BLACK PARENT ADVOCACY AND EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS:
LESSONS ON USE OF VOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

BLACK PARENT ADVOCACY AND EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS:
LESSONS ON USE OF VOICE AND ENGAGEMENT

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"The opportunity is there, this is what I think of when I think of role models, I think of my experience" (Anthony—a participant in this study—commenting on the effectiveness of advocating for his child). Black children encounter racism in American schools and parents need to advocate for them. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how Black parents developed and used their voice to advocate for their children in a predominantly White educational system with a history of racially disparate outcomes. Particularly, this study drew on the experiences of 15 participants, two men—one was a grandfather—and 13 women, whose children had successful outcomes in graduating from high school and going on to post-secondary education. The findings reflect Black parents' understanding of the need to advocate to support their child's success in getting through school: all related incidents of discrimination where they needed to speak up on behalf of their child in response to inequitable treatment within the educational system including in the classroom, participating in extracurricular activities, and in access to resources. Parents facilitated their use of voice on behalf of their children by cultivating engagement with the school, getting to know teachers and administrators, and being involved in their children's activities, making sure they were seen to make sure they would be heard when needed. Most parents in the study recalled role models in their own families as inspirations for their sense of voice in countering experiences of racism. These participants urged other Black parents to be involved and speak up for their children, and to connect with and draw on the social support of other Black parents of children in school. These findings suggest that as we continue to work to address systemic racism disadvantaging the most vulnerable of our community, our children, parental voice by individuals and within the Black community contributes to getting

heard at the educational decision-making table and producing positive educational outcomes for these students. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu/) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu/).

Keywords: Black students, education, family engagement, family/school partnerships, leadership, narrative inquiry, parent involvement, parental advocacy, parent voice

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memory of my dear mother, Mrs. Dorothy M. McMillian, who advocated for me when I was a child. She wept for me and celebrated my success. She cheered me on with every challenge. She now rests with Our Blessed LORD on High. At times I still feel her presence and urging for me to go on. Everything is going to be alright.

Photograph from the author's private family collection.

Acknowledgements

This Antioch University doctoral experience has been transformative, joyful, and quite a challenging journey. In many ways the interactions with professors and classmates, the reading explorations, and finally the stories shared by the research participants, all aligned with memories of significant events throughout the course of my life. This dissertation being the culminating reflective experience, and a sweet reminder of the spirit of determination that I witnessed in my own mother. A parent who would not accept no as an answer to the question, Why can't my child participate? This doctoral accomplishment indeed represents a history of struggle by courageous parents, just like her, who spoke up and advocated for their children. These parents would not accept the status quo circumstances that has disparaged so many Black children and damaged them by depriving them of the right to a quality education. It is wrong and must not be tolerated. Hearing these stories was stressful at times. This journey also has provided support for me by some fantastic people who helped me and enabled me to finish. I am grateful to all of these people, and I will never forget ANY of them.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the 15 participants; 13 women and two men; one of which was a grandfather. Your important stories, that were told authentically, can indeed help other parents, and teachers, and a public education system that is in need of real leadership and change. Your sharing can help today, as well as tomorrow, as lessons for future generations of parents to advocate and not be quiet about their child's educational experiences. You were courageous when it mattered most, and now your child has graduated high school and gone on to college. You should be proud, and we must celebrate you. Unfortunately, your experiences were not the norm, and that must change.

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PRELUDE

The pride to feel that your own strength

Has cleaved for you the way

To heights in which you were not born,

But struggled day by day

What though the thousands sneer and scoff,

An' scorn your humble birth?

Kings are but puppets; you are king

By right of royal worth.

—Paul Laurence Dunbar

I was raised to believe that I could become anything in which I set my mind to becoming.

—Anonymous

Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity. If any man seeks for greatness, let him forget greatness and ask for truth, and he will find both.

—Horace Mann

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

How have Black parents/guardians developed and experienced the use of voice in advocating for their children in public education? In this study, voice means acts of agency that involved the expression of suggestions and beliefs to influence or contribute to a process or decision (Avery & Quiñones, 2002; Rowe, 2017). Despite ongoing interest in and efforts to provide successful educational outcomes to all students in the United States, Black children continue to face significant challenges in achieving positive educational outcomes, including graduating from high school and pursuing post-secondary education. In *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do*, Steinberg (1996) summarized a decade of academic research into high school student achievement and found striking and consistent differences in student performance: in aggregate, Black students lag their White peers. These differences cut across socioeconomic groups. As the academic gap between White and Black students persists, difficult debates over the reasons for that gap often accompany them. This dissertation sought to provide a rich, contextual investigation of Black parents' and guardians' experiences and perceptions of ways that they facilitated positive educational outcomes for their children by speaking up on their behalf.

In this study, I applied the lens of critical race theory (CRT; Yosso, 2005) as a conceptual framework to explore this issue within the context of systemic racism, along with Epstein's (1995/2010) model of "Six Types of Parental Involvement" in children's education. CRT provides a macro-level lens for making sense of the structure and culture in which the parents' experiences are embedded, while Epstein's model offers a micro-level lens for making sense of

the many ways parents and guardians are part of their children's education through everyday interactions.

Disparities in outcomes within American public education are shaped by inequities found across social institutions. "Critical race theory argues that the notion of race is a socially constructed concept that is used to marginalize groups of people in the interest of White privilege" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 47). Long ago, Woodson (1933) observed how the perceptions of dominant groups—notably Whites—set the standard by which the cultural values, beliefs, and the ultimate potential of minority groups were judged. Advocates for educational reform have used CRT as a framework for considering various mechanisms that perpetuate obstacles to successful educational outcomes for marginalized students. "Race-based beliefs and attitudes shaped instruction, research, and policies that historically defined the Black educational experience in America" (Steinberg, 1996, pp. 69–70).

Proponents of CRT have suggested that policies and school culture driven by traditionally dominant attitudes and values devalue and exclude the knowledge, cultural context, relevance, and importance of marginalized groups, leading to interacting factors that perpetuate disparate educational experiences and outcomes for historically marginalized students (Auerbach, 2010; Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995). "Studies consistently demonstrate racial disparities in participation in policy making, student interaction with teachers, and related educational outcomes" (Auerbach, 2010, pp. 728–729). Although numerous factors have been posited as contributing to these disparate outcomes, current research indicates that collaborative efforts on the part of parents, schools, and communities can be used to create fundamental changes to school culture that potentially mitigate the circumstances that block success for historically marginalized students. For example, "Family–school partnerships are increasingly seen as

powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collective"
(Auerbach, 2009, p. 9). Partnerships between school and families and community groups are
now widely seen as the norm—in theory (Pushor, 2010; Tollefson, 2008). But what is espoused
and the actual achievement of such constructive partnerships in American schools are still
distinct (Davies, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Van Voorhis &
Sheldon, 2004). Authentic partnerships where all are equal and of the same mind and
commitments are uncommon (Cooper & Christie, 2005; López & Stoelting, 2009; Warren et al.,
2009). Ideally, these partnerships are authentic partnerships, or democratic schools, and they
create respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups who are
stakeholders in the pursuit of an agreed upon purpose that is socially just. Unfortunately, "many
public schools have failed to build partnerships that support the involvement of parents of
marginalized students" (Auerbach, 2012, p. 9).

Although family and community engagement in education has gained increasing
popularity as a tool for improving the plight of all students, there is surprisingly insufficient
documentation in the literature regarding how school leaders actually achieve these results
(Auerbach, 2009). There are many examples in the literature of addressing racial inequity at the
educational table where teachers and administrators sit; however, the parental perspective is
often understudied, which constitutes a gap in the literature. Moreover, few investigations focus
on identifying specific experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of parents from marginalized
groups that contribute to successful educational and life outcomes for their children (Barnyak &
McNelly, 2009; Benson & Martin, 2003; Patrikakou et al., 2005).

As a framework for understanding how Black parents and guardians enact partnerships
with schools in their children's education or, more broadly, their advocacy and support of their

children in school, I use Epstein's (1995/2010) Six Types of Parent Involvement, which are as

follows:

1. *Parenting*—Families establish home environments to support their children's learning, which includes parent education and other courses of training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, and family literacy); schools may play a role in offering family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services; and home visits at transitional points in elementary, middle, and high school.

2. *Communicating*—Parents partner with schools by engaging in effective forms of home-to-school and school-to-home communication about their child, school programs, and the student's progress. These include conferences between parents and teachers at least once a year; schools ensuring language translators for families as needed; and regular exchanges of information, such as useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.

3. *Volunteering*—Parents can engage in school or classroom volunteer programs to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents, they can establish a parent room or family center for volunteer work, and for meetings, and to serve as family resources, and they can participate in an annual postcard survey to identify all parent talents, their time availability, and locations for volunteering. Schools can work on recruiting and organizing parent help and support.

4. *Learning at Home*—Families help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Schools can provide information for families on skills required for students in all subjects and in all grades, as well as information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.

5. *Decision-making*—Families can be active participants in school decisions and parents can serve as leaders and representatives. Schools can encourage engagement in PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, etc.), district-level advisory councils and committees, as well as offer resources for parent leadership development.

6. *Collaborating with Community*—Parents may support their children's educational success by accessing resources and services from the community. By providing information and coordinating service for students and families on community health, on cultural, recreational, and social support, and on other programs and services, schools become active and important members of the community. They also can be key distribution points for information about community activities that link to learning skills and talent development, especially summer programs for students. (Epstein, 1995/2010, pp. 82–83)

Broadly speaking, *parental voice* refers to the expression of knowledge, values, attitudes, and experiences that parents possess and that they potentially bring to the educational decision-making table to advocate for their children; parental voice may include cultural and traditional beliefs as integral parts of parents' perspectives (Epstein, 1995/2010; Henderson et al., 2007; Payne, 2006). However, people who are members of historically marginalized populations may have experienced limited opportunities for developing and exercising agency, like voice, particularly in White-dominant institutions like public education (Lareau, 2011). So, while effective collaboration between schools and families may rely, in part, on parental involvement, parents in historically disadvantaged groups may not come to the table with the cultural capital and experience that would allow them to feel like empowered partners in their children's education. Yet, some parents in disadvantaged groups defy the odds and do speak up, exercising voice to advocate for their children in school. This study asks the following:

1. How do Black parents and guardians develop and use voice to advocate for their children in a predominantly White educational system?
2. How do Black parents and guardians perceive their use of voice as contributing to their children's educational outcomes?

Better understanding of the development and use of parental voice in facilitating successful educational outcomes for students in marginalized groups may have implications for practice and interventions in educational and community settings. Using a qualitative research methodology such as narrative inquiry offers potential for rich insights on lived experiences of parents who used voice in advocating for their children and how they view that contributed to the educational outcomes for those children as students.

I take a narrative inquiry approach to investigate how Black parents and guardians in a predominantly White, middle-class school system used voice to facilitate successful educational outcomes for their child's schooling in the school environment. For this study, *successful educational outcome* meant the parent's or guardian's child graduated from high school and attended some form of post-secondary education, such as college or trade school. Learning about parents' contributions to student success through the voices of the parents themselves would broaden our understanding of parental voice (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Ideally, the findings of this study inform efforts to support the development and use of parental voice in schools in ways that encourage and foster student achievement.

Definition of Key Terms

To provide a conversational context for the exploration of parental voice and student success, several terms bear definition.

Parent or guardian: Caregiver acting in the role of a mature guiding presence for the student on matters of educational support including blood relatives, adoptive, or foster parents.

Parental involvement: Broadly, parents' engagement in their child's schooling, including but not limited to the six types of parental involvement in education outlined by Epstein (1995/2010): parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with community.

Academic success: Graduating from high school and attending any post-secondary education such as college or trade school.

Parental voice: Voice refers to acts of agency that involve the expression of suggestions and beliefs to influence or contribute to a process or decision (Avery & Quiñones, 2002; Rowe, 2017). Parental voice in this study reflects parents' or guardians' acts of agency on behalf their

children in an educational setting and serves as way in which parents engage in contributing to their children's academic outcomes. It reflects the set of values and opinions a parent brings to the educational decision-making table, including their cultural backgrounds and unique perspectives. More broadly, parental voice may represent the views and influence of a host of familial and nonfamilial persons with significant ties the student(s). It not only extends to immediate guardians, such as biological, adoptive, and foster parents, but also includes parent groups, community organizations with whom a child may be connected, and related family-school relationships (Auerbach, 2009).

Researcher Positionality: The Storyteller's Story

The issue of equity in public educational access is important to me because I have personally experienced disparate treatment in schools, and I can empathically identify with the stories common to many Black students in America, today. I know how it feels to be treated as someone with little or no value, to be discriminated against as a daily occurrence, and to not have the power to redress this routine mistreatment. It is awful, and it is the systemic reality for Blacks in our society at every level, and its prevalence is strongly seen in our public schools.

I understand some people may say that my educational and professional successes are proof that the previously mentioned treatment was not all that bad because I have apparently succeeded despite the odds. I have indeed had access to engaging educational experiences because of thoughtful and caring teachers. The benefits and the support derived from these teachers during crucial moments in my formative life happened, I believe, because of my mother's advocacy. She was an indomitable support for me and, though I was not aware at the time, a vocal and engaging force for assuring my positive learning experiences and success. This is the reason for my interest in this subject of Black parental voice. In many respects I may have

statistically been the exception to the rule for a Black student back then, but it did not start out that way. I can confidently attribute these positive benefits as directly connected to my mother's voice experiences, and thus this dissertation sought to better understand this form of advocacy. To explain my positionality within this research I recount a portion of my own story in the following vignette.

My story begins with my family moving to an all-White suburb because my mother wanted a better life for us, and a better school for me. I was in the third grade, and I remember my mother taking me to the school on the first day, personally meeting with my teacher, and requesting an appointment with the principal. I was a big child, and very shy. I did not hear exactly what she said to the teacher, but I could tell she was quite serious by the expression on her face. She then left for work after giving me a few words of encouragement to start the day, and I entered the classroom as one of only three Black students. After work she asked me about my day, specifically what I had learned, and for me to share with details. She actively listened to me and encouraged my sharing. This was part of our daily routine.

My mother was divorced, and I was her oldest child of three. Our move to this new neighborhood was an opportunity for a fresh start from the community where we lived and especially from my old elementary school. She did not like the way I was treated there, and she would not tolerate it any longer. In fact, she took me out of that school and home-schooled me for about a year (something unheard of back then), and when the opportunity to move away became available, she acted without reservation. As the result, we started a new life in a new community and with a new school in the suburbs, and she was clearly excited about our family's move-up.

To afford to live in our new community, my mother took on additional work. She began cleaning the home of a Jewish family and washing and ironing their laundry. As a matter of routine, on Saturdays she would take care of their laundry, working in our home, and while washing and ironing their clothes she would play "Texaco Presents the Metropolitan Opera" on the radio. Sometimes we—mostly my sister and I (my brother was still very young back then)—would complain of being bored and I remember her tearing up newspaper and telling us to put it back together again like a puzzle. Then she would challenge us to read the newly assembled pieces. She would also take breaks to read to us from her old college books from Morris Brown College in Atlanta. I remember her dramatic reading of Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven" and Shakespeare's "Macbeth." She also explained the big words she was reading and encouraged us to try out these new words in a sentence. Perhaps this was an intentional strategy to encourage our learning outside of the classroom, but to me it just seemed like home and our lifestyle.

Perhaps the sharing of these home experiences would help someone to understand one of the most memorable incidents I had as a child, at the Chambers Elementary School with my teacher, Mrs. Dyer, that I still recall fondly as a pivotal moment in my educational journey: I was daydreaming in Mrs. Dyer's class, something I did often, when she touched my shoulder and called my name softly and said "Mark, you can do this work," referring to the worksheet on my desk. I replied, "Yes, Ma'am," because I was raised to speak in this manner, and I read and answered the questions on the paper. Mrs. Dyer was a short and petite White lady with an adorable smile. She did not smile too often though, but when she did it seemed to make all of us smile too. She had a gentle manner and always wore dresses and nice perfume.

When I took the finished paper to her desk she said, "very good," and I felt a happy and a satisfied feeling came over me. Well, she would continue to give me work and when I would submit the finished papers she would say, "very good," when I turned-in my work, and this acknowledgement gave me quite a sense of value, and maybe even significance. These experiences caused me to begin to look forward to school. I would prepare for the next school day the night before, I had my homework done and in good order, and I even think I may have stopped daydreaming, I know I paid much better attention, and I would make connections to the things I heard on the radio station played at home, or something my mother read with the subject matter. I went from being one of the poorest performers to one of the top students by the end of the school year.

My mother celebrated my accomplishments and our talks about the school day became more significant to me, and my perspective on learning changed. Education became the great equalizer, a leveling field, and an opportunity to express myself despite how I was treated because I am Black. I found out that I had value. I was indeed equal to Whites even though I was not treated the same. What I did not know at the time was that my mother had spoken with the principal and Mrs. Dyer, and that they were in regular communication. She shared with them information about me and how they should engage me for best results. She was also supporting my learning by the many things she would do, including taking us to Lake Erie and talking about the wonders of nature, visiting the library to check out books and read aloud, going to museums, and even teaching us about germs in the performing of our routine household chores, like the work I had to do to keep the apartment areas clean outside to help with the rent cost. Everything we did seemed to have a connected purpose, and my mother's voice was the guiding force in how I was treated and how I achieved. She spoke up at the school and things changed for me.

In 2019, I traveled to Havana, Cuba, to study the educational system with a group of Antioch University doctoral alumni. One of the many rich experiences we had was learning about the strong connection teachers there typically have with their communities, and how they provide a significant portion of the instruction in the homes of the students, often sharing meals in these homes with their students' family members. The teachers' connection to the students and their parents is natural, warm, and trusting. Parents interact with teachers as if they were actual members of their family. This was indeed impactful for me. It is not this way for Black students in the United States.

I have often tried to make a difference in the lives of the young and not so young Black students with whom I have worked over the years, personally and professionally, who were clearly vulnerable due to systemic forces. My studies at Antioch University have often had the underpinnings of this desire to make a difference as a common theme as I have sought to understand and reckon with the complex issues of power and marginalization. The most significant aspects of my work have focused on improving the educational plight of Black people as a traditionally discriminated population. The persons benefiting from these efforts have often lived in poverty—abject poverty—and a continuing state of crisis; improving their educational journey would most assuredly improve their standard of living and quite possibly quality of life. Sadly, the person usually missing from the decision-making table was the student's parent. This dissertation is therefore dedicated to those parents who were voluntarily present in this meaningful engagement of their children's education, in the hope that their voices may one day be heard by others, because all of our children's futures are simply too important not to speak up!

Context of Research Study: A Community's Changing Sociodemographic Profile

The parents interviewed for this study reside in an affluent Midwest community where racial disparities not only persist but have deepened. Thirty years ago, the median income for White families in the area was almost double that of Black families; by 2020, White families on average earned almost triple the income of Black families—approximately $118,000 per year to $43,000 per year, respectively, according to Shrider et al. (2021) in a report for the U.S. Census Bureau. Additionally, the proportion of Black families living in poverty nearly tripled, from 6% in 1989 to 16% in 2017, while the proportion of White families in poverty doubled, but from just 2% to 4%. These trends exist despite intentional efforts to the contrary: over 60 years ago the Black and White residents in this community formed a coalition committed to racial integration in their neighborhood. During the 1970s, progressive ideas became reality as this commitment produced voluntary busing, redrawing school boundary lines, and student groups formed with emphatic dedication to Black student achievement, and cross-racial friendship efforts. Today this suburb that drew Black families chiefly seeking a better life because of the historic efforts and vitality of race relations and the quality schools, has proven to have some of the same problems as other communities. This community school system boasts of a reputation for excellence through sending students to elite universities. It has Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, theatre, foreign language courses taught to elementary students in French, Spanish, German, Latin, Greek, and Mandarin, and international travel opportunities for students. However, it has not produced the same results for Black students as for White students.

Nationally, researchers have attributed low achievement rates of Black students to economic issues. Families with less money can ill afford educational extras and encounter more of life's stressors with fewer hours for parents to help with homework. These parents may have

also had bad experiences when they were in school and thus feel uncomfortable engaging

teachers (Meckler, 2019). In the late 1990s, a U.S. Department of Education and National Center

for Education Statistics report (Smith et al., 1997) stated that Whites, who accounted for half the

student population, made up 93% of students in the top 20%. While the rate of placement of

Black students in enriched programs such as Advanced Placement has improved over the past

two decades, there is still a wide gap in this indicator according to a report for the U.S.

Department of Education (de Brey et al., 2019). In postsecondary graduation rates, again, Black

students significantly trail behind most other ethnicities: 40% compared to 64% of White

Students and 74% of those of Asian origin (de Brey et al., 2019). Summing up an overview of

the *Condition of Education 2020* by Irwin et al. (2021), the National School Boards Association

(2020) sum up the situation bluntly: "The achievement gap between Black and White students

has not been closed" (para. 14). Their analysis gives the basis for such discouragement in terms

of high poverty rates among Black students, lack of home internet access, disproportionate

over-representation in programs for students with emotional disturbances, and a continuing

disproportion between Black students and Black teachers in the system (National School Boards

Association, 2020).

Given the continued racial disparities in educational outcomes nationally, even in

communities where intentional efforts to counter them, makes it as important to understand what

parents can do to help their children successfully navigate through school. As systemic racism in

American education continues to disadvantage the most vulnerable members of our community,

our children, this study explores how parental voice on behalf of Black students is used and

contributes to positive educational outcomes. Thus, the study contributes to the literature by

centering on the importance of parent voices. The Black parents and guardians in this study

shared stories of how their voices made the difference in their children's success. By highlighting these stories, the gap in the literature where parent voice is absent is closed by bringing focus to what works and not just problems. These stories also draw attention to interventions that cost nothing materially—though there might be considerable emotional and social costs for parents of using voice—but have large impact for a child, other children, and may even contribute to change in educators.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Public Education and African Americans: A Historical Perspective on Marginalization

In the United States, students from marginalized groups historically faced challenges in achieving successful educational outcomes in terms of high school graduation, postsecondary education, and enhanced quality of life. Well-regarded scholars, such as Ladson-Billings (1995) and Bernal (1998), have asked whose knowledge is valued and whose knowledge is not. Throughout American history, racism has shaped this debate (López & Stoelting, 2009; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Steinberg (1996) in *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do,* offered a powerful assessment of the American school system's decline and inequities, along with accompanying suggestions for change. Steinberg demonstrated that Black children persistently have worse outcomes than do White children in public education and further argued that today's American high school graduates are the least intellectually competent in the industrialized world.

Disparity in educational outcomes between marginalized students and those from dominant groups is nothing new. Steinberg's (1996) book is based on a nationwide survey study of more than 20,000 junior high school and high school students that found consistent ethnic differences in student performance. It was a clarion "call-to-arms" for parental involvement. The author also raised the concern about a "coasting" mentality among American students, that stems from the family as much as from the school and that has contributed to the abysmal state of American education. According to Steinberg, a community's issue of racial disparity is represented in research that shows that the practice of desegregation is not the same as creating equitable outcomes. He argued that anytime a school's data is examined by students' race, the results reflect different patterns of experience within the same school.

Steinberg (1996) provided clear and convincing evidence of disparate treatment in schools by race of students, with strong differences between student socioeconomic groups. Moreover, the work demonstrated specific racial disparity in that African American and Latino students were performing well below their White peer groups, whereas Asian students were excelling in the same or similar circumstances. The case for change is clear and includes factors beyond the classroom. One site for intervention that may have a significant impact is parental involvement, particularly reducing barriers to the inclusion of parents of disadvantaged students in the educational process.

Parents play a central role in the lives of their children:

Parents are their children's first educators, and they remain their life-long teachers. The question is not if parental involvement is an essential aspect of education; rather, it is how do educational establishments create a system that fosters and encourages strong partnerships that include all parents (Reeves, 2005, as cited in Rapp & Duncan, 2012, p. 2).

Socialization around education is a factor in learning for all children, however, communalism is more prevalent in the socialization experiences of Black students, in contrast to the more individualistic emphasis typical among their White counterparts (Sankofa et al., 2005; Tyler et al., 2005). According to Epstein (1995/2010), Black parents are not disinterested bystanders in their children's education and care that their children receive a good education to prepare them for their future. They are interested, too, in engaging with school leaders, including their children's teachers (Epstein, 1995/2010). It is not clear, however, that schools are prepared to partner with them: "Currently parental involvement seems to be somewhat one-dimensional. The vast majority of involved parents appear to be middle-class, Caucasian mothers" (McGrath & Kuriloff, 1999, as cited in Rapp & Duncan, 2012, p. 2). Of course, it is important to care about White middle class mothers, but schools must be more inclusion around other stakeholder groups (Henderson et al., 2007). Partnering with parents means making sure other parent stakeholder

groups who may not be the dominant group are represented, including parents from different ethnicities and social classes (Payne, 2006).

Parental involvement means "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes, 2005, p. 245). This definition is intentionally broad as parental involvement has many aspects:

> Parental involvement cannot be defined in one conclusive statement. In fact, parents and school personnel may view parental involvement differently. For example, some parents may view parental involvement as keeping their children safe and transporting them to school, whereas teachers and other school staff members more see it as parents' actual presence at school (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) differentiated between school-based and home-based involvement: School-based involvement requires parents to make actual contact with school personnel (for example, attending school meetings, talking to teachers, supporting school events, and volunteering time at the school). On the other hand, home-based involvement encompasses assisting with homework, responding to children's academic performance, and talking with children about happenings at school (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Although it is difficult to articulate a specific definition of parental involvement, many researchers agree that it is comprised of separate dimensions (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). According to Georgiou and Tourva (2007), parental involvement includes the dimensions that were originally coined by Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon. (Rapp & Duncan, 2012, p. 4)

The persistent academic performance gap between White and Black students often has triggered strong debates over the reasons for this difference. Ogbu (2003) explained that Black Americans historically were provided with inferior education as a means of fitting them for their lower caste status, citing that over the past 100 years, some significant systematic changes have occurred in response to this system. Not surprisingly, this system operated as part of a job ceiling against Blacks to force them to take inferior jobs, though not merely because of their inferior education. Black education in the United States is, among others, a "very powerful mechanism by which this job ceiling is sustained" (Ogbu, 2003, p. 177).

Ladson-Billings (2006) confronted the educational field for its acts of "randomly and regularly using culture to inhibit its ability to effectively educate African Americans" (p. 104). She attributed a cultural deficit-based approach in the education of minority students to,

The failure of teacher education programs to inform and instruct their students about the vital role of culture in learning . . . So, at the same moment teacher education students learn nothing about culture, they use it with authority as one of the primary explanations for everything from school failure to problems with behavior management and discipline. (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 104)

Some theories attempting to explain educational disparities suggest that Black students of any age do not value education. However, such theories overlook the voices of Black children's parents, strangely absent among stakeholders, from education interventions. One such theory, student oppositional identity theory, "appears to generate the most vitality in the achievement debate in the literature" (Wiggan, 2007, p. 319). According to the theory, the explanation for the apparent lower achievement of Black students in American schools can be measured through the use of standardized achievement tests. This assumes that knowledge and "Whiteness" are synonymous and, therefore, distasteful to African American students, a force worth resisting to maintain one's Black identity (Wiggan, 2007).

Lipman (2017) offered another thesis in response to a contemporary examination of the disparate treatment of Black children. This author concluded that neoliberal education policy is alive and well and prevalently displayed in school-closing decisions, privatization choices, and a strategic system that is designed, through a policy of racialized state violence, to thwart the efforts of Blacks to achieve self-determination. Lipman examined the language used by policymakers and resisting stakeholders in Chicago's education restructuring, finding that decisions further marginalize disenfranchised stakeholders.

Understanding the factors contributing to the historic and persistent racial differences in educational outcomes in the United States continues to challenge advocates of providing effective education for all students. However, educational researchers have argued that long-established social views drive the ongoing disparity and that established practices intentionally maintain a socioeconomic structure that reproduces racial inequality. Building on

critical race theory, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that the use of "race" in the United States, though broadly considered, had not been theorized from a critical perspective of race in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) until the end of the 20th century. Ladson-Billings and Tate asserted that race needs to continue to be considered in American society—where property rights seem valued above human rights—to understand the consequences of racial inequality more fully. Therefore, critical race theory is useful for framing this study within the literature and the sociohistorical context of the experiences of the parents and guardians who participated in it.

Critical Race Theory as Conceptual Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) posits that the dominant culture historically serves as a basis for judging the culture and practices of minority groups, and that these attitudes dominate research, policies, and institutional structures in a given social collective. Proponents argue that dominant White values have historically skewed Black Americans' educational experiences. Derrick Bell (1995), an African American professor and civil rights lawyer, published an article, "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?" He and many other scholars and scientists delivered lectures and published popular and scholarly pieces in response to the book, *The Bell Curve* (Hernstein & Murray, 1994), which presented an argument for the "natural" inferiority of Blacks by relying on dubious evidence and previously refuted theories. In his renowned article, Bell presented the CRT conceptual framework by which a solution-driven understanding of educational inequalities may be derived. He explained that CRT takes the construct of race as a way of marginalizing non-White groups of people in the interest of White privilege. Race is neither biologically grounded, nor natural. Bell argued that *The Bell Curve*'s authors were aware of the biased information upon which they relied, but nevertheless chose to support these myths

for the sake of personal gain and to perpetuate the status quo. Bell also shared the history of the origins of CRT, carefully defined the theory, and addressed the attacks levied against the theory by its opponents. Among the defenses discussed by Bell were the inspiring stories of Black struggles in America in the face of seemingly relentless efforts to subjugate categories of people. CRT uses storied examples to raise the collective voice to address the struggle for equality.

Yosso (2005) applied CRT specifically as a framework for considering racial disparity in educational processes and outcomes. By using CRT, the focus on communities of color shifts from a deficit model to one that sees the positive benefits of skills, abilities, resilience, and strong relationships. It further defines often unrecognized, but clearly identified, aspects of cultural capital such as language, tacit knowledge of how to navigate social institutions, career aspirations, and social networks that students bring to their classrooms. Students from families in communities of color may bring different strengths that can contribute to bringing equity into the educational context. According to Yosso, the voices of those whose knowledge traditionally has been devalued are excluded but have practical value. Education, like other American institutions, fails to value the knowledge and experiences of marginalized groups due to underlying racism (Yosso, 2005). Both Bell's (1995) and Yosso's (2005) explanations and applications of CRT to understanding of racial inequities provide support for the necessity of cultivating parental involvement, perhaps particularly the role of parental voice, in advocating for marginalized students in schools.

Pierre Bourdieu's work on cultural capital also provides helpful context for appreciating the intersection of race and social class position on educational outcomes (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). His model of cultural capital "focuses on conflict, change, and systemic inequality. It highlights the fluid nature of the connection between structure and agency. As an example,

Bourdieu argued that individuals of different social locations are socialized differently. This

socialization affords children, and later adults, with a sense of what he called "the comfortable or

natural stasis" (as cited in Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 274). These background experiences of

socialization are termed *habitus*, and they also "correlate to shape the amount and forms of

resources individuals inherit and draw upon as they confront various institutional arrangements

in the social world" (Lareau, 2000, p. 275). This perspective offers potential explanations for

why actions and skills of marginalized parents are critical for influencing change in the

educational outcomes of their children. It also provides recognition that parents of marginalized

students may not have had the same opportunity to develop and gain experience as agents in

navigating social institutional arrangements and, as a consequence, may feel less empowered to

advocate for their children.

Parental Behaviors and Attitudes, and Children's Educational Outcomes

Research shows that involved parents contribute to children's educational success

(Davies, 2002; Gordon & Louis, 2009). The importance of parental engagement also has been

highlighted in educational policies, including the federal legislation, No Child Left Behind Act

of 2001 and the Obama administration's 2009 "Race to the Top" initiative. In policy, parental

involvement is strategically sought as a way of improving failing public school performance and,

thus, it is incentivized with public tax dollars. However, these policies and associated

interventions are often created without input from the people they are intended to serve:

> Tragically, the voices of the parents of marginalized students have remained silent for so
> long that they are often, essentially, nonexistent in policy making. This systemic
> disregard of involvement of parents of students from marginalized populations has come
> about through a history of discounting their significance by the very persons tasked with
> engaging the parents—the teachers and school administrators. (Barnyak & McNelly,
> 2009, p. 34)

The Importance of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement potentially changes existing narratives that serve as obstacles to effective and equitable educational settings.

> There is a consensus in research that positive attitudes and behaviors toward education by parents are associated with favorable outcomes in children's learning and their schools. Parents' interest and presence positively affect students' academic achievement and even learning in a much broader sense. (Auerbach, 2012, p. 41)

Goodall (2012, as cited in Levinthal de Oliviera Lima & Kuusisto, 2020) described parental engagement as a kind of holistic pedagogy wherein parents partner with teachers. Using Goodall's parental engagement work, Levinthal de Oliviera Lima and Kuusisto (2020) explored the pedagogical benefits by holistically exploring the relationship and growth of the parental engagement movement with its emphasis on involving parents in education. According to Goodall's model, when teachers and parents work together, the potential for real benefit occurs for the students. This is a simple and well-known proposition that is not consistently practiced for all students but offers a profound opportunity for change, especially with marginalized students. The holistic perspective shared by Levinthal de Oliviera Lima and Kuustito suggests an approach should be advanced and studied.

Though simple conceptually, reducing barriers to achieving meaningful parental involvement is challenging. Barnyak and McNelly (2009) studied one urban school district's efforts to fulfill their stated commitment to parental engagement and involvement. This quantitative study examined the impact of a first-year intervention on educators' practices and beliefs and evaluated on six national standards measured using *The Parent Involvement Inventory* (Illinois State Board of Education, 1994) for the study. This study was, in part, testing Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy in examining the match between educators' beliefs about parents matched their practices with parents. They did not: the results showed educators

espousing beliefs about the importance of parent involvement on children's achievement, but what their practices ran counter to these expressed commitments. In Barnyak and McNelly's study, the educators' self-beliefs about their abilities were critical to determining their success in engaging parents. This suggests that when persons are self-efficacious, they undertake more challenging tasks and persist with determination and, in converse, the disconnect between the teachers' and administrators' stated commitments and their actual behaviors is so revealing. Barnyak and McNelly found that professionals with years of experience and roughly a third of whom had graduate degrees, were influenced by beliefs about race that appear to run counter to their commitments.

Parent-school partnerships tend to contribute to students' success in school and later in life (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Herman & Yeh, 1983; National Middle School Association, 2003). School engagement of parents in their children's learning contributes to student success across socioeconomic lines. Parent involvement in their children's education is associated with higher student achievement and improved school attendance, well-being, behavioral and academic outcomes, readiness for learning, future aspirations, and more positive experiences with school (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978; National Middle School Association, 2003; Sarason, 1971). For instance, Auerbach (2009) presented experiences of four educators' proactive attempts to engage families and the community with their schools. The school leaders' individual commitment to working toward greater social justice was the catalyst for their pursuit of educational equity for the marginalized Latino families served by their school districts. The school leaders acknowledged an awareness

of multiple family engagement models, and creatively employed strategies that were salient to the population they served and the circumstances that were presented to them.

The concept of schools forming partnerships with families and communities, and the benefits for students and teachers of involved parents, has been touted for many years (Auerbach, 2012; Benson & Martin, 2003; Patrikakou et al., 2005). Sadly, there remains a disconnect between the espoused rhetoric and the actual partnership practices taking place in most American schools. Auerbach (2012) explored these "partnerships" and shared evidence that in practice were the antithesis of this concept. She argued for a leadership model suited for authentic partnerships that informs practice. Meaningful partnerships involve cultivating "respectful alliances" among stakeholders that demonstrate, with equity, the value of relationships with the school through solution-focused dialogue, power sharing, and high standards of fairness.

Auerbach (2012) examined the literature on family involvement and community engagement to expound on partnership. She offers a model structured to advance greater equity through authentic partnerships. According to Auerbach, it is through these partnerships that schools, families, and communities can reduce inequities by race and class. These partnerships are not limited to the oppressed and marginalized segments of communities; rather, they serve as a model for collective work toward social justice. Auerbach (2012) calls this the "moral obligation of leadership" (p. 5). Authentic partnerships are "respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups, that value relationship building, dialogue" and sharing power across differences for more socially just schools (Auerbach, 2012, p. 5).

Embracing the need and creating structures for family-school partnerships may not be enough, though, as some parents from historically marginalized groups may not have had opportunity and experience in developing and exercising agency for navigating and acting within

dominant group institutions. Fine (1993) offered three descriptions of large parental involvement projects in urban school districts that were intended to address development of voice in oppressed groups. The discussion focused on how parents were being positioned as "subjects, but also as objects, of a struggle to resuscitate the public sphere" of public education (Fine, 1993, p. 682). Authentic parental involvement is said to require three-way commitments in order to achieve effectiveness: "(1) organizing parents, (2) restructuring schools and communities toward positive educational and economic outcomes, and (3) reinventing rich visions of educational democracies and of difference" (Fine, 1993, p. 728). The study concluded that "unless parents are organized as a political body, parental involvement programs will devolve into, at best, into a swamp of crisis interventions leaving neither a legacy of empowerment or a hint of systemic change" (Fine, 1993, p. 728).

Involving and empowering parents requires concerted effort. For instance, Dauber and Epstein (1989) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study to examine the role of teacher attitudes facilitating parental engagement with the school and concluded:

> Teachers who did not frequently involve parents in their children's education made more stereotypic judgments about the involvement and abilities of less-educated parents, socioeconomically disadvantaged parents, and single parents. In contrast, teachers who were "leaders" in the use of parent involvement, and who found ways to involve parents, did not prejudge less educated, poor, or single parents. Rather, they rated all parents as successful helpers with reliable "follow-through" with their children at home. (p. 1)

It followed that teacher attitudes, not parental education level and socioeconomic and/or marital status, were the best predictors of whether teachers saw parents "as knowledgeable and successful partners with the schools in their children's education" (Dauber & Epstein, 1989, p. 2).

In a deeper investigation of parental involvement, Jeynes (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 21 studies to consolidate information about the influence of parental

involvement on the academic achievement of minority children. The analyses were used to determine the overall effects of parental involvement as well as specific components of parental involvement. Jeynes found that parental involvement is a significant predictor of all educational outcome variables for the minority groups under study. Jeynes concluded that researchers should continue to study the role of enhanced parental involvement focusing on "which programs work best and why" (p. 266). Later, Jeynes (2011) reiterated that, "Evidence . . . over the last decade [shows] that parental involvement may be one of the greatest ways o help at-risk children" (p. 39). He emphasized the strong evidence that parental involvement is far broader and complex than researchers previously believed and that teachers need to support parents by affirming "what they're doing right" (p. 39).

Parents of students who are in historically marginalized populations face longstanding barriers to meaningful engagement within schools. Using CRT and social justice theories, Fennimore (2017) reviewed research studies conducted between 1995 and 2016 that addressed parent involvement in education of privileged versus marginalized groups. The results challenged prevalent hegemonic approaches (i.e., discriminatory assumptions of the dominant group of parents and their silencing efforts on the nondominant parents on issues of unequal access to opportunity). The review concentrated on studies which documented,

> the experiences of nondominant and minoritized parents who challenge injustice and inequity in the public schools their children attend. It interrogates hegemonic approaches to parent involvement [that] favored dominant groups and silence efforts of nondominant parents to confront discriminatory assumptions and unequal opportunities. (Fennimore, 2017, p. 159)

The studies Fennimore (2017) selected "reflected grassroots parent activism in encountering conflict and tension and exposing racism, classism, and discrimination in public school practices and policies (p. 159). Relying on both CRT and social justice theories, Fennimore (2017) referred to "three major public school hypocrisies" (p. 159):

Hegemonic, traditional, school-controlled parent involvement that privilege dominant groups and devalues contributions of nondominant groups; false claims of equity in schools characterized by stratified and differential opportunities; and discriminatory, market-based choice and privatization schemes. (p. 159)

Of particular interest to me for my study was Fennimore's (2017) charge to researchers on ethical issues. These can that arise when research seemingly "'confirms' nondominant parent and child inferiority" (p. 159). She concluded that researchers should,

Raise awareness and concern in the academy and in society at large about the continuing struggle for educational and civil rights and the critical role that nondominant parents and communities can play in strengthening equity and justice in public education. (Fennimore, 2017, p. 176)

Cavendish and Connor (2018) examined the complexities associated with parent–school partnerships, particularly regarding parent voice for students with disabilities. According to the authors,

In a review of the research on school collaboration with culturally and linguistically diverse parents, Harry (2008) reported key themes from the research that included an insensitivity to the logistics of family involvement in schooling, a limited provision of information on parental rights, and a history of mistrust engendered by previous exclusion from public schooling (p. 377). Subsequently, the desired collaboration stated within the law may not actually materialize when disagreements arise about important issues such as eligibility for receiving special education services, what is interpreted as the least restrictive environment, and what constitutes reasonable accommodations. (Cavendish & Connor, 2018, p. 4)

Cavendish and Connor (2018) offered recommendations for strengthening these connections by confronting the challenges of school-parent collaboration, emphasizing the focus on supporting parents and acknowledging the various positionalities and methods of researchers who study the partnerships and whose work informs interventions. Although these perspectives were beneficial to understanding parental voice development and parent-school partnerships, particularly for marginalized students, they neither identified nor offered a set of practices as potential interventions, which speaks to the need for continued study.

In sum, the research on parental engagement in children's education continues to change as social scientists learn more about the subtle and complex dynamics involved. Parent-school partnerships do not guarantee parental involvement, and opportunity to develop and practice agency, such as voice, may be a crucial intervening factor. Parental voice opens a dialogue that informs the school about the students' home-life circumstances, provides opportunities for learning intervention, and understanding the cultural dynamics of the family. As well it mitigates the cultural dynamics of the school (Dauber & Epstein, 1989).

Unfortunately, just having the parent seated at the educational decision-making table is not enough. Parents must also be readied for active sharing and for possibly negotiating some matters. They must also be prepared to learn because these are crucial conversations. Without the school's assistance, the knowledge of parents and their actions to help their students are heavily dependent on their social class or education (Dauber & Epstein, 1989). These are only a few of the reasons why the exploration of parental voice self-development, as in this study, is so vital. In this research study, the interest is in exploring the thoughts and perspectives of parents whose Black children experienced educational success in a predominantly White school system. The aim is to learn whether and how they cultivated voice to advocate for their children's education, with all the subtleness and intricacy that may have involved, as well as how they view their use of voice as countering the abysmal expected outcomes for their student.

Parental Voice in Educational Settings

Th meaning of "voice," in a broad sense, is captured by Hirschman's (1970) definition of it as an attempt to change a situation, in contrast to giving up, giving in, or accepting the status quo:

> To resort to voice, rather than exit, is for the customer or member to make an attempt at changing the practices, policies and inputs of the firm from which one buys or the organization to which one belongs. Voice here is defined as any attempt at all to change rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective position. (p. 30)

For parents in the school setting, parental voice means expressions of their ideas, suggestions, beliefs, and other reactions to a wide range of educational issues and their corresponding behavioral interventions. According to McKenna and Millen (2013), parent voice implies not only that parents have and offer ideas and opinions about their children, but also that educators are receptive to what they have to say. This allows for an open and multidirectional flow of communication. Similarly, parental presence accounts for the actions that are related to the voices of caregivers. McKenna and Millen (2013) define parent voice and distinguish it from parent presence as follows:

> The right and opportunity for parents and caregivers to express their understandings about their child and families' everyday lives and educational experiences in and out of school. These expressions may consist of parents' desires, dreams, goals, and hopes for their families and children as well as frustrations, concern, or anger over isolation and exclusion. Parent presence refers to a parent or caregiver's active involvement in their child's education, whether through formal school space (traditional activities) or in more personal, impersonal spaces, including spaces created by parents themselves. (pp. 17–18)

Thus, parent (or caregiver) engagement, in this sense, encapsulates both parent voice and parent presence. McKenna and Millen's (2013) grounded theory research with a sample of parents who were involved in a local parent education program, produced detailed descriptions of conversations, parent writings, and focus groups. The collected data was organized into a new model of parental engagement. This developed model has as its central focus the child's well-being, which was the basis for these interactions. They explored the lack of congruence between the cultures of the families and the educators' perspectives about how they live. Parent voice, as defined by McKenna and Millen, implies not only the parents' opinions and ideas, but also the need for educators to be receptive to them and open to multidirectional communication

flow. Similarly, parent presence addresses the actions related to the voices of the parents and caregivers and the accompanying educators' perceptions. They highlight that educators often miss opportunities to serve students more effectively because they fail to understand the home-school-community contexts in which the students live.

Martin and Vincent's (1999) study of parental voice in United Kingdom schools that viewed parents as citizens with inherent rights to speech and to the engagement of teachers in decision making. The parent–teacher relationship was examined by using data that explored the home–school connection with a case study analysis. They found that the school strongly controlled the parents' use of voice and that these relationships could be separated into three categories: consumer accountability, active volunteerism, and tutelage. Such practices debase the citizenry argument for voice, but they imply that a greater role for parental participation was permitted in some of the schools. Admittedly, these were cautious and temporal spaces for voices that were still highly regulated, yet parents are citizens, and the student belongs to their family unit. Should they not have a voice in their child's education?

Connecting the work on parental involvement specifically with the construct of parental voice, Auerbach (2012) explored the work of engaging parents in the education of their students among Latino immigrant parents, noting that when the culture of the teachers is so very different from that of the family, facilitating engagement has its own set of challenges. How do marginalized parents successfully construct their role in support of their child's educational opportunities, and what can be learned from their stories of building these important relationships? This discussion of traditions, beliefs, and perceptions not only helps define the cultural gap but also builds a bridge to better understanding and the cultivation of real relationships. Auerbach brought forward the idea that by actively and purposefully respecting

parental voices, an inclusive dialogue ensues, and the discourse that follows usurps the traditional educational equity divide and even provides the basis for community-building and a reconciling justice.

Relatedly, Morin (n.d.) offered specific recommendations for how to effectively use parental voice. The writer shared advice provided to parents, as the voice for their child, as a means to address problems or issues when something "just isn't right." Morin emphasized that the parent knows their child's strengths, challenges, and interests best, and that this advocacy is important because it helps to ensure the child has the needed support to thrive. Morin made eight recommendations for use of parental voice:

1. Understand what it means to advocate.

2. Know it's all right to speak up.

3. Write down your thoughts.

4. Start by speaking with someone you trust.

5. Ask as many questions as you need to.

6. Don't be afraid to show emotion but be respectful.

7. Ask about extra help for your child.

8. Keep speaking up!

This advice may be sound, though it is still not known what helps parents cultivate a sense of ability and confidence in using voice or how they view it contributes to their children's education outcomes.

The focus of this dissertation on parental voice is on the experiences and stories of parents and excludes consideration of a comprehensive systems approach as remedy for inequality in public education. However, it is important to acknowledge that systemic approaches

contribute to preparing marginalized students for college and greater opportunities.

Walker Johnson (2018), for instance, found evidence that strategic partnerships and

evidence-based practices guiding advocacy efforts improve low levels of college degree

attainment among African American students. Engaging marginalized families in discussions

and finding ways to effectively connect them with their students' education in a goal-directed

way, such as a college education, may enhance the student's education and the parent may also

consider continuing education. Thus, through partnerships and the development of parental

voice, the entire household may be affected.

Chapter Summary

The issues relating to parental voice exclusion are institutionalized, numerous, and

difficult to overcome. If parents are to achieve real voice, the literature suggests they must

develop, cultivate, use, and sustain it. This research study aimed to explore and understand the

experiences of African American parents in developing and using their voices to help their

children succeed as students.

My review converges with Hatten's (2011) comments in her dissertational literature

survey:

> While public education reform is usually driven from the ideas and priorities of
> mainstream educators and sometimes minimally informed policymakers . . . there are
> many factors other than standards, assessments, and newer teachers holding advanced
> degrees that should influence education reform. (p. 22)

To facilitate all students becoming prepared for tomorrow's opportunities this study

explored how Black parents develop and use their voices to advocate for their children and how

engaging their perspectives bridges gaps in understanding in the educational process. When

teachers and administrators understand the family-home-community dynamics, they can better

serve the learning needs of the students and build a supportive relationship with the parent more successfully.[1]

As described in detail in the next chapter, I used narrative inquiry, primarily relying on qualitative interviews to collect and analyze the data for key patterns and themes related to the development and use of parent voice in educational settings. The stories of parents who advocated for their Black children in White schools, as told by themselves, provided firsthand, compelling testimonies of their experiences and offered insight for other parents and advocates working to build strong family–school partnerships and equitable school environments.

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[1] Decisions on how to promote and support student success have implications for students from kindergarten through 12th grade and into postsecondary education. The purpose of this study was to delve into the stories of Black parents whose children had successful educational outcomes despite their being marginalized in their school system and learn how these parents developed and used of their voices as advocates for their children in school. This chapter provided the historical context, theoretical framework, and relevant empirical research that serve as background to the study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the development and use of voice among parents of Black students who were successful in supporting their child's educational goal attainment. Through interviews with Black parents of successful students, I also explored how parents perceive how their use of voice influenced their student's success in a school system that is predominantly White and middle-income. The participants shared their stories in open-ended interviews, which were transcribed and analyzed following traditional qualitative research methods. The results provide potentially useful information that can be applied to helping parents from traditionally marginalized families act to reduce disparate outcomes for their children.

The narrative inquiry study focused on listening to and describing how Black parents feel about their child's educational successes and their own advocacy experiences, thus providing a missing voice in our understanding of that process, and I applied the following research questions:

1. How did these Black parents develop and use voice to advocate for their children in a predominantly White educational system?

2. How did these Black parents perceive that their use of voice contributed to their children's educational outcomes?

History and Philosophy of Narrative Inquiry

"The oldest and most natural form of sense-making" involves stories or narratives (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002, p. 66). Humans make sense of themselves and their experiences through stories and communicating them to others.

> Stories of experience are biography, life history, oral history, autoethnography, and autobiography. The significance of this form—and more specifically, first-person

accounts of experience told in story form with a beginning, a middle, and an end—to qualitative research is the use of stories as data. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2009, p. 32)

According to Chase (2008),

The social sciences, and particularly within the tradition of qualitative research, the term *narrative analysis* typifies two major principles. The first principle is that narrative is a major way by which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning. The second principle emphasizes the fact that personal narratives, no matter how unique and individual, remain social in character. Therefore, narrative analysis combines a focus on people's actual stories with some form of analysis of the social character of those stories, which is the value of this approach. (p. 79)

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggested the melding of personal and social conditions in narrative inquiries. They emphasized that creating stories involvces selectivity among and response to the world around and the world within. They stated,

Narrative is both phenomenon and method. Narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the pattern of inquiry for its study . . . Thus, we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

Later, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) elaborated on this, explaining that a person's experience retold as narrative is,

An exploration of the social, cultural and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42)

Stories hold center stage as a source for understanding human experience. There are numerous texts that focus on narrative research, key recent ones being *The Meaning of Others: Narrative Studies of Relationships* (Josselson et al., 2007); *Handbook of Narrative Analysis: Mapping a Methodology* (Clandinin, 2007); and the journals, *Journal of Narrative and Life History* and *Life History and Narrative Inquiry*. These have all contributed to the growing popularity of this form of qualitative research. The "text" of the story is the data in narrative

research and, thus, hermeneutics—which originated as the interpretative study of written texts—

is often used as the philosophic underpinnings for narrative analysis (e.g., van Manen, 2016).

"Although hermeneutics originated in the study of written texts . . . narrative analysis extends the

idea of text to include in-depth interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs,

and creative nonfiction, placing an emphasis on interpretation and context" (Patton, 2002,

p. 115). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasized that "although the concept of narrative

inquiry as a research methodology is new to the social sciences, its roots are firmly in the

humanities" (p. 2) and in disciplines with realist, modernist, postmodernist, and constructionist

strands.

Narrative Inquiry Defined

At the heart of narrative inquiry and analysis is "the ways humans experience the world"

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). As a research technique, one studies experience through

stories. An emphasis is placed on the stories people tell, how these stories are communicated,

and the language used to tell the stories. So, in a narrative inquiry,

> The researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to
> provide stories about their lived experiences. This information is then retold or
> "re-storied" by the researcher in a narrative chronology. Ultimately, the narrative
> combines views from the participant's life with those of the researcher's life in a
> collaborative narrative. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

Researchers of social contexts often choose to interview persons in whom they are

interested to get a sense of their lives, their experiences, their emotions, and their thoughts

concerning their situation (Bold, 2011). On a fundamental level, narrative methodologies are

intentionally designed to articulate and make familiar those experiences and perspectives that are

a part of everyday life. Narrating, then, organizes related experiences, knowledge, learning, and

social change, and because of this, narrative researchers seek to gain insights about personal

experiences and an understanding of issues, the construction of knowledge and identity, and the

similarities and differences of ways of knowing across groups and among individuals (Daiute, 2014). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) observed, "Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. The language and criteria for narrative inquiry are under development" (p. 7). They went on to state, "Because collaboration occurs from beginning to end in narrative inquiry, plot outlines are continually revised as consultation takes place over written materials and as further data are collected to develop points of importance in the revised story" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 11).

Finally, Clandinin (2013) defined narrative inquiry as follows:

An approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding. Narrative inquiry is therefore a multifaceted approach for understanding the human experience, which allows a researcher to gain knowledge through the storytelling of others. (p. 17)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) therefore described narrative inquiry as a cocreation between the researcher and participants over time, in a place or places, and through social interactions. "The inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).

Research Design

Understanding factors that contributed to Black student success, particularly in predominantly White schools, remains critically important due to persistent educational disparities. My using narrative inquiry enabled participants in this study to express and make meaning of their past experiences with use of voice to address the issues of disparate treatment of their child in a school system with a history of inequitable outcomes for Black students. The purpose of this study, then, was to examine the phenomenon of the use of parental voice and how it connects with the research on parental involvement in children's educational outcomes. The

results can inform interventions to help parents, teachers, administrators, and community agencies to identify and implement strategies that may increase Black parental involvement and minority student academic success.

Although this dissertation was not a case study of the school system from which the sample is drawn, understanding it as context for the parents' narratives is critical to the value of this research. Merriam and Tisdell (2009) noted that in qualitative research, "the focus is on the search for meaning and understanding" (p. 4). The school district in this study was a predominantly White, middle class, suburban school system with a history of intentional efforts toward racial integration in the community and equity in education, yet persistent disparities in academic outcomes. It represented what might be thought of as a version of a best-case scenario for students from historically marginalized populations to be successful in a predominantly White school system and reflects how intractable racial inequalities remain.

Recruitment of Participants

This qualitative, interview-based narrative inquiry study included 15 parents and guardians of Black children who had had successful educational outcomes (graduated from high school and went on to some form of post-secondary education, such as college or trade school). I recruited parents of children who attended this affluent community's school system because of its history of intentional efforts to achieve integration and equity—and its inability to do so (Meckler, 2019).

Note that in reports of the research, including this dissertation, I do not use the actual name of participants, the school district, or town to protect participants' confidentiality. Because the population of interest for this study is Black parents, White and other non-White persons

were not included in the study. All participants were aged 35 or older and gave voluntary

informed consent to participate.

I purposefully sampled participants who were parents of Black students who graduated

from the same mid-Western school system described previously. Their children all went on to

some form of post-secondary education. I used multiple recruitment strategies to garner

participants, primarily snowball sampling, beginning by seeking referrals from people within my

own social network. However, I did not know any of the eventual participants in the study. I

began sampling by connecting with people in my social network. Some were neighbors or

community members with whom I had interacted before, and none were relationships involving

transactions or power differentials through which I could have coerced participation or in which

there would have been potential role conflicts. I have lived and worked in the area for decades,

and among my social contacts were some individuals who could have been included in the study.

I did ask these individuals to participate, but only to refer other prospective participants to me by

either passing along study information and my contact details, or by offering me contact

information for the people whom they knew. Additionally, I posted on the community's social

media groups and alumni websites, and asked local churches to include in their bulletins and

newsletters, the following brief study description:

> If you are the parent of a Black student who graduated from high school in [the selected community] please consider helping with my dissertation research on Black parents' roles in their children's educational success. For more information, please contact me at (my email) OR send me a message at # [a Google Voice # set up for this study]. Thank you!

> I'm Mark McMillian, a member of the community and a doctoral student at Antioch University. This study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, *email given in letter*).

> For each contact attained by any of the above means, I sent an email or message, or

responded to voice mails with a phone call, with the following information:

Hi [Their Name],

I am getting in touch with you because you may be able to help me with my dissertation research on how parents contributed to their children's educational success. This study is part of my work in the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change.

I'm looking to speak to parents of Black students who have graduated from [the school district] and went on to college or trade school. If that describes you, I'd appreciate a chance to interview you one-on-one for about an hour. I'm interested in learning about your experiences in supporting your child's education when they were in school.

[For email] Attached to this message is an informed consent form that provided more details [either email attachment or link to a website hosting it]. Please take a look and let me know if you have any questions. Would you be so kind as to let me know when might be a good time for an interview via Zoom or perhaps somewhere in town?

This study was reviewed by Antioch University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, her email).

Thank you so very much for considering my request for your help.

Sincerely,

Mark McMillian, PhD Candidate

Antioch University, [my email & Google voice number]

Procedure With Participants

I provided an informed consent form to each prospective participant in my initial contact with them, as noted in the sample email/message above. Additionally, I asked each participant who responded to my inquiry about a time and means of meeting for an interview, as well as to provide the signed informed consent form before or at the time of the interview. Finally, when we met before beginning the interview, with each participant I verbally reviewed the elements of informed consent, including that their participation was voluntary and confidential, confirming that they consented to my recording the interview (audio only for in-person interviews and audio and video for video conference interviews). I also reinforced their freedom to decline to answer any question and to withdraw from the study, and I ensured that they had a copy of the informed consent form.

Interview Format

Individual interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews that were conducted in person were audio recorded and transcribed; video conference interviews were video recorded and audio recorded with only the audio retained and transcribed.

The interview questions were as follows:

A. Looking back on when your child was in school, tell me about your experiences with the school as you tried to support your child's success?

   [*Possible follow-up prompts and questions.*]

   a. Tell me what it was like advocating for your child with the schools?

   b. Were there particular challenges?

   c. Particular things that were helpful or supportive to you in advocating for your child?

   d. Examples?

B. Not everyone feels comfortable or confident about speaking up for their child(ren) with the school. How was that for you?

   [*Possible but not necessarily follow-up questions.*]

   a. How did you develop a sense of confidence about speaking up for your child at school?

   b. Can you tell me a bit about how and when you developed that sense of confidence, empowerment, or voice to speak up for your children?

   c. Did you have any models in your life of people who spoke up and used their voice?

C. How do you see your use of "voice," speaking up for your child, as contributing to your child's educational success?

D. What advice do you have for parents of Black students in mostly White schools about speaking up for them and supporting their success?

[*Possible but not necessarily follow-up questions.*]

    a. What would you tell parents of Black children about how to advocate for them in school?

    b. What might help parents of Black children to develop a sense of voice on behalf of their kids?

Confidentiality

The level of privacy in this study was confidentiality. Because I had identifying information about the participants from contact information and obtaining informed consent, I could not offer anonymity. However, by protecting the identity of participants in my records, de-identifying their data, and using pseudonyms in reports of my research, I ensured their privacy. Transcriptions were redacted in a manner that preserved the confidentiality of the participants as well as that of others whose names may have been mentioned. Regarding confidentiality, I followed the conceptualization by Berg (2001), who stated that providing "confidentiality is an active attempt to remove from the records of research any elements that may identify the subjects" (p. 57). Contact information and informed consent forms were stored in a password protected file on a secure, password protected cloud drive. Transcripts and field notes were given an ID number and pseudonyms assigned when transcripts were cleaned, and all identifying information was redacted. Finally, a key linking identities and ID numbers was stored

in a separate, password protected file and this key will be destroyed once this dissertation is finalized.

Participant Well-Being

I believe that this study presented no risks to participants beyond those of everyday life. Participants self-selected into the study and participated voluntarily. Interview questions did not specifically elicit sensitive information, and no deception was used. I recognize, though, that asking people about their lived experiences always includes the risk of evoking difficult memories or experiences. Therefore, my informed consent form included contact information for free mental health support, such as a crisis hotline. Additionally, I acted as an empathetic and attentive researcher, alert to the wellbeing of the participants in my study. Should I have noticed any signs of discomfort or upset of participants during the interviews, I would have asked the participant if they would have liked to stop or, if in my judgment someone was upset, I could have brought the interview to a close. Given that the risks of this research were low, and the potential benefits included informing interventions to support parents in advocating for positive educational outcomes for their children, the benefits outweighed the risks. Further, the selected method, individual qualitative interviews, asked respondents to tell their own stories in their own authentic voice. It may have even benefited the participants to reflect on and tell their stories: "The oldest and most natural form of sense-making" involves stories or narratives (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002, p. 66).

Data Analysis

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) observed,

> There is no formula for the best way to analyze the stories we elicit and collect. Indeed, one of the strengths of thinking about our data as narrative is that it opens up the possibilities for a variety of analytic strategies. (p. 80)

Narrative inquiry has multiple forms of data analysis. Polkinghorne (1995) suggested there are two general types: The first is the paradigmatic type in which the analysis of narrative or storied accounts are examined for their data and narrative type. The second is the analysis of cognition or "descriptions of the accounts that produced the storied accounts" (p. 21). For this dissertation, I have employed the cognition or descriptive type of narrative inquiry. This permitted me to conduct data analysis by examining the narratives to produce a description of repeated themes in the storied accounts (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 10). According to Daiute (2014), "dynamic narrative inquiry emphasizes the interactive, communicative, purposeful nature of narrating, leading to strands of meaning that researchers can then identify to enhance findings about human complexity, understandings, and behaviors" (p. 29).

According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000), "the narrative interview is a technique for generating stories; it is open in regard to the analytical procedures that follow data collection" (p. 4). Narrative inquiry presents a unique method for making meaning of an individual's past experiences (Chase, 2008). This method communicates the central character's perspective of not only events over time, but also their accompanying emotions, views, and perspectives, "highlighting the uniqueness of each human action and event rather than their common properties" (Chase, 2008, pp. 656–657).

Although several methodological approaches exist for analyzing narrative data, Chase (2008) identified five major approaches from which I employed the psychological approach. This was done with the intent of emphasizing the meaning of these stories to the participants, how the storytellers' lives were affected over time and, hopefully, their sharing of their growth (Chase, 2008). As this process was applied, the focus on how the participants' stories influenced their children's academic success became increasingly apparent.

By using significance analysis, I examined the individuality as well as the diversity of meaning in the narratives in two phases: The referential phase is the actual storytelling, but the evaluative phase is where the meaning and significance emerges. How the story is shared lends itself to clues about what was important. For example, the use of negatives, intensifiers, and psychological expressions provide insight into what is important to the storyteller. "The true power of significance in analysis is in the way a story is told'' (Daiute, 2014, p. 150).

The presence and patterning of evaluative devices provide a systemic means of understanding, and it considers the functions of narratives within the broader context of using narrating to interact (Daiute, 2014, p. 163). Evaluative devices reveal how a storyteller wants to be perceived by the listener and how they feel about the subject being discussed. These expressions are contingent upon power relationships and interpersonal factors that ultimately influence the evaluative response and how the story is told. Evaluative devices have this unique role in that they coordinate the understanding of the story in terms of both its shared themes and the affective response.

It is important to note that the use of evaluative devices in coding is intended to indicate the speaker's attitudes and emotions toward the narrated events. This is accomplished through evaluative devices like negative encoding, marked emphasis in voice, exaggeration and the use of hyperbole, and the use of gratuitous and aggravated signals. It is this evaluation that speakers emotively express and that emphasize which aspects of their story they feel contains "tell-ability: the importance attributed to the story's telling in particular circumstances" (Georgakopoulou & Goutsos, 2004, p. 132). Further, according to Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (2004), personal "anecdotes are the most frequent form of narration" and in these anecdotes, narrators participate as both storytellers and characters [allowing]for a particularly rich and flexible

self-representation" (p. 133). What this entails is about identity construction in narrative is that

the story's narrated events are not of specific importance, but rather the speaker's judgement as

to how certain aspects of the story should be emphasized and evaluated.

Central to the use of narrative analysis is understanding how stories connect to and reflect

reality. Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) raised the challenging issue of accuracy and researcher

perspective in using narratives:

> Should every narrative be considered a good description of the events told? Must we
> accept every storyteller's account as valid? How should we approach narratives that are
> clearly devoid of reality? As Castoriadis (1975) once put it, while trying to describe the
> Eiffel Tower, people can say either "this is the Eiffel Tower" or "this is my granny." As
> social researchers, we need to know the difference. (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000, p. 71)

Therefore, I considered the process of analysis, which includes the following descriptive

devices:

1. Read each narrative at least twice.

2. Identify the evaluative devices that appeared in each narrative.

3. Identify each device individually (i.e., psychological states, intensifiers, causal

   connections, negations and hedges, and qualifiers). Check the narrative several times

   to assure no evaluative devices have been missed and that the evaluative devices have

   been accurately identified.

4. Identify the frequency of evaluative devices.

5. Identify patterns of significance.

6. Identify functions of significance.

7. Summarize my feelings and discuss my conclusions.

I was motivated by a strong need to understand the interpretive and a desire to hear and

make rational sense of the stories from those I interviewed. I wanted to understand what they

believe their voices contributed to their experiences working with the school system on behalf of

their child, and perhaps some of the reasons why this had not been the case for many other Black families within this system. My curiosity led me to narrative inquiry because I wanted to hear authentically from parents in a manner that was as comfortable as possible for them to share. Evaluative devices in coding permitted me the benefit of focusing on those revelatory aspects of the narrative through a structure that is salient to the most important aspects of that empathic sharing. It also provided a means to compare their storied accounts and address my research questions. Interviews were 60 to 90 minutes for each participant.

The Relationship Between Me and the Participants in Storytelling

The planned gathering of data from the participants via naturalistic interviews produced a research product that included subjective collaborations with its co-construction. This narrative inquiry research development included mutual understanding and participant relationships that were crucial to the process. Thus, the epistemological underpinnings guiding this research aligned with the constructivist paradigm. According to Hatch (2002), "Constructivists assume a world in which universal, absolute realities are unknowable, and the objects of inquiry are individual perspectives or constructions of reality" (p. 15). Hatch further asserted that constructivist researchers appreciate shared meaning with their participants and that their findings emerge in the process of co-construction.

The value of narrative inquiry resonated with me because of this methodology's strong use of the participants' lives as the primary source of data. I, too, had a common experience as a child of a strong and vocal parent advocate. Based on John Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), described narrative inquiry as,

> [A] collaboration between researcher and participants, over time . . . An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that made up people's lives, both individual and social (p. 20)

As I reflected on this study, I believe it produced significant implications for future research. I had considered my own educational advocacy for my children and my mother's advocacy for me. These reflections were achieved quite naturally as I sat and considered my readings and the stories that I had heard. Studying the development and use of parental voice in the education of Black children and youth has the potential to add to our understanding of what has worked and can work for many marginalized parents and students. Although there was a limit to generalizability in the choice of qualitative narrative inquiry as the methodology, I discovered patterns that may have transferability and can inform interventions that support families in fostering educational achievement.

Storytelling has been a natural part of the human experience since recorded history. We all have stories, and the transferability of the lessons learned from these narratives always have the potential to inform, instruct, and inspire. Narrative inquiry presented an opportunity to experience the journey of someone else's lived reality and to learn from their experiences. Stories have power to not just inform, but also to transform.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The strategy to assure trustworthiness and credibility for this research involved regularly checking with participants during the interview to ensure I was understanding what they were sharing, as well as the use of peer debriefing by asking for purposeful feedback on data interpretations for this process. These acts of authenticity provided me with opportunities for reflexivity around participants' expressions of perception and feeling related to their experiences. Therefore, the quest for credibility focused on the accuracy of the data as participant views, interpretations, and the definitions represented by them as shared by this researcher (Polit & Beck, 2012).

I remained keenly aware that I was someone who could possibly misinterpret the stories shared by participants, as I had somewhat different positionality: I was a married and then, a single father with custody raising my children, who are now grown, and my parental involvement in their education occurred quite some years ago. Those experiences may not have been relevant to the participants' stories. Considering multiple narratives from a range of participants as well as peer debriefing, and review of multiple sources of data including field notes and my researcher journal for reflection, helped to assure trustworthiness (Merriam, 2002).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this narrative study was to shed light on the issue of developing parental voice to address educational disparities of students of color. My interest was to better understand how Black parents gave voice—not just access, but *voice*— to matters concerning their marginalized children, and in preparing these students for college. "Educational reform has typically been focused on the side of the decision-making table where teachers and administrators control" (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 17) but not so much on the student's parents' side of the table. In fact, the parents' opinions can be routinely discounted, thus the value of these parents' points of view are essentially dismissed as not really worthy of serious consideration, and the opportunity for true engagement has then been lost (Sankofa et al., 2005; Tyler et al., 2005). After conducting interview sessions with 15 individual participants and using the data analysis methods shared in Chapter III, I identified themes in these parents' lived experiences. Emergent themes were identified using data transcriptions, reviewing the audio recordings, reconsidering their demographic data, and revisiting my field notes. In this chapter, a horizontal view of the participant narratives is used to lift for consideration their stories with excerpts from these interviews.

Employing a narrative inquiry approach (Polkinghorne, 1995) permitted the participants to freely share their stories of personal experiences. Constructing meaning from the stories involved my own perspective as a member of a marginalized group and the task of constant immersion into these transcriptions once the interviews were completed, through active listening. The process also involved attending to the language that was used in the text and acknowledging unexpected information emerging from these discussions.

The sample of participants for this study include 14 Black parents, and a grandparent. Of the 15 participants, two were male, and 13 were female. Every participant volunteered to take part in a one-time interview. Because of the COVID pandemic, all interviews were conducted remotely via video meeting, except for one that was held at a public library not far from the participant's home.

The findings of this study indicate that these parents' voice advocacy for their children positively influenced the outcome goal of graduation and attending college. Analysis of these adults' engagement was organized into the three commonplaces of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative inquiry: time, space, and social relationships, which provided a multifaceted view of these lived experiences. Three-way axial coding was used to organize their words and phrases into common themes that corresponded to these commonplaces, and then the themes were organized into participant perspectives. This chapter provides participant demographics, initial coding, and the common themes.

The Findings

Participant Demographics

Table 4.1 provides demographic information of the interviewed participant sample. This description allows the reader to make comparisons of this study with similar research, and form opinions and questions for continued exploration. A brief participant profile is included to further shed light on these individuals' positionalities. Participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Table 4.1

Demographic Descriptors of Participants

Participant (pseudonym)	Sex	Age	Occupation	Education	Child Gender	Child's Graduation Year
Traci	F	40s	Professional	College	2 sons	2018 and presently
Anthony	M	40s	Professional	College	1 daughter	2018
Aisha	F	40s	Professional	College	1 daughter and 1 son	2014 and 2017
Jacquetta	F	40s	Professional	College	1 son	2018
Sylvia	F	40s	Paraprofessional	HS	1 daughter	2017
Freda	F	40s	Paraprofessional	HS	1 son, and 2 older siblings	2018
Gerri	F	40s	Professional	College	2 daughters	2012, 2014
Alicia	F	40s	Professional	College	4 children	2010, 2012, 2017
Samantha	F	40s	Professional	College	3 sons	2011, 2013, 2017
Chandra	F	40s	Professional	College	3 children	2016 (youngest)
Clarice	F	40s	Professional	College	1 daughter and 1 son	2018, 2021
Sheila	F	40s	Professional	College	4 daughters	2017 and presently
Lori	F	40s	Professional	College	1 daughter 1 son	2018, 2020
Missy	F	50s	Professional	College	1 daughter 2 sons	2015, 2017, 2020
Devon	M	70s	Professional	Some College	11 grands: 9 girls & 2 boys	2015 (granddaughter)

Biographical Sketches of Participants

Traci is married, and a professional. A mother of two sons, one has graduated and is attending college and the other son is currently a student at the high school. She was very direct, matter of fact in her interview presentation. She appeared genuine to me, and, at times, a bit vulnerable. She identified this research as potentially valuable to others and was glad to be a part of it. Friendly, with a serious demeanor, her sharing struck me as open and sincere.

Anthony focused on the parent's role with their child. Again and again, he made mention of the conversations he had with his daughter and how beneficial interventions were for her. He is a graduate from the same high school in which she attended, and he had many fond memories of his experience. He is a college graduate and professional. He shared his thoughts in a straightforward, practical, and clear manner.

Aisha's interview was delivered in a matter-of-fact presentation. She was clear and easy to understand. She displayed a strategic approach to addressing the issues in the questions posed. This mother of a graduated son and daughter also seemed quite courageous when discussing confronting school power dynamics and disparate treatment involving her children in school. Aisha attended prestigious private schools and her interview made me think of the possible impact of class-based differences and educational success.

Jacquetta is married, and both she and her husband attended predominantly White colleges, but predominantly Black grade schools. They have a son who is now in college. She shared in a matter-of-fact manner that suggested comfort and confidence in the telling of her story. It was as if she had discovered the secret to achieving equality within a disparate and unjust system and now, she was glad to share her knowledge. The importance of family connection kept arising in her talk.

Sylvia is a single mother of a daughter attending college. She is a high school graduate, and a paraprofessional who gave a heartfelt and at times a very sad interview. She seemed a bit ashamed at times when she shared her story, particularly when she discussed her reluctance to speak up for her daughter more forcibly. This thought made her feel ill. Her sincere sharing was authentic and matter of fact, though, and greatly appreciated.

Freda is now divorced but was married at the time her children attended this school system. We talked mostly about her youngest child's experience. He has two older siblings that went through the same school system. Freda is a high school graduate and a paraprofessional. She was bold and confident during the interview. She says she was familiar with the "games" of the system and its motivational ends, and that she discovered the benefits of voice advocacy as the means to address disparate treatment. She shared her personal story from a sense of reconciled pride that some may consider unusual—joyful at being raised by supportive grandparents, and aunts and uncles—contrasting with the disadvantages of having two parents who simply will not work together.

Gerri is a college educated, professional, and single mother of two daughters, graduates from this school system who also graduated from college. She attended and graduated from the school system as well. Gerri placed significant emphasis on her being an alumna of the school system and the benefit to her children of her and her siblings from having had this experience. This line of dialogue in the interview seemed to express a sense of pride, as well as precaution. It also permitted an exploration of how families can come together to offer advice and sometimes interventions for situations that are not going well. She certainly exemplified self-efficacy in her approach to advocating as a parent and her commitment to "showing-up." The takeaway from

this interview was the need for parents of Black students to be passionate, watchful, and engaged, and have open family communication for advice in advocacy.

Alicia is another alumna of the school system and a very strong advocate for parental voice. Her sharing was quite passionate. She is clearly a proud mother and a proud resident of this community. She is also college educated and a professional. As a single mother of four, she seemed eager to tell her story, although we were facing a time constraint. All four of her children have graduated high school, and three of them have attained college degrees. Her youngest child is in college now. She appeared excited throughout our interview and was very confident.

Samantha is married and the mother of three sons, all of whom attended and graduated from this school system. She is also a college educated professional. She appeared to me to be authentic and displayed leadership traits, throughout her storytelling, of guiding her sons as she advocated for them within this school system. She was quite forceful at times and yet sophisticated in her approach to describing her experiences. This was a memorable interview that stirred emotions within me as she shared her stories. She was clear, quite serious, and very impassioned.[2]

Chandra is a divorced alumna of the school system, and the mother of three, her youngest graduated in 2016. She is also a college educated professional. She was very proud of the school system. She described her experience with being involved as a volunteer during her children's education, and how that experience helped her learn to advocate for her child. She also developed relationships that garnered additional support because of her regular presence at the school. At times she seemed protective of the school system even though her son had had a

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[2] Please note: Samantha was also helpful in securing other interviews for me. I am very grateful for her support and advocacy.

challenging experience there. I think the new interim principal was a great help to her. She mentioned that he was African American. Overall, Chandra struck me as very sincere.

Clarice is also an alumna of the school system. She is the married mother of two children—a son and a daughter—who graduated and went off to college in 2018 and 2021, respectively. This parent may have been in a different socioeconomic class than the other parents interviewed. She and her husband, a local professor at an Ivy League university, were very active with the school, and often engaged in formal administrative leadership roles. They are well-traveled, well-educated, and appear to have had quite a different upbringing than the other participants. They were clearly a middle-class couple, and their advocacy extended to the purposeful raising of their children to develop and use their own voices as well. Clarice was clear and straightforward in her presentation. She also seemed quite glad to share her perspective. She was forceful regarding Black parents' need to advocate for their children. This couple was thoroughly engaged in affecting the school's leadership practices and policy.

Sheila is single and an alumna of the school system. Her father is also an alumnus of the school system. She is the mother of four daughters, graduates of the school system. Sheila is also a college educated professional. This was an emotional interview with clearly visible and painful moments for the respondent. Heartbreaking. I needed to take a little time after this interview ended for personal reflection. The discussion had brought the ugly reality of racism toward our children to a point that affected and upset me. However, we did speak for a little while after the recording stopped in my attempt to assure that she was alright. Her memories of the treatment of her children, and one child in particular, were horrific. No one would be unaffected by these acts against their children. It was truly sad.

Lori was married at the time of her children's education and is divorced now. She has a son and a daughter. Both graduated from high school, but only her daughter went to college. Lori is a college educated professional. She shared quite different approaches in her advocacy interactions with the school for her daughter than that she used for her son. She sounded defensive and protective of her daughter who was a very good student, but with her son, she engaged the school to ask for help with his discipline issues. In both instances, she was unsatisfied with some of the experiences. During her children's school years, there was also a loss in family income, including the loss of their home and the eventual ending of her marriage. This seems to have played a role in her change in advocacy efforts with the school, and, quite obviously, complicated matters for her. Her story was difficult to follow at times and her approach sometimes seemed contradictory; but upon later reflection of the life experiences she shared, it began to make more sense to me.

Missy gave a pleasant discussion from a perspective slightly different from the other interviews. She described her interactions with the school as a parent advocate from two perspectives: as an advocate for her own children and as a professional educator working with her husband (a scholar) to lead racial reform efforts in the school. The perspective shared elements similar to other respondents, but the overarching theme appears to be from a macro leadership level. She is a college educated professional with a master's degree. Her husband has a PhD. Their daughter and two sons graduated from this school system and all attended college. She described experiences from painful and challenging situations, as well as a perspective of high expectations for her children, and advocacy for system change. She was quite proud of her husband and children's success but at times seemed saddened by the cost of this educational

journey. Her perspectives seem to have been influenced by educational and travel experiences and growing up on the West Coast.

    Devon is married and a grandfather in his early 70s. He is a retired professional, with some college education. We talked mostly about his granddaughter whose mother died tragically and whom he and his wife raised. This granddaughter graduated high school and has now graduated from college, as well. These grandparents have nine granddaughters and two grandsons. Devon skipped around at times in the discussion, but his sharing was heartfelt and seemed quite sincere. This interview took place at a local library not far from his home. The interview also raised the issue of Black children being raised by people other than their parents and the educational implications, not to mention the effects of aging.

Coding and the Three Commonplaces of Narrative Analysis

    Table 4.2 provides some of the common concepts identified in the initial data coding phase by examining time, place, and social relationships in the data, following Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) approach to narrative analysis.

Table 4.2

Concepts From Initial Open Coding

Concept	Initial Reflections
Time	Over the years, at one point, for five years, I also was, what is now, that was something, I'm a graduate, I had growing up, I learned the importance. When I think back, I looked to them, I experienced it, today's environment, when we went to school, every day and what assignment is due. Because of the way she had to handle things—and why?—because she was Black. Be visible.
Place	The principal's office, classes, and classrooms, sitting in the background. Extracurricular activity and be exposure to diversity, grow up around just Blacks. The real world. The education there was supposedly a good education. At the school. Growing up in the projects. Exposed to different things. Different countries. The war. The suburbs. This community. Our neighborhood.
Social relationships	Family and friends. The teachers. Their classmates. The principal. Other children that went through this system, the counselors, the leadership. A typical kid. A Black parent with a child in the system, their mentors. Aligning with the right people. He doesn't know; the young kids think they know everything, but they don't.

Table 4.3 reflects results from the second phase of coding and represents a review of the data for each commonplace (time, place, social relationships), and provides information of the connections between terms used by the interviewed participant sample. These are the key emergent characteristics.

Table 4.3

Categories Within the Three Commonplaces

Commonplace	Emergent Characteristics
Time	References to the past and now with differences and similarities in school and family relationships, distinctions in grades and expectations, activities after school versus school times, learning from previous experiences with child's siblings, changes in teaching methods over time, years of attendance and graduation, school culture change over the years, child's age and appropriate expectations, prior to college, how the world has changed over time, child's performance compared to their Black and White classmates at the time.
Place	At the school, in classes, compared to other high-quality schools, inner-city schools, Grade schools, my professional job roles (status), moving here from out-of-town and best place for our children to go to school, good place for preparing our children for Ivy League education, church, our experiences in Africa and other countries (Tanzania, East Africa, Trinidad, Ghana, West Indies), elementary school, high school, Kindergarten, Advanced Classes, the library, home, College, suburban schools, extracurricular activities, sports, band.
Social Relationships	Having a seat at the table, predominantly African American group, a buddy, connected within the district, PTO people, the community, fellow athletes/teammates: sports people, service people, and microaggressions from peers and staff, the community, our family, their siblings, the church, self-relating internally and externally, teachers, staff, bullies, advocates, spouses, friends, racists, the principal, being single.

Personal Narratives of Common Factors Attributed to Academic Success

Using narrative interviews allowed me, as researcher, to gather information about the lived experiences of the studied participants. After the data collection process, analysis of qualitative data was accomplished by scrutinizing all gathered information to identify significant categories of meanings and behaviors. Through data analysis, broader themes emerged. I explored the participants' shared experiences and developed a sense of the essence of these experiences and there subsequent meaning. I also explored the individual differences in experiences among the parents. My aim was to better understand how these Black parents

developed and used their voice to advocate for their children in a predominantly White

educational system, and how the use of parental voice impacted the child's educational

outcomes, including the specific benchmarks of a high school graduation, and attending college.

Table 4.4 displays the findings from this study of examining the stories of 15 Black

parents experience with advocating for their child in a school system with disparate outcomes for

Black children. The table contains the five main themes and accompanying sub-themes that

emerged in this process. The number of participants addressing the various sub-themes are also

displayed.

Table 4.4

Themes and Sub-Themes

THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	# of Participants Addressing Theme
Theme 1: Protecting My Child: A Physiological Response	
Sub-themes: My Emotional Journey Experience	15
A Stressful and Challenging Time	15
Having Courage to Just Show-Up!	12
Theme 2: Speaking Out About Racial Inequity and My Child	
Sub-themes: Knowing the Risk	14
Applying a Solution Focused Intervention	13
Considering Your Audience	15
Who Can Help Me?	5
Sub-themes: Talking About What Happened	15
Theme 3: Results of Confronting These Racist Actions	
Rage	2
Resistance	15
Retreat	1

Sub-themes:

THEMES AND SUB-THEMES	# of Participants Addressing Theme
Recompense/Reform	2
Theme 4: How My Voice Developed	
Sub-themes: Recalling Who Did It Well in My Life	15
Response to Their Voice Advocacy	15
My Takeaways/Lessons Learned	13
Theme 5: Advice to Other Parents on Speaking-Up	
Sub-themes: Understanding the System	15
Being Prepared / Showing Up to _**NOT**_ Show Out!	13
Clarity on What to Say	15
Who Can Help Me?	3
Knowing the consequences	3

Theme 1: Protecting My Child: A Physiological Response

The reflections from the participants on the theme of *Protecting My Child* demonstrated a strong concern for protecting their children from all forms of racial discrimination. The participants shared their different experiences of mastery in this pursuit, but all shared their concern for their child's well-being because of the discriminatory actions at the school. The accompanying sub-themes identify forms of parental concern for the disparate treatment in their emotional states, stress levels, and physical reactions from the behaviors leveled at their child. These responses came when asked to share their story about the *Chance to Act: The Need to Intervene*. As one parent (Jacquetta) shared,

> We saw some things that the teacher was doing and saying to our child that she wasn't saying or doing to other people who were not minority students. So, we scheduled appointments, we came in, we let it be known that we were not satisfied. We let it be known how we expected our child to be interacted with, and how we expect the teacher to be in contact with us about real things that were going on in the classroom. And when the interaction with the teacher did not work, yes, we did go over the teacher's head, and went to the principal, and expressed our concerns. So, we were for the most part dealt with, and this is when he was a young boy, you know, in the first grade.

Emotional Journey

Each of the 15 participants shared stories about their concern for the abusive school

environment and overcoming these challenges to their child's educational success. They

acknowledged the existence of racially based treatment and the need for them to take action.

Freda said she had had some past similar experiences with this school system and was

well-prepared to intervene. She stated:

> I can't help but to just add some background. I had already had two other children that
> went through this school system. So, I was familiar with how the communication systems
> worked, and kind of familiar with where there may be opportunities for me to step in and
> push him forward, or where I felt like I needed to step in dealing with teachers,
> counselors, the leadership, principals. I already knew that I needed to get him aligned
> properly with the right people in the school system for him to be successful.

Gerri pointed out how having familiarity with the school system as an alumna was

beneficial to her and how some things had changed, and others remained the same. She said,

> I was very involved with my children's progress through school as I was a graduate of
> this high school. I am a product of the school system myself, so I kind of knew the
> system. I knew the ins and outs. That was a plus, and also having siblings who also were
> a product of the school system. I was very involved. I knew the resources that were there
> and that was able to help them through the process, to help them go through
> academically. I noticed, like, some differences. When it came to their classes and how
> they were set up, and some of the things they offered them. I knew I had to be involved.

According to Samantha, the children picked-up on the teaching differences that were

being made, when addressing Black students to that of addressing the White students. Even the

clearly visible teacher expectations for poor performance by Black students, and with unmasked

assumptions of limited intellectual ability, and their blatant teaching adjustment accommodations

for these differences were noticed.

> Because I'm not in the school every day. A lot of times, they (her sons) felt like, they saw
> a lot of differences. They realized, and they recognized that, you know, the classes were
> all White with one of the two Blacks, or didn't feel like everybody got pushed the same.
> They had a class that was, I don't know what you would call it, when I was in school
> back in the day, it was a regular class or modified class maybe. Those classes historically
> have always appeared to be more Black. They saw the difference in the way the teachers

let things go and didn't teach and didn't seem to care. Like these kids aren't as invested, or they're not. Not saying that this is what they said, or just is the impression that they got from the teachers, that they did share with us that, you know? People were allowed to just do whatever. It was like these people who take these classes maybe aren't worth the same investment that I'm going to put into my upper level classes. They're 'ore serious. Their work flow was not as easy. It wasn't challenging with the Black students. They didn't feel challenged and the kids in the class basically did what they wanted to do.

Chandra pointed out that protecting her child's interest was non-negotiable. She felt that the missing piece to Black children's success was their parents' involvement. According to her, this is not the only factor, but without this support the child is potentially left hopeless. She explained:

My father always said you can get an education anywhere. He said, "If you want to learn, you can get an education anywhere, even in a poor school district." I do believe that, but I also believe that it's also contingent upon us in helping that kid foster their success with parental involvement. I was a very involved Mom. I have three grown children. My youngest, came out in 2016, and just graduated from Ohio State this past May, and is now residing in Columbus, Ohio. I'm not trying to brag on my son, but he was very bright. All my kids could read by the age of three. When they started school, I always worked with them. In summer, having them study their math facts and all that, I understood why my son became so restless. There was an African American, male principal, he was the interim principal, because the principal was out, experiencing a long-term illness. He, got to the point! He had once said to me, 'come in, you're talking with me, now'. Well, he said, 'If I were you', he said, 'if my kid keeps getting sent out, it's like, what's the point? You're sending your kid here to learn. What is the problem? What are we really trying to address?'

I'm not one of those kinds of parents that would, just go off on the teacher, because I understand, as a divorced mother of three, sometimes anybody can have problems or episodes in their life. I saw how that particular teacher, she was a female teacher, I saw how every time a Black, particularly a Black boy talks, she was . . . "go out, sit outside the classroom." I looked up, I saw a couple of White boys talking and doing things and nothing was said, "No____ sit down, ____ do you know?" So, I saw that, but anyway, upon her knowing of that letter I sent, and getting wind of the letter and my frustration and my son's frustration, whatever, she tried to be kind of really nice, and not like she wasn't nice to me before. She was saying, 'I brought you a coffee', when I come to volunteer, and I'm like, everybody to me and to some degree, some people just have their biases. Some biases, I should say, racism that's ingrained, but she always had something negative to say about the Black kids. She was very good with math though, and that I applaud her for because my son was very good in math, because of that experience, it was kind of bittersweet. I just believe we as parents, we have to advocate for our child, just as I tried to do, if there was an incident or anything. I feel that it lets the teacher know that you're a concerned parent, and that you value how your child is being treated. Rather, I'm saying, good or bad. I just think it's important to speak up. I do

believe every parent, no matter what school district, no matter what race or anything, you have to be an advocate for your kid. I've always been the kind of parent where I always listened to my kid's story. That's why we always had dinner together. Every day. That's how I find out what is happening. Once, I actually told the teacher, I told her that my son was experiencing being harassed and bullied a little bit, and that, I'm just letting her know of this. I said, but don't worry, I'll handle it. I'm going to talk to the child's parent, myself, and I did and it stopped. I raised my kids with anything that they wanted to know, to try to have that level of confidence to say, ask for what you want, or what you need. I raise my children saying, to ask, and I said it's just yes or no, but don't be afraid to ask. Don't be afraid to hear no, it's not the end of the world. Prepare your kids for the real world and, as I always used to tell my kids, well, sometimes take under consideration what could be happening in your teacher's life. I mean, that's like real. Particularly African American parents, must be able to speak up, and be good advocates for their children.

Sheila told a heartbreaking story about working to protect her daughter after noticing a teacher's disturbing behavior, and the actions she took immediately as a precaution. This is another informative experience of the initiation of advocacy to overcome abusive environments to help one's child succeed, and in response to a parent's emotional state, and with some painful reflection. By taking notice of these behaviors and being aware of the options to performing the task of mitigating the problem, parents really can help in making a difference.

I remember going to her parent-teacher conference, and a teacher telling me that she was really a great example, especially for the other little Black boys and girls, of how to be a good student. I'm really trying not to be offended so much, but I was so offended by the comment because one, there was a distinction between the Black children and the White children in the classroom right off the bat. But you know, you don't really feel that way. I never felt that way as a parent. I stayed with my father while I was in high school for some years, never wanted to transfer, but high school for her was always challenging. For my daughter, I always felt this way, of course, I am her mother. However, the difference was that there were very few Black people in her class, she would take an engineering class, she would be the one Black student that would be in that class. She'd be taking AP chemistry, she'd be the one Black student in that class. So, if there was even another Black student, there would come time for the group work, they group the Black students together. Right, and the other students, they have a lot of say about what can happen, and what goes on in the classroom. My daughter really struggled. She struggled because she didn't have support, and it was as if she was having a problem with the learning part, where she thrives elsewhere. She found a home in a group when she was, I believe, she was a junior. So, this group was a group of students led by one of the teachers, and they're basically creating a Black history month program whereby the students could perform, dance, and theater arts, and basically just tell their stories. They didn't feel like their stories were being heard. They felt like they were being oppressed. I mean, you had

that narrative, but then you had the other part of it that was hyper sexualized, you know, you were parents, but it's a family night out, and we're about to observe a Black History Month performance.

So, it was like you had two different realities at once. Right? Something that wasn't unique to our culture, where women are being exploited, they're showing their bodies, these young girls were dancing provocatively. That was okay, but on the other side, you have historical speech, you had this at right around the time that young men are still being shot today. So, the kids were traumatized, and were trying to express themselves. The program allowed for them to do that, but always in the back of my mind, because I knew what it felt like to walk into that school and not feel like I was a part of them (I went to the school), I always felt like, what are they going to do to these kids? Because they're really talking too rude, right? One moment, they say that I'm wonderful, I want you to go forward. Then zero. Please? So, you know, it was a lot of tears to get her to graduation. She really hated school. I was always on top of it. So, it was this and that and where are we going? And now if I'm mean, if I'm honest and look back, I really felt like I really kind of failed my daughter in that moment because I wish I could have provided her some other support that I didn't give her back then. I thought it was an US thing. I didn't realize until later that it wasn't just us. I was hoping that we were just going through issues and having problems. We really have to be advocates for our children. We're the adult in the room speaking to another adult, it sometimes, I think for me, it was as if on a few occasions I felt like my daughter wasn't really studying, and maybe that's why she got those grades. Then when you are able to look and see and read the content, read the essay, read the report, and you just really then feel like the child was slighted. I was good for the conferences. That's one thing I did. If my daughter, her grades are slipping, I would call a conference, and pull all the teachers that I felt, that I needed to have a conversation within the room. Because, sometimes, you go into these parent-teacher conferences, and you get 15 minutes. The teacher has everything that the child has done, as far as the grades laid out, and it's very scripted on their part because of time. You don't really get a chance to really talk and get to know what really are the issues and where they're coming from, as I was trying to be an advocate for my daughter.

My role model is my mother, my mother is the biggest noise maker when it comes to inequity that I know to this day. She's just a fighter. I had to go back into that skill box, and I really got to know that my kids need someone, they need you, and it is not just about what goes on inside the house. You prepare them, you try to raise them and give them everything that you have, and then you send them into the world with monsters. So, sometimes, you want to fight the battle for them, or at least let them know that you're in their corner. I'm fighting back the emotion of it, because it's really heavy. I remember when she was very sad, and they get like that sometimes. You have to keep your eyes on them. I was a volunteer, for everything that she played. I was at the games and bought a T shirt. If she was in a spelling bee, I was present, and when she was doing poetry. I think part of the advocacy is not just about when it's bad, but also supporting the child and making sure that the child can see that you are part of their education with them, and that you haven't taken them to school with laughter for these people to take care of them or raise them for you. This is their education, it is a family journey. I just remember being very bold and being really like a problem, maybe to some people, who probably viewed me as a problem. Because a lot of times, it was just the attitudes. It was there, and it was

the attitude of being a single mother and I think the extra addition is that, we don't have enough time to be present.

   We don't have enough time to care, and that really wasn't the truth. It's not the truth, for really, the majority of parents. One of these little girls was being called, a slave, by another student. I was just like, a slave? I don't recall what the girl's response was, but she ended up being reprimanded for whatever she did, and the girl who called her a slave told her that she didn't suffer any consequences. I saw my children willfully being harassed at the school, to be called those things, and no one really took it seriously, and does anything about it. There was a time where I would have been, for instance, with my mother, with banners and cars saying we won't take it no more. Stop! That's appropriate sometimes, and sometimes it's best to walk away. Sometimes it's best to leave with some energy for fighting for something else. You want your child to enjoy education. Do you want them to want to learn forever? It broke my heart that they had those experiences, and I don't feel like any of us were supported. None of the families were supported.

Stressful Experiences

Each participant described some form of racial inequality related

to a history with Black children in this school system, and concern for their own child that

corresponded to the discriminatory patterns of this community (discussed in Chapter I). It is

interesting to note, that these reflections were of successful interventions during a stressful time,

that revealed a sense of internal motivation, primarily driven by their own parental

self-expectations. In some form, each participant referred to the influential power of their

presence for their child at this critical time juncture. As an example, Aisha shared the following:

   So, for me personally, the child that we speak of at this point was identified as someone diagnosed with anxiety and depression. So, as far as that goes, it was almost like, I don't want to say an argument, but it was a struggle. It was a push / pull type situation for me, and I felt like that because my child was Black, she didn't get the same treatment or the same consideration as a child who was a Caucasian would have gotten.

   Sylvia shared a similar story, as a parent bewildered by the stories her daughter had

shared with her about her school experience, and what she learned from other Black parents.

According to her:

   She struggled with this one teacher. After talking to some other parents, I realized their kids were also struggling with this teacher. I don't know what the issue with that particular teacher was, or why our kids had a problem with her, but it was the homework that was always an issue and how she spoke to the kids. So, you know, I had my daughter

stick it out, but I think I had a conversation with the teacher of course, during parent-teacher time to see if it was my kid, or if it was her. I realized it was the teacher. You know, every teacher does things differently. So, I did have my kids stick it out, but I had to have several conversations with that teacher throughout the year. I didn't talk to the faculty, like the principal or anything. I just kind of had my daughter stick it out. But because I knew it wasn't her, it was the teacher, and I also knew that she would have to at some point deal with adversity. So, I just had her stick it out to the next grade, but I definitely wouldn't let her follow that teacher, and you know, parents asked about that particular teacher, I didn't have anything good to say about her. I need to be my daughter's number one cheerleader in support. So, I need to use my voice to make sure that she understands that, and she can do things in life, through adversity.

So, going to teacher-parent conferences and seeing what's happening, and if it's not right, speaking out. I got sick with this incident. I didn't speak to the faculty, but at least having those conversations with the teachers, seeing what the issues are, and being supportive. Going to the school and participating, and making sure that if you see something, you say something. Because we have to be our number one cheerleader for our kids. And so, that means being involved. We can't sit on the sidelines and expect other people to just teach them. That means we have to be involved. I was a single parent. I got to know the teachers. So, a good parent always wants to protect their child and be there for their child. You can't expect someone else to raise your kids, you can't leave it up to them to totally educate your kids because sometimes, I think teachers are biased, sometimes. So, they have their own views of the world. That's what they're sharing. They're sharing those views with your child. So, you have to be there and involved to know what your child is being taught.

Lori shared an interesting scholastic perspective that told of her daughter's high academic performance and the subsequent challenge her demonstration of learning abilities produced within this system.

I reached out to the school when I realized she pretty much was sitting in the corner while the teacher was attending to everybody else. It seems that she could only handle teaching the kids that really needed teaching to get them through Kindergarten, whereas my daughter was just in the corner reading and writing in a journal. I had to reach out because the teacher kind of ridiculed her journaling. That's what my daughter's going to do, write about church and family. I contacted the principal to make sure that she would be attending. My ex-husband actually went to the meeting, and we were lied to. We were told that they don't move kids up. So, her and another young man of Indian origin, were given a fifth-grade book, but they weren't taught it. I put her in all of the advanced classes, at that point I realized, they really do have stratification. She said she was bored. I said, well, we need to do something about it. So, I sent an email to the principal and said, as you know, my daughter gets all A's, because actually, he would always send a letter home saying congratulations on your straight A's, but not do anything about it or not talk to us and say, do we need to do something with your child other than what we're doing? I said, I'd like her moved up in math, and I know that you move kids up. It took two sets of communication. Although the teacher said, Oh, she is in the right place, we'll

get her up to par. So, I said, Bethany, history's not even your thing, I'm pulling you out of that. So, I moved her to honors classes, then after that, she was fine. So, I'm a very vocal parent, I'm a very involved parent. So, that was the only help I could get from the system.

That's, how I am. You have to have a voice for your child. Just as you have to have a voice in medical treatment. You use your voice everywhere. You should not go through life alone. My name in the schools is well known for the good because I was on PTO, and a band booster, and everything. The teachers also know me because I needed help. You have to be involved.

Just Showing-Up!

Taking action to address these issues at the school requires a determination that exemplified these parents' commitment to their children's well-being. Sometimes these opportunities to engage made the participants question their own experiences and ability to succeed in their advocacy efforts. There also seems to be a sense of the motivating power of *Just Showing-Up!* as Alicia, demonstrated in her following reflections:

> Back then some of the newer teachers or some of the newer administrators in the high school, were trying to threaten my kids with things, the ninth-grade principal pulled my daughter . . . the assistant principal couldn't show her because it's not in the handbook. So, he got a little bit upset, because she stood up, and she caught him on his book. I think as far as that, you know, when some of the Caucasian teachers higher-up, they try and pull their weight to try and scare the African Americans to make them do things. They know that it's not right, or they try and use their weight to just put some type of fear in the African American children. I think when my daughter came home and told me that story, I immediately went to the principal and to the superintendent. I had to go to the board about that. The Superintendent at the time, had him removed and had her reprimanded. I really had too many problems in school with them. I knew the chain of command and how to, if something went wrong, I knew how to follow-up on it. Ignoring the chain of command, helped me to navigate when my children needed me there to navigate. Being very involved in my children's education was a huge success for them, too.

Missy shared a story quite different from the other participants because the involvement with the school that she and her husband had with the school; it was directly related to leadership issues of accountability and performance. She explained:

He's (my son) going to model citizenship, he knows how to act outside of his house, and he is taking a makeup exam. There's chatter around him and a White boy in front of him taking this makeup exam, and the science teacher looks at them, sees the White boy turn around to ask my son a question on the test, comes up to my son snatches his test and tells him 'you can take the exam when you can answer it on your own.' He tells the White boy, who happens to be a friend of his, you need to go up and tell the teacher what happened. So the White boy did. He told the teacher that he asked my son a question. My son actually had to go up to the teacher and kind of advocate for himself and say that, I wasn't cheating. I don't think she called the White parents because I actually asked. I saw the White parents in, I think we were in Italy on a band trip, and I don't think the teacher called them. I was just curious if she had. This White teacher threw everything at him, being a good student, and our son having doing well in the class, and all of that goes out the window just because all she can see is Black and White. Fortunately, my husband handled the situation, and so he wrote a nice letter to the teacher and to the acting principal at the high school. So, [she sent] a letter to him to call her racially biased. I don't know what he did. I don't know how he exactly termed it. I don't know how he phrased it. He basically called the teacher out, that she was stereotyping and using racial biases against our son. So, he didn't sugarcoat it. I mean he's a diplomatic guy, but basically, he called the teacher out. So, he had a conversation. Actually, my husband became the organizational leader of this Civic group and for seven years straight, worked tirelessly with the school board, residents, and administration to tackle issues of race and the environment of the schools. It was really, really, intense for a good seven years. After the seven years, he kind of retired. I still stayed engaged, but not as much, because we got a new superintendent.

Devon, the grandfather whose daughter's tragic death left him and his wife to raise her daughter—their granddaughter—shared his past experience of trying to become familiar with the school system while seeking a better educational fit for this grandchild. He described how his relationships with a supportive and influential network helped in this pursuit. He explained:

She (his granddaughter) excelled in everything that she participated in. Her reading scores, math scores, and the requirement for passion for the school was high, something of that nature. She would always score high. So, as she moved on toward the second grade, I decided I wanted to take her out of the school there and try somewhere else. So, we started with another elementary school, because during that time, the principal of the school, who then became superintendent of the school district, and then became mayor of the city, which at that time was a friend of the family, told us to remove our granddaughter out of the school system. According to her, it couldn't do nothing for her because she excelled too rapidly. We're just too far advanced for the rest of the kids in the school system. So, we started looking at our choices, added to how they treated us, and how they treated our granddaughter, we decided to go with a private school, she was only one Black in her room. I think at the school period, can't be more than a half a dozen, a half a dozen Blacks. We didn't let that bother us. We didn't seem to have any problems or anything, and by the time she participates in everything, she had won all

kinds of awards and things. She was involved in the Glee Club and the choir. We had always tried to make sure that all of our grandchildren, especially having nine granddaughters, are able to learn things.

Theme 2: Speaking Out About Racial Inequity and My Child

Each of the participants described a belief in their own ability to be engaged with the schools and succeed in speaking up for their child. There were different levels of enthusiasm as they shared their experiences, as well as in recalling the various degrees of confidence needed in this process. The sub-themes identified were *Knowing the Risks*, *Applying a Solution Focused Intervention*, *Considering Your Audience*, *Who Can Help Me?*, and *Talking About What Happened*. The need for the parents' voices in these matters was clearly undisputed. They were all persuaded that they had the skills and abilities necessary because these matters involved their children. Aisha explained:

> So, for me personally, the child that we speak of at this point was identified as someone, diagnosed with anxiety and depression. So, as far as that goes, it was almost like, I don't want to say an argument, but it was a struggle. It was a push / pull type situation for me, and I felt like that because my child was Black. She didn't get the same treatment or the same consideration as a child who was a Caucasian would have gotten.

Knowing the Risks

The participants openly shared perspectives from life experience that prepared them for the dangers and uncertainties of addressing disparate treatment in a racist environment. Gerri shared her strategy for preparing her child for the school system.

> I do sit down with my children and show them, how to do their work, and I am involved in their homework. We are involved in their lessons. In African American homes, we do work with our children with their work, and we are paying attention, and we are noticing things, that's wrong, or seems incorrect, or that can help all the children not just my child. So, why think bad, or speak bad, in addressing our concerns? It makes you know, in my family's way of speaking out, worked for her in the long run. When I say reputation, we were known as a family who was concerned, a concerned parent. I'm a parent that's involved in their children's education.

Anthony spoke of how he was prepared to advocate for his child when the need arose. He said:

> The opportunity is there, and this is what I think when I think of role model. I think of my experience, and being able to share that with her, and having the confidence to back her throughout her schooling. I was trying to be that same thing for my children.

Traci appeared genuine, and a bit vulnerable. She identified this research as potentially valuable to others and was glad to be a part of it. She had a friendly, but serious demeanor, and her sharing seemed open and sincere. She described the need for a leadership mindset in this advocacy. According to her,

> It is necessary to be pivotal, have a seat at table, and getting leadership involved. Having a voice with leaders, and helping others find voice is needed. There are microaggressions, inability to relate. It can be a little overwhelming, and that's why we must take charge.

Applying a Solution-Focused Intervention

Giving thoughtful consideration to the mitigation of the issues to be addressed in their advocacy helped the participants in their engaged interventions. Jacquetta explained:

> We had to have a conference with that PE teacher, as well as his classroom teacher, we went to the principal, it was imperative that we be involved. Can't just sit in the background. You still need to know what's going on there at school. Your child's voice is only you, only getting one side of the story, you need to be in there and see what's going on.

Clarice described the effects of advocating for one's child and the learning implications for others to produce solution focused interventions for their own issues.

> Actually, I honestly didn't really have to speak up for them that often. I think what I found was, I used my boys more to encourage other people who didn't know that they could speak up. Whereas I knew that White parents had been putting their kids in these classes, whether they should have been there or not, for years, and that, if you wanted your child in the class, you would have to tell them to put him in the class. If they didn't automatically do that, White parents were doing that, had been doing that. So, you might have a White parent whose child needed constant tutoring, to pull out a C in an AP class, but they were going to put them in there anyway. I think that was something that, if I had to tell other Black parents, that you have to kind of really use this system. You do have to advocate for your child, because a lot of us don't, and that's something that they have.

Samantha shared an experience that resulted in what seemed to be compassion and empathy. According to her,

> Occasionally we would have some interactions with some teachers that, you know, didn't go so well. But again, it was nothing ever to the point of, I'm ready to pull my son out. I felt overall, everybody was pretty responsive. Then there was one particular vice assistant principal, I guess you would call it, I don't know if that's right, or vice principal, or whatever, who really engaged the students and especially the Black students. But he engaged all the students and he was African American himself, and connected with my sons and connected with us, especially with my middle son. During a family meeting with all the key players: the teachers that were involved, the principal, vice principal, and the guidance counselor, to talk about what my son who was a junior at the time, I believe, was going to happen, and what he needed. I felt that that was helpful, I felt really like everybody at that table cared.

Considering Your Audience

There appears to be a commonplace view from these participants of the disparate atmosphere of this school system, and the need to address these racist dynamics with consideration of who the audience is. The need for appropriate action that demonstrates a respect for the institution and the ideas espoused, but clearly addresses the issues of unfairness, can feel like "walking a tightrope." Note, several of the participants were also alumni of the school. On one hand, these participants seem to understand the reality of addressing disparities in a system with a history of racism, and on the other hand, share an optimism that maybe things will be different this time. The burden of these taxing feelings came across in their sharing. For instance, Missy, a professional who has worked with her husband, a local professor, to make changes in this system related to its history, and thus had had high-level meetings in their home, shared the impact this engagement had on their children,

> I think that, just my modeling, like I just don't take any mess. Honestly. I'm like too kind to tackle things straightforward. My kids have seen that. I think modeling, that is key. I mean, they're my kids, and have seen us walk the walk, not just talk the talk, but they've seen us host meetings at our house year after year after year, and you know, they're comfortable with the superintendent, assistant superintendents or a couple of the principals. They're comfortable in all those different arenas, many of those times these people have been in our house. So, I think that's also played into their comfortableness.

According to Devon, the pattern of behavior he saw at the school revealed unpleasant familiarity with past injustice practices, and the self-hatred effects on marginalized children. He explained:

> Things might come up, where some might not be number one, she could be number two. She couldn't be number one. It might be one problem wrong or something of that nature, always. That she couldn't always be Number one, it seemed like with the athletics she had no problem. Seemed like around maybe 10th grade? Yes. I guess, as you got a little bit further up, things start changing a little bit more, where we had to ask for conferences with the teachers, with the guidance counselors. Things will come up, such as students or fellow students, such as how many baby daddies your mother have? What do your grandparents, or your parents do? We always stopped that talk, telling her, that if anyone asks you anything of loss, or your parents, you tell them to ask us.

Who Can Help Me?

Though each participant shared their story with a sense of self confidence, there were also circumstances where seeking help and connecting to influential persons were acknowledged as contributing to the difference made. This practice does not in any way reduce the impact of the parents' voice advocacy. Again, Jacquetta shared a story of aligning her son for success and in getting him help:

> So, I knew that it was very important that I was always talking to the staff. We were very, very fortunate that the last two years that he was in the school system, a new superintendent had started. It was a Black man, and my goal was to be able for my son to pick out some lower classmen to be their mentors. And my goal was achieved. So that without that, he probably, with just his grades, would not have gotten into Ohio State University. But like I said, aligning him with the right people, that would keep him focused and motivated, helped.

Talking About What Happened

Each parent alluded to or clearly stated their stories of talking with their child about a conflict at the school. This communication aided the child in preparing them for the environment in which they were returning, and undoubtedly produced a life lesson that would benefit them later. A good example of talking about what happened was shared by Samantha as follows:

I see it as showing them that they have a parent who is involved and cares. I mean, there are times when I would get involved, and they would say, "No, leave it alone, mom"—and I wouldn't. I mean, obviously, I would listen to them sometimes. But when I use my best judgment as a parent, and say, "No," but I need to do this, I think it sets an example for them about advocating for themselves and others. And speaking up for when things are wrong. And I feel like it has paid off because they are very vocal. I think that comes from examples that are set at home.

Theme 3: The Results of Confronting Racist Actions

Each of the participants referred to the effectiveness of their efforts at confronting racist practices. The confidence they gained, as well as the disappointments they experienced, were part of the sharing. These results are captured within the sub-themes of *Rage, Resistance, Retreat, Recompense and Reform*. For Aisha, it was a heavy responsibility, but necessary to making the much-needed change. She explained:

It was me taking off work, me going to the school and having meetings with a group of teachers or doing a Zoom meeting with a group of teachers. Me asking, can she get put in the right class, so that she can possibly take control of her own life, you know, give her back some of the control that they asked her to have.

Rage

When he got a little bit older, maybe he was in the fourth grade, his gym teacher accused him of stealing something out of the locker room. So, it was his first experience with the use the discipline. So, of course, we were not pleased. You know, my son was fortunate to have both parents who were visible and active. Because as they grow up, if they stay in the same school system, they're going to know like they knew, oh, boy, here comes (Jacquetta), and we know that they want the best for their child. We know that we better do what we need to do for the child. If you try to talk to the teacher and you don't get any satisfaction, then you go as far up in that school system as you have to in order to get what your child deserves.

An impassioned response to her child's mistreatment caused a physical reaction in one parent. Sylvia shared,

I need to be my daughter's number one cheerleader in support. So, I need to use my voice to make sure that she understands that, and she can do things in life through adversity. So, going to teacher-parent conferences and seeing what's happening, and if it's not right speaking out. I got sick with the other incident. Unfortunately, they're still people who treat our kids a little bit differently. They don't sometimes see our kids as being smart enough.

Resistance

Gerri, a Black woman, gave a leadership and change perspective that addressed an academic issue with implications for all the students at the school. Perhaps the modeling of success at completing similar tasks will give also witness to others. She reflected:

> My speaking up was very successful, and I'll give you an example. I think me as a family member, speaking up, helped. There was a situation where our daughter was being taught mathematics, and the way the material was being presented, seemed like it was inaccurate, like the technique or what they were using was wrong. The way they were teaching. The mathematics was like a difficult method of being taught. My brother is a mathematician, and when he saw the type of lesson that my daughter brought home, he was like, "This isn't the correct way, math should be taught in the elementary level." He went to the teacher, and the teacher couldn't explain why, he said. "This is just the way the instruction is done." So, they sent him to the board, the Board of Education, and he spoke to the head of instruction there, and they sat down with my brother and went over why they do what they do. To make a long story short, my daughter, stood out. Actually, they kind of pulled that curriculum out, they didn't teach that method anymore, because it was a challenge for the students. I commend him for that, because they saw that as a problem, but then it also recognized me as a parent.

Retreat

Lori gave an interesting perspective of an option that I call *Retreat*. She explained the necessity for recognizing when things are not worth it. According to her,

> Sophomore year, I pulled her out of that AP U.S. History. She did not get through that crazy Summer Reading, and by week two of the school year, she had failed two quizzes because she hadn't done that. Although the teacher said, Oh, she's is in the right place, we'll get her up to par. Tears are not needed in high school. So I said, to my daughter, history's not even your thing, I'm pulling you out of that. So I moved her to honors classes, then after that, she was fine. She continued with all her languages, she took some crazy math at a local university, when she was a senior, because she was through with every math class that her high school could give her in all AP courses. You know, the end result is she is at a prestigious university, now.

Recompense and Reform

Clarice gave the perspective for the need for change and how it appears to be long overdue:

The district has finally recognized and come out and said that they have not been good about putting Black children into higher level classes, who could do the work. I mean, I think that's where advocacy is really important for parents, just to know, Black parents in particular, to know that just because they don't put him there, doesn't mean he can't do the work. You might have to go up to the school, they knew me in the schools, and my husband in the schools. We just made sure we were known. I think that also probably helped. I mean, my kids were studious enough to do the work anyway. So, part of it was that they could do the work. Another part of it, I think, was probably, we were not parents who were going to take it quietly. If our kids were not where they should have been, we weren't going to just quietly sit and say, Oh, well, maybe next time. So that would be my main thing, that I would say about having to advocate for them, I never really had to, but I would if I needed to.

Theme 4: How My Voice Developed

The participants described experiences of performing the task of speaking up with success, and with a degree of confidence. This confidence derived from seeing others, mostly their own parents, navigate systems of disparate treatment to achieved desired results. They recount these lessons with explanations I classify under three sub-themes: *Recalling Who Did It Well in My Life*, *Response to Their Voice Advocacy*, and *Takeaways From These Lessons Learned*.

An alumnus of this school district, Anthony, explained:

Knowing that she's in that same environment. Kind of gave me the backing to speak up. Remembering my mother and my father, I was trying to be that same thing for my children. I had the experience of being in that same environment, and knowing I was where you're sitting.

Recalling Who Did It Well in My Life

Jacquetta spoke of a family history of maternal advocates, who were also educators, and then contrasted her development and the expectation to be vocal to what she implied, as a much more complacent approach today. The expectations are different and so are the results. She recounted as follows:

Our mothers were teachers. Our aunts were teachers. Our mothers were very high achievers, who had the support of their parents, when they were in situations where they weren't treated fairly. And so they, you know, their parents advocated for them. And so,

as they were raising us, our parents advocated for us. However, it wasn't the way younger parents advocate for their children. They gave us the skills to kind of speak up for ourselves. And if that didn't work, then they would come in and assist.

Sylvia also credits her mother as her example of who did it well in her life, but she also shared that her mother's own educational pursuits were cut short as a part of her motivation. She explained:

> I would say my confidence comes from my mom. She wasn't exposed to or allowed, rather, to further her education. So, she always instilled in us to make sure that we got our education and go as far as we can. So, she instilled that confidence in us. Also, as a good mother and a protective mother. That's where I saw, what it was to be a good mother. So, of course, I did that with my child, and to go a little bit above and beyond, because I had experiences that my mom didn't.

When discussing her influences, Freda provided a perspective that has today become more relevant to family dynamics in the African American community. She brightly shared her story with optimism, of being raised by grandparents with support from her other relatives, and how this affects her children. She stated:

> I was raised by my grandparents. I was raised by numerous aunts and uncles. I feel like, it was actually a blessing for me to be raised by all of these people, because a lot of my friends had only their mother or father, and you always have like, one advocate and one that you know, they're against you. I had lots of aunts and uncles, I had grandparents. They always told me I could do anything. I always tell my kids they can do anything. I will never let anyone stop them from doing what they want to do, within reason.

Response to Their Voice Advocacy

Alicia shared a lesson learned from speaking up, as taught by her parents, and the effects it has had on her:

> I guess my role models first would be my parents because they always taught us to speak your mind professionally. When you have something to say don't let anybody talk you down, you stick to something. If you believe in something, that's what you believe in. I had had great teachers during my academic years at this school that I still speak with today, that were role models for me as well when I was in school.

Samantha's response seems to agree with this statement on parental voice advocacy, but also includes parents with physical and health challenges:

I think my heroes were my mother and her sister, who was like a mom to me, because she raised me when my mother migrated up north and had gone to the service. She, both of them, I don't say that my aunt was disabled. And so, I learned a lot because I saw her as not letting that disability, she was crippled with rheumatoid arthritis, and I saw how she just continued on. She worked through that since she was 17. She let nothing stop her. Just some powerful women who really valued family. Like those are my heroes.

Clarice shared some history related to how her voice developed, contrasting the differences in the approaches to advocacy of male and female family members and how this impacted her. She also gave an interesting perspective on raising adults, and not children, as part of this response to advocacy inquiry.

My influencers were my parents, but particularly my mother, because she was a teacher. She educated from kindergarten up to college, throughout her career. So, I knew from her, and that was kind of ingrained in me. Then her mother, my grandmother, who was a school librarian, in Toledo, Ohio. I guess that side of the family is just always very outspoken. Anyway, they've never shied away from speaking up for their kids and for advocating for education and all of that. Now, my dad and his side of the family are into education, too. But I think the outspokenness comes from my mother. My dad can talk a lot when he needs to, but my mom has always. I really get it from her, as far as knowing that teachers are just people, and I could talk to them about whatever's going on with my child. I also have said to my kids, that I think it's been helpful to try to get them to learn that they have to speak out for themselves with teachers also. I think one of the things my husband and I have been cognizant about is the fact that we are raising adults.

My Takeaways/Lessons Learned

Sheila's response seemed to sum up many of the perspectives that were shared, as she talked about her mother's advocacy. She made clear that the issues we were discussing is a daily experience and part of the reality in living with racism. She explained as follows:

My role model is my mother, my mother is the biggest noise maker when it comes to inequity that I know to this day. She's just a fighter. So, the confidence is a necessity. When you are walking around in this Black skin, being a woman, you have to be, I don't want to say strong, but more assertive. Maybe there are others, you have to stand up to because people will try to give you whatever it is that they think you deserve. So, you have to be the one to say, no, that's not how it's going to be, or we have had a lot of conversations about that and I have a choice in this matter, too. So, children need to see that because they have to develop those skills as well. So, when it comes time for them to be a parent, or just an adult, they know how to do so diplomatically. Let someone know. No, I don't agree, or thank you so much for your help. Glad we were able to work this out.

Theme 5: Advice to Other Parents on Speaking-Up

For these parents, *Speaking Up!* is clearly an extremely important part of breaking undesirable patterns of behavior in the school, while creating an effective parent / teacher dialogue, while doing something quite necessary to protect your child. Without this parental intervention there would undoubtedly be a lack of much needed student support. This could increase obstacles to student success and given an environment with a history of constant marginalization, the ill effects of contributing to potentially emotional trouble and worsening poor self-esteem. These are all potentially societal implications funneled into a system that can be addressed when Black parents take action.

For this section's theme, the parents seemed more vocal than at any other time in their interview responses. The sub-themes of *Understanding the System*, *Being Prepared: Showing Up to NOT Show Out!*, *Clarity on What to Say*, *Not Being Afraid*, and *Knowing the Consequences*, demonstrate a sincere level of concern for other people's children and the dangers of doing nothing in response to the issues discussed. For instance, this advice came from Aisha:

> Get to know your kid and advocate for them on the level that they need to be advocated on. Don't advocate because you want them to look like or be like me, or sound like someone else. Embrace whatever diversity they have within themselves as a Black child. Just because I'm Black, we think as Black people, and make the mistake of being too familiar with each other. Just because I'm Black, does not mean I have the same attributes as you, or the same thought processes. Get to know your kid, get to know that kid, and then what they need. What are their needs? Have a conversation with them.

Understanding the System

Samantha also summed up some of the responses to the important role parent's play in influencing educational outcomes. The perception of presence and the accompanying engagement creates the psychological reward for the child that there indeed is oversight from someone who cares. It tends to additionally set the standard of expectation. According to Samantha,

I would say, the main thing is to be visible. Then act to be in contact with your child's teacher from, preschool or whenever. Because as they grow up, if they stay in the same school system, they're going to know like they knew, "Oh, boy, here comes Mrs. J——, and we know that they want the best for their child. We know that we better do what we need to do for the child." if you try to talk to the teacher and you don't get any satisfaction, then you go as far up in that school system as you have to in order to get what your child deserves. The services, the treatment, the equality, the equanimity, whatever you're looking for. Don't stop until they get what they what they need.

Another participant, Anthony, added,

It was something where she hadn't had an assignment completed, and or something major, and she was falling behind with something and he kind of mentioned to her and nudged her a little bit, like, Hey, I know your dad. So, you know, you got to make sure that you're getting your work done. Overall, when I think about, what gave me the courage to have the confidence to back her throughout her schooling, I think, my experience with this school system and understanding that you get out of it, what you want to get out of it, you know? I was where you're sitting, walking those same halls, kind of experiencing those same things that you experience in high school." I think that's where, maybe that confidence comes from, and being able to share that with her. Making sure that someone's setting accountability, without them really realizing that you're assuring accountability. Just by asking questions by making sure that they can answer those questions.

Being Prepared / Showing Up to <u>NOT</u> Show Out!

These can be some intensely uncomfortable moments and having a cooler head will prevail. The fact that these parents and their families had problems of their own, besides these educational challenges at the school, speaks to their focus and determination. The teachers are human and have feelings and lives outside of the school. Cooler heads prevail. Sylvia shared:

You have to have conversations with your kids. You can't expect someone else to raise your kids, you can't leave it up to them to totally educate your kids because sometimes, I think teachers are biased, sometimes. So, they have their own views of the world. That's what they're sharing. They're sharing those views with your child. So, you have to be there and involved to know what your child is being taught.

Clarity on What to Say

Freda was emphatic in her advice:

I would tell Black parents, and I do all the time, you have to stay engaged. I was engaged in every single thing my kids did. You have to be involved. It makes all the difference in the success of your kids. From the standpoint of teachers, or any curriculum. In the

outside activities, you have them in, and if people know that the parent is engaged, then they don't tend to play around with the kids. You have to show you are there for them, and not to be their friends, but to be their parent. To be involved and let them know that even when you don't do what they want you to do, you're doing the best thing for them. One day, they may or may not see it, but you got to do what you got to do as a parent. That's the bottom line.

Accountability and Knowing the System

Responding to issues of concern at the school can naturally be an uncomfortable experience, and one that some people would choose to avoid. Having the courage to act, as these respondents have recommended, could well be supported by having someone to talk to about these things. Sheila shared the following experience:

Well, the first thing I would say is, and it was what was helpful for me, was having someone that was in the school to be able to navigate the system. Because just like, if you were a doctor, or a lawyer, there's a language that educators speak, right? If you don't know the processes, if you don't know who to contact, people are getting in your way, or not helping you out. Knowing the departments inside the institutions that will support you, as a parent of a student is essential. I think one of the greatest things you can do is write emails, create paper trails, if you feel like your child is having an issue. Because phone calls can be ignored, phone calls can be dismissed, but when you put it on paper, and you have a record of your reaching out, it creates a sense of accountability.

Lori's response carries similar advice and urgency:

I would tell them that they need to be involved, they need to talk to someone who has been there, who has a child that's a year, two years or even five years above them, to get the lay of the land. I understand what the school system is like. No matter what system it is, and then you have to speak up, you have to call, you have to email, you have to speak up for your children. I have talked to parents that had had their kids tracked. They said they couldn't do anything about it. Some of them said they may call. I don't stop until I get some kind of satisfaction. If I know what I am fighting for is the right thing.

Knowing the Consequences

In this study, as in similar research, participants expressed concern for navigating the educational system and knowing the consequences of their advocacy. This in no way diminishes the need and urgency to take action, but it does shed light on understanding the circumstances one has entered. One's presence at the "educational decision-making table" makes it easier to

build connections, and challenge perceived cultural and experiential differences. Often, and

unfortunately, it can be the only course of action left to take. Missy makes this clear as she

explained,

> It doesn't matter what school you're in, doesn't matter if you're the most privileged private school out there in the world, or the most downtrodden public school, wherever, you still have to advocate for your kid. You have to be a presence. The adult has to be a presence for the young person, and they have to speak up and advocate for their kids. So, I think that number one, is that you cannot rely upon any school district, any school system, to do right by your kid. I think that having high expectations, like having a parent having high expectations for their kid, is also very, very important. My kids know that we have very, very high expectations for them. That doesn't mean they had to take AP classes all the time, but it means that we want them to be pushed. I think that some Black parents don't necessarily push their kids to the kid's potential, or what their ability is. I would say, cultivating and encouraging your kids to keep those relationships that are going to help them get through the system is important. I would say, getting yourself familiar with where you can access informational resources is also really important in any school district. I would say, having parents become familiar with just the correspondence that's coming out of the schools, or even though I'm not a big PTO person, I would go to the meeting just so I would know what was going on. I think there's value in in attending, or at least being knowledgeable about what's being discussed at those meetings. I think that's something that Black parents can also access. I think the why, is everyone wants their kid to be successful. I think it takes a lot of pieces in order to help your kid to be successful.
>
> So, yeah, it's a necessity. I mean, there's a necessity to be active in your child's education. I just feel like you have to be a presence and you have to show up. You have to let folks know that you care about your child and that you're going, to be there if something happens. If another Black kid had told their parents about that, I don't know if they would have acted on that, but we were pissed. We most definitely were going to raise our concerns with the teacher and call it like it is, and with the school. All that that teacher saw was the color of my son's skin, and not the fact of any of these other things came into play as far as his superiority in her class, and so that was just really unfortunate.

Similarly, Devon shared the following:

Speak up. Because if you don't speak up, no one, will have any idea what you might want, or are trying to do. Just, speak up. If there's a problem, or say something to compliment the staff, teachers when they do good. If you see or learn of things within the school, things that they might advertise or offer, try to get your children involved. Do your homework! Get it over with. Right when you come in, do your homework. Get over it. Don't wait. Don't wait unto Sunday night, Sunday evening, to do Monday's Homework. Do it Friday while it's still all on your mind. Out of my 11 grandkids, all of them finished high school. Three of the girls completed college. Two of the boys. One last year. So, education, learning, training, is the key. It is just something.

Summary of the Analysis

Each participant shared their own personal stories of supporting their Black child during the student's educational experience in a school system with a history of disparate outcomes. Their children successfully graduated and attended college. As I listened to these stories, I was often taken aback by the things they endured in their quest. These narratives were carefully examined and compared to each other and became a means to identify themes and sub-themes that gave an understanding of the experiences encountered and a deeper look at a real contributing factor to student success often neglected. That is parental voice advocacy.

There is wide acceptance of the *concept* of creating partnerships between schools and families and community groups (Pushor, 2010; Tollefson, 2008). But the gap remains wide between supporting this in principle and actually implementing the practice of full and authentic partnerships in schools across the nation (Davies, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). Perhaps by redefining authentic partnerships from the parents' side of the decision-making table, versus the teachers and administrators' side, we might come to a beneficial reckoning. This authentic partnership may indeed create a respectful alliance among all parties, develop deeper dialogue across differences, find creative ways for sharing resources for the student's educational advancement, and create a more just and equitable democratic perspective. Based on this study, starting with the family and the community seems to be a very wise strategy. The intersection where the mutual paths among families and schools meet may attain agreement that transcends racial differences.

Advocacy for using parental voice as expressed in the stories of this study's participants, suggest that these positive caring adults can set realistic and ambitious expectations for their child's educational experience. Black children will encounter racism and parents need to

advocate for this reason. Parents can successfully engage school staff, even those who are dismissive or reluctant to engage. Knowing how the system works and who to talk to makes a difference. They also can prepare their marginalized child for the vicissitudes of the daily school environment experience where they are often, sometimes constantly judged by the color of their skin and not the content of their character. Being a parent who is involved and known to the teachers and school leaders helps in getting heard when speaking up for children. Positive, caring parents can engage decision-makers in the community and other parents to build coalitions, and even participate in high-level leadership and change systemic roles. Therefore, the question that must be asked is how to help parents have voice and advocate for Black children in schools.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The opportunity is there; this is what I think of when I think of role models, I think of my experience—Anthony (one of the participants commenting on the effectiveness of advocating for his child).

The purpose of this study has been to explore the experiences of Black parents who were successful in helping their child graduate from a public school system with a history of disparate outcomes for Black children, and then go on to college or some other form of professional education. The participants' stories reveal a clear understanding, individually and collectively, of their ability to advocate and succeed in getting their child through school. These passionate narratives serve as examples for other parents. This study shows that, though emotionally taxing, this intervention was effective for the parents interviewed. Their stories of courage, pain, and eventual triumph are inspiring as well as informative.

The motivation for this study was quite important to this writer, as I began by considering the story of my mother's advocacy for me and my own educational journey. Having reflected on these experiences and the literature, two research questions soon emerged:

1. How do Black parents use their voice to advocate for their children in a predominantly White educational system?

2. How do they develop parental voice to impact the child's educational outcomes?

In particular, I was interested in identifying the factors to which parents attributed to their advocacy success with the school through their stories of having helped their child graduate from this high school with a history of disparate outcomes, and see those children go on to attend college.

The findings in this study were gained from a narrative inquiry process examining the stories of the 15 parent participants, two men (one a grandfather) and 13 women, who revealed common perceptions and experiences. This qualitative study supports previous research

regarding parent voice, which "refers to the values, opinions, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds of the parents, guardians, and families of students enrolled in a school, which also extends to parent groups, cultural organizations, and other entities related to a school through familial connections" (Great Schools Partnership, 2013, para.1). The study also affirms that Black parents' voices are vital in the educating of their children in our current school systems. The personal stories shared by the participants demonstrated a self confidence in the face of severe challenge that speaks to their committed love of their child in spite of systemic circumstance.

These findings are motivators for continued examination of the development and use of parental voice within the Black population, and community. Additionally, it is a clarion call to address the systemic racism of the most vulnerable of our community, our children. If leadership and change is to occur, Black parents must be at the educational decision-making table, and our voices must be heard.

Thematic Interpretations of Participant Stories

The findings from this study capture the shared participant experiences of the 15 parents on their use of voice as advocates for their child. These stories formed the basis of this study. The following themes stem from the analysis of the data:

1. Protecting My Child: A Physiological Response

2. Speaking Out About Racial Inequity and My Child

3. The Results of Confronting These Racist Actions

4. How My Voice Developed

5. Advice to Other Parents on Speaking-Up

The number of participants aligned with the narrative analysis requirement of this study. These qualitative findings may or may not concur with the findings from other studies. The

significance of the themes is that they reflect the accounts of these participants as they told their stories in their own way. A benefit of this study is sharing their accounts as consideration in relation to other research. Adding parents' voices at the center of research is largely missing in the literature. This study's model ought to be further tested, and perhaps reconfigured for greater exploration into the role of family legacy, community dynamics, and CRT and the persistent challenge to educational change. Each of these suggested explorations can be made from a strengths-based approach, that is, on what works.

Findings in the Context of Theory and Existing Research

The importance of parental involvement in children's school achievement is well-established in modern educational research. Parent engagement relates to students' long-term success (Jeynes, 2005, 2011). The parents who engaged in this study all shared a commitment in their stories to assuring positive educational outcomes for their children. In accordance with the study's analytical framework, the findings are linked with the theory and research presented in Chapter II.

Use of Voice for Advocacy

For the parents in this study, the positive outcomes associated with their use of voice as advocates for their children produced important lessons to be learned. Each parent willingly shared advice for other parents when asked. Their responses reflect the scholarship related to academic achievement because of increased parental involvement. A strong response from Freda, indicative of others in the group, was on the need to be engaged with the school:

> I would tell Black parents—and I do all the time—you have to stay engaged. I was engaged in every single thing my kids did. You have to be involved. It makes all the difference in the success of your kids for them.

Implications from this side of the educational decision-making table—the side of parent and caregiver, with the other side being teachers and school administrators—shows how this

engagement matters: "Honoring that which is real, useful, and culturally sensitive regarding parent engagement is a test of our commitment to public education at large" (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 44). Parental voice serves as a means for parents to react and intervene on behalf of their children across a range of issues. Therefore, the parent's voice of advocacy should be encouraged and celebrated because it is a welcomed partnership for student success.

The parents in this study shared perceptions and recounted experiences of their use of voice to advocate for their child. Each described stories of the effectiveness of this advocacy, even one who shared regret that she had not been more vocal earlier or taken additional action. According to Sylvia,

> I had my daughter stick it out, but I think I had a conversation with the teacher, of course, during parent teacher time, to see if it was my kid, or if it was her. I realized it was the teacher, you know . . . and she wanted my daughter to follow her to the next grade. I was like, "No!" So, I did have my kids stick it out, but I had to have several conversations with that teacher.

The model of parental leadership employed here was derived from Epstein's (1995/2010) Six Types of Parent Involvement. The use of this approach framed our discussions with a definitive scholarly model consisting of the following:

1. *Parenting*—Helping families establish home environments to support their children's learning.

2. *Communicating*—Designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and the student's progress.

3. *Volunteering*—Recruiting and organizing parent help and support in school or classroom volunteer programs to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.

4. *Learning at Home*—Providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

5. *Decision-Making*—Including families as participants in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives for active PTA/PTO parent organizations, advisory councils for parent leadership development and participation.

6. *Collaborating with Community*—Coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and providing services to the community.

Epstein (1995/2010) developed this parental involvement framework to assist educators in engaging effective parent partnership programs. An important experience shared by the participants in this study corresponds Epstein who described "a consensus in research regarding the favorable aspects associated with positive attitudes in parents and the behavior toward their child's learning and their child's schools" (Epstein, 1995/2010, p. 81). My research has also demonstrated that the parent positively impacts the student's academic achievement and learning in a broader sense.

The participants' stories produced themes that show a relatable connection to the Epstein's (1995/2010) six elements of parental involvement. The parenting element identified with the *Protecting My Child* theme is seen in each narrative. The home environments described by the parents showed a commitment to the child's learning and produced a reaction to the signs that things were not going well that had them engage the school in these matters. There was a clear need for assuring the child had a sense of belonging and happiness that undergirded the parents' advocacy. This theme, coupled with Epstein's element of *Communicating* (# 2), is

demonstrated in the theme here on *Speaking Out*. The parents actively engaged school personnel to address these issues. It is this commitment to voice advocacy that is responsible for the change, and instrumental in their child's success.

One parent was particularly adamant about her *Volunteering* (Epstein's # 3) at the school and how this allowed her to keep tabs on what was going on. It was her way of Confronting Racist Actions. This theme was employed by other parents in their expressed commitments to school personnel about their interest in the school functioning well. This was unsolicited assistance which makes it all the more impactful.

Learning at Home (Epstein's # 4) is also identified with the themes that emerged in this study of *Confronting Racism*, as well as *Preparing My Child*. These themes together speak to the parents' commitments to support their children with the tools needed to address disparate treatment and display parents' open interest in their children learning through good home preparations. Learning at home supports the fundamental work of the school in preparing scholars for the future. It can also instill confidence in the student, thus mitigating the threatening effects of a racist environment.

Epstein's (1995/2010) aspects of parenting, *Decision-Making* and *Collaborating with the Community* (respectively # 5 and 6), connect with the two themes in this study: *My Voice Development* and *Advice for Parents*. Voice of advocacy development was a learned experience that, when coupled with advising other parents, demonstrates a teaching and learning collaboration. The effects on decision-making at every level, and *Collaboration*, or simply working together, are undeniably positive. This is the difference these parents made in the lives of their children, and with other families.

Parental involvement, a form of parental engagement as conceptualized by Goodall (2012) and collaborators, presents a framework that is coherent to the principles of the holistic approach of pedagogy to teacher-parents' partnerships" (Levinthal de Oliviera Lima & Kuusisto, 2020, p. 204). The findings of this study highlight this partnership and its benefits, though it is initiated and maintained by the parents. These parents' stories indicate that they were instrumental in building these relationships. It also shows the mobilization of social supports and draws on models of experiences gained from family members and others to help in this voice advocacy.

Public Education and African Americans: The Persistence of Marginalization

The experiences shared by the participants were either directly or indirectly related to this school system's history of marginalization of Black students. For those directly impacted, they were alumni of the school themselves, and for the other parents they simply recalled similar experiences in other places. CRT highlights the need for culturally competent teachers in the education of children (Delpit, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The findings in this research align with the literature reviewed in that it demonstrates evidence of the positive experiences gained from the parents' involvement despite an absence of valuing non-dominant group culture and contributions in the school. One parent, Freda, gave an interesting perspective when she likened the experience to a company making a business decision about staffing. She shared,

> It's like a company, they're trying to keep their numbers i—line. I've seen many children that were basically, shifted to outside learning opportunities, and out of there. Like lots of online schools, and those non-traditional schools. that just helps the school system numbers. That's what I know, it's like, blank is messing up the bottom line.

As a theoretical perspective, which is readily relatable to the development and use of voice in Black parents, Bell (1995) presented a conceptual framework by which a solution-driven understanding may be derived. In a later publication he argued that the notion of race is a

socially constructed concept used to marginalize groups of people in the interest of White privilege (Bell, 2008). Among the issues discussed by Bell, are the inspiring Black struggle stories of America in the face of seemingly relentless efforts to subjugate the people. CRT uses storied examples like those in this research, to raise the collective voice to address the struggle for equality. This work, including my study, exemplifies the necessity of cultivating parental voice for marginalized students. The systemic failure of the public schools to effectively engage Black parents' voices clearly points to a preferential and biased set of practices that have continued. This study shows the importance of parent voice and its effectiveness. Students are not protected if parents keep silent. The parents' speaking up can make a difference and contribute to change in the teacher's behavior. In the following sections, I will make more explicit the high relevance of the themes identified in this study to these ongoing challenges.

Theme 1: Protecting My Child: A Physiological Response

In response to some incident of concern at the school, each participant shared their story of the need to act to protect their child from racial discrimination, often with their child's teacher. These impassioned narratives had sub-themes of: *My Emotional Journey Experience*, a *Stressful and Challenging Time*, and *Having the Courage to Just Show-Up!* Each individual shared an awareness of the dangers of this unacceptable treatment from experience and that it simply could not be tolerated. These incidents of bias produced a physiologic response within them, and their actions were compelled by these behaviors.

Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) article, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" argues that that one's race in America continues to be a constant consideration. That society values property rights over human rights, and that by examining both race and property, the implications of inequality the society imposes can be better understood. This essay fits well with

understanding this exploration of marginalized students and their teacher-parent relationships, parental voice, and the role of CRT. The social justice issues that are so pervasive in American society today, as well as the implications for redress through parental voice development, fits these descriptive parent experiences shared. Through exploring the storied experiences, the parents who participated in this study have sought to engage and make real change happen for their children.

A contemporary examination of the disparate treatment of marginalized children can be also found in Lipman's (2017) article, "The Landscape of Education 'Reform' in Chicago: Neoliberalism Meets a Grassroots Movement." This author concluded with a description of a strategic system that was designed through policy of racialized state violence, to thwart the efforts of Blacks to achieve self-determination. The implications for silencing the parental voice of marginalized students are wide and disparate. The interest in studying parental voice development appears to be well-positioned to inform on these issues.

One parent in my study shared a perspective that speaks to her determination in the face of intimidating odds. Her response to the question on what advice she would offer other parents captures these feelings that were similarly echoed by the other parents as well. She explained,

> If your child needs to be placed in a higher class level, then you fight for it, and these are the ways that you go and fight for it. Starting with the counselor, and if the counselor doesn't get it, then you go to the assistant principal. The assistant principal doesn't do it, you go on up the chain of command until it is done. I think it is very important for us, as African Americans, to fight for our children, and make sure our children get the same education as everybody else gets. We are always labeled when we shouldn't be labeled. Because we're very intelligent human beings as well.

> Another parent echoed these sentiments:

> You have to have conversations with your kids. You can't expect someone else to raise your kids, you can't leave it up to them to totally educate your kids because sometimes, I think teachers are biased, sometimes. So, they have their own views of the world. That's what they're sharing. They're sharing those views with your with your child. So, you have to be there and involved to know what your child is being taught.

The parents shared that this was an uncomfortable experience. It also gave them the opportunity to show their child by example the impact of a parent's advocacy. Additionally, the research cites the relevance of these examples, discussed in *Speaking Out About Racial Inequity*. Within the stories shared there was strong sense among the parents that expectations be kept high for their child. These parents believed in their child's capacity to perform well if given the opportunity. This expectation accompanied their desire for their child to fit in socially with classmates. There was also the general expectation that the child should keep the parent informed of things that were going on at the school.

Theme 2: Speaking Out About Racial Inequity and My Child

A theoretical construct relevant to the findings in this study is the concept of self-efficacy. Individuals with a positive sense of self-efficacy believe that they can "successfully execute the behavior required to produce desired outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). By focusing on the participants' belief in their child's ability to succeed, the self-efficacious parent emerges in this case, and these qualities are identified for the study's data analysis. Considering that perceived self-efficacy is connected to personal success and identifying parents' self-beliefs assisted in the design of the interview questions and for the analysis of their responses.

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy informs on the second theme and sub-themes of this study. The parents' overwhelming response in this inquiry produced the theme: *Speaking Out About Racial Inequity and My Child*, which captured their concerns for their children's well-being and gave greater clarity through the sub-themes: *Knowing the Risks*, *Applying a Solution Focused Intervention*, *Considering Your Audience*, *Who Can Help Me?*, and *Talking About What Happened*. Each of the participants shared a sense of accomplishment in fulfilling this task. Similarly, some saw their parental voice accomplishments as good for all the students

at the school. The relationships formed, though from matters of great concern, seemed to produce results that would not have happened had they remained silent. It seems apparent that every participant was well-prepared for the task of using their parental voice. They knew the rules and the risks. Many of them came to the table to meet their child's educators with suggestions for change that clearly showed thoughtful preparation for the moment to advocate. Some described activities equal to enlisting support, identifying allies, and assessing risks as part of their preparation for their use of parental voice. It was not an option to stay silent.

Morin (n.d.) offered recommendations for how to effectively use parental voice. The advice provided to parents recognized that they are the voice for their child, the means to address problems or issues when something "just isn't right." Morin emphasized that parents know their child best and that their advocacy is important because it helps to ensure appropriate support. Her recommendations were as follows:

1. Understand what it means to advocate.
2. Know it's ok to speak up.
3. Write down your thoughts.
4. Start by speaking with someone you trust.
5. Ask as many questions as you need to.
6. Don't be afraid to show emotion—but be respectful.
7. Ask about extra help for your child.
8.   Keep speaking up.

Theme 3: The Results of Confronting These Racist Actions

The third theme and its sub-themes derived from this research, produced catalyzing moments of reflection because of the overarching differences, similarities, and plot lines. As the participants described their voice advocacy and the results in confronting racist actions all of

them acknowledged some form of resistance. One described feeling as if she wanted to retreat, and two described anger that was akin to rage at the unjust treatment of their child. Two held out feelings of hope that things would change, reform would come, and a sense of recompense. All believed that the need for them to take action was clear. Their responses model elements from McKenna and Millen's (2013) article, "Look! Listen! Learn! Parent Narratives and Grounded Theory Models of Parent Voice, Presence, and Engagement in K–12 Education," and their well-described experience of parental voice development. This paper addressed the notion of parental voice and parental presence as it is related to engagement, exploring the disconnect between the cultures of the families and the educators' perspectives of how they live. Parent voice, as defined by the authors, implies not only the parents' opinions and ideas, but also the need for educators to be receptive to these voices and accommodating to an open and multidirectional communication flow.

This qualitative study recognized that educators very often miss out on opportunities to more effectively serve students because they fail to understand the home-school-community relationship from which the students have come. The participants all shared their personal stories of resistance to the teachers' status-quo attitudes related to their child. According to them, their voice advocacy made the difference in the successful outcomes of their children in spite of this educational environment. Additionally, overcoming barriers to parental voice involvement should be studied to understand the families, teachers, and administrators who resist this advocacy to better understand how these barriers can be addressed and overcome.

Theories that have suggested that African American students of any age have had no appreciation for the value of education mask the truth that the voices of the children's parents are strangely absent from school reform plans and policies. One of the theories that serves this

purpose is "Student Oppositional Identity Theory [which appears to] "generate the most vitality in the achievement debate in the literature" (Wiggan, 2007, p. 319). According to the theory, the explanation for the apparent low achievement of African Americans is due to the use of standardized achievement tests. The idea is that knowledge and "Whiteness" are synonymous and therefore distasteful to African American students, a force worth resisting to maintain one's Black identity. The participants' shared perceptions in their describing resistance to racial stereotyping and the research openly challenges this notion. A sense of belonging has been prevalent in psychological and educational research for many years (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Goodenow, 1993; Maslow, 1954; Tinto, 1993). Additionally, Deil-Amen (2011) defined a sense of belonging as an intellectual and social congruence, or "a normative fit between the students and the values of the educational system" (p. 55). Engaging students without considering their parents and families is an unacceptable practice but a common experience for Black students.

The idea of schools forming partnerships with families and communities, as well as parental involvement's benefits for students and teachers, has been touted for many years (see Auerbach, 2010, 2012). Sadly, there remains a strong disconnect between the rhetoric that is espoused and the actual partnership practices taking place with Black families in American schools. Real partnerships are respectful alliances between educators and families, and community groups that demonstrate, without respect to race, the value of relationships with the school through solution-focused dialogue, power sharing, and high ideas of fairness.

Theme 4: How My Voice Developed

All participants shared memories of how their voice of advocacy developed and, for the most part, these were positive learning experiences. As they shared these memories of voice of advocacy experiences it was clear to see how one affected the other. The demonstration of parent

voice has profound impact on the child. Their narratives have implications for engaging youth in decision-making, child development for service, and support for open-communications and talks about feelings.

The sub-themes identified give credence to this learning intervention. They were: *Recalling Who Did It Well in My Life*, *Response to Their Voice Advocacy*, and the respondents' *Takeaways From These Lessons Learned*. In recalling who did it well in their lives, the participants mostly shared stories of their parents, but one recounted how aunts and uncles were key in her raising. She cited their mutual supportive encouragement of her but from their own vantage point. This gave her an understanding that there is more than one way to address a problematic situation, and still options available when things go awry.

In recalling the response to their role models of voice advocacy, significant details were added that gave a perspective of their life circumstances at the time. A parent who herself had been denied an educational opportunity because of nothing she had done (or failed to do), strived with her daughter's education to achieve educational goals. The mother's stance was supportive and empathetic but came with performance expectations that made her daughter appreciate the significance of the mother's thwarted achievement. This shaped the parent's voice advocacy experience with her own child.

For each of the participants, the takeaways or lessons learned had concomitant value. The benefits they had experienced in their lives, coupled with the challenges, gave them the confidence to speak up for their child. The parents who had attended this school system themselves were especially adamant in their committed to seeing their child succeed. All the parents shared stories of this experience and its significance.

Epstein and Dauber (1989) focused on the role of teachers in the effectiveness of parental voice and engagement. They found that teachers who had inadequate experience—voluntarily or not—with parental engagement, "made more stereotypical judgments about the involvement and abilities of less educated parents, socioeconomically disadvantaged parents, and single parents" (Dauber & Epstein, 1989, p. 1). On the other hand, they found that "teachers who were 'leaders' in the use of parent involvement, and found ways to involve parents, did not prejudge less-educated, poor, or single parents" (Dauber & Epstein, 1989, p. 1). Dauber and Epstein referred to such teachers as "successful helpers with reliable follow-through on learning activities at home" (p. 1). It is important to recognize that often it is not parental characteristics such as level of education, income levels, or whether they are married or single, that most affect their success in engagement on behalf of their children. Instead, Dauber and Epstein concluded that the attitudes and actions of teachers have the most predominant influence on the children's education.

Theme 5: Advice to Other Parents on Speaking Up

Participants warned other parents to maintain composure and suggested the importance of being well-prepared in speaking up. There were also insights given about this particular school system that described inconsistent practices, and a governance structure that could be manipulated. The fact that their child's wellbeing was on the line emboldened these champions to also encourage others to drive and go forward. It fits with the research by Jeynes (2005) in which a meta-analysis of 21 studies found parental involvement positively impacts the academic achievement of minority children.

The sub-themes for theme 5 identified in my study were *Understanding the System*, *Being Prepared*/*Showing Up to <u>NOT</u> Show Out!*, *Having Clarity on What to Say*, the need for

Accountability and *Knowing the System, and Knowing the Consequences*. Overall, these findings indicated thoughtful reflection on experience by the parents in this study.

Limitations of This Research

Although the findings of this study broaden the scope of research on parent involvement, there are limitations. The study was limited to the 15 volunteer participants who met the criteria for succeeding in helping their Black child graduate from a predominantly White school system with disparate outcomes and then go on to college. This study did not measure other variables that may have impacted this achievement, for instance, the various engaged teachers' viewpoints, and the now grown students' experience at school and at home with their parents and family.

Another limitation relates to gender balance: only two of the six men who expressed an interest in participating in the study actually followed through by engaging in an interview with me. A greater number of fathers in the sample could have provided comparison perspectives to those shared by the 13 mothers.

A further limitation was imposed by the external factor of their being a pandemic. All the interviews were conducted by video, except for one held in a public library near the parent's home. This interview method precaution was largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps under different circumstances the number of responses would have been different.

Directions for Future Research

Several opportunities for future research emerge from the data analysis of this study. Replicating this study with additional parents and employing the methodology used could help to confirm, refute, but certainly would give additional clarity to the findings. The added information would contribute to this and other research on engagement of Black parents in the education of their children.

Future researchers might consider focusing on students' early developmental years to examine the timing and impact of parent engagement in their learning, as well as on their later years of educational experience. Perhaps beginning with a preschool program, future research could include a longitudinal study that examines the lived experiences of Black parents' voice advocacy over time. It would be also interesting to know if this parental engagement in the child's learning contributes to future parent voice development as a family tradition. Research on parental voice and family and community involvement in the schools should continue to be examined. There is also a clear need for research on effective teacher and administrator training to facilitate parent engagement.

Using other methodological approaches also could prove beneficial. For instance, a longitudinal study of parents of successful Black students would provide a perspective from different points in time. This could be as early as grade school, through timepoints in the middle and high school experience, and even into the college years. This would afford a greater understanding of the advocacy experience throughout the student's educational advancement.

Also, examining the experiences of the parents and their children using a mixed-methods approach, for self-efficacy for example, could provide valuable information from interviews and focus groups. This could also provide a means to consider a case study approach to research for the same population. Engaging teaching staff of these students in the research and taking a narrative inquiry approach would form a fuller picture of these success narratives.

Finally, a continued research focus on parental approaches (e.g., Baumrind, 1967; Benson & Martin, 2003; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) as potential keys to Black students' success would be worthwhile. Questions can and should be addressed such as the following:

- What are the effects of authoritative parenting on Black children's educational success?

- What are the implications for passive parenting, and the effects of both of these from a narrative inquiry approach?

As well, sampling for factors related to these styles and sociocultural differences by class and ethnicity (e.g., Lareau, 2011) could yield greater insight into beneficial data, as would exploring variations by child-parent gender patterns, specific challenges and strategies for Black students with disabilities, and class structure identification.

Implications for Practice

As I was engaged in my study I was often asked about my research by colleagues and lay people. Several suggestions emerged from these conversations about future research. Among those were the differences of male and female parent perspectives, and that of grandparents. The parents in this study either mentioned or alluded to support from others: parents, family members, and friends. The parents were also prepared to intervene even when they were unaware of that preparation. Learning to speak up is vitally important because our children need us. Because the study was conducted in the midst of a pandemic during this study, research issues came up concerning learning remotely and parents' advocacy through technology. Suggestions for sharing my findings emerged, and these included providing workshops on parental voice advocacy development, structured active listening exercises to demonstrate engagement, and connecting to encourage consistent follow through behaviors. This content could help parents develop and use their voice, as in role playing. This training intervention's planning and execution should actively involve parents with experience in successfully using their voices of advocacy.

There are options for developing and strengthening the use of parent voice with implications for the parents, students, educators, and community leaders. The participants in this study discussed parent-teacher partnerships that emerged from their use of voice to advocate for their child. Many attributed their involvement to a legacy of success that was intergenerational. These parents had voice because *their* parents had spoken up for them. And then, their children did the same and spoke up for their own progeny. This cascading legacy of success in a school system with a history of disparate outcomes had much to do with the awareness of the parents on how the system worked and what to do to overcome barriers, on how to secure allies, and parental ability to make changes when needed.

Closing Reflections on This Study's Findings

CRT plays a part in this legacy development in that it recognizes the history of unfairness of a system that has succeeded in marginalizing the most vulnerable of our society, our children. Ignoring this history and its ramifications for today is an acceptance of the persistent challenges and a hindrance to Black parent voice development. If you do not see the problem, you cannot reasonably hope to be part of the solution. Black parents not speaking up does not protect their child: it supports the behaviors and outcomes we dread for our children.

For parents without a legacy of success it is not too late to begin anew. Organizations like the National Parent Leadership Institute (NPLI) partners with parents and communities to equip families for civic engagement by building skills and knowledge in advocating and supporting your child at home, school, and the community. Participating in the local PTA (Parent Teacher Association) is also an option to learn about the school system, make connections within the community, and engage educational leadership. Purposefully engaging the child's teacher and school leaders is a direct and necessary important option. Learning to show up can be achieved

through a myriad of options. There are coalitions associated with Black churches, informal

support groups, a network of community resources directly or indirectly involved in schools

from the public library to neighborhood gatherings of parents like street clubs. There are also

familial connections that may prove beneficial. The bottom line is that if a group for support

cannot be found maybe it is time to start a group. A broad literature of practical ideas and

strategies for activating parental involvement can be consulted (e.g., Benson & Martin, 2003;

Funkhouser et al., 1997; Leddy, 2018).

For students, parental voice has vital significance because it confirms the

home-to-school connection, but it requires the student to tell their parent what is going on.

Without this information parents cannot effectively advocate. Academic health is bolstered

because of the support provided in the family home. The child's education must continue to be

forged by the parent. After all, it was the parent who taught the child their name, how to speak,

and the many behaviors associated with being at home. The parent, in fact, is the child's first

teacher. The in-school teacher then becomes an extension of this family learning tradition. The

school is a part of the lifestyle of the family home, and it is therefore normal and necessary for

parents to be involved in every aspect of their child's educational life. The child then should

never lose that level of support. The parents of this study emphasized the significance of their

home environment as absolutely necessary for their child's educational success. Parent voice is

familial, it is trusted, and it is essential to success.

For teachers, there is a critical need for parental engagement. Parents can help create a

constructive educational environment that supports learning and academic success that will

include an engaged home environment that will have many potentially positive ramifications for

the classroom. When teachers successfully engage parents the parents voice emerges and greater

insight into the student's history, behavior and disposition can be discovered. The classroom

practices shared by the teacher can also create an understanding that can lead to a relationship of

camaraderie, which can avert future issues and send a message to the student of unity between

teacher and parent. Unfortunately, "neither teachers nor administrators are educated in how to

develop, monitor, and improve connections between schools and families (Dauber & Epstein,

1989, p. 16). As McKenna and Millen (2013) shared,

> Parent/caregiver engagement impacts schools, families, and most poignantly, children in indisputable ways. Honoring that which is real, useful, and culturally sensitive regarding parent engagement in education is a test of our commitment to public education at large. Engaging parents in respectful, meaningful, reciprocal avenues of communication is a commitment to the civic-minded, democratic, community-centered principles our schools were, ideally, founded upon. Schools and educators who are willing to put aside assumptions and preconceptions about parenting and the abilities of children and their families based on race and class will go a long way toward moving forward. New concepts of family and parent engagement must be attentively and rigorously examined. Incomplete perspectives about parents and families prevent the "out of the box" thinking . . . which can be seen as a primary need for school systems as they continue to become more diverse if they are to teach and serve students completely. The development of cooperative, sensitive cadres of adults whose central goal is to work in conjunction with one another for the benefit of the child is a feasible framework for tapping into the resources offered by parent voice and parent presence. Creating these partnerships is not simple, nor is it something that can be readily created in the absence of the context of working models. Parent engagement is a relational endeavor that requires ongoing motivation and mutual respect. Inclusive, culturally relevant models that accurately represent the perspective of parents will help in further expanding educator and policymaker perspectives about parents, children, and the educational process in useful ways which will allow everyone involved to more closely approximate an ideal partnership on behalf of children. (pp. 44–45)

My study's findings suggest that community support along with parent voice had decisive

implications for the students' success. The parent's engagement of teachers and school

personnel, along with the knowledge of practices within this system, happened in this specific

affluent suburban community that has had a history of poor educational outcomes for Black

students. The parents interviewed were aware of these outcomes and purposefully involved

themselves in their child's school success. The study was a strength-based approach to finding

out how parental voice had worked for and benefited their Black children. The community that had previously disparaged other students like those in this study, appeared to support them because of their parents' voice advocacy. The participant stories demonstrate the power of parental voice and presence in the outcomes of these vulnerable Black students, and the positive effects from the community in response. For community members like the parents in this study, caring organizations in the community such as Black churches can serve as a resource and place for social networking and coalition building.

Finally, qualitative research provided the ideal means to authentically address this study's exploration. It also gave me the opportunity to reflect on my own experiences in relation to the literature and participants' stories. I gathered thick descriptions with detailed data from the participants by purposely using extended quotes to allow readers to judge for themselves how this data was interpreted. These are not cherry-picked snippets of data that resonated with me and my experiences, but data I transparently shared with committee members on coding and analysis for a quality interpretation. Other people were also engaged to see if they saw the data in similar ways, as a further quality check.

In this study, parent voices are centered and heard. The focus provided evidence of positive outcomes and what works. The methodological approach was purposefully designed to hear in a natural and open way the stories of Black parents as they would tell us what matters. This was a unique study because it involved stories of Black parents on their use of voice to successfully advocate for their child in a school district with a history of disparate outcomes. The study fills a gap in the literature by focusing on this strength-based approach. For educators to be successful, they must be knowledgeable of how to create successful partnerships with parents. Hearing from these successful parents themselves is an ideal way to start. By recognizing and

respecting the cultural and socioeconomic differences of parents of Black children through hearing the voices of these successful parents, perhaps teachers may be able to better support the learning of the students' assigned to their classrooms.

Conclusion

These results, overall, demonstrate the continuing need for a research-based approach using narrative inquiry. This population, Black parents, has received little attention from research that builds on strengths. Earlier literature highlighted the educational struggles of Black students and focused on the schools and their efforts to effect change; this study changes focus, envisioning student success as an outcome of the support of their parents. Every one of the participants in this study experienced challenges in their child's educational journey requiring them to use their voice to make a difference, and they and their child succeeded despite an often-abusive environment. This research permitted these parents to share their stories of adversity and explain how they found success. Parents' knowing how the system works and who to talk to, and when to say something seems to have made a difference for some of them, too. These parents who got involved and were known to their children's teachers and school leaders got heard when they needed to speak up. Learning to lean on other parents for support is important as well. This creates authentic partnerships, respectful alliances, and power sharing. There remains a need to better understand parental advocacy for educationally successful Black children. This study provides fresh insights and perspective from Black parents' perspectives. The product of the narrative inquiry approach was rich with stories of parents' experiences, quite sad at times, and all fully worthy of consideration to inform interventions.

Afterword

Early in this dissertation I relayed the "storyteller's story," a narrative that explained both my positionality and specific inspiration for this topic. In closing, I am struck by how the findings here resonate with what I remember of my mother's tenacious championing of me (without which this dissertation would never have come to pass). At the deepest visceral level, her voice countered negative ways that I was seen, protecting me (Theme 1) so that I could succeed. Repeatedly, she spoke out (Theme 2) at the slightest hint of racial profiling or stereotyping me. The results of her confronting racism (Theme 3) were, as I said, foundational to my academic achievement including this study. I can say less about Theme 4, because to me she was such a pillar of strength that how she became that powerful voice she was is a story of her personal history that would require a dissertation in itself—so hard to do now because she is with the Lord. And, similarly, the influence she may have had by helping other parents to speak up (Theme 5), is known now by fewer and fewer yet has flowed, unacknowledged, into the lives of many and the lives of their children. She lives on in the academic and life success of people she never knew and who never knew her. In Wilder's (1955) words from his novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (which he dedicated to *his* mother), "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning" (p. 117).

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APPENDIX A: IRB PROTOCOL

Antioch University Graduate School of Leadership and Change

PhD Leadership and Change Dissertation (IRB)

1. **Name and mailing address of Principal Investigator(s):**

   Mark A. McMillian

   ████████████████

   Cleveland, OH ██████████

   For faculty applications, Co-Principal Investigator(s) name(s): N/A

2. **Academic Department:** Antioch University PhD Leadership and Change Program

3. **Departmental Status:** Student

4. **Phone Number**: (a) Mobile ██████████

5. **Name & email address of research advisor:**

a) Name of research advisor

J. Beth Mabry, PhD

b) E-mail address of research advisor

███████████████

6. Name & email address(es) of other researcher(s) involved in this project:

a) Name of Researcher(s) N/A

b) E-mail address(es) N/A

7.**Project Title:** EXPLORING BLACK PARENTAL VOICE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE SCHOOL SYSTEM.

8.**Is this project federally funded:** No

Source of funding for this project (if applicable):

9. Expected **starting date** for data collection: 06/21/2021

10. Expected **completion date** for data collection: 09/30/2021

11. **Project Purpose(s):** (Up to 500 words)

This study explores (a) how Black parents develop and use voice to advocate for their children in a predominantly White educational system and (b) how these parents view their use of voice as contributing to their children's academic success. "Voice" in this study means acts of agency that involve the expression of suggestions and beliefs to influence or contribute to a process, decision, or outcome (Avery & Quiñones, 2002; Rowe, 2017). Understanding factors that contribute to Black student success, particularly in predominantly White schools, remains critically important due to persistent educational disparities. Using Narrative Inquiry will enable participants in this study to express and make meaning of their past experiences with use of voice to address the issues of disparate treatment of their child in a school system with a history of inequitable outcomes for Black students. The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the phenomenon of the use of parental voice and how it connects with the research on parental

involvement in children's educational outcomes. The results may inform interventions to help parents, teachers, administrators, and community agencies to identify and implement strategies that increase Black parental involvement and minority student academic success.

12. Describe the proposed participants- age, number, sex, race, or other special characteristics. Describe criteria for inclusion and exclusion of participants. Please provide brief justification for these criteria. (Up to 500 words)

This qualitative, interview-based narrative inquiry study will include 20 to 30 Black parents whose children had successful educational outcomes (graduated from high school and went on to some form of post-secondary education, such as college or trade school). In particular, I recruited parents of children who attended the school system because of its history of intentional efforts to achieve integration and equity and, yet, its inability to do so (Meckler, 2019). Please note: in reports of the research I will not name the school district or town, in order to protect participants' confidentiality.

Because the population of interest for this study is Black parents, White and other non-White persons are not included in the study. Men, women, and people who identify outside the gender binary are welcome to participate in the study. All participants will be age 18 or older in order to give consent to participate.

13. Describe how the participants are to be selected and recruited. (Up to 500 words)

I will purposefully sample participants who are Black and parents of students who graduated from the school system and went on to some form of post-secondary education. I plan to use multiple strategies, primarily snowball sampling, beginning with people in my own social network. I have lived and worked in the area for decades and among my social contacts are some individuals who can be included in the study. I will ask these individuals to participate, and as part of the interview I will ask them to refer other prospective participants to me by either passing along study information and my contact details, or by offering me contact information for the people whom they know.

Additionally, I will post on social media groups or alumni websites, and ask local churches to include in their bulletins and newsletters, the following brief description:

If you are the parent of a Black student who graduated from high school in Shaker Heights, please consider helping with my dissertation research on Black parents' roles in their children's educational success. For more information, please contact me at ███████████████ OR send me a message at # [a Google Voice # set up for this study]. Thank you!

I'm Mark McMillian, a member of the community and a doctoral student at Antioch University. This study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, ████████████████).

For each contact attained by any of the above means, I will send an email or message, or respond to voice mails with a phone call, with the following information:

Hi [Name],

I am getting in touch with you because you may be able to help me with my dissertation research on how parents contribute to their children's educational success. This study us part of my work in the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change.

I'm looking to speak to parents of Black students who have graduated from Shaker Heights schools and gone on to college or trade school. If that describes you, I'd appreciate a chance to interview you one-on-one for about an hour. I'm interested in learning about your experiences in supporting your child's education when they were in school.

Attached to this message is an informed consent form that provides more details [either email attachment or link to a website hosting it]. Please take a look and let me know if you have any questions. Would you be so kind as to let me know when might be a good time for an interview via Zoom or perhaps somewhere in town?

This study was reviewed by Antioch University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, lkreeger@antioch.edu).

Thank you so very much for considering my request for your help.

Sincerely,

Mark McMillian, PhD Candidate

Antioch University

████████████████████

[Google voice #]

14. Do you have a prior or current relationship, either personal, professional, and/or financial, with any person, organization, business, or entity who will be involved in your research?

Yes, I will know some of the people in the study, but not all of them. I will begin snowball sampling by connecting with people in my social network, some of whom are neighbors or community members with whom I've interacted before. However, these are not relationships involving transactions or power differentials through which I could coerce participation or in which there would be potential role conflicts.

15. Describe the process you will follow to attain informed consent.

I will provide Informed Consent form to each prospective participant in my initial contact with them, as noted in the sample email/message above. Additionally, I will ask each participant who responds to my inquiry about a time and means of meeting for an interview to provide a signed (may be electronically signed and provided via email) Informed Consent form before or at the time of the interview. Finally, when we meet for an interview, I will verbally review with each participant, before beginning the interview, the elements of informed consent, including that their participation is voluntary and confidential, that they consent to my recording the interview (audio only for in-person interviews and audio and video for video conference interviews), that they are free to decline to answer any question and to withdraw from the study, and ensure that they have a copy of the Informed Consent form.

16. Describe the proposed procedures, (e.g., interview surveys, questionnaires, experiments, etc.) in the project. Any proposed experimental activities that are included in evaluation, research, development, demonstration, instruction, study, treatments, debriefing, questionnaires, and similar projects must be described. USE SIMPLE LANGUAGE, AVOID JARGON, AND IDENTIFY ACRONYMS. Please do not insert a copy of your methodology section from your proposal. State briefly and concisely the procedures for the project. (500 words)

This is a Narrative Inquiry research study that relies on individual qualitative interviews for data gathering. Below is the semi-structured interview guide:

Individual interviews will follow a semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions are as follows:

 A. Looking back on when your child was in school, tell me about your experiences with the school as you tried to support your child's success?

  [Possible but not necessarily follow up questions.]

  a. Tell me what it was like advocating for your child with the schools?

  b. Were there particular challenges?

  c. Particular things that were helpful or supportive to you in advocating for your child?

  d. Examples?

 B. Not everyone feels comfortable or confident about speaking up for their child(ren) with the school. How was that for you?

  [Possible but not necessarily follow up questions.]

  a. How did you develop a sense of confidence about speaking up for your child at school?

  b. Can you tell me a bit about how and when you developed that sense of confidence, empowerment, or voice to speak up for your children?

  c. Did you have any models in your life of people who spoke up and used their voice?

 C. How do you see your use of "voice," speaking up for your child, as contributing to your child's educational success?

 D. What advice do you have for parents of Black students in mostly White schools about speaking up for them and supporting their success?

  [Possible but not necessarily follow up questions.]

  a. What would you tell parents of Black children about how to advocate for them in school?

  b. What might help parents of Black children to develop a sense of voice on behalf of their kids?

Interviews conducted in person will be audio recorded and transcribed; video conference interviews will be video and audio recorded with only the audio retained and transcribed.

Transcriptions will be redacted in a manner that preserves the confidentiality of the participants as well as others whose names may be mentioned. In regard to confidentiality, I follow the conceptualization of Berg (2001), who states that providing "confidentiality is an active attempt to remove from the records of research any elements that may identify the subjects" (p. 57).

17. Participants in research may be exposed to the possibility of harm - physiological, psychological, and/or social - please provide the following information: (Up to 500 words). Identify and describe potential risks of harm to participants (including physical, emotional, financial, or social harm).

I believe that this study presents no risks to participants beyond those of everyday life. Participants will self-select into the study and participate voluntarily. Interview questions do not elicit sensitive information, and no deception is used. I recognize, though, that asking people about their lived experiences always includes the risk of evoking difficult memories or experiences. Therefore, my Informed Consent form includes contact information for free mental health support, such as a Crisis Textline (Text HOME to 741741).

c. Explain why you believe the risks are so outweighed by the benefits described above as to warrant asking participants to accept these risks. Include a discussion of why the research method you propose is superior to alternative methods that may entail less risk.

Given that the risks of this research are low and the potential benefits include informing interventions to support parents in advocating for positive educational outcomes for their children, the benefits outweigh the risks. Further, the selected method, individual qualitative interviews, asks respondents to tell their own stories in their own authentic voice. It may even benefit participants to reflect on and tell their stories: "The oldest and most natural form of sense-making" involves stories or narratives (Jonassen & Hernandez-Serrano, 2002, p.66).

d. Explain fully how the rights and welfare of participants at risk will be protected (e.g., screening out particularly vulnerable participants, follow-up contact with participants, list of referrals, etc.) and what provisions will be made for the case of an adverse incident occurring during the study.

Participation in the study is voluntary, does not involve vulnerable populations, and no deception is used. Therefore, participants who consent to be interviewed will be aware of the nature and risks of the study. Further, before each interview, I will gently remind participants of their right to decline to answer any question and to stop the interview and/or withdraw from the study.

Additionally, I will be alert to any signs if discomfort or upset of participants during interviews and, if I observe it, will ask the participant if they would like to stop or, if in my judgment someone is upset, I can bring the interview to a close. As part of the Informed Consent form, I provide contact information for a crisis hotline, in case a participant later wants to talk with someone as a result of participating in the study. Under no circumstances will I attempt to provide counsel as I am not qualified to do so, but I will act as an empathetic and attentive researcher, alert to the wellbeing of the participants in my study. Should an adverse event arise, I will immediately notify my faculty sponsor and AU GSLC's IRB Chairperson, Dr. Kreeger.

18. Explain how participants' privacy is addressed by your proposed research. Specify any steps taken to safeguard the anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of their responses. Indicate what personal identifying information will be kept, and procedures for storage and ultimate disposal of personal information. Describe how you will de-identify the data or attach the signed confidentiality agreement on the attachments tab (scan, if necessary). (Up to 500 words)

I will conduct all one-on-one interviews, transcribing the audio recordings, and redacting from them any identifying information. The level of privacy in this study is confidentiality. Because I will know identifying information about the participants from contact information and obtaining informed consent, I cannot offer anonymity. However, by protecting the identity of participants in my records, de-identifying their data, and using pseudonyms in reports of my research, I can ensure their privacy. Contact information and informed consent forms will be stored in a password protected file on a secure, password protected cloud drive. Transcripts and field notes will be given an ID number and pseudonyms assigned when transcripts are cleaned, and all identifying information will be redacted. Finally, a key linking identities and ID numbers will be stored in a separate, password protected file and this key will be destroyed once the dissertation is finalized. All other research record will be retained for 3 years in keeping with federal guidelines.

19. Will audio-visual devices be used for recording participants? Will electrical, mechanical (e.g., biofeedback, electroencephalogram, etc.) devices be used? (Click one) Yes.

If YES, describe the devices and how they will be used:

Interviews may be conducted in-person, via video conference calling (Zoom), by telephone. In-person and telephone interviews will be audio recorded using a digital recorder, uploaded to computer, and initially transcribed using speech to text software, such as Otter AI, and then cleaned for accuracy and to redact identifying information. When interviews are conducted via video conference, the platform's recording feature and transcription will be used; the video will be deleted and the audio transcript cleaned and identifying information redacted. Once transcripts are finalized, audio recording will be deleted.

20. **Type of Review:** Expedited

Please provide your reasons/justification for the level of review you are requesting. This study represents research involving benign behavioral interventions. This study involves the collection of information from adult subjects through verbal or written responses or audiovisual recordings. The same subjects will agree to the intervention and the collection of information and its intended use, with confidentiality of data assured.

Expedited review seems the most appropriate type of review for this study as it involves confidential individual interviews, involves no deception, and presents low risk.

21. Please attach any recruitment flyers, letters, recruitment scripts, or other materials used to recruit participants. Attach informed consent, assent, and/or permission forms. If a consent form is not used, or if consent is to be presented orally, state your reason for this modification below. In cases when oral consent will be used, include the text to be used for the oral consent. *Oral consent is not allowed when participants are under age 18.

As noted earlier, I will recruit participants by posting an announcement of the study on social media sites, in groups, and/or alumni websites for the Shaker Heights., OH school system. I also will ask local churches to include the announcement in their bulletins and newsletters. Here is the sample announcement:

> If you are the parent of a Black student who graduated from high school in Shaker Heights, please consider helping with my dissertation research on Black parents' roles in their children's educational success. For more information, please contact me at [email] mailto: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ OR send me a message at # [a Google Voice # set up for this study]. Thank you!
> I'm Mark McMillian, a member of the community and a doctoral student at Antioch University. This study was reviewed by Antioch University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮).

For each contact attained by any of the above means, I will send an email or message, or respond to voice mails with a phone call, with the following information:

> Hi [Name],
> I am getting in touch with you because you may be able to help me with my dissertation research on how parents contribute to their children's educational success. This study us part of my work in the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change.
>
> I'm looking to speak to parents of Black students who have graduated from Shaker Heights schools and gone on to college or trade school. If that describes you, I'd appreciate a chance to interview you one-on-one for about an hour. I'm interested in learning about your experiences in supporting your child's education when they were in school.
>
> Attached to this message is an informed consent form that provides more details [either email attachment or link to a website hosting it]. Please take a look and let me know if you have any questions.
>
> Would you be so kind as to let me know when might be a good time for an interview via Zoom or perhaps somewhere in town?
>
> This study was reviewed by Antioch University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, lkreeger@antioch.edu).
>
> Thank you so very much for considering my request for your help.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Mark McMillian, PhD Candidate
> Antioch University
> ████████████████
> [Google voice #]

22. If questionnaires, tests, or related research instruments are to be used, then you must attach a copy of the instrument at the bottom of this form (unless the instrument is copyrighted material), or submit a detailed description (with examples of items) of the research instruments, questionnaires, or tests that are to be used in the project. Copies will be retained in the permanent IRB files. If you intend to use a copyrighted instrument, please consult with your research advisor and your IRB chair. Please clearly name and identify all attached documents when you add them on the attachments tab.

This is a Narrative Inquiry research study that relies on individual qualitative interviews for data gathering. Below is the semi-structured interview guide:

Individual interviews will follow a semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions are as follows:

E. Looking back on when your child was in school, tell me about your experiences with the school as you tried to support your child's success?

   [Possible but not necessarily follow up questions.]

   a. Tell me what it was like advocating for your child with the schools?

   b. Were there particular challenges?

   c. Particular things that were helpful or supportive to you in advocating for your child?

   d. Examples?

F. Not everyone feels comfortable or confident about speaking up for their child(ren) with the school. How was that for you?

   [Possible but not necessarily follow up questions.]

   a. How did you develop a sense of confidence about speaking up for your child at school?

   b. Can you tell me a bit about how and when you developed that sense of confidence, empowerment, or voice to speak up for your children?

   c. Did you have any models in your life of people who spoke up and used their voice?

G. How do you see your use of "voice," speaking up for your child, as contributing to your child's educational success?

H. What advice do you have for parents of Black students in mostly White schools about speaking up for them and supporting their success?

   [Possible but not necessarily follow up questions.]

   a. What would you tell parents of Black children about how to advocate for them in school?

   b. What might help parents of Black children to develop a sense of voice on behalf of their kids?

I have agreed to conduct this project in accordance with Antioch University's policies and requirements involving research as outlined in the IRB Manual and supplemental materials. I certify that I have attached documentation confirming completion of the CITI Modules.

Confirmation: Yes.

Attachments

Informed Consent Form

CITI Completion Certificate

CITI Completion Report

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

[ON LETTERHEAD]

Study on Exploring Parental Voice and its Role in Student Success

You are invited to participate in my doctoral dissertation research on parents' advocacy for their children 's in educational settings. Particularly, I am interested in hearing the experiences of **parents of Black students in the school system** whose children graduated from high school and then went on to college, trade school, or some other kind of post-secondary education.
Participating in the study means taking part in an individual interview with me that will last about 45 to 60 minutes. The interview can take place via Zoom video conference, or in-person at a mutually convenient, neutral location, such as coffee shop or the library where they have a meeting room where we can talk.
Your participation is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. If you choose to participate in an interview, you are free to decline to answer any question or to stop the interview at any time. Please know that there will be no hard feelings if you choose not to take part in the study or if you do participate and then withdraw.
Your participation is confidential. Your identity and the information you provide will be kept confidential. I will combine the information you provide with the responses of other study participants, and I will remove any identifying information from my notes and the transcript of our interview. You will not be named in any reports of this research. With your permission, I would like to record our interview for accuracy. Once I have transcribed the interview in writing, I will delete/erase the recording. Please initial here if you consent to be recorded:

_____
There are no known risks to participating in this study beyond those of everyday life. There also is no compensation or direct benefit to you for your participation. However, by sharing your experience and insights in this study, you may contribute to efforts to enhance parents' support of their children's education.
If you have any questions, please contact me or my faculty sponsor using the information below.
Thank you for considering my request for your help.
Sincerely,

Mark McMillian, PhD Candidate Antioch University

███████████████████

Beth Mabry, PhD, Professor Antioch University

Graduate School of Leadership and Change

███████████████

This study was reviewed by the Antioch University Institutional Review Board for the

Protection of Human Subjects (Dr. Lisa Kreeger, Chair, ██████████████).

Signed Informed Consent (you may print, sign, and scan or take a picture of this page)

- I am age 18 or older

- I have read the above informed consent form

- I voluntarily agree to participate in the study

- I give my consent for recording the interview

Printed Name of Participant:

_____

_____   _____

Signature   Date

If you find that you want to talk with someone about your experiences or feelings after participating in this study, please contact the Crisis Text-line (Text HOME to ████████) or other sources of care and support, such as The Black Mental Health Corp (████████████).