Daddy Is Involved: How Do African American Fathers Participate in the Education Experiences of Their High School Children?

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DADDY IS INVOLVED:
HOW DO AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS PARTICIPATE IN THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCES OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CHILDREN?

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES

BY
GREGORY PIERRE BAKER
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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ABSTRACT

Parents have tremendous influence in the lives of their children. As a result, it is valuable to investigate how high school parents participate in their children’s high school education experiences. African American fathers in particular, have been placed under scrutiny by the media and general population for not being involved in the education experiences of their children, while the research literature dispels this generalization.

This study investigates how African American fathers, in a suburban community, participate in the education experiences of their high school children. This research study took place at a Du Page County, Illinois, high school under the pseudonym Suburban High School (SHS). The investigation of this topic uses a qualitative case study methodology and thematic analysis of interviews with ten African American fathers, observations at academic and co-curricular events, and interviews with ten educators, who work with African American fathers at SHS. Field notes were compiled to capture the subjects and observations at this research site illustrating the nature of parent involvement at Suburban High School.

Through these qualitative methods, this study aims at developing meaningful data to compare and reify how African American fathers participate in their high school children’s education experiences. This study contributes to the existing research literature about African American father involvement in their children’s education experiences.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Parents participate in the education of their children in different ways. Examples of parent participation include but are not limited to attending evening programs sponsored by the school, attending their child’s extra-curricular activities, or holding an executive office for their children’s school parent teacher association. Other parents who are not as involved in the formal school sponsored events, provide a home environment that has the needed resources and supports that foster their educational needs outside the school setting.

According to Lareau (1987), professionals who work with children, such as teachers, embrace the idea that “promoting educational development in children is influenced by proper parenting ... Proper parenting must include talking with your children, developing their educational interests, and playing an active role in their schooling” (p. 4).

In addition to understanding how proper parenting influences the promotion and success of academic achievement in children, some scholars have suggested they are capable of predicting a child’s achievement by analyzing their family’s socioeconomic status (Marsiglio & Coham 2000; Robinson & Harris, 2014). Focusing solely on a families’ socioeconomic status as an independent variable, does not thoroughly capture how and why parents should participate in their student’s education. As a result, it is appropriate to begin a qualitative investigation to assess the following research question,
“How are African American fathers participating in the education experiences of their high school children?”

Focusing on how African American fathers participate in their high school children’s education complements the existing literature that illustrates how African American fathers participated in their children’s education experiences during the elementary and junior high school years (Campbell & Verna, 2007; Domina, 2005). During elementary and through junior high school, children’s parents place an emphasis and priority on the importance of their children’s education. Parents regularly assist their children with homework and attend school sponsored events, such as parent teacher conferences, to stay informed about their child’s academic and behavior progress (Jeynes, 2010). Once children enter high school there is a decline in parent participation. However, children still benefit from parent participation because children benefit from having a parent assist them with making key decisions about their social groups, post-secondary planning, and making healthy behavior choices (e.g., drug and alcohol awareness, safe sex practices, and promoting a positive self-image) (Covey, 1997; Danielson, 2012). Likewise, Noguera and Wing (2006) stated that “parents play a powerful role in advancing their children’s educational experience” (p. 201).

Statement of the Problem

African American fathers are depicted as being absent and indifferent about their children’s general welfare by a good deal of the mass media, especially sensationalist talk shows. Both relationships, especially the fragile relationships these fathers have with their children, attempt to build the case that these men are not positively involved with their children; even though the literature dispels generalizations of this nature (Quiones &
Kiyama, 2014; Shuffleton, 2014). Furthermore, these accusations of indifference about fathering stem from the idea that a child and his or her family’s social class impacts the way how family members interact with each other, as well as with others—namely, a school, and other authority figures and institutions (Lareau, 1987; Quadlin, 2014).

Lareau (2003) makes the suggestion in Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life that it is possibly a “mistake to accept, carte blanche, the views of officials in dominant institutions (e.g., schools or social service agencies) regarding how children should be raised” (p. 13). The reality is that society follows the values of the wealthy and middle-class, not those who are from the working-class and poor segments of society.

This study is designed to generate a better understanding of African American father participation in their children’s high school education experience. The researcher finds this topic to be a much-needed area of study given the limited body of research, documenting the participation of African American fathers in the high school setting.

To investigate this topic, a case study took place at a high school located in Du Page County, Illinois. This research took place at Suburban High School (SHS), where the researcher examined how African American fathers participated in their children’s high school education experiences. This study included observations of African American fathers at SHS programs, and interviews were conducted with ten African American fathers and ten professional educators employed at SHS. These methods provided data that illustrated examples of how African American fathers participated in their children’s education experiences at SHS. Through multiple interviews, observations of parent participation at SHS, the data was reviewed, transcribed, and sorted
thematically. The findings inform readers of this study of how African American fathers participated at SHS in their children’s educational and curricular experiences.

The findings made the research study relevant to the researcher’s personal and professional experiences as an African American father of two children and a public high school administrator. The researcher desires to be involved in every aspect of his children’s education experiences, and the researcher hopes that the findings of this study will create additional knowledge and conversations on how all fathers can participate in the high school education experiences of their children. This study complemented the existing literature by providing an account featuring a case study methodology and various theoretical and philosophical considerations (e.g., Parent Investment Theory [PIT], cultural and social reproduction, and phenomenology). These theoretical and philosophical considerations were embedded throughout the examination of literature and findings in this study.

**Conceptual Framework**

This study employs some similarities with the work of Fox and Bruce (2001), who focused on how men “transform their attitudes about fatherhood into parenting commitments and actions” (p. 394). These scholars utilized the Parental Investment Theory (PIT), which relegates parent participation to a “sociobiological and evolutionary psychology, [which] assumes that concern with one’s inclusive fitness, that is, the continuation of one’s unique genetic inheritance, is a universal cross-species adaptive characteristic” (p. 396). PIT opposes the idea that unconditional love is the reason why a parent (a father, in this study) uses their time and resources for their children. This
parental love conflicts with PIT’s universal component of it being conditional to their child’s conduct, intellectual abilities, as well as co-curricular talents.

A similar assessment of why parents, especially women, commit and continue raising children is found in Hochschild’s (2003) seminal work, *The Second Shift*. One theme focuses on analyzing male participation in household affairs, with an interesting statistic: “One out of five men in this [Hochschild’s] study were as actively involved in the home as their wives” (p. 226). This shift in caregiving responsibilities assumed by fathers is evidenced in Shuffleton’s (2014) study about “New Fatherhood.” Shuffleton discussed the transfiguration that has taken place in the shift of parenting roles given the change in more mothers working and fathers assuming more care taking roles within the home (helping with homework, staying home with a sick child, etc.).

Another researcher who influenced this study, Lareau (2003) adds an additional dimension to this parental investment theory in *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. Lareau introduces two parenting strategies: concerted cultivation and natural growth. Concerted cultivation explains how parents intentionally teach their children how to effectively interact with various social institutions and agents of various entities. She goes on to suggest and illustrate how these interpersonal skills are taught and mastered by some children in wealthy and middle-class households through a series of interviews and other research methods. Conversely, child-rearing practices of working-class and poor families were observed as aligning with the natural growth model of child rearing. This child rearing practice illustrates how children learn on their own how to interact with their peers, adults, and organizations; most notably, school (Lareau, 2003).
There are benefits and weaknesses of each parenting strategy. Larearu (2003) concludes that children who are raised in homes encouraging concerted cultivation habits, which tend to be wealthier or middle-class homes, are more likely to succeed in school and their future endeavors. As a result, wealthier communities, under the direction of parents and adults who were likely raised in similar settings, are likely to socially and culturally reproduce their cultural and economic values to ensure their children enjoy similar economic and social success. Parents and communities who lack comparable economic and social resources want to provide similar opportunities for their children, but the ability of these households and communities to do so is compromised, making it more challenging for children from these lower socioeconomic communities to achieve upward social mobility. Consequently, these circumstances often create an achievement gap between children from households of different socioeconomic conditions (Chubb & Loveless, 2002; Noguera & Wing, 2007). Not because parents from lower socioeconomic communities are indifferent about teaching their children how to succeed in school, according to this author’s insight as an educator and parent, but due to a lack of physical, capital, and social resources.

The challenges facing parents and children from lower socioeconomic households, with limited resources and access to physical and human capital, can further be understood by exploring the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s (2000) “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction” presents a framework for educators, social scientists, and others to consider a theory, which ties the transmission of resources to family and school structures (p. 57). These structures include the family’s and school’s ability to distribute symbolic wealth, or the “gifts” that uphold an implied
hierarchy that reward individuals with skills and academic talents, giving certain people more autonomy and control of the social order (p. 60).

Applying this Bourdieuan logic, parents from higher socioeconomic households will likely have a better opportunity to satisfy their own needs. The egos of these parents become satisfied, and they may be more inclined to participate in the daily lives of their children. This does not prevent parents from lower-socioeconomic groups from striving to help their children. However, having limited access to fiscal resources increases the pressure a parent experiences as a provider of resources and services for their children’s education and co-curricular experiences. In addition, when children fail to meet their parent’s expectations of academic and co-curricular achievement it influences a parent’s desire to provide resources and time to their children, which has been termed the Parental Investment Theory (Fox & Bruce, 2001).

These applied Bourdieuan notions of the Parent Investment Theory (PIT) are further applied to this study’s attempt to understand how African American fathers participate in the education experiences of their high school children by including phenomenology as a philosophical consideration. “Phenomenology is a descriptive science concerned primarily with the objects and structures of consciousness” (Noddings, 2007, p. 70). Phenomenology is used within this study by considering the thoughts of the African American fathers in this study, who view their role as a father to include being involved in the education experiences of their children; regardless of their individual or children’s circumstances. Using phenomenology gives subjects in this study a platform to speak about their personal experiences, and insight as to how it relates to their children’s high school experiences.
By supporting educators, curriculums, and reform proposals, children are more likely to show increases in academic, social emotional and life skills (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). Phenomenology is applied in this study when African American fathers provide personal accounts of how they advocated for their children in the educational environment.

The benefit of applying the principles of phenomenology to understand how African American fathers are involved in their high school student’s education experiences is predicated on the fathers of this study receiving an opportunity to share their personal experiences that illustrate their ability to recognize, describe, and potentially alter the existing circumstances regarding their children. This information was gathered by two methods; observations and interviews, where field notes—much like ethnographic field notes, and transcriptions of interviews, were recorded to document how African American father participation is seen and discussed during this study. The case study occurred at Suburban High School. This high school is located in suburban community in Du Page County Illinois, just outside of Chicago.

A potential benefit of framing this study under the rubric of phenomenology is observing how a respective education system teaches and implements edicts from a building, district, state, and national level to parents to promote and secure parent participation in the education experiences of students. This study, trying to understand how African American fathers participate in their high school children’s education experiences, also provides an opportunity to observe how a school mobilizes the African American fathers to participate in their children’s education experiences. Furthermore, an additional aspect of this study demonstrates how African American fathers are not
simply symbolically recognized as partners in the education experience for the African American fathers’ children, but included and consulted in decisions affecting their children’s education experiences.

This conceptual framework is informed by the Parent Investment Theory (PIT), the parenting practices of concerted cultivation and natural growth, cultural and social reproduction theories, and phenomenology. These concepts inform this study, which gives readers a better understanding of how African American fathers participate in the education experiences of their children. A discussion of the research question will ensue.

**Research Question**

Stake’s (1995) seminal work, *The Art of Case Study Research*, states “the design of all research requires conceptual organization, ideas to express needed understanding, conceptual bridges from what is already known, cognitive structures to guide data gathering, and outlines for presenting interpretations to others” (p. 15). This study seeks to explore how African American fathers participate in their high school children’s education experiences. The following research question seeks to explore the participation of: “How do African American fathers participate in the education experiences of their high school children?”

According to Stake (1995), when attempting to answer how or why questions, when the inquirer has little control over events being studied, he recommends using a qualitative methodology. Regarding case study research as a research strategy, Small (2009) wrote qualitative research, in particular case studies, can be likened to an experiment, a history, or a simulation, which may be considered an alternative research
strategy. This research question seeks to understand the various ways African American fathers participate in their children’s high school education experiences.

Designing a quantitative study would only inform readers about very specific independent variables analyzed during a specific historical moment; these conditions will not be the same indefinitely and everywhere. Thus, a research design using a quantitative methodology will not create a general understanding of the case in question, because the behaviors of the African American fathers, their children, and others involved in the education experiences of the youth cannot be controlled.

The research question and conceptual framework produced information capable of helping scholars gain a better understanding of how African American fathers participate in the lives of their high school children.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations that existed in this study were a result of time the researcher had to conduct observations, schedule interviews that fit the participants’ and researcher’s schedule, along with gaining the trust of the educators interviewed.

This study was also impacted by the researcher’s presence at observations where some of the father participants may have altered their behavior and interactions to project an image of fatherhood they wanted to portray. One way the researcher was able to gain trustworthiness and research positionality was by his race and identity matching his participants (Quiones & Kiyama, 2014).

Another limitation of this study was the duration and frequency of observations. Observations were limited to evening, and were not captured during the school day. Despite this limitation, evenings provided a wealth of opportunities to conduct
observations as most parents interact with schools in the evening, after their work day at events like parent-teacher conferences, extra-curricular events, discipline hearings, and board of education meetings.

Additionally there was the threat of attrition; participants cancelled scheduled interviews to accommodate their family and work responsibilities. This was a difficult limitation to overcome, but rescheduling interviews was how the researcher addressed this challenge, as well as making sure multiple interviews were offered during this research project, to gain as much data for analysis.

A similar but disjointed limitation occurred as a result of overly-active African American fathers being the main African American fathers interviewed for this research project. As a result, these interviewees do not reflect the general African American father behavior. This limitation was out of the researcher’s control. This is why it was important to develop strong relationships with building administrators, the faculty, and staff of SHS.

In the next chapter, a review of literature related to this study is executed.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study began with a notion that African American children have not and are not achieving at the same academic level as students of other races, but with African American father participation in the high school setting academic achievement is improved. However, there is a lack of literature that discusses how African American fathers participate in their high school children’s educational experiences. Most of the literature that discussed African American father participation in schools focuses on African American father participation while their children attended elementary school, social defiance, gender specific differences in parenting, and how mothers take on a more dominant role in raising children and communicating with educators in comparison to African American fathers. As a result, an examination of research on African American father participation within the high school experiences of their children ensues in this study.

The following sections in this literature review are broken down into themes that were observed, discussed in interviews with African American fathers in this study, or researched as essential questions to consider when investigating this topic.

Parenting Styles of African American Fathers

Edin, Tach, and Mincy (2009) provided a well-crafted definition of fatherhood, and theoretically discussed the divergent cultural factors that influence people’s understanding of fatherhood. Edin et al. defined fatherhood as “a relationship that is not
independent of, but largely flows through and is contingent upon, the relationship between the father and the child’s mother” (p. 152). Based on this definition of fatherhood, fathers are able to develop a relationship with their children’s mother that makes it possible for a familial structure to exist. This definition of fatherhood challenges men who want to be involved in their children’s lives to maintain and preserve relationships with each family member of their household.

Researchers Campbell and Verna (2007) did a study to understand what are effective parental influences using parental practices that make up Bloom’s (1981) Curriculum of the Home, using cross-cultural data from high-achieving families in Asia (Taiwan, Thailand), Europe (Greece, Germany), and the USA. From their research, they compiled over 500 parental recipes, which gives specific examples on how parents organize the learning process, provide motivation, and work with the community around them to assure that their child will succeed at school. The top five parental recipe categories are: 1) Expectations; 2) Work ethic; 3) Communication; 4) Homework; and 5) Commitment (Campbell & Verna, 2007, p. 509).

Campbell and Verna (2007) provided specific examples as to how parents develop and maintain this climate generate a number of positive outcomes (see Table 3, p. 511). Three categories that are specific to this study are 1) Academic Self-Concepts; 2) Beliefs; and 3) Ways to Communicate. Starting with “Academic Self-Concept (confidence in abilities) parents help their child build skills in various academic areas (reading, math, science, etc.). This component is executed when parents discuss when their children their academic concerns, review their children’s testing results to determine strengths and weaknesses, and by staying in regular communication with teachers.
Secondly, the component “Beliefs” focuses on developing positive community beliefs that foster productive and active citizens in their community and world. When parents encourage their children to explore and be involved in their school and community activities they build a sense of belonging and a way for them to connect to skill sets and leadership skills outside of the classroom and home environment. Finally, “Ways to Communicate” focuses on parents developing and continuing day-to-day communication with their children in as many ways as possible. In today’s era, parents have an endless list of ways to communicate with their children. Various forms of technology make communicating with their children much more frequently than ever before.

Each of these noted three components are important when researching various parenting styles and investigating how to be an active and involved parent in your child’s academic and extracurricular experiences.

Multiple researchers cited in this study believe that there are several variables and cultural values one must note and consider when researching father involvement and various parent styles. Parents who are involved in their high school children’s education experiences provide their children with a sense that doing well in school is possible for them and is worth investing in (Oyserman et al., 2007).

One of the leading hypotheses is predicated on the idea that an individual’s socioeconomic status has a strong correlation with a parent’s ability to provide academic and professional mentoring (Bourdieu, 1989, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). Bourdieu (2000) developed the concept of cultural capital, which reproduces structures among social classes where the dominant culture’s values and habits are transmitted on everyone within a society (p. 58). Depending on the values and habits established within
a community, certain parenting styles and roles fathers assume within their family and other social institutions (e.g., school) will influence how cultural capital is transmitted within the father and child relationship.

A similar mindset as Campbell and Verna, researchers Hill and Torres (2010) conducted a study that utilized Bourdieu’s (2000) concept of cultural capital through its examination of the intrinsic values families place on education, and the connection of parents’ involvement given resources they have available to help their children be successful (p. 101). While Hill and Torres (2010) study focused on Latino families, it is very relevant to minority families in general and their desire to reach the “American Dream” through making sacrifices for your children to access a quality education, home, and life style for them to be successful long-term (p. 105). It is important to note that every family has values that focus on obtaining success for themselves and their families, but success is influenced by intrinsic motivation from the father to push himself and his children to succeed academically and personally. This value of working hard to obtain the “American Dream” is a well sought after status of every ethnic group or culture that resides in the United States (p. 95).

Additionally, author and sociologist, Lareau (2000) is known for her research on investigating parenting styles when comparing African American children and families to their Caucasian counterparts. Also, Lareau’s work emphasizes how socioeconomic status influences how parents teach their children how to interact within different social institutions, such as schools. Her field research mentioned in her book Unequal Childhoods, explains her subjects’ background of being white and black children from middle class, working class, and poor families. Through Lareau’s research she uncovered
the variations in parenting styles that relate to class distinctions. For example, Lareau (2003) noted how different family circumstances influenced a child's achievement and behavior in and out of school. Lareau’s findings allowed her to draw a significant correlation in parenting styles of working class, and poor families (pp. 237-256).

Lareau (2003) has two theories for raising children: (1) concerted cultivation and (2) natural growth. Concerted cultivation is a type of childrearing model commonly used by middle class parents (p. 3). This model consists of parents engaging in their children’s afterschool activities and providing a structured life for their child. Parents who use the concerted cultivation model, attempt to daily provide structure and a routine within their children’s education and social experiences. A positive attribute to this style of childrearing is that children are taught lessons through organized activities that help prepare them for post-secondary options, and how to effectively interact and communicate with others in society (Lareau, 2003). Specific examples of this type of parental method is teaching their children how to engage critical thinking by asking challenging questions, encouraging the use of higher level grammar, and providing a supportive family environment (pp. 238-239).

The second model that Lareau (2003) describes is natural growth model, which is a type of childrearing that is practiced by middle and lower-socioeconomic status parents that is not necessarily by their preference or choice. Parents who use this model are less involved in the structure of their children’s extracurricular activities and commonly have less time and educational background to instill set values and routines upon their children that will give them leverage in advancing in the school or extracurricular settings. The natural growth model explains that fewer organized activities and more free time for their
children to play with other children in the neighborhood. This is the natural growth parenting model’s preferred choice in how children use their time on homework, activities, and within family structures that are unpredictable and lack regular routines (pp. 238-239).

**African American Fathers and Academic Participation**

Research over the past several decades have documented a positive link between parental involvement and children’s school success. A father’s presence and participation have a positive influence on children’s academic achievement (Domina, 2005; Edin et al., 2009). Fox and Bruce (2001) developed the parental investment theory (PIT), which “directs attention to the father's instrumental interests in children. It suggests that with increases in a child's ability to enhance the father's long-term well-being, the father's willingness to invest his own resources of time, money, and energy into the child will increase” (p. 397). PIT gives parents the ability to individualize how they invest in each child specifically. This theory proposes that a “father must not only decide how to allocate scarce resources among competing investments, including children, but also which children are likely recipients of his limited parental investments“ (p. 397).

The research Quadlin (2014) conducted was similar to Fox and Bruce (2001) in that the relationship between achievement and investment for their children varies based on the directionality of their child’s achievement and resources available to parents (Quadlin, 2014, p. 2). Quadlin discussed the concept of parent investment within education varies and is unequal within families which is due to social class, gender, attractiveness, or any attribute that a parent may feel the need to provide enrichment or remedial opportunities for learning or cultivating co-curricular skills and interests.
Quadlin identified five forms of investments parents can provide for their children: economic, educational, interactional, social capital, and expectations (p. 4). Each form has the opportunity to impact a student’s willingness to achieve academically and personally.

Also, Quadlin (2014) reported a child’s response to their parent’s relationship style is another important factor that influences how well a child achieves academically. Fathers who develop close affective bonds with children are more effective in monitoring, communicating and teaching children. The cultivation of these relationships help to provide access to information, assistance, opportunities, and others resources in the community that foster the healthy development of youth (Coleman, 1988). Applying the Parental Investment Theory (PIT) of Fox and Bruce (2003) endorses this ideal that when a parent invests time in their children, the performance and results produced satisfy the parents use of resources to invest in their children.

Two additional scholars with a similar philosophy, which resurfaced throughout this dissertation, are Blau and Bettie. Blau (2003) and Bettie (2000, 2003) each write about race, gender, and how race and gender combined impacts parental involvement. In particular, Blau (2003) writes that parents can value education despite existing financial and cultural disparities. Yet, scholars have dispelled the notion that an absolute answer can be contrived from looking at one or two specific demographics, rather critiquing various independent variables is necessary to ascertain a better understanding of why a parent or student is not capable of being interested in promoting achievement in a child’s varied educational experiences.
Blau (2003) provided quantitative data, via the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and High School Effectiveness Study (HSES), which illustrated the “Educational Aspirations of Black and White Students and Their Families and Friends, NELS Tenth Graders” (pp. 61-62). Also, Blau’s Race in the Schools: Perpetuating White Dominance? answers the book’s title question, “No.” Blau wrote, “Overall, then, black students value education significantly more highly than white students do, and they have somewhat higher educational aspirations than white students” (p. 63). This conclusion was similar when comparing black and white students of similar socio-economic status however, the perception held by some stakeholders and members of the mass media suggest there is a difference (p. 63).

This difference is the result of comparing white students from wealthier socio economic status (SES) to black (and other ethnic minority) students from lower SES because this statistic provides a noticeable arithmetic difference (Blau, 2003). Hence, this ‘apples to oranges’ comparison of demographic groups from different economic backgrounds is methodologically flawed and misleading. As a result, it is important for stakeholders to be cautious of how they explain and recognize differences among students and their families, limitations of studies, and whether or not mixed methods were used to increase the validity and reliability of any remarks made as a part of the analysis to conclude a posed question. This notion of comparing students from wealthier SES to black (and other ethnic minority) students from lower SES claims origins in the 1965 Moynihan Report.

The Moynihan Report “is one of the most famous piece of social scientific analysis never published” (Massey & Sampson, 2009, p. 6). Yet, this text assisted
President Lyndon Johnson’s administration to generate potential strategies to address “the Negro Problem”—the low socioeconomic status of African Americans living in the South after legal segregation came to an end (Massey & Sampson, 2009, p. 6). This Moynihan Report was created in the aftermath of the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act, and was ideally committed to finding a way to eradicate economic disparity African Americans suffered, as a result of generational hardships inherited; albeit slavery and a Jim Crow legal system that punished African Americans (p. 6). The moral agenda of the Moynihan Report sought to “break the cycle of black poverty and put African Americans on the road to socioeconomic achievement and integration into American society” (p. 6). One of the critical points raised by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, author of the Moynihan Report, fixated on observations where the norm appeared to be African American women heading households (pp. 6-7). This structure, observed in many African American families, was questioned by Moynihan, and perceived as a “pathological” condition needing remediation because African American men were considered emasculated in their homes and among their families (p. 7).

**African American Fathers’ Communication Habits with Children**

Ongoing communication with children is an important component to developing and maintaining a positive and healthy relationship with children. African American father’s role in regularly communicating with their children is critical in understanding the academic and social-emotional needs. Academic and social-emotional needs exist within every family and influence a child’s ability to communicate their needs at home and in the school setting. Several researchers cited in this study have expressed the desire
to help fathers engage in effective communication with their children in a positive and efficient manner.

**African American Fathers and Social Emotional Needs of Their Children**

Noddings (2007) defined phenomenology as “a descriptive science concerned primarily with the objects and subjects of consciousness” (p. 70). Phenomenology helps people observe how individuals or various cultures think about themselves and the relationships they have with others and how different resources and conditions influence the quality of a relationship between two or more people. In this study, it was visible that African American fathers used their physical and cultural capital to strengthen their children’s ability to do well in school and develop relationships with others during their high school experience, which overall impacted the social emotional state and confidence of their children.

Arnett (2000) defines a new psychological developmental phase after adolescence called emerging adulthood. During emerging adulthood, those at the end of their teens and before they become young adults begin to develop their own social relationships with the aide of physical and cultural capital resources, much like an individual who use phenomenological thinking when making decisions about how they interact in social institutions. High school is an opportunity for children to learn from parents how to incorporate ways to build self-confidence in academic and social settings. This phenomena is influenced by each child’s family’s opportunity to teach their child effective ways to communicate how they want their father to teach and support their individual goals for the future before they are an adult.
By following this inclusion of phenomenology, African American fathers are displaying their concern about the social emotional welfare of their children and the impact it has on their children’s overall confidence and success (Arnett, 2000).

Gender differences bring on varying types of social emotional needs and how it impacts parent communication regarding their social welfare. Cooper (2009) examined how father-daughter relationships and academic engagement among African American teenage girls. Relying on a psychosocial theoretical approach, this text examined “whether father-daughter relationship quality is indirectly and directly associated with academic engagement among a sample of African American adolescence girls” (p. 496). Though focused on middle-school students, the study is an example of a mixed methods study that examines behaviors of certain members of a school community. A recommendation for future research about “father-daughter relationship quality on both academic engagement and self-esteem” (p. 511) was encouraged.

**African American Fathers as Secondary Liaisons**

Quinones and Kiyama (2014) led a peer research study, which focused on Latino parent involvement in a local school community. Their research team worked closely with school personnel to understand parent involvement, in particular Latino fathers and the impact on student achievement. This study has significantly more mothers who participated compared to fathers, which allowed for the researchers to conduct independent studies on the eight father participants in their study (p. 156). This study promoted student persistence and success along with seeking to understand the barriers that limit a student’s education experiences. School initiatives were evaluated promoting and shaping fathers and all family members in the school engagement process (p. 169).
The overall outcome of this study spoke to the maternal figure being the staple of the school communication and how there is a greater need to understand the father figure and their participation within the school setting (Quinones & Kiyama, 2014).

Likewise, researcher Hochschild (2003) wrote her seminal book *The Second Shift*, which provides readers an in-depth look and discussion of how mothers are the primary care givers and communicators for their children’s education concerns. Historically, this is due to women being stay at home mothers while the fathers have been the “bread winner” for their family. As a result, mothers internalize the responsibility of maintaining the home and children (p. 8). Mothers concerned with their children’s academic welfare, including their academic education experiences, are able to join and become active in any parent organizations, which provide meaningful face to face opportunities for their children to benefit from. Hochschild also spoke about the masses of women who have moved into the economy, and families being hit by a “speed-up” in work and family life. There is no more time in the day than there was when wives stayed home, but there is twice as much to get done. It is mainly women who absorb this “speed-up” (p. 8).

Furthermore, the duties of the “stay at home mom” are still present and evolving with changing responsibilities parents experience in the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century with more mothers working full time. The increase of working mothers as resulted in a shared responsibility between mothers and fathers as they rear their children (Hochschild, 2003).

A more contemporary critique of domestic labor and child rearing is examined in “New Fatherhood and the Politics of Dependency” (Shuffleton, 2014). In this article, Shuffleton provided a detailed explanation of how the role of the fathers has shifted from
days of old. “New Fatherhood” shifts the paradigm that mothers can only be the sole caregiver of children leaving fathers with the role of being the “breadwinner” for the family (p. 216). In today’s families, fathers are encouraged and are being more visible with engagement with building relationships with their children, staying home when they are sick, helping with homework, household chores, etc. Shuffletton noted that fathers may struggle with balancing more child rearing responsibilities with job responsibilities. She referenced the term “transfiguration” has defining what is occurring within families and fathers participation with families as jobs, education levels, and responsibilities are shifting for both men and women (p. 229).

**African American Fathers and Experiences with Racialization**

Domina (2005) and Hamer and Marchioro (2002) analyze how African American fathers’ participation in the education experiences of their high school children can positively affect how these parents interact with their children in their study. The literature does not provide many studies illustrating how African American fathers participate in the educational experiences of children in high school. Articles are available that quantify the involvement of African American fathers in the lives of their children, but this demographic group’s participation in their children’s education experiences is largely absent.

Coley (2003) considers “the role of biological and social fathers in the lives of low-income African American female adolescences, as well as the processes through which fathers influence adolescence psychosocial well-being” (pp. 867-868). This article paid a lot of attention to attachment theory, or the stability of the relationship between a child and parent, and how an adolescence girl is less likely to suffer from depression and
other psychological conditions. However, Coley did not discuss how a healthy relationship for an African American teenage girl and her father can impact the child’s ability to successfully navigate her way through certain social institutions; notably school.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) provided a text that illustrates how it is more complex and difficult for a black family to build relationships with school personnel than for a white family given the social class, and racial lineage and history of black Americans (p. 39). Lareau and Horvat wrote, “Many Black parents, given the historical legacy of racial discrimination in schools cannot presume or trust that their children will be treated fairly in school” (p. 42).

Racialization is defined as the process of assigning ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social practice, or group that does not identify itself as such (Omni & Winant, 1986, p. 5). Racialization is one potential reason why African American fathers do not participate in their high school children’s education experiences. Readers must also be aware of the other reasons that have an influence on a man’s desire to interact with their daughter or son during their high school years.

Similarly, people throughout the United States of America may suggest Americans are living in a color-blind society. To further understand why some people acknowledge a color-blind racist system exists and this system’s flaws, it is helpful to review Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (2006). Bonilla-Silva wrote the following about color-blind racism:
color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards. It allows a president [U.S. President George W. Bush] to state things such as, “I strongly support diversity of all kinds, including racial diversity in higher education,” yet, at the same time, to characterize the University of Michigan’s affirmative action program as “flawed” and “discriminatory” against whites. Thus whites enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding “racists.” Shielded by color blindness, whites can express resentment towards minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic; and even claim to be the victims of “reverse racism.” (pp. 3-4)

A society where its “contemporary racial inequality [is] . . . the outcome of nonracial dynamics,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2) which helps to provide an explanation why certain neighborhoods are racially segregated or integrated. Proponents of this ideology would accept “market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and . . . imputed cultural limitations,” (p. 2) as vital circumstances that influence why certain members of society (i.e., African Americans) have a particular lived reality; such as living in a particular community around other people who look like and think like them. Editors John E. Chub and Tom Loveless (2002) wrote, “Critics of tracking have long charged that the practice treats minority students unfairly, channeling them into low-track classes in which very little learning takes place” (p. 8).

The premise of Bonilla-Silva (2006) research focuses on sociologists Bourdieu (2000) and his concept regarding social and cultural capital needing to exist for families to invest more time and financial resources in their children. Bourdieu reported that characteristics must be displayed that match with successful academic talents or athletic abilities in order for a parent to “understand the rules of the game” for helping their children be successful in the world (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 39). It is important to note
that not all cultural and social capital hold the same value. The value of their children’s capital is determined by the parent and society.

Furthermore, researchers Marsiglio and Cohan (2000) did a qualitative study which highlighted a sampling of the diverse perspectives, methods, and analytic tools to understand the multidisciplinary study of father involvement and paternal influence. These researchers focused on how gender, race, and economic factors shape the context for the practice of fatherhood, fathers’ social capital contributions, and the social psychology of fathering (p. 91).

This subscribed sociological perspective gives this study additional perspectives on how social forces that impact economics, gender, and race contribute to sorting men and fathers into different sets of circumstances that in turn affect the way they think, feel, and act as fathers (Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000, p. 78).

Marsiglio and Cohan (2000) defined social capital as it relates to father involvement as:

Social capital is a multidimensional concept and, when related to fathers’ involvement in children’s lives, indexes paternal contributions to family-based and community-based relations that typically benefit children’s cognitive and social development. One set of relations involves the extent to which fathers maintain relationships with their children and their children’s mother that are predicated on trust, mutual expectations, and a sense of loyalty. To what extent do fathers base their parenting roles on parental support mixed with authoritative control? To what extent do they share similar parenting values and conflict resolution strategies with their co-parent? Are they supportive of their co-parent in familial and non-familial areas? The other set of relations includes fathers’ (and mothers’) connections with individuals and organizations in their larger community, particularly the school and neighborhood. (p. 85)

“Children in father-absent families are reported to have lower educational achievements, more aggression, and less self-regulation” (Honig, 2008, p. 665). These
psychosocial concerns impact children’s ability to concentrate in school and perform well on high-stakes exams, which can add to the stress experienced by single-parent households. In addition, stress is placed on the parent who does not reside with the child who is experiencing difficulties at school, home, and possibly other social institutions (e.g., religious centers, etc.).

One of the most detailed accounts of African American father participation in the education experiences of high school children is by Noguera and Wing (2006). These editors and the other contributors discuss how a group of engaged parents were involved in education reform efforts at Berkeley High School (Berkeley, California) (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Unfinished Business illustrates how a group of civically minded parents, representing students from various socioeconomic classes and ethnic minority groups, were supported by some members of academia and other likeminded pundits (Noguera & Wing, 2006). But, these advocates essentially lead their own fight against school board officials, administrators, faculty, staff, and parents satisfied with the academic achievement status quo (Noguera & Wing, 2006), to improve educational services for children who have not been able to excel academically. This book is an anomaly in its own right because it not only discusses the racial, gender, and socioeconomic composition of parent participants in the school reform efforts, but contains comments and thoughts from teachers and students (p. xii).

**African American Fathers’ Interactions with Educators**

Endya Stewart (2008) reported that parent and child discussions were found to have a significant correlation with academic achievement, suggesting that parental engagement in education-related topics with their children is one of the most effective
ways to improve student’s academic achievement. “This form of parental involvement in students’ academic lives is crucial for promoting achievement” (p. 198). Educators and school personnel can help African American fathers to participate more regarding their children’s academic performance by providing opportunities that are inviting for African American fathers to meet educators along with their children. Jeynes (2010) conducted research that encourages educators and schools to incorporate an inclusive attitude toward the multiple ways minority families are involved in their children’s learning. Educators are able to promote and look for ways to increase parental involvement that is regular and holds children to high expectations in the classroom.

In a similar manner, researcher, Jeynes (2012) did a meta-analysis including 77 studies on different types of parent involvement program for urban students (p. 706). Jeynes asked for readers of his study, in particular educators to ask themselves two questions: “Do school based programs positively affect student outcomes among Prek-12? and What school based programs have the greatest impact?” (p. 712). Jeynes concluded that parental involvement programs are associated with higher student academic outcomes. Jeynes noted that schools should guide parents in reinforcing how powerful it is to reinforce homework, reading, and communicating with the school (p. 718).

Jeynes’s (2012) study focused on teaching parents reading strategies to help their children at home to improve their test scores and overall achievement. His study put an emphasis on consistency with parent communication and tools to aid them in helping their children improve their reading and overall attitude toward school success. Jeynes reported that when parents want to be engaged and sought opportunities for engagement
versus school sponsored programs, academic success was present more often. The ideal situation would be a combination with strong teacher-parent relationships, consistent parenting tools provided to help with improving testing, and authentic ways to engage families who live in urban environments to feel welcomed in a school setting that they may have never embraced or understood when they were a student (p. 740).

Jeynes (2012) two summarizing questions along with the concept of school’s investing in parent programming has recently been on the forefront of investigation and research due to the book *The Broken Compass* (Robinson & Harris, 2014), which attempts to dispel any correlation between parent involvement and student achievement.

While the authors of *The Broken Compass* (2014), Robinson and Harrison, stated, “Many Teachers (and parents) often report that minority parents are less visible at school than their white counterparts” (p. 113). This should be a concerning statistic to educational stakeholders as to why this is the case. Also, these researchers went on to say that any likeminded researcher should explore the topic of parental involvement and inform policy makers and school personnel of the racial and social class variations that impact how to approach parents when dealing with children, especially those who are performing below average in achievement testing (p. 229).

There have been multiple rebuttals of Robinson and Harris’ (2014) research and its claims to demystify any correlation to student achievement with parent involvement. The most noteworthy researcher who challenged Robinson and Harris is Anne Henderson. Henderson is an educator, senior consultant at Annenberg Institute for school reform where she is a leading expert, and author of *Beyond the Bake Sale*, which focuses on studying and understanding the relationships between families and schools. Henderson
stated that Robinson and Harris “draw upon a limited body of federal survey data to cobble together some rather expansive and faulty conclusions” (Walker, 2014, p. 7).

Henderson definitely finds value in pointing out specific drawbacks to certain kinds of parent involvement in schools and the focus on the study used by Robinson and Harris focused mainly on student test scores as the only measure of success in a school. Henderson spoke about how *The Broken Compass* “failed to take into account that correlation does not equal causation” (Walker, 2014, p. 3). Henderson went on to say that if a parent has a student who is below average or failing a subject they should be assisting their children with homework in the home environment. Also, Henderson (Walker, 2014) wrote that if parents do not help their children complete homework and other academic tasks that their lack of participation is minimal proof that the parent’s lack of participation has made the student perform poorly (p. 3).

*Beyond the Bake Sale* (2007) concludes that the term parent involvement should look and feel different than the traditional ways it’s been defined (Walker, 2014, p. 4). *Beyond the Bake Sale* (2007) provides readers with specific strategies, tools, and assessments schools can use to start connecting with families and evaluating immediately if it’s working. School and family partnerships are important and Henderson devoted half of this book sharing with readers why schools should invest in parent participation, which includes checklists to use within schools to assess the schools current culture and needs. The four levels of parent partnership mentioned in Henderson’s book include fortress; come-if-we-call; open-door; and partnership (Anderson & Howland, 2008, p. 166).

Henderson (Henderson et al., 2007) defined these four levels as:
1) Fortress: parents belong at home, not at school. If students don’t do well, it’s because their families don’t give them enough support. We’re already doing all we can. Our school is an oasis in a troubled community. We want to keep it that way.

2) Come-if-we-call: parents are welcome when we ask them, but there’s only so much they can offer. The most important thing they can do is help their kids at home. We know where to get community help if we need it.

3) Open-door: parents can be involved at our school in many ways—we’re working hard to get an even bigger turnout for our activities. When we ask the community to help, people often respond.

4) Partnerships in school: all families and communities have something great to offer—we do whatever it takes to work closely together to make sure every single student succeeds. (pp. 19-25)

Beyond the Bake Sale (2007) also provides specific strategies for schools to help teach parents to be advocates for their children and themselves instead of seeing their child as a “problem child” or a “problem parent” when communicating concerns back and forth regarding their child’s progress. Henderson suggests that when schools “share” the power and responsibility of academic achievement with the families, they will see a better school climate and higher test scores (Anderson & Howland, 2008, p. 169).

The models and parent partnership strategies discussed by Henderson (2007) are within the same construct as Lareau and Horvat’s (1999) Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships. These researchers concluded that parents who intentionally seek to understand the school system’s policies and procedures, teach their children to understand and use effective communication approaches to navigate concerns within the school setting and how to advocate for oneself. Likewise, Campbell and Verna (2007) provided evidence that when parents encourage their children to explore and be involved in their school and
community activities, they build a sense of belonging and a way for them to connect to social and leadership skills outside of the classroom and home environment.

In an interview with the *New York Times*, Robinson (2014) responded to critiques made on their book *The Broken Compass*. He expressed that “Schools should move away from giving the blanket message to parents that they need to be more involved and begin to focus instead on helping parents find specific, and creative ways to communicate the value of schooling, tailored to a child’s age” (Robinson, Interview, *New York Times*, April 2014).

Robinson and Harris (2014) reported their study, dispels the idea that parent involvement automatically impacts student achievement. They wrote “researchers exploring the topic of parental involvement should inform policy makers and school personnel of the racial and social class variation, which impact how to approach parents when dealing with children’s below average achievement” (p. 30). When schools invite parents to sit on advisory teams with administrators to evaluate current practices used to understand student achievement in the classroom and high stake tests, school expectations and modeling ways for parents to be proactive at home when helping their children learn outside of the classroom setting is the new “stage setting.” This new “stage setting” environment provides parents a chance to build up their children’s confidence about doing well in school, which requires parents to understand the expectations set forth for their children in the school community they attend. This joint relationship must be authentic and consistent to see the desired outcome of regular parent and appropriate parent participation in a welcoming school environment, which seeks to understand the community and families it serves.
Summary

The literature on the participation of African American fathers in their children’s education experiences does not provide a lot of discussion about their involvement during high school. There is a shortage of research and texts that specifically address academic and social emotional benefits of having African American fathers involved in their child’s high school experience. This lack of research is not unique to just African Americans fathers; but overall research is lacking when seeking to understand the benefits of African American father (and all fathers regardless of ethnicity) involvement in their child’s high school experience.

Through further examination two distinct mindsets regarding parent participation and their children’s education experiences have emerged: 1) parent participation does influence a child’s education; or 2) the inverse is evident, there is no influence over a child’s education. There is fertile ground for additional research to expand both arguments, and a call for various research methods to be used to help readers understand the diverse and complex nature and ways parents choose to participate in the education experiences of their children. Researchers are encouraged to explore the effectiveness of how parent participation impacts their children’s academic success and social emotional well-being.

The next chapter covers the methodology and methods used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter states the research question and discusses the research methodology used, including the research question and data collection methods. This chapter also provides an overview of the research site and introduces readers to ten African American fathers who participated in semi-structured interviews. In addition, a brief overview of ten high school educators interviewed at the research site, who interacted with African American fathers during and before this study, is included.

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the following research question: “How do African American fathers participate in the education experiences of their high school children?” This question was decided on after reviewing the existing literature and noticing a lack of information in this area. A qualitative case study approach was decided upon, and seven themes emerged, which were used to investigate this topic. Data was collected from field notes of observed events that parents attended at the research site, as well as transcriptions of semi-structured interviews with ten African American fathers and ten educators from the research site. The data was then thematically sorted and used to inform this study’s analysis. These findings and variations of how African American fathers participated in the education experiences of their high school children are discussed in Chapter Four.
Methodological Approach

This study used a qualitative case study methodology which Stake (1995) also provided an example of how to design questions and sort data findings into thematic categories. A case study is defined as addressing a particular and complex a single case, which helps people understand a phenomenon within certain circumstances (p. 110). In addition, Stake explained that the nature of qualitative studies must include: 1) understanding of the complex relationships that exist within the uniqueness of a study; 2) an ability to zero in on the empathetic and empirical findings of each case and the particulars of each case; 3) provide direct interpretations and observations made during study; and 4) seek and obtain meaningful data from information and observations (p. 110).

Similarly, methodology researcher Small (2009) informed readers that a case study’s strength lies not in the being able to generalize, but providing readers with concrete information about a particular phenomenon under examination. Small reported that there is a demand for case studies of poor, minority, or immigrant groups and neighborhoods that not only generate theory but also address the empirical conditions in other cases (not observed). Small did not quantify a set number of case studies needed to generate ideas and theories, but instead focused on the type of data that was being collected and what meaning the data would uncover to share with readers about a broader understanding of a topic that has bias or limited information, due to lack of proper qualitative and sequential order (p. 28).
Overview of Research Site and Participants

Initially, the researcher conducted an online search of public suburban high schools in the Chicago, Illinois metropolitan area that had an African American parent organization. Next, the researcher contacted administrators from multiple public high schools. Meetings with two of the high school principals were conducted, in which this study’s research question and methodology were discussed. The reasons behind selecting public suburban high schools in the Chicago, Illinois metropolitan area with an African American parent organization were exclusively considered are the following: (1) the researcher was working full-time in the Chicagoland area, so he elected to conduct this study locally; and (2) the researcher wanted a high school to assist in identifying African American fathers to serve as subjects. An African American parent organization assisted the researcher in recruiting study participants. As a result of this process, one research site was secured: Suburban High School (SHS) of Du Page County, Illinois.

Research Site Selection and Data Collection

The researcher initially wanted to conduct this study at three suburban high schools in order to acknowledge any variations or similarities of how the phenomenon of African American father participation in the high school setting is understood. This did not occur, as two schools declined to participate in this study, despite spending an entire semester making multiple phone calls, sending e-mails and letters, and conducting face-to-face interviews with administration at all three respective schools. Despite this shortcoming, the researcher was welcomed to collect thorough and meaningful data at SHS. This invitation allowed the researcher to begin his investigation on the research question posed.
Suburban High School made it a priority to construct design-specific services to reduce the achievement gap and provide services to acculturate students to SHS’s competitive academic and extra-curricular culture. Suburban High provided information on their website describing the nature of their student intervention programs, mainly the student-faculty mentoring program and the school’s African American parent organization, Parent Connection. The student-faculty mentoring program, Parent Connection, and SHS’s unique school demographics made this high school a promising site from which to collect data.

**Data from the Illinois Interactive Report Card (IIRC)**

When this study was conducted during the spring of 2012, Suburban High School had a coed enrollment over 3,000 students. The racial composition of SHS students was 68% White, 5.5% Black, 7.9% Hispanic, 15.2% Asian, .1% American Indian, .2% Pacific Islander, and 3.1% Two or More Races (IIRC).

Suburban High School had a low-income student enrollment of 11.3%, an average daily attendance rate of 95.6%, and a 100% parental involvement rate during the 2011-2012 school year (IIRC).

In 2014, the IIRC defines parental involvement as:

the percentage of students whose parents or guardians have had one or more personal contacts with the students’ teachers during the school year concerning the students’ education, and such other information, commentary, and suggestions as the school district desires. For the purposes of this paragraph, “personal contact” includes, but is not limited to, parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. The parental involvement component shall not single out or identify individual students, parents, or guardians by name. (IIRC)
This definition of parental involvement is broad, and includes various forms of communication and contact a parent can have with SHS. Furthermore, the IIRC reported parental involvement rate of 100% at SHS does not specify the ethnicity or race, socioeconomic status, or the variation of activities a parent participated in nor the frequency to meet the criteria mentioned on the website.

**Data Collection**

As a result of having one research site, the researcher was able to attend many curricular and co-curricular school-sponsored events. This enabled the researcher to develop relationships and credibility with parents and school personnel, as they visibly observed the researcher attending various events to best understand the culture of African American father involvement at SHS.

The research officially began after meeting with the principal of SHS and the letter of cooperation was received via mail. This letter was an agreement between the researcher and SHS that all visits to the school must be prearranged in order to conduct any research activities for this study. The letter expressed that every participant interviewed must sign a consent-to-participate document with the researcher. In addition, the letter of consent stated that no publication of this study can occur without the written consent of every participant. All of these caveats were written within the letter of consent that met Loyola University Chicago’s Institutional Review Board.

Since this is a qualitative study, the researcher used sampling for range and snowball sampling to obtain participants for this study. According to Small (2009), “interview based researchers should consider focusing on long standing techniques which might yield better and more reliable data through sampling for range” (pp.13-14). In addition,
Small discussed how snow-ball sampling is a well-known practice of obtaining additional participants for an interview based study by asking for referrals of other African American fathers who were participants in this study. To gain a better understanding of the knowledge acquired through interview based research, the researcher used the “extended case method” model, which allowed the researcher to learn from a particular social situation in relation to the broader social forces shaping it (p. 19). An extended case method (ECM) is an ethnographic research method which provides a detailed study of concrete empirical cases with a view to “extract” general principles from specific observations (Small, 2009). Within this study, the researcher provides readers with a number of related events and actions from interviews and observations at SHS where subjects and educators over an extended period of time illustrate the variations of how African American fathers participate in their children’s education experiences.

Observations and Field Notes

Along with meeting the Institutional Review Board’s expectations, Suburban High School’s principal connected the researcher to a retired African American faculty member who was serving as a consultant and the primary liaison for the Parent Connection organization. Parent Connection is a parent organization of SHS that seeks to inspire and empower African American students to achieve higher levels of academic performance. Parent Connection states that their mission is achieved by the collaborative efforts of parents, school and the community (SHS website).

The SHS Parent Connection liaison told the researcher about various curricular and co-curricular events to attend, that African American fathers traditionally attended. The liaison’s assistance helped the researcher find events to observe desired subjects. At
these events and other programs, the researcher took field notes on African American fathers who were participating in the education experiences of their children.

**Participant Selection and Data Collection**

In addition, SHS’s Parent Connection liaison extended an invitation to the researcher to attend a Parent Connection monthly meeting. At the April 2013 meeting, the researcher was given an opportunity to talk about this study. At the conclusion of the researcher’s address to the attendees, an invitation to participate in the study was extended to African American fathers present at the meeting. Four African American fathers exchanged information with the researcher and later scheduled an interview. The four African American fathers referred other African American fathers to the researcher, securing three additional fathers to interview. In total, ten African American fathers were interviewed. The ten semi-structured interviews were the premier research method of this study because each subject was given an opportunity to offer their own account of how they participated in the education experiences of their children. The first interview took place on April 23, 2013, and the last interview was conducted on September 1, 2013.

Similarly, the Parent Connection liaison and SHS principal connected the researcher with ten SHS educators who interacted with African American fathers, either as a classroom teacher, counselor, coach, or school administrator. These SHS educators were interviewed on May 21, 2013. During each individual semi-structured interview, these participants were able to communicate their perceptions of how African American fathers participated in their children’s high school education experiences at SHS.
The ten interviews with African American fathers and ten interviews with SHS educators were transcribed. Also, each SHS event observed had field notes recorded. These two methods served as the means to collect data for this study, which were thematically organized into seven findings, discussed in Chapter Four.

The following text reviews the limitations and reliability of this study’s data.

**Limitations and Reliability of the Data**

Data collected from observations (field notes) and interviews (transcriptions and summaries) do not have a universal meaning. The varied and diverse data collected and used to form conclusions and recommendations give those interested in African American father participation at the high school level a multifaceted representation of the case. This type of qualitative data analysis from a case study that elects to interview subjects, present “multiple realities” (Stake, 1995, p. 64). Inherently, this is one of the limitations, as well as a strength, of case study research, which allows subjects to hold various “descriptions and interpretations of others [events and social interactions]” (p. 64). The inability to easily manipulate data collected from observations or interviews, reduce a case study’s ability to effectively provide a comprehensive assessment of a larger social issue, such as African American father participation in public education. Documents (e.g., websites, online texts, leaflets, reports, and student files) that provide information germane to the study reduce confusion and increase the validity of observations noted and comments made during interviews.

As for challenges regarding the physical process of collecting data, hand written and word processed copies of all field notes were cataloged. As for interviews, notes were hand written and transcriptions were typed, with the assistance of an audio-recorder
to replay and review interviews, to assist with the data collection process for the study interviews. In addition, during observation of participants, it was very important to observe from rooms at events where the researcher can visibly see and hear as many people as possible at any given event. Each interview took place, with the consent of school administrators, in rooms at each SHS that were private and gave each interviewee an opportunity to be heard clearly.

Another challenge in collecting data for this research project lay with the researcher gaining the trust of constituents in the school community. Considering that the majority of field work took place on evenings and weekends outside of the regular school day, there was limited access to observe how African American fathers participate in their children’s education experiences and engaged with their children and school officials. It was imperative for the researcher to work closely with school administrators who referred African American fathers and SHS educators to serve as participants in this study. In addition, the researcher was made aware of seminal events capable of providing opportunities to observe how parents participated in the education experiences of their children.

Within the idea of reliability, this study was conducted by a researcher who is an African American father of two children and not employed by the unit district where African American fathers interviewed sent their children to school. These conditions provided these participants a safe forum to express their experiences in a non-threatening manner to someone who mirrored their ethnicity and culture. In addition, the researcher was younger than all of the African American fathers interviewed for this study. Participants in this study welcomed the researcher as an individual seeking to understand
their experiences, and not someone who was judging the quality and frequency of their participation in the education experiences of their children. As a result of this positionality, participants referred additional fathers to contact the researcher in hopes to expand this study.

Educators who were interviewed in this study were aware that the researcher had the support of the principal of SHS to obtain their perspective on how African American fathers participate in their children’s education experiences at SHS. This request by the principal influenced the ability of the researcher to obtain scheduled interviews with SHS educators. Of the ten educators interviewed, only two were minority staff members and all educators had various personal and professional experiences with observing African American fathers at SHS. Overall, these educators interviewed, provided the researcher with insight about the views, opinions, and culture of SHS and African American father participation at SHS school events and educational setting.

The next section introduces the African American fathers who were interviewed and observed in this study.

**Introduction of African American Fathers**

Each man signed a consent form prior to the interview he participated in. The interviews ranged between 33 minutes to 75 minutes in length, and the age of participants varied, which was indicated by the year each participant graduated from high school. The oldest subject graduated from high school in 1974, and the youngest subject graduated from high school in 1988 (Miller Interview, May 9, 2013; Sanders Interview, September 1, 2013). Table 1 illustrates this data, along with each participant’s: children’s
mother’s name, marital status, number of children, and number of children in high school.

Table 1. African American Father’s Family Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Father</th>
<th>Name of Children’s Mother</th>
<th>Year Father Graduated From H.S.</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Number of Children in H.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curtis Clarke</td>
<td>Camille</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Daniels</td>
<td>Denise</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darrell Dixon</td>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Jackson</td>
<td>Jonetta</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrell Lewis</td>
<td>Latoya</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Miller</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otis O’Neal</td>
<td>Octavia</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Powell</td>
<td>Patrice</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedrick Sanders</td>
<td>Sorcha</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrance Taylor</td>
<td>Tamika</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mr. Curtis Clarke

Mr. Curtis Clarke, a 1982 high school graduate, is married to Mrs. Camille Clarke. Together the Clarke’s have three children who attended SHS during the 2012-2013 school year. Two of their children were seniors—Christopher, 18, and Corey, 17; and their only daughter—Cassandra, 16, was a junior. According to Mr. Clarke, his expectation for each of his children is to participate and try their best in the classroom, and if any of the children have success in one of their extra-curricular activities, that’s
great, but Clarke insisted that grades come first. During Clarke’s response to the following questions, “What’s your favorite memory from any of your children since they’ve entered high school? What’s your favorite memory so far?” he shared, “they [Christopher, Corey, and Cassandra] can see the big picture they can see down the road; so that’s encouraging to me” (personal communication, April 23, 2013). Clarke believes that academic success is the most important thing for a student; for his children. As a result of Clarke placing an emphasis on academic excellence, his sons Christopher and Corey were not only able to each receive full athletic baseball scholarships to Ivy League colleges, but each child took multiple advanced placement courses at SHS and earned college credit prior to graduating from high school.

Cassandra sang with one of the SHS choirs and danced with the SHS Orchesis Dance Troupe. In addition, Cassandra took regular education and several Honors English classes as a student at SHS.

Mr. David Daniels

Mr. David Daniels’ children have a similar level of success, but his family’s story is different. Daniels, a 1987 high school graduate, was separated from his wife Denise during this study, but Daniels and Denise raised their children, Deitra, 17, and David, Jr., 15, together. Deitra lived with Daniels, where she attended another Chicagoland high school, and David, Jr. lived with Denise and attended SHS. Deitra attended the local high school, where she participated on the high school and nearby club gymnastics teams in her community; her brother, David, Jr., participated on the SHS soccer and track teams. Despite both children being very active in athletics and being full-time students,
their father participated in many of their education experiences, especially their co-curricular activities.

Daniels mentioned during his interview that he and Denise agreed to Deitra living with him and attending the local high school near him, which had a more competitive gymnastics team and competitive club gymnastics program, which enabled their daughter to train year-round. The coaches’ expertise and commitment to Deitra, along with her hard work and the support of her family, gave her an opportunity to compete in amateur competitions. Deitra’s performance gave her early vital exposure to a top women’s gymnastics program, and according to Daniels, the family was hopeful that she would receive an NCAA scholarship (personal communication, June 27, 2013). After this study, the researcher learned that Deitra received a full athletic scholarship to a women’s gymnastics team. David Jr. lived with his mother and attended SHS. David’s athletic performance was not as successful as his sister’s, but both of his parents made it a priority to attend his soccer games and track meets.

Both of his children have been enrolled in regular education courses.

Daniels shared that he is in constant communication with his son via phone and face-to-face contact (i.e., they eat dinner with each other on a regular basis and attend church together). Denise does the same with Deitra, as their schedules allow.

**Mr. Darrell Dixon**

Mr. Darrell Dixon and his wife Diana have five children. He is a 1975 high school graduate. All of Dixon’s sons play at least one musical instrument, which keeps these parents busy (personal communication, May 21, 2013). Dion, the oldest child
graduated from SHS in 2011, and their second and third-born children, Denzel and
Damian, were enrolled in their junior and freshman year, respectively, at SHS during the
2012-2013 school year. Dwayne, the youngest boy, was in sixth grade during the 2012-
13 school year, and the two-year-old daughter, Danielle, is the youngest member of the
Dixon family. Dixon shared that he thinks African American fathers need to participate in
programs for parents, so their children are represented and their voices and their concerns
are acknowledged by SHS. This was one of Dixon’s core values that resonated during
his interview, and was shared by other participants.

Mr. Julius Jackson

Among the participants who agreed with Dixon’s position that African American
fathers need to participate in programs for parents at SHS was Mr. Julius Jackson.
Jackson, a 1986 high school graduate, and his wife Jonetta have three children: Josh, Jeff,
and Jackie. During Jackson’s interview, his oldest son Josh was a sophomore and
involved in various student organizations, while his two other children, Jeffrey and
Jacqueline, were enrolled in junior high and elementary school, respectively, during this
study. Jackson shared during his interview that Josh attended a private Cook County
Christian school from kindergarten through eighth grade until the family moved to SHS’s
community prior moving to SHS’s community, where he then attended SHS (personal
communication, May 14, 2013). Jackson expressed a concern that Josh did not have any
black friends, while maintaining one of the primary responsibilities for parents is to “be
there [at the school—SHS] and have our child’s back and make sure they don’t fail”
(personal communication, May 14, 2013).
Jackson was another African American father more concerned with his child doing well in school rather than having a high school experience where his child had a solely social experience at SHS. Jackson, much like other subjects, wanted his son to experience academic success. This desire was a recurring theme. In addition, Jackson expressed that he wanted Josh to use a successful education experience at SHS to help him develop a foundation to secure future prosperity, pleasure, and peace in his future professional and personal life.

Mr. Latrell Lewis

Mr. Latrell Lewis is a 1985 high school graduate, and he and his wife Latoya are the proud parents of a daughter, Lisa, who received a Division I basketball scholarship (personal communication, May 16, 2013). With Lisa earning a full-ride scholarship to college, beginning in August of 2013, this allowed for Lewis and Latoya’s desire for their daughter to earn college degree more attainable.

Lewis did not express a similar post-secondary expectation for his son Lance, who received special education services at an off-site school during this study, because SHS was not able to meet all of the accommodations in Lance’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) (personal communication, May 16, 2013). The Lewis family, similar to other families represented in this study, were very close because the parents advocated for their children. Lewis and Latoya have advocated for each of their children in very unique and specific ways to fulfill their children’s needs at SHS and beyond. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis were concerned about establishing ideal conditions to ensure future academic success, especially for Lisa’s future success as a college student (personal communication, May 16, 2013).
Mr. Michael Miller

The Miller family embraced the ambition to have their children do well in school, as well. The Millers decided on living in the community where Suburban High School and the other unit district schools exist, before their children were born. Miller, a 1974 high school graduate from a Chicago Public School, and his wife Mary are the parents of Marcus, a 15-year-old sophomore, Malia, a 13-year old eighth grader, and a nine-year-old third grader, Myles. Not only did Miller talk about his children’s continued successes as they have matriculated through SHS’s unit district, but Michael communicated that his wife Mary, a junior high school teacher, has been a positive academic influence over all of his children. In addition, Miller and his wife have served on various parent organizations throughout their children’s academic careers. Miller talked about Marcus knowing that “somebody is going to be there for him one way or the other, and that he can come to us” (personal communication May 9, 2013).

Mr. Otis O’Neal

Mr. Otis O’Neal, a 1979 high school graduate, and his wife Octavia have raised two young men. The O’Neal family’s SHS graduates are 21-year old Otis Jr. and 18-year old Class of 2013 grad, Omar. O’Neal recognized that his sons “did okay; they both struggled” (personal communication, July 1, 2013) academically, specifically in English. O’Neal regularly checks in with his sons during the week and mentioned that his family spent time together on weekends, attending church and brunch. The weekend was a time when O’Neal talked extensively with his sons about school and their future plans after high school.
Mr. Paul Powell

Mr. Paul Powell, a 1978 high school graduate, and his wife Patrice came to the United States from Jamaica for professional opportunities in the greater Chicagoland area. One of the concerns the Powell’s had was making sure they picked a community that was safe and able to provide their son a quality education. Powell and Patrice made the decision to locate to Suburban High School’s unit school district community. Mr. and Mrs. Powell have become active members of various parent organizations at SHS, despite their busy careers as an electrical engineer and consultant for an interior design company, respectively.

Powell shared during his interview that his father was not present or active in his life, and he went on to explain that his mother’s physical presence at school sponsored events, not her understanding of education’s ability to improve his financial circumstances in the future, gave school officials an opportunity to encourage her to push him to continue his formal education after high school (personal communication, April 25, 2013). The absence of a father was an emotional pain that other African American fathers interviewed for this study communicated during their interviews, and multiple African American fathers interviewed stated that they would not abandon their children. The story of each man who grew up without their father was slightly different; some men never lived with their father, while others lived with their father during part of their life, and some of the men were able to stay in contact with their father, even if the relationship had been off and on throughout their life.
Mr. Sedrick Sanders

Mr. Sedrick Sanders, a 1988 high school graduate, and his wife Sorcha have a daughter, Sareena, who attended SHS during this study. Sanders wanted Sareena to have a positive high school experience, in part because his parents went through a divorce during his freshman year, which he shared was a difficult year for him, and the divorce had a big impact on his life (personal communication, September 1, 2013). This was different from some of the other subjects because Sanders communicated that the relationship he had with his father, prior to his parents divorcing, was not good, and it became even worse after the divorce (personal communication, September 1, 2013). Sanders made it a point to participate in school-sponsored programs for his class of 2016 daughter Sareena, who takes regular education courses. He seized opportunities to show his love for his daughter and wife by letting his actions be a reflection of his love, and not only his words (personal communication, September 1, 2013).

Mr. Terrance Taylor

Mr. Terrance Taylor and his wife Tamika made and kept a commitment for their sons, Tony, Class of 2010 and Tim, Class of 2013, through their graduation from SHS and beyond. Taylor, a 1984 high school graduate and pharmaceutical sales representative, provided various opportunities for Tim, his son who attended SHS during this study, to stimulate his interests in math and science. Taylor provided Tim access to a tutor for some of the AP courses he took at SHS to supplement the classroom instruction he received, to help him be successful (personal communication, June 5, 2013). In addition, Taylor and Tamika supported their children, despite any of their academic shortcomings.
Taylor shared during his interview that Tony began pursuing his bachelor’s degree, but withdrew because he was not interested in completing a four or two-year post-secondary education; instead, Tony wanted to pursue a vocation certification (personal communication, June 5, 2013). Taylor mentioned that Tony graduated with a 2.8 GPA and planned on attending college (personal communication, June 5, 2013). Taylor provided stories of how he and his wife planned to continue supporting and encouraging their children, even though they may not follow the path Taylor and Tamika had wanted.

This concludes the introduction of African American fathers interviewed. The following text briefly describes the ten educators at SHS who were interviewed for this study.

**Introduction of Educators**

Each educator signed a consent form prior to the interview they participated in. All interviews took place at SHS, and ranged between 20 minutes and 48 minutes in length. Each educator interviewed was referred to the researcher by the principal of SHS, who prearranged set times for the interviews to take place. According to the principal of SHS, the ten educators interviewed for this study interacted with African American fathers in their role as a teacher, coach, counselor, or school administrator. Table 2 illustrates the number of SHS educators interviewed by the role they served during this study. Some of the educators served in more than one role at SHS. This occurred as a result of three educators coaching in addition to serving in another role at SHS during this study.
Table 2. Number of Educators by Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role at SHS</th>
<th>Number of SHS Educators In Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected from the semi-structured interviews completed with the ten SHS educators have been incorporated in the thematic findings of this study. This concludes the introduction of SHS educators interviewed.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the methodology and methods used to collect data. The next chapter will discuss the findings of this study.
CHAPTER FOUR
FINDINGS

This chapter presents seven findings that illustrate how African American fathers in this case study participated in their children’s high school education experiences. In particular, this chapter includes the ideas and statements of ten African American fathers interviewed who had one or more child attend Suburban High School (SHS) when this case study was conducted. The perceptions of ten SHS educators (e.g., administrators, counselors, teachers, and coaches) who have interacted with African American fathers during and prior to this study, were gathered from individual interviews. Data was also collected from observations of African American fathers at SHS academic and co-curricular events. Moreover, the findings reviewed within this chapter not only answer this study’s research question, but present variations from the data collected in this study that were diverse and connects the data to the existing literature.

Relationships with Parents Reconsidered:

African American Fathers’ Reflections of their Parents

African American fathers in this study were reflective upon their high school experiences and intentionally promoted certain values they believed will help their children be more successful than they were as teenagers and young adults. This desire to prepare the next generation for a successful life is a common goal for parents. According to Arnett (2000), parents realize emerging adulthood creates financial and emotional stress that is difficult to manage as a young adult.
In this study, the ten fathers discussed how their relationships with their parents influenced their views of fatherhood, their career paths, and life paths. Many subjects discussed how not having a father present when they were in high school impacted their career paths and future decision making skills. The following paragraphs provide a summary of this particular finding on the relationships these subjects had with their fathers. This is similar to Lareau (2003), who discussed two parenting styles: natural growth and concerted cultivation. The study’s participants seem to have experienced the natural growth model while they themselves were growing up, whereas their own parenting practices more closely resembled concerted cultivation practices. In the following sub-themes, readers will learn how subjects felt about their experiences of being a father compared to the relationship these subjects had with their biological father.

**The Influence of Growing Up Without a Father**

During participant O’Neal’s interview, he shared, “Growing up without a father, I was very sensitive about this [participating in my children’s education experiences] and I didn’t want my children to grow up this way, but I also believe there are some lessons they [Otis’ children] need to learn on their own (personal communication, July 1, 2013). He continued, “I think they [African American fathers] have to be involved; you can’t just be there [at school functions] ... You have to have a strategy. One thing I noticed is that Chinese families send their students to Saturday school to learn strategies. I learned this because I coached basketball and they would be in the high school teaching strategies to their kids, and I think African American kids could use this too” (personal communication, July 1, 2013). Participant O’Neal talked about his children—Otis, Jr. (Class of 2010) and Omar (Class of 2013), not meeting the academic expectations of the
O’Neal home him and his wife Octavia established (O’Neal Interview; July 1, 2013). Otis and Octavia expected their boys to earn B’s or better in their classes (O’Neal Interview; July 1, 2013). In an effort to be informed of the particular challenges Otis, Jr. and Omar encountered at SHS, O’Neil shared that during Sunday brunch he would listen to any concerns and be made aware of major upcoming academic tasks from his children; as well as any co-curricular or social-emotional concerns (O’Neal Interview; July 1, 2013).

One insight O’Neil shared during his interview that he learned from having conversations with Otis, Jr. and Omar was that his sons needed to have a certain level of comfort (O’Neal Interview; July 1, 2013). The level of comfort O’Neil was talking about was his children’s being secure in their school environment at SHS, and one of the goals Otis pursued to help his boys feel more comfortable, to have less stress attributed to any social discomfort, was “to build relationships with the teachers and principals because the change in dynamics—and this impacted the way they [Otis, Jr. and Omar] performed in the classroom” (O’Neal Interview; July 1, 2013). Also, participant O’Neal shared that he encouraged his children to schedule meetings with their teachers—whether it was before or after school; to get additional tutoring from their SHS teachers to give them the confidence they needed to do their best academically (O’Neal Interview; July 1, 2013). This intimate knowledge about his children’s preferences and mentoring his children to learn how they can advocate for themselves may not be directly attributed to O’Neal having brunch with his children weekly. Yet, this Sunday event helped O’Neil cultivate a relationship with his children, which made it possible for him to be aware of what concerns his boys perceived as a problem worth sharing with their dad.
O’Neal’s parenting habit mirrors renowned author, Stephen Covey’s (1997) five key ways parents are able to participation to their children. Covey’s (1997) five key strategies for parents to participate in their children’s education and social experiences are: 1) Emphasizing (intentionally listening); 2) Sharing (authentically sharing your emotions, thoughts, and concerns with your children); 3) Affirming (uplifting and providing your children with an intentional sense of validation, appreciation, and encouragement; 4) Praying (utilizing higher powers for strength and wisdom to raise and uplift your children); and 5) Sacrificing (doing more than is required, providing additional support despite hardships it may cause by doing so) (Covey, 1997, p. 338).

Another participant who emulated Covey’s (1997) strategies was participant Clarke. Clarke talked openly in his interview about his father not being a presence in his life, and shared a similar pledge that mirrors participant O’Neal’s. Participant Clarke suggested that his father taught him that a father’s presence is helpful, by his not being present (personal communication, April 23, 2013). Clarke shared during his interview that he is an Assistant Troupe Leader for his sons’ Boy Scout Troupe, to make sure they stay on task to get their Eagle requirements (Clarke Interview; April 23, 2013). Again, here is an example of Clarke participating in a physical activity with his children—in this case Christopher and Corey; who participate in a local Boy Scout Troupe that meets at the black Protestant church his family attends in Du Page County (Clarke Interview; April 23, 2013).

Similarly, participant Powell shared similar statements about his biological father being absent, and how his high school principal asked his mother about what college Powell was going to attend impacted his life (P. Powell personal communication, April
25, 2013). Powell’s mother shared with his high school principal that he was simply going to work after graduating high school. “…the principal said, ‘You’re just going to let him work?’ My mom was embarrassed, and by that statement. At that point I had decided that I needed to go to college” (P. Powell, personal communication, April 25, 2013).

In this study, African American fathers shared vivid accounts that explained how growing up with or without a father influenced their lives, and how they pledged to commit themselves to their children. The following category under this finding discusses these subjects involvement in their children’s athletic experiences.

**Being Involved in Athletics**

Within the first few moments of their interviews, four of the fathers interviewed talked about their own extra-curricular participation in a high school activity, others talked about the racial composition of the high school they attended, and still others talked about the quality of the education experiences they had as high school students. These responses came as a result of protocol question one, which every subject was asked. This question was “Describe your experiences as a high school student. When and where did you graduate from high school?”

Below is a list of statements made by four of the African American fathers about their involvement in one or more extra-curricular activities they participated in when they were in high school. Participant Clarke stated, “I liked playing sports, and I was on the football, basketball, and baseball teams. And I really enjoyed playing sports” (personal communication, April 23, 2013). Participant Lewis shared that he “played [college] football all four years, so I knew the process,” in order to help his daughter Lisa consider
her Division I scholarship offers and pick the university that best met her needs (personal communication, May 16, 2013). Participant O’Neal mentioned “I played a couple of sports—I didn’t play every year though. I play football, basketball, and a little baseball” (personal communication, July 1, 2013).

Participant Powell said “I was captain on the track and field team, I did rugby, I participated in plays—I played the voice of God, opera—I was an okay singer” (personal communication, April 25, 2013).

Participants Clarke, Lewis, O’Neal, and Powell all talked about their participation in athletics. These memories had a significant impact in their willingness to participate in their children’s co-curricular activities because each father was able to reflect on the positive experience they had as a high school athlete and they want to replicate that same experience for their children. Athletics was not the only indicator of participation in their children’s extra-curricular experiences, but the researcher note that father attendance at athletic events was the most attended co-curricular while observing subjects and African American fathers at SHS.

These subjects participation in their children’s co-curricular experiences were intentional acts to build relationships with their children by providing visible support at their co-curricular events. These intentional behaviors and statements are illustrations of phenomenology, where subjects discussed their past experiences with athletics and their relationships with their children. In addition, the shared joy and satisfaction they experienced as high school athletes is similar to their children’s experience with athletics.

Subjects in this study and their children both recognize the benefits of participating in sports. This phenomenon produced experiences that are very similar but
different because of the environment where the children participated in athletics and the fact that the subjects, as their children’s father attended the experiences that their children participated in, unlike the absence of these subjects’ fathers at their athletic events.

In these examples, there is a correlation between the African American fathers in this study and their high school athletic and co-curricular experiences impacting their willingness to participate and support their own high school children’s experiences. Additionally, these subjects used their cultural and social capital to strengthen their children’s ability to do well in their co-curricular activities. In the next finding, the researcher speaks about how these subjects participated in their high school children’s academic programs.

**African American Fathers’ Participation in Academic Programs**

A common thread amongst the fathers in this study, is the use of their resources and time to promote their children’s academic achievement in high school by attending school events for parents and providing supplemental academic enrichment opportunities. Robinson and Harris (2014) stated, “Parents who have post-high school goals for their student tend to be valuable for student progress, despite the parent’s income level or outcome of student’s achievement” (p. 84). The following categories are key findings that came out of this study regarding these fathers participation in academic programs.

**African American Fathers Attended Academic Programs and Meetings**

Domina (2005) and Edin et al. (2009) discussed how a father’s presence and participation have a positive influence on children’s achievement. Examples of this conclusion is evident in all ten of the participants. One participant expressed that it was vital for parents to meet with school officials to let them know that you, as a parent, are
serious about advocating for your child (P. Powell, personal communication, April 25, 2013). Participant Powell shared why he participates in various parent programs and does not solely use different electronic communication with his child’s teachers and coaches at SHS.

Powell stated:

Now when we come to parent programs or meetings with teachers we [referring to him and his wife Patrice] recognize that teachers who don’t see you being engaged have the inclination to not engage you. We’ve had some issues, but because we have been on top of things, we figured it out; we’ve come in and shared what we are doing and ask what else we can be doing and they [teachers] share what more needs to be done. (personal communication, April 25, 2013)

Participant Powell’s willingness to have face-to-face interactions with educators, versus relying on e-mailing and calling educators over the phone, made it possible for him to clearly communicate expectations he and his wife had for their son and the teachers working with their child. Also, meeting with educators face-to-face provided an opportunity for educators to review and explain which imperative skills and course knowledge have been developed and learned. In addition, skills and course knowledge that need additional practice to demonstrate mastery were addressed.

Parents with children who receive special education services are required to be members of their child’s Individualized Education Planning (IEP) Team. Parents are expected to participate in annual meetings along with engaging in regular communication with their child’s case manager (Kunz & Eulass, 2009, p. 36). African American fathers in this study had children who received IEP services and they participated in regular communication and scheduled meetings for their children.
Participant Jackson discussed how he and Jonetta have been committed to advocating for their son Josh at his annual review meetings. Jackson emphasized there was still a need for their son to continue working with the speech pathologist because he would mispronounce words. Getting good grades was not the standard Mr. and Mrs. Jackson were willing to accept and use in order to determine if Josh should stop receiving special education services. The Jacksons wanted him to demonstrate that his speech was fluid and free from certain imperfections associated with his need for speech therapy (personal communication, May 14, 2013). “As parents we have to do our job to follow up with this and ask questions. We have to be there and have our child’s back, and make sure they don’t fail” (J. Jackson, personal communication, May 14, 2013). This is another example of African American fathers being reluctant to trust an institution; in this case, Suburban High School.

It should be recognized that none of the other African American fathers interviewed for this study, besides participant Powell, explicitly talked about attending and participating in SHS’s parent teacher conferences. However, multiple African American fathers interviewed for this study did acknowledge their children’s participation in the student-mentoring program or their participation in Parent Connection and school sponsored meetings.

Participant Miller shared an account about him and his wife being a part of SHS’s district think tank of seven elementary school teachers, the elementary school principals, and two other married couples when their oldest son Marcus was in elementary school to discuss perceived problems of black boys (M. Miller Interview; May 9, 2013). Miller talked about his active role in this committee, but he did not share any account of him
being actively involved in any committees or any think tanks, since 2011 when Marcus began attending SHS.

An insightful follow-up to participant Miller’s involvement is reviewing the interview of participant Jackson, where he spoke openly about his views of the educator’s role versus the parent role when educating a student. Jackson stated “A lot of times a teacher may not have your student’s best interests at heart. The ideal thing is [that] teachers have the highest interests of students at heart. As parents we know that that’s not always true. As parents we have to do our job to follow up with this and ask questions. We have to be there and have our child’s back, and make sure they don’t fail” (J. Jackson, personal communication; May 14, 2013).

Participant Powell expressed a similar opinion as participants Jackson and Miller, “it’s a game and you got to know the rules” (P. Powell personal communication April 25, 2013). Powell stated: “I think it’s important to set up additional meeting with the counselor, and sit down and review concerns. I know other parents who have done this” (P. Powell personal communication; April 25, 2013). Participant Lewis shared during his interview an account about another African American father who had some questions about his son’s academic progress, came up to SHS and immediately scheduled a meeting with his child’s counselor. Participants Lewis and Powell both mentioned how SHS staff regularly contact parents to discuss any type of concerns regarding their child (L. Lewis personal communication; May 16, 2013).

This sub-theme provided specific examples of how African American fathers were active participants in their high school children’s academics. The subjects’ communication with SHS gives encounters of various settings and experiences, which
include a certain level of variation given the academic progress and needs of their individual children. In the next sub-themed category, readers are presented with how these subject’s utilized the school information system used at SHS to be involved with monitoring their children’s academic progress.

**Participants Used School Information Systems to Monitor Academic Progress**

SHS provides a school information system called Infinite Campus which allows parents and students to view current grades, attendance, transcripts, and any school infractions obtained during the school day. SHS provides parents with a log-in to view this information during registration each school year. Parents can also email the teacher for the Infinite Campus system along with checking daily homework assignments if the teacher chooses to post this type of information on their particular area.

Every subject in this study utilized Infinite Campus to monitor their children’s grades. Researchers Campbell and Verna (2007) spoke about effective parental practices, which includes being committed to monitoring their children’s academic progress. Regularly checking their children’s grades using SHS’s Infinite Campus system is an example of Campbell and Verna’s (2007) “parent recipes” for an appropriate and successful way to be involved in their children’s education.

Specifically, participant Lewis expressed that he not only monitored his daughter’s academic performance in science through Infinite Campus, but made an effort to be in regular communication with her teachers using this system (L. Lewis personal communication; May 16, 2013). After being in ongoing communication with his daughter’s science teacher about her academic progress, and only a marginal
improvement in her grade occurred; Lewis made the decision for Lisa to get additional academic support with a paid outside tutor (L. Lewis Interview; May 16, 2013).

An additional use of technology available at SHS is the software program Naviance, which gives users the ability to complete a career interest inventory and perform college-related searches for admission and scholarships. In particular, using Naviance provided participant Powell with another opportunity to participate and engage in conversations with his son about college trends, needed ACT scores for admission to particular colleges and universities, and the result of his career inventory search. Specifically, Powell communicated with his son’s guidance counselor, who provided their son some ideas about which major and college, university, or trade school to explore.

In closing, both of SHS’s school systems, Infinite Campus and Naviance provided subjects in this study ongoing communication and monitoring of their student’s progress and post-secondary goals. The next finding covers how African American fathers participated in co-curricular events at SHS.

**African American Fathers’ Participation in Co-Curricular Activities**

As noted in the literature review chapter of this dissertation, research over the past several decades has documented a positive link between parent involvement and children’s school success. A father’s presence and participation have a positive influence on children’s academic achievement (Domina, 2005; Edin et al., 2009). Additionally, Fox and Bruce (2001) developed the parental investment theory (PIT), which “directs attention to the father’s instrumental interests in children. It suggests that with increased involvement, a child develops the ability to enhance their father’s willingness to invest his
own resources of time, money, and energy into the child will increase” (p. 397). Parental Investment Theory proposes that a “father must not only decide how to allocate resources among competing investments, including children, but also which children will be the likely recipients of his limited parental investments“ (p. 397).

Fathers in this study attended and financed their children’s co-curricular activities, which they encouraged their children to participate in, as part of a comprehensive education that was interwoven with academic success. Interactions the African American fathers in this study had regarding their high school children’s participation in an extra-curricular activity (e.g., club, fine arts program, or athletic team), along with any observations at SHS events, were analyzed, as well as any participation in SHS parent organizations committed to supporting student co-curricular activities. In the noted categories below, the researcher discloses how fathers invested their time in co-curricular events of their children.

**Participants Attended Athletic Events**

One of the components that stands out in this study and in particular this sub-category is the concept of “beliefs”, which focuses on developing positive community beliefs that foster productive and active citizens in their community and world. When parents encourage their children to explore and be involved in their school and community activities, they build a sense of belonging and a way for them to connect to social and leadership skills outside of the classroom and home environment.

On a few occasions, the researcher observed participant Daniels would talk loudly towards his son, a football player, to encourage him to keep doing a good job on the field. The son was not observed looking at the bleachers or making any comments in response
to his father, but it provided his child with a verbal affirmation of his support and presence at the football game.

Participants Taylor and Daniels were also observed in attendance at the two football games observed during this study. Each father supported his own child with their presence, and attempted to motivate their sons from the bleachers by making comments to support their efforts on the football field, even though others may have perceived some of the comments as heckling. Taylor said “hit 20 so hard he doesn’t get up.” Other adults sitting in the bleachers at the October 11th football game also yelled comments towards the officials; some were light hearted, others included expletives because certain adults did not agree with a referee’s call. Another unknown dad yelled out to the referee, “If you don’t throw a damn flag for holding, I’m coming down there.”

It is important to note that African American fathers were only observed at football games, which was likely influenced by their children participating in athletic or non-athletic activities connected to the SHS football program (e.g., football and the Spirit Team). The researcher attended several other fall sporting events, and did not observe any other African American fathers present.

The participation of SHS African American children in different co-curricular activities significantly impacts the attendance of African American adults, which made it difficult to observe African American fathers at different extra-curricular activities. Hence, a decision was made intentionally by the researcher to attend different SHS events that involved African American children of all participants in this study and any other black children at SHS. The decision of which activities to observe was based on the
activities the SHS African American children participated in, which was obtained from the subjects in this study and SHS staff.

**Participants Attended Non-Athletic Events**

While the father participants did not represent every African American father of SHS’s African American student body, they did illustrate how some men elected to participate and engage in their children’s academic and co-curricular experiences at Suburban High School. Participants Jackson and Dixon were able to support their sons, not on the football field, but in fine art programs at SHS and the school’s Spirit Team. Participant Dixon had a stronger appreciation for the fine arts because he played the flute when he was in high school (D. Dixon, personal communication; May 21, 2013). Also, none of Dixon’s children who graduated from SHS participated in any extra-curricular activity outside of the music department. Dixon’s passion towards music has had a significant influence on all four of his boys to play a musical instrument.

The researcher observed several subjects in this study attending their children’s various extra-curricular activities at SHS. Some of the subjects were volunteers in a co-curricular parent organization, which provided funds for students to participate in the activities easier by generating more money to purchase supplies, subsidize travel expenses, etcetera. Also, some of the African American fathers who attended their children’s extra-curricular activities mentioned they did so because these events took place during the evening and were an interest of a father when they were in high school.

Furthermore, many of the African American subjects shared during their interview that watching a fine arts production, music related recital, or an athletic event
for their children were some of—if not, the most fond memories of their children in high school.

These various representations of how some African American fathers participated in their children’s non-athletic and athletic co-curricular activities challenge the idea that African American fathers are not involved in their children’s education experiences. Lareau’s (2003) two theories for raising children: (1) concerted cultivation and (2) natural growth were observed throughout this study. In particular, subjects in this study provided a daily structure and a routine within their children’s education and social experiences.

A specific example was participant Lewis discussing how his daughter not only participated on the basketball team at SHS she also played club basketball off season (L. Lewis, personal communication, May, 16 2013). This effort to refine participant Lewis’ daughter’s skills is a form of concerted cultivation because it provided structured practices, additional game experiences, and extra opportunities for exposure to be recruited by colleges to play basketball. When participant Lewis’ daughter was a six years old she curiously asked him what game a group of people at a public park were playing, the game she saw people playing was basketball. In response to participant Lewis’ daughter asking him what game people were playing, he decided to purchase a basketball and begin taking her to the park to have fun and learn the game of basketball. This natural growth model was apparent from an early age and made a huge impact on her involvement in basketball, which led her to receiving an athletic scholarship for college.

Within this study, Lareau’s (2003) parenting styles were used as a framework to teach and support structured and free play activities that help prepare their children for
academic and co-curricular participation, and how to effectively interact and communicate with others in society (Lareau, 2003). The next finding covers the various communication styles used by subjects in this study.

**Communication with Children: A Function of African American Fathers**

In this study, African American fathers were intentional in how they regularly communicated with their high school children regarding their academic success, co-curricular involvement, and emotional well-being. These participants used face-to-face communication at least weekly to check-in with their high school student regarding their academic, co-curricular, and social experiences. In addition, these participants regularly scheduled time and had impromptu times with their high school child to talk about their post-secondary plans and future life ambitions (e.g., family and career). Quadlin (2014) discussed three ways relationships can operate: parents as reinforcers, parents as compensators, and parents as null effects (home environment that has the resources and space to study successfully at home). Quadlin reported that a child’s response to their parents’ relationship style is another important factor that influences how well a child achieves academically. Fathers who develop close affective bonds with children are more effective in monitoring, communicating, and teaching children.

Social capital is inherent in the relationship between parents, individuals, and institutions in the community. The cultivation of these social capital relationships help to provide access to information, assistance, opportunities, and other resources in the community that foster the healthy development of youth (Coleman, 1988).

As noted in Chapter Two, the Literature Review, Marsiglio and Cohan (2000) subscribe to a sociological perspective in their study which provides an additional
perspectives on how social forces that impact economics, gender, and race contribute to sorting men and fathers into different sets of circumstances that in turn affect the way they think, feel, and act as fathers (p. 78) These researchers are seeking for fathers to “expose their children to healthy dyadic interaction processes, bring about closure in their children’s social networks, and act as a liaison to valuable community resources for their children” (p. 78).

Additionally, Covey’s (1997) Habit Five “Seek First to Understand…Then To Be Understood” recommends that parents understand the concept “People do not see the world as it is; they see it as they are-or as they have been conditioned to be” (p. 203). Covey suggests that parents often try a variety of motivational strategies to encourage their children to do well academically and personally when they have not talked with their children about what and how they are motivated. Covey encourages parents to understand their children’s attitude towards school and co-curricular experiences, what motivates and maintains their interests, and how social pressures positively or negatively impact the choices they make and information they disclose to their parents.

By following Covey’s prescribed parenting habits, parents reduce the opportunity to misunderstand their children’s behavior, which causes their responses and reactions to be disconnected from true problems that exist with their children.

Below is an example of participant Clarke’s desire to seek an understanding of his children and make it a priority to protect their children’s social and emotional welfare. Clarke shared during his interview how one elementary school teacher told one of his sons that he could not become a doctor (C. Clarke, personal communication, April 23,
When the participant Clarke became aware of the teacher’s negative remarks, he scheduled a meeting with the teacher and principal. These type of concerns affect parents of girls and boys, various ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and families who live in rural, urban, and suburban communities. In particular, some of the subjects interviewed for this study shared concerns with the friends their children have picked, while other subjects were concerned that their children did not have many or any African American friends at SHS.

Among the fathers interviewed, participant Clarke did not look favorably on all of the children his daughter decided to spent time with during and outside of school. Clarke was concerned that his daughter could not stretch herself academically if she continued to associate with some of the African American students she decided to befriend, who were perceived by him as not being academically focused. During Clarke’s interview, it did not come across that he was concerned with his daughter misbehaving at SHS or getting engaged in any risky behavior outside of school. His concerns appeared to be exclusively academic.

Previously mentioned in Chapter Two, author and sociologist, Lareau (2003) is known for her research on investigating parenting styles when comparing African American children and families to their Caucasian counterparts. Lareau’s field research mentioned in her book *Unequal Childhoods*, explains her subjects background of being white and black children from middle class, working class, and poor families. This conclusion is drawn the responses noted in each interview as it pertains to the resources they have available for their children along with the subjects sharing their profession and at some times their spouse’s profession which draws the researcher to make this claim.
To further understand Lareau’s (2003) viewpoints, additional subjects are explored. Participant O’Neal shared during his interview that he learned from having conversations with his sons that they needed to have a certain level of comfort (O. O’Neal personal communication, July 1, 2013). The level of comfort O’Neal was talking about was his children being secure in their school environment at SHS. One of the goals O’Neal pursued was “to build relationships with the teachers and principals because the change in dynamics—and this impacted the way they [his sons] performed in the classroom” (personal communication, July 1, 2013). Also, O’Neal shared that he encouraged his children to schedule meetings with their teachers, before or after school, to get additional tutoring from their teachers to give them the confidence they needed to do their best academically (personal communication, July 1, 2013). Being aware of his children’s preferences and the mentoring of teaching how to advocate for themselves was a concerted cultivated behavior participant O’Neil conducted by having brunch with his children weekly (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Using Bourdieu’s (2000) social and cultural capita, which an individual’s socioeconomic status has a strong correlation with a parent’s ability to provide academic and professional mentoring (Bourdieu, 1989, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000), subjects in this study not only cultivated skills necessary for academic and social development but ensured their high school children’s access to the best high school education experiences were afforded. Bourdieu’s (2000) concept of cultural capital, which reproduces structures among social classes where the dominant culture’s values and habits are transmitted on everyone within a society (p. 58) is evident throughout the communication amongst the subjects and their high school children in this study. This was done by the
subjects providing their children with access to private tutoring, year round athletic and musical practices outside of SHS, and social enrichment and religious activities within their community.

Depending on the values and habits established within the SHS community, certain parenting styles and roles fathers assumed within their family and other social institutions (e.g., school) definitely influences how cultural capital was transmitted within the father and child relationship (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). Each subject executed their communication with their high school children in different ways but similar manners. The end goal of all subjects of this study was to have open and effective communication with their children on a regular and ongoing basis that enriched their children’s academic and social emotional experiences.

An example of this communication is evident with participant Daniels who talked with his son each day, and commended his son during his interview by saying, “He has dedication, you know he’s a child that doesn’t want anything—academic wise he focuses and does what it takes. Although sometimes he can do better ... and we constantly preach the academics, sports doesn’t last forever, so he is more focused. I think he is headed down the right path” (personal communication, June 27, 2013). Daniels commitment to his son is remarkable, considering he and his wife are separated, and he lives in a Will County, Illinois suburb (D. Daniels personal communication, June 27, 2013).

Daniels works in a Du Page County suburb and calls his son to meet up with him, or simply talks with him to see how he is and to ask about his homework and test scores (personal communication, June 27, 2013). Daniels also takes time during these face-to-face conversations or phone calls to keep the bond with his son strong by asking about
things not related to school (personal communication, June 27, 2013). Daniels shared that he does the same with his daughter, who lives with him, with one exception being that his wife is the parent who contacts SHS more frequently about their son’s academic concerns (personal communication, June 27, 2013). In the next category the researcher discloses how subjects used technology to communicate with their high school children.

**Technology Helped African American Fathers**

Technology transforms how parents actively participate in the education experiences of their children, both with communicating with their children and the school staff. Using technology to communicate with the school requires knowledge of the school information systems and a willingness to check communication delivered via e-mails and school websites on a regular basis.

As noted in the literature review, Arnett (2000) defines a new psychological developmental phase after adolescence called emerging adulthood. During emerging adulthood, parents have a critical opportunity during their children’s high school experience, to learn from their parent’s way to build self-confidence in academic and social settings. This phenomena is influenced by each child’s family’s opportunity to teach their child effective ways to communicate how they want their father to teach and support their individual goals for their future before they are an adult. When parents use technology to communicate with their children and school staff, they can have ongoing and more frequent conversations outside of and in addition to the face to face communication that should be in place.

In addition, educators who are adept at using technology can provide African American fathers and other parents with access to electronic devices additional
opportunities to communicate about relevant concerns for their children. The following text will provide examples of how subjects used technology to participate and divide the parenting responsibilities.

Participant Jackson shared during his interview that he sends his son text messages to communicate tasks that he expects his son to complete (J. Jackson personal communication, May 14, 2013). One example Jackson shared was a text he sent his son about enrolling in an enrichment summer school class (personal communication, May 14, 2013). Jackson shared that his son would often send him or his wife a text message when his theatre rehearsals would end, so they would know he needed to be picked up from school (personal communication, May 14, 2013). On many occasions during the researcher’s interviews, other subjects shared that their children would send texts to communicate when they needed a ride home or to notify them about of their whereabouts.

Somewhat similar to participant Jackson’s use of text messaging to prompt his son to sign up for summer school, participant Lewis discussed how he was satisfied with SHS’s level of communication with his family (L. Lewis personal communication, May 16, 2013). In particular, Lewis said “When there are concerns we discuss this at parent teacher conferences or e-mails” (personal communication, May 16, 2013). Even though participants Powell, Jackson, and Lewis discussed their electronic correspondence with SHS, it was evident from their and other participants’ interviews how their children’s mother was the primary communicator with SHS. In the following finding, the researcher discusses the subjects’ various roles as secondary liaisons within the high school setting.
African American Fathers Served as Secondary Liaisons

Within the School Setting

African American fathers in this study communicated and visibly collaborated with the SHS as a secondary liaison for their child and family. Fathers have various levels of investment in their children given their work schedule and comfort level with taking on more caregiver roles. Quadlin (2014) mentioned various forms, including economic, educational interactions, social capital, and expectation. The fathers in this study displayed all of these forms throughout their communication and involvement with their children. Covey’s (1997) “Putting First Things First” habit requires parents to put their children first in a “turbulent world.” Despite a fathers work schedule, he should intentionally make time to let his children know he cares, wants to actively participate and doesn’t put or allow work priorities to supersede parenting responsibilities for being a caregiver and active participant in their children’s lives” (p. 113).

African American Fathers Collaborate with their Children’s Mother Strategically

Participant Powell stated:

Now when we come to parent programs or meetings with teachers we [referring to he and his wife] recognize that teachers who don’t see you being engaged have the inclination to not engage you. We’ve had some issues, but because we have been on top of things we figured it out; we’ve come in and shared what we are doing and ask what else we can be doing and they [teachers] share what more needs to be done. (personal communication, April 25, 2013)

Powell would later mention, “We are very fortunate because my wife’s schedule allows her to come in at any point to meet with anyone if needed, and I know that all parents can’t do this” (personal communication, April 25, 2013). This brings into question Powell’s position on the parent participation spectrum which he discussed in his
interview as intrinsically liberal or progressive; in that a child can be given opportunities to take responsibility for their formal and informal learning and professional future (Lareau, 2003). Here is an example of participant Powell, a father who has used concerted cultivation parenting strategies, using the natural growth parenting model when he gave his son an opportunity to own his experiences and time (Lareau, 2003).

Participant Powell affirmed this during his interview:

My role has always been to make sure they are on the right path—no matter what route you [any of his children] take. My wife focuses on the school stuff—ACT Test and preparations, and getting the dates in order and how to prepare while I have focused on being the income guy, and I try to set an agenda to check in with him [Percy] more now that he is getting older. Now he is at a stage now, he wants to listen to a man because he sees himself as a young man now; my wife will say, ‘We’ll wait until your dad gets home.’ (personal communication, April 25, 2013)

Hochschild’s (2003) seminal work, *The Second Shift*, examines the roles contemporary women play in their family; especially the dual roles of provider and nurturer. Her work provides statements from heterosexual married working couples, which illustrates how women exert more energy and spend more time performing parenting duties than the men who they cohabit with (Hochschild, 2003). The various critiques of how domestic labor is shared between mothers and fathers occurs, with the primary emphasis being on child rearing, which compliments the observations made during the data collection of evidence for this study about African American fathers participation in their high school children’s education experiences. According to Hochschild, parenting responsibilities are, at best, a 50-50 or shared venture, but, typically results in mothers performing more domestic and child rearing tasks than fathers. The ten SHS educators interviewed observed parents interacting with their children, whether the parents are married, separated, or divorced. As a result, these SHS
educators, in their various roles within the school, are in a unique position to observe how parents participate in their children’s high school education experiences.

From observations the researcher conducted at SHS, he noted there were more mothers in attendance than fathers at the incoming freshman parent night and the junior parent night programs. As the literature in this study has previously stated (Akresh, 2012; Auberch, 2007; Quinones & Kiyama, 2014), mothers are more likely to participate in school-sponsored programs and events designed for parents to learn about curriculum, and college and career options. The incoming freshman parent night and junior parent night programs are two events sponsored by SHS that cover information related to curriculum and post-secondary planning tools and staff members.

SHS fathers, if present, are almost exclusively present as spectators. Rarely is a father, regardless of their race, observed participating in a school-sponsored activity for parents, or holding a leadership position in a volunteer organization. Nonetheless, these mothers and fathers, as previously stated, are present at events and participate; there are exceptions, but the participants in this study are anomalies among their contemporaries.

Parenting duty, is more frequently a concern of mothers. Mothers internalize the responsibility of maintaining the home and children (Hochschild, 2003). A way for a mother to reduce any concern she may have for her children’s academic welfare may include her becoming active in any organizations, which provides meaningful information for her to help give her children an advantage in post-secondary planning. This may also explain why there are more mothers involved in parent organizations like Parent Connection, among others at SHS. This rationale has been projected onto African American fathers, suggesting participation takes place to make one’s spouse happy that
they are involved in a school-related activity that benefits their children and reduces the amount of stress their companion places on themselves. Hochschild (2003) wrote:

As masses of women have moved into the economy, families have been hit by a “speed-up” in work and family life. There is no more time in the day than there was when wives stayed home, but there is twice as much to get done. It is mainly women who absorb this “speed-up.” (p. 8)

As a result of the “speed-up” Hochschild (2003) articulated, one may consider the participation of the African American fathers of this study, who attended the April 2013 Parent Connections meeting, incoming freshman orientation program for the Class of 2017 and their families, and other events related to the curricular progress and development of their children; as being a courtesy to support their significant other. In the following category, a further explanation of how fathers participated as secondary liaisons is explored.

School Sponsored Meetings and African American Fathers

Multiple SHS educators talked about fathers being more involved in co-curricular activities of their children than academic and post-secondary conversations. However, SHS fathers (and mothers) were observed by members of the administration and student services personnel in attendance at Junior and Senior Class Presentations to receive information about the college and financial aid application processes.

A perceived reason, this parenting duty, is more frequently a concern of mothers, because they tend to internalize the responsibility of maintaining the home and children (Hochschild, 2003). A way for a mother to reduce any concern she may have for her children’s academic welfare may include her becoming active in any organizations, which provides meaningful information to give her children an advantage. This logic
could be used to explain a mother’s interest in any co-curricular activity one of her children participates in, as well.

A secondary source for this same point is Shuffleton (2014), who discussed the shifts in the paradigm that states the mother is the only caregiver for children. Shuffleton reported “fathers must be deeply involved in raising their children then they have been previously” (p. 220). Subjects in this study reported they assist their partner by staying home with their sick children and helping regularly with homework, and co-curricular tasks.

To further support the need for more research of the changing of the role of fathers, researchers Quinones and Kiyama (2014) worked closely with school personnel to understand parent involvement, in particular Latino fathers in their study and the impact on student achievement. This study concluded that more mothers participated compared to fathers, which allowed for the researches to do independent studies on the eight father participants in their study (p. 156). School initiatives were evaluated promoting and shaping fathers and all family members in the school engagement process (p. 169). This finding is similar to SHS’s Parent Connection organization which promotes African American parent involvement centered on the academic achievement and post-secondary goals of SHS African American children. The next finding of this dissertation focuses on the topic of racialization and the impact on the ten subjects.

**The Racialization of African American Fathers and their Children**

Racialization is defined as the process of assigning ethnic or racial identities to a relationship, social practice, or group that does not identify itself as such (Omni & Winant, 1986, p. 5). African American father participants in this study and their children
felt racialized because they did not meet some of SHS’s community stereotypes that other African American fathers and children portrayed. One SHS educator shared that there are two African American fathers in this study were racialized when their children met academic and behavioral expectations, as well as when these subjects visibly participated in school-sponsored events where low African American father participation was present.

Lareau and Horvat (1999) wrote, “Many Black parents, given the historical legacy of racial discrimination in schools cannot presume or trust that their children will be treated fairly in school” (p. 42). Racialization is one potential reason why African American fathers do not participate in their high school children’s education experiences, but other reasons that influence a man’s desire to interact with their daughter or son during their high school years include their parenting style along with their work schedule which could limit their participation on a regular basis given set hours or schedules. The compounded impact of these reasons can result in a reality where African American fathers are not participating in the education experiences of their high school age children. Some of the African American fathers interviewed shared their own insight as to why more African American fathers at SHS do not participate in school sponsored events for their children (D. Dixon, May 21, 2013). However, prior to stating some of the interviewed fathers’ insights on African American father apathy, it is important to frame what parental apathy means.

By adopting a Bourdieuan (2000) understanding of apathy, people are perceived as lacking interest in reproducing their social and cultural wealth, which is evidenced by not spending monetary resources or leveraging existing social networks they are a part of with their children. African American fathers who participated in this study expressed
this as a reason why other African American fathers were not present at SHS sponsored events. When a parent is hesitant to share their resources with their children for the benefit of their children’s education experience, there has to be a reason. This reason is not transparent to SHS school personnel or parents who attend and participate in these events.

Two participants in this study specifically spoke about their perception of other African American fathers at SHS who were not visibly participating in school sponsored education experiences of their children. An example of this is participant Miller, who shared non-visible parent involvement does not mean the investment and conversation of their children’s success is not evident within their home setting. Likewise, participant Clarke spoke about other fathers work schedules often conflict with school sponsored events, which limits their visibility at these scheduled events. Participants Miller and Clarke reported that fathers are active in e-mailing and communicating with their children’s teachers and counselor if concerns arise. Overall, participants in this study (and other African American fathers) actively attended meetings and events sponsored by the SHS Parent Connection organization that serves as an opportunity to obtain information regarding in a smaller setting to discuss and review the school’s goals and upcoming events.

All Compliments Are Not Accepted

This recognition of participation from SHS personnel was not universally accepted as a compliment by African American fathers in this study. For instance, Clarke stated, “What the hell do you expect my kids to be?” as he described how school officials
attempted to compliment him as a parent because his children followed school policies and were polite to adults at SHS (D. Dixon, personal communication May 21, 2013).

Some of the African American fathers interviewed expressed they had concerns with SHS, as an institution, because color-blind racist ideology was used to describe how they participated in their children’s education experiences or how their children conducted themselves as students at SHS. Color-blind racism is defined as the disregard of racial characteristics when choosing which individuals will participate in some activity or receive some service (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2). In practice, color-blind operations would not use racial data to make no classifications, categorizations, or distinctions based upon race. These interactions, described below, by the African American fathers who talked about concerns with them or their children being racialized and their lack of faith with SHS educators and the school system to provide an impartial high school education experience for their children. Conversely, not every African American father interviewed felt there was a racialization of African American fathers and their children. A candid analysis of African American fathers’ and their children’s racialization at Suburban High School will follow.

Sometimes inadvertently, white citizens and white institutions attempt to recognize African American families who rear children that meet or exceed individual or system wide expectations; such as good behavior at the public high schools. However, compliments shared are not always perceived as being sincere, and this creates a divide between a given African American family and the school. Some African Americans will frequently question the motive behind compliments they receive from a person of
European ancestry or any institution considered to be a part of the white social structure (i.e., the public high school).

In the early 2000’s people throughout the United States of America suggested Americans are living in a color-blind society, a society where its “contemporary racial inequality [is] ... the outcome of nonracial dynamics,” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 2). This helps to provide an explanation why certain neighborhoods are either racially segregated or integrated. Proponents of the color blind racial ideology would accept “market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and ... imputed cultural limitations,” (p. 2) as vital circumstances that influence why certain members of society (i.e., African Americans) have a particular lived reality, such as living in a particular community around other people who look like and think like them. To further understand why some people acknowledge a color-blind racist system exists and recognize this system’s flaws, it is helpful to review Bonilla-Silva’s work. Bonilla-Silva wrote the following about color-blind racism:

Color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards. It allows a president [U.S. President George W. Bush] to state things such as, “I strongly support diversity of all kinds, including racial diversity in higher education,” yet, at the same time, to characterize the University of Michigan’s affirmative action program as “flawed” and “discriminatory” against whites. Thus whites enunciate positions that safeguard their racial interests without sounding “racists.” Shielded by color blindness, whites can express resentment towards minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic; and even claim to be the victims of “reverse racism.” (pp. 3-4)

Participant Clarke’s personal experience with SHS educators praising him for raising children who conduct themselves as respectful young adults and display discipline
in their academic endeavors was not recognized as racist by any of SHS’s educators. Often people are not aware of the subtle ways personal interactions can have lasting effects on people. An SHS educator was asked during their interview how the school can engage more African American fathers in the school setting, and she recommended that the school “Partner with the community. Develop genuine relationships,” which may spare another African American father from having an experience similar to Clarke. In addition, this same SHS educator suggested that any structural approach the school considered undertaking with minority communities, especially African American families, requires school officials to interact individually with families. Using a personal approach, reduces any perceived notions that an African American father has with any SHS educator attempting to complement their family.

Misunderstandings in communication and assumptions can quickly compromise healthy relationships because one person lacks faith in another person doing what they are supposed to do. In this study, educators of African American children at Suburban High School and African American fathers shared they held open and honest conversations about the progress of African American high school children—when the African American fathers were receptive or seeking information about their children. These accounts were relayed by SHS educators who were perplexed about how they can develop a relationship to work collaboratively with some African American fathers, but not with other African American fathers who are not frequently observed being on campus or responsive to phone calls or e-mails.

An example from this study is the interaction between the SHS school administrator and participant Taylor, who was upset at being informed about his child’s
misconduct. This example provides a glimpse as to how SHS’s leadership can intervene when it is necessary to do so after something negative has occurred. Taylor’s son was involved in a verbal altercation with another student during the school day. Participant Taylor received a phone call from his son’s Dean to discuss the situation and to proactively solve this situation from occurring again (T. Taylor, June 5, 2013). However, the data from this study does not clearly indicate if SHS had developed a plan to build a relationship with participant Taylor’s family prior to any student misconduct. Also, it was not discusses if SHS had a protocol outlining how administrators should intervene in a situation to diffuse any potential conflict or maintain a positive collaborative relationship with parent partners. Being able to effectively end arguments between parents and school officials, as well as being able to preserve healthy relationships between the community and school body, aids a high school become more effective in its efforts to educate the children who attend the school.

It is important for the readers of this dissertation to take note of one of the most detailed accounts of African American father participation in the education experiences of high school children is by Noguera and Wing (2006). Further explanation of this study is noted in the literature review. These editors and the other contributors discuss how a group of engaged parents were involved in education reform efforts at Berkeley High School (Berkeley, California) (Noguera & Wing, 2006). Unfinished Business illustrates how a group of civically minded parents, representing students from various socioeconomic classes and ethnic minority groups, were supported by some members of academia and other likeminded pundits (Noguera & Wing, 2006). But, these advocates essentially lead their own fight against school board officials, administrations, faculty,
staff, and parents satisfied with the academic achievement status quo (Noguera & Wing, 2006), to improve educational services for children who have not been able to excel academically.

Many of the Suburban High School educators interviewed have stated that developing relationships is one of the most important things the school needs to do in order to attract more African American fathers of SHS students to actively participate in programs offered by the school. What is the course of action once African American fathers begin participating in events sponsored by the high school? There is not a prescribed path or set of directions to show people how to work collaboratively and efficiently with parents in general, let alone African American fathers, which is one of the parent subgroups SHS has not been able to effectively engage consistently.

A counselor at SHS shared their thoughts on how fathers should participate in their children’s lives as a high school student at SHS.

Personally, my preference and what I would like to see is the father guiding their student; their son or daughter, toward seeking the answers themselves, to find out, to advocate for themselves; to assert themselves in conversations with their teachers, coaches, the administration—just to understand how everything works. (personal communication, May 21, 2013)

To ensure parents and the school communicate with each other to try and problem solve various issues facing individual students and the general student body population, the school’s administration needs to build bridges. One SHS educator concurs with the recommendation for school administrators “to look at creating an atmosphere where students and families feel comfortable advocating” (personal communication, May 21, 2013).

One of the SHS educators interviewed stated:
I think the fathers just want our school to realize that it’s a different experience for minority students; what’s it going to look like—especially if they came from the city—they know this is a good school district and they moved into the district because of it and want to understand the school and get their students adjusted. (personal communication, May 21, 2013)

These educator concerns, confront SHS to provide a better education service for African American children and their families.

To meet these challenges, a SHS educator shared there is an achievement gap committee that is dedicated to generating ideas on how the school can create various interventions, and went on to recommend that “instead of having a three hour meeting about the achievement gap, let’s spend three hours dividing up the list meeting with [African American] students on the closing the gap list” (personal communication, May 21, 2013). Another challenge SHS will have to address appropriately is learning how to effectively talk about controversial topics, such as the achievement gap and racial attitudes among some of the educators at Suburban High School. This vicissitude becomes complicated, because some of the SHS faculty have been identified by one of their peers who said they expressed with their words, body language, and tone of voice attitudes some SHS educators carry towards African American children.

This teacher regretfully said, “Everyone puts on the right facade and gives the right answer, but I don’t know if it’s their area of passion.” This educator also shared that some SHS educators have sarcastically said, “All I have to do is talk to administration about black people [when applying for a vacancy] and I’ll get the job” (personal communication, May 21, 2013).

Each African American family and child are impacted differently by conditions within the SHS community. The ability to be resilient varies. One administrator shared
that “The [African American] families that have grown up here are pretty invested [in SHS], the recently relocated families that are African American are not involved at all. If other staff members shared anything else they are lying” (personal communication, May 21, 2013). This statement is boldly using an absolute to make a point that African American families and their children, who relocate and begin receiving educational services from SHS, are not able to transfer without having any problems. The statement made by the SHS administrator is not true, but there is some merit and truth to the point raised. Perhaps a more accurate statement about African American transfer students should read, “It has been observed that many transfer African American families have not been able to consistently participate in education programs; especially African American fathers.” This revised text provides a more accurate assessment of how African American fathers (families) are participating in the education experiences of their children.

Educators interviewed in this study had a common concern that transfer students are rarely prepared to handle the academic rigor and expectations that are present at SHS. Students who have been enrolled in the SHS unit district are accustomed to and aware of the daily class routines, homework requirements, and rigor of tests given across all content areas. These educators interviewed went on to say that transfer students (and parents) often reported to staff that their previous school district was “not as academically challenging” as SHS (personal communication, May 21, 2013). The difference between the difficulty and tempo in classes causes transfer students, who are motivated to access the resources available to be successful at SHS, but those transfer students who are not as
intrinsically motivated often shut down and receive low or failing grades until a
counselor or teacher steps in to intervene (personal communication, May 21, 2013).

Given this disconnect, educators need to review ways to help families make a
successful transition into the SHS academic setting. Researcher Jeynes (2010) conducted
a study that encourages educators and schools to incorporate an inclusive attitude toward
the multiple ways minority families are involved in their children’s learning. Educators
are able to promote and look for ways to increase parental involvement that is regular and
holds children to high expectations in the classroom.

To conclude, it is critical to understand the developing quality relationships with
African American fathers is one of the first steps to successfully engage black fathers. As
one of the counselors shared, like other SHS educators:

African Americans are not of the ‘thick’ ... They are not one all fit all, so you
have the spectrum; and so within the group you have the spectrum. You have
children who come from two-parent homes, in which both parents work in concert
in support of their child. And you see and hear that voice more, about what my
father is expecting, or etcetera. Then you have some households in which the
parents are either separated or divorced, or maybe the father has passed on, or the
mother is the ‘lead’. (personal communication, May 21, 2013)

These dynamics have an influence over how African American fathers participate in their
children’s education experiences, and consequently, how positive a child’s high school
education experiences are.

Another concrete example is the perception of participant Sanders, who shared
that he and his wife had to advocate for his daughter not to be enrolled in special
education classes (personal communication, September 1, 2013). Sanders shared that his
daughter earned A’s and B’s prior to the recommendation for her to receive special
education services (personal communication, September 1, 2013). Sanders went on to
state that he has observed other African American children being placed in special education classes when he has been on campus, and that “sometimes parents don’t advocate for their kids, and the kids get stuck there [in special education]” (personal communication, September 1, 2013). Chubb and Loveless (2002) wrote, “Critics of tracking have long charged that the practice treats minority students unfairly, channeling them into low-track classes in which very little learning takes place” (p. 8).

This account is similar, but different than participant Jackson’s experience of having to advocate for his son at his annual review meeting. Revisiting the Jackson family’s interaction with SHS’s special education department and speech pathologist, the parents were not in agreement with SHS’s recommendation to stop their son’s special education services (J. Jackson, personal communication, May 14, 2013). As a result, Mr. and Mrs. Jackson emphasized there was still a need for their son to continue working with the speech pathologist because he would mispronounce words. Getting good grades was not the standard Mr. and Mrs. Jackson were willing to accept and use in order to determine if their son should stop receiving special education services. They wanted him to demonstrate that his speech was fluid and free from certain imperfections associated with his need for speech therapy (J. Jackson, personal communication, May 14, 2013).

During Jackson’s interview, he offered an eloquent critique of educators in general, which asserted:

A lot of times a teacher may not have your student’s best interests at heart. The ideal thing is [that] teachers have the highest interests of students at heart. As parents we know that that’s not always true. As parents we have to do our job to follow up with this and ask questions. We have to be there and have our child’s back, and make sure they don’t fail. (personal communication, May 14, 2013)
This is another example of African American father’s reluctance to trust an institution, to trust Suburban High School. In the next category, the researcher continues to understanding findings in this subscribed areas of racialization.

**The Haves and the Have Nots**

Participant Clarke, as previously referenced shared an account about one of his sons who expressed an interest in wanting to become a doctor during middle school (Clarke Interview; April 23, 2013). Participant Clarke and his wife were not shy about meeting with school personnel when a teacher made a comment about their sons not being able to become doctors due to a low score on a math exam. This type of parental response shows their desire to instil a positive social emotional well-being for their children by building their confidence in their dreams and aspirations despite a recommendation of one school educator.

A key finding noted in the literature review from Judith R. Blau (2003) provided quantitative data, via the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and High School Effectiveness Study (HSES), which illustrated the “Educational Aspirations of Black and White Students and Their Families and Friends, NELS Tenth Graders” (this is the title of Table 3.2—Blau, pp. 61-62). Blau wrote, “Overall, then, black students value education significantly more highly than white students do, and they have somewhat higher educational aspirations than white students” (p. 63). This conclusion was similar when comparing black and white students of similar socioeconomic status (p. 63); however, the perception held by some stakeholders and members of the mass media suggest there is a difference.
As a result, it is important for stakeholders to be cautious of how they explain and recognize differences among students and their families, limitations of studies, and whether or not mixed methods were used to increase the validity and reliability of any remarks made as a part of the analysis to conclude a posed question. This notion of comparing students from wealthier SES to black (and other ethnic minority) students from lower SES can claim origins in the 1965 Moynihan Report (Blau, 2003).

This glimpse into participant Clarke’s perception of how SHS racialized him as an African American father, as well as his children, illustrates his perception that SHS had a different set of behavior standards African American children were expected to uphold, versus other portions of the student body.

Similarly, participant Powell reported during his interview a different type of racialization he has experienced because his son has an athletic physique. Powell stated during his interview that some of the white families in the SHS community have made comments of the following nature:

When we [the Powell family; in particular, his son] would go out and meet [other families]—there are a lot of Caucasians in the area—the first thing we hear them [white families] ask our son is, ‘Hey big guy, what sport do you play? Not what are you studying? I’m sure they don’t say this to other Caucasian students.  
(personal communication, April 25, 2013)

Powell’s resentment towards the stereotyping his son was subject to did not come from SHS; however, such comments could negatively influence other African American fathers and make it undesirable for this portion of the SHS parent community to attend school sponsored activities. When a person is insulted they can withdraw, assertively question, or passively accept perceived insults about their child or themselves.
This may be a contributing factor as to why some African American fathers do not join and actively participate in some of the school sponsored parent organizations; they have been racialized. In the next category, subjects discuss their thoughts on a SHS school newspaper article, which connects to the finding of racialization expressed amongst the subjects in this study.

**African American Fathers’ Thoughts on the SHS Newspaper Article**

In the January 2013 edition of the SHS student newspaper, an article about the school’s achievement gap between its African American students and white majority was discussed (SHS Newspaper). Due to the confidentiality of this study, the researcher is unable to provide the author’s name or specific quotes from this article.

The article began with a narrative of an African American female student of SHS, who transferred from a Chicago Public School, and addressed how she has needed to utilize academic supports to meet the rigor of SHS’s curriculum (SHS Newspaper). The article then reviews the high stakes test performance of SHS African American students on the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) since 2001 (SHS Newspaper). A noted author who writes about the achievement gap is referenced, and different SHS administrators share their thoughts about the achievement gap’s impact on the entire public school system and SHS in particular.

African American fathers in this study commented on the intellectual inferiority portrayed in the schools newspaper article that discussed African American students underperforming in comparison to their white peers.

The most profound perceived or realized racialization African American fathers discussed during their interviews was the SHS student newspaper reporting that African
American students did not perform as well on high stakes exams as their white counterparts. Some of the African American fathers interviewed shared how they thought it was inappropriate for the school to report such information in a publication that circulates in throughout the SHS community, and how the information reported affected the academic confidence and self-esteem of the African American children who attend Suburban High School. In addition, questions about certain demographic groups being omitted from the article made one of the African American fathers critique the motive of the article’s publication even more.

The article ends with a SHS administrator being quoted as saying, “I think eliminating the achievement gap completely is the right goal for any school and for the nation as a whole” (SHS Newspaper). The same SHS administrator is also quoted at the conclusion of this article saying, “But I do think eliminating it [the achievement gap] entirely will be very difficult, so I’d be content, over the next decade or so, if it was merely reduced significantly” (SHS Newspaper). The ‘messaging’, or how the information from this January 2013 article about the achievement gap was communicated to students and families, was not well received by some of the student body and parent constituents, as already indicated. The reporting of this story gave some of the SHS African American fathers the perception that SHS African American students are academically inferior, or that the school believes African American children are not intelligent and valued by the school.

Participant O’Neal posed a question about the exclusion of Asian American students does not address what he was really upset about, and it is problematic because he is attempting to use the model-minority stereotype, which Lee (1994) defined as the
inclination for a person to believe “Asian Americans are successful in school because they work hard and come from cultures that believe in the value of education” (p. 413). Lee went on to write, “Scholars and the popular press have contrasted the success of Asian American students to the underachievement of other minorities” (p. 413).

Participant O’Neal expressed his frustration with African American children at SHS being discussed as low achieving students on high stakes tests, and raised the question, “Why did the SHS newspaper not compare the high stakes test scores of white children compared to Asian children” (personal communication, July 1, 2013)?

Participant O’Neil used a generalization that Asian children are intellectually superior to white students, which is similar to what the SHS newspaper did to compare African American children to Caucasian children at SHS. The next category of this finding, details stereotypes the subjects mentioned in their interviews while being at school sponsored events.

**Stereotypes of African American Fathers at School Sponsored Events**

Robinson and Harris (2014) wrote, “Many teachers (and parents) often report that minority parents are less visible at school than their white counterparts” (p. 112).

Although it is noted in Robinson and Harris that:

- minority parents care about their children’s education just as much, if not more, than white parents, although more often than now people in society view parental involvement by what they can visible see happenings in the school rather than what occurs in the privacy of their homes. (p. 113)

This finding holds true to how the subjects in this study felt about the stereotypical perception that due to not seeing black fathers at events, they are not involved and they don’t care. African American fathers in this study discussed their
frustrations with being subject to prejudice, and how they taught and emotionally supported their children when they experienced being racialized. African American fathers interviewed shared their lack of institutional fidelity with SHS personnel because access to information about school resources, intervention programs, and community resources were not always transparent. According to SHS educators interviewed (personal communications, May 21, 2013), correspondence about SHS programming and resources are shared with parents via e-mail, and if parents do not regularly check their e-mail they will not be reminded or updated on programs the SHS is offering.

Participant Clarke shared during his interview that in junior high and elementary school years, he helped his children with some of their homework, but once they began high school he couldn’t be of any assistance (personal communication, April 23, 2013). He referenced being able to buy materials, taking them to the library, group meetings, but given level of education that they have reached;” I couldn’t help anymore”. Clarke went on to say.” They [Christopher and Corey] are taking honors and AP classes and he can get ‘em where they gotta be. But, as far as assisting them with the actual material of some of the classes, I can’t help. But, some, like biology, ‘cause I went to college for biology; I can help with that because it hasn’t changed” (Clarke Interview, April 23, 2013).

Being intellectually intimidated has an adverse impact on most people, and some people may say men have a more difficult time accepting the fact that they need help. As a result, the reality may be that some of the African American fathers may be apprehensive about exposing their ignorance to SHS. Still, Clarke expressed that he still supported his children in their academic endeavors by using his time and resources to put
his children in a position to get assistance with course-related content they were afforded in the rigorous classes they enrolled in at SHS. In the next finding, the educators interviewed provide their perceptions of how African American fathers participated at SHS.

**Educators’ Perceptions of African American Fathers’ Participation**

In this study, educators were able to distinguish the differences between African American fathers they interacted with along with sharing how African American fathers participated in their children’s education experiences both proactively and reactively. These ten teachers, coaches, school counselors, and administrators shared their perspective of how they have interacted with African American fathers of SHS students.

During these interviews with educators at SHS, some apprehension about talking about this topic with the researcher existed, while others did not shy away from expressing their ideas and sentiments about African American fathers and African American children at Suburban High School.

Part of these subjects’ reluctance is due to these employees of SHS not wanting any negative reproach or not wanting to share any information that may taint SHS’s reputation or their own professional reputation. This institutional or individual anxiety about frankly discussing African American father participation at SHS was evident throughout the researcher’s interviews.

As mentioned in the literature review, Henderson’s (2007) book *Beyond the Bake Sale* defines the term parent involvement, which including parent involvement looking and feeling different than the traditional ways it’s been defined (Walker, 2014, p. 4). Henderson (2007) focused on strategies, tools, and assessments schools can use to start
connecting with families and evaluating immediately if it’s working. School and family partnerships are important and Henderson spent half of her book sharing with readers why schools should invest in parent participation that includes checklists to use within schools to assess a school’s current culture and needs. The four levels of parent partnership mentioned in Henderson’s book include: fortress; come-if-we-call; open-door; and partnership (Anderson & Howland, 2008, p. 166).

Additionally, Henderson (2007) provides specific strategies for schools to help teach parents to be advocates for their children and themselves instead of seeing their child as a “problem child” or a “problem parent” when communicating concerns back and forth regarding their child’s progress. Henderson suggests that when schools “share” the power and responsibility of academic achievement with the families, they will see a better school climate and higher test scores (Anderson & Howland, 2008, p. 169). The next category provides insight on how SHS communicated more with mothers than fathers at SHS.

**SHS Communicated with Mothers, not Fathers**

Educators interviewed in this study shared there was a division between which African American fathers they communicated with in their high school student’s educational experiences.

Only one SHS educator, a counselor, talked at length about African American fathers being involved in the post-secondary planning of their children. This counselor may be quoted as saying:

African Americans are not one of the ‘thick’ . . . They [African American fathers] are not one all fit all, so you all have the spectrum; and so within the group you have the spectrum. You have children who come from two-parent homes, in
which both parents work in concert in support of their child. And you see and hear that voice more, about what my father is expecting, etcetera. Then you have some households in which the parents are either separated or divorced, or maybe the father has passed on, or the mother is the ‘lead’ and you hear, you don’t hear the voice as much among the girls as much. But, those male students who have their father somewhere in their life you do hear them [the African American male students at SHS] speak of their father (personal communication, May 21, 2013).

This counselor’s willingness to note the myriad of family dynamics, which exist and should be noted, is an example of an individual attempting to conceptually meet and enact SHS’s mission.

One administrator was hesitant, but willing to be honest and address the fact that she thought “we [SHS’s faculty and staff] have an end goal of getting everyone [every educator] involved.” This administrator went on and questioned, “Does our building buy into it [SHS’s mission and the ability to meet SHS’s mission when servicing the African American students at SHS]?” This school leader begrudgingly confessed, “I don’t think they [the SHS faculty and staff] do one hundred percent. I think there are these thoughts that if their [the SHS African American student’s] parents don’t care about their education, why should we” (personal communication, May 21, 2013)?

These school leaders utilized SHS’s existing interventions, specifically set up for African American students and families, to improve the education experience for SHS’s African American student body and to support parents who are attempting to provide additional support to remediate or enrich the academic experiences of their children. The level of progress some SHS African American students have made has been marginal, according to the SHS educators interviewed. In addition, these academic gains are not occurring fast enough in some cases to help African American students meet and exceed
the desired benchmarks on high stakes assessments. The next category speaks to how subjects in this study perceived African American fathers attending summative events.

**African American Fathers Participate at “Big” Events**

Stewart (2008) reported that parent and child discussions were found to have a significant correlation with academic achievement, suggesting that parental engagement in education-related topics with their children is one of the most effective ways to improve a student’s academic achievement. “This form of parental involvement in students’ academic lives is crucial for promoting achievement” (p. 198).

Three SHS school administrators and two counselors made comments about fathers being present at large and celebratory events at SHS. One administrator said, “Dads come to big events, culminating events, big games, or summative events. Performance events [that are] competitive in nature ... where there is a winner or loser.” This administrator’s perspective will disqualify nearly any academic related programing from even being recognized as an event that a SHS African American father may be in attendance for; graduation may be the exception. In addition, this school administrator stated:

> They [African American parents of transient students] don’t know anything that’s going on and they don’t know anything about their kids, and it’s always reactionary [when they advocate for their children]. It’s about responding to poor grades or behavior. It’s not ongoing communication or relationships about overall progress. (personal communication, May 21, 2013)

These statements serve as evidence that some African American parents are not participating in academic related experiences of their children who attend SHS.

As cited in the literature review, Jeynes (2010) discussed how school leaders need to seek to understand where to concentrate their efforts in promoting parental engagement
According to Jeynes, two questions that school educators must consider are (1) do school based parental involvement programs positively affect student outcomes, and (2) what school based programs have the greatest impact? One of the SHS teachers interviewed talked about the need to find additional ways to communicate with African American families and fathers. This educator recommended that SHS representatives:

> go to the neighborhoods where the poor African American students live, not our rich African American students live to get to know them and get them to participate in parent programs and activities. This is the group of parents we do not see at events. (personal communication, May 21, 2013)

This educator’s desire to meet African American parents where they are and attempt to foster a healthy relationship with African American fathers is honorable. However, the challenge becomes the ‘human element,’ the desire of other SHS educators to take on an additional work responsibility to meet SHS’s mission statement previously cited.

Communicating with African American families about the academic performance of their children mirrors a similar pattern that white and other ethnic groups typically undergo. The mother is the steward of academic affairs and the father is not typically concerned with academic related conversations. Exceptions shared by a few of the counselors and administrators interviewed considered the father who is not the primary guardian, but has a right to be informed about their children’s scholastic achievement; or the father who is the sole guardian of their child.

One counselor shared that some African American fathers become very interested in the academic performance of their children as they matriculate through SHS. These men are concerned about their child’s pending scores on high stakes exams and the
ability to finance their post-secondary education. In addition, some of the athletic coaches at SHS shared that African American fathers are interested in the academic expectations for their children who may qualify for an athletic scholarship and must meet their respective university’s academic expectations to secure and keep their athletic scholarship after SHS.

One administrator shared, “I do hear students stating their dad helped them with things at home; I guess dad’s visibility doesn’t mean he isn’t invested.” This type of participation, home participation, has not been developed thoroughly in this study. There are opportunities at home for African American fathers to ask their children about what they have studied at SHS, and these fathers have the opportunity to probe further and ask open-ended questions to engage their children in critical thinking questions to reinforce what children are learning at school (personal communication, May 21, 2013).

In closing, Robinson and Harrison (2014) stated, “Many Teachers (and parents) often report that minority parents are less visible at school than their white counterparts” (p. 113). For educators concerned with improving the participation of African American and other minority parents, the statement just mentioned benefits from resources and time being allocated to this education concern. Critics of Robinson and Harris conclude that parent involvement does impact student achievement, and their study was too narrow in its focus (Henderson; 2007). These differing scholars with torn philosophical and methodological approaches, leave additional researchers an opportunity to continue exploring this topic of parental involvement. Education researchers, policy makers, and school officials have been informed by the findings of this study to consider the racial and social class variations that impact how the academy approaches parents when dealing
with children, especially those who are performing below average in achievement testing (p. 229).

The discussion of African American father participation amongst the ten SHS educators interviewed provided the researcher with a perception that African American fathers in general do not consistently engage in school sponsored events. However, the SHS educators interviewed recognized that certain African American fathers were very involved in the education experiences of their children and other children attending SHS. The participation of African American fathers at SHS events was noted when the event acknowledges their children’s talents (academic or co-curricular), or if the child is in need of some academic or behavior remediation given concerns brought forward that need parent involvement given the nature of the concern.

In the following chapter, this dissertation concludes with the discussion and conclusion of this study.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the following research question, “How do African American fathers participate in the education experiences of their high school children?” This chapter discusses the research findings in light of other factors and dynamics that researchers have identified as influencing parent involvement. In particular, Lareau’s (2003) work has provided the study with a provocative framework for understanding how class, race, and a child’s family life impacts and influences their childhood. This study’s research question was explored through a case study where ten African American fathers of a Du Page County, Illinois, high school were interviewed about how they perceive their own participation in their children’s education experiences. Ten educators from the high school the fathers’ children attended were also interviewed, to share their experiences about how they perceive African American father participation. In addition, observations were made at school events to recognize how African American fathers and other parents participate in their children’s education experiences.

As a result of the case study conducted, the researcher came to the following conclusion to the research question: The concerned and engaged African American fathers interviewed intentionally used their financial, social, and cultural capital to improve their children’s ability to be prepared for their high school and college studies and the global workforce. In addition, these African American fathers sought specific programs, tutors, and experts to help their children acquire college and career readiness.
skills, which they believe will reduce stress and make their children’s future professional and personal lives less stressful and more enjoyable.

The researcher will elaborate on this conclusion in three ways. First, it is important to acknowledge that the African American fathers interviewed listened to and talked at length with their children about their emerging adult lives. The fathers interviewed communicated how they provide financial and emotional support to make sure their children receive and value education. Multiple subjects relocated their families to the Suburban High School unit district community to ensure their children had access to a quality education. For example, participant Clarke talked openly about his children’s transition into the SHS unit district, which started during his children’s elementary school years (personal communication, April 23, 2013). Every African American father interviewed expressed the importance of consistently talking with their children about their academic performance, co-curricular involvement, and general welfare. These subjects communicated how they had face-to-face, over the phone, and text message conversations with their children. In particular, when participant Taylor shared his insight about African American father apathy, he stated,

It’s been my philosophy . . . to be a good person first, and to be a good provider for my family. And that’s not always monetary things—it can be emotional support, it can be a situation where I am needed on a daily, monthly basis, and I am committed to do this. (personal communication, June 5, 2013)

Participant Jackson discussed during his interview that he sends his son text messages to communicate tasks he expects his son to complete (personal communication, May 14, 2013). An example of Jackson texting his son was when he sent him a text to remind him to enroll in an enrichment summer school class.
Second, it is important to recognize that the African American fathers interviewed attend co-curricular experiences their children participate in at school or a part of other institutions (e.g., club sports, church, etc.). As noted in chapter five, participant Dixon expressed that a “father should attend any and every event possible to show support [for their child or children] ... It shows the African American father is taking time to show support and [that] they really care” (personal communication, May 21, 2013). Utilizing Dixon’s statements as sound logic, Participants Jackson, Clarke, Daniels, and Taylor are examples of men who live out Dixon’s mantra of caring through their actions. Participant Jackson was observed smiling during his interview when he recalled his son showing he and his wife a Facebook video of him doing the Dougie in the school mascot costume, which resulted in the Jackson family and their neighbors going to see him dance during a football game, among other co-curricular events he participated in at SHS. Participant Clarke also discussed his role as an Assistant Troupe Leader for his sons’ Boy Scout Troup, as two of his sons were attempting to meet their Eagle Scout requirements. Participants Daniels and Taylor were observed in the bleachers at football games talking loudly to encourage their sons to keep doing a good job on the field. Accepting participant Dixon’s mantra about caring through one’s actions, each of these African American fathers not only met, but exceeded the criteria.

Third, in elaborating on the above mentioned conclusions, recognize that these ten African American fathers participated in programs for parents (e.g., college related programming, academic honors convocations, Parent Connection, etc.). During Participant Miller’s interview he spoke about parent participation primarily takes place in the “elementary and junior highs” (personal communication, May 9, 2013). Two of the
African American fathers in this study were active members of their child’s Individualized Education Plan team. Examples of their participation are noted in Chapter Four, where each subject described how they advocated for the exclusion or inclusion of special education services they thought were appropriate for their student (S. Sanders, personal communication, September 1, 2013; J. Jackson, personal communication, May 14, 2013, respectively). Another example is how participant Lewis actively engaged with his daughter’s science teacher to improve her academic achievement. However, she did not make adequate progress and participant Lewis hired an outside tutor, which improved her academic performance (personal communication; May 16, 2013). Only one of the ten participants explicitly mentioned attending and participating in SHS’s parent teacher conferences. Nevertheless, multiple subjects interviewed discussed or were observed participating in a Parent Connections program or activity. At the April 2013 incoming freshmen program for the Class of 2017, it was visible that African American fathers were active participants at the Parent Connection table.

All of the aforementioned examples support the conclusion drawn at the start of this chapter. The literature reviewed earlier provides further context to gain additional insight into the research findings.

Bourdieu’s research (Bourdieu, 1989, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000) discusses the connection between socioeconomic status and a parent’s ability to provide academic and professional mentoring. Applying Bourdieu’s concepts of social reproduction and cultural reproduction, explains how accessing education resources is a major reason each African American father interviewed and their wife relocated their
family to the Suburban High School’s community. SHS has a good academic reputation and has demonstrated its students are able to perform well on high stakes test.

Each participant in this study provided accounts about how they have financially and emotionally supported their children’s access to a quality education provided at SHS. However, every subject discussed how their female partner was the primary parent communicating with SHS and attend more school sponsored programs. Participant Powell (personal communication, April 25, 2013) commented that his wife has a flexible schedule, which allows her to meet with SHS educators. Multiple participants discussed how their female partners oversee the daily monitoring of grades, school communications, and scheduled activities. In particular, participants Dixon and Daniels each intentionally mentioned their children’s mother performing these tasks (personal communication, May 21, 2013; personal communication, June 27, 2013).

Many of the African American fathers interviewed talked about growing up with their mothers being the primary influence on their success at school and beyond. Participants also shared pledges they have made to themselves pledging to be active participants in their children’s lives, especially their education experiences.

This level of commitment is discussed by Fox and Bruce (2001). These scholars examined “why it is that some men’s commitment to their children hinges on their sense of the long-term self-advantages of investing in their children, and how some men can switch their commitments to children on and off depending on circumstances” (p. 402). The parental investment theory (PIT) Fox and Bruce wrote about provides an explanation why the fathers interviewed did not submit and succumb to a passive and
unengaged parental role. The fathers interviewed were parents who participated and took a proactive approach in their children’s education experiences at SHS.

Hochschild (2003) researched and wrote about the division of domestic labor in households during the 1980s, an era that saw women continue to serve as the primary adult rearing children and an era that experienced a growth of women entering the workforce. This modern woman began working one professional shift, and upon her arrival home she would work her second shift as a mother and wife (Hochschild, 2003). This evolution of motherhood documented by Hochschild has influenced the role of fathers who participate and influence their children’s upbringing and education experiences. However, the African American father’s presence is still a valuable component to a student’s academic and social-emotional development.

According to Domina (2005) and Edin et al. (2009), a father’s presence and participation have a positive influence on the academic and co-curricular achievement of children in and outside of school. This notion was confirmed throughout this study. Each father interviewed talked about his level of participation in his children’s education experiences, and how his support, in many cases, helped the child meet their goals. Nine of the ten fathers interviewed were married to their children’s mother.

**Findings from Interviews**

The African American fathers interviewed shared they were pleased with the academic and extra-curricular experiences their children were exposed to at SHS. In addition, as previously stated in this chapter, some of the African American fathers discussed during their interview that it was not coincidence that their family lives in the community where SHS resides. They were aware of SHS’s reputation and academic
success before they moved to the area, and SHS was a contributing factor for their family moving to their residence.

Similarly, the educators at SHS who were interviewed expressed they were pleased with the general level of parent participation. One student services administrator shared, “I think this school has great parent involvement compared to any other school.” One of the counselors stated, “I see them [fathers] present during Parent-Teacher Conferences, I see them present during Class Level Presentations (e.g., Freshmen, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior Class Presentations)” (personal communication, May 21, 2013). Another administrator commented that “Most district parents are comfortable advocating for student,” and recognizes, “You have to look at creating an atmosphere where students and families feel comfortable advocating concerns” (personal communication, May 21, 2013). These perspectives from SHS educators have been communicated because many of the parents share similar, if not identical, values regarding education (Bourdieu, 1989, 2000; Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). If the parents just referenced by the SHS educators do not agree with any of the decisions made by school personnel, they will use school-appropriate channels to advocate their disagreement to a particular policy or edict. These views of social and cultural reproduction help institutions, like SHS, regenerate values and mores. When African American fathers and other minority parents embrace the dominant culture’s education ideas, practices, and traditions, it has the potential to provide minority children with academic and co-curricular success with more ease. However, when African American fathers interviewed elected to participate in parent programing, they were able to leverage those interactions when advocating for their children in the future. Likewise, SHS
educators interviewed noted they have been able to develop stronger relationships with parents who participate in parent programing and supplement their visits with correspondence via e-mail. One of the administrators interviewed stated, “Once you have the parents’ trust, it works much better” (personal communication, May 21, 2013). This comment was in reference to building and fostering a healthy and positive relationship with African American fathers.

The findings of these interviews also expressed different opinions between an SHS educator and some of the African American fathers regarding responding to the educational needs of their children. The lone dissenting SHS educator said, “Everyone puts on the right facade and gives the right answers, but I don’t know if it’s their area of passion.” This critique of SHS educators not being sincere with their desires to work with African American students and families came from one of the SHS educators. Every SHS educator may not share this person’s position, or the administrator’s position previously stated. However, the other stakeholders, the known and unknown African American fathers who send their daughters and sons to this school, are hoping that SHS educators actually want to work with and for their benefit to give their children a quality education.

Yet, there were spoken and unspoken concerns and anxiety some African American fathers interviewed had about Suburban High School being sincere and not patronizing the African American fathers’ children. These subjects expressed concerns that all one needs to do is listen to conversations that occur informally within cornerstones of the African American community (i.e., churches, Nation of Islam temples, barber shops and beauty salons), and an African American will eventually
address the anxiety and reality experienced by other African Americans who have had their expectations for certain experiences not fulfilled; including experiences African American fathers want for their children who go to high school.

The findings of this study show that when positive relationships are present and parent programs such as Parent Connection at SHS, more parents socially engage in the school’s organized events for parents. Even if the standards are as simple as being able to get parents to attend school sponsored functions on a regular basis (e.g., Parent Teacher Conferences, Back to School, or Class Presentation programs) and improve the average daily attendance rate of students, then SHS must reconsider what they are doing to meet their standards.

**Implications**

This study shared and acknowledged the voices of African American fathers who have been invisible in literature on parent participation. While this study is limited to this one school setting and only ten African American fathers were interviewed along with ten educator at SHS, it provides a critical lens of the views as to how and why fathers engage in daily activities involving both co-curricular and academic experiences of their children.

Several authors referenced in the literature review wrote about the need for parents to invest not only to correct academic deficits of their children, but also in ways to help their children think about future planning, in particular post-secondary planning. Conversations with children on a regular basis along with regular communication with educators have aided in the success of all ten participants and their children.
While mothers were identified in this study as the primary communicator for school related concerns or questions, the fathers this study examined were consistently present and able to provide their children a safe physical and emotional environment to learn how to be resilient. Also, fathers in this study effectively teach their children how to be resilient, as well as emotionally secure, by developing a relationship with each of their children in which they praise the accomplishments of their children and directly address any academic or social shortcoming. This is similar to Covey’s (1997) work, which focuses on parents making it a priority to develop relationships with their children that discuss school related or other concerns consistently and intentionally. Schools that support parents who are engaged in making a concerted effort to cultivate education and good citizenship for their children have the ability to partner successfully with all types of students and parents. Additionally, schools are able to partner with parents who need guidance and direction on how to help their children be academically successful and enjoy their experiences at school. Parents who have limited knowledge of their child’s school culture and the academic expectations set by the school should be given encouragement and resources within and outside of the school to help their children have a productive academic and social experience. This notion of schools and parents developing meaningful and shared partnerships was highlighted in the researcher’s literature review, particularly within the work of Henderson (2014), Hill and Torres (2010), and Jeynes (2014).

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The observations made during this study were limited, given the researcher’s full-time employment. Schedule conflicts between subjects and the researcher restricted the
availability to conduct interviews in a timely manner. The sample size of African American fathers interviewed was small, despite many efforts to advertise and network at SHS. Of the African American fathers and some of the SHS educators interviewed, a lack of trust for the other stakeholder to do their part to make the education process easier was present. This lack of institutional fidelity amongst the fathers interviewed and the SHS educators interviewed is at the core of the study’s research question. The data collected from this study did not give a clear picture that African American fathers trusted that all of the SHS educators had their children’s best interests, nor did SHS educators trust that African American fathers were supporting and reinforcing the school’s agenda for their children who attend this high school as students. Connected to the researcher’s limited number of subjects, both African American fathers and educators at SHS, a larger sample size of both stakeholders providing additional data for analysis will help dispel or affirm this limitation.

In addition, future research on African American father participation in schools is needed to improve the: education experiences of African American children; experiences of African American parents assisting their children navigate through their child’s various education experiences; and professional educators seeking ways to improve the education experiences for African American children and their academic performance. These suggestions for future researcher can be addressed by researchers conducting longitudinal studies that investigate how African American fathers’ participation evolves throughout their children’s preschool through high school experiences. Also, future research in contrast of this study that includes larger samples of African American fathers whose students are not engaged and succeeding in school provide a comprehensive and
panoramic view of what is not helping African American students thrive like other African American students. In addition, similarities and differences among and within various rural, suburban, and urban school communities in and outside of the United States of America is another way to strengthen the existing literature with future research projects.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, African American fathers at Suburban High School participate in their children’s education experiences, but the visibility of this group is not as prominent as the visibility of other ethnic groups. In addition, SHS has had positive experiences interacting with some African American fathers, and there is a desire by the school’s leadership to cultivate a better relationship with the community’s African American families. This is not an easy endeavor. The lack of trust held between some African American fathers and SHS educators compromises initiatives SHS decides to undertake, but having African American fathers participating in their children’s education experience is an attainable goal. A goal that can be supported by SHS’s Parent Connection organization, which focuses on developing effective partnerships with African American parents and school personnel.

Considering these conclusions, it is important to note to readers how researchers cited in the literature review speak to the need for schools to re-evaluate how they invite and involve parents in the school setting. Evidence of this was highlighted in Henderson, et. al (2007) *Beyond the Bake Sale* and researchers Verna and Campbell (2007) and Lareau and Horvat (1999) who continuously spoke to the need for parents to understand
how to engage themselves and their children in the school system’s activities and educational conventions.

One of Suburban High School’s priorities involves the school addressing the fact that African American students have not constituted a large percentage of the student body and is subsequently not a priority of this school community. An emerging African American population in SHS’s residential community is forcing the unit district and school administrators to address the changes in the neighborhoods that send children to Suburban High School. There needs to be an intentional effort to make the African American students feel as if they a part of the school. SHS needs to find ways to be more inclusive of their African American students. When the African American students feel as if they belong to the school and experience academic success and become involved in co-curricular experiences, then African American fathers can feel their family belongs to the school community at large. This intentional involvement increases the chances of African American fathers partnering with the school.

Furthermore, the school board and district administrators serve as the leadership who make policies and appoint individuals to execute and manage district edicts. If the school board, district administrators, and SHS educators want to improve its relationship with African American fathers, this institution and its staff must commit time and ongoing effort to this cause. This becomes an additional responsibility for the school district and SHS to balance its other existing initiatives, interventions, and programs that must include such shifts in Illinois public schools that include: Common Core; PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) Assessments; IL
Senate Bill 7; Student Growth Data, which influence teacher and administrator performance; etcetera.

In order to increase and sustain African American fathers’ participation and establish a higher level of trust between African American parents and educators at SHS, the next step is finding ways to examine and strengthen the relationship among these adults. Each adult, parent and educator, serve a vital participant in a child’s success both academically and social emotionally. African American fathers must begin having critical conversations among themselves, with their children and families, and with stakeholders of the school community they belong to. This empowers them to articulate how they have participated and how they want to participate in their children’s education experiences, and how school officials, and more importantly, their children, want them to participate in their education experiences. African American father participation in the high school will become evident if educators truly want the presence, involvement, and input of African American fathers as these men participate more in the organized activities of the school community. By doing so, African American fathers will feel welcomed and not undermined for participating given preconceived notions that these fathers do not participate in their children’s educational experiences. Stakeholders within the school system and community should find clear and meaningful ways to purposefully engage African American fathers as equal partners, who are able to voice their concerns, advocate, encourage, and applaud their efforts for engaging in the educational process of their children.
APPENDIX A

FLYER FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
Daddy Is Involved

How Do African American Fathers Participate In The Education Experiences Of Their High School Children?

My name is Greg Baker. I am a graduate student at Loyola University Chicago, currently enrolled in the Cultural & Educational Policy Studies Ph.D. program. I am completing a research project designed to improve people’s understanding of ‘How do African American fathers participate in the education experiences of their high school children?’

Here’s how you can be a part of my project:
- Participate in a 30 minute face-to-face interview regarding your current and past involvement in your African American child’s high school education

Willing To Share Your Thoughts About African American Father Participation?
Please Call Greg Baker at 630-XXX-XXXX
APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHERS
The following semi-structured interview protocol will be used when interviewing African American fathers of Suburban High School (SHS) students.

1) Describe your experiences as a high school student. When & where did you graduate from high school?
2) How many children do you have, and do your children live with you?
3) How has raising your child/children changed since they entered high school?
4) What is your favorite memory of your child/children since they have been in high school?
5) Describe the frustrations your child/children have shared with you about their high school education?
6) Do school personnel clearly explain what they expect of you as a parent? If so, could you share what you have been asked to do by members of the faculty, staff, and administration?
7) When and how do you and your student(s) talk about their life at school, and what happens during their school day?
8) When and how do you and your mate (wife, girlfriend, or ex-wife) talk about your child’s/children’s life at school, and what happens during their school day?
9) How & when do you interact with professionals (teachers, administrators, coaches, and co-curricular sponsors) regarding your student?
10) How would you like to learn about what is going on with your child’s/children’s education experience, and how would you like education responsibilities to be divided between you and the school & you and your mate?
APPENDIX C

PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEW WITH EDUCATORS
*The following semi-structured interview protocol will be used when interviewing current and retired members of Suburban High School (SHS) faculty, staff, and administration.

1) How should fathers participate in their high school children’s education?


3) How often do you communicate with African American fathers?

4) Does SHS have an active group of fathers participating in their children’s education? If so, how are these fathers participating?

5) Please describe your most recent communication (e.g. letter, e-mail, face-to-face or phone conversation) with an African American father of a student at ________________ (INSERT SCHOOL’S NAME)?

6) Do African American fathers participate in volunteer organizations within the school, or support school programs by attending events or making monetary donations? If so, what organizations and programs do African American fathers participate in?

7) How have African American fathers supported: a) school policies; or b) goals from the (INSERT ORGANIZATION/GROUP)?

8) Which African American father have you enjoyed working with since you have worked at (INSERT SCHOOL’S NAME)? Why was this father a pleasure to work with?

9) How could (INSERT SCHOOL’S NAME) get more African American fathers to participate in the education experiences of their children? Do the leaders, does everyone; think African American fathers will participate in their children’s education?

10) Do students talk about their African American fathers helping them meet their academic or co-curricular goals? If so, have you seen examples where African American fathers have helped a child meet his/her goals?
APPENDIX D

AFRICAN AMERICAN FATHER PROFILES
Mr. Curtis Clarke:
Mr. Curtis Clarke (1982 high school graduate) and his wife Camille have three children who attend SHS. The 18 and 17 year old senior boys (Christopher and Corey) and 16 year old junior daughter Cassandra are encouraged to participate and try their best in the classroom and their extra-curricular activities. Chris and Corey have each received a baseball scholarship to tier one colleges, and have taken multiple advance placement courses. Where Cassandra continues to sing in SHS choirs and dance with the SHS Orchesis Dance Troupe; as well as take regular education and a few honors English classes.

Mr. David Daniels:
Mr. David Daniels (1987 high school graduate) is separated from his wife Denise, but they raise their children together. Mr. Daniels’ junior daughter Deitra lives with him in another suburban Illinois community, and is a competitive gymnast seeking an NCAA scholarship; while Mr. Daniels’ sophomore son David, Jr. lives with his wife and attends SHS. Mr. Daniels’ son plays soccer and runs on the track team. Both students are enrolled in regular education courses, and Mr. Daniels & his wife work together—despite being separated, to raise and support their children in their respective curricular & co-curricular endeavors.

Mr. Darrell Dixon:
Mr. Dixon (1975 high school graduate) and his wife Diana (of Vietnamese ancestry) have five children together; all of the children play one or more instruments. The oldest child (23 year old Dion) graduated from SHS and the second & third born children (Denzel and Damian respectively) are currently at SHS, in 11th and 9th grade respectively; while the youngest boy (Dwayne) is currently in 6th grade. The two year old baby girl Danielle is the only daughter of this union. Mr. Dixon shared that he thinks African American fathers need to participate in programs for parents so their children are represented and their voice, their concerns, are acknowledged by SHS.

Mr. Julius Jackson:
Mr. Julius Jackson (1986 high school graduate) and his wife Jonetta have three children, with only one child currently attending SHS. Mr. Jackson’s oldest son Josh is a sophomore, and is involved in various student organizations, and the other children are in junior high & elementary school (Jeff and Jackie respectively). Mr. Jackson’s oldest son attended a private Christian school prior to attending SHS from kindergarten through 8th grade. Also, Mr. Jackson shared during the interview that his sophomore son does not have any black friends, and maintains that a parent’s responsibility is to “be there [the school—SHS] and have our child’s back and make sure they don’t fail” (Jackson Interview; 5-14-13).
Mr. Latrell Lewis:
Mr. Latrell Lewis (1985 high school graduate) and his wife Latoya have two children: one senior (Lisa) and one sophomore (Lance). Mr. Lewis’ daughter will be attending a Division I school on a basketball scholarship in August of 2013. Also, Mr. Lewis shared during his interview that his daughter earned average grades in the regular education courses she was enrolled in at SHS. In addition, during the interview … Mr. Lewis shared that his daughter may have experienced some ‘culture shock’ as she transferred to SHS’s unit district during elementary school. Also, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis’ son receives special education services at an off-site school because the accommodations in Lance’s Individual Education Plan cannot be satisfied at SHS. The Lewis family is a tightknit family with parents who advocate for their children in unique ways to fulfill their children’s unique needs, and opportunity to pursue a college education due to natural and cultivated athletic gifts.

Mr. Michael Miller:
Mr. Michael Miller (1974 high school graduate) and his wife Mary (of Italian & German ancestry) have three children: ages 15 (Marcus, a high school sophomore); 13 (Malia, an 8th grader); and a nine year old (Myles, a 3rd grader). Mr. Miller shared during his interview that his children have attended schools in the unit district where SHS resides for their entire public school career. Also, Mr. Miller talked about his wife’s positive academic influence over all of his children—she is a junior high school teacher; as well as, both of their influence in their children’s education … both have served in various parent organizations throughout their children’s schooling. In addition, Mr. Miller talked about his 15 year old son knowing that he is present and willing to help him if needed.

Mr. Otis O’Neal:
Mr. Otis O’Neal (1979 high school graduate) and his wife Octavia have two boys—21 year old Otis, Jr., and 18 year old Omar. Both of Mr. O’Neal’s children have attended other schools in the unit district throughout their entire K-12 academic career. Mr. O’Neal recognizes that his sons “did okay—they both struggled” (Mr. O’Neal Interview; 7-1-13) academically; specifically “in English” (Ibid.). Also, Mr. O’Neal shared that he regularly checked in with his sons during the week and that the family spent time on weekends attending church & brunch, where he would have an opportunity to talk with his sons in more detail about school and their future plans after high school.

Mr. Paul Powell:
Mr. Paul Powell (1978 high school graduate) and his wife, Patrice, came to the United States from Jamaica for professional opportunities in the greater Chicagoland area. Mr. Powell has a sophomore son—Percy, at Suburban High School (SHS), and works as an electrical engineer; while Mrs. Powell works as a consultant for an interior design company. Despite Mr. & Mrs. Powell’s busy professional lives, they are both very involved in various parent organizations at SHS.
Mr. Sedrick Sanders:
Mr. Sedrick Sanders (1988 high school graduate) and his wife Sorcha have a freshman daughter Sareena who attends SHS. Sareena currently takes regular education courses, and Mr. & Mrs. Sanders have made an effort to participate in school wide curriculum programs. Also, Mr. Sanders expressed concerns with SHS’s perceived practice of over-enrolling African American students in special education during a September 1, 2013, interview.

Mr. Terrance Taylor:
Mr. Taylor (1984 high school graduate) is pharmaceutical sales representative and raises (with his wife—Tamika) two boys ages 18 (Tim) and 21 (Tony); a high school senior at SHS and a college junior who graduated from SHS. Mr. Taylor shared that his senior son has an interest in math and science and has taken AP courses at SHS. Also, Mr. Taylor shared during the interview that he and his wife have worked together to develop their sons’ ability to make strong decisions for their own future.
REFERENCES


VITA

Dr. Gregory Pierre Baker is currently serving in his twelfth year as a public school educator. During Greg’s first ten years of service, he was a member of the faculty at Proviso West High School in Hillside, Illinois, where he served as the Social Studies and World Languages Department Chair for two years. Prior to Baker’s tenure as the Chair, he taught a variety of Social Studies courses: Civics—a Consumer and Civic Education class, and World, United States, and African American History. As a classroom teacher, Baker encouraged students to become life-long learners by having students read and write about their family’s lineage and the various contributions people have made to humanity, while simultaneously pushing students to think critically.

Currently, Greg is serving in his second year as a Dean of Students at Glenbard East High School in Lombard, Illinois; where he works with students, families, the Glenbard East High School community, and Glenbard 87 schools to improve school safety, student attendance, academic achievement, and parent participation.

A few personal notes about Dr. Greg Baker: he is a graduate of Glenbard West High School (Glen Ellyn, Illinois), baccalaureate recipient of Illinois State University (Normal, Illinois), received a Masters of Education in School Leadership from Concordia University Chicago, and is married, with two boys.