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In Their Own Words: Examining the Educational Experiences, Expectations, and Values of Oregon Low-Income, Single Black Mothers

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In Their Own Words: Examining the Educational Experiences,
Expectations, and Values of Oregon Low-Income, Single Black Mothers

by

Reiko Mia Williams

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

Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership: Administration

Dissertation Committee:
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Abstract

The long-standing achievement gap between African-American students in grades k-12 and their White counterparts has inspired many educational leaders and policy makers to seek a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the various factors affecting the well-being of Black students. The conversation has historically focused on deficits and dysfunction while ignoring strengths and resiliencies. The research in this study investigates inaccuracies regarding Black families in order to change the conversation from one of deficits to a strength-based lens. In spite of the inequities that exist for Black families with regards to housing, employment, and health, Black parents remain committed to ensuring that their children receive the level of education required to increase life and career opportunities. There are common misconceptions of parental apathy and low expectations, yet these misconceptions are easily countered when the critical role that Black mothers play in their children's academic success is acknowledged, respected, and honored.

While there are too many Black children who are struggling in public schools according to traditional measures of success, there have always been and will continue to be Black children who thrive in the face of low-teacher expectations, under-resourced schools, and the cultural disconnect that exists between the school and their home. These students have an essential, yet often unrecognized, asset—a strong, familial value for education and high, parental expectations. This study examines the educational expectations and values of low-income, single, Black mothers and how they convey their values in support of their children.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Jacklin Teresa Williams-Blanco. All that I am, all that I have ever done and will ever do, I owe to her. Despite being handed a deck where the odds were stacked against her, she lived a life worth living and celebrating. I wish that I could achieve half of what she did. I learned every lifelong lesson from her. Her legacy is reflected in every effort, every milestone of my life and those of my children and will be for generations to come.

Acknowledgements

To every friend, relative and associate who encouraged me to stick with this, thank you. You don't know how much your words of encouragement helped to quell the internal doubt I had that I could finish. There were times that I didn't think I could. I have always loved to write but I wanted to write on my terms and by my own rules. I prayed that writing a dissertation and complying with many rules about academic writing has not hindered my love for, and my ability to freely express myself through the written word. I have dreamed of writing. I believe that God has blessed me with a gift. Completing the research and this dissertation has required me to remain committed, to believe in myself, and to be disciplined despite so many familial commitments and obligations. Since I began pursuing a doctoral degree, my daughter Jacklin graduated from high school, attended the University of Maryland, and then graduated from St. Mary's College of Moraga, California, both schools where she played basketball. She also played professional basketball in Chiasso, Switzerland and then Belgium and a few months ago achieved two major milestones of getting married and having her first son and my first grandchild. My daughter Jaime graduated from high school and then the University of Tennessee in Knoxville where she played basketball for the Lady Vols, was drafted into the WNBA, and has played abroad in Israel, Italy, France, Russia, and Turkey. Jaime continues to pursue her love of basketball and someday plans to coach at the collegiate or professional level. During this process, I welcomed Eboni, my third daughter a year after beginning doctoral coursework who became the light and center of our family. She is following in her sister's foot-steps, but has participated in so many extra-curricular

activities including intensive music education in the study of the clarinet, African dance, volleyball, track and field, Campfire leadership, and as you guessed it, basketball.

Basketball tournaments, high school gymnasiums, online streaming, road trips, practice, recruiting visits, traveling abroad, and supporting their love of basketball and extra-curricular activities has been a welcome distraction. My daughters are the center of my universe. I would not have traded sharing in their lives and milestones for anything, not even the honor of a dissertation. I believe in God's perfect will and timing. My daughters are living independently and Eboni as a high school sophomore has a measure of independence in light of all of the uncertainty that came with the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper has been a true exercise in discipline and persistence. I thank God for two doctoral advisors, Esperanza De La Vega and Pat Burk, who both believed that I could do it and spent countless hours reading, revising, commenting, and mostly expecting more of me. "Espie" took over after Pat retired. She held my hand at every stage of this process. I absolutely could not have done this without her. She is a true teacher who sees each of her students, meets them where they are, holding high but reasonable expectations and loves and accepts them. God knew what I needed and when. I am eternally grateful for her guidance and am deeply indebted to her for walking me through this.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
CHAPTER I: Introduction.....	1
Introduction and Background.....	1
Statement of the Research Problem.....	2
Significance.....	4
Personal Journey.....	7
Presentation of Research Methods and Questions.....	10
Key Terms & Concepts.....	11
CHAPTER II: Literature Review.....	15
Review of the Literature.....	15
Deficit Theories.....	16
Theoretical Framework.....	25
CHAPTER III: Research.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Research Methods.....	33
Participants.....	35
Evelyn.....	38
Alexis.....	40
Amber.....	40
Pam.....	41
Tonya.....	42
Recruitment.....	44
Data Collection and Instruments.....	46
Research Questions.....	47
Data Collection Procedures.....	48
Role of the Researcher.....	49
Data Analysis.....	50
CHAPTER IV: Presentation of Findings.....	54
Theme 1: Societal Racism.....	55
“They Just Assume”.....	55
Theme 2: Incongruent Home-School Relations.....	61
“I just always felt like I wasn’t good enough”.....	61
“ That was why we ended up moving out of there”.....	63

“They told me I’m not welcome there”	65
“I had to straighten him out”	68
“She expected greatness from all of us” Cultural Compatibility	70
Theme 3: Counter-narratives	76
“She did do everything she could...for me to be successful in school” ...	77
Summary	83
CHAPTER V: Conclusion and Recommendations	85
Discussion	85
Recommendations	95
Areas for Future Research	97
Conclusion	98
References	101

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Participants' Education, Work and Schooling	Page 37
Table 2	Participants' Family Structure	Page 57
Table 3	Critical Race Theory/Dissertation Themes	Page 85

CHAPTER I: Introduction

Background

The achievement gap in schools is said to have lifetime consequences, limiting opportunities for minority students in higher education, employment, and earnings (Carnervale, 1999; Jencks, 1992; Murnane & Levy, 1996; Ogbu, 1994). Gaps have been documented in high school graduation rates, placement in special education, advanced placement courses, suspension, and expulsion rates as well as standardized test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2010) between white students and their Black counterparts. A number of researchers (Kozol, 1992; Losen & Orfield, 2002) have cited the underfunding of urban schools and the lack of commitment and responsibility for the success of Black and Brown students as a new form of structural racism.

Achievement gaps, as we know them, are actually gaps in opportunity and are the result of institutionalized practices that are embedded in U.S. schools as well as all industries of our society particularly and most devastatingly, in the field of education. Malcolm X said it best while speaking to a Civil Rights era crowd, “When you live in a poor neighborhood, you're living in an area where you have poor schools. When you have poor schools, you have poor teachers. When you have poor teachers, you get a poor education. When you get a poor education, you can only work in a poor-paying job. And that poor-paying job enables you to live again in a poor neighborhood. So, it's a very vicious cycle.”

In 2020, attempts to explain the root cause of the opportunity gap for Black students typically lie between two polar opposite ends of a continuum from personal

accountability to institutional responsibility. While national inequities have been documented for Blacks in employment, housing opportunities, health access and the penal system, etc., not all recognize that these inequities impinge upon the ability of students and families to achieve educational success (Allen, 1995; Epps, 1995).

Sociological reports blame Black family culture, explained as historically, morally and culturally-deprived, as the source of the problem of inequitable educational outcomes (Moynihan, 1965; Rainwater, 1966). Regardless of the differing perspectives and what continues to be a gloomy outlook, there is also research that shows that there remain socio-economically oppressed students from Black single, female headed households, who, in spite of the myriad obstacles, manage to forge a positive path within the school system and to be on track toward graduation and possibly post-secondary educational opportunities.

Statement of the Research Problem

Parental involvement is widely recognized as an important contributor to the academic success of Black students (Coleman, 1991; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Cooper & Datnow, 2013; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 1989). However, studies examining the role of parenting on Black students often focus on risk factors and ignore the ways in which Black families promote successful school experiences and achievement (Yan, 1999). Therefore, the purpose of this research study is to **understand how low-income, single Black mothers of K-12 students convey their values and expectations for the schooling and education of their children.**

A significant amount of the research about Black student success is specific to

their success in post-secondary education; however, before students can access institutions of higher learning, they must achieve success in K-12 schools. Unfortunately, Black student success in K-12 education is overshadowed by deficit discourse which amplifies disengagement, apathy, and underachievement as their typical experience (James, 2012).

While research often examines the problem of the opportunity gap as it pertains to the experiences of Black students who are failing, research examining the experiences of persisting Black students and their family pales in comparison. Further, there is not enough research about the role of families on the social and emotional well-being of Black students. Therefore, this study will explore the contributing factors of mother participation on Black students and specifically the intergenerational transmission of educational values that work to ensure that Black children are prepared for the cultural conflicts, low expectations, racism, and unequal experiences they will undoubtedly face in public schools.

Public schools remain places where dominant culture ideals and values are promoted and advanced (Delpit, 2006). Consequently, Black students and other students whose own culture is in conflict with the culture upheld in public schools are not expected to achieve overwhelming success (Delpit, 1995). While the achievement gap affects K-12 children, an achievement gap has been found to exist during the preschool years as well. By the time Black and Hispanic children reach kindergarten, they are evaluated to be far behind their peers in reading and math readiness (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). The gap widens as Black students are promoted. Much of the responsibility for the

achievement gap implicitly or explicitly blames Black parents and culture; less accountability is ascribed to school personnel and leaders.

Despite so many unfavorable odds stacked against them, a significant number of Black students are able to participate in, and in many cases to perform well, sometimes outperforming their White and Asian peers. This study will examine family attributes for Black students who are able to persist in public schools and will serve as an effort for Black mothers to tell their own story. Solorzano & Yosso (2002) note that research and theoretical models that attempt to explain outcome and achievement inequities often support dominant societal perspectives through promoting notions of deficiency among students of color. They introduced the “counter-story” as a useful approach to education research and defined it as a method of telling the stories of people who have been overlooked in the literature and as a means by which to examine, critique and counter majority culture stories or master narratives about people of color (Harper, 2009).

Significance

The achievement gap has lifelong consequences (Carnervale, 1999; Jencks, 1992; Ogbu, 1994). Students who graduate from high school and are exposed to college preparatory curriculum and information have greater access to, and success with, college and university attendance (Cabrera & Nasa, 2000). Research has shown that the higher the educational level you attain, the greater your earnings will be and that one way out of poverty is through economic empowerment (Gofen, 2009). In order to increase your chances for becoming economically empowered today, a solid foundation with, at minimum, a high school education is required (Balfanz, 2009). Students who go on to

graduate from high school and then college are more likely to own their homes, to more actively participate in their children's education, to make more informed decisions about the schools their children will attend, to better advocate for their child's needs, etc. (Epstein, 2010).

Jackson and Moore (2009) assert that most of the educational research on Black males reflects a "doom and gloom trajectory in the educational enterprise," often portraying the educational experiences of Blacks with a focus on deficits. The typical Black boy in a K-12 educational setting is taught almost exclusively by White women "who combine an insufficient anticipation for his academic achievement with high expectations for disruptive behavior, intellectual stupidity, and a dispassion for learning that will ultimately culminate with high school dropout" (Davis, 2003; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Jackson & Moore, 2008; Noguera 2003; Toldson et al., 2008). While this research focused on the educational experiences of Black boys, the findings also can be seen in the experiences of Black girls.

In order to achieve successful life outcomes for Black children, it is important to better understand that the barriers require increased understanding and attention. Firstly, Black children are forced to learn how to negotiate complex educational systems where dominant, mainstream norms and values are embedded in all aspects of school culture (Delpit, 1995). Cultural discontinuity is evident when ethnic minority students cease cultural value-based practices, namely those found in their home communities, when they are at school. Secondly, Black students have some measure of resilience to overcome the effects of poverty (Ford, 1994). Students who live in poverty might experience many harsh realities including housing instability; hunger, health and nutrition problems;

physical, emotional and psychological abuse as a result of family stress; family instability and inadequate schools and educational experiences (Milner, 2015). These issues are not all unique to families experiencing the effects of poverty; however, many of these factors are present or exacerbated because of poverty. Third, Black students and their families must contend with the daily effects of institutional racism, personally-mediated prejudice and racism, and daily microaggressions (Pierce, 1974). He refers to racial microaggressions as subtle insults directed toward people of color, often automatically or subconsciously. Over time, the cumulative effects of racial microaggressions can impact student self-perception, confidence and ultimately their academic performance (Milner, 2015). This research study will examine the ways in which Black families, through countering the deficit narrative and low expectations of school personnel, have played a critical role in the success of Black students. The essential role many Black families fulfill in holding high expectations and countering the deficit-oriented educational narrative has significant positive influence on student performance (Grossman, 2012) and might possibly mitigate some of the ill-effects of cultural discord, racism, and poverty.

The challenges that Black students in America's public schools face cannot be solved by educators alone; nor can these problems be solved by parents or families alone. Black students in schools across the country are confronted by social, emotional, and environmental problems. More collaboration between the school and home will need to be focused on dealing with these problems. (Drake, 2000). Research has consistently demonstrated that parent/family involvement significantly contributes to improved student learning outcomes. Although family involvement is recognized as one of many factors that can improve our schools, this knowledge "does not consistently translate into

implementation” (Drake, 2000, p. 34). Schools must work collaboratively with Black parents/families to improve student learning experiences; doing so recognizes the “interdependent nature of the relationship” between families and schools and values parents as “essential partners” (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

It is critical that educational researchers, policy makers and political figures understand that Black parents are essential partners in improving the educational success of students. Examining the ways in which low-income Black families uphold expectations and the manner in which their educational values work in support of schools is important in order to better understand how to improve K-12 educational experiences for Black students.

Personal Journey

I was born in Baltimore City in 1967 to a beautiful mother who happened to be nineteen years old and unmarried, with a 17-month toddler son when I was delivered. She had attended public schools in Baltimore City, reared by her mother and maternal grandfather in a narrow city row house. School was not of primary importance in a home where her young mother didn't think it was immediately beneficial. Stories of my mother's childhood suggest a life wrought with deficits – there always seemed to be too little of everything except sadness. My grandmother didn't attend school past 6th grade, not because schools were unavailable, but because no one insisted that she go – her only objective was to find a husband/provider. When she was well into her 80's, she came to Portland from Baltimore to live with me after suffering a stroke. During one of our many conversations, I asked her if she had any regrets. She thought for a moment and said what I had never expected - that she regretted not having sought a better education. She held

no more than 3 jobs during her entire lifetime. She was excluded from many opportunities and was not expected to do very much. She would not become a hard laborer (a cement finisher like her father or a construction worker like her brothers) in Baltimore as those jobs were those that men pursued; she did not see herself working as a domestic for one of the Jewish women in Pikesville or in Reisterstown. When I meet White women who are of the same generation as my grandmother whose social activities include college alumni socials and outings with university friends, the unequal experiences and the cumulative effects of those differences become more apparent. My grandmother was of college age in 1947, long before the Civil Rights Act or the Black Liberation movement, SCLC, Little Rock 9, Brown vs. Board of Education, or lunch counter sit-ins. In 1947, there were more schools and colleges that she could not go to than those that she could. Understanding her personal story is essential for me to make sense of where my family is in 2022, but it would not do any good to know her story without contextualizing the societal norms at the time of her birth, childhood, and schooling. She handed down knowledge and information based upon an educational exposure to 6th grade. It was not unusual that my mother, as smart as she was, would complete high school - she was not expected to. But what she did do – earn a high school General Equivalency Diploma (GED), complete an adult education program to become a licensed practical nurse and enroll in a historically Black college, Coppin State College (now University), in the mid-1970's – defied the expected odds for a poor Black girl growing up in inner-city Baltimore. I think about what inspired her, from whom and where her motivation to go to school, to return to complete school after the interruption of pregnancy and childbirth in pursuit of a post-secondary education came. I believe that

my mother was intrinsically motivated but also having met and spent time with my paternal great-grandmother in Baltimore who only went to school to 2nd grade in Timmonsville, South Carolina, toiled as a sharecropper before leaving the Jim Crow south with her five children in June of 1941 in hopes of a better life in Baltimore City. They moved from 603 West Conway Street in South Baltimore to 541 Paca Street before moving to 2013 East Preston Street where she would live for nearly 50 years before she died. In her lifetime, she was able to found the East Baltimore Women's Democratic Club, Mothers Against Polio and to have a recreation center named in her honor. Three of her children went on to Morgan State University, two of them becoming educators themselves. My mother's educational pursuits, I believe, were inspired by her father's family, by her paternal grandmother. She was the first in her family to go to college and set an expectation that her own three children would go and we all did. My personal journey is one that can't be understood outside of my family's story and the larger societal context. My personal story leads me to wonder about the factors that are present in families where poor Black mothers, who have not been formally educated, raise children who value education and achieve educational success in K-12 schools and in post-secondary settings. My own family is an example of how, despite their socioeconomic status resulting from exclusionary laws, policies, and practices along with inequitable experiences in formal education, they continued to press forward and to expect their children to do even more than they were able to. My mother would have been considered a 1st generation college student since she was the first in her family to attend college, myself and my siblings would be considered 2nd generation college students since each of us went to college; and my children, nieces and nephews are and

will be 3rd generation college students. I attribute this to the foundation that my mother established.

Presentation of Methods and Research Questions

In promoting the need for collaborative relationships between schools and home, this qualitative **study seeks to understand how low-income, single Black mothers of K-12 students convey their values and expectations for the schooling and education of their children.** The following three research questions guided this dissertation study:

1. What are the ways that low-income, single Black mothers communicate to help their children cope with the racism they will face in society?
2. How do low-income, single Black mothers prepare their children for public K-12 education?
3. In what ways do low-income, single Black mothers counter the negative stereotypes and low expectations held by some school personnel?

Cultural discord, low expectations and institutional racism are experiences that are difficult for any Black child and their family to circumvent. These factors adversely impact Black student experiences in K-12 public school settings; the measures used to evaluate their academic success are not culturally relevant, the teachers they will counter will more than likely come from a different racialized background, and they will too often encounter educators who do not believe nor expect that they are capable of success.

Key Terms and Concepts

In this section, I will define key terms and concepts that will be used throughout this dissertation study and will provide an overview of their use and relevance related to their use.

Achievement Gap/Opportunity Gap. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to the term, “achievement gap” as defined by Howard (2010) as “the discrepancy in educational outcomes and access between various student groups in the United States, in particular African American, Native American, certain Asian American, and Latino students on the low end of the performance scale, and their White and certain Asian American counterparts at the higher end of the academic performance scale.”

Performance indicators on standardized tests are the most common criterion for the achievement gap; however, an achievement gap is also reflected in grades, high school graduation rates, placement in special education, advanced placement courses, suspension, and expulsion rates as well as standardized test scores (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The achievement gap has also been defined and in this paper will be defined as an opportunity gap to reflect that educational disparities are not simply the result of Black student performance on achievement tests but the cumulative effect of inequitable access, resources, exposure, and opportunity. The achievement gap has raised a multitude of concerns and resulted in a significant body of empirical research (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Jones, 1984; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1995). The achievement gap is said to have lifetime consequences, limiting opportunities for minority students in higher education, employment, and earnings (Carnervale, 1999; Jencks, 1992; Murnane & Levy, 1996; Ogbu, 1994). In fact, an overwhelming majority of

low-income, African American, and Latino students remain at or below basic performance on standardized achievement tests (Meece & Kurtz-Costes, 2001).

Black - African-Americans are often referred to as “Black” to acknowledge that they have origins in any of the Black populations of Africa. There is no consensus on how people identify. For the purposes of this paper, I chose Black as an empowering term that encompasses all of the ways in which people of the African diaspora show up.

Counter-narrative - Critical race theory in education advances the idea that counter-narratives are important and central to understanding the nature of reality; in particular, counter-narratives “told by people of colour” (Lopez, 2003, p. 84) can contribute to the knowledge base of those often pushed to the margins in education. From critical race theory perspectives, knowledge can and should be generated through narratives and counter-narratives that emerge from and with people of color. A recurrent theme of this body of work is that the narrative and counter-narrative should be captured by the researcher, experienced by the research participants, and told by people of color. Critical race theory's advancement of the narrative and counter-narrative centralizes race for the knower and for the known. In other words, race and racism are placed at the center of the narrative and counter-narrative in critical race theory.

Counter-storytelling - Solórzano and Yosso (2002) introduce counter storytelling as a useful approach to education research. They define this as a method of telling the stories of people who are often overlooked in the literature, and as a means by which to examine, critique, and counter majoritarian stories (or master narratives) composed about people of color. Master narratives are dominant accounts that are often generally accepted as universal truths about particular groups (e.g., Blacks are hopeless and

helpless) – such scripts usually caricature these groups in negative ways. Solórzano and Yosso note that research and theoretical models that seek to explain outcomes inequities and achievement differences in education often support majoritarian viewpoints through the constant amplification of deficiency among students of color. As such, a counter story ‘exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color. Although social scientists tell stories under the guise of “objective” research, these stories actually uphold deficit, racialized notions about people of color.

Cultural Capital – Bourdieu (1977) first used the concept of cultural capital to analyze how culture and education interact, and ultimately contribute to the social reproduction of inequality. Cultural capital is the advantage accessed by middle class, educated European American parents from knowing, preferring, and experiencing a lifestyle congruent with the culture that is dominant in most U.S. schools (Lee and Bowen, 2006).

Cultural Discontinuity – Cultural discontinuity has been defined as a school-based behavioral process where the cultural value-based learning preferences and practices of many ethnic minority students-those typically originating from home or parental socialization activities-are discontinued at school (Tyler, M; Uqdah, A; Dillihunt, M; Beatty-Hazelbaker, R; Conner, T; Gadson, N; Henchy, A; Hughes, T.; Mulder, S.; Owens, E; Roan-Belle; Smith, L.; Stevens, R, 2008). Cultural discontinuity, in educational research, has been captured by different terms including, cultural conflict, (Vega, Khoury, Zimmerman, Gil & Warheit, 1995); cultural dissonance, (Bell & Clark, 1998; M.W. Garrett, 1995; Hale, 2001), and cultural misalignment, (Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006).

Institutional Racism – Racism is defined as a combination of prejudice and power that allows the dominant race to institutionalize its dominance at all levels in a society (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). I have defined institutional racism, for the purpose of this paper, as the collective manifestation of dominant cultural practices, norms, values, and expectations in all facets of society to the detriment of people of color. Institutional racism or systemic racism is a hierarchical system that comes with a broad range of policies and institutions that keep it in place. That hierarchy places whites at the beneficial end of a continuum and blacks (and especially those with darker pigmentation) at the polar opposite end. Systemic racism, structural racism and institutional racism may be used interchangeably in this paper.

School-Family Partnership - School and Family Partnerships have gained national significance as a method for improving the schooling experiences for children and improving learning and achievement. Children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher rates of attendance, homework completion, and school completion, higher grades, and test scores (Barnard, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). Other terms used to describe the relationship between home and school include “family (or parent) engagement,” “parental involvement,” “parental participation.”

CHAPTER II: Literature Review

There is a plethora of literature that examines the Black experience from a deficit lens. The literature is replete with terminology that has become synonymous with stereotyped notions of a Black experience in which poverty, single-parent households, welfare, and high-school dropout are essential features. Data about gaps in achievement and in other routinely measured student characteristics and outcomes target, either directly or indirectly, children and families as the source of the problem (Marsh & Noguera, 2018; Noguera, 2003; 2008). Historical and present constructions of success and failure blame children of color and legitimize educational inequity by indirectly “teaching children to blame themselves for failure” (Deschenes, S.; Cuban, L.; and Tyack, D., 2001). Despite literature that describes Black families with a deficit lens, it is not as common to find research that highlights the assets that Black families bring to the educational process. More Black students are graduating from K-12 schools than ever before. Historically Black colleges and universities are more successful than traditionally and predominately white institutions at graduating Black students (Chenoweth, 1999). It’s important to recognize that against the backdrop of deficit perspectives Blacks continue to overcome overwhelming odds and institutional barriers (Hrabowski et al., 2002).

Black, single, low-income, female headed households are the most common family structure for Black children to be born into in the United States. In 1970, 65% of Black families included married parents (Hrabowski, Maton, Green & Grief, 2010). In the 21st century, only one-third of Black children live in two-parent families, according

to the National Center for Education Statistics) and more than two-thirds of Black children live in or near the poverty level. According to Collins, 1987, Black mothers are most likely to be the primary economic support for their families; a higher percentage are single mothers and when they are married, they are more likely to earn as much as or more than their husbands. Black mothers are also much more likely to be unmarried breadwinners (51.1 percent), compared with white (16.0 percent) and Hispanic (25.7 percent) mothers or mothers of another race or ethnicity (13.2 percent). Growing up in a single-parent family can have severe economic and social consequences - most Black children are raised in a single-parent home (Page & Stevens, 2005).

The achievement gap, which researchers have associated with socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity, has become a well-known term (American Psychological Association, 2012). By definition, the “achievement gap” places responsibility on the individual, their preparation, ability and specifically their performance on standardized exams and not with the school and the beliefs and practices that are upheld in the educational system (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Many teachers have historically regarded Black parents from a deficit perspective (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Harry & Anderson, 1994). Negative stereotypical assumptions and attitudes are often held regarding Black parents, blaming them for their child’s academic failure instead of examining the school’s role in perpetuating negative and harmful assumptions (Blair et al, 2001).

Deficit Theories

Black language, culture, values, and norms are often stereotyped, misunderstood, and even ignored altogether. The absence of personal, meaningful relationships between

teachers and the students and families they serve contribute to the gulf between educators and Black communities. One deficit theory popular in the 1960's was known as the "Equality of Educational Opportunity Report" also referred to as "The Coleman Report" which called into question the relationship between educational achievement and educational funding suggesting that, "[s]chool's bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context" (Ferguson, 1991). Coleman's work de-emphasized the role of schools to impact student achievement and instead claimed that a child's background and "general social context" was to account for the disparity in achievement between White and Black students.

The deficit theory shows up in other places in the educational system, but the one common factor is the tendency to blame. For example, Rothstein (2010) argued that the single-most important factor determining whether students succeed in school is not their zip code or income or skin color, but their parents. He went on to say that,

If a child's parents are poorly educated themselves and don't read frequently to their young children or don't use complex language in speaking to their children or are under such great economic stress that they can't provide a stable and secure home environment or proper preventive health care to their children or are in poor health themselves and can't properly nurture their children or are unable to travel with their children or take them to museums and zoos and expose them to other cultural experiences that stimulate the motivation to learn or indeed live in a zip code where there are no educated adult role models and where other adults can't share in the supervision of neighborhood youth, then the children of such parents

will be impeded in their ability to take advantage of teaching, no matter how high quality that teaching might be (p. 1).

Rothstein (2010) blames Black families for the problems their children face in school and yet, the socio-cultural context is complex. Despite Rothstein's assertions, there are many systemic factors which are outside of the control of Black students and families, which should be considered. For example, according to Darling-Hammond (1998), urban and low-income schools that serve a disproportionate representation of Black students have more poor-quality teachers than schools that serve predominantly White children. Why is this example important? In contrast to what Rothstein asserts about the conditions of Black families, research suggests that a good teacher can ameliorate some of the effects of poverty that are often blamed for poor academic outcomes (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

In a study of schools where student achievement was reported, Loucks (1992) found that parent involvement was a significant factor in both accelerated and sustained student academic performance. Parental involvement is, arguably, a critical factor in the success of any child. However, Louck's research and Coleman's Report situate responsibility for Black student academic outcomes within Black families and don't adequately evaluate or consider that Black families face societal and institutional barriers which impact their efforts to achieve success no matter how hard they might try. Additionally, many educators complain about the lack of Black parental involvement and even go so far as to blame Black parenting as a root cause of the achievement gap (Perry, 2018). Negative stereotypes and ethnocentric, dominant cultural values and expectations about parental involvement impede essential relationships from being established between student, parent, and teacher – relationships which are keys to student success

(Picower, 2009). Research has shown that there is, in fact, a mismatch between the perceptions that teachers hold of Black family involvement and the reality (Flores, Tefft-Cousin & Diaz, 1991; Poplin & Weeres, 1992). In schools throughout the United States, teachers can be heard saying “Those parents just don’t care,” implying that parents, whose cultural norms are inconsistent with those embraced and upheld within the school environment, are responsible when their children do not achieve academic success by the school or district standards. This mismatched perception and erroneous assumptions among educators contributes to the deficit view of Black families.

Highly quoted school family engagement researcher Joyce Epstein has identified that school-family partnership, more commonly known as parental involvement, is the single-most important factor impacting student achievement (Epstein, 1990; 2010). Epstein defines partnership more broadly than parental involvement which connotes parents and involvement at school. She distinguishes family partnership to acknowledge the many ways in which families show up and defines partnership as two-way communication and collaboration between home and school (Epstein, 2010). While Epstein attempts to define partnership more expansively, she does not identify the institutional barriers, namely systemic racism, affecting families of color. As Black students and families interact with public school personnel, policies and practices, they experience a mismatch or a discontinuity between the culture of the school and their home culture making partnership problematic (Villegas, 1988). This discontinuity impacts the ability for successful school-family partnerships to be developed, which can foster student achievement and contribute to closing the achievement gap (Cairney, 2000). The lack or absence of school-family partnerships between Black families and

school staff negatively impacts Black student achievement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). In order to better understand the experiences of Black education in the 21st century, it is important to investigate and understand Black culture in the context of White public schools and shift our focus away from deficits to assets. A significant challenge for Black students is to adapt to differences regarding the ways in which teachers teach and the manner in which Black students learn (Delpit, 2006; 2008; 2012). Academic risks are associated with the potential discontinuity (or mismatch or “lack of fit”) between the behavioral patterns and values normed in low-income and minority communities and those in mainstream schools (Delpit, 1995; Gordon & Yowell, 1992). Cultural discontinuity is experienced in schools when ethnic minority students’ cultural value-based practices, namely those found in their home communities, are in conflict with the school’s normed values (Delpit, 1995). Research has also found that by the age of eight, differences between the cultural values and patterns of home and school communication undermine children’s enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their capacity to learn (Cummins, 1986).

In the article “No Mystery: Closing the Achievement Gap between Africans and Excellence” the authors (Perry, Steel & Hilliard, 2003) challenge the often deficit-oriented discussion, by saying we should shift the conversation away from deficits as the sole explanation for the academic failure or success of Black students. They go on to posit that the sociocultural context of mostly female-headed households living in environments that are over policed and under resourced neighborhoods “may determine opportunity to learn, not capacity to learn” (pp.133-134). Perry et al. (2003) further critiqued the achievement gap as a gap in achievement between whites and Blacks that

“establishes European average achievement as the universal norm even if it’s mediocre... Closer scrutiny is usually heaped on those who perform poorly than on those who succeed” (p.137).

The authors suggest that there is no absence of success in moving low-achieving Black students to high achievement. Their work examines a continuum of behavioral styles and describes Black students' preference for experimentation, improvisation, and harmonious interactions. Good teachers of Black students “are not preoccupied with IQ tests or theories of intellectual inferiority (Perry et al., 2003, p.148). The school’s focus on deficits is too often the norm, which reinforces a negative view of Black students. Duncan-Andrade (2017) reinforces this idea in the following quote:

We have built a system of schooling, and schooling is a process by which you institutionalize people to accept their proper station in life, education is the process by which you teach people that they can fundamentally change the society, we do not educate most of the people in this society, we school them (p.1).

Low achievement for Black students has been an expected and accepted norm in schools and school districts throughout the country (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2015). In light of the realities Black students and families face, Howard (2010) asks an essential question, “*Who really cares?*” He ponders whether we as a nation are truly committed to providing all students a “first-rate, rigorous, humanistic, culturally and socially responsive education” (page 15).

Howard’s question is one that teachers, school leaders, superintendents and school board officials should reflect upon. In the face of persistent achievement gaps;

inequities in special ed, TAG and discipline referrals for Black children; and unequal outcomes, schools and districts appear unwilling to pursue radical changes for the benefit of Black children and other under-served communities.

Persistent achievement gaps can be traced back to the experiences of Black students in the classroom. Teacher assumptions about family culture are too often shaped by experiences that are void of personal, meaningful interactions, but are formed by stereotypes and judgments rooted in deficits (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Also, Lareau's (2001) research explored parent engagement which is often referred to as "involvement or participation." She found that involvement at school occurred most frequently for those parents whose culture and lifestyle was congruent with the school's culture: White parents. Black mothers face significant challenges because they often have fewer opportunities to get involved at school and lack an understanding of how the system works (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). Black mothers also bear a disproportionate amount of criticism in the literature (Brown, Davis, & Brown, 2000). The disconnect between home and school culture can distress the adjustment and performance of Black students (Cholewa et al., 2008; Neal et al., 2003). This can also disrupt school learning, impact their concepts regarding racial identity, and limit their access and aspiration for college (Kunjufu, 2000).

Cultural deprivation theory attributes racial gaps in achievement to presumed cultural deficits; these deficits become the explanation for differences in school performance (Estrada & Vasquez, 1981; McCarthy & Apple, 1988; Nieto, 1992). Social reproduction theorists say that underachieving schools are necessary to reinforce existing social and economic structures that depend on low-wage, low-skill labor in a capitalistic

society (Giroux, 1992; MacLeod, 2018). In other words, schools are designed to maintain the status quo. Epstein (1995) offers a view that reinforces the status quo expectation that parents are the ones that are “responsible” to become partners in their children’s education.

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children’s families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children’s education and development. *Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children* and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students (italicized not in original (page 701).

Epstein does not ground her work in Critical Race Theory. Her widely promoted perspective is one that does not address nor seem to consider the impact of race and racism in the context of schools.

Taylor (2010) highlights other risk factors associated with being an African American, including daily experiences of discriminatory behavior from individuals and institutions, political, work place, and housing restrictions motivated by race. Some researchers suggest that the effective schools model of the 1970s and 1980s, popularized by Ron Edmonds (1979), tells us a great deal about how schools are able to affect resilience. Effective schools promote academic success among traditionally low-performing non-white students (Masten, 1999). Researchers also cite the need for

teachers who are caring and supportive (Benard, 1991; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Werner & Smith, 1989); a safe and orderly school environment (Freiberg, Stein, & Huang, 1995; Wang et al., 1995); positive expectations for all children (Henderson & Milstein, 1996); opportunities for students to become meaningfully and positively engaged with the school (Finn & Rock, 1997), and efforts to improve partnerships between the home and school (Comer, 1984; Masten, 1999). Fifty years later, these correlates or elements of the effective schools model are still relevant and needed for all students, but especially for students who have been marginalized.

Duncan (2002) says Blacks are often “beyond love” and calls for radical interventions in educational policy, research, and practice to help communities who are marginalized, racialized, and scrutinized. Educators have a responsibility to ensure that their instruction and practices acknowledge, embrace, and reflect Black student and family culture. School teachers and leaders can move beyond love and take necessary steps to bridge the school-home gap to allow Black students and their families to feel welcomed and supported at school. Leaders of public school districts and the educators who are willing to learn about the cultural values, beliefs and traditions of Black communities take essential steps toward closing the persistent achievement gap and ensuring that race is no longer a predictor of student achievement.

Ensuring educational equity is a moral imperative for a society in which education is a crucial determinant of life chances” (Levin, 2009, p. 5). Black students too often attend underfunded, poorly resourced, culturally incompatible schools. Their participation in these schools routinely results in poor academic outcomes, not because they lack the capacity to achieve academic success, but because success is not expected,

demanded, nor prioritized. Success is culturally-relevant; those in positions of power and decision making in educational systems reflect white, dominant societal values. White cultural norms are the standard by which non-white communities are assessed. Black students, when evaluated using measures that center whiteness or use White achievement as a benchmark for success, will always be at a disadvantage.

Until and unless federal policymakers deem the status of Black student education a national crisis, the outlook will continue to be bleak for too many Black K-12 students. The persistent problems of underfunding, low-expectations, lack of interest, and discontinuity, are all problems that can be dismantled. Duncan-Andrade (2009) makes a poignant call for what he refers to as “critical hope,” which “audaciously defies the dominant ideology of defense, entitlement and preservation of privileged bodies at the expense of the policing, disposal and dispossession of marginalized ‘others’” (p.9). As educators our work must reflect “critical hope” in the boundless potential and intellectual capacity of young people. Educational systems must be transformed so that the promise of education can be actualized for all children.

Theoretical Framework

There is a plethora of data attesting to the role and value of parents who are engaged in their children’s education. Research establishes that a clear, consistent, and convincing link is evident between family engagement and student achievement (Mapp, 2009). Educators often underestimate the significance of families getting their children to school punctually, nourished, and motivated and often ignore the various cultural ways in which families demonstrate their value for school and education. The lack of educator understanding and value for other cultural ways of being has harmful effects on

children's development of a positive academic identity. An important component of successfully educating children from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences is the ability of teachers to connect what children are learning in the classroom to what's happening in their home environments. A lesson about farming or camping may be quite difficult to understand by a child who was reared in an urban area. Contextualizing the content to children's lives may be difficult for a teacher who does not understand some of the complexities of life as experienced by a low-income Black family. The obstacles in the Black family-school relationship are embedded in a narrative that is not based upon experience or relationships. In order to counter this, Critical Race Theory is a framework that can help to explain the challenges and provide an understanding of the landscape of public school and Black communities in order to transform education experiences and outcomes for all Black children.

The theoretical framework used in this study to examine how single black mothers convey their educational expectations is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory was initially developed by legal scholar Derek Bell (2004) as an analysis of race and racism but was later applied to the field of education to explain the myriad factors that contribute to the opportunity gap. Critical Race Theory is supported by five tenets: 1) permanence of racism; 2) critique of liberalism; 3) whiteness as property; 4) counter-story; and 5) interest convergence. As applied to the field of education, CRT describes racism (Tenet 1) as endemic to, and a permanent feature of American life. Consequently, claims to eradicate or undo racism are impossible since racism is a permanent feature of American life according to CRT. By extension, claims to close the achievement gap between the academic performance of Black students (as measured by

standardized assessment tools) and the academic performance of White students (measured by the same tools) would not be realistically attainable. White student achievement is established as the norm by which all other students are measured even when the performance of White students is mediocre. Further, the tenet of interest convergence (Tenet 5) suggests that the interest of Black students (and people of color) in achieving racial equality will only be accommodated when they converge with the interests of Whites who are in policy-making positions. According to Bell, even when the interest-convergence results in a remedy that is effective, “that remedy will be repealed because of fear that the solution is threatening the superior societal status of whites.” Bell refers to these tacit agreements as “silent covenants” (Bell, 2004, p.69). Bussing resulting from the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* is an example of interest convergence. Black students were forced to integrate White schools often facing lengthy bus rides out of their communities into schools where they faced hostility from students and teachers. Many White school districts refused to integrate their schools until it was mandated that they do. Consequently, Black students were forced to go to White schools and not the reverse. Many Black teachers lost their jobs as a result of efforts at racial integration of public schools. Students also lost culturally-responsive Black teachers who mirrored student lived experiences and believed in their infinite possibilities.

Another tenet of Critical Race theory is the critique of liberalism (Tenet 2). This tenet criticizes the educational system for accepting slow incremental changes to close gaps in opportunity and achievement disparities. In order to redress previous injustices and to address current inequities, CRT advocates for sweeping, radical changes. In K-12

public educational institutions, this tenet is best demonstrated by the all-too familiar, “achievement gap,” reflecting racial group differences in standardized test scores, most often between White and Black students. School districts, around the country, on paper express a commitment to close the gap between White and Black students. In many cases, annual goals to close these gaps are minimal goals that in order to achieve would take 25 years. Incremental change in public education can be demonstrated in various other aspects of strategic efforts. Workforce development and diversity human resource efforts are another example of this tenet. Public education employers often cite difficulty in finding qualified staff of color to fill teacher, staff and administrator vacancies; however, districts will travel to other states to recruit, only to have these recruited diverse teachers leave after a short time. Educational assistants and para-professionals, who are disproportionately people of color, often remain in these roles for long periods without ever being considered or supported with advancing on the educational ladder. Until radical change is sought to address gaps in racial representation, racial disparities in education employment will continue to be a phenomenon in public education.

School districts around the country have focused on quantitative data to measure student performance and regard this as a measure of their success. Diminished importance is accorded to personal narratives; personal stories are not acknowledged as evidence of inequity and discrimination. CRT posits that it is critical to recognize the experiential knowledge of people of color (Tenet 4). Consequently, individual reports and other accounts of Black people and other people of color are not validated - they don't pass the “quantitative reality” test. In spite of this, CRT says, “the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (Tate, Ladson-

Billings, & Grant, 1993, p.58). In order for schools to successfully teach Black students, they require input and understanding from Black families. A counter-story or individual voices are important for teachers to be able to understand, analyze and eradicate the predictability of disparate student performance outcomes. In order to ensure that teaching and learning is culturally responsive and that Black student's needs are valued and important, educators must be able to hear and honor the unique story they bring. A teacher who honors and listens to families and is asset-based in their understanding is more likely to ensure that the cultural ways of being are reflected in the curriculum.

Whiteness as property (Tenet 3) posits that Whiteness has a property value and status in which, "White racial identity provides the basis for allocating societal benefits" (Harris, 2020, p.3) One of the privileges and benefits of "property" is that it contains power and privilege, not always in the material sense, but in an intangible way that confers absolute rights to include and exclude. Black families, by and large, do not have the societal benefits as those of white families to be able to negotiate a complex set of factors in schools. For example, parent teacher associations in schools are structured in ways that are incompatible with norms in the Black community. While some Black families mistrust the educational system as a profoundly "White" institution (Ogbu, 2003), many Black parents are constantly trying to advocate for their children within this system. The lack of participation by Black families in school decision making bodies, because of their cultural incompatibility, may adversely consequence Black families from participation in parent association groups, which are often privileged to provide input on school decisions. PTAs are often hierarchical and not collaborative in their approaches to solving problems. Researchers have often overlooked the social and cultural capital found

in communities of color and viewed working class parents and members of racial minority groups as lacking access to the valued forms of capital. Despite this invisibility, the Black community has distinct forms of social capital such as prayer, call and response communication, and a communal ethos that are often valued and important resources that facilitate community action (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). Orientations of collectivism versus individualism contribute to the power, possibility and hope found in the Black experience.

Overall, the Critical Race Theory tenets provide a framework that allows the researcher to understand the contextual lives of Black students and families. One tenet in particular will become the centerpiece of this dissertation. The “counter-story” tenet of CRT is intended “to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). There is a socially-accepted premise about Black students and their academic potential (Kuykendall, 1989). For many Black students, factors like negative stereotypes, low expectations, and cultural bias all contribute to a negative school experience. Teachers who have negative attitudes toward their students contribute to the massive educational failure of Black children (Levy, 1999). Black youth can be victimized by the low expectations of teachers which can result from a teacher’s preconceived notions about Black student potential rather than their actual performance. Rubovits and Maehr (1973) through their research, discovered that Black students are given less attention than their white counterparts in the classroom, regardless of actual intelligence.

The impact of institutional racism is an often subconscious cycle of self-doubt and in some instances, an avoidance of intellectual competition among Black youth (Phillips,

2011). Schools promote institutional racism through policies which allow 60 percent of African American youth to be tracked into programs that deny them a strong appreciation for their own history, culture and literature and access to higher order thinking skills (Cheyney et al., 1987). All of this points to the need for educational transformation and CRT can help us to understand the academic status of Black students, families, and the deficit experiences they have undergone within our educational system. This dissertation hopes to bring in the voices of the mothers of Black children, who love their children and want the very best. Their stories counter the dominant narrative that “they don’t care” and will peel back the layer of the assumptions and misunderstandings that educators have about Black mothers concerning their children and their education. Using the Critical Race Theory framework, the possibility of making necessary changes to improve student outcomes, utilizing the counternarratives shared by single Black mothers. The following chapter will describe the methods to be used in this research study.

CHAPTER III: Research

Introduction

This study sought to illuminate the voices of single Black women in relationship to their engagement with their child's learning experiences both inside and outside of school. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) note that research and theoretical models that attempt to explain outcome and achievement inequities often support dominant societal perspectives through promoting notions of deficiency among students of color. Based upon Critical Race Theory, they found "counter story" to be a useful approach to education research and defined it as a method of telling the stories of people who have been overlooked in the literature and as a means by which to examine, critique and counter majority culture stories or master narratives about people of color.

There has been a dearth of research about the impact of low-income Black mothers on academic achievement and the racial implications of social and cultural capital which play a key role in Black student success. Therefore, this topic is a critical one to examine further. The population of interest for this study was low-income, single, Black mothers of students in Oregon public schools. The parents of Black students in predominantly white schools are often known to school teachers, counselors, and administrators because as a group, they stand out in a predominantly white school. While this study includes families for whom a father figure is present, this study focused on understanding the role of single Black women who are the primary custodial parents of their children.

Research Methods

This qualitative study examined family characteristics for Black students in Oregon public schools and served as an effort for five Black single mothers to tell their stories and share their experiences. I chose to conduct a qualitative study because it more closely aligns with the Critical Race Theory framework which amplifies counter narratives of marginalized people whose stories are too often ignored and trivialized.

The purpose of this research was to inform the policies and practices in education for the benefit of Black children and families. Emerging approaches in qualitative research are expected to help “give voice” to underserved and underrepresented populations to inform policies and practices toward social change and lead to social action (Charmaz, 2011). Using the qualitative paradigm, I chose to conduct interviews with 5 Black, low-income single mothers in Oregon public schools in order **to understand how low-income, single Black mothers of K-12 students convey their values and expectations for the schooling and education of their children.**

Research has found that by the age of eight, disparities between the cultural values and patterns of communication of the home and school may undermine a child’s enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their capacity to learn (Cummins, 1986; Entwisle, 1995). Knowing this, I sought to identify how and what parents communicate to their K-12 children to examine the cultural communication patterns at home. This study will highlight similarities and differences between what is communicated at school and at home. The need to understand what single Black mothers demonstrate their educational values is a central focus of this research, especially as cultural differences are often a place of misunderstanding in schools.

Qualitative research has revealed emerging approaches that are expected to “give voice” to underserved and underrepresented populations which can inform policies and practices toward social change and lead to social action (Charmaz, 2011). According to Sleeter (2017), one critical analytical tool is taking seriously people of color’s experiences with racism. In this study, I chose to listen to the voices of five low-income mothers of Black students in Oregon public schools to collect data about their own educational experiences as well as their children’s educational experiences. One of the tenets of Critical Race Theory, “permanence of racism” did emerge in the findings.

I used the analytical tools that are grounded within the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory. Building upon another tenet of Critical Race Theory “counter stories,” this research amplifies participants' voices and empowers Black mothers as individuals and members of communities who have been disenfranchised. Moreover, Black mothers' counter stories can provide a more holistic approach in understanding their historical traumas, barriers, and victories. This research study can contribute to our understanding of, and improve school and Black family partnerships and Black student achievement.

A qualitative research approach that provides a space to be heard and is responsive to the historical and lived experiences of communities who have been marginalized can bridge an understanding of the impact of educational policies, procedures, and practices affecting them. Tillman (2002) suggests:

Culturally sensitive research approaches both recognize ethnicity and position culture as central to the research process...When research about African-Americans is approached from a culturally sensitive perspective, the varied

aspects of their culture and their varied historical and contemporary experiences are acknowledged. She continues, an argument for the use of culturally sensitive research approaches within the field of qualitative research is based on the assumption that interpretive paradigms offer a greater possibility for the use of alternative frameworks, co-construction of multiple realities and experiences, and knowledge that can lead to improved educational opportunities of African-Americans. (p.5)

In this study, the culturally-sensitive research approach in the interviews provided an opportunity to holistically listen and culturally understand the lived experiences of the five single Black mother participants.

Participants

In this section, I will provide an overview of the five women who generously agreed to participate in this study. Afterwards, I will provide a narrative section for each of the women to highlight their particular sociocultural context and situation during the study period.

All five of the participants had at least one child in Oregon public schools, K-12. Four of the participants drove their children to school because they selected a school different from their neighborhood. One of the participants did not need to drive her child to school because transportation was provided (neighborhood school). Of the schools available in the district, parents could choose to enroll their children in school outside their neighborhood if they provided transportation. Two of the participants applied to the focus option language immersion programs in Spanish and Mandarin (where their children attended) because neither of these programs were offered at their neighborhood

schools. The other two participants opted to enroll their child in a non-neighborhood school.

Two of the study participants share in the transportation of their children to and from school with at least one of their children's fathers. Four of the participants in this research study use their personal vehicles to transport their children to school each day which amounts to an average daily commute of 9.6 miles per day round trip and a minimum of 48 miles per week. This amounts to 1,296 traveling miles in a typical 180-day school year (based upon 27 school weeks). Additionally, the commute time for the children, usually between 20 and 30 minutes each way, results in time lost because it is challenging to participate in extracurricular activities, to complete homework or to prepare for school while driving.

Extracurricular activities build new skills, broaden horizons, enable new friendships, and minimize screen time. Extracurricular activities also support academic performance, contribute to higher self-esteem, social opportunities, and support the development of essential life skills. When children are spending a significant amount of time commuting to school, they lose valuable time that could be spent participating in after school extra-curricular programs. The cumulative total of time spent in transportation to and from school each week amounts to more than 3 hours traveling to and from school. Annually, this amounts to more than 100 hours in transportation not to mention the cost of gas and car repairs necessary for regular school participation to occur, according to professors from Villanova and Stanford Universities, students should have up to but no more than 20 hours weekly of extra-curricular activities. (Parker, 2014)

All of the participants had some experience with post-secondary education. Two of the five have taken community college classes. Three of the five interviewed have a Bachelor’s degree although each of them had a non-traditional pathway (did not go directly to college after high school). Each of the participants in this research study has a source of income independent of state or federally-sponsored systems of economic support. Three of them work full-time for a large urban school district. Table 1 outlines participants in this research study, their occupation, education level, their children and whether or not they are attending their neighborhood school, whether or not they attended pre-school and the average weekly hours they spend commuting (driving their child to school if they don’t attend their neighborhood school).

Table 1: Participant Education, Work and Schooling

Parent	Occupation	Ed Level	Children	Neighborhood School	Pre-School	Wkly Hours Commute
Evelyn	para-educator residential shelter worker	Community College	2	Yes	Yes	0
Alexis	social worker	Bachelor’s	1	No	Yes	40
Amber	human resources	Bachelor’s	3	No	Yes	60

	mgr					
Pam	child-care provider	Community College	2	No	Yes	60
Tonya	para-educator	Bachelor's	3	No	Yes	80

Evelyn: “I felt like I wasn’t expected to do well.”

The first participant, Evelyn, is the mother of two children ages 13 (daughter) and 9 (son). Evelyn worked in a full-time teacher support role. Evelyn worked with students in segregated classrooms which had historically been referred to as the “B” classrooms (b for behavior). Currently, these special classrooms are referred to as socio-emotional skills classrooms. Evelyn’s children attended a large urban school before being enrolled in a smaller school district in a neighboring county. She was raised by her maternal grandmother in Portland from the time she was two weeks of age. Her great aunt flew her to Portland after she was born in a Seattle hospital. Her mother and father were addicted to drugs and alcohol and were incapable of caring for her. Evelyn is now 37 years of age and neither of her parents has overcome their addictions. Evelyn lived in the same home with her grandmother, her first cousins, and an extended network that included her late great-grandmother who played an integral role in her development.

Evelyn had been enrolled in a teacher preparation program partnership which provided tuition and academic support to participants who aspired to be teachers. The program was “designed to recruit and help prepare culturally competent teachers, with a

special focus on historically underrepresented groups in the teaching profession. (PCC). While Evelyn was a participant in the program, she was working toward completing her lower division requirements to be able to transfer to a four-year university; however, this specialized program's future is now uncertain. During the time of this study, callers would hear a pre-recorded message that read, "this office is not staffed at this time," and no current application or information could be found on the website. The program director's recent retirement appears to have coincided with the closure of the program, at least according to any search for news and information on the website where the program has been housed and managed for the past 30 years. Evelyn expressed her desire to continue her education despite many obstacles.

Evelyn also had a non-traditional pathway toward post-secondary education. She attended more than five alternative schools after starting 9th grade at a local high school. She ended up earning her GED (General Equivalency Diploma) from an alternative school. She went to cosmetology school and completed a program in hair design, working several odd jobs before going back to school. Just before her 24th birthday, Evelyn welcomed her daughter. Before her daughter's 1st birthday, she enrolled in the skills center at the local community college, took more classes and then eventually applied to the teacher preparation program partnership. Issues outside of school adversely impacted her ability to persist in the program so after a year, she dropped out and later re-enrolled. She welcomed a second child and dropped out of the program altogether. Evelyn has ample credits to transfer to the university; she still envisions a college degree in her future. Evelyn shared that a large reason for her struggles were impacted by what

she describes as unhealthy relationships with her children's fathers. The toxicity of those relationships impacted her ability to see her goals to completion.

Alexis: "I pop up in class occasionally."

The second participant interviewed, Alexis, is the parent of one middle-school aged daughter who for multiple years attended a language immersion public school. At the time of the interview, her daughter was an 8th grader attending four schools since she started kindergarten. Her daughter did attend two language immersion elementary schools, but once in middle school, Alexis did not continue to pursue the language immersion option.

Alexis was reared by her mother and her stepfather between Portland and Texas. She went to a community college directly after high school then took two years off to work. Alexis began her undergraduate studies at a historically Black university in Texas but soon dropped out. She went back to finish her degree at an Oregon university while pregnant with her daughter who is now in 8th grade. When Alexis finally graduated from college, her daughter was three years of age. Alexis eventually found a career in the social services field.

Amber: "He's in Mandarin immersion because his dad wanted him in there."

The third participant, Amber, is the mother of three sons - one high school graduate, one attending a private high school and the third in an elementary school language immersion program. Her children do not currently attend their neighborhood school, but she commutes with them to her work-site in a school district they attend. Amber had her first son when she was a senior in high school; she dropped out of school and later returned to complete her high school equivalency before going to college. She

graduated from college with a degree in human resource management and now works full-time as an administrative professional.

Amber shares a story of being asked by her high school counselor whether she was anorexic because she was very thin. She reported having felt so discouraged and self-conscious about being seen as “very thin,” that she stopped going to school altogether. She was raised by her mother and her stepfather along with her siblings in the state of Oregon. Amber was a teen mother and while she was in high school, none of her teachers or counselors talked to her about going to college. Two key events happened - a high school track coach asking her about college and accompanying a friend who was taking the SAT (scholastic achievement test). Despite not knowing what it was, she tagged along to take the SAT and eventually was accepted into an Oregon university.

Pam: “My first-grade teacher really influenced me. She was the best teacher I ever had. When I see her, I give her a big hug.”

The fourth participant, Pam, has two elementary-school aged sons with two fathers. She has since had a third child. The father of her kindergarten age son has multiple children and he is involved in each of their lives. One of her children’s fathers, who was involved in his son’s life, was found guilty of a felony, and is serving a long-term prison sentence. He will be released from prison long after his son graduates from high school. Pam operates a day care program in her apartment caring for children in her community.

Pam has taken a few community college courses; she graduated from a public alternative high school and was raised by her maternal grandmother intermittently. She first went to live with her grandmother before kindergarten and remained there through

her mother and father's prison stints. Both parents struggled with addiction and had long-term involvement with the penal system. Her family cycle of grandmothers raising their children's children was repeated in Pam's own life. For example, her grandmother dropped out of middle school to help her own grandmother raise her own siblings because her mother was an alcoholic and her father wasn't around. Then, her grandmother turned around to raise seven of her own grandchildren (including Pam and her sister).

Pam lives in an apartment community with a history of crime and violence. What's interesting about Pam's neighborhood is that it bumps right up to another community that has been revitalized. The transformation included security services, social service programs and law enforcement to ensure that the neighborhood did not succumb to previous community obstacles, i.e., drug possession and distribution; property crimes; and gang activity. This participant lived in an apartment community that accepted federal housing subsidies (Section 8 housing). This contributes to the clustering of children and families facing similar obstacles who lack social and cultural capital and access to be able to live in a thriving, diverse and upwardly mobile neighborhood community. These neighborhoods are situated less than one mile away from a sewage treatment plant. Sewage pump stations and pipes emit the awful stench of wastewater 24 hours a day.

Tonya: "So my kids are not attending their neighborhood school as an African American single mom in the Black schools they're not getting the support that the White schools get."

The fifth participant, Tonya, has three children - one middle school son, a 5th grade daughter, and a 2nd grade son. Her oldest son was diagnosed with an intellectual disability. The children have no contact with their father as ordered by the court. Tonya has a large extended family network that provides childcare and social activities. She lived with her mother and father in an intergenerational household for a number of years before moving into her own home with her children. This has created tension because her parents were closely involved in the rearing of her oldest child who receives financial and other support for developmental and intellectual delays. At the time of these interviews, Tonya was estranged from her mother and father because of her choice to move into a separate home. Her family relocated to Oregon during the 70's. Tonya and her siblings attended elementary schools and graduated from Oregon high schools. Tonya graduated from college with a general studies degree. She works two jobs - one in the hospitality industry and also works as an educational assistant

Tonya came to Oregon when she was five years of age with her four siblings. Her mother never worked and didn't go to school past 5th grade; she had her first child at 13. Tonya and her siblings struggled with education throughout school; their parents could not help with their education and insisted that the children come home directly after school. Her parents expected that school was where all learning took place. Tonya's high school counselor saw something special in her and encouraged her to go to an Oregon university; fortunately, she had multiple scholarships to help finance her tuition. She took remedial courses at the community college and then went to the university full-time. Tonya's mother encouraged her to drop out; no one in her family had a college degree and Tonya's mother felt that it was not a priority; however, her father encouraged her to

complete her degree since she had a scholarship. Tonya is the only person in her family who went on to college. Tonya is one of the first to pursue and complete a post-secondary education in her family.

Recruitment

The participants in this study were added in a layered manner during a six-month period while I was an elementary school principal for Portland Public Schools. The criterion for participation required that the marital status of female parent participants be single. This included women/mothers who are cohabiting but not formally married. This was in keeping with the research process of purposeful sampling. The participants were brought to my attention through relationships with parents during my 12-year professional career as a school district administrator and program manager. Through word of mouth among the Black community, names of potential participants were forwarded to me. I then contacted them through phone calls to tell them about the study and to request their involvement. I invited ten low-income, single, Black mothers of K-8 students in Oregon public schools to participate. Five mothers agreed to participate out of the sample of 10 potential applicants. Through text or phone calls, the participants and I scheduled a time to meet in different locations. At the initial meeting with each participant, I explained the study and shared the consent form with the women and obtained a signature before continuing with the first interview. This was occurring during a time when restrictions were imposed because of the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, participants wore masks and were socially distanced during interviews.

Qualitative research primarily focuses on participants' words and stories; therefore, I conducted individual interviews of 5 women. Purposeful sampling is a

research strategy whereby the researcher relies on her own judgment when choosing members to participate in the study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Purposeful sampling is intended to achieve two primary goals. The first goal is to find instances that are representative or typical of a particular type of case. The case in this study focused on single, Black mothers of children in K-12 Oregon schools in a particular area. The second goal of purposeful sampling is to achieve comparability across different types of cases (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). While there is a commonality of all the participants in this study, they are considered individual cases because their stories and experiences are unique to them. This sampling process allowed me to compare participants in order to understand similarities and differences in their stories.

The Oregon schools where the participants lived in or nearby included some startling demographics of a major school in the area. Of all the students that this school district serves, 8.7% or roughly 4,300 students are identified as Black. According to the Oregon Educator Equity Report (2019), only 2.7% of all 3,722 teachers are Black. The district employs roughly 100 Black teachers while they have 4,300 Black students. It is uncommon for a Black student to have a Black teacher during their schooling experience. This is not unique to Oregon but is a national phenomenon. In areas that have large numbers of Black students and higher numbers of Black teachers (relatively speaking), the trend and student-Black teacher ratios are reversing; in other words, no matter where you live, your chances of having a Black teacher are slim and don't appear to be getting any better. This landscape provides a picture of the socio-political context in which the study participants are situated.

Each of the participants is the parent of a child or children who have at one time or another attended an urban school district, which currently serves in excess of 46,000 students in the metropolitan area. All of the study participants attended public schools during all or part of their own K-12 education. Each of the participants shared a perspective of what it meant to be a single Black mother of children attending a K-12 public school. The common identifiers of the study participants include that they are each single and not currently married. Additionally, all of the participants qualify or have qualified for some form of public support, either federal financial aid, SNAP (supplemental nutrition assistance program) benefits, unemployment, housing assistance (Section 8), and/or state-sponsored child-care assistance. In summary, the five single Black mother study participants shared their unique stories providing insight into shared common experiences and the ways in which they made meaning of their own and their children's experiences.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data collected in this study primarily consisted of in-depth qualitative interviews. Seidman explained that an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience is at the heart of interviewing (2006). For this study, I used a model of in-depth, phenomenological interviews and held three separate interviews with each study participant. The first interview sought to understand the context of the participants' experience. The second interview allowed study participants to detail their experience within the context in which it occurred. The third and final interview was intended to allow study participants to reflect on the meaning their experience has for them. Ultimately, this study aimed to provide a glimpse

into how five Black, single, low-income mother participants interpret their experiences and interactions with public educational cultures and institutions.

These five participants were interviewed three times following Seidman's in-depth phenomenological interview protocol. Through this interview process, it was important to amplify the voices of the participants. As single Black mothers, their experiences reflect the experience of Black women throughout the country who have been stigmatized by educational entities. Seidman supports "valuing the words of the participant because those words are deeply connected to that participant's sense of worth." He goes on to explain that when using interviewing as a way to collect data, we should "respect the dignity of those interviewed" (p. 110). As a researcher, I attempted to connect with and respect the study participants by honoring and valuing their lived experiences and stories.

As a researcher, all of the data we collect is interpreted through our own lens. My awareness was not only intellectual but also at a deeper person level as a woman who is Black and also a single mother.

Research Questions

Using the Critical Race Theory framework, the following questions guided the development of this research:

1. What are the ways that low-income, single Black mothers communicate to help their children cope with the racism they will face in society?
2. How do low-income, single Black mothers prepare their children for public K-12 education?

3. In what ways do low-income, single Black mothers counter the negative stereotypes and low expectations held by some school personnel?

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted three in-depth interviews of the five participant Black mothers of Oregon K-12 students. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. I sought permission to audio record the individual interviews and later had the individual interview data transcribed using an online transcription service. The fifteen interviews were conducted over a 4-month period. Participation was voluntary and participants understood that they were free to withdraw at any time.

The interview process began with an invitation to engage in conversation, reflection, and sharing of their personal stories. A soft start for the interview allowed for time to engage in informal conversation to help participants to connect and to feel more comfortable. The interview questions and interactions focused on parent perspectives and did not seek to elicit responses that could be seen as damaging. If the participant disclosed information that placed them at risk or revealed a pressing need, the researcher provided community resources and information to assist the participant. In accordance with Institutional Review Board procedures to protect participant data, the researcher created pseudonyms and did not use real names orally or in written format. Documents and audio tapes were placed in a locked, secure cabinet that only the researcher was able to access. Identities of the participants and their pseudonyms were not kept with the data.

Electronic files were stored on the researcher's computer that is secure and password protected. Throughout this study, I utilized a culturally-sensitive research approach.

Role of the Researcher

I am Black, a single mother who is the daughter of a single mother and the research questions had personal meaning for me. Further, I am in a leadership role in a school setting and I worked to ensure that participants did not feel pressured or coerced into participating. I also recognize that my role allowed me access because of my relationship to the topic and the participants. As a researcher, if I were a middle-aged white male, I may have a difficult time establishing rapport in a group of Black women. I recognize that I had an advantage because my race, gender and age afforded me the opportunity to connect with my participants in a way that another researcher might not be able to. The intersection of race and gender along with deep cultural bonds among Black women fosters a common understanding based on shared life experiences.

During my twelve-year career as a school district leader, I served as a school building administrator which afforded me access to families. In my role, I know many of my students and their families. In 2011, I organized a school district program, Young Gifted and Black, specifically for African American/Black students and families. Students were nominated for recognition and each year we selected students to be recognized. Through this process, I encountered many Black students and met their families. As well, I participated in the organization and facilitation of Black Family

Nights at two public elementary schools. Coupled with my role as a researcher, I acknowledge the assets and social-cultural capital I hold.

Data Analysis

Data for this qualitative research was collected and analyzed using a Critical Race Theory framework. The main data source were the 15 in-depth interviews where participants shared their perspectives, experiences, and reflected on their lives as single Black women raising children in Oregon's educational system. This allowed me to study the experiences, attitudes, decisions, and values of low-income, single Black women in order to provide a counternarrative to the dominant assumptions held about single Black mothers. I attempted to document and understand "meaning" from the point of view of low-income Black mothers and interpret this within the broader social and political context. **Therefore, this research focused attention on study seeks to understand how low-income, single Black mothers of K-12 students convey their values and expectations for the schooling and education of their children.**

Using Critical Race Theory as an analytical tool allows this research to give voice that empowers Black mothers as individuals and members of disenfranchised communities to systematically improve school and Black family partnerships and Black student achievement. One of the tenets of Critical Race Theory is counter-storytelling (narratives) which is a tool for contradicting racist characterizations of social life and exposing race neutral discourse, revealing how white privilege operates to reinforce and support unequal racial relations in society. Therefore, this research focused on low-income, Black single mothers in order to provide an increased understanding of how their lived experiences and their values about education are conveyed. Research approaches

that provide the space to be heard and are responsive to our needs can bridge an understanding of the impact of educational policies, procedures, and practices affecting the Black community. Tillman (2002) suggests: Culturally sensitive research approaches both recognize ethnicity and culture as central to the research process. When research about Black people is culturally-sensitive, the varied aspects of their culture and their varied historical and contemporary experiences are acknowledged. She goes on to say that:

[A]n argument for the use of culturally-sensitive research approaches within the field of qualitative research is based on the assumption that interpretive paradigms offer a greater possibility for the use of alternative frameworks, co-construction of multiple realities and experiences, and knowledge that can lead to improved educational opportunities of African-Americans” (p.5).

Culturally-sensitive research approaches align with the Critical Race Theory framework, and specifically the use of counternarratives as an analytical tool for amplifying the voices of single Black mothers and taking seriously their experiences with racism and stories of resilience (Sleeter, 2017). As a researcher, I understood the historical and contemporary landscape of public education in Oregon because of my career as an educator where I prioritized making connections with Black families. While it felt natural to me, upon reflection, I recognize that I was operationalizing a culturally-responsive approach to my dissertation study.

After the recordings of the 15 in-depth interviews were transcribed, I read through the transcripts several times. I reviewed the printed transcripts and made notes in the margins about the different topics that caught my attention. During the next phase of

analysis, I began to create a code book and reviewed my notes in the margins to cluster similar ideas under initial codes. Ryan and Bernard (2003) refer to this process of clustering as creating units of meaning, or concepts, as “expressions” of a theme. Braun and Clark (2006) refer to these as “codes.” At the end of this first stage of the process, I had seven categories that my data could be chunked under. These categories were:

- Student/Parent Black teacher relationship;
- Negative White teacher experiences or interactions
- Preparation before child entered school
- Home preparation / Homework for everyday school
- Social Isolation in predominantly White schools
- Discriminatory experiences at school
- Personal accountability/presence at school

During the second phase of the analysis, I reflected on the topics, re-read the transcript, and began to cluster participant responses under three themes. This process also refers to Guba and Lincoln’s (2005) reflexivity. The field of qualitative research doesn’t include the term of validity very often; however, trustworthiness of the research study emerges from reflective practice, systematic data collection and protocols and procedures in data analysis. (Lincoln & Guba, 2005) Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research has included multiple definitions and subcomponents to a variety of researchers (Krefting, 1991). Lincoln and Guba (2005) refer to trustworthiness as fairness and authenticity. Fairness refers to the aim of including participant voice and perspective, with varied opinions, in the analysis and interpretation. This research study met the goal of trustworthiness from conceptualization to research questions to participant inclusion and

analysis. The study afforded an opportunity for low-income Black women to tell their stories in an effort to counter the dominant narrative and to afford them an opportunity to talk, in their own words, about education and their children.

I identified areas of repetition among expressions to determine if a theme was prevalent (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I established a theme where I perceived multiple similar expressions to exist. Where there were expressions that seemed to fit across themes, I reflected on whether the themes were similar enough to collapse or if one was a subcategory of another. The three themes that emerged after this process were Societal Racism, Incongruent Home-School Relations, and Counterstories, which were considered within the theoretical backdrop of Critical Race Theory.

Within the framework of Critical Race Theory, the presence of racism and discrimination raised critical questions and sought to amplify the voices of those who are often ignored and marginalized in society. The lack of consistent representations, values and practices between home and school operate as places of conflict but can also work in harmonious collaboration (De La Vega, 2005). Counternarratives, which recognize and value minority lived experiences and support equity and social justice became a central focus of this dissertation study. By giving power to the voices of individuals and communities, counter-storytelling fights against dominant culture narratives that lack the knowledge and wisdom that minority individuals hold about themselves and their traditions, cultures, communities, homes, struggles, and needs. The next chapter brings forth the participants' voices and counternarratives that emerged from the data analysis process.

CHAPTER IV: Presentation of Findings

This chapter examines and describes who the single, Black mother study participants were and presents an analysis of their responses to three in-depth interviews following Seidman's (2019) protocol. As noted in the previous chapter, there were three themes that emerged from the data analysis process: Societal Racism, Home-School Partnerships, and Counterstories. This study was specifically aimed at identifying the ways that single Black mothers convey their educational values to their children. The study examined the experiences of mothers in their own voices and narratives in response to a series of questions regarding what educational expectations, values and associations are transmitted regarding schooling and education to their own children.

The first section contextualizes the participants' lives in a broader, macro-level context and will detail how each participant has been impacted by racism and how it collectively contributes to an accumulation of discriminatory forces in their lives. The Societal Racism theme describes how the participants experienced and understood the societal forces that they and their children faced in their day-to-day living, including their interaction with public education. The second section of this chapter explores participants' perceptions of the role that school staff play, positively or negatively, in the educational experiences and outcomes for their children. The theme of Incongruent Home-School Relations will be examined as events and interactions that involve teachers/school personnel which often resulted in marginalization of children and their mothers. The impact of "being invisible" contributed to feelings of harm and being misunderstood among the single Black mothers in this study. The last section will focus on the theme of Counternarratives. The essence of these participants' voices is central to

amplifying counternarratives and challenge widely held assumptions and stereotypes of Black families, mothers, and children. This study will bring to life stories of low-income, single-Black mothers and their own and their children's educational experiences.

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to understand how perspectives of and values for education are reflected in low-income, single-Black mother's actions and communications.

Theme 1: Societal Racism

“They Just Assume”

The tool for analysis became the theoretical frame of Critical Race Theory which examines how racism permeates all aspects of society, including the educational system. Societal norms in the United States carry many assumptions and beliefs about how people, especially non-White people, should interact, behave, and what a family should “look like.” Amber shared an experience where stereotypes were reinforced in her child's interactions with his teacher.

Maybe I'm nitpicking but his English teacher picks books and reads to him. When she finally picks a book with Black kids in it, the story starts off with the parents getting a divorce and they're angry which is just strange to me. All the other books, it's princesses and kids being happy and this one's all...I don't know if I'm going to say anything at this point but knowing me, I am going to say something. Why out of all the books, you pick the one where the kid has a negative experience?

Public education is replete with dominant culture curriculum and White teachers who reinforce White values and norms (Delpit, 1995). When non-White life experiences are

introduced at school, they are often from a limited, narrow and/or stereotypical lens and seldom through a broad, comprehensive or “minority” perspective. These kinds of actions contribute to an educational environment where children and their families may feel ignored, unseen, and inferior.

There is a stigma about Black single mothers and a widely held assumption that they do not care about or are not invested in the education of their children (Collins, 2016). As an example of how Black mothers experience these assumptions, Evelyn shared that her child’s teacher rarely communicated and even avoided sharing information altogether.

Sometimes, they’ll assume certain things about you, that you don’t have certain resources available or that you’re not interested in your child’s educational needs as much as if they come from a two-parent home or if there was a white parent. They just assume that you’re not as concerned. It seemed like whenever I would ask questions about my son, she seemed like she would be caught off guard, like she’d be surprised that I would ask those questions.

Evelyn’s children attended a school where few Black families were part of the school population, one in which she and her children were racially under-represented. This example highlights how her family experienced discomfort, exclusion, negative assumptions, and low expectations from school representatives. It was clear from Evelyn’s interactions that the school staff had deficit-oriented, preconceived ideas about her as a parent.

Another example of dominant assumptions is a belief that one should be married before having children. The fact that all of the participants were never married is the first

counter narrative that emerged in this study. There is also an assumption or idea that “single mothers” don’t have the fathers’ support. This notion is not aligned with the data from this study. For example, Table 2 provides a picture of a family structure that is counter to the dominant narrative.

Table 2 Participant’s Family Structure

Participant	Marital Status	Age	Father Involvement	Number of Children	Age Range of Children
Evelyn	Single/Never Married	37	Yes	2	9-13
Alexis	Single/Never Married	40	No	1	13
Amber	Single /Never Married	40	Yes	3	9-18
Pam	Single/Never Married	27	Yes	2	1-10
Tonya	Single /Never Married	42	No	3	6-11

Table 2 outlines the participants, their marital status, their age, the involvement of their child’s father and information about their child(ren). All five participants selected for this study are single and have never been married. For this research study, I was particularly interested in single mothers and with purposeful sampling, all of my participants in this study ended up being single mothers who had never married. This was interesting to note as well as the age range of the participants who were from 27 through 42. Participants’ children are from as young as kindergarten to college-aged. Each of the participants had children attending an Oregon public school and all but one participant had a child in

elementary school, 3 of the 5 participants have children in middle school and one participant has a child currently in high school. Three of the five participants have some involvement from the father of at least one of their children although each participant is the primary, psychological parent, and provider for their children.

In the U.S., the dominant narrative of a family structure is two married parents. This narrative is supported by public policies that discouraged economic support for two-parent Black families in particular. Public benefits were often denied to poor in-tact families (mother and father living together). This, among other historical factors, led to a rise in single Black mother-led households. Racism, a global phenomenon, is pervasive in every aspect of life. Black women, while increasingly assuming the primary custodial parenting role, also faced the stigma assigned to them regarding their interest in, and capacity for, the education of their children. They are forced to live in communities that are not only financially accessible to them but also where they are welcomed. These tend to be communities that are racially segregated and economically oppressed. Consequently, the schools are more often racially segregated and do not receive equitable funding and support. Evelyn describes how finding an affordable and welcoming place to live took precedence over school choice.

I have went through a process to decide the school before, but because of my living situation, I did not consider the school at all or the district. I was more concerned about making sure I could live somewhere that was affordable at that time. I wish, kind of, thinking back on it, I wish that I would have been more concerned about the schools that they were at.

Evelyn did not let these restrictions deter her from advocating for her children. Often schools that are deemed “good schools” are in communities where housing is financially inaccessible. In Evelyn’s situation, she petitioned to advocate for a special school for her son to attend. She explained that, *“I met the deadline, I did everything I was supposed to do, and I really believe it was because, due to my economic background, to where I lived at, they didn’t want to let him into that school.”*

The participants experienced racism during their own life experiences which shaped how they felt as learners. As well, their own experiences with racism directly impacted how they prepared their children. For example, some of the participants spoke about not wanting their children to have the same experiences that they did. Evelyn mentioned that *“I was really concerned about the way that the teacher would make them feel if they needed help or if they didn’t do things correctly. I didn’t want them to have the same experiences I had.”* She goes on to explain how she supports and advocates for her children.

If they’re struggling with something, I make sure that I make myself available and I let them know that it’s okay to struggle with stuff, that that’s completely normal and that it’s smart to ask for help and to accept help. I make sure that they know, Then I let them know that I’m willing to sit next to them until they work through whatever...if it’s academic, especially, because I dealt with academic esteem a lot in school that I don’t want my kids to have to go through that.

Other participants shared similar ways in which they advocate for their children and prepare their children for schooling and life experiences where racism is pervasive. Amber described an experience her son had which had a profound impact on his understanding of how racism operates in society.

Yeah, by them getting pulled over by the cop for no reason. My oldest son, I kept trying to explain to him, not trying to sound racist or anything, you need to watch out for cops and everything else. Then his friend get pulled over at gun point right in front of my house. He had to go outside and tell the cops, "Yeah, they're coming here." They wanted to know why they live in the neighborhood. Now him and his friends don't even want to have anything to do with the cops. I don't think my middle son is really experienced it but it's all on the internet, so you see.

For Black families, having crucial conversations regarding how to interact with law enforcement officers is a matter of life and death. The repercussions of this all-too common experience for her son and his friends are likely to be long-lasting. Pam shares a similar talk with her young son about how she feels she must share the harsh reality of racism.

I tell my children the truth about why police are doing what they're doing, why people are out there marching for Black Lives Matter. I tell my children the truth and I tell them all the time that you are a black man, you are a black kid. It's going to be hard for you. So, we're going to need to learn about what's going on so that you won't be in the way. You know?

In Pam's talk with her son, she prepared him for the interactions he would have that are crucial conversations that Black parents have with their children and especially their sons. Black men are dangerously viewed as violent, disrespectful, unintelligent, hyper-masculine and anti-social and these harmful stereotypes impact how they experience school, how school staff interact with them and how they ultimately approach the learning process (Harper, 2006). Stereotypes rooted in deficits, criminality, moral deficiency, and intellectual inferiority adversely impact the life and school experiences for Black children and their families. Sue (2007) who studied the effects of microaggressions, writes that the inherent message in racism is that the White race is superior and all other races are inferior. Sue also recognizes that the experiences and feelings of Black people

as racial/cultural beings are often invalidated in spaces where White dominant cultural ways of being are the norm and the standard by which non-White people are measured. Facing many forms of resistance from society and in schools puts Black children and their families at a disadvantage from the start.

Theme 2: Incongruent Home-School Relations

“I just always felt like I wasn’t good enough”

Participant responses were also categorized under Incongruent Home-School Relations – these were responses that in some way reflected interactions with school staff and cross-cultural communication that resulted in conflict. Participants described low expectations from their own teachers and from their own children’s teachers. For example, Evelyn shared feelings of being overlooked and detailed how her early experiences adversely impacted her developing a strong sense of self and influenced her own achievement in school and her comfort interacting with school staff.

When I was in kindergarten and I would raise my hand or ask for help, the teacher would never...it seemed like he would never reply, like he never would come over and help me with anything. It just seemed like he always overlooked me. Like I was overlooked a lot. So, from that point on, I kind of was scared to ask for help in school. I can remember - and maybe he didn’t do it on purpose - but I never had a connection with any of my teachers prior to the fifth grade, because of them not...Not seeming like they wanted to know me or cared to help. I didn’t have a connection with them. So, I think that at times when I needed help and my

need wasn't met, that created a negative experience for me with my teachers, where I didn't trust that they had my best interest.

Evelyn attended a predominantly Black elementary school in Oregon. Her experiences were not isolated incidents but were patterned experiences in which she felt ignored and overlooked. Evelyn did not share explicit incidents in which her teacher told her that she did not belong or expressly refused to help her; however, there was a subtlety in the messaging where she was able to read her teacher's non-verbal cues. In other words, Evelyn noticed from the time she started school that she was treated differently, less favorably than other students in her classroom. She commented on how she was overlooked, seldom called upon to answer questions and not recognized when she did accomplish things in school.

I realized that my teachers wouldn't call on me first when I had my hand up to answer questions. I was overlooked often. I did not get praised when I did accomplish things in school. I just always felt like I wasn't good enough.

The experiences that Evelyn shared revealed a pattern that many Black children experience such as low expectations, isolation, feeling unseen. This in turn can create self-doubt for learners. This is a clear example of how cultural incongruence contributed to a disconnect between the student's home life and their school experience.

Alexis describes similar feelings during her early school experiences in an all-white elementary school in Texas where she briefly lived with her grandparents. Several decades later, she was able to recall being treated unjustly.

I remember I was having to unfairly put my name on the sad face board for every little thing. For me as a kid, I didn't feel like it was warranted compared to what I

was viewing other children having to do. I had all white teachers there. It was predominantly all white students.

In this situation, the teacher created a common classroom management system that was punitive. Alexis felt targeted when having to be “called out” for her behavior, while her peers were not punished in the same way. She noticed this at a young age, much like Evelyn. Alexis described feeling that her presence at school was of no consequence, that it essentially did not matter. *“I don’t really recall any of the teachers really being invested in what I was doing.”* These reflections from Alexis and Evelyn from their school experiences were examples of how racism serves to marginalize individuals, including children, by neither recognizing their talents and gifts nor their presence.

“That was why we ended up moving out of there”

The childhood experiences and interactions of the participants in this study, years later, are not different from the experiences of their children. One of the tenets of Critical Race Theory is Critique of Liberalism, which challenges the idea that changes regarding racial disparities happen incrementally, advantaging White people to the detriment of Black children and their families. A generation later, the study participants described that their children faced discriminatory experiences and microaggressions (Sue, 2007) at school - in the classroom, in the cafeteria and on the playground. For example, Evelyn shared the following:

I feel like it was not addressed properly at all but my son has had comments about his complexion made, my daughter has dealt with racism, comments about her complexion made in the school. Both of them been called derogatory racial names at school.

Both of Evelyn's children had school experiences in which they were singled out because of their skin color by other children. They were excluded from play and other activities, and at times, called highly-charged, offensive, and demeaning names. Evelyn goes on to explain: *"Both of them experienced the racism part in school. My baby had one of the kids talking about [how they] can't play with them.... because his skin was black or something."*

Similarly, Alexis' daughter was frequently pulled out of class to meet with the Black school staff member to address student conflicts associated with race. Alexis grew so tired of the racial harassment her daughter faced that she moved her to a different school.

Any issues they had, they were then shuffled out to the Black school SUN coordinator, who...that was really not her job or her role. She was actually called the N word a couple times by one particular girl. That was why we ended up moving her out of there.

In Oregon schools, SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) is an after-school program funded in partnership by the county and the school district and run by a SUN coordinator, in this case, a Black woman. Typically, student conflicts are referred to a counselor, student management specialist or administrator; however, in the example that Alexis provides, it was assigned to the after-school coordinator even though it was not her role or responsibility. The nature of the conflict (Alexis' child being called the "N" word) warranted involvement by school staff.

Pam described treatment that was not hostile; however, she believed that her son had difficulty forming friendships because, in a predominantly white school, the color of his skin was often viewed as a barrier.

I feel like sometimes he's not comfortable because kids can be mean, you know. And he's not the same color as most of them. So, I feel like he might feel uncomfortable to play with...I feel like sometimes he's not accepted with the other...the same gender as him and I think that's why he plays with a lot of girls...I think girls understand him more than boys of a different race.

In Pam's attempt to understand what was going on with her son in the school, she reflected on her own understanding about racism and how skin color/phenotype can make children feel excluded or isolated.

“They told me I'm not welcome there”

The participants in this study described their childhood experiences which were, decades later, in lock-step with the experiences of their children. They described schools in which they felt isolated and shared multiple examples in which their children were excluded or mistreated because of their race. Participants went on to describe their interactions with school staff in both how they felt they were perceived (as parents) as well as how they were treated. Lareau's (2002) study found that Black parents are least likely to be able to negotiate schools and institutions on behalf of their children. Lareau's research seems to situate the problem at the feet of Black families; however, Tonya's experience reflects a level of fear and apprehension on the part of teachers which adversely impacted their ability to develop supportive home-school partnerships.

But sometimes I feel like the teachers are afraid to reach out to Black parents because they don't know what's going on. I'm like, I know this parent. She don't know her child is acting like this...they don't reach out to the parents and I guess they feel like if the parents do come up there and "act up," that's a scare tactic so they don't reach out to the parents.

The stereotype of the angry Black woman and teachers being afraid to speak with them is reflected in the experiences Tonya shared. Black families are often labeled as broken; Black mothers as loud and uneducated; and Black children as bad and deviant troublemakers (Emdin, 2016; Morris 2016; Reynolds 2010). School solutions often come from the notion of 'fixing' Black families for whom there is common belief that they lack skills and knowledge to add anything of value to their children's education' (Childs, 2005)

Tonya explained that school staff would not communicate with her even to the degree that when she attempted to communicate, she was told that she was not welcome.

It was no communication whatsoever. I communicated with the staff up there, they wouldn't even communicate back. It was only for my son's best interests. Like, "What is he learning? I don't want my child playing a game. I would take a visit up to the school. They told me I'm not welcome there, I had to ask why I'm not welcome here. I said, "Give me a hall pass, I'm going to see where my child is."

In this example, Tonya advocated for herself and pushed back on the district's policy of needing to give 24-hour's notice before getting access to her son's classroom and teacher. While the school staff may not have directly stated the words 'you're not welcome,' the impact of this experience made Tonya feel that she was, in fact, not welcome. The

response of the school implied that they are not partners. Tonya was trying to advocate for her son, yet was stuck in a rule-governed school system that did not accommodate her needs or alleviate her concerns. Pam tried to remember the name of her child's second grade teacher who she felt targeted her son. This white male teacher was focused on pathologizing her son's behavior. Pam described the teacher "picking on" her son and she felt the situation was compounded by the fact that she was a single Black mother. In her own words, there was the intersectionality of gender and race in the teachers' views and she felt that this teacher behaved this way because her son did not have Black male figures coming to the school to check on him. In other words, he would not have bullied and intimidated a black male the way he did Pam. In this case, not only was her son targeted but she also felt devalued and ignored.

There was a teacher that he had, I think it was third grade. It was a white male teacher and I always just felt like he always just picked on him. Like, throughout the whole school year because of who he was, you know? I think because he was Black and he only had his mom there. He didn't have no male figure coming up to the school...Second grade, yeah. He just always just picked on him...It was just always something throughout the whole school year.

The above example highlights interactions in which the school teacher focused on this student's deficits and didn't demonstrate that he sought to understand her child through building a relationship and connections with him. Pam also described that the teacher only called when he felt there was a problem with her son. These frequent negative exchanges made Pam feel that her son was a target.

“I had to straighten him out”

Many of the participants' experiences were described as feelings, attitudes, and perceptions. They detailed encounters in which they felt treated differently, noticeably inconsistent with teacher and staff treatment of other parents who are White. Each participant described ways in which they felt ignored and excluded and also provided examples of ways in which their child's teacher held low-expectations of their children. In a prior quote, Evelyn described how her son's teacher would withhold information and limit communication. In the following quote, she described the nature of her relationship with this teacher.

This teacher, one of my son's teachers, I came to ask for information and she always left out information from me. She never included me in... She never brought things to my attention that were supposed [to be brought to my attention]. She also made a comment about me dropping him off late one time in front of my son and in front of his sister. I don't know if race has something to do with it or not but I would assume that if I was one of the White parents at the school, she wouldn't have been talking about me to my children. I had to address that.

In the above example, Evelyn felt that this was an attempt to shame her in front of her children. She described ways in which she attempted to engage with her child's teacher that were met with passive non-compliance and when the teacher made the remark about their late arrival, it felt disrespectful. Evelyn's way of addressing this incident was to follow up with the school counselor requesting a meeting to discuss the teachers' inappropriate communication.

Alexis noticed that her child's math teacher expressed surprise that her daughter, who was struggling in math, completed extra credit work. This teacher went so far as to say that he didn't expect her to do the extra credit work, although he had offered it to all students.

I had one teacher - actually this year - her math teacher, I had to straighten him out, because she struggles in math and so I was helping her with some homework and I had her to do extra credit, extracurricular. And he told her, he was like, "Oh wow, I didn't expect you to do that."

The comment appeared to have triggered a reaction from Alexis, who felt compelled to "straighten him out." This can be interpreted in multiple ways; however, it is an example of how a subtle remark from the teacher conveyed a different expectation to Alexis' daughter.

The examples above detailing Alexis and Evelyn's experiences interacting with their children's teachers demonstrate the actions that they took to advocate for their children. Instead of accepting the manner in which they were treated which left them feeling disrespected, they took action to "straighten them out." They took steps to educate and expect respectful communication for themselves and their children from school staff.

While all of the study participants described interactions with school staff which often left them feeling devalued, each of them also discussed experiences in which they felt included, honored, and cared for. These counter experiences reflect moments in which they experienced more harmonious and culturally-responsive interactions with school staff.

“She expected greatness from all of us” Cultural Compatibility

Participants discussed with precise detail, teachers who had a positive impact on their schooling experiences. Often, participants described that these teachers, in many cases, shared their own racial identity and were culturally compatible. They also described teachers for whom their child had a positive educational experience. Evelyn shared her early experiences in public schools recounting ways in which she felt ignored and excluded. She endured four years of negative experiences before she found a teacher who made a profound and lasting impact on her academic esteem and her connection to school. This teacher, who was Black, routinely celebrated small accomplishments, providing her with one-on-one attention and motivating her to believe in her ability to excel academically. This teacher demonstrated a growth mindset for students which in turn set Evelyn up for success at the end of elementary school and before her transition to middle school.

I had a teacher in the fifth grade that impacted me in a positive way because when I would make small strides towards academic excellence, she made a really big deal about it. She celebrated a lot where it motivated me to want to do more. And she pulled me aside a lot. She gave me a lot of one-on-one attention and she allowed me to know that she seen something in me, that she felt belief that I could do a lot of great things. And she set a standard for me and she allowed me to develop a different kind of confidence in myself.

The connection Evelyn shared with her teacher was broader than their shared racial identity although Evelyn expressed that her teacher was able to connect with her cultural background and understood her strengths as well as her struggles.

I feel like she related to me more because she came from my cultural background. That she understood my family dynamic the way my home life was, that she understood me better because of me coming from the same cultural background. She was really approachable. She made herself approachable to me. She would tell stories in class about her own personal life where we were able to connect with her. She had a twin sister that was disabled that would come to our classroom. She was a mother. She had a lot of children so her opinion was valued a lot. So, she was not just a teacher, she was like a mother figure, as well. And for a child that grew up without a mother, that's important. Yeah, she made herself very relatable to us, to all the students in the classroom, it seemed like. And she made herself available. She was always available to help us and to meet us wherever we were at to see us succeed. And she didn't really make a difference [in how she treated her students]. I didn't see her make a difference in the students, she expected greatness from all of us. She didn't have one greater expectation for another kid, it was the same.

Evelyn describes how her fifth-grade teacher shared aspects of her life with her classroom which allowed her students to relate to her authenticity. Additionally, she made herself available to meet their unique needs while holding high expectations for each of them. According to Evelyn, this teacher was able to know what each of her students needed, such as Evelyn's need for a positive maternal role model because of her mother's absence. Even though her teacher was aware of the familial obstacles some of her students faced, she did not hold low expectations for what they could achieve.

Alexis also describes her schooling experiences that have had an enduring impact on her life twenty years later. Unlike other study participants, Alexis' school experience is one in which Black teachers and Black administrators were commonplace. She contrasts her two early schooling experiences, one in which school staff and students were predominantly Black alongside another where she was one of a few Black students.

Overall, I had a really good experience...I just remember that I had a lot of Black representation. I had a lot of Black teachers. A lot of Black administrators. I was really immersed in predominantly Black schools. The only time I had an issue, I do recall having issues in Texas. Which was the opposite, despite that I was there with my Black family. The schools were not that integrated there. So that was my first time consciously knowing that I was dealing with some race stuff. You know? I didn't have the language, but I knew, it was the white girls versus me and my cousins.

While Alexis didn't have the words to describe the realization that she was experiencing racial conflict, she recognized that her interactions at a predominantly White school were bigger than her understanding, therefore she referred to it as "race stuff."

Alexis chronicles experiences with multiple teachers who held high but reasonable expectations for students while showing care and concern for the well-being of their students. The following quote describes one such teacher.

Just, she brought a different cultural lens. She is from Liberia. We did a lot of talking about that. I was introduced to African dance back then. She always checked in with us around going to school; how things were going, asking us

about grades, how class was going. Just having her be there. In middle school, I had Ms. E, she was my 6th grade teacher. I really loved her. She was very disciplined. She didn't play with us. But she was compassionate and had a heart. She admitted if she was wrong about anything. She was one of the first people that gave us input [she gave her students' voice] on how our class was run, and creating rules and the culture in our space.

Alexis described that her own childhood experiences with teachers included white teachers who held high expectations persistently seeking strategies for their academic engagement and success. A consistent approach that Alexis described among all of her teachers, no matter their race, is that they, “did not play.” This colloquialism suggests that there was a firm approach to teaching that did not appear to negatively impact the positive perception she had of her teachers.

*She had very high expectations of us. I had one really good, she was actually white, but I think her grandchildren were biracial. Miss *****, she was our math teacher that same year. She was also disciplined, she had high expectations, but she was really good at being creative about how we learned math. Even though I didn't get it, she found ways to get me involved and get pieces of it. I had Mr. **** in 7th grade. He was a Black teacher. I liked him overall. He was funny once you got to know him. I had a Black principal in middle school. Everybody seemed genuinely invested in whether I succeeded or not, and they didn't let me slide on stuff. There was always accountability and responsibility there. Mr. *** was really one of my favorite teachers there. He taught African American history class that was an*

elective at the high school. I was able to really dive into our culture with him. He didn't play either.

Amber went on to describe her high school African American male teacher who helped her during her senior year of high school. Prior to her experience with him, she had few encounters with teachers who took any interest in her personal well-being. He was the sole reason, she explained, that she found herself at a community college after high school.

Because when I wind up messing up my senior year and got pregnant. He was the one that said, "I still want you to go to school," and that's why I wind up going to community college and he sat there and he explained to me that I shouldn't give up, so I wind up going to college. Even though it took me a while to graduate, I wouldn't have went if he didn't say anything to me.

Amber's story provides a glimpse into what can happen when a teacher takes an interest in the well-being of students and mentors them, despite the hurdles they might face, to believe in themselves and to continue their education.

Tonya shared how powerful and life-changing, positive connections with teachers have been for her family. She met a Black teacher through her work as an instructional assistant at a local k-8 school. This teacher took a personal interest in the success of Tonya's children and provided packets and handouts for her children and even offered to do in-person tutoring. This teacher was not a teacher of her child but provides an example of a communal, collaborative support system that happened organically.

We became really close; we had a bond and I seen her teaching style and I started sharing information about my kids and she started being consistent. At this

present moment, I think she really liked me as a person so she start doing extra handouts and packages for the kids and she even offer to sit down and come to my house and do reading with C, being that that's my oldest son. T, [Tonya's child] was a little more here [hand gesture to demonstrate at a higher level]so she did reading groups in the morning with this teacher. R [Tonya's youngest child] was pre-K going into kindergarten so she was giving me packages for him to prepare him for kindergarten.

Tonya's description of this teacher provides an example of how educational support happened through multiple ways. The relationship she developed with this teacher was the first step in building trust and beginning to communicate in a more personal way. The educational support that this teacher provided was voluntary and aligned with what each of Tonya's children needed.

Pam also shared a positive memory about her own schooling experience. Her first-grade teacher was influential in creating a warm and nurturing school experience for her, flexing the school rules and expectations to provide what Pam needed in the absence of her parents who were incarcerated. This teacher recognized what is needed for a young child and used her awareness and positional authority to give Pam what she needed.

*My first-grade teacher, Ms. ***.she helped me through a lot. My mom was incarcerated, so it was just like she understood somehow. I don't know how but she was always there for me. She would give me that extra help when I'm having bad days. She allowed me to sleep up in the loft area when I was real tired, you know? Ms. *** really influenced me as a teacher. She really did. She was the best*

teacher I ever had. And she's still around. When I see her, I give her a big hug...She was my first Black teacher...I think my only.

What is striking about Pam's description of her first and only Black teacher was that this thread was seen in the narratives of all five participants. While Alexis spoke about multiple teachers, some who were not Black, having a positive impact on her, the critical nature of this finding resides in the relationship that the teachers, most of them Black, fostered with the participants. It is worth considering and exploring further the connections between identity, culture, and relationships in an educational context for Black children.

Theme 3: Counter-narratives

Counter-storytelling is used to magnify the stories, experiences, narratives, and truths of communities whose voices are ignored, devalued, made invisible and even trivialized. Narratives and experiences of white culture are pervasive and accepted as universal truths in American society. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) cast these as the "dominant" or "master narrative." These ideas and ideals have significant power and influence in social, institutional, and economic systems and structures. In order to shift power and to validate the experiences of communities who are marginalized, enlisting, centering, and honoring their voices, perspectives and experiences are crucial. The counterstory is a narrative that is in conflict with dominant narratives. A focus on counter-storytelling allows the individual or community who has an important stake to be able to, in an unrestricted manner, tell their story and to speak their truth. The participants in this study shared a common counter story to the notion of "family."

“She did do everything she could...for me to be successful in school”

The intergenerational support and connectedness of Black families has long been documented. It is not uncommon for Black children to live in multi-generational homes; to be reared by a grandparent and/or relative caregiver; or to have a grandparent or relative be in proximity playing a role in their educational and psychological development. In this study, three of the five participants interviewed described having lived with their grandparent during at least part of their childhood.

Alexis describes that she lived with her grandparents briefly and then was sent to Texas to live with different grandparents. She also described that her grandparents served as a safety net and were a protective factor in her upbringing, helping to shape her views and attitudes towards education and schooling.

We lived with my grandmother for a little bit, because her and my grandfather, they owned a home over here...Then at one point, my mom sent us to live in Texas, with my grandparents there.

Alexis was able to depend on her grandparents, partly because her mother needed their support as a single-mother raising Alexis and her siblings. During part of her childhood, Alexis and her mother lived with her maternal grandmother. Her maternal grandmother was a homeowner and provided shelter for her daughter and grandchildren when they needed it.

Evelyn was raised by her grandmother who had to work outside of the home extensively. Evelyn was born in Washington and at two weeks of age, was flown to her maternal grandmother by a relative. She was never raised by her mother or father, who both had long term alcohol, drug addiction and mental health issues. Evelyn reported that

she believed that her mother was addicted to drugs when she was born and that she may have been born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome as her mom had long-term dependence on crack/cocaine. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) is caused by the interruption of fetal exposure to drugs during pregnancy. Evelyn lived in a multi-generational home that at times included her uncles, aunts, cousins, and great-grandmother at one time. Evelyn's aunt (her mother's younger sister) also struggled with addiction. Her grandmother raised three of her grandchildren: Evelyn and her two cousins because their mothers were addicted to crack cocaine. Her grandmother was the matriarch of the family and a constant presence in Evelyn's life. She stated "*I was raised by my grandparent and she had to work a lot.*" Working outside the home allowed her grandmother to financially support her grandchildren.

Evelyn detailed that her grandmother helped to shape her attitudes and experiences largely by enrolling her in community and school-based educational programming. This included educational camps, academic intervention, and teacher-recommended programs.

I think the positive approach that my family had for me with my education is that my grandmother, even though she wasn't someone that would sit down and read books with me or anything like that, she did do everything she could to have me in programs that have the resources available for me to be successful in school. I think that her being resourceful allowed me to realize that she had a standard for me. I tried to do the same thing with my son just to make resources available, and myself, as well, with my children to provide, to meet their needs, if I feel like they have academic needs that need to be met.

Evelyn describes the positive and far-reaching impact that her grandmother's expectations and values had on her life and ultimately the lives of her two children. Her grandmother may not have met a school's expectation for parental involvement (i.e., reading at home, homework support, PTA, etc.); however, she demonstrated her value and commitment toward the education of her grandchildren in other ways.

Similarly, Pam was reared along with a sibling by her grandmother because of her parent's addiction; namely alcohol addiction. As well, Pam's mother and father had recurring interactions with the criminal justice system and were frequently incarcerated throughout Pam's childhood. She mainly lived with her grandmother although she did live with her mother intermittently. Pam's responses reflect that her experiences with schooling and education were mainly shaped by her grandmother's involvement.

At times it was tough for me. And I honestly believe because my grandma really couldn't teach me much in education because she dropped out of school I think in eighth grade, no sixth grade or something like that. And she had to take care of her siblings. So, she really didn't have that much education to teach me or my other siblings. So, I kind of struggled in school. Especially in elementary. So, I mean, it was rough at times. But when I got a hang of it was kind of cool. My grandma, she didn't play about us not doing our homework, or reading. Because we struggled with reading. Or going to school every day. She didn't care if we were sick or not. She'd get us up and make sure we get to that school bus.

Pam recounts that her grandmother insisted on regular attendance and participation in school which influenced how Pam now parents her own children. She details that, not only did her grandmother play a significant role in her educational development, but the

academic development of her children was transformed by her grandmother as well, as she describes in the following quote.

My grandma influenced me with my child, because she was around with my oldest child. And he had problems running out of class and stuff in kindergarten, first grade. So, she influenced me by just keep working with him, keep trying. Keep him level.

The influential role of multi-generational caregivers in the transmission of educational expectations and values was consistently highlighted among the participants interviewed for this study. Grandmothers were the most integrally involved in the direct educational experiences of the participants in this study. The participants described ways in which their grandmothers served as a bridge between school and home expecting homework to be completed and connecting them with resources. Pam describes that her grandmother had an active, visible presence at her school.

My grandma. She did the best she can... we all went to the same school. Every school. We all went to every school together. And on family nights she would come. She would make sure we were all there...She was involved in a lot at our school. Almost everybody knew her at every school that we went to. She made sure her face was present. That everybody knew who her kids were.

The involvement of grandparents as caregivers and liaisons between school and home was evident in the experiences of three of the five study participants. Conversely, Amber who during her early childhood was reared by her mother and father, described the challenges of her schooling experience and the peripheral involvement of her parents.

Sadly, my parents never really pushed education on us like that. So, it wasn't like...I don't recall coming home and them asking us, "Where's your homework?" and sitting down doing homework... My dad wasn't involved, he was back in California, so he wasn't involved at all. My mom, she went to a lot of sporting events. I don't recall her really going to any of the conferences. She wasn't that involved in school.

Amber's assessment of her parent's participation was that it was minimal. She describes that her parents didn't discuss school work or sit down with them to support homework completion. She does note that her mother came to support her sporting activities. This type of involvement is typically not recognized as a form of family engagement.

Tonya, who like Amber, was reared in a two-parent home, shared that there was a disconnect between her home and school. Her parents did not seem to convey a high value for schooling and education. Tonya described that there were expectations for what she should do at home, i.e., chores and cleaning. School expectations and values, for example, homework and regular attendance were not supported or reinforced in Tonya's home.

It wasn't really no big expectation. My dad, he worked a lot. He expected us to go to school but basically if I woke up in the morning and told my mom I didn't feel like going to school, it was pretty much stay home and clean up. It weren't no force. We didn't really have to do homework. We had a routine. We went to school, we came home, clean up and got ready for the next day. It wasn't no extra studying. It wasn't nothing like that. We weren't even forced to do homework.

Tonya disclosed how the lack of attention or connection to her schooling experience adversely impacted her academic development and had lifelong implications.

Growing up, it was a struggle because we didn't really have a lot of support. So when you have parents that doesn't finish high school and can't really support you it made it difficult. So, once I got to the fourth grade, I realize I was in trouble. I was having challenges and I didn't have a lot of support at home because of my parents couldn't help me. We didn't stay after school for the support. It was more like just go home and do the best you can and go back to school. So, the little learning that we did get was if I went in for recess or join library time if they made me stay behind and get support from a teacher. So, once I went to middle school it was all over. It was nothing but struggle from middle school and high school.

Tonya's parents relocated to the northwest from the south in pursuit of better opportunities. They were part of the mass exodus of six million Black people fleeing the isolation and segregation of the Jim Crow south during the Great Migration from 1919-1970. Tonya's family left the southern United States following other family members to the Pacific Northwest. Tonya shared that her father drove to Portland with a companion because he could neither read nor write. Her parents expected that school business took place at the school, likely because they had little formal educational experience and few academic skills to teach their children. When Tonya went home, she did not receive support with homework mainly because her parents also did not understand her schoolwork and would have difficulty and lack the confidence to advocate for Tonya to receive additional support to address her struggles in reading.

We did not really do no activities, no conference really. It was nothing. It was really no care. Just be good kids, go to school, come home. It wasn't really no

care even when they said you don't turn in your homework. That was one thing that was on my report card but it wasn't no consequences for it. It was, "You need to start turn in your homework." And I'm like, "I don't know how to do it." So, it wasn't no consequence if I didn't know how to do it, they didn't know how to do it so I didn't get no help, no tutoring, nothing.

Tonya's parents reacted to school feedback by telling her that she should start submitting her homework; however, what she described reflects that her parents didn't know how to help her other than to share the school's expectation that it should be done. Tonya describes having struggled at school, having parents who had their own obstacles with literacy and having teachers who seemed to be aware of her challenges but offered little or no intervention.

Summary

The five Black women interviewed for this research study graciously gave of their time during the three individual interviews (15 total) in which they reflected upon their own experiences with schooling, shared their attitudes and beliefs regarding their own children's experiences as well as their interactions with school staff. Their experiences do not happen within a vacuum, in other words, they exist within a White supremacist and patriarchal context and their experiences, no matter what, cannot be isolated from racism according to Critical Race Theory. Racism permeates every aspect of their lives, from where they will be allowed to live, how and what schools their children will attend, the quality of those schools and the treatment they will receive as low-income, Black single mothers. In addition, the participants spoke about how the unfavorable expectations were

predetermined for their children, how the curriculum perpetuates White narratives as the norm, how school staff hold biased assumptions about them as parents, and their awareness of how racist contexts can be harmful to their children and stressful to navigate as a mother.

As evidenced in the stories of these five women, they and their children will experience negative attitudes and perceptions from people who have limited interactions and understanding of non-White and poor people. Their stories are integral to the transformation of educational infrastructure, policies, and practices. In Chapter 5, I review the themes that emerged from the findings and examine my research questions in order to make recommendations for practice and policy changes to the field of education.

CHAPTER V: Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how and whether single Black mothers communicate their value for education. This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings as they unfolded into three themes. The chapter concludes with areas with a brief summary, recommendations, and a direction for future research.

Using the Critical Race Theory framework, the following questions guided the development of this research:

1. What are the ways that low-income, single Black mothers communicate to help their children cope with the racism they will face in society?
2. How do low-income, single Black mothers prepare their children for public K-12 education?
3. In what ways do low-income, single Black mothers counter the negative stereotypes and low expectations held by some school personnel?

The three themes that became clear in this study were all aligned with Tenets of Critical

Table 3: Critical Race Theory and Dissertation Themes

Tenets of Critical Race Theory	Themes from Dissertation Findings
Tenet 1 (Permanence of Racism)	Societal Racism
Tenet 3 (Whiteness as Property) Tenet 2 (Critique of Liberalism)	Incongruent Home-School Relations
Tenet 4 (Counternarratives)	Counternarratives

The first theme, Societal Racism is aligned with the first tenet of Critical Race Theory: Permanence of Racism. While the single mothers interviewed for this research study shared many actions that reflect their values and commitment for and toward education, negative stereotypes in society, myths of intellectual inferiority, inequitably-funded schools, with predominantly White teachers and administrators, racially segregated communities and schools in socioeconomically-deprived neighborhoods are the myriad factors that create complex, multi-dimensional challenges to ameliorate. With each obstacle, racism was and remains the foundation. Despite the fact that too many Black families are found at the bottom of many social stratifications, Hill (2003) writes at length about the resilience of Black families and their ability to thrive in racially hostile environments. Hill describes the strong kinship bonds that are common in Black families who are more likely to take in elderly relatives, to informally adopt relative and non-relative children and to live in multigenerational households with greater frequency than White families. As evidenced by the study participants, non-traditional and multigenerational networks and systems of support were reflected in almost all of their lives.

Theme two, Incongruent Home-School Relations aligns with the tenets - Whiteness as Property and Critique of Liberalism. Study participants described how many preconceived notions were made about them simply because of their ascribed racial identity, often based upon skin and hair markers, that were rooted in deficits. The notion of having “property” or “capital” points to having power because of the color of your skin. Having White skin in a racially caste society confers unspoken advantages and privileges that are rationalized to be the result of effort and hard work (meritocracy). The

expectations for how families are expected to partner with school staff via parent-teacher conferences, site council participation, literacy nights and membership in parent teacher associations are social constructions rooted in dominant cultural values. It is assumed that parental presence in school-based events is indicative of a parent's value for their children's education. When these school-based activities are largely white and steeped in dominant cultural norms, the inherent message is that Whiteness is of value and is more important than their presence.

Schools and communities throughout the U.S., remain racially and economically segregated (Owens, 2020). Black communities have suffered the impacts of redlining, gentrification, and housing discrimination which together severely restrict their ability to select a home with access to the best schools. Conversely, many White families in 2022 have 12 times the wealth as Black families (McIntosh, Moss, Nunn & Shambaugh, 2020) and can be selective about where they choose to live based upon what has been evaluated and communicated to be the quality of a school. It is no coincidence that a Zillow search or any other real estate listing will indicate K-12 schools along with their grade. White students and families, because they live and play in racially-homogeneous spaces, lack personal meaningful interactions with Black people and other people of color.

Consequently, White educator understanding of Black people is shaped by: narrow and often harmful media portrayals, school curriculum that tokenizes the experience of non-Whites and limited, as well as inaccurate and even culturally-exclusionary curriculum. In other words, what White people know about Black people is derived from limited exposure primarily at school and what they learned on TV. One study participants' account of feeling "I'm not welcomed there" is indicative of hostile and unfriendly

treatment that is not always outward but often operates in a very visceral, covert manner. Evelyn's expression that "they just assume" highlights the nature of Black mother school experiences. If White people had or sought deep, meaningful engaging experiences with Black people, they would be more inclined to see the complexity inherent in any racialized group of people. Instead, the all-too often default is to make assumptions based upon limited social interactions and understanding.

Often forced to live in racially segregated communities, Black children are five times more likely as White children to attend schools that are highly segregated by race and ethnicity (Economic Policy Institute, 2020). Since public school attendance is dictated by your address and Oregon continues to be racially and economically segregated, mother participants in this study make concerted efforts to select schools for their children away from their neighborhoods and when they do this, they must assume the burden of providing transportation for their children. In spite of rising costs of gasoline, vehicle maintenance, often idle time commuting through traffic, and the limitations resulting from earlier departure and later home arrival times, most of the mothers interviewed in this study found it a worthy sacrifice to be selective about the school their child(ren) attend. Mothers who select the schools do so with their child's needs at the center of their decision making. At times, they employ the school district's formal lottery or petition process and in other cases, they take the fastest and most direct route by using someone else's address. School selection is a purposeful, deliberate action in which these single mothers intend to access what they believe to be a higher quality educational experience for their children. In Irvine's 1990, she found that many African Americans believe that resources and quality follow White students adding that when

Black families look at the physical facilities and the instructional materials comparing them with racially segregated schools, Black parents surmise that where White children are, there is educational excellence.

For Amber and other participants who had the wherewithal to be selective about where their child(ren) went to school and to intervene when the situation seemed to warrant, many families do not have this option. Transportation obstacles, the expense of commuting, varying ages of children and child-care responsibilities as well as work commitments prohibit many families from choosing a school. Consequently, they send their children to the neighborhood school. As noted in the introduction of this study,

When you live in a poor neighborhood, you're living in an area where you have poor schools. When you have poor schools, you have poor teachers. When you have poor teachers, you get a poor education. When you get a poor education, you can only work in a poor-paying job. And that poor-paying job enables you to live again in a poor neighborhood. It is a very vicious cycle (Malcolm X).

The second Critical Race Theory tenet that aligns with the theme of Incongruent Home-School Relations is Critique of Liberalism. This tenet allows Whites to feel no responsibility for the hardships Black people face in order to maintain the status quo of White dominance in society. (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Tate & Ladson-Billings, 1993). School staff often insist on colorblindness, a manner that assumes that all students have the same educational needs and are affected by the same issues (Blair, Ma & Lenton, 2001). Because public education was developed centering the needs and interests of White people and since any effort to reform education has been incremental and not revolutionary or transformative, schools are places where

Black people are apt to feel as Evelyn explained, “*where I didn’t trust that they had my best interest.*” While Critique of Liberalism can be seen on a macro level, the mother participants' experiences reflect the incremental or slow-moving change that is endemic to schools.

While the study participants often make deliberate decisions about the schools their children attend based upon information, observations and/or assumptions about the quality of the schools, the participants in this study shared how they each interact with school staff as advocates, intercessors, and even advisors. In Amber’s story, she described how her child’s middle school math teacher held low expectations for the work that her daughter would or could complete. This math teacher, who reacted with surprise that Amber’s daughter completed the extra-credit work, triggered a response in Amber who said, “*I had to get him straight.*” She went on to explain that she felt his remark was steeped in low expectations for her daughter. Consequently, she held a conversation to communicate her own expectations and to unpack the teacher’s comment. The burden falls on Black mothers to educate school teachers and staff who don’t seem to have responsibility for creating culturally-responsive classrooms and schools that ensure the psychological safety of all children. As Tonya noted when she became frustrated at the lack of follow through and slow change process “*Sometimes you just get sort of like fed up and like, ‘Okay, we need to have a big meeting, sit down, get a clear understanding...sometimes that don’t even work.’*”

Amber shared another story of how she felt she needed to intervene when she learned that her daughter and other students of color were losing extensive class time to have talks to repair conflicts. Coincidentally, the practice that was implemented is known

as “restorative dialogue” and while it was developed in response to the disproportionate discipline of youth of color. Amber described how restorative justice in practice meant that her daughter and her non-White peers were shuffled off to a Black after-school provider (and not the teacher or counselor) for extended periods of time to resolve their conflicts.

The third theme of Counter-narratives is aligned with tenet 4 of Critical Race Theory. Counter-stories both expose and critique dominant male, White, and heterosexual ideologies which perpetuate racial stereotypes. Race, gender, and legal scholar Dorothy Roberts argues that stereotypes of poor Black women as bad mothers indicate that they are more closely scrutinized and their parenting is evaluated with suspicion (Collins, 2016). Teachers’ perceptions of Black mothers are infused with racial bias. Dumais et al. (2012) found that elementary school teachers assessed Black parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling in a negative light, while interpreting White parents’ involvement positively. These scholars point to the dominant narrative that Black parents don’t care about their children’s education. The experiences of mothers like Evelyn tell a vastly different story. *“They just assume that you’re not as concerned. It seemed like whenever I would ask the teacher questions about my son, she seemed like she would be caught off guard, like she’d be surprised that I would ask those questions.”* Even though Evelyn was attempting to engage with the teacher about her son’s academic well-being, she was met with passive resistance and her concerns seemed to be trivialized by this teacher. Evelyn read to her children, she enrolled them in preschool learning programs and researched the best resources available that would provide a solid foundation before her children even began school. Despite her dedication and

commitment which counters the dominant stereotype about Black mother engagement in the education of their children, her son's teacher seemed to have a fixed mindset rooted in negative stereotypes about Black people. The counter stories that the participants shared with me during their interviews touched on many of the tenets of Critical Race Theory. However, the core of their counter stories is reflected in their actions and what they communicate as mothers - to their children. Their counter stories are not aligned with the White majority narrative, but instead counter the images, stereotypes and create day-to-day moments in life when they need to speak truthfully to their children. Their voices and stories share with us another way to see the world. Amber describes how she provides advice for her daughter to:

Advocate for herself, using her own voice to say what needs to be said, stating her side of the story. I've had to explain to her about sometimes you have to be diligent about going and getting your story told first so that it's one of the stories that are at the forefront of someone's mind, because if another White kid comes behind you, which has been her experience, and tells their story first, that is automatically the story that is believed...I always want her to know that she and her voice is just as important as anyone else's and that she's just as qualified as anyone else and that she deserves the same access as anyone else...And if nothing else, as long as I'm alive, she always has me to come behind her to support and usher her into that. And I really try to ...not speak for her but really...just stand behind her so she can speak and use her own voice and that she understands that her voice is just as important and just as powerful as her counterparts.

There were many ways in which participants conveyed a counter narrative in their conversations with their children. Pam responded to a question regarding her conversations regarding racism and discrimination with her children.

*Let's see. We watch so many movies, especially now, because they're all like on Netflix and all that stuff. Well, let's see. We watched the LA riot and I was explaining to Rashad about it. We watched a lot of movies. That's what we do, and then when I read... I was reading, I think it was a Rosa Parks book and *** was very interested in it, because he knew that that was Martin Luther King's wife. So, he was like...just asked me a lot of questions about it. He even have books that he's reading now, just about Black boys, you know? And, yeah, he just learned about Emmett Till in one of his books that he was reading. So, yeah. I always want my kids to know that they're kings. They're young, black kings, and to be the best that they can be. Yeah."*

The conversation that Pam has with her elementary-school aged son is likely one that he will never have at school. Her particular efforts to ensure that her son was exposed to an understanding of Black history and culture were demonstrated through reading books and watching films at home. Other participants described ways in which they prepare their children knowing that the school curriculum will not adequately address their history and culture. In addition to having the essential conversation that Black families have with their children in order to ensure their safety in a world in which they experience the economic and social emotional impact of racism. The conversation is often and most intensively regarding how to interact with the police. Solis (2021) described the approaches that Black parents take when having the "talk." These conversations often

include messages of cultural pride and lessons about racial inequalities. It is critical for Black families to have “the talk” with their children not only about interacting with the police but also to prepare them for negotiating educational systems where institutional racism is embedded in the policies, practices, and culture.

Throughout this research, I found that participants benefited tremendously from having a Black teacher. They each describe a sole experience in Oregon with a Black teacher, who served in a pivotal role for them. One of the common threads among their experience is that their Black teachers all held high expectations for them and saw them when the participants often felt invisible in largely White spaces in school settings. These “dreamkeepers” as Ladson-Billings (1994) describes them, not only attended to their academic needs and well-being, but they actually knew and cared for them. Pam described her first and only Black teacher.

My first-grade teacher...she helped me through a lot. My mom was incarcerated, so it was just like she understood somehow. I don't know how, but she was always there for me. She would give me that extra help when I'm having bad days. She allowed me to sleep up in the loft area when I was real tired, you know? Ms. Flowers really influenced me as a teacher. She really did. She was the best teacher I ever had. And she's still around. When I see her I give her a big hug... She was my first black teacher.

Pam's description speaks to the close connection and emotional bond she had with her teacher, and Evelyn echoed her description when speaking about her son's teacher.

“She's African American, yes, and I requested her. And she has an ongoing relationship she's had with my son since kindergarten. Evelyn also spoke about her own positive

experience with a Black teacher “*I did have a teacher in fifth grade that had a really positive influence on my education that had high expectations for me.*” These positive experiences with Black teachers point to some recommendations that the educational community should consider.

Recommendations

From the analysis of the interviews in this study, we find that Black mothers are deeply committed to securing an education that will set a firm foundation for the future life and career opportunities for their children. While there is mistrust for the educational system, this study revealed that these mothers are engaged in a constant struggle to advocate for educational rights for their children. These mothers view education as one of the greatest tools against racism and oppression and make many personal sacrifices to ensure that their children receive a solid education (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Robinson & Weblow, 2012). However, the burden of pushing for change and bringing the issues to the forefront should not fall on Black mothers time and time again. Black mothers, who are already disproportionately burdened with invisible labor (cooking, cleaning, planning, childcare, etc.), demonstrate through conscious choices and parenting that they have a strong value for seeing that their children have a quality school experience. The participants in this study are taking extensive and sometimes exhaustive measures to ensure that their children have access to a quality education. The following are some recommendations for the educational community to consider.

1. School leaders have an opportunity to examine policies that deter Black mothers from inclusion in school decisions.

2. School leaders make decisions about their workforce and typically make hiring determinations at least annually. Inviting and encouraging Black mothers to apply for a position and to share their expertise in multiple ways.
3. Demonstrate a commitment to taking action to hire for equity and not simply talking about it as a value.
4. School's need to be deliberate about hiring diverse candidates who reflect the cultural backgrounds of their students, as a positive teacher-student relationship is a key component of students' success.
5. School leaders have a responsibility to create pathways to family engagement and participation that are culturally responsive. Black mothers must be invited to share their ideas and perspectives, no matter what school they attend.
6. School leaders and district decision makers can examine school choice policies that are restrictive and remove barriers like painstaking application processes.
7. School and district leaders make regular decisions about the kind of professional development that will be offered to teachers, educational assistants, and other school staff. Ensure that critical conversations about race and inequitable school structures occur within those trainings.

Amber made an interesting observation related to how schools can transform.

Is really helping carve out a work force and a pathway for Black adults to become teachers. I think representation is really, really important and that is, I think, one of the key places that need to start is our kids need to be able to see themselves and the people that are educating them. And as a state and government, there need to be better pathways and lowered barriers to getting into the field of

education as a whole. And there are a lot of barriers to that from cultural and language barriers to some of the requirements just the financial fees that come with needing to do these different things

This dissertation study set out to explore the experiences of single Black, low-income mothers with children in the schools. How did they convey their values to their children and how did they communicate their importance with actions and words? The five participants in this study are a small sample size, but their voices and counternarratives echo those of other single Black low-income mothers. Given this size limitation, it is natural to carefully think about the next steps of this research trajectory.

Areas for Future Research

This research study highlighted other opportunities to improve the experiences of Black mothers and their children. While this study focused on the stories of Black mothers, an examination of the experiences of Black students can potentially provide insight into how the expectations and values of their mothers show up in the behavior, attitudes, and actions of Black children. Additional research would delve more deeply into the multi-generational expectations and values which were briefly touched upon in this study. An examination of students who achieve school success by traditional measures would provide key information in understanding the preparation, motivation, and attributes of these successful students. Further research regarding the role of male and father figures and their relationship with school staff as well as how they demonstrate their support for their children's education, would provide important information in order

to understand the adult communities that surround Black students and common patterns that exist.

Conclusion

Black mothers are invested and care deeply about securing quality educational experiences for their children. In order to do so, they must negotiate complex systems, travel long-distances, and have the fortitude to advocate for themselves and their children in environments where their cultural ways of being are often invalidated. They demonstrate relentlessness, resiliency, and determination when it comes to seeking a better life for their children. They know and believe that better opportunities can avail themselves through the promise of public education. They overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to ensure that their children are in what they deem to be quality educational environments. Their fierce dedication to the education of their children can be summarized in their expressions of their hopes and dreams for their children's future:

Above all else... you know, she is in a space where it is fostered for her to think for herself; to think critically, be able to explore options, make decisions for herself, and that she knows that as many options as possible are available to her. That she knows there are options, and that she feels confident in taking whatever option she wants. And that, me, personally, in everything she does, she learns to advocate for herself. That's huge for me (Amber, Interview 1)

I hope that they're confident in their ability to learn, that they're confident in that. I would like for my children to go to college and to reach their greatest potential as far as their education is concerned. But at the same time, I want them to

understand that if they want to attain their education, they can do that. That they're able to go to college, that they have what it takes to study and to understand information. That they're just as good as anybody else. I just want them to have the confidence, if they want to be anything that they want to be in life (Evelyn, Interview 1).

Alexis' hopes for her son were,

That I make sure that they take advantage of every opportunity and learn as much as they can. Because now I realize how the first couple of years of their schooling experiences were important (Interview 1).

So, my hopes right now for my kids is that they can just keep up. I'm pushing them to do the best they can. Reading and writing is one of my main things that I want for the kids, the best for them because that's the areas that we as my immediate siblings struggle in. Right now, I can say I can't go to not one family member to edit my paperwork. I have to go outside in the community. So right now, my goal is for my kids to be able to read and comprehend and just write a decent paper (Tonya, Interview 1)

My hope for them is to go to college, to finish college, to be the best that they can be. I hope that they get all the education that they're supposed to get. Even more. My kids are smart. And I want them to be able to see, and to know, "I'm smart." I be telling them every day, "You are smart. You're very smart. Keep going." And I always tell [my son] Don't take the easy way out, because that's not how life is going to be. Keep going. You're smart. Stay solid, you know. Don't give up on

your kids. Push them. You the only one who's going to do it, so you got to do it. Ain't no giving up. There's no giving up in this. Stay strong. Make sure your kids know that they're beautiful, that you love them, that you're only doing it for them, you know? (Pam, Interviews 1 and 3)

It was my honor to be a conduit through which powerful single, low-income, Black mothers could share their truths and tell their stories. My own mother was single, low-income, and Black and the power of her experience compelled me to lift up the voices of similarly-situated women. I believe in the power that education can provide to lift Black women from a station that society attempts to consign them to. I am grateful for every second spent and for every moment recollecting childhood stories and understanding the beliefs that undergird them in their pursuit of a better life for themselves and their children for which they are so deserving.

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