilized two of these - feminist and critical - as lenses to interpret the

interactions with and experiences of the participants of the study. Critical social research seeks

insight into society in order to help individuals that may be constrained by oppressive

conditions, and ultimately, work toward human emancipation. The perspective requires the

researcher to scrutinize the underlying mechanisms, the ruling relations as identified by Smith

(1987) that account for social inequities. Once identified, the work then entails moving toward

the empowerment of those with less power. Those with 'less power' can include a number of

individuals, and therefore, the critical perspective tries to interconnect the many faces of

oppression (Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg, 2011). In general, the works of critical theorists

have translated into simply criticism, a focus on the negative, without action (Denzin & Lincoln,

2011; Mertens, 1999, 2009); however, it is important to note that this study was an attempt to

be critical by confronting the injustices of a particular public sphere, the educational arena, in

order to empower individuals.

In order to enrich the potential of current theories of parental involvement that directly

affect educational reform and policies, it is necessary to question the implicit definitions and

expectations of parental involvement and seek to bring about change *for and with* those

individuals that have been pushed to the parameters of society.

The second theoretical perspective to shape this study was the feminist perspective.

Feminists make sense of the world in a variety of ways, even conflicting at times with each

other, to their work and efforts in research. However, all feminist share in common an understanding that traditional research has not taken into account the presence and experiences of women (Esterberg, 2002).

Of the different varieties of feminist theories, this particular study drew on the works and perspectives of standpoint feminist theorists. Standpoint research recognizes that a universal woman does not exist, and instead, embraces the idea of a situated woman surrounded by her experiences and knowledge specific to her place in society. Rather than rejecting the position of "the other," Tong (1998) claims that it should be embraced claiming,

> "…women's otherness enables individual women to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and practices that the dominant male culture seeks to impose on everyone, particularly those who live on its periphery. Thus, otherness, for all of its associations with being excluded…has its advantages" (7).

Being a woman conducting research with other women did not necessarily imply that I was an 'insider.' I am still a member of the privileged white middle class individual attempting to understand the experiences of single working Black mothers with young children merely from the standpoint of the daughter of a single working mother and a mother myself. I was aware of and recognized my past and present position, and rather than refusing to put it aside, I used my experiences and 'bodily existence' as a starting point for inquiry (DeVault, 1999). The personal is political, as Kleinman (2007) reiterates the feminist adage, and if personal experience is indeed tied to power relationships, as accepted by feminist and critical theorists, then "…it is important to not only pay attention to what participants think and do, but also what they feel" (p. 65).

Many standpoint feminist theorists, such as Hartsock (1987), Hill-Collins (1986, 2008), and Smith (2005), have claimed that to truly understand particular phenomena for marginalized

members of society, researchers need to begin from the standpoint of those individuals. The
need to gather and understand different perspectives of all individuals is necessary to transform
social inequities and social injustices, which ultimately will benefit all of society (Mertens, 2009).
This study was an attempt to stand in the position of single working Black mothers and
recognize what they do to become involved in their children's education.

Despite the intent and purposes of this study - to transform the lives of single working
Black mothers and their efforts of involvement in their children's education through changes in
policy, and to provide a space for their voices to be heard - it is important to recognize, as a
feminist researcher, Freire's (2000) assertion that an individual cannot liberate another
individual; rather people, together, can help liberate one another.

Situated within the transformative paradigm and the feminist and critical theoretical
perspectives, this study was also framed according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994)
social ecological model. Since the investigation focuses strictly on the parents interactions and
involvement as it relates to the child's development and the changing nature of the concept of
education to signify that which takes place in the school, this study relied on Bronfenbrenner's
definition of development to encompass the concept of education. Bronfenbrenner (1979)
states,

> "Human development tis the process through with the growing person acquires a more
> extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and
> becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of,
> sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in
> form and content" (p.27)

The choice to utilize Bronfenbrenner's ecological model allowed for a focus on the relationship and interaction aspect of the mothers and their children. Other ecological models exists, including Epstein's model of three overlapping circles – the family, school, and community – on the development of children as well as Waddock (1995) suggests a six-sided ecological model with a network of agencies. However, most ecological models focus on the measures the school can take to improve rather than focusing on the development of the child. Bronfenner's social ecological theory places the child in the center, which ultimately is the goal of the involvement of parents.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1994) proposed that a child is surrounded by layers of relationships. The most inner layer, the microsystem, consists of various settings within which the child is in direct contact with significant people developing and maintaining relationships that have a direct effect on her development. People within a child's inner layer are teachers, friends, parents, other family members, and community leaders. The mesosystem contains all of the microsystems of a child's life, and specifically focuses on the connections created between microsystems as it relates to the child's education. Beyond the mesosystem is the exosystem, which Bronfenbrenner claims has an indirect effect on the child. Systems within the exosystem include examples such as the parent's employer or district-level school administrators. The macrosystem, which includes the cultural and economic conditions of society, encompasses the exosystem, and finally, the chronosystem, is the outermost layer, that deals specifically with time. Parental involvement is a complex phenomenon that entails various interactions and connections with individuals, organizations, and systems at all levels; therefore, Bronfenbrenner's theory, with its focus on complex layers of the school, family, and community relationships situated around the individual student development, provided a founding

conceptual piece to gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement and the role mothers play to be involved in their children's growth and development.

Design of Study

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding on how and why single working Black mothers become involved in their elementary aged children's education and the construction of meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education. Since the literature of parental involvement and the models provided strictly focus on the role of parental involvement that occurs within the school, this study sought to advance the understanding of the importance of parental involvement that occurs *outside* of the context of school. The focus on the meanings the mothers constructed on parental involvement in their children's education and the experiences they have had within this particular role situated this study within the body of qualitative research, specifically case study methodology.

The definitions of qualitative research are varied, multi-faceted and fluid with boundaries being pushed and stretch to include a variety of forms and products; however, there are key components of all qualitative research that makes it distinct from quantitative and mixed methods research. Merriam (2002) has identified four main characteristics that all qualitative inquiry possesses. Qualitative research: 1.) Strives to understand the meaning people have constructed about their society and experiences within the society, 2.) The researcher is the instrument, 3.) The process is inductive, and 4.) The product is richly descriptive. Creswell (2013) identifies the four Merriam mentioned, but also includes four other characteristics pertinent to qualitative inquiry - a natural setting, multiple methods, reflexivity, and emergent design. These eight characteristics distinguish qualitative research from that of quantitative or mixed methods.

Qualitative research is used to *explore* a phenomenon that is *complex*, and requires the researcher to go about the exploration in a number of ways in order to understand the details of an issue. There is no prescribed manner in which qualitative inquiry is conducted, however, the process needs to be structured in a way that gains insight into how individuals interpret and interact with the social world (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative inquiry is concerned with understanding the contexts or settings in which participants practice their everyday lives; an in-depth look at the deeper thoughts and behaviors that govern individuals' responses (Creswell, 2013).

While some authors such as Creswell focus on the process of qualitative inquiry, others, such as Denzin and Lincoln (2011) focus on what qualitative inquiry can accomplish. Defining qualitative research as a situated activity involving a set of interpretive practices that make the world and the observer visible, Denzin and Lincoln claim that such practices can in turn change the world. Through the transformative paradigm and the attempt to eventually effect change in educational policy, the approach to this study, and the position of the author, aligned with Denzin and Lincoln's belief that inquiry can in fact transform the world.

Case study.

The research questions, purpose, and goals of any type of inquiry drive the methodology and methods to be used within the design of that specific study (Silverman, 2010; Creswell, 2008, 2013; Morse & Niehaus, 2009).   As mentioned, this particular study focused on gaining an understanding of how single working mothers become involved in their elementary school aged children's education and for what reasons; therefore, in order to answer such questions, a case study methodology was utilized. Yin (2009) indicates a case study should be utilized and is the preferred method of choice when the research is attempting to discover "how" and "why"

questions, when the researcher has little to no control over events, and when the researcher is

dealing with a contemporary phenomenon within the context of real-life. The research

questions posed for this study specifically were a.)How single working mothers become involved

in their children's education and why they do become involved, and b.) How single working

mothers construct their meaning of parental involvement in their children's education and why?

Both questions sought to understand an extensive concept, parental involvement, at an in-

depth level in order to construct a deeper description of parental involvement in children's

education.

The topic on hand as well as the involved participants still occurs in real-time; real-life

events and experiences that cannot be controlled in the sense that many exploratory

quantitative studies are able to control. In the attempt to gain a deeper understanding of

individuals' constructions of parental involvement, a controlled environment, as that in a

laboratory, will not contribute well to the research purpose. This study was about life and the

participants' experiences, specifically single working Black mothers' involvement in their

children's education, which did not align well with being studied in the laboratory.

There are many definitions available for a case study, however most authors rely on Yin

(2009) and Stake's (1995) defining characteristics of case studies. Yin (2009) claims case studies

is an empirical *inquiry* that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its

real-life context, ….that relies on multiple sources of evidence, …and copes with multiple sets of

variables of interest" (p. 18). Yin approaches case studies as a *methodology*, as opposed to

Stake, who approaches case studies as a *bounded system*. Stake (1995) identifies a case study as

the bounded system in which is to be studied, and is a "specific, complex, functioning thing"

(p.2). For this particular study, Stake's definition and defining characteristics of case study as a

"bounded system" was utilized and supported. The boundaries of the study were single working

Black mothers within one community who have children in the elementary school, and who are

involved in their children's education**.** However, as Stake has pointed out, the boundaries and

definitions of case study are oftentimes blurred, and thus, needs to be recognized in the

attempt to define the bounded system for this study.

Yin (2009) categorizes case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive, and he

differentiates between single (holistic) and multiple-case studies. Stake (1995), however,

categorizes the case study as simple intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. The intrinsic case

study is used in cases when the researcher simply in interested in the *case*; to better understand

the case. The instrumental case study, on the other hand, is used to accomplish something

other than a simply understanding of the specific phenomenon. It is used to provide insight into

an issue or help refine a theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The collective case study is similar in

nature to Yin's multiple-case study, and simply involves more than one case. This study was an

attempt to understand how single mothers become involved in their children's education;

however, the inquiry also focused on gaining additional insight, through in-depth scrutiny, in

order to refine current parental involvement theories and models. Due to the goals and nature

of this study, Stake's instrumental case study was utilized.

The use of case studies has historically provided a wealth of information, producing

canonical texts for all fields of study, and yet, has been held to low regard, or outright ignored,

as a methodology. Flyvbjerg (2006) claims that the method has been, and currently remains,

misunderstood as its role pertains to research, and has identified five misunderstandings of case

studies. One of the main misunderstandings of case studies deals specifically with the lack of

ability to generalize on the basis of an individual case, and therefore, the case study cannot

contribute to the development of science. Flyvbjerg (2011) indicates that before such a generalizing statement on case studies can be asserted, one needs to determine "upon the case one is speaking of and how it is chosen" (p. 304). Yin (2009) also argues,

> "Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universe…[T]he case study, like the experiment, does not represent a "sample," and in doing a case study, [the] goal is to expand and generalize theories and not to enumerate frequencies" (p.15).

Even though, generalizability has been one of the main sources of scientific progress, perhaps, as Flyvbjerg (2011) has suggested, it has considerably been 'overrated' as the main source of science. Rather than attempting to prove or disprove a hypothesis, case studies, specifically, pursue the opportunity to learn something unique below surface level that "generalization" studies simply cannot capture.

As with all types of methods, the case study has both strengths and weaknesses in its application. Case studies provide the ability for the researcher to look in-depth at a complex phenomenon; to comprise a narrative that is more detailed, complete, and full of richness and that may foster new hypotheses and new research questions. However, the obstacle of generalizability, the intensiveness, and the emerged emphasis on randomized field trials (Smith, 2008), must be acknowledged as limitations of conducting research through a case study methodology.

Participant selection and description.

The selection of the participants involved in this study was purposive and through the process of snowballing. Purposive sampling, also referred to as judgment sampling, is the process of selecting a sample that is believed to be representative of a given population (Gay,

Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Purposive sampling allows qualitative researchers to choose a case, a

bounded system, which meets the characteristics of that which is being studied; however,

purposive sampling is not carried out in a lackadaisical, haphazard manner, but rather requires

the researcher to critically consider the boundaries and parameters of the population being

studied and to base the purposeful selection on those parameters (Silverman, 2010). This study

sought to understand how single working Black mothers, as defined as those mothers who self-

identify as 'single', Black, and who are employed in one full-time employment position, make

sense of their experiences with being involved in their elementary school-aged children's

education. Those individuals who fit within the stated parameters *and* can best add to the

understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement will be selected.

As all sampling techniques used in qualitative inquiry, purposive sampling has both

advantages and disadvantages to its use as a sampling technique. An advantage of purposive

sampling is that the sample selection is based on the researcher's personal knowledge and

experience of the criteria required of the group sample; however, this advantaged is based on

the researcher's ability to create worthy criteria of the selection process. Like the case study,

the selected sample also limits the ability of the researcher to generalize the findings (Gay, Mills,

& Airasian, 2009).

Snowball sampling technique will also be utilized in this study. Snowball sampling

entails identifying a few individuals who fit the criteria, and then using those individuals as

'gatekeepers' to other individuals that may meet the criteria (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The initial

participants recruit additional participants that meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria until an

appropriate number of participants have been reached. In order to gain access to the

community and sample population, I received suggested names from a director at a local

community-based organization in which several single working Black mothers and their children maintained membership. After receiving suggested names of parents, I made calls to the prospective parent-participant. After briefly describing the study, I asked the participant if she would be interested in participating, and those who express an interest were then invited to meet to discuss the study in detail and the informed consent form was administered. Although this process tends to take a bit longer to accomplish, the 'referral' method contributed to my ability to develop a trusting relationship in a timelier manner than other methods of sampling.

The first six participants who agreed to participate in the study, met the criteria, and were determined to be key informants with the ability to communicate effectively and thoughtfully (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009) were selected to participate in the study. A description of each participant is as followed:

Gina S. is the mother of one boy, aged 7, who is in the second grade at Lincoln Elementary. Gina works as a cashier at a local family-owned furniture store, and has done so since she was 16 years old. Gina is approximately 30 years old and is the sole provider for her son. Her son's father does not have an active role in her son's life, and therefore, she tends to rely on other family members, such as her mother, as her main support system for her and her son.

Sherry J. is the mother of one boy, aged 9, who is in the fourth grade at Lincoln Elementary. Sherry has worked in a local food chain for approximately three years. In her late 20s, Sherry is the sole provider for her son. She does not have any extended support system and tends to rely on the community and her church's membership in times of need. Upon graduation from high school, Sherry did complete one semester at the local community college, but withdrew due to financial reasons.

Lisa M. is the mother of two twin girls, aged 7, who are in the second grade at Lincoln Elementary. She works as a nail technician for a locally owned hair salon. Lisa went straight into the workforce after high school graduation and has worked since to support herself and her daughters. Approximately in her mid-20s, Lisa does not maintain any contact with the father of her children and solely relies on her sister for support.

Shawna K., in her early 30s, is the mother of one son, aged 8, who is in the third grade at Lincoln Elementary. Shawna is employed with a major grocery chain within her community and worked there since the store's opening date four years ago. Shawna graduated from high school, but did not pursue attendance at a college. She maintains contact with her son's father, but the relationship is sporadic. She tends to rely on her community and her church's membership for spiritual support and guidance and lacks any other type of support system with family members or friends.

Tasha F. is the mother of one daughter, aged 6, who is in the first grade at Lincoln Elementary. She is employed at a distribution center for a large grocery chain in a nearby community. Tasha is approximately 30 years old and does not have any post-secondary experience. She entered the workforce immediately upon graduating from high school. Tasha maintains contact with her daughter's father, but does not rely entirely on his support with her daughter. If she relies on anyone's help, Tasha relies on close friends and extended family members.

Denise W., approximately aged in her late 20s, is the mother of two daughters, aged 6 and 9, and in grades first and fourth, respectively at Lincoln Elementary. Denise works as a payroll specialist for a local manufacturing factory. She has completed two years of coursework at a local community college in business administration. Of the women in the study, Denise has

the strongest support system in terms of family members helping her with her girls and financially in some regard. She, however, does not receive support from the girls' father and he does not play an active role in their lives.

The setting.

Lincoln Elementary School is situated in Jackson, which is a city with a population slightly under 30,000 located in the Midwest. The city has a history riveted with racial tensions by past practices and public lynchings that have been left unaddressed and silenced amongst the individuals within the community, perpetuating a racial and socioeconomic status divide throughout the city. Jackson's economic basis was founded on the gas boom, and like many other Midwestern cities, transitioned to a reliance on the manufacturing industries of automobile and glass production. As industries relocated, Jackson's economic basis diminished and the population and property values of individuals followed. According to the U.S. Census, in 2011, the racial and ethnic make-up of the city consisted of 76 percent non-white Hispanic, 15 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic or Latino origins, and 3 percent biracial; however, the geography of racial groups are very much divided and homogenous within selected neighborhoods. The median income of the town was slightly above $30,000, with 25.4 percent of the city's population living below the poverty line.

Built in the 1950s, Lincoln Elementary resembles the typical limestone and brick façade used in the past to construct schools. The surrounding landscape and visitor buzzer system add to the drab unwelcoming appearance when entering the building. Compared to the other schools within the district, Lincoln does not enjoy lush green playground facilities with newly furnished playground equipment. The entire school property is encompassed by a ten-foot chain linked fence with a parking lot placed within the fenced area. The school is situated within a

predominantly black lower socioeconomic status urban area. The neighborhoods adjoining the

school are primarily single family slab homes built in the 1960s and multifamily conversion

home units and a public housing complex butts right up to the school's property line directly

behind the school. A hair salon, convenience store, a church, and one prominent community

organization are scattered among three abandoned manufacturing facilities within walking

distance from the school.

In many ways, Lincoln Elementary is a traditional urban school community with almost

70 percent of the 278 students as children of color. Even though Hispanic and black students

make up 51.1 percent of the student population, 20 out of the 21 hired teachers were white and

the classified staff members, including two secretaries and one custodian, were black. Of those

21 certified staff members, 62 percent are identified as new teachers with experience ranging

between 0 to 5 years of prior teaching experience.   In terms of socioeconomic status of the

student body population, 93.5 percent of the students receive free and reduced lunches. The

school's standardized test scores and academic performance is well below the school district's

and state's averages with only 37 percent of the students passing both the math and language

arts statewide standardized test, which is precisely why parental involvement has been

emphasized as a means to improve the academic achievement of the school's population.

Data Collection Measures

Open-ended semi-structured interview (Kvale, 1996) questions were used to gain an in-

depth understanding of the participants' experiences and meanings of parental involvement in

their children's education. Open-ended, semi-structured interviews provide the space for

individuals to tell their stories in a manner that best represents them (Connelly & Clandinin,

1990; Denzin, 1989).   An interview guide was on hand and consisted of questions that best

address the participants' beliefs about education, their roles in their children's education, and their current and past experiences with their children's public school system; however, the interviews were approached as conversational (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and without the constraints of a prescribed set of questions. It is hoped that by approaching the interview process in such a manner the participant were more at ease and more engaged in the process. Data was collected through three interviews with each participant lasting approximately one to one and a half hours in length, and took place at a mutually agreed upon location. Fieldnotes were also taken throughout the interviews in the third person point of view, to best ensure effectiveness in conveying my participants' words (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995). Each interview was digitally recorded with transcription to quickly follow the conclusion of each interview, and the follow-up interviews were not scheduled until an initial analysis was conducted on the initial interview.

It is important to note and acknowledge the various issues that may arise when interviewing women. I was attempting to gain an understanding on how single working Black mothers, in a sense, navigate parental involvement and the meanings they place upon the engagements and interactions with their children. While I am a woman, I fully acknowledge that my experiences were not in any way similar to the women's of the study. I do recognize that all women's experiences are gendered, and that no two women's experiences are identical; therefore, I am encompassing 'diversity' in a diverse manner among all women who are single working mothers. With that said, I do, however, still believe that historically women have been marginalized, and some groups of women have been, and currently remain, more marginalized than others. Recognizing that some women still tend to feel powerless, without much to say, and/or in the process of trying to 'find her voice,' as indicated by Reinharz and Chase (2002), I

approached the interview processes with an awareness that some of the women may have never had the opportunity to express themselves *and* may not know what to do when given the opportunity. Nonetheless, the following quote from Meredith Ralston (1996) exemplifies my theoretical perspective as I entered the conversation with these women:

> "The value of listening to these women's voices is the value of their testimony and experiences, which have been ignored and dismissed…[N]o one has thought to ask them about what they need or what would help them, either because people assume that they do not know what their needs are; or because people assume that they are stupid and lazy and have no potential anyway…"(as quoted in Reinharz & Chase, 2002, p. 223).

Deficit thinking about women, and particularly single Black mothers, whether working or unemployed, is still prevalent in mainstream society's thought, and continues to be a prominent factor within the educational reform and parental involvement literature. My goal, as indicated earlier, was not to 'give voice' to these women, as suggested by Creswell (2013), but rather to provide the space for and amplify their voices within a society that continues to make assumptions about women's daily lives, specifically single Black mothers.

Data was also gathered through numerous nonparticipant observations that took place between the mothers and their children in a variety of settings, between the mothers and teachers within the school and classrooms, and between the mothers and the community-based and faith-based organizations' directors and leaders. In total, I accompanied three mothers during three separate one-on-one meetings with teachers during afterschool hours to discuss efforts to improve their children's coursework in addition to attending three different church services to witness the interactions between the mothers, their children, and the membership of the churches. I also observed interactions between the children, their mothers, and the

directors of the afterschool program on several occasions. These observations in addition to

documents from the school's website, the school's parental involvement policy, communication

text between the teachers and the mothers, and documentation on children's coursework

contributed to a deeper understanding of how the mothers were involved in their children's

education.

Data Analysis Procedures

During the transcription process, I transcribed the conversations verbatim rather than

using an idealized realization of the conversation. I used italics to indicate stressed words, (/)

symbols to indicate breakage in the language, and include filler words as they were used by my

participants. I conducted the transcription in this manner because I felt it was important to be

able to return to the transcripts and locate words and concepts that were stressed by the

participants in order to gain a better understanding of the meanings each of them may add

through their expressions. I also utilized 'memoing' (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) while transcribing

the data and coding transcriptions for each individual separately before cross analyzing between

individual participants.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted in a manner consistent with case study

methodology (Creswell, 2013). Each interview was read through to make margin notes and

form initial codes. A description of each case and its context was created, and then used to

establish themes and patterns. Each set of themes was analyzed to identify reoccurring themes,

both similarities and differences, across narratives to develop generalizations about the various

cases, and then contrasted with published literature on parental involvement.

Strategies to Increase Credibility, Transferability, and Trustworthiness

In an environment that currently holds randomized controlled trials and other 'scientific experiments' as a gold standard in educational research (Smith, 2008), it is difficult overcome the arguments that qualitative inquiry lacks rigor, generalizability, and is laced with researcher bias. Yet, it is still important for qualitative researchers to demonstrate rigor, generalizability, and quality qualitative inquiry. In quantitative studies, terms such as reliability and validity are measured to ensure a good study; however, Golafshani (2003) indicates that reliability and validity are concepts based on a positivist paradigm, and thus to evaluate qualitative inquiry, it is important to completely remove the language that is riddled with the positivist lens, and replace it with a language more suited for a naturalistic perspective. "Unlike quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, predication and generalization of findings, quality researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). Rather than using reliability and validity, the language of a positivist paradigm, this study utilized and addressed issues of credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness.

Merriam (2002) identifies eight key strategies for promoting the credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness of a qualitative study: triangulation, member checks, peer reviews, reflexivity, saturation, maximum variation, audit trail, and the use of rich, thick description, all of which serve important roles in the research process. In order to address issues of credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability within this study, I incorporated several of the suggestion Merriam has provided. First, I conducted member checks with my participants after the interviews had been transcribed as one way to ensure trustworthiness *and* as a method of triangulation. Stake (1995) indicates that through member checks, a participant can provide observations and interpretations to the data, and critical insights into various sources of data. Although some authors tend to shy away from the member checks, my past experience

with participants has proven to be helpful to me to ensure my interpretations were accurate based on the participants' expressions and responses.

I also maintained a researcher's journal which not only allowed for an organized audit trail, but also provided a space for reflexivity throughout the entire research process. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify this reflection process as 'progressive subjectivity,' in which the researcher engages in self-reflection, making notes of initial hypotheses and feelings, and revisiting the concepts throughout the study. This reflexive process, as recorded in the researcher's journal then served as a point of triangulation for the study.

Finally, as indicated in the participant selection process, I planned to conduct interviews until I arrived at the point of saturation with my data. The prolonged and substantial engagement with my participants through conversations, observations, and the processes involved in building trusting relationships played a role in reaching a saturation level that allowed issues to be identified accurately. Peer-reviews with colleagues and mentors also took place to contribute to the quality of the study and occurred throughout the entire phase of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) stress the importance of bridging procedural ethics to the ethics of practice, and therefore, measures to address ethical issues will be congruent throughout the entire study. I conducted the study in an ethical manner through efforts of maintaining goodness and trustworthiness as well as maintaining awareness of personal assumptions and biases that may have emerged through the data collection and analysis processes. I also maintained confidentially of my participants' in an effort to respect their positions and relationships within the study as well as respect the position of my participant, as

Mertens (2009) suggests, and avoid further marginalizing those who have been historically marginalized.

Limitations

One of the main limitations to the study was the control for accuracy with the responses from the participants in the study. The idea of parental involvement and parenting are congruent, and oftentimes the lines are blurred to distinguish one from the other (Standing, 1999). The possibility was present for the participants to respond to the interview questions in a manner they felt they were expected to respond in order to reflect their good parenting skills. The possibility of answering a question to align with the perceived expectations of the researcher is present in all studies that utilize interviewing techniques. However, measures of trustworthiness, such as member checks and triangulate my data, were addressed to ensure accuracy and to build relationships to gain trust from my participants.

A second limitation was with the construct of 'single parent.' Some women may actually be identified as single mothers, but still live with a partner who may or may not play a role in the child's life. Some women may actually be identified as married, but their partner may be overseas in active duty or travel to work throughout the week forcing the mother to assume the role of a single mother in terms of household and childcare duties. For this study, it was imperative that I obtained participants that were single mothers in terms of women who have been divorced or have never been married and do not have a form of support within the household.

Finally, time and resources must also be recognized as limitations to the study. Given ample resources, it would have been possible to extend this study and explore more individuals

within the population. Resources could also extend the means to travel to other cities in order

to compare across various geographic and ethnic categories.

Chapter 4: Findings

Although much research has been done with regard to parental involvement in

educational settings, much less work has examined how parental involvement operates outside

of the context of school as it relates to a child's education. Much of the research available

demonstrates the impact parental involvement has on a child's education as measured through

standardized test scores or models to increase parental involvement in terms of attendance in

the schools, thus contributing to a traditional discourse of parental involvement and ultimately

excluding large portions of individuals' efforts as engaged parents. As Lawson (2003) argues,

most policies and programs continue to engage parents in school-centric activities as a means to increase parental involvement. In this sense it is important to study the construction of parental involvement and engagement as it takes place outside of the context of school. Understanding how parents become involved or engaged in their children's lives, specifically how single working Black mothers become involved, is crucial to understanding future possibilities for parental involvement in American schools.

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into what single working Black mothers in one community do to be involved in their children's education, the reasons why they become involved, and how they construct their meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education. The findings of this are studied are organized by two guiding questions – 1.) How are single working Black mothers involved in their children's education and why? and 2.) How do single working Black mothers construct their meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education and why? Findings are presented as themes that emerged from analysis of the data. The first three themes reflect the various ways these single working Black mothers are involved at the school, in the community, and within their homes, and the reasons why they are involved. The last two themes represent ways they construct their identities. The chapter closes with a discussion of the findings in relation to prominent theories and existing literature.

Symbolic Involvement– "It Means I Care."

As the literature of parental involvement indicates, parental involvement generally encompasses the engagement of parents in what Lawson (2003) calls school-centric activities, in which "schools are the unit of analysis and children's academic achievement is the primary focus" (Lawson, 2003, p.79). According to Calabrese-Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George

(2004), it is the participation of parents in school-centric activities which is recognized and specifically counted as involvement. Thus parental participation in school-based activities is considered the most prominent and heavily weighted way to involve parents in their children's education, as indicated in parental involvement models such as Epstein (1990, 1995, 2005). This form of involvement, based on and linked to the objectives of the school, is sanctioned as the solution to effect change and improvement in student's academic achievement.

In 1966 Coleman identified family background as an overwhelming factor that impacted student achievement, more so than the direct efforts of school officials. Although the findings of the Coleman Report have been debated, the discourse of parental involvement in children's schooling has remained an essential target in educational policies as an attempt to close the achievement gap in America's public schools. The research and corresponding educational policies claim that it is the involvement of parents that determines the educational outcomes of children, and therefore, these findings and expectations are inclusive of all parents, particularly mothers who have elementary aged children, despite circumstances, context, and life experiences that may hinder involvement of a nature expected by school officials and the intent of educational policies.

Unlike mothers from two parent families, who have the ability to send 'the other half' to ensure presence at the school-based activities, the majority of the single mothers in the study had little in the way of extended support systems to attend various activities that took place within the school. The mothers within the study lacked flexible work schedules or vacation days, which did not allow them to leave their jobs to attend to matters at the school. The participants in the study, however, made great efforts to attend most, if not all, of the school sponsored events, including their children's music programs, parent-teacher conferences, and

open houses even if it meant foregoing income by taking an unexcused absence from work.

Scholars such as Auerbach (2007) and Lopez et al. (2001) believe that school-based types of

events tend to be the primary means for parents to demonstrate their involvement to school

officials.

Due to the large number of students failing to pass the state exam, Lincoln Elementary

has made parental involvement a high priority in its school improvement plans. Each parent is

provided with a Parental Involvement Policy which highlights the measures the school will take

in order to increase parental involvement amongst the parents of the children enrolled at the

school. The measures include holding annual meetings to inform parents of their rights' and

requirements' as an involved parent, to include parents as representatives on the School

Improvement Plan, and how communication will occur and information will be dispersed to the

parents or guardians of the children enrolled in the school. In order to increase parental

involvement, the school also hired a Parental Involvement Coordinator and created a 'parent

room' within the school equipped with computers and academic-based items available for

parents to access and utilize as resources.

Via the school's website, the school has also provided several resources to parents on

how to become more involved in their children's school including opportunities to serve as

active members on a parent advisory committee. The committee is purported to provide the

space to meet directly with the superintendent of the school district to improve communication

with parents and as a means to strengthen parental support of the school district. Also

dispersed through the school's website is a parental agreement contract that parents are

expected to uphold in order to demonstrate their involvement with their children's education.

Within the contract, the school has identified the following items each parent is expected to do

in order to maintain a 'parent as teacher' mentality: Provide a quiet time and place for homework and monitor television and technology use, read for 20 minutes each day, ensure child attends school daily with adequate sleep, regular medicine, and proper nutrition, attend parent-teacher conferences, communicate the importance of education and learning to their children, and finally, respect the school, staff, students, and families. The explicit curriculum for parents (Eisner, 2002) is provided not only through the school's website, but also in the monthly parent workshops aimed at helping parents become more involved with their children's education.

Many of the measures taken by Lincoln Elementary School's administration and staff resemble the strategies and models supported by Epstein (1990, 1995, 2011). Several opportunities for traditional-based parental involvement were extended by the administration and staff of Lincoln Elementary School to the parents. The school hosts an open house night or 'meet-the-teacher' night during the first few weeks of the school year in addition to parent-teacher conferences in the fall semester in order to allow parents the opportunity to meet their children's teachers and to learn the expectations and goals of the school year. Henderson (2007) claims that such events provide the opportunity to bridge diversity gaps, learn more about the students' families, and to allow parents the chance to ask questions they deem of importance. Given one of the primary initiatives of Goals 2000 to establish partnerships with parents, traditional school-based activities, such as meet-the-teacher night or parent-teacher conferences, hold the potential to provide pathways of dialogue between parents, students, and school officials. However, the mothers within the study described the event, much like many of the events held at the school, as an optimum tool to transmit the school's agenda; one to be received and accepted by the parents with little to no emphasis on creating partnerships.

Gina: "Sure I attend those events. I go to meet the teacher or open house, whatever

you want to call it. I sit in those little desks for fifteen minutes while the teacher

goes through what I need to know and what I need to do as a ma…I don't get to

talk to her about [son], I don't get to ask her any questions, no time for

that…She didn't even ask me my name when I came in. So yeah, it is meet the

teacher, but that is it. Not meet the parent or get to know me or my son any

better."

Sherry: "I don't even know *how* she can get to know me or my child, because they don't

even *ask* questions about us. They just assume they know…all of the teachers."

Lisa: "The school says that the open house and parent-teacher conference is a time

when we can get to know her and they can get to know us, but the conversation

is like talking to a stranger. Just nonsense talk…"

Denise: "They say that meet the teacher night is not the night to ask questions about my

children…I am supposed to wait until parent-teacher conferences for those

types of questions."

Sherry: "I don't understand why there are certain times that I am allowed to discuss

things about my child and times when I am not, but it never seems like the right

time."

Shawna: "And when I get the opportunity to actually talk to the teacher, there is no

time."

Gina: "I am supposed to sit there and be quiet and simply listen."

Shawna: "I attend all these events and never get the chance to *talk.*"

> *Lisa:* "I sit there and listen while she tells me what is wrong with my children, like *I* need to *fix* them."

> *Gina:* "She tells me what is going on with [son], what his grades are, what he *should* be learning and where he's at. And when *I* try to talk, she says that we have to schedule another meeting."

> *Denise:* "I think they think I have nothing else going on. Like I am sitting around watching TV all day and can just drive to the school and meet with the teacher."

> *Tasha:* "I feel like, I am here *now*. I am meeting with you *now*. I took off work to come here to talk to you about my daughter and you want me to wait to ask you questions."

When parents enter traditional formal spaces of education, they do so, as Fine and Weis (2003) discusses with limited powers to define their roles or actions. Rather than viewing and exploring ways in which parents possibly can and currently act as what Civil, Guevara, and Allexsaht-Snider (2002) call 'intellectual resources', Jackson and Remillard (2005) claim that the activities identified as parental involvement are defined through the vantage point of the school, and thus, it is the school's vantage point that is not only failing to recognize parents, specifically low socioeconomic status minority parents, as intellectual resources, but also defining the mothers' roles when they enter the traditional spaces of education. Weininger and Lareau (2003) conducted an extensive study concerning parent-teacher conferences and its corresponding interactions and exchanges in relation to social class and different racial groups. Their findings demonstrated distinct differences between the interactions among middle-class parents and those among lower and working class individuals. There were differences among social classes

in terms of authority dynamics, specifically in terms of middle-class parents being able to articulate and control the conversation more so than lower socioeconomic status individuals.

In addition, Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999) conducted extensive work dealing with families' interactions with school officials, and discussed detailed institutional standards of acceptable behavior within schools as they relate to parental involvement. Teachers in their study described supportive parents as those who were, in a sense, compliant with the teachers' and schools' requests. Epstein (1987) and Van Galen (1987) have also noted patterns of acceptable behavior on the part of the parent when it comes to interactions with school officials. Those parents that demonstrated support of the objectives of the school as well as avoided situations of undermining the authority of the school were seen to have a positive relationship with teachers and the schools as an involved parent. During the current study's interviews with the participating mothers', each mother describe the interactions with school officials at events such as meet-the-teacher night and parent-teacher conferences as exchanges of information being directed *at* them and did not feel their opinions or comments were wanted or even warranted. Not only did the mothers feel as if they did not have a voice in any matter as it related to their children, the mothers also believed their assigned role was to become mere spectators in the education of their children.

> *Denise:* "I don't get the opportunity to talk to her about what *I* think needs to happen."
>
> *Sherry:* "I would like to say, hey, have you thought about this? Have you considered
> talking to him one-on-one? Have you considered giving him something to read
> that he might *enjoy*?"
>
> *Shawna:* "The time I did speak up or try to say something, no one was listening to me."

Gina: "She thinks I want to argue and I all want to do it *talk.* Let's talk about this and

can *I* be included in the conversation?"

Sherry: "It's a defense, instant defense, like I am going in there to attack her or

something…like whatever I want to say or question is an attack on her

teaching…I can't even join the conversation, I can't even get to that point

because she has some answer for everything."

Shawna: "It should be a team effort. It should be like what can we do together…but I

am not even asked. It is more like, this is what is wrong, this is your

responsibility to fix. It's school, so at what point does it become *their*

responsibility, too?"

Lisa: "The thing is they say parents have rights and responsibilities, but all this talk is

basically our responsibilities and no rights. I may have the *right* to ask her a

question, to find out what is going on in the classroom, but she blocks that right

and places it back on me."

Denise: "I will tell you what it is like. It is like being allowed in a toy store and someone

always telling you to hush, to not touch, that you can simply look…no touch, no

talking, just looking. Look and see what we are doing with your girl. Look how

well she does when we do this. But the once something goes wrong, something

not right, then they all point to me and say this is your fault."

Gina: "It's all one way. One way, *their* way. *Their* way is the right way to teach, to learn,

to handle my son in classroom, and that's all I hear. Ain't no way for me...so I

just quit trying to talk."

The mothers continued to attend the events held at the school despite being silenced in the conversation of their children's schooling. Besides the Open House night and parent-teacher conferences, which take place once a year in the fall semester, the school also hosted music programs, 'Muffins with Moms' mornings, parental workshops, and family reading nights to encourage parental involvement. Many of the parents within the study felt that the extra activities and events were added stress to their already overwhelming schedules and situations; however, they attempted to juggle transportation and work schedules in order to attend many of the events. Other school-based activities in which the mothers took part dealt directly with supplying the tools and necessary supplies for school-based projects, communicating with the teachers, and staying on top of their children grades, all of which are advocated by Balli, (1998), Epstein (1990, 1995, 2005), and Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, and Jones (2001) as direct factors affecting student achievement.

As part of the schools' parental policy, parents are responsible for staying connected to what was taking place at the school as it related to their children's grades and academic achievement. In the rhetoric of staying connected, the mothers perceived an insinuation of maintaining a presence in all aspects of the school as it related to their children. The mothers within the study described an expectation of attendance at all events as part of their responsibility to stay connected to their children's education. Therefore, to demonstrate to the school administration, the teachers, and perhaps even to the school community, that they are in fact involved parents, all of the mothers attended the school's music programs, parent-teacher conferences, open-houses, and oftentimes family reading nights.

Shawna: "They expect somebody to be there."

Tasha: "The school expects all kinds of things…to help with homework, to go to events, to call the teacher, to sign reading logs, the list is never ending, and I think it is that there are no other options that is the worse part of it all."

Gina: "If I could send someone else to fill my shoes, I would. I would gladly send someone else into that school, but I got no one. I don't have a man to show up and take my place or a man to pay the bills so I can go be involved in the school… it's me who has to fill those shoes."

Sherry: "But they do not consider what we have going on at home or at work. They don't think about the mama who has to be at work at 7:30 in the morning who has to take a half day off to go eat muffins with her son, or me who has to work nights sometimes so I can have the weekend with my son.   They don't think about *me*".

Denise: "I think that the school wants to know that I am doing my job, and part of my job is to be there showing my support for [daughters]."

Tasha: "To be honest, none of it has anything to do with [daughter]…I can't talk to them about her when I should have the chance and the other events really don't provide anything but chit chat….Well, chit chat don't get the work done."

Denise: "Muffins, music programs, PTA meetings… Like those mean anything."

Shawna: "None of it has anything to do with school…his learning. Me going to a music program or not does nothing for his grades or getting him back on to reading level…but it means something…"

Gina: "It means that I know the rules…"

Shawna: "It means I care."

Although much research claims parental involvement has a direct impact on the academic success of the student, the participating mothers did not believe their attendance to the events provided by the school and identified as opportunities for parental involvement had much impact on the academic success of their children. Rather they attended the events to demonstrate their support because it was an assigned role as a parent, specifically as a mother. In essence, their attendance signified a *symbolic* involvement. The mothers felt that if they *failed* to live up to the expectations of the school, in regards to these forms of parental involvement, then they would be viewed as apathetic parents.   Knowing their limitations in terms of being 'present' in the school, in the form of volunteering and chaperoning, these mothers felt that it was important to be 'present' in as many events as possible to demonstrate a support for the school's objectives even in such cases where they believed the actions held no academic meaning for their children. As the mothers of the study described, they simply attended the events and abided by the expectations of the teachers to avoid or deflect perceived judgments on them as mothers.

> *Gina:* "They have these mothers or maybe the teachers' mothers were the mothers who stayed at home, who had someone else to work, who could come and go as they pleased. They could come to the school when someone needed them to work in the classroom or pour juice during the parties. They could spend all day baking nice cupcakes or cookies to take to school on birthday parties. They had the *time* to do that. There are moms like that…even in this school. It's just not me."

> *Denise:* "You know the teacher's pet in the classroom… that a part of you really wants to be and the other part despises them? The part that wants to be the one who

the teacher likes and scores the highest on the test, yeah part of me wants to be

that. Then the other part thinks, you making all of us look bad, like we aren't as

good as you. That's the part I hate…there are mamas like that, that I feel they

making all of us working mas look bad because we can't do what they do."

Tasha: "So these ideas of what should happen or what does happen for some mothers is

what everyone else is supposed to be like."

Shawna: "And if I am not like that, like what they want, they think I am not good for my

own child."

Denise: "They want me to attend parent workshops or meetings of some sort to teach

me how to be a good parent. I just want to say, I don't need to know how to be

a good mom. I *am* a good ma."

Sherry: "I have to be there. I have to be there to show them that I care. Really, it

shouldn't matter. It shouldn't matter if I go to the music program or muffins

with mom…what should matter is that I love my boy and I take care of him and

try to do the best for him so that he can have a better life. But they don't see

that. They don't know that. They think your boy needs a male figure, your boy

needs a father in the house, and that he acting the way he does because he

doesn't have a father or he will end up on the street because you the only one

caring for him."

Lisa: "If I don't show up, then what? Then what happens? They think that I don't care

about my kids, that I don't want them to learn, that I am the problem with them

in the first place."

Their attendance to school-sanctioned activities were viewed by the mothers as hollow outward displays of involvement that were typically not done so for the academic achievement of their children, but rather to an extent for their own benefit to deflect further judgment onto themselves or that which would be placed onto their children. Griffith and Smith (1987, 1990, 2005) work on the ideology of single motherhood and its role in the public school system exemplifies societal expectations, specifically educators' view of single working class mothers as deviant. Her findings indicate that single parenthood created children who were problems for the schools.   The participating mothers of this current study were well-aware of the fact that they were viewed as imperfect families.   Thus the mothers believed there was an implicit association made on the part of the teachers and administrators between being 'present' in the school and being a 'good mother', and being a 'good mother' produced 'good children.'

The conversation as it pertained to good parenting and being a good mother was in a state of dissonance between the mothers and the school officials. Schools officials and the corresponding policies within the school were aligned with what Hays (1996) calls intensive mothering, which holds that mothers are the preferred caretakers of children and that mothering involves activities that are expert guided, emotionally absorbing, and labor intensive. To achieve this ideal state, mothers must adopt a strict utilitarian philosophy by being entirely devoted to the care of others and sacrificing their own needs and interests to ensure others' needs are met. According to Thorne (1993), intensive mothering is also based on the social construction of an ideal family that consists of a White, middle-class, heterosexual couple with children, and as Medina and Magnuson (2009) claims, women who fail to achieve this hegemonic ideal do not fit the social construction of good mothers despite endeavors to parent according to the intensive mothering ideology.

Valencia (2010) has thoroughly discussed the extent schools and corresponding educational policies laced with deficit thinking position parents of color or lower socioeconomic status against the standard of a 'good mother'. Single working mothers, specifically women of color, who receive public assistance are viewed and personified as the most deviant from the dominant ideology of intensive mothering, and as Medina and Magnuson (2009) states, "For people who accept this ideology, women who cannot afford to devote their time and attention to intensive mothering should not have children" (p.92). However, it is not simply individuals who have bought into the intensive mothering ideology, society as a whole, specifically institutions within society, use intensive mothering as the cultural and political standard by which mothering is judged.

Although the idea of intensive mothering is also applied to Black American mothers, Hill-Collins (2008) has discussed the differences in experiences and interpretations of motherhood between women of color and low-income with those of white, middle-class mothers. The controlling images of mammy, the matriarch, and the welfare mother make it difficult for Black mothers to define and value their own experiences of motherhood, and thus, create a dynamic and dialectical understanding of Black motherhood. In many Black communities, mothering is not only contained to what Hill-Collins identifies as 'bloodmothers', but rather "often extends the boundaries of biologically related individuals" (p.120) to include 'othermothers', who provide support to not only the children, but also the biological mothers to help them fulfill their own personal needs. The relationships of mothers with one another, with othermothers, with Black children, and with the larger community form connections and develop an extended network that defines mothering to many Black American mothers. In essence, the mothers participating in the study existed in what Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) identify as a dualistic

space. The Black mothers are living in a space through "their own personal perspective and the perspective of their oppressors, to whom they adapt" (p.130). Although the mothers within the study believed that each were 'good mothers' they were clearly aware of the fact that their actions were being evaluated by school officials while they were present in and even more so in their absence of school sponsored activities. Traversing between both spaces is another aspect of Black mothering, specifically as it relates to Black mothers with daughters. Hill-Collins discusses the dilemma Black mothers face to ensure their daughters' physical survival and to teach them their 'place' in an oppressive system, while still trying to encourage them to develop the skills to confront the oppressive order. Those Black women with "strong self-definitions and self-valuations who offer serious challenges to oppressive situations may not physically survive" (p. 122). The mothers within the study, under the scrutiny of the school, as well as society, chose to abide by the school's expectations to not only resist judgment on their practices of motherhood, but also to deflect any repercussions their actions may have on their own children.

> *Sherry:* "The kids whose parents aren't there are not treated the same as those whose parents are there. I can't say exactly that the kids' whose parents are always there get special treatment, but yes, they do. Some kids simply are treated differently than others."

> *Denise:* "Yes. It's all about who you are. If you are a Thompson, then you get away with more than if you are a Jackson. You know what I mean…you aren't judged as bad or it is looked at as, oh he just made a mistake. He isn't really a *bad* kid…I am not a Thompson, so I have to be there to step in."

> *Shawna:* "If you don't come in, then your child gets pushed aside. If he's not causing trouble, then he is pushed aside. If he doing okay in school, then he is pushed

aside. Well, what do you think happens to the kids that gets pushed aside? He

is forgotten."

Gina: "I want [son] to behave in school, because they already think he is bad. They are

just waiting for him to mess up. This is something white moms don't have to

deal with. [They] don't have to teach their child two different messages. One

that says do what the teachers tell you to do, but don't let them treat you bad.

That's what I am constantly telling him."

Tasha: "As I said, if I don't show up for her activities, then they think I don't care. And

sometimes, I don't care. But I do care about her and how she does in school,

and I do care about how they treat her. If I am not there, then they won't listen

to her. They barely listen to me, but at least I know how to talk to them so that

they don't forget about her."

Sherry: "It's like dealing with a lion. Somehow you have to learn how to calm him down

before you try to feed him, because deep down you are scared he is going to

bite you. Well that is how I feel when I talk to the teachers. I can't go in there

showing my anger like I am feeling. I have to go in there and be nice so that I

can get what I need for my son. If I don't then he is the one that is punished."

Given the discord between the expectations of school officials and the Black mothers of

the study in terms of mothering and the understanding that the context of parental involvement

continues to be socially constructed to be a white, middle-class norm, the participating mothers

of the study are set up for failure despite their attendance to all of the school-based events. As

Black single working mothers they are not only framed as a deviant to the mothering ideology of

society and the school, but also expected to navigate a system that is constructed based on a

white racial frame. The capital each mother brought to the table in their interactions with school officials, in their efforts to prove their worthiness as mothers, and in their attempts to stay connected to their children's schooling, was measured and discarded for everything they are not rather than who they are and what they do for their children.

Calabrese-Barton et al. (2004) developed an "ecologies of parental participation" conceptual framework in an attempt to look at the whole system of the school in which parents are involved in their children's education. The focus of utilizing an ecological framework was to analyze and reveal parental interactions and relationships not only between the parents and their children, but also the dynamics between the parents and school administrators and teachers, and in doing so, Calabrese-Barton et al. differentiated between involvement and engagement.   Rather than using involvement, which has been used and continues to be used to signify what parents do, engagement is used to move beyond a parent's participation in an event and towards a recognition of "the situations or contexts that surround an individual's decision to participate in an event, including his or her relationships with other individuals, the history of the event, and the resources available to the individual parent" (p.4). If a distinction was to be made between involvement and engagement, according to Calabrese-Barton et al., then the participating mothers in the study were merely involved at the school, but not engaged parents. None of the women felt the school-centric activities were a true representation of parental involvement, but rather were symbolic representations of their involvement; measures to merely signify their involvement, to portray themselves as good mothers in the eyes of the school, and to deflect judgment and potential repercussions for their children. However, the actions and behaviors that took place among the mothers in the community and home were more representative of an engaged parent.

Culturally Relevant Involvement – "It is on the test, life's test..."

Communities hold a wealth of learning opportunities for individuals of all ages. Not only are formal and informal learning environments encompassing a variety of interests made available, but also opportunities are presented through a number of individuals residing in and around the community that act in what Murrell (2000) calls 'community teachers' who are able to serve as intellectual resources for community members, specifically the youth of the community. The role of the community as a learning environment for its youth has historical roots in the Pre-colonial period, during a time period prior to common schools, when education entailed children learning the norms, beliefs, and skills embraced by the tribe in order to contribute to the economic and moral endeavors of the community. The members of those early communities assumed a collective effort to take care of and educate the young. Like the role of the parents in the education of their own children changing during the Progressive era and beyond, so too has the role of community transitioned to accommodate the changes of society taking on a less active role in the growth and development of children. However, in recent decades, advocates such as Murrell (2000, 2001), McLaughlin (2000), Eccles and Gootman (2002), and Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins (2005) have attempted to situate and position the concept of education within the context of community rather than simply containing it within the school.

Community-based organizations and the individuals within the organizations are contained within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) *mesosystem.* The mesosystem consists of a network of relationships surrounding a child that have a direct effect on the contribution of his/her growth and development. Community-based organizations take on a variety of roles and responsibilities depending on the geographical location and the needs of those residing in the

area. Some community-based organizations have focused primarily on the development and

empowerment of individuals living in poverty by serving as resource centers providing not only

material necessities, but also spiritual and emotional resources as well. Lawson and Alameda-

Lawson (2012) have done extensive work to create and sustain community-based organizations

aimed at providing resources for non-native English speaking individuals who are attempting to

navigate the institutions within their community. Other organizations have assumed the role to

support the efforts of other institutions, such as schools, to ensure the youth within their own

community are not left behind. Such organizations, in conjunction with the home and school,

are where students live their daily lives and this realm is where their development occurs or has

the potential to occur. Thus, the objectives of many community-based organizations,

specifically those targeted at youth, focus on the growth and development of children in hopes

to effect academic growth as well.

The community within which the participants of the study resided possessed several

community-based organizations and faith-based organizations to help in the efforts of

individuals to develop physically, intellectually, and spiritually. With a population slightly under

30,000, the community possesses one library situated in the downtown area with a variety of

public transit available to make commute easier for those relying on public transportation. The

city also has several parks and recreation areas for families to enjoy at no-cost or at a minimal

fee in addition to other organizations, such as a Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, and YWCA with fees

based on families' financial standings. Many of the organizations also provide extra-curricular or

organized sporting and artistic opportunities aimed at getting children from all backgrounds

involved in healthy and holistic activities. The community also hosts several community events,

such as art walks, urban gardening, and holiday festivals, in an effort to collectively enhance the

lifestyles of members of the community.

Given the limited time and resources the mothers possessed, all of the mothers within

the study provided ample learning opportunities for their children within their own community

and nearby communities, signifying their involvement in their children's education *outside* of

the context of 'school.' Weekly trips to their town library to gather books and to participate in

literacy-based programs were common occurrences among all of the mothers. The families also

frequented the local parks, recreation centers, and skating rinks in order to spend time with and

provide healthy activities for their children. All of the mothers and their children were members

of the community's YWCA, which not only provided activities for the families to stay healthy, but

also hosted several outreach programs for the children during the summer. Beyond the

community-based organizations, the mothers and the children within the study were heavily

involved in faith-based organizations, which provided a number of opportunities to all members

of the family to work and serve collaboratively with other community members.

Such activities and events as those sponsored by the various community-based

organizations are oftentimes not perceived to be a component of an individual's education;

however, when viewed through a holistic lens, the programs are in fact approaching the growth

of individuals in what Miller (1990) identifies as a holistic education, which is learning

opportunities to enhance the intellectual, spiritual, and physical development of individuals

within the community. Throughout observations of the children and their mothers within the

community and the interactions that took place amongst the mothers, their children, and

community members, education, in the sense of growth and development, was occurring. All of

the mothers recognized and expressed the importance of learning that takes place in a variety

of settings, and that education did extend beyond the brick-and-mortar building of the school.

> *Sherry:* "Think back to a time when you were young. Were there not things that you
>
> learned outside of school that perhaps you should or shouldn't have learned?
>
> Just on the bus ride alone, I learned more than my mama wanted me to hear. It
>
> happens. We talk about keeping kids off the streets because they will learn bad
>
> habits or learn from people who are no good, so yes, learning does occur
>
> outside the school."

> *Shawna:* "Education is important. Period. Without it, things are just more difficult. So I
>
> think that school is important, but I also think the things they learn out of school
>
> are just as important if not more important for them to survive."

> *Tasha:* "I think there is a distinct difference in the learning that takes place in the school
>
> and what takes place at home and things in the community, but I still call it
>
> learning."

> *Lisa:* "They learn how to deal with people, they learn how to communicate with other
>
> kids and adults, teamwork, leadership, the activities they are involved in, they
>
> learns all of these things, and these things are important."

> *Denise:* "Sure I think someone could argue that it is not *academic*, but it is life, and there
>
> are all kinds of lessons that we learn in life."

> *Gina:* "What he learns out here, well it may not be on a test at school, but the way I see
>
> it, it is on the test, life's test to see if you are welcomed at Heaven's door."

The mothers engaged their children in all different types of activities and learning opportunities

within their community and surrounding communities by embracing the educational value in

such realms. The activities and opportunities fell within two spheres of learning environments –

unstructured and structured informal learning environments – aimed at the development of the

physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of their children. A characteristic of

unstructured learning design is a lack of predetermined objectives prior to the engagement of a

student. The majority of the activities the mothers provided for their children within the

community would be identified as unstructured, exploratory, and even play. In describing a

culture based on a whole-child approach to curriculum, Bravmann (2011) claims that the

educational process not only is centered on the student, but also holistically engages the

children so that "all learners will proceed freely and naturally to greater knowledge of

themselves and of their world" (p.103). Those in favor of a whole-child approach to education

believe that environments that foster creativity and self-directed interests will ultimately lead to

a state of 'goodness' as each child grows and develops with herself and others.

Lareau (2002) discusses the differences in structured and unstructured learning

opportunities amongst Black and White families across all socioeconomic status groups in

relation to children's engagement. Many of the activities provided to the White middle and

upper socioeconomic status children were time extensive and structured to achieve determined

objectives. The activities in which the Black families of lower socioeconomic provided for their

children, however, were not structured, were exploratory in nature, and were very much

considered natural growth of a child. Such activities did not have predetermined objectives on

the onset of the 'lesson.' The reasons why the mothers provided such opportunities for the

children to engage with community-based organizations and other learning opportunities within

the community varied to a certain degree; however, all of the mothers provided such activities

to promote the whole-child.

Denise: "Everything that they do at the school is good. Kids need that, but there are

other things they need to in order to make it in this world. I know I have to

provide that for her, but she is also needs guidance in ways that maybe I can't

provide. And she *deserves* it."

Gina: "The school can't do everything, I get that. But we focus on testing and math and

reading and we forget that they are kids and we forget that they have other

interests too."

Tasha: "School is important, but I don't think they *see* my child at the school. They don't

recognize her strengths and weaknesses as a part of who she is. I don't even

know if they see a little Black girl."

Lisa: "I think the teachers get so wrapped up in the testing that they forget they are

dealing with young children."

Shawna: "They need environments that are nurturing, that allow them to be kids."

Tasha: "Some people look at us and think why don't those mamas do something with

those kids, running around like they are, just free willing it, and that is okay. Not

everything has to be so set. We don't always have to have rules with

everything…if she wants to run around acting like an animal with her friends, or

she wants to read books on trucks rather than dolls, then that is okay. Why

should someone step in and bother that?"

Gina: "Kids play, it is as simple as that. Look at them when they are playing. You don't

think learning is going on there? Sometimes he is so into what he is doing that I

basically have to take my hands and pry him away."

Sherry: "Sometimes we just wonder through the trails at the park with no purpose, just

taking a day for me and him to be together, and I just let him go explore. He

would spends hours just walking around flipping up rocks, asking a million

questions that I don't know the answers to. Some would think it was just a

waste of time, like we aren't getting anything done, but it is good for him."

All of the activities, both structured and unstructured, in which the mothers engaged their

children focus on the development of the whole child in an effort to prepare them to be better

citizens, for college, and for their future careers. In terms of structured activities and

organizations within which their mothers engaged their children, the mothers did so with clear

goals and objectives in mind. Although not the same churches, all of the mothers and their

children were heavily involved in their community churches. Besides regular service, the

children also took part in youth groups and various events the church sponsored for the

community. Some of the events that the children helped implement consisted of food and

clothing drives, meals-on-wheels programs, community revivals, and community beautification

projects. The reason for the engagement of the children in these activities was two-fold for the

parents; the mothers wanted their children to develop a strong spiritual foundation and they

wanted their children to be immersed in environments that emphasized 'giving back' to the

community. The interviews with the mothers demonstrate not only their desire to serve their

community and faith, but a desire to instill those beliefs and practices in their own children.

Denise: "Well it gives them something to do and keeps them out of trouble. They have

fun and also they learn stuff while they are there. It may not be anything that

helps with school, but they learn things that are not taught in school. They learn

how to work together and build trust and healthy lifestyles. It is also important

that they realize how important the church community is to their lives and their

well-being. Kids need support, and sometimes a parent can't do it all. My

church is my family and they help out just like any other family member would

in a time when perhaps you can't do it alone. My girls need to realize that

sometimes you get help, but that sometimes you gotta give the help. They need

to know how to give back."

Sherry: "Like the church, I make him go to church for himself, for his soul, but I also

make him go for the people of that church. You know how you have to do some

things for others even when yourself is flat busted? That is what I want him to

understand, that there are people in our community who have it worse off than

us, and we need to hold out our hands and help them up. Even those people

who think they don't need our help, they need us and we need them. He needs

to know these things, and so that is why I make sure he goes to church and is

involved in our community."

Gina: "My goal for my child is for him to be a *good* person. I hope that everything I do

for him helps him develop into a good person, a successful person, who is caring

of other people, who can take care of himself…but really a lot of the things I do I

do it because I want him to have a good childhood and to be a good person.

And his involvement in this community is one of those things."

Tasha: "I want [daughter] to learn that there are good people in this community, I need

her to hear that message. If you would drive by our homes and you pick up the

paper, you get a bad view of what happens here. A lot of people assume they

know the people here without actually knowing us. We are doing our part and

we doing our best, but when all you hear is negative, then you think that is all

there is. She gets to see that we are doing good, that to do good means that

you will receive good from the Lord."

Shawna: "Life throws you all kinds of things and the Lord provides you with people to

help you get through that. My son knows that we don't have what some kids

have and you know that is okay. He needs to learn though that what we have

with our community and our families is more than many people have and so he

needs to be grateful for what we can give to others."

Tasha: "It is good for her soul...she needs to know the message of God and she needs to

know how to live her life according to His words...that is how we do it."

The mothers within the study stressed the importance of giving back to their community

in whatever measure possible and that focus also extended to their own children. Beyond the

moral education each of them hoped their children were receiving during church service, the

mothers' goal was to ensure their children were witnesses to the 'goodness' surrounding the

community and its members. The objectives the mothers set for their children align precisely

with principles of Black theology as they are set forth by Hopkins (1999). In the development of

Black theology, a connection was made between God and the poor in part to the poverty

surrounding the birth of Jesus and the idea that God sides with those who see the materially

poor and oppressed. Hopkins also stresses an emancipatory connection within African

American churches and liberation for those that anchor themselves in the interests of the Black

poor. He states, "The true African American church must witness outside of buildings and on

behalf of the least in society" (p. 34). The mothers and their children, being of lower

socioeconomic status and among the least in terms of economic stability, believed that it was their and their children's job to see to it that they contributed to the communal well-being.

In addition to the church and the corresponding community involvement activities, all of the mothers enrolled their children in an afterschool program. Some of the reasons why they chose to enroll their children in the program were strictly practical reasons, such as afterschool care, costs, and schedules; however, the main reason they opted to enroll their children was directly linked to the exposure of positive role models within their own community. Hughes, Rodriguez, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, and Spicer (2006) have suggested that African American families hold strong beliefs in providing lessons about and exposure to role models that personify positive characteristics, specifically as it relates to leadership, moral character, and civic engagement. The participating mothers of the study felt it was important for their children to be surrounded by individuals 'like them', who not only maintained similar values and belief systems and embraced their culture, but also understood the meaning of being Black.

Lisa: "I want my girls to learn about their culture, to know about the civil rights, and to know who they are and be proud of who they are. They shouldn't be ashamed or think of themselves different just because they are black. I don't think the school does a very good job of promoting this, and I don't think that is right since most of the kids in the school are black."

Gina: "Most of the teachers are white. Most of them don't live around here, and most of them don't go to church or do business here. They all drive here, so they don't know us. They don't know the community, they don't know that many of these business owners have lived here most their life and will do just about anything for our kids. They don't know us, and so they just assume."

*Shawna: "*They don't see that our kids are black. That is the problem. They just don't

see it, and so they think they are being all fair and equal. But when you don't

recognize it, then you say it don't exists. So basically you saying my son doesn't

exist."

Sherry: "The church and Hope Center [afterschool program], they are good to my child

because they are teaching him the things that I am teaching him. They know

him, they stress his importance, that his is worth something. The school tries,

but it is not the same."

Denise: "The programs that I put my daughters in are safe. It is with safe people who

will teach them about other racial groups, about pride, and know how to deal

with her. They are reinforcing what I am teaching at home and what they are

hearing at church. The school is the only one miscommunicating, which is a

problem."

The mothers, the afterschool program, and the church communities provide an environment

that allows the children to not only grow and develop intellectually, spiritually, and physically as

children, but also fosters the growth and development of strong Black children with pride in

their culture. The mothers' objective in engaging their children in such opportunities was

merely to expose them to adults and environments that believed in their potential and valued

them as human beings.

The activities and opportunities the mothers of the study provided and extended to

their children are not recognized as parental involvement based on Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011)

and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1990, 1995, 2005) models. Nonetheless what these

parents do and the reasons why simply signify a form of parental involvement that is worthy of

recognition. The sacrifices the mothers make and the reasons for doing so demonstrate more

efforts of engagement and involvement than the traditional school-based activities call for, and

yet, schools and programs continue to view them as apathetic parents. Surrounding their

children with positive influences that recognize and value their culture, their potential, their

self-worth, and the modeling of giving back to the community require more effort than merely

attending a parent-teacher conference or making sure their children completed homework; they

are efforts that prove they are not apathetic parents.

Advocacy Involvement– "I Support My Son…"

Mertens (2005) wrote,

"Stepping back for a moment to consider the larger role and meaning of home,

we find that there is no word so loaded as 'home' in the Romance languages

and English. Home is a benchmark in the geography of our life world and in the

West, home is ideally a place of security and privacy – a place where one can be

'oneself,' feel protected and accepted. This is, in part, why violations of the

home as a sanctuary…seem especially vile; such actions remind us, however,

that home is not always a haven from the larger world, but a microcosm of the

larger society. Like the social order, home is a cultural construct insofar as it is

more than the physical structure we label a house" (p. 20).

Home is a microcosm of the larger society, and to that effect, societal influences play a

role in the activities that take place within the home. The boundaries of home are not clearly

drawn and are far from being impermeable to the actions of individuals and institutions,

specifically in terms of the role parents play in their children's education as an involved parent.

Historically, the home was the primary educational environment within which children learned

and parents served as the children's first teachers. As public schools became the primary

location for education to take place, the lines continued to become blurred, as noted by Reay

(2008), in separating the private realm of home from the public realm of schooling. Many

parents were expected to take on a less active role in the preparation of their children and leave

the education of children to the experts. But while in the sanctity of the home, at what point

does a parent continue to parent and stop educating?

Goals 2000: Educate America Act was an attempt through legislation to bridge the

spheres of home and school by developing partnerships between parents and teachers in an

effort to increase academic achievement for students. Although it is recognized, as Berger

(1995) suggests, that parents are children's first teachers and home is a learning environment,

many schools fail to recognize parents as 'intellectual resources' (Civil, Guevara, and Allexsaht-

Snider, 2002) and continue to intrude and shape the role of parenting in the vein of parental

involvement. Rather than embracing the knowledge and skills parents bring to the child in the

home setting, schools are attempting to educate parents by incorporating workshops and

training seminars to help parents become better parents.   Auerbach and Collier (2012) and

Delgado-Gaitan (2004) provide examples of how schools are using such workshops to *train*

parents on particular literacy skills in an effort to improve children's standardized test scores.

The discourse surrounding schools as they attempt to involve parents remains situated in a

dualistic space where the objectives of the school enter the home and the parent is expected to

fulfill and support those objectives and at the same time be content with limited reciprocal

actions on the part of the school.

One of the key measures used in many parental involvement models schools attempt in

an effort to increase parental involvement at home is requiring parents to help their children

with their homework. Within the home sphere, Epstein's (1990, 1995, 2011) learning at home category primarily deals with strategies schools can implement to provide information to families on the best methods to use to help their children with homework and curriculum-related activities. Even though as Berger (1995) suggests parents are children's first teachers, the teachers still retain the authority in this form of involvement. Such measures of involvement within the home remain to be initiated by the school and continue to be school-centered. The parents have not chosen the manner in which involvement is to take place and are again expected to take supportive roles in the schooling of the child. Helping children with their homework, completing school projects at home, and similar strategies still focus on the initiatives of the school and what the school and teachers deem best for the parents to become involved as it relates to students' schooling.

Rather than seeking out a different curriculum and providing activities to 'offset' the objectives of the schools, the mothers from the study engaged in activities within the home that consisted of support in two different aspects – supporting the efforts of the school and supporting the efforts of the community-based organizations. The participating mothers of this study, perhaps due to a lack of empowerment or possibly capital, trusted the school's efforts and the curriculum as the best possible curriculum for their children. As Auerbach (2007) has noted, many individuals who have not had the opportunity to succeed educationally, tend to trust and rely entirely on the efforts of the school in terms of curriculum. This state of trust may also be in part due to the fact that many individuals, specifically those of lower socioeconomic status are what Vincent and Martin (2002) identify as 'educational outsiders.' Lacking an understanding of the educational discourse prevents them from taking on agency as it relates to the school's curriculum. Therefore, in an effort to support the initiatives of the school, the

participating mothers of the study assumed the typical association of parental involvement in the home by helping their children with their homework, in the event it did not get completed at the afterschool program, and providing an environment conducive to learning for the children. They also were diligent about ensuring their children read daily and faithfully completed the weekly reading log required by the school. Although the mothers did not always agree with *how* the teachers approached the education of their children, they did not argue or question *what* was being taught to them.

> *Gina:* "I would like to think that I support my son rather than completely supporting the school. I support their efforts. I know that it isn't always right, but I try to support what they are doing at school in the home. I help with the homework, partly because I still can, and also because I need to know what is going on if something should go wrong."

> *Sherry:* "I don't question what he brings home. If he needs help with a project, then I try my best to help him. I know that he can't do it alone and I don't want his grades to be affected, so we do what we can do."

> *Tasha:* "I think they are teaching what my child needs to succeed. I would like to think that they are preparing her for college. I can't say definitely that she will go that route, but at least it can be an option if she can and wants to go that route."

> *Denise:* "Of course, it is not perfect, nothing is perfect, but I think they are at least preparing them to pass the state tests, and since they have to pass the tests to eventually graduate, then I feel they are on the right track."

Although Goals 2000 was an attempt to bridge the gap between the home and school by forming partnerships, legitimate partnerships with both parties having a voice in the

conversation of schooling fail to exist in many public education facilities, forcing parents to remain on the sidelines of their children's education. Even though the mothers supported and helped the initiatives of the school in the home, they still felt their relationship with the school was not one of a partnership. In fact, many of the mothers expressed a concerned about a blurring of lines between the home and school. Standing (1999) also acknowledges the blurring of lines between the home and the school, and notes "The expectation of schools that mothers' time is always available extends to the out of school hours…It breaks down the public-private divide by bringing the work of the school into the home…" (p.489). Standing also claims that many of the mothers within her study wanted a complete distinction between the schools and the home, in terms of where and when school work should take place. Although the mothers within this study did not necessarily believe in a complete separation between home and school in terms of their children's education, they did discuss the specific roles and responsibilities of the school and home and of the parents and school.

> *Tasha:* "My role is to encourage her and stress the importance of school. She has to get an education. So if I am telling her one thing or showing like I don't care, then she is more likely to quit, and that just can't happen. Mixed messages will only harm [daughter] in the long run."

> *Lisa:* "My job is to help my children in as many ways as possible to make sure they do well in school. That is my job. It is the teachers' jobs to make sure they are doing everything possible to make sure they do well. I have to trust that they are holding up their end of the bargain."

> *Shawna:* "Sometimes I feel that the teachers are more concerned about what I am or am not doing instead of worrying about what they should be doing."

Gina: "They need to worry about what takes place in the school, the students' school

work, how kids are treating each other, making sure the kids are learning what

they need to be learning. My job is to support that, to make sure my child's

needs are being met."

Ensuring their children were ready for school by providing them with the proper

nutrition and a nurturing home environment, providing their children a space to work quietly on

their homework, and supplying ample reading materials to promote literacy, all of the

participating mothers reinforced the school's objectives as well as maintained their expected

roles of a parent in the private realm of their homes. However, their activities as an involved

parent were not entirely contained within the objectives of the school. The mothers also

reinforced the efforts of the community-based organizations within the private realm of their

homes.

Many of the objectives of the afterschool program were not only established to

supplement the efforts of the school, but also to provide children with a safe, nurturing

environment that exposed children to various skills required for future success in addition to

exposing the children to positive influential role models. As noted by Assibey-Mensah (1997),

the problems that tend to be associated with Black youth are exacerbated by the deprivation of

roles models and positive social networks, and as noted by Wilson (1996), an individual's "skills,

habits, and styles are often shaped by the frequency at which they are found in their own

community" (p. 72). Given that the mothers and their children within the study lived and were

surrounded by an environment that was of lower socioeconomic status and poverty stricken,

the mothers' decisions to enroll their children in the afterschool program, as well as the variety

of other community-based activities, was in part due to a desire to immerse their children in an

environment that would provide positive influences and strong role models. As noted in observations and conversations with the mothers, it was evident the mothers reinforced the message the afterschool program was attempting to send.

> *Shawna:* "I am constantly using [director of afterschool program] as an example that my son needs to look up to. He came from this area, he was a poor black boy, and yet, he made it. *And* he is giving back. That is why my son needs to be around him."

> *Lisa:* "Kids get in trouble, they kids. But what I tell them, what Hope Center telling them, what they receiving at the YWCA, you hope that they listen. Nobody wants to listen to their mama. I didn't, so if they will listen to everyone else, then hopefully they will be better off."

> *Tasha:* "My daughter needs to know that she is a strong, beautiful black girl, who will be a strong, beautiful black woman. And she matters, and [afterschool program director] reinforces this. The people at the YWCA stresses this. All of these people tell her and show her how she is a beautiful black girl, and if she continually hears it, then she will believe it."

In conjunction with the exposure to positive role models, the prominent message the mothers wanted their children to gain dealt specifically with lessons dealing with racial socialization. Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, and Sellers (2009) discuss the concept of social racialization, "as the process by which parents teach their children about the significance and meaning of race" (p.246) as it relates to African American boys. According to their study, children of parents who consistently counteract negative racism experiences by speaking messages about self-worth and pride in their culture have greater academic motivation and

increased academic achievement compared to those children whose parents do not convey such

messages.   The participating mothers of this study chose to enroll their children in the

afterschool program and other community-based and faith-based organizations due to the

lessons and environment that supported their culture. The role of racial socialization carried

into the home as well with the mothers stressing the importance of talking to their children

about a number of things that affected their children directly because they were Black. The

mothers, in collaboration with the afterschool program directors, emphasized feelings of self-

worth, highlighted racial barriers messages, and stressed the importance of pride in their race to

their children.   All of these conversations and topics were explicitly discussed as an important

role as a Black mother in their homes.

> *Denise:* "They have to hear it. Only damage will happen if Black children are not aware
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> of the issues out there."
>
> *Lisa:* "It's something you don't want to talk about with your kid, and something white
>
> people don't have to talk about with their kids, but it is something that has to be
>
> done."
>
> *Tasha:* "She has to know that there is evil, that she will be judged because she is a young
>
> black girl, and when that time comes, if it hasn't happened already, she needs to
>
> know how to be strong and carry on. I have seen too many girls get broken
>
> down by it."
>
> *Gina:* "There is this stigma for being a Black man. It don't matter how many good Black
>
> men there are and what they have accomplished, it only takes one Black man to
>
> tear it all down again…so [son] needs to know how some people perceive him.

He needs to know what to expect, so he can stand up and say, this is me. I am

not that, *this* is me."

The parents maintained open communication lines with the directors of the community

centers, perhaps more so than with their children's teachers, and sought ways to aid the

directors in their efforts to support the children. The community centers welcomed the

extended help of the mothers, thus developing strong partnerships and a level of respect

amongst all stakeholders. In turn, the mothers used the directors and community members as

models and standards to which they wanted their own children to measure. However, they did

not only reinforce the positive influences of the afterschool program, but also reinforced the

standards and guiding principles of their churches within their home. Although the lines of

home and school were quite blurred in regards to where the parent parents and where she

educates, the boundaries between home and community, specifically the faith-based

community, were nearly nonexistent. As indicative of community life prior to the common

school era, education was not entirely confined to the schoolhouse and was, in the words of

Dewey (1938), life. The mothers embraced the community and the family of the church as

teachers for their children's intellectual and spiritual growth and development, and did not

confine the lessons presented to their children by the church to the realm of the church.

> *Gina:* "When I talk about family to my son and the importance of family in our lives, I
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> talk about this family in our home and our home with the church. They are our
>
> family and we look out for our family."
>
> *Lisa:* "This is how we do it. We have standards and we treat people good, no matter
>
> who they are. I tell the girls that we have to love everyone despite their flaws,

because we have flaws as well. Nobody is perfect, and they need to remember that."

Tasha: "The church has helped me when I was at a low point in my life, and although I don't have much, although I can't give much, I do what I can do. And I make sure [daughter] does as well."

Sherry: "The point I try to stress with [son] is that you have to give back. Give back to your community, give back to Jesus. We are blessed and although some may look at us and think, poor you…we are blessed to be here and to be healthy and we have each other. So I would like to say poor *you* to those people who think they have it all."

Within African American families, the church has played a significant role in their lives, and as Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) note, has contributed to the viability of the African American community in large measures due to their functions to promote spirituality, high achievement, and commitment to the family as survival mechanisms. Billingsley and Caldwell also observe that spirituality, in particular, is one of the most distinctive features of African American culture, and this is reflected in the participating mothers of the study. All of the mothers identified themselves as religious, attended church weekly if not more, and prayed often. They also all believed that the church played an important role in their children's lives in shaping and guiding them to live spiritual lives. This form of involvement - the spiritual guidance of the children, the reinforcement of spiritual principles – is a very important aspect of developing the whole child, and yet fails to be recognized as a component amongst any prominent parental involvement model and fails to be conceived as a form of parental involvement.

Although the prominent parental involvement models (Epstein, 1990, 1995, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995, 1997, 2005) impose specific standards on the actions and efforts of mothers in terms of parental involvement within the home, the mothers of this particular study actually moved beyond the mere expectations of a the model and served as a liaison to the school and the community-based organizations. Home, as indicated by Mertens (2005) is socially constructed, and to the participating mothers, was not confined to the house within which they and their children resided. Rather their home also included the context of community and the community members. The mothers' role as an involved parent within the home, within the community, and at the school simply entailed being an advocate for their children – advocating for their children's well-being and their children's future goals, which although significant and well-deserving of attention, has yet to be recognized within the discourse of parental involvement as parental involvement.

Parental involvement functions in what Chandler (2007) identifies as an empty signifier. It is assumed that all individuals within society know of its meaning and its defining characteristics; yet, as exemplified in the educational policies and the implementation of legislation in programs within the K-12 schools, discord exists in its meaning amongst all stakeholders of education, particularly among the individuals the policies are intended to reach. The idea of parental involvement is rarely recognized as being a socially constructed phenomenon. Individuals construct meaning through the interactions and experiences they may encounter with a particular phenomenon, in this specific case, parental involvement. Crotty (2003) defines the theory of constructionism as a belief that "…all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an

essentially social context" (p. 42). In describing how and why single working mothers construct meaning of parental involvement in their children's education, two themes emerged as contributing to their construction – the mothers' prior educational experiences and their spaces of interactions.

Prior Experiences with The 'Ideal' Involved Mother - "It's a White Girl Thing…"

The potential impact, both positive and negative, parents can have on their children is a historically recognized concept. Parents tend to pass down cultural values and belief systems to their children within the home environment and through exposure to a variety of social institutions. The experiences of a child and the environment within which she is exposed shapes and constructs the meaning she makes of those interactions, and in terms of parental involvement, the meaning single mothers make as they construct their role in their children's education is largely dependent on what they experienced as students themselves. In an attempt to understand why parents become involved in their children's schooling, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) claim that parents "construe the parental role as including parental involvement in their children's education" (p. 313) and that the construction is contributed to what they learn and witness through their own personal experiences.

All of the participating mothers within the study were raised in a single parent household with little to no presence of their fathers or other male figures in their lives. Not only did all of them witness the role their own mothers had in their educational experiences, but also observed the many barriers their own mothers faced physically, mentally, and economically throughout their entire childhood. Not one of the mothers could identify an instance when their own mothers were present in the schools, but rather recalled the involvement of their mothers outside of the context of school.

Sherry: "When you are a child, you don't know what poor is. You don't know that you

are poor until you get older and someone tells you that you are poor. You just

see your family as your family and what you experience as a family and what

you see in your community, that is just normal. So to be without a father in the

home and seeing my mama work and do what she did for me, that she took us

to church, put food on our table, and taught us right from wrong, well that's just

how it had to be, and it was normal."

Gina: "My mom was never in the schools. She had kids to feed and she had to work to

feed us. She never helped us with our school work, but she always made sure

we were clean and fed and she showed us love, and honestly, I don't think a

school knows that kids who are loved in their family and their community are

probably better off than the kids who have their moms in the school all the time

or that so called involved parent."

Denise: "I know the school means right. I know they think that if we get these mothers

in here, then that means they care and that means they will help their

children...any maybe it does for some kids. Can I say that I would have gone to

college if my mama didn't have to work or could be in the schools helping out?

Maybe, but maybe not. But I can say that I wouldn't be here today if it weren't

for her showing me how to work hard and showing commitment to a family and

showing me that faith does get you somewhere. She did what she could do and

I can't ask for anything more from her."

Lisa: "My mama sacrificed just about everything she had in order to raise me. Those

sacrifices, the school don't see them. Those sacrifices don't show up in the

schools…"

It is evident throughout the participating mothers conversations their understanding of how

schools fail to acknowledge what parents are already doing for their children in ways that are

visible to them as the children, but invisible to the school. As noted by Jackson and Remillard

(2005), since parental involvement is evaluated from the vantage point of the school, parents,

such as the participating mothers' mothers, are identified as being minimally involved and

perceived to not value education. Yet, through conversations, the mothers of the study

believed their mothers were not technically involved in their schooling, but were in fact involved

in their education. Many of them even acknowledged the influence their own mothers had in

how they approach the school and perceive their roles as parental involvement in their

children's education.

Denise: "Sometimes people, particularly white moms, think I am too harsh with my kids.

They think that I tell them too much, that I order them around, but that is how it

is. Why you going to hide something from kids when they eventually going to

have to deal with it? Why you going to let me have a choice in something that

they shouldn't have a choice in? This is how I was raised and so I do the same

with my girls."

Tasha: "I admire what my mama did. She did right, she taught me right and made me

proud of who I am today. I know that people look at me and think, well there's

another poor black mama on welfare and they think that I am the problem, that

I am lazy, and that I want to just feed off the system…but I know that is not who

I am and the best thing I can do is the same for my girl."

Shawna: "Being involved in your kid's education is being involved in their lives.

Knowing what they up to, who they are talking to, how they are doing in school

and in church. It is easy right now, while they are young, but staying involved

when they get older is probably just as important but harder. I was always mad

at my mama because she was always asking questions, where you going to be,

who you going to be with, but now I see [laugh], now I see…and I'm going to be

right up there with my own."

Even though Delpit (1995) argues for educators to view parents as resources, Griffith

and Smith (1987, 1990, 2005), and Standing (1999) suggests that the discourse surrounding

parental involvement, specifically as it relates to single motherhood, view mothers and their

children as problems of the school. Furthermore, Standing makes the point that parental

involvement is seen as a solution to societal issues, and the 'lone mother' is position within a

discourse that "views her as the cause of societal breakdown" (p. 480) as well as the solution to

the breakdown. Although the parents of the participants were not recognized by the schools or

even society as a contributor to their children's education, the mothers of the study viewed

their own mothers as a resource, a model to emulate, to navigate the realms of school, home,

and community. The roles within which their own mothers played as a parent and the activities

within which their own mothers engaged, such as exposing them to the greater community and

sacrificing personal needs within the home, constructed their idea of a mother and a mother's

role in their children's education.

During the mothers' experiences within school as students and now as parents, the mothers have also witnessed how other mothers are involved in their children's education as it pertains to the school. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) claim that parents become involve and construct their meaning of involvement based on the actions and behaviors of other mothers within the schools. In essence, parents construct their meaning of parental involvement in comparison to how other parents construct meaning. The participating mothers within the study, however, constructed their meaning based on a continuum of comparisons of other mothers. Rather than trying to achieve the standards of what other mothers are doing while in the school, the participants structured their identity utilizing a deficit model; assuming the engaged mother that maintains a heavy presence in the school was the standard to which they could not attain, which is precisely what the schools and the models of parental involvement do.

> *Gina:* "I'm not saying it is entirely a white girl thing, but you know that it is the white moms that are in there every day. Not so much here, because we don't have that many white kids in this school, but the moms that come in and help out or those that go on field trips and chaperone are the white moms."

> *Lisa: "*There are the moms that go to PTA and bake the goods, who come in there right out of a TV show. Well people need to snap back into reality, because those of us here are far from movie stars. I don't have time, and so yeah, if I have to define parental involvement it is what those moms do. And when you look at it that way, then no I am not an involved parent."

> *Shawna:* "They expect a certain mom, and one who can do this and do that and is able to sell a hundred candles for fundraisers because they have people who can buy

candles. Then you have me, who has to scrape pennies to buy one candle for

my child so that he is not the only one in the school who hasn't sold any

candles."

Denise: "Parental involvement to me or what I think it really means is a mom who is

always in the school, who goes to the meetings, goes into the classroom, stays

at home and can do what she wants to do with her kids and the school. She is

the one taking the pictures at field day, eating lunch with her children every

week. Sure that is nice, and don't we all want to be able to do that, but I can't

make that happen."

The mothers constructed an idea of parental involvement that was very much in line

with the discourse of parental involvement as a 'white girl thing' – a socially constructed

concept built around the values and norms of the White, middle-class family. Their

constructions were also based on the activities of 'that type of mom' (Stitt and Brooks, 2013);

the type of mom who has the resources to be present within the school, signifying her

involvement by being in the actual school environment to demonstrate her support and caring

attitude for her children's education. This construction was supported by the explicit curriculum

of the school in terms of parental involvement policies and the school's website, by the null

curriculum of what was not recognized, and by a standard of parenting that was imposed upon

them by the school, the administrators and teachers, as well as society. The image of the

involved parent and the expectations of the school have situated the mothers of this study in a

position that forces them to attempt to attain the unattainable; measuring their worth and

value as mothers based on a socially constructed concept of parental involvement of '*that type*

of mom.'

Spaces of Whiteness, Wealth, and Marriage -"You Put Black, Single Mom, and Poor

Together…You're Just Screwed…"

At a most basic level, the idea of space and the construction of individuals' identities

have been interconnected; people create and develop spaces as often as spaces can be used to

shape and develop people (Massey, 1994). The geographies of space have multiple and

changing boundaries, with overlapping and intersecting lines maintained by social relations of

power and exclusion. As noted by Bettis and Adams (2005), "Places are made through power

relations which construct the rules which define the boundaries. These boundaries are both

social and spatial – they define who belongs to the place and who may be excluded, as well as

the location or site of the experience" (p. 4). As it relates to parental involvement, space plays a

significant role in the construction of the identity of an involved parent in children's education

and in its amorphous shape as a mother navigates the boundaries of various spaces and places.

The prominent parental involvement models, the educational reform policies, the

expectations of the school, and the entire discourse of parental involvement has powerful

consequences for mothers, particularly those who are non-white and of lower socioeconomic

status, in their ability to visualize themselves as an involved parent within the space of school

and parental involvement that has constructed a specific type of mother as an involved parent.

The discourse within the school has, in a sense, already written the mothers' scripts, and inhibits

the mothers' ability to write their own script as an involved parent. The space of the school

circulates messages of power, privilege, and inclusion for who can and cannot be an involved

parent.

Lareau and McNamara-Horvat (1999) situate the role of Bourdieu's capital within

moments of 'social inclusion' and 'social exclusion' between parents and school officials. Their

explanation of the moments centers on the context of the capital and how individuals actually

activate the capital they possess. Although Bourdieu (1977, 1987, 1989, 2007) claims that

everyone possesses forms of capital, it is important to note that given the expectations of the

school and the discourse surrounding parental involvement, none of the mothers' capital was

recognized. Through their efforts to communicate with teachers during school-based events

about their children and being silenced and the perceived expectations to be present in the

school, the mothers recognized that they failed to meet the standards of a 'good mother' and an

'involved parent' and they were well-aware they were being viewed with a deficit lens. All the

capital of the world, in the eyes of these mothers, would not change the moments of exclusion

for them as an involved mother, unless it was in the form of whiteness, wealth, and marriage.

> *Lisa:* "I would be treated differently if I was white…white mothers do not have to deal
>
> with this…"
>
> *Tasha:* "If I had money, then someone might listen to me."
>
> *Sherry:* "The thing is that they see me as some defect since I don't have a man…as if
>
> marriage solves all of the problems."
>
> *Gina:* "You put black, single mom, and poor together…you're just screwed…"

Parental involvement and all other activities that take place within social institutions,

specifically schools, are constrained and dictated by the culture encompassing the social

institutions. The culture of schools and that of parental involvement is white, and thus, only

white cultural capital is accepted and embraced. Specifically, it is the white racial frame (Feagin,

2010) within our society that has structured every institution that dictates the exclusion and

inclusion spaces of parental involvement in children's education. The white racial frame has

imbedded stereotypes and rationalizations to the stereotypes in a manner that allows White

individuals to construct their own identity in terms of what they are not; not black, not Latino, not lower income and so on. Thus, the construction of the mothers' identities and meanings of parental involvement in their children's education is largely due to the white racial framing of the schools. When whiteness is in power within the schools, whiteness is able to create, maintain, and change the rules of parental involvement; therefore, the Black single working mothers of this study will never possess the 'right capital' and will never be perceived or included in the conversation of involved parents.

Given the fact that black single working mothers are not viewed as resources by the school, they are also approached as in need of educating. Within the spaces of interactions in schools, specifically as it relates to interactions between parents and teachers, the teachers are, in fact, the knowers. Code (1991) poses the question of 'the knower and the known' from an epistemological standpoint. Although Code is working strictly within the realm of feminist theory and the construction of knowledge, the question and its answer is applicable to the space of the school and the interactions between parents and teachers. The subject to be known is the child, and given a mother has raised her child, one would think that she possesses quite a bit of knowledge of the known; yet, once mothers enter the space of school, they are then perceived to lack any knowledge of the known. The role of the knower shifts positions due to the power relations of the school, the social constructs of the school, and the teachers – the experts – become the knowers of the known. Through conversations with the mothers and observations of interactions between the mothers and their children's teachers, it is clear whose knowledge is of most worth.

The power relations of the knower and the known within the space of the school is best exemplified by a conversation between Gina, one of the participating mothers of a son within the elementary school and her son's teacher.

Teacher: "We believe that [son] needs to be tested for special education. He is struggling in both reading and math, he has a hard time focusing on his work and has trouble following the rules of the classroom. I have spoken with a couple of other teachers and they agree with me. He is needs to be tested."

Gina: "I don't really want him tested. I don't think there is anything wrong with him. He finishes all of his work and his grades are okay. I don't understand what the problem is."

Teacher: "I realize he finishes all of his homework, but he has a difficult time focusing on the work when he is in school. Based on his pre-assessment tests, he is showing to be below the expectations of the school. We feel that he should be tested and then we will be able to provide him the instruction that he needs to succeed."

Gina: "I don't want to have him tested. I don't want him labeled. I know with enough hard work and help, he will be fine. If I allow you to test him and he is labeled special education, then he is labeled for the rest of his life. He just needs practice and some one-on-one time."

Teacher:" I think you are afraid of the way people with perceive him and not really concerned about his education. You need to be concerned about his needs, and a test can help us determine that. There is not any stigma to being in special education classes and just because we have him tested does not mean he will

meet the qualifications to be identified as special education. Also, if he does

meet the qualifications, and improves in a couple of years, then he will be

removed from the program. I think you really need to consider his needs and

his education. We need to do what is best for [son]."

The conversation between the mother and her son's teacher, this space of interaction, demonstrates the power relations in place and how the mother is situated within the dialogue. The teacher assumes the position of knower, the individual who knows what is best for the child, and the parent is to assume a compliant position with the teacher's decision. Such interactions within the space of school have played a significant role in constructing all of the mothers' identity and meaning of an involved parent. However, once removed from the realm of the school, and into the space of school and community, the parents not only resume the position of knower of the children, but also are empowered, in fact are included, to be involved parents.

The community-based organizations, specifically in terms of their churches and the afterschool programs, all of which although situated within Feagin's (2010) white racial frame of society, still align with Afro-centric culture and pedagogy, embraced and viewed the mothers as resources to pursue their overall objectives. Not only did they accept and utilize the mothers in an effort to educate the children within those programs, they also acknowledged the fact that they could not accomplish the objectives of the programs without the mothers. By recognizing the efforts and the roles the mothers played in the overall educational growth and development of the children, the community-based organizations and church family created a space of interaction for the mothers to become empowered individuals. The respect and value provided

to the mothers was returned with an active commitment on the part of the mothers to be involved parents.

> *Denise:* "They allow me to be me. They see my worth, they see my child's worth…"

> *Sherry:* "The Hope Center, they don't care that I don't have money, they don't care that I am single, they aren't blaming me for all the problems in society…they just want me to take care of my son, and to them, that is really all that matters."

> *Lisa:* "You know when you belong and when you don't belong. I know that I am not wanted at the school even though they say they want me. It's not sincere. But the community welcomes me, they know that I can do good for others, and they expect me to help those that are less off than myself."

> *Shawna:* "I will help in any way that I possibly can. I do my part, and if I had more time or more money, I would do even more. They take what I can give and don't expect anymore."

The spaces within the community—based and faith-based organizations and the interactions between the mothers and community members allowed for partnerships to exist. The various environments and the culture of the organizations did not exclude the efforts of the mothers, but rather embraced their strengths and weaknesses as related to the aims and goals of the programs. Although in some situations the mothers were not the knowers of the knowledge being presented within the organizations, they still retained the knower identity in the cases that their children were involved. Delgado-Gaitan (1991, 2001, 2006) calls for a total investment on the part of schools to create ways parents can become a part of their children's education in a manner than not only empowers the parents, but also provides a continuous

transition from home to school.   An empowerment framework, according to Delgado-Gaitain

(1991) includes aspects of collectivity and mutual respect, in which the participants "become

aware of their social conditions and their strengths; they determine their choices and goals.

Action is taken to unveil one's potential as a step to act on one's own behalf" (p.23). The

community-based and faith-based organizations provided ongoing processes of empowerment

for the mothers, which in turn, not only affected their involvement within the organizations and

programs, but also remained with the mothers while in the sanctity of their homes. In essence,

the mothers were empowered to be active and engaged mothers in their children's education.

Personal prior educational experiences and witnessing the experiences of others'

construction of parental involvement play significant roles in how and why black single working

mothers construct their identity as involved parents. Their identities or lack thereof are also

constructed through the spaces and places of interactions between mothers and various

stakeholders. In some places, such as the schools, the mothers' identities and life scripts were

already written and awaiting their rehearsal, while other areas, such as the community,

promoted empowerment on the part of the mothers to construct and write their own scripts as

involved and engaged mothers. The dominant discourse of parental involvement, the

educational policies and programs promoting parental involvement, and the school's

expectations of parental involvement not only shape the construction of mothers' identities as

non-involved parents in their children's education, but also hinder the proposed outcomes they

intended to accomplish. Until schools and other social institutions begin to analyze and

deconstruct the white racial framing of schools, and specifically parental involvement as "that

type of mom", the identity of black single working mothers of lower socioeconomic status will

continually be construed as the' minimally involved and hard to reach', and parental

involvement, with its intent to increase academic achievement for all students, will never be reached.

Discussion

In an attempt to define culture, Geertz (1975) paraphrases an analogy of Max Weber's web by claiming, "Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (p. 5). Unpacking parental involvement exposes a 'culture' of parental involvement that is constructed as a web. It is clear that boundaries of parental involvement are infinite with no distinguished navigational points to determine where the lines are drawn or where the actions of an involved mother resume. Rather, the involvement of a mother consists of interconnections, relationships, and exposure to several aspects of society within the culture of parental involvement. Surrounded in a discourse – a web – that positions them as deviant, a problem to the school and society, the mothers, were in fact deviant to the standards of the school in essence due to their actions that moved beyond expectations of the ideal involved mother. The mothers of the study not only attended to the expectations of the schools, but also engaged in a greater capacity outside the realm of the school within the home and the community. The reason for their efforts and the continuation of their actions were centered on their support for the children. Although the mothers' efforts are not recognized in prominent parental involvement models or educational policies, the mothers of the study were, in fact, involved in their children's education.

As a targeted strategy for increasing standardized test scores and academic achievement in an effort to close the achievement gap, schools and educational policies have

called for a surge in measures to increase parental involvement. The calls have implicitly, and in

some cases explicitly, targeted children of families that are considered 'at risk', which are

predominantly families of color and of lower socioeconomic status. The ideology surrounding

the parental involvement discourse, as well as the various components of the models and

implementation practices, are centered on the concept of standardization - social efficiency-

driven curriculum in a sense. Parental involvement has been identified as one of the solutions

to overcome low standardized test scores amongst low performing students. Given the test-

driven curriculum and the accountability rhetoric within the public schools, the measures taken

to not only educate the children, but also involve parents have been approached by similar

means. A one-size-fits-all mentality to the school's curriculum has been perceived by school

officials to be applicable to parental involvement. Rather than recognizing and embracing the

unique lived experiences, values, and beliefs of all individuals into the conversation of parental

involvement, schools have adopted and institutionalized a 'model' of parental involvement in

the service of the value of being efficient. Much like the belief that all children must learn in the

same way, the same material, and at the same time, the belief that all parents and the activities

in which they engage in terms of parental involvement conform precisely into a model has

detrimental effects, even counterproductive effects, on the intended outcomes of the

curriculum.

Historically, the social-efficiency movement in American schools, as Kliebard (2004)

has noted, was an attempt to 'eliminate the waste' in the curriculum and the idea that

everything relating to the schools could, in a sense, be predicted and controlled by the use of

science. As Kliebard notes, "It was a science of exact measurement and precise standards in the

interest of maintaining a predictable and orderly world" (p.76). The surge of social-efficiency

within the Progressive Era was during a period when the influences of the family and church were in question, and the function of the school, specifically the teachers, was expected to restructure the deteriorating social institutions of society. Quoting Ross (1901), Kliebard writes, "The school…was actually in a better position than the family to instill the habit of obedience to an external law" (p.79). Placing children within a controlled environment surrounded by experts was one way to curtail the negative influences of the families, churches, and the declining moral standards of society.

The idea, then, of parental involvement conceived within a social-efficiency ideology is that if schools can control for and predict the activities within which parents engage in as it relates to the school and, in part, the homes, then schools are using the parents as conduits to reinforce the messages being taught within the schools. Not only are the children influenced, possibly negatively by the mixed messages received in regard to the explicit, implicit, and null curricula (Eisner, 2002) of the schools, but the parents as well are receiving the messages; their involvement is not acceptable, and only that which is deemed appropriate by the school is counted. Thus, parents either assume the position or the role deemed 'involved' by the school, or they simply choose not to participate. In the case of the mothers of the study, they attempted to fill the expectations of the school, while simultaneously teaching their own curriculum.

The expectations of the school in terms of parental involvement placed upon the mothers of the study were foundational in two aspects of the mothers' efforts to be involved in their children's education; they coerced the mothers to become involved in school-based activities and served as a basis of construction in the mothers' own identities as involved mothers. One of the main reasons why the mothers attended most, if not all, of the traditional

school-based activities, such as parent-teacher conferences and meet-the-teacher nights, was

simply because the school counted those events as a form of involvement. Perceiving presence

as an expectation of parental involvement, the mothers, knowing their limitations to being

present in other capacities, felt that these forms of involvement would demonstrate to the

school their nature of involvement and disprove any notion that they were apathetic parents.

Indicative of the prominent parental involvement models and programs, such as Epstein (1990,

1995, 2011) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005), and the work of scholars

such as Lawson (2003), and Auerbach (2007), these types of activities tend to be the most

emphasized and highly recognized types of involvement based on the vantage point of the

school. In a sense, the mothers' presence at the activities demonstrated that they cared, and

their caring actions could then potentially be perceived on the part of the school as actions of

'good mothers'.

As Smith and Griffin (2005) argue, parental involvement policies and programs implicitly

rely on the nuclear, two-parent family, with the father assuming the breadwinner position in the

family and the stay-at-home mother is able to focus all of her energy on maintaining the house

and children's school work. Families who do not fit within this construct create problems for

schools. Under the 'panopticon' (Foucault, 1995) of parental involvement, the mothers were

aware they were being measured by standards and expectations they knowingly knew they

could not attain – a White, middle-class ideal (Auerbach, 2007; Reay, 2008) - yet feared what

would happen to their children academically if they did not conform as best as possible to the

expectations of the school; therefore, the expectations of the school and the socially

constructed concept of parental involvement contributed to the construction of the mothers'

own identities of an involved parent within the realm of the school. Hoover-Dempsey and

Sandler (1995) claim that mothers' construction of an involved mother is derived largely due to their prior educational experiences with involved mothers and what they witness during their childhood. The mothers of the study were also the daughters of single working mothers who also possessed limited time, material resources, and knowledge about the educational system to be an involved mother within the school. The mothers of the study not only were able to witness the invisible work of parental involvement in which their own mothers engaged during their childhood, they also witnessed the visible efforts of the majority White mothers within the realm of their own childhood schools. Both experiences contributed to their own personal construction of an involved mother; however, the White mothers' efforts and behaviors were reinforced in the educational policies and parental involvement programs as the right way to do parental involvement.

The mothers within the study constructed their meaning of an involved parent within the school on the basis of a continuum of involvement. At one of end of the continuum was the White, middle-class mother who was in charge of the PTO, who had the resources, time, and knowledge of the educational system to volunteer in the classroom, chaperone field trips, and buy treats and baked goods for the classroom. The construction of 'that type of mom' (Stitt and Brooks, 2013) from the perspective of the participating mothers resembled Posey-Maddox's (2013) mothers who are "professionalizing the PTO" (p. 236). On the other end of the continuum were the mothers who did absolutely nothing in regards to their children's education, failed to attend the events, communicate with teachers, or stay on top of their children's academic progress. The participating mothers within the study placed their involvement, as it pertained to the school, in between the two constructs. Due to the expectations of the school and the construct of the ideal involved mother, the mothers

structured their identity utilizing a deficit model, because they knew they were unable to achieve the standards of an involved mother. Without whiteness, wealth, and marriage, the mothers knew they would not be able to achieve the gold star standard of the involved mother; therefore, they did what they were able to do within their means by attending events and staying connected to their children's academic progress among other things. The mothers did not consider themselves 'involved mothers' at the school due to the expectations of the school and their prior experience with White mothers' involvement in their own education. Outside the context of school, beyond the constraints of the ideal involved mother, the mothers self-identified as involved mothers. As stated by one of the participating mothers of the study, "Being involved in your kid's education is being involved in their lives." Being involved in their children's lives extended beyond the perimeter of the school in realms that empowered them personally as involved mothers, but also saw them as the intellectual resources (Civil et al., 2002) they were or had the potential to be.

Within the realm of the community, with community-based and faith-based organizations, and in their homes, the mothers were empowered to be and constructed themselves to be involved parents of their children's education. They not only exposed their children to the wealth of information and resources of the community in an effort to contribute to their children's growth and development, but they also reinforced those lessons and messages received from the community within the sanctity of their homes. Their involvement was essentially that of a liaison, and home represented a space where the objectives of both community and school were reinforced. The mothers' actions supported their children's intellectual development as accorded to the objectives of the school in addition to promoting

the spiritual and emotional development of the child as accorded to the objectives of the faith-based and community-based organizations.

The mothers' aims to enrolling and immersing their children in activities within the community were for a multitude of reasons varying in degree from practical means, such as afterschool care, work schedules and finances, to theoretical reasons, including the type of culture and environment in which they wanted their children subjected. Nonetheless, the primary purposes for providing community-based and faith-based organized activities for their children stemmed largely due to the community teachers and othermothers within the community, the culturally relevant pedagogy utilized in the organizations, and the lessons of social racialization the children received; all of which aligned to the mothers' beliefs and values as important in terms of their children's education.

The theory of intensive mothering evolved from the work of Hays (1996), in which she claims that mothering is a historically constructed ideology, in which society recognizes certain aspects as "sacred, inviolable, or at least commonsensical that follow from the natural propensities of mothers or the absolute needs of children" that create "a cultural power of the concept of mothering in our society" (p. x). The ideology of intensive mothering, according to Hays, centers on the expectations that mothers should expend exhaustive resources in raising their children and an unselfish rationality guides the mother's behavior. The intensive mothering ideology has saturated schools in the form of parental involvement, and has created a conflicting position for single working mothers to navigate. Single working mothers, faced with the constraints of providing for their families financially as well as emotionally, are asked to fulfill the work of school under the duties of involved parent. Given their lack of personal resources – time, energy, and money – many single working mothers must rely on available

support systems to aid in the mothering expectations placed upon them by the schools and society.

The mothers of the participating study, facing similar situations associated with being a single working mother, relied heavily on the community-based and faith-based organizations and the members within each organization as their support system to help in the growth and development of their children. Although the mothers could not fulfill the expectations of the intensive mothering ideology alone, they ensured the expectations were met through a collective effort with their community, specifically through the efforts of Hill-Collins's (2008) othermothers and Murrell's (2000, 2001) community teachers. Hill-Collins notes that African-American communities recognized that "vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible" (p.119), and as result many African-American communities rely on the assistance provided by othermothers – "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities" (p.119). Black motherhood is constructed very differently from Hays (1996) intensive mothering ideology, which the focus on mothering is done solely through the efforts of the individual mother. The centrality of Black motherhood is organized and maintained through women-centered networks that not only provide support in child-care measures, but also represent a space that allows for the confrontation of oppressive institutions (Hill-Collins, 2008). The confrontation of oppressive institutions and the teaching of social activism occurs through the African-American community 'family', which is reflective in the participating mothers' decisions to engaged and immerse their children within the community networks.

Murrell (2000) also brings attention to the wealth of intellectual resources within urban communities, specifically in terms of the contributions of community teachers. Murrell (2001)

developed a framework for teacher preparation in urban settings, and in doing so, stresses the

concept of creating communities of practice that recognize culturally and linguistically diverse

student populations. He calls for an increase in community teachers – "teachers (particularly of

color) whose teaching practice is effective with students in culturally, linguistically, and

ethnically diverse urban communities" (p. 339). Murrell identifies community teachers as those

individuals who "see themselves as change agents" and who develop the "contextualized

knowledge of culture, community, and identity of children and their families as the core of their

teaching practice" (p.340). Due to their in-depth knowledge of the families they serve,

community teachers also forge strong relationships with students' families and include the

parents within their space of education. The pastors of the churches, the directors and

administrators at the Hope Center, and the members of the churches, although not licensed

teachers with a thorough understanding of curriculum and sound pedagogy, would in fact be

identified as community teachers due to their commitment to what Ladson-Billing (1995)

defines as culturally relevant teaching that was committed to the collective, not just the

individual, empowerment of the community.

From the perspectives of the participating mothers of the study, the community

members within the church and afterschool programs also filled the role of Hill-Collins's (2008)

othermothers for the mothers of the study. They helped with their children's homework and

provided additional instruction, most times one-on-one tutoring, to contribute to their

children's academic success. They oftentimes provided snacks to hold the children over until

their mothers could pick them up, and ultimately they provided a safe, nurturing environment

for the children to go to afterschool. The community members – othermothers- not only

supported the mothers' efforts in raising their children, but also supported the growth and

development of the children's culture in order to provide them with the best available resources they could provide to give them a chance to succeed. The members of the community-based and faith-based organizations were considered family; specifically, family that provided strong positive role models to help in the development of character and leadership in their children in addition to the providing a nurturing, safe environment for their children to thrive as Black children. The environments within which the children were subjected embraced culturally relevant pedagogy – pedagogy that "not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469). Unlike the schools, according to the mothers' opinions, the community-based and faith-based organizations and the members within each recognized the differences in their children, stressed the importance of and pride in their race, and allowed the messages to relate to their personal cultural context. The mothers provided such opportunities to their children because both the othermothers of the mothers' community and the community teachers provided lessons of racial socialization, which was being taught within the home in an effort to address the social, emotional, intellectual, and moral growth and development of the children.

Racial socialization, or ethnic socialization, refers to the transmission of information regarding race and ethnicity to children from adults. According to Hughes et al. (2006), racial socialization specifically entails "exposure to cultural practices and objects, efforts to instill pride in and knowledge about African Americans, discussions about discrimination and how to cope with it, and strategies for succeeding in mainstream society" (p. 748). Evans, Banerjee, Meyer, Aldana, Foust, and Rowley (2012) also note that racial socialization may raise awareness of injustice and connect with children's developing sense of agency. The participating mothers of

the study stressed the importance of their children receiving messages of racial socialization and believed that communication about issues relating to race where absolutely necessary for their children to become successful contributing individuals to their community and the greater society.

All of the components of the community-based and faith-based organizations – the role of the othermothers and community teachers, communication of racial socialization, and the culturally relevant pedagogy – tie into the mothers' overall vision of education for their child. Conceiving parental involvement as a culture, then the culture of the parental involvement in which the mothers of the study were situated within and exposed their children was a curriculum that was specifically focused on the child; a whole-child, holistic curriculum that met the social, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual growth and development of the child.

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2007) has identified five tenets in the whole child initiative: healthy lifestyles, safe environments, engaged learning, support from adults, and challenging curriculum. As Bravmann (2011) describes, whole-child is the "well-rounded development of the heart, the body, the mind, and the spirit…the desire to develop the goodness, morality, and ethical foundations for leading a righteous life, and the betterment of the immediate community, society, and the world" (p.103). The concept of approaching education through the whole-child recognizes the mind, body, and spirit of an individual is inseparable. Whole-child education is also aligned with Miller's (1990) conception of holistic education, which he describes as a paradigm that approaches education spiritually more so than materialistically, viewing the learner as a "human being as creatively unfolding from within, rather than as a passive victim of biological, economic, or ideological forces" (p. 58). Holistic approaches to curriculum recognize the interconnections of humans

with all other components of life; in a sense, an ecological model of life, emphasizing the integration of the inner qualities of human life with the outer physical structures throughout society.

The 'structure' of a holistic curriculum develops in the balance of interactions between the individual and her community, creativity and tradition, intuition and reason (Miller, 1990) and embraces the interconnectedness of all. In an attempt to explain the humane aspect of the holistic curriculum and the purpose of 'school,' Macdonald (1964) wrote: "the school does not exist primarily to inculcate our cultural heritage, not principally to develop role players for society nor primarily to meet the needs and interests of the learners. The school exists to bring learners in contact with reality, of which, our society, ourselves, and our cultural heritage are parts (p.47). Education is to be experienced as a system of relationships that are not intended to simply serve as a means to an end; rather the relationships aid in the development of all individuals involved within the process.

The participating mothers of the study had visions for their children that included success in the form of giving back to their community, growing and developing spiritually, intellectually, and actively to effect change locally and globally, and to create life-long learners who would continue in their moral course to goodness. Through the efforts of the mothers as involved mothers in the education of their children within the home as a liaison, their efforts to immerse their children in culturally relevant environments with strong, positive, Black community teachers and othermothers, and their unwavering efforts to demonstrate their involvement to the school, the mothers of this study went to great lengths to navigate the web of parental involvement for one main reason – to educate their children as whole human beings – socially, emotionally, spiritually, and academically.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to understand how single working Black

mothers become involved in their children's education, the reasons why they become involved,

and how they construct their identities and meaning as being involved parents in their children's

education. The study was an attempt to move beyond the traditional models of parental

involvement that tend to only recognize mothers' efforts and presence within the school and

towards a reconceptualized idea of parental involvement that recognizes the engagement of

mothers outside the context of the school. This chapter will provide a summary of the study, the current literature, and the findings of the study, followed by a discussion of the conclusions derived from the findings. Finally, recommendations for future research are presented.

Summary of the Study

This study sought to understand how and why single working Black mothers become involved in their children's education and the meaning and construction of their identity as an involved parent. Specifically, two research questions guided the study: 1.) How are single working mothers involved in their children's education and why? and 2.) How do single working Black mothers construct their meaning and identity of an involved parent in their children's education and why? In an effort to seek understanding of how single working mothers in one community become involved in their children's education and the reasons for doing so, an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) was utilized and framed through a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2009) and analyzed and interpreted through critical and feminist lenses. Six participants were selected through means of purposive and snowball sampling procedures by gaining access through a local community-based organization which the mothers and their children were all members. The participants of the study were single mothers who were employed in one full-time job and had children in one elementary school in grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Through the use of semi-structured open-ended interviews, three interviews lasting approximately one hour in length for each of the six participants, an in-depth perspective was obtained on the unique real-life context and interactions of mothers and their children as they engage in the involvement of their children's education. Nonparticipant observations of interactions between the mothers and their children's teachers, the mothers and the community leaders, and the mothers and their children were also utilized to gather

additional data to gain a complete picture of their involvement. Documents pertaining to the

students' academic progress, communication between the school and mothers, the school's

parental involvement policy, and information on the school's website also contributed to the

context of the school's culture within which the mothers were situated.

Review of the Literature

Decades of research have publicized the multiple benefits of parental involvement in

children's schooling. Parental involvement is claimed to have a direct impact on the academic

achievement of students, and studies have demonstrated the benefits to students whose

parents are involved in their education. Specifically, research addressing parental involvement

has shown that students tend to have higher grade point averages (Chen & Gregory, 2009;

LeCroy & Krysik, 2008), higher standardized test scores (Hayes, 2011), and better academic

performance in subject specific courses such as reading and mathematics (Baker, Gersten, &

Keating, 2000; Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2007; Hong & Ho, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein,

2005; Van Voorhis, 2009) than students whose parents are not involved in their education.

Parental involvement in children's education is also linked to better attendance rates (Chang &

Romero, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon, 2007), fewer behavioral issues in the

classroom (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005; Dinh, Roosa, Tein, and Lopaz, 2002; Sheldon &

Epstein, 2002), and higher graduation rates (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). The existing literature has

contributed significantly to the understanding of parental involvement and has had a direct

effect on the creation and implementation of educational policies and models created to target

parental involvement.

Educational policy developed in an effort to close the achievement gap between low

achieving students and high achieving students first originated with the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965, which specifically addressed the need for schools to create

pathways and programs to involve parents of 'at-risk' students. In an effort to reach children of

low-income communities and explicitly an effort to increase their academic achievement

through higher standardized tests scores, policy within A Nation at Risk, Goals 2000: Educate

America Act, and No Child Left Behind continued educational reform efforts through calls for

parental involvement in the schools and the establishment of partnerships between parents,

teachers, and school administrators.

Parental involvement has been conceived and identified as the participation in or

attendance to traditional school-centric activities (Lawson, 2003). Models and programs

promoting parental involvement, such as Epstein (1990, 1995, 2011) and Hoover-Dempsey and

Sandler (1995, 1997, 2005) focus on the activities parents engage in at the school and in their

homes as it is directly linked to the activities taking place in and the objectives of the school.

The idea of parental involvement surrounding the schools and educational policies tends to

embrace a 'white middle-class' ideal (Auerbach, 2007; Reay, 2005). The defining attributes of

parental involvement - those that are recognized by members of the educational field - are

those that entail and require parents to communicate with teachers, volunteer to chaperone

field trips, attend programs at the school, such as Back to School (Meet the Teacher) nights

(Lopez & Donovan, 2009) and parent-teacher conferences, and even requires parents to supply

snacks and treats for the classroom (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Lareau (1987, 1992, 2002, 2011) has spent many years shaping and contributing to the

parental involvement discourse. Most of Lareau's work as the sole author and in collaboration

with others (see Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau & McNamara-Horvat, 1999; Lareau &

Weininger, 2003, 2008; Weininger & Lareau, 2003) is situated within Bourdieu's (1977, 1987,

1989, 2007) framework of capital and has contributed significantly to educators' understanding of the role capital plays in the interactions that occur between parents and school officials and among parents and their offspring, thus shedding light on how parental involvement varies between different races, such as European American and African American families, and among social classes. These studies have not only provided a critical view on the 'white culture' of schools and the corresponding interactions and acceptable capital activation, but have also provided varying perspectives on parental involvement, especially as it relates to individuals who do not fall within the white, middle-class demographic categories.

Although the research on parental involvement has made substantial headway on understanding parental involvement of various ethnic, racial groups and socioeconomic status, and the possible effects and implications parental involvement has on children's academic achievement, the continuation of research needs to be conducted in order to fully gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement. Several gaps in the understanding of parental involvement still exist: the definitions, the expectations, what counts as parental involvement, for whom and why as it relates across and between various racial, ethnic, gender, and social categories.   Due to the changing demographics within the American public schools, the need to reconceptualize parental involvement to be inclusive of and recognize the efforts all individuals is long overdue.

Summary of Findings

Situated within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1986, 1994) social ecological theory, specifically Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem, this study attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of how and why single working Black mothers become involved in their children's education in their children's school, their home, and in their community, in addition

to how and why the mothers construct their identities as involved parents. The involvement of the mothers is presented in a variety of activities that take place within the home, community, and school; however, five essential thematic categories emerged from the conversations pertaining to why the mothers engaged in such activities and their construction of an involved parent: symbolic involvement, culturally relevant involvement, advocacy involvement, ideal mother, and wealth, marriage, and whiteness.

Within the realm of the school, the mothers engaged in traditional-based activities typically associated with parental involvement within the current literature. The forms of involvement included attending school-based events, such as parent-teacher conferences and meet-the-teacher night, staying connected to their children's academic progress, and maintaining lines of communication with the teachers and the school administrators. While all of these behaviors on the part of the parent have been identified as parental involvement within the prominent models (Epstein, 1990, 1995, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995, 1997, 2005), the parents viewed these forms of involvement as merely symbolic; to demonstrate to the school, the school officials, and the school community that they cared about their children's education. The mothers were involved in such activities not for the academic achievement of their children, but rather to deflect the deficit lens in which they were aware they were being viewed.

In terms of community involvement, the mothers exposed and immersed their children in community-based and faith-based organizations that not only contained positive role models, but also fostered the spiritual, emotional, social, and intellectual growth and development of the children: both of which were viewed to be contributing factors of success for the children's future. The environments and the activities conducted with the organizations

were culturally relevant and reinforced lessons of racial socialization. Recognizing their race, promoting pride in their culture, and advocating for social justice, the community-based and faith-based organizations valued the children and the mothers as human beings.

Within the sanctity of the home, the mothers aided the children with their homework, diligently ensured their children read daily, signed the children's reading logs weekly, and helped with school projects that needed to be completed at home. In terms of nonrelated involvement activities, the mothers provided encouragement, stressed the importance of school, church, and discussed issues relating to race and their culture. In essence, the mothers served as liaisons to support the intellectual growth of the child based on the objectives of the school and supported the social, emotional, and spiritual development of their children based on the objectives of the community-based and faith-based organizations. The reasons for positioning themselves as a liaison for both was not strictly to serve the purposes of the school and community-based organizations, but rather to serve as an advocate for their children.

The construction of the mother's identity of an involved mother was largely based on the activities of the White mothers during their own schooling experiences. The mothers were aware that they were being measured according to the idea of the 'ideal' involved mother, which was not only reinforced in the discourse of parental involvement, but was also supported through the expectations of the school. The ideal involved mother was the mother who had available resources in time, money, and knowledge of the educational setting that allowed them the opportunity to maintain a heavy presence within the school. Basing their identity on the ideal involved mother, the mothers failed to identify themselves as involved parents within the school, but rather drew their identity from the actions and behaviors they engaged in at home and in the community-based and faith-based organizations. Their previous experiences with

their own mothers' involvement as invisible work and their witness to the visible actions and

behaviors of the White mothers played a significant role in their understanding of the construct

of an involved parent.

Finally, the spaces of interaction between the mothers, teachers, school officials, and

community leaders contributed to their construction of being an involved parent. In spaces

where they were recognized as intellectual resources, in the case of the community-based and

faith-based organizations, the mothers felt empowered to be an involved parent in their

children's education. However, within the formal space of the school, between interactions

with their children's teachers and school administrators, the mothers felt that their identity of

an involved parent would only come through capital in the form of marriage, whiteness, and

wealth; achieving that status would provide them the opportunity to remain a knower of their

child, the known.

Conclusion

In the past two decades, there has been a surge in literature focusing on parental

involvement. This dissertation builds on the existing literature in that it argues for the

important roles parents play in their children's education. Previous research has shown the

efforts of involved parents and the effect their efforts have on the academic achievement of

children (Epstein, & Voorhis, 2010; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002; Mo &

Singh, 2008; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). This literature has contributed significantly to

understanding the involvement activities of parents in their children's education and the

targeted strategies schools can implement to increase levels of parental involvement. However,

the majority of current literature has not recognized the efforts of the parents involved in their

children's education outside of the context of school, and specifically fails to recognize the

perspectives of single working mothers across all racial, cultural, and ethnic lines. In an attempt

to move beyond the traditional models of parental involvement that place heavy emphasis on

the presence of parents within the schools, this dissertation aimed to understand the efforts of

mothers and how their efforts relate to their children's overall growth and development within

their homes and community in order to reconceptualize the meaning of parental involvement.

The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that single working Black mothers, despite

their position within a deficit and defective discourse (Griffith & Smith, 1987, 2005; Standing,

1999), are involved in their children's education and their reason for doing so are centered on

their support their children's holistic development. The nature of their involvement and their

identities of an involved parent are largely structured due to the various spaces and places of

learning. In terms of parental involvement, the boundaries have clearly been drawn as it relates

to the acknowledged efforts of mothers in and for the school. However, the boundaries of

parental involvement transition into a 'mothering' discourse within the home and community.

As mothers attempt to traverse these spheres of development, at what point does a mother

transition from simply mothering into being an involved parent of her child's education? Based

on the beliefs of the participating mothers, the answer would be never; yet, schools – perhaps

driven by the need to predict and control for the standard of parental involvement - have

distinguished between the two, leaving many mothers, specifically single mothers of color and

lower socioeconomic status, feeling powerless.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) believes that when a student or parent belonging to cultural or

racial group that differs from white mainstream and enters school, "schooling becomes a

discontinuous process for a number of reasons, including languages, values, and practice

differences" (p. 20). The discontinuous process for many parents of color is due to the

dominant racial framing of society. The framing of the school, as well as all institutions within

America, is structured according to what Feagin (2010) identifies as the white racial frame,

which is "an overarching worldview, one that encompasses important racial ideas, terms,

images, emotions, and interpretations" (p. 3), and it is within a white dominant racial frame

where rationalization and determination of the racial interactions and inequalities for non-white

parents occur. Given the discourse of parental involvement as socially constructed to be aligned

to a White, middle-class norm, (Auerbach, 2007; Reay, 2008) and to an intensive mothering

ideology (Hays, 1996) situated within an institutionalized white framing, it is not surprising that

many parents – those that do not conform to the standard of society – are isolated from the

realms of school and are identified as hard-to-reach.

During the Clinton administration, Goals 2000: Educate America Act ordered into law six

educational goals with the intent that all students would be provided with the resources to

attain high levels of achievement. Among the six educational goals was a heavy emphasis on

the development and maintenance of parental partnerships in order to increase parental

involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of

children (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994). The promotion of the social, emotional, and

academic growth of a child is also advocated by supporters of holistic curriculum or whole-child

education. Schools attempted to create various programs and implemented models that aim to

develop relationships with parents and provide opportunities for parents to play an active role

within the school as it relates to their children. However, given the demands of standardized

testing and accountability, few schools, including the school of this study, have actually abided

by the mandates of Goals 2000 by promoting all three dimensions of children's growth: social,

emotional, and academic. In the way of parental involvement, many schools have continued to

maintain traditional approaches and expectations of the role of parents as mere spectators or conduits to reinforce the academic agenda of the school.

Similar to the values and beliefs held by the single working mothers in Stitt and Brooks (2013), the participants of this study saw value in the development of the whole-child; an education devoted to developing children spiritually, socially, emotionally, physically as well as intellectually. Both sets of mothers, although different across racial, socioeconomic, and educational lines, valued a whole-child approach to educating their children and sought out various environments and activities to fulfill the deficits they believed existed within their school's curriculum. Within an institution that viewed them with a deficit lens, the mothers viewed the school's curriculum as deficit to what they believed their children needed to be successful in the future. Rather than being empowered enough to activate their forms of capital within the space of the schools and challenge the existing curriculum, the mothers of the study chose to activate their capital in spaces throughout the community and within their homes. They supported the school's curriculum by ensuring their children completed the homework, but still chose to expose their children to a wealth of knowledge within their community that they believed contributed to the growth and development of the whole child. Despite educational policy and the values of the parents, many schools continue to focus on standardized test scores and neglect the development of the whole child. A discord in beliefs between the parents of the children within the school and the practice of the school will continue to distance the very individuals that parental involvement programs are attempting to reach. Thus, the individual who is most affected by the existing distance between the parents and the school is the child, who will increasingly experience school as a discontinuous process from her home and her community.

The focus within the major educational policies and reforms addressing parental involvement has been an attempt to increase the standardized test scores and bridge the achievement gap between low-achieving students with high-achieving students. As indicated by the research (Baker, Gersten, & Keating, 2000; Friedel, Cortina, Turner, & Midgley, 2007; Hayes, 2011; Hong & Ho, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Van Voorhis, 2009, 2011), parental involvement has been identified as a key factor in achieving high standardized test scores; however, many scholars, practicing educators, and parents would question as to whether standardized test scores is the overall purpose of education and parental involvement. The narrowing of a curriculum to focus strictly on components of standardized tests not only has disastrous effects on the children receiving the curriculum, but also in terms of the constraints it places on parents who value their children's education and aspire to be involved.

The elevation of a strictly academic agenda – driven by the rhetoric of accountability and the practice of high-stakes standardized testing are contributing factors to the sterile environment within the schools, creating barriers for parents to become engaged, and in a sense, removing the community within the schools. In an attempt to reconceptualize parental involvement in their children's education, it seems necessary to reconceptualize the concept of education – from that based on the primacy of the school to one that embraces the entire child and her surrounding microsystems. Therefore, in order to recognize the unrecognized in parental involvement, to embrace all parents as cultural and intellectual resources, schools and the individuals within the schools not only need to begin the process of deconstructing the White, racial frame from within, but also need to embrace and acknowledge all parents' efforts in their children's social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth and development as parental involvement.

Recommendations

This study included interviews from a total of six single working Black mothers and

data derived from observations of the mothers engaged with various stakeholders of their

children's education. The findings from this study are not comprehensive enough to make

claims or generalizations regarding parental involvement among all single working Black

mothers. Therefore, although much research has been conducted and focused on parental

involvement, specifically pertaining to ways schools can approach parental involvement

(Epstein, 1990, 1995, 2011), the reasons why parents become involved (Hoover-Dempsey &

Sandler, 1995), and the effects parental involvement have on student achievement, further

research is still needed in order to inform educational policy and practice. Given that the

demographics of our country are changing and the traditional models of parental involvement

are primarily based in a white, middle-class ideal, changes need to occur in how we approach,

conceptualize, and even research parental involvement in the future.

Auerbach (2007, 2011), Delgado-Gaitan (1991, 2004), and Lawson and Alameda-Lawson

(2012) have initialized the process of transforming and expanding the concept of parental

involvement as it pertains to parental efforts inside the home and community. In order to

progress and continue to unpack the concept of parental involvement, the need to evolve

methodologies to include previously excluded voices is warranted. As discussed in the literature

review, the majority of research focusing on parental involvement has either been approached

as a quantitative study or a qualitative study. The 'either/or' approach to studying parental

involvement has left many unanswered questions and a lack of understanding on the complex

phenomenon; therefore, future research needs to consider the use of mixed methods inquiry to

continue to gain a deeper understanding of parental involvement. Mixed methods inquiry

moves away from the either/or approach towards embracing a 'both/and' approach; combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to gain a deeper understanding of the concept.

Future research also needs to be conducted in order to develop new models that push the boundaries of parental involvement in schools to encompass the efforts of parents outside the context of the school with a focus on the individual development of the child.   While this research focuses on the work of Black single working mothers, future research needs to be conducted in order to gain an in-depth understanding on how exactly the types of parental involvement may vary according to different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status, and perhaps at the intersection of all three. Finally, future research needs to be conducted on the means to partner with parents, community teachers, and community-based and faith-based organizations to further understand the role each of these can and do play in the education of children.

The present study contributes to the discourse of parental involvement as it relates to educational policy, research, and practice. By understanding how parents currently are involved in their children's education, both in-and outside the context of school, the study was able to unpack different aspects of parental involvement and contribute a deeper perspective to examine parental involvement in all its forms. This research highlights the role schools and educational policies have in constructing parent's identities as involved parents in their children's education as well as hindering the activities in which they purport to achieve. Further exploration of parental involvement from multiple perspectives is needed in order to reach and recognize the efforts all parents contribute to the growth and development of their children.

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"Recognizing the unrecognized" in parental involvement: Understanding single working

mothers' role in the education of their elementary children

You are being asked to participate in a study pertaining to parental involvement with their children's education. The research seeks to understand how single working mothers engage in their children's education and how they perceive the value of their engagement in their children's academic, emotional, and social growth. You have been selected because you are at least 18 years of age, you have identified yourself as a single working mother, and you have a child or children in an elementary school within grades K-5. This research project is a dissertation project for completion of the doctoral program at Ball State University. The findings of this study could be used by the principal investigator to inform future educational research (e.g., scholarly publications) and conference presentations.

If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in two interviews. Each interview will take approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours and will take place at a time/day at a mutually agreed upon location. With your permission the researcher would like to record the interviews by using a digital recorder. The recordings will be transcribed, but your name or other identifying information will **not** be included in the transcript.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may stop participating in this research at any time or choose not to answer any question without penalty.

Although disclosure of your identity is a possible risk, every precaution will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of any records generated by this research. All generated records will be transferred and stored on a password protected laptop computer. All notes generated from the interviews will be destroyed immediately upon transfer into electronic form. Further, all data gathered during this study will be kept indefinitely on a password protected laptop computer due to the possibility of using data for future research work (i.e., publications, conferences). Only the principal investigator (Nichole Stitt) and her committee chair (Dr. Nancy Brooks) will have access to the interviews and observation field notes. Your name and any other identifying information will not appear in any reports or documents that may be published as a result of this research project.

There are no foreseeable risks at this time for participating in this study. I hope that you may consider this opportunity and be willing to share your personal insights in regard to your involvement in your children's education. Although you will not benefit directly from being involved in this study, your views are highly appreciated and valued and will inform and support the researcher's understanding of the how single working mothers engage in the involvement of their kids' education.

If you do not understand any portion of what you are being asked to do, or the contents of this form, the researcher is available to provide a complete explanation. Questions are welcome at any time. Please contact Nichole Stitt at nmlinn@bsu.edu or (765) 635-3906, Dr. Nancy Brooks at njbrooks@bsu.edu or (765) 285-2721. For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Director of Research Integrity at Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

I have been informed of any and all possible risks or discomforts.

I have read the statements contained herein, have had the opportunity to fully discuss my concerns and questions, and fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research project as a human subject, and the attendant risks and consequences.

_____

Research Participant Signature   Date

_____

Researcher Signature   Date

"Recognizing the unrecognized" in parental involvement: Understanding single working

mothers' role in the education of their elementary children

Interview Guide

1.) Tell me about your education.
   a. Where did you attend school?
   b. What type of school?
   c. What did school mean for you?
   d. What were your parent's expectations of education for you?
   e. Were your parents involved in your education? If so, in what ways? If not, why?
2.) What are your personal expectations of a school? (for your own children)
   a. What do you believe your children should learn in school?
   b. Do you feel public education meets those expectations? Why/why not?
   c. What do you expect out of the teachers? Principles? (do you feel the communication lines go both ways)
3.) How would you describe parental involvement in kids' education? (How do you encourage creativity?)
4.) What role do you think parents should play in their kids' education?

5.) In what ways are you involved in your children's education?
   a. Within in the school?
   b. Outside of the school?
   c. Describe the activities that are involved.
6.) What would be your ideal "involvement" situation?
7.) What factors prevent such an "involvement" situation from occurring?
8.) What do you think the teachers/principles expect out of you?
   a. Are you able to meet their expectations? Why, why not?
   b. Would you prefer more of an involvement? Why, why? And if so, in what ways?
9.) Have you been invited to become more involved in the school setting?
   a. Who "invited" you? How were you made aware of the involvement opportunity?
10.) What forms of communication occur between you and the school? How often to you communicate with the school? In what situations do you communicate with the school?
11.) What types of activities do you arrange for your children outside of school hours? Do you perceive this as education?
12.) Are you involved in any parent groups or PTA/PTO? Why or why not?
   a. Would you like to become involved in groups that make decisions for the school?
   b. What problems/obstacles did you encounter?
13.) Describe a typical day/morning/daily routine in relation to your involvement with your child's school day.
14.) Do you feel being involved in the school is important? Why or why not?
   a. What benefits does your involvement bring to your child (children)?
   b. Do you believe it to be important to be involved outside of the school? Why or why not?
   c. What benefits does your involvement outside of school bring to your child?
   d. Do you believe there are any situations in which negative outcomes have occurred (or could occur) due to your involvement? Explain.
15. Is there anything else you would like to discuss pertaining to your involvement with your kid's education?