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Choose or Lose: African-American Parents and the Decision-Making Process in School Choice

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Choose or Lose: African-American Parents and the Decision-Making Process in School Choice

by

Marquis E. Baker

Under the Direction of Jonathan Gayles, PhD

ABSTRACT

As a focus of this work, the researcher will examine the influence of African-centered institutions on African-American students through the perspective of parents. Through a series of interviews with parents of students attending an African-centered institution, the researcher will investigate why these parents have chosen to send their children to this institution, why it was important for them (the parent) to do so, and if they feel their child is well equipped for the future because of attending the institution. The study will be conducted in an African-centered institution in the Atlanta area. Participants in this study will be African-American parents of the students attending the African-centered institution. Mwalimu J. Shujaa's education and schooling model for African-American students (1993; 2003) will be utilized as a theoretical framework.

The significance of this work lies in its ability to critically consider the benefits of African-centered institutions on the success of African-American students.

INDEX WORDS: African-centered education, Pedagogy, Culturally-relevant teaching, Parental involvement

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, Felicia Delila Spruce. For without her many sacrifices and devotion to my life, none of this would be possible. May she rest forever, peacefully.

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PROLOGUE

From a young age, I have always been interested in education and ways of learning. My mother and grandfather made sure of it. Growing up in Detroit, MI, in a single-parent household, I was exposed to a variety of things. Throughout my life, one thing that maintained its consistency was my mother and her valuing of education. She was extremely strict, and wished for me to get the best grades in school to secure my future. My grandfather, on the other hand, was an African-American Studies scholar of sorts. He devoted our conversations to expanding my understanding of Black people throughout the world. He constantly stressed that there was so much that was not taught to me in school. He strived to create a body of knowledge that I could comprehend, appreciate, and hold on to. The combination of their educational perspectives helped shape my understanding of education today.

As I traversed my school years my love for education steadily grew, and truly manifested itself as I entered Renaissance High School in Detroit. During my junior year, I experienced a class devoted to the study of African-Americans and their experiences. For a first time, I could link both my mother's and grandfather's ways of educating and learning. In this course, we studied not only African-Americans, but Black people throughout the African Diaspora. We had cultural dishes, participated in traditional dance workshops, and even organized an African festival for the entire school. Although, my school was in the heart of Detroit, and majority of my teachers were Black, this was the first time I had experienced something of this magnitude. After this class, I was not only interested in education and ways students learn, I became concerned with what and how Black students were learning.

Upon entering Howard University in 2011, I was immersed in the field of African-American Studies, and began to expand the body of knowledge my grandfather had instilled me.

Also, I could couple this knowledge with my growing passion for education in a much larger context. Through my studies, I learned that Black students were not only learning and being taught differently than their white counterparts, but they were suffering in various areas as a result. My Sophomore year at Howard I was a counselor for a summer engineering program that travelled to various middle schools in Washington, DC. We went into one school where the student population was primarily Black. I was distraught by how little the students knew about engineering. We spent majority of our sessions teaching the students basic concepts they should have learned throughout the year and rarely got to completing actual engineering projects. It was just as astonishing to see the students where the population is primarily white excel in the engineering curriculum. In that moment, I came face-to-face with the realization that there was an apparent disparity between the ways in which Black and white students receive their schooling.

Entering Georgia State University as a graduate student, the engineering camp experience fueled my research. I became curious with whether it was the curriculum, the school, the parents, skin color, or something else that made these students excel in the engineering camp. Even the Black students of the primarily white institution were more prepared and well-equipped for the curriculum. I became curious as to why the parents of those African-American students chose to send their children to those institutions. Was it because of better opportunity, a fear of the primarily Black institution, or a multitude of other possibilities? With these questions in mind, and a growing popularity with African-centered education within communities, I've become interested in why parents choose to send their children to African-centered institutions.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

There is a severe disconnect between the needs of African-American students and the delivery systems of public schooling in America. In *The State of African Education* (2000), Asa Hilliard details “12 Challenges” facing the African people. He conveys two critical points associated with improving education for Blacks: (1) becoming conscious of ourselves in relation to our local African communities, and (2) control over the education and socialization of Black children (Hilliard, 2000). He examines the miseducation received by Black children that has been heavily influenced by white supremacy. He states:

...above all, we must understand that the structure of society and the embedded structure of education/socialization systems in hegemonic societies are designed to maintain hegemony. It is the structure, including especially its ideological foundation that controls possibilities for African education/socialization, even today... Moreover, they shape the beliefs and the behaviors that guide miseducation, while blaming victims (Hilliard, 2000, p. 6).

Here, Hilliard argues that many structures and systems in society are put in place to purposefully miseducate Blacks, and promote the ideology of those in power. Hegemony refers to the dominance of one group over another. Hilliard identifies the characteristics of these hegemonic structures within American society, how they plague the educational experiences of Black youth, and argues for better education and socialization methods for Black students.

Joyce King (2005), like Hilliard, examines Black education noticing that education for Blacks has been organized to promote the ideology of dominant groups. In this context, ideology

refers to the ideas that promote a systematic body of concepts, especially about human life. In America, European ideology is absolute. This is most prevalent in schooling environments, where education is used to reinforce the ideology of this dominant group by purposefully neglecting the contributions of Blacks and other minority groups (King, 2005). Additionally, King argues that education about Blacks and their experiences are often understudied and underdeveloped in educational contexts. King provides four premises associated with Black education:

First, truthful, equitable, and culturally appropriate education is understood to be a basic human right and not only as a condition of Black people's individual success and collective survival but is also fundamental to civilization and human freedom. A second premise is that African descent people share broad cultural continuities and our survival as an ethnic family, in other words, our peoplehood, is at stake in educational and socialization processes. A third premise is that Black education has been understudied from perspectives that recognize these educational excellence traditions and a positive role for culture in learning... Fourth, formal education, abetted by ideological pedagogical content knowledge, has been organized not only for miseducation but also to elevate and maintain the control of dominant groups (King, 2005).

Today's 21st century schools lack diversity and non-hegemonic perspectives in subjects like reading, language arts, social studies, history, and science (Murrell, 2002; Akbar, 1998). Noticing these many deficiencies in the American schooling system, African-American parents begin to seek out institutions offering a culturally appropriate environment for their children (Stevenson & Arrington, 2012). Beginning in the 1960's and 1970's (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000), African-centered schools became these institutions, and literature illustrates the importance and

significance of this form of pedagogy utilized in many of these institutions (Asante, 1991; Noble, 1990; Karenga, 1995; Shockley & Frederick, 2010; Lee, 1994; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990; Hilliard, 1995, 2000; Akoto, 1992; Dei, 1994; Giddings, 2001; Ginwright, 2004; King, 2005) Although there is an abundance of literature exploring African-centered pedagogy, there is little literature which properly articulates parent perspectives as it relates to African-centered education. More importantly, there is a lacking in literature pertaining to African-American parents and why they send their children to these institutions. This work aims to uncover the latter.

1.2 Purpose & Significance

As a focus of this research, the researcher aims to detail the perceptions and experiences of African-American parents relating to their choice to send their student to an African-centered institution. The purpose of this work is to add to an existing body of scholarship investigating the influence that African-centered institutions can have on students. Also, given that parent perspectives will be a focus of this work, a second purpose of this work is to investigate the conscious decision made by African-American parents as they are most influential in the decision-making processes pertaining to their child's education. The significance of this work lies in its ability to critically explore the influence and impact of African-centered institutions. Moreover, the work allows for parents (a voice usually unheard) to express their opinions about their child's education.

1.3 Nature of the Study

This is a qualitative study. Qualitative approaches to research allow for the researcher to delve deeply into issues to uncover common themes (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, this approach to research uncovers why and how individuals make decisions, in contrast to the more

statistical and generalized conclusions produced by quantitative approaches to research. Creswell provides this working definition for qualitative research:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

The specific qualitative approach utilized for this research is phenomenology. In using this approach, the researcher will be able to focus on the experiences and perspectives of individuals as told by them (Creswell, 2007). By focusing on the experiences of these individuals, the phenomenology approach uncovers how participants come to view the world and make decisions.

1.4 Research Questions

There are two questions driving this research. The main question, “What motivates African-American parents to place their children in African-centered schools?” stems from the background of the study. In response to the many societal issues plaguing African-American youth today, it becomes imperative to offer alternatives for educating African-American students. Institutions utilizing African-centered pedagogy have become useful alternatives for African-American parents when choosing schooling options. For varying reasons, these parents

choose differing methods for educating their children in response to those methods offered in public school settings. The first, and most pertinent question to this research, will uncover these reasons.

The second question, “In what ways do African-American parents feel the African-centered institution is influencing the success of their children?” is a follow-up to the initial question of the research. Once parents have chosen to send their child to the institution utilizing African-centered pedagogy for any of the varying reasons, the second question will discover if this choice was a positive or negative one from the perspective of the parents.

To answer these questions, a series of sub-questions will be implemented into the interview process. These questions will include, but not be limited to:

- a. What things, if any, do you look for when selecting a school for your child?
- b. Do you have any pressing issues with traditional or public methods of education? If so, what are they?
- c. Did you seek out alternative methods of education because of these issues?
- d. How has your child developed academically as a result of attending this school?
- e. How has your child developed behaviorally as a result of attending this school?
- f. Would you send your child back to their previous institution?

In answering these sub-questions, the researcher can extract common themes from parent responses to create a narrative to illustrate the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Mwalimu J. Shujaa’s education and schooling model is a theoretical framework for understanding how decision-making about education and schooling are influenced. Shujaa thinks of schooling as “a process *intended* to perpetuate and maintain society’s existing power

relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 15). However, Shujaa makes a distinction between education and schooling. He states that “Education, in contrast to schooling, is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 15).

The conceptual model for the framework represents a cyclical process in which individuals either support or reject the existing social order that promotes European-American ideals throughout schooling and education. At various points within this conceptual model, the cycle branches off into four bifurcations. Bifurcation one represents any situation in individuals’ lives when they evaluate the quality of their lives as either consistent or inconsistent with their achievement expectations (Shujaa, 1993, p. 13). At this bifurcation, Shujaa argues that if individuals’ quality of life is consistent with their achievement expectations, they are likely to accept the structural conditions of society and allow for existing power relations to flourish. Shujaa gives many examples of ways in which individuals’ quality of life can allow them to surrender to the existing social order. For example, an individual that “expects to achieve prosperity and is prosperous is likely to be highly motivated to support the social arrangements” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 19). On the other hand, a person that lives in poverty would adopt a “fatalistic” approach to their achievement expectations thinking that nothing within the system will change to positively affect their lives. In turn, they don’t have the motivation to challenge the social order surrendering to it as well. In contrast, if an individual sees their quality of life as inconsistent in either of the above examples, according to Shujaa, they will more than likely challenge the social order.

Bifurcation two represents what individuals attribute their unmet achievement expectations: self or group characteristics or social institutions (Shujaa, 1993, p. 19). Shujaa states that “when African-Americans attribute unmet achievement expectations to their own [self or group] characteristics, we see the realization of racism’s ultimate impact as a strategy for maintaining and perpetuating social domination. Its overt manifestation is the internalization of the racial inferiority ideology” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 20). If the individual can attribute their unmet expectations to the many ways in which society plagues non-white communities, the individual’s focus becomes countering the structure of society to promote achievement instead of accepting the status quo.

Bifurcation three represents the idea that differing interpretations of one’s relationship to the social order are evident in choosing between public school reform and the rejection of public schooling. At this bifurcation, Shujaa again makes an important distinction between the two. He notes that “schooling reforms are not intended to produce fundamental changes in the role schooling plays in reproducing the value system of the politically dominant culture and the social ordering that serves its elite” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 22). While the rejection of public schooling, on the other hand, calls for a societal reorientation and necessary fundamental change that creates new avenues for educating students.

Finally, and most relevant to this study, bifurcation four represents parents’ decisions to send their children to African-centered independent schools. Throughout a series of interviews conducted by Shujaa and his research team, they found that parents choose to send their children to African-centered independent schools for a variety of reasons. Some choose these institutions as an alternative means of achieving personal success and individual wealth despite social constraints. In other words, some parents see these institutions as a means to navigate this

troubled system, but unknowingly, they “reinforce the existing power relations and value orientations of the society’s politically dominant culture. Fundamental change within the structural condition is not a necessity, but they do reject those traditional methods of schooling” (Shujaa, 1993, p. 22). Other parents who differentiate between education and schooling send their children to African-centered schools out of a desire to see fundamental change and collective advancement for people of African descent. They utilize these institutions to promote the preservation of the “African historical-cultural continuum”. Each component of the model explains factors that influence decisions that African-American people make about schooling and education in the context of the United States (Brock & Johnson, 2014; Shujaa, 1993).

1.6 Assumptions

In conducting research such as this, there are many assumptions that can be made. The first assumption is that all parents actually choose to send their children to the school they are enrolled in. The placement of their child in a particular school could be because of varying circumstances outside the context of this research. For example, a parent could be choosing to send their child to certain institution because of the convenience of its location. A second assumption is that there is an apparent influence that African-centered institutions can have on African-American students. Even though students within this institution are Black and of African descent does not mean that introducing them to an African-centered learning environment will bear any kind of results whether it be positive or negative. A last assumption that arises within the research is that Black students need alternative methods of education. In response to the traditional methods of educating youth in America, the researcher assumes there is a need for alternative methods for schooling and education among African-American students. Another

individual may not make this same assumption, and argue that traditional forms of schooling produce great results, and there is no need to seek out these alternative methods.

1.7 Limitations and Researcher Bias

As with many empirical forms of research, there are several limitations that could hinder this work. One main limitation is the small number of participants. With a research question as complex as this, it becomes difficult to label the findings factual. A much larger sample population size, spread across multiple institutions, in multiple cities, is needed to increase the validity of the research. A second limitation within the research is the availability and willingness of participants. With things such as work schedule, personal and family time, amongst many other things, finding appropriate meeting times becomes cumbersome. Additionally, some questions may have seemed a bit personal, so willingness to answer these questions in an honest manner served as a limitation to this research. Next, a differing of interpretations of African-centered education and methods of schooling, could be a limitation. Since African-centeredness is so complex in nature, a parent's understanding, acceptance, and praxis of African-centeredness could differ in minor ways than that of another parent. In turn, this will inform their responses. With these differing interpretations, it could be difficult to create common themes from interviews. A last limitation within the research is the bias on behalf of the researcher. As an African-American male, who attended an institution utilizing this form of pedagogy in high school, and graduated from an Historically Black University (Howard University), the researcher is well aware of the bias at play in communicating the impactful nature of these African-centered institutions. The researcher has made tremendous effort to eliminate this form of bias as to limit its effect on the overall research and its findings.

1.8 Summary

Throughout this brief chapter, we have been introduced to the context of this research. The background and problem of the research provided us with information related to the need for African-centered methods of education. The purpose and significance shed light on the goals of this research, and spoke to its contributions to the scholarly academy and to society at large. The nature of the study describes the method chosen to analyze data. For this research, a qualitative examination of the data will be conducted, utilizing the phenomenology approach to analyze responses from participants. The research questions section detailed the questions driving this research, and context to support their aims. The theoretical framework section explains Mwalimu J. Shujaa's theoretical framework, and how it will inform this research. The assumptions presented arose from both the researcher and literature related to the overall idea of African-centered Pedagogy. The limitations articulated were a reflection of the researcher's opinion on what could serve as a potential hindrance to this study. Next, we will explore relevant scholarship related to this study in the form of a literature review.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the researcher will present existing scholarship relative to this subject. First, a brief history associated with African-Americans and their experiences with education in America will be discussed. This historical narrative will provide context to support the role and influence that African-centered institutions can have. Next, the researcher will explore African-centered education and examine contemporary works illustrating the usefulness and impact of African-centered institutions and pedagogy. Third, critiques posed against African-centered education and African-centeredness will be examined. Lastly, a discussion of African-American parent perspectives as it relates to their children and educational experiences will be discussed. Because parent perspectives are a main component of this study, the researcher finds it necessary to provide insight on the views parents have and share as it pertains to their African-American children's education.

2.1 Historical Context

Although we see a spike in efforts by Blacks to control the education of their communities during the period of the 1960's and 1970's (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000), it would be remissive not to discuss those attempts made by African-Americans to educate themselves and their children before this rise.

As Africans began to enter North America as slaves, they brought with them a variety of cultural beliefs and practices (Gundaker, 2007; Hilliard, 1995, 2000). One important aspect of their culture was their high value for education throughout their societies. It is a popular misconception that Africans were without educational systems before the intrusion of Europeans on the continent of Africa (Marah, 2006; Hilliard, 1995, 2000). James (1954) and Hilliard (1995, 2000) emphasize the indigenous forms of education that developed within the Nile River Valley

civilizations. Within this unique culture, many texts, forms of remarkable architecture, and complex religious systems illustrate the valuing for educational practices on the continent. John Marah (2006) examines the Kikuyu educational system. This system was a lifelong process that focused on communalism, group cohesion, loyalty, how to care for family, and the expectation of care for the aged. Hilliard notes:

continent-wide, Africans regarded the education process as a transformative process, one in which a person becomes not only schooled but socialized. A person becomes different, a person becomes more godlike, more human, by virtue of the cultivation rendered through the education and socialization process. It was a process rooted in a worldview” (Hilliard, 1995, p. 6).

These methods, upon many other things, aided Blacks in educating themselves once they would arrive in America.

Education for Africans America developed within a politically and economically oppressive context (Anderson, 1988; Williams, 2005). Slaves were prohibited from reading and writing, forced to learn the Christian gospel as their primary source of knowledge, and punished immensely for valuing education (Anderson, 1988; Williams, 2005; Gundaker, 2007). Whites in North America utilized education to keep African-Americans in a place of subservience. Laws were put in place that strictly forbid reading and writing for slaves. For example, in 1831, North Carolina passed an Act making literacy in any form illegal. The legislation reads:

AN ACT TO PREVENT ALL PERSONS FROM TEACHING SLAVES TO
READ OR WRITE, THE USE OF FIGURES EXCEPTED

Whereas the teaching of slaves to read and write, has a tendency to excite dissatisfaction in their minds, and to produce insurrection and rebellion, to the manifest injury of the citizens of this State:

Therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, and it is hereby enacted by the authority of the same, That any free person, who shall hereafter teach, or attempt to teach, any slave within the State to read or write, the use of figures excepted, or shall give or sell to such slave or slaves any books or pamphlets, shall be liable to indictment in any court of record in this State having jurisdiction thereof...

...and upon conviction, shall, at the discretion of the court, if a white man or woman, be fined not less than one hundred dollars, nor more than two hundred dollars, or imprisoned; and if a free person of color, shall be fined, imprisoned, or whipped, at the discretion of the court, not exceeding thirty nine lashes, nor less than twenty lashes. ("Act Passed by the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at the Session of 1830—1831" (Raleigh: 1831))

In his autobiography, Henry Bibb details the struggles he faced learning to read as a slave. In Georgia, laws were passed that barred any number of “negroes, molattoes or mestinos, or even slaves in company with white persons, to meet together for the purpose of mental instruction” (Bibb, 1849, p. 32). He and other slaves were not allowed paper, pens, books, or any means to expand their minds. He recalls a poor white girl named Miss Davis who taught slaves in a Sabbath School. She acquired books and other various materials for the slaves, but

once word spread of her teaching slaves to read and write, patrols were sent to the school to dismantle the operations on the next Sabbath (Bibb, 1849). Frederick Douglass shares similar experiences when detailing his education during slavery. Douglass began his educational journey at the age of 12 when the wife of his slave master began to teach him the alphabet (Douglass, 1845). Once convinced that reading and writing would give slaves a desire for freedom by her husband, she would stop teaching Douglass. Douglass would soon begin to secretly teach himself to read and write. (Douglass, 1845). For many slaves, education was equated with freedom, and “once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom” (Williams, 2005, p. 6). Slaves would sneak off plantations and meet in secrecy to further educate themselves on ways to resist the system of slavery. Literacy was a means for slaves to write passes for freedom and learn of activities of abolitionist groups (Williams, 2007). Slaves would pass these abilities on to their children in efforts to educate them and hopefully free them. These successes made during the period of enslavement propelled efforts of African-Americans in relation to educating themselves once slaves were emancipated.

Upon emancipation, African-Americans continued making strides toward educating themselves and their children. Ex-slaves were some of the first native Southerners to argue for forms of universal education (Anderson, 1988). Anderson states that the “foundation of the freedmen’s educational movement was their [newly emancipated slaves] self-reliance and deep-seated desire to control and sustain schools for themselves and their children” (Anderson, 1988, p. 5). Once the educational system in America was constructed, African-Americans noticed deficiencies in the ways in which Blacks were forced to learn. Influenced by the “Hampton-Tuskegee Idea” (Anderson, 1988, p. 33) for educating ex-slaves, curriculum and instruction

during this period focused primarily on agricultural skills and other forms of manual labor. Booker T. Washington became a well-known advocate for this form of education. Washington believed that by acquiring vocational skills Blacks would be able to positively impact their social, economic, and political position within America. At the Cotton States and International Exposition of 1895, Washington delivered his famous *Atlanta Compromise* speech. In it he states:

Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our grievances to overshadow our opportunities (Washington, 1895).

DuBois' ideas of education contrasted starkly with that of Washington. Unlike Washington, DuBois thoroughly examines the idea of Blacks needing different methods for the education of their communities. He is one of the principal organizers of the Niagara Movement, which sought to combat the "accommodationist" policies presented by Washington (Wiggin, 2010). In 1906, DuBois delivered a speech at Hampton University. According to DuBois, his view of education sought to provide "our youth a training designed above all to make them men of power, of trained and cultivated taste" (DuBois, 1906; Aptheker, 2001, p. 30). He wished to expand the ideas associated with the Hampton-Tuskegee model by incorporating the

development and training of high-quality teachers, leaders, and thinkers within the Black community. He argues that:

If we are to be trained grudgingly and suspiciously; trained not with reference to what we can be, but with sole reference to what somebody wants us to be; if instead of following the methods pointed out by the accumulated wisdom of the world for the development of full human power, we simply are trying to follow the line of least resistance and teach black men only things and by such methods that are momentarily popular, then my fellow teachers, we are going to fail and fail ignominiously in our attempt to raise the black race to its full humanity and with that our failure falls the fairest and fullest dreams of a great united humanity (DuBois, 1906).

Some Blacks were interested in creating an educational system that fostered their ideas of freedom, social order, and aided in improving their everyday lives in society (Anderson, 1988). Dissatisfied with what the schooling system offered to them and their children, Blacks in America began to find alternative methods for educating their communities. The Rosenwald Schools, built by Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington across southern America, specifically North Carolina, in the early twentieth century are great examples (Hanchett, 1988). In establishing “a combination of active leadership in the state Department of Public Instruction and enthusiastic fund raising by blacks at the grass-roots level, North Carolina constructed over 800 Rosenwald buildings” (Hanchett, 1988, p. 387). These schools were created in efforts to provide the budding emancipated Black population of the south with opportunities to progress their education. Although these institutions taught Blacks to be good farmers, and very seldom taught these individuals the proper skills necessary to ever escape rural life, they were still a

standing “testament to Afro-Americans’ tenacious pursuit of education” (Hanchett, 1988, p. 427).

Carter G. Woodson was very prominent in influencing ways in which Blacks in America viewed education. Beginning with his own hardships pursuing a doctorate degree from Harvard in history where “professors scoffed at the notion that people of African descent played a vital role in world history and American history” (Wiggin, 2010). With the founding of Negro History Week, later to be named Black History Month in 1926 (King, 2017), Woodson devoted his life to combating this miseducation received by Blacks in America. In his most famous work *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), he states:

if you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself (Woodson, 1933, p. 71).

This work became influential in detailing the ways in which the education system failed Blacks (Woodson, 1933). Woodson examines the many failures of the educational system in America to present authentic African-American history, and this system’s efforts to control the minds of Blacks. The infusion of African-centered methods of education aided in combatting this miseducation received by many African-Americans.

Levine (2004), and Payne and Strickland (2008), find many examples of African-American communities making efforts to educate themselves and their children. Some of these efforts include Citizenship Schools established by Septima Clark and Myles Horton, and Summer Freedom Schools established by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

(SNCC). These Citizenship and Summer Freedom Schools are of particular importance. The Citizenship Schools were viewed as a form of resistance to the discrimination Blacks and other poor people faced relating to voting rights. Williams states that “the schools educated thousands of African Americans and dramatically increased the number of registered African American voters in the South at the time” (Williams, 2009). Levine (2004) argues that what remains unique about the Citizenship Schools is that the program was simultaneously practical in its goals, and showed Blacks and other poor people that they “possess the power to transform themselves as they work to transform the society in which they live” (Levine, 2004, p. 414). The Summer Freedom Schools were established by SNCC to counter the traditional education received by African-Americans and poor whites (Payne & Strickland, 2008). Most significant was the impactful role that the community played in the Freedom Schools. Not only were students involved in the schools, but parents and grandparents became influential in the learning processes of the institutions. These individuals would take what they had learned and disseminate this information throughout their communities to empower and strengthen them (Payne & Strickland, 2008).

The resolve of African-Americans in relation to pursuing better educational opportunities for themselves and their families did not manifest itself within early, primary, and secondary education only. In the college realm, similar sentiments arose about the ways in which Blacks receive education. Fed up with the Eurocentric hegemonic views of society perpetuated in most universities, Blacks sought out different approaches for education. Thus, the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) arose. According to Albritton (2012), “the HBCU history is deeply rooted in the Black community’s commitment to racial uplift and community empowerment” (Albritton, 2012, p. 312). There is a long-standing history of these type of

institutions and their influence throughout African-American culture. Beginning with the founding of Cheyney University of Pennsylvania in 1837, Blacks began to enter colleges and universities that fostered their development. Dr. Mary Mcleod Bethune, an American educator, became an advocate for understanding ways in which Blacks received education. She is most highly noted for her involvement in the development of the Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona, Florida (an HBCU), and in the founding of the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) alongside Dr. Frederick D. Patterson. The development of Bethune-Cookman is of particular importance because it speaks directly to the will and persistence of African-Americans to control their education. Beginning as the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, Bethune would merge the school with the Cookman Institute for Men (History of B-CU, n.d.). This institution was an “innovative institution of higher education for people of color” (History of B-CU, n.d.). A most pivotal time in the history of HBCUs is during the 1960's and 1970's, around the same time that African-centered institutions came to fruition. Albritton suggests that “during this period, access to education liberated Blacks and enabled them to experience and to understand the world in ways that once seemed unimaginable. At the same time, as more and more Blacks received a formal college education, they acquired new skills to use in their fight for equality and justice” (Albritton, 2012, p. 313). Cries of "Black Power" rang across the nation, specifically on HBCU campuses. Students took up multiple aims all devoted to bettering themselves, their communities, and their education. HBCUs became a site of activism within the African-American community where “many Black students cared deeply about the plight of Black people, and they did much to ensure that their schools addressed issues of justice and equity” (Albritton, 2012, p. 313). These institutions produced some of the most influential people of this movement. For example, Diane Nash, a graduate of Howard University (an

HBCU) aided in leading SNCC during their educational pursuits aimed at securing rights for themselves and their communities, including the Freedom Schools mentioned earlier. She, amongst many other individuals, helped shape the ways Blacks thought about and pursued higher education. Today, HBCUs are among some of the top universities in the country and are still devoted to empowering African Americans through education. Like many other important contributions to education, the influence of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities play a vital role in understanding the plight of African-Americans in relation to their educational pursuits.

The development of these institutions, passion from communities regarding education, and the work of numerous scholars and activists, amongst many other more prevalent acts, aided in the rise of Black independent schools in the 1960's and 1970's.

2.2 African-centered Education

The rise of African-centered education has origins within the “community control of public schools movement” of the 1960's and the founding of the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI) in 1972. This schooling movement in urban, primarily Black communities, was an “attempt by Afrikan people... to obtain power over schools in their communities. By forcing confrontation over the issue of power, this movement marked a watershed period in Afrikan strategies to obtain quality education in the United States” (CIBI: An Historical Overview, n.d.). Originally stemming from the multiple sectors of the Black Power Movement, the community control of public schools movement found ground in Harlem in 1966, calling for improvements within public schooling for low income and minority students in New York City (O'shea, 1977). This movement's progressive nature was emulated throughout the country, spanning cities like Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Boston, East Palo Alto, and Washington,

D.C. Many independent Black schools were formed because of this movement. Some include the Uhuru Sasa Shule (Freedom Now School) established in Brooklyn, the Afro-American School of Culture in Los Angeles, Omowale Ujamaa in Pasadena, The Winnie Mandela Children's Learning Village in Compton, NationHouse in Washington D.C., New Concept in Chicago, and The Marcus Garvey School of Los Angeles (CIBI: An Historical Overview, n.d.).

In 1970, a conference was held in East Palo Alto, CA by the California Association for Afro-American Education and Nairobi College to “set up criteria for the evaluation of independent black schools and to facilitate communication between such schools” (CIBI: An Historical Overview). It was during this conference that the phrase “Independent Black Institution” was coined. Additionally, this conference helped to solidify the concepts that characterized these institutions. Specifically, “the relationship between culture and worldview” (CIBI: An Historical Overview). By 1972, the Council of Independent Black Institutions was formed to create a network of scholars and institutions devoted to the positive development of Black people. Overtime, these institutions would begin to grow and foster unique methods for educating their students and communities. Some of these efforts include the Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist approaches to education. One manifestation of their efforts was the African-centered approach to education. This approach was unique in its own right, and quickly gained footing within communities.

Many scholars argue the importance of African-centered content within schools (Asante, 1991; Noble, 1990; Karenga, 1995; Shockley & Frederick, 2010; Lee, 1994; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990; Hilliard, 1995, 2000; Akoto, 1992; Dei, 1994; Giddings, 2001; Ginwright, 2004; King, 2005). Lomotey (1992) states:

African-centered education enables African American students to look at the world with Africa as the center. It encompasses not only those instructional and curricular approaches that result in a shift in students' worldview, but it engenders a reorientation of their values and actions as well. Correspondingly, an African-centered curriculum stresses that educators encourage African American children to look at the world through an African-centered set of lenses that provides them with vision that is more focused, has a wider periphery and more depth. It involves more than mere textbooks and other curricular materials; it also encompasses a supportive, understanding, and encouraging school climate as the culture surrounding the curriculum (Lomotey, 1992, p. 456).

According to Daniel Pollard and Cheryl Ajirotutu (2000), in the 1960's and 1970's African-centered schools were created to provide an alternate form of education for African-American students. The infusion of African-centered methods of education aided in combatting the miseducation received by African-Americans (Woodson, 1933).

African-centered education provides a lens for viewing the world where Africa is a central focus. This form of education encompasses ideas related to both academic and personal growth for Black students (Lomotey, 1992, Asante 1991, Shujaa, 1993, Murrell, 2002). According to Lomotey, African-centered institutions utilize a unique curriculum structure that emphasizes historical grounding and ethical development. This curriculum structure aids to “enable students to see themselves and their ancestors as leading contributors to the history and culture of the world” (Lomotey, 1992, p. 456). Some aspects of African-centered education are rooted in and inspired by the ideas of Kwanzaa (Marks & Tonso, 2000; Noble, 1996). Kwanzaa promotes 7 key African-centered principles: Umoja (unity); Kujichagulia (self-determination);

Ujima (collective work and responsibility); Ujamaa (cooperative economics); Nia (purpose); Kuumba (creativity); Imani (faith) (Marks & Tonso, 2000; Noble, 1996).

According to Lee, Lomotey and Shujaa, (1990) philosophically, African Centered pedagogy aspires to:

1. Legitimize African stores of knowledge;
2. Positively exploit and scaffold productive community and cultural practices;
3. Extend and build upon the indigenous language;
4. Reinforce community ties and idealize the concept of service to one's family, community, nation, race and world;
5. Promote positive social relationships;
6. Impart a world view that idealizes a positive, self-sufficient future for one's people without denying the self-worth and the right to self-determination of others;
7. Support cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness;
8. Promote the vision of individuals and communities as producers rather than as simply consumers. (Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990, p. 50)

With these ideas in mind, we can see a dramatic increase in the amount of African-centered schools during the 1960's and 1970's (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000), with the Nairobi Day School and Chick Elementary School as stunning examples (Hoover, 1992, Durden, 2007). The Nairobi

Day School was described as one of the best educational programs for African-American students in the country during this time (Hoover, 1992). The Nairobi Day School was unique because it promised full refunds for tuition for any student who did not learn to read at grade level (Hoover, 1992). This is significant because of the extremely low literacy rates within African-American communities during this time (Hoover, 1992). Chick Elementary was created in response to parents and educators pleading for an African-centered institution in Missouri (Durden, 2007). As a result, in 1991 J.S. Chick Elementary became an African-centered school, “aimed at upholding and honoring the cultural and historical legacy of excellence among African people” (Durden, 2007, p. 28). Since the implementation of the African-centered structuring within the school, Chick elementary is among the top performing schools in the state of Missouri. In 2005, 48% of Chick Elementary students, compared to 24% of Black students and 36% of White students statewide, scored at the proficient or advanced level on the Missouri Assessment Program's fourth grade math tests. (Durden, 2007).

Presently, there are numerous African-centered institutions that offer students alternative methods of education (Watson & Wiggan, 2016). Some of these institutions include the NationHouse of Washington, DC, Timbuktu Academy of Detroit, MI, Sankofa Academy in Houston, TX, and Little Sun People in Brooklyn, NY just to name a few. Ginwright (2004) and Merry and New (2008) identify entire school districts (Portland and Detroit) being able to implement some form of African-centered education into their city-wide curriculum (Ginwright, 2004; Merry & New, 2008). In 1987, Portland Public Schools commissioned the “African American Baseline Essays” at the recommendation of Asa Hilliard (Ginwright, 2004). These series of texts offered students information related to “history, culture, and contributions of diasporic Africans in the areas of art, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and

music” (Ginwright, 2004, p. 26). These schools began to serve as the perfect alternatives to parents growing issues with public schooling and the ways in which their children were educated.

Contemporarily, there is research being conducted that illustrates the influence of African-centered education. Some examples are listed below. Moreover, research details institutions utilizing African-centered content and its significance for African-American students. For example, we can consider the success of the Carter G. Woodson Academy (CGWA). Marcia J. Watson and Greg Wiggan (2016) document this high-performing K-8th grade African-centered private school, where they have a remarkable record on student achievement and a unique curriculum structure (Watson & Wiggan, 2016). It is important to note that this school is in an area where the dropout rate is more than 50% for African-American students and the schools there score below the state average on state assessments (Watson and Wiggan, 2016). In this study, CGWA was selected because of its record on student achievement and its unique curriculum. CGWA is comprised 100% of African-American students and teachers. Overall, in 2014, the average achievement percentages for CGWA were 77% in reading and 70% in mathematics. In comparison to the local public school district, CGWA scored at least 15% higher in both reading and mathematics (Watson & Wiggan, 2016).

In 2016, Tabora A. Johnson illustrated the “power and importance of teaching youth of African descent their ancestral contribution to history and the modern world” (Johnson, 2016, p. 143). Johnson documents the experiences of students in an African-centered after school program called Kamili Ville. The Kamili Ville program meets two times per week for approximately two hours. The program is split between an academic support session and a session devoted strictly to African-centered curriculum. According to Johnson, “students found a

safe, empowering space within their urban school setting in Kamili Ville. They reported feelings of excitement about learning African culture, and specifically said they felt that a family environment was created” (Johnson, 2016, p. 152). Hanlon and Simon (2009) took an intriguing look at two separate groups of 6th-grade African-American youth residing in high-risk urban areas. They utilized an African-centered after-school program as a form of intervention and introduced it to one of the 6th-grade groups. After one-year, the researchers reported on the effectiveness of the program. Results of the study revealed significant effects for academic achievement and behavior in terms of grade point average and teacher ratings that favored students at the intervention site.

At Harriet Tubman Academy, Watson and Wiggan (2017) examined the learning environment of an institution utilizing critical multiculturalism and anti-racism education. Through the perspectives of the students and teachers at the institution, the researchers identify one key theme: The Value of African-centered Education, and 2 subthemes: Remembering the Ancestors, and Cultural Empowerment. Through a series of interviews, students state that the African-centered education that they receive at the Academy motivates them to be better people and students. One student stated: “The African-centered education here at Harriet Tubman Academy has been amazing. It has molded me into the African-American woman that I am today” (Watson & Wiggan, 2017, p. 14). In relation to the two sub themes, students pay homage to their ancestors through libation ceremonies and learning circles. Through these activities students then feel empowered (Watson & Wiggan, 2017). Ultimately, all the “students, teachers, and administrators describe the African-centered education at Harriet Tubman Academy as positive and empowering” (Watson and Wiggan, 2017, p. 14).

Janice Lord-Walker (2014) studies the influence that African-centered schools can have on student success in mathematics. She focused on three main concepts within her research: African-centered education and culturally responsive pedagogy; curriculum and instruction with specific attention given to mathematics; and striving for academic achievement for African-American students (Lord-Walker, 2014). She concludes that the presence of African-centered education within the school not only gave students a support system within the school, but motivated them to want to do better in the mathematics class (Lord-Walker, 2014). Teaching students about the complex ways in which Africans throughout history have utilized mathematics helped these students feel empowered.

These schools and programs, amongst many others, serve as stunning examples articulating the influence of African-centered content. The success of these institutions helps foster parents' perspectives and opinions on school choice for their children. Although these institutions offer alternative forms for educating Black students, it is important to discuss the various arguments against this form of pedagogy and African-centeredness in general.

2.3 Critiques of African-centered Education and African-centeredness

Many scholars pose arguments against the ideas of African-centered education and African-centeredness. (Ginwright, 2004; Merry & New, 2008; Gayles, 2008). Merry and New (2008) thoroughly examine many aspects of African-centeredness, primarily focusing on its subjective nature, and its failing to adequately reflect the diversity of the Black American experience. According to Merry and New, “many critics argue that ACP [African-centered Pedagogy] (and Black nationalism generally) essentializes Blackness/Africanness,” and “romanticizes African and African American history...” (Merry & New, 2008, p. 52). Influenced by “structural nostalgia” (Herzfeld, 2005), the romanticizing of Blackness creates a dreamlike

past used to avoid true constructive dialogue with the real past, present, and future (Herzfeld 2005; Merry & New, 2008). They go on to explain ways in which various interpretations of African-centeredness lack in relevant information pertaining to the experiences of women, promote a denigration of homosexuality, and adopt patriarchal views that can be as damaging to Blacks as white racism (Merry & New, 2008). Merry and New state that African-centered pedagogy “elevates heterosexist, patriarchal norms to privileged heights at the expense of women, sexual minorities, and persons of mixed race” (Merry & New, 2008, p. 52). They go on to contend that African-centered pedagogy attempts to construct and maintain an authentic African tradition that is often times imposed on children. This foreign system of values, rarely reflects their lived experiences, and becomes problematic when implementing this form of pedagogy.

Ginwright (2004) suggests that Afrocentric education ignores the complex intersectionality of class, gender, and sexuality when discussing Black youth. He explains that:

Despite the fact that Afrocentric education is often used in poor and working-class communities, these strategies surprisingly have not adequately addressed the ways that poverty and class isolation impact young people’s lives. Similar to the other forms of multicultural education, Afrocentric reform views ethnic identity as the central mediator in the process of bringing equity into the classroom... Multicultural educational strategies such as Afrocentrism have almost exclusively focused on students’ racial and cultural identities, while they have largely ignored the ways in which social class in general and poverty in particular have come to influence multicultural efforts in schools. The omission of such an analysis encourages simplistic models of black youth identity and

avoids the complex intersection of class, gender, and sexuality and the rich variation within each group (Ginwright, 2004, p. 27).

Gayles (2008) critiques the use of Afrocentricity and African-centeredness from an anthropological viewpoint. He argues that an essentialist approach to understanding African-centeredness creates a “high-stakes either or dichotomy” (Gayles, 2008, p. 152), where either you fit into this monolithic understanding of Blackness or your experiences are often neglected. Gayles suggests that “while groups may share a ‘life story,’ essentialist approaches discourage honest engagement of alternate and concurrent life ‘stories’” (Gayles, 2008, p. 152). Ultimately, essentialism makes it difficult for the varying Black realities across the diaspora to be discussed. We must remember to center all those individuals that constitute the diaspora, not just a generalization of the Black experience according to a group of scholars (Gayles, 2008).

Ginwright (2004) asserts that “this type of analysis leads to an understanding of identity that is segmented, fragmented, and decontextualized” (Ginwright, 2004, p. 27).

A last critique lies in reasons why African-centered approaches to education often are unable to sustain themselves, and fail as a result. Levine (2000) conveys an interesting argument in relation to the matter. She examines the Atlanta and Milwaukee Public Schools Afrocentric Curriculum Programs, and identifies many reasons why these programs failed. A first reason is “the issue of power” (Levine, 2000, p. 201). Within this, Levine explores ideas such as the information that teachers should teach, the resources that are allocated to the programs, and the structures, policies, and practices that need to be in place to sustain a movement. Secondly, she states that many of these programs fail because they lack the “psychological and developmental aspects of Afrocentricism that demand that teachers and students reflect upon complicated issues associated with their own personal, cultural, and ethnic identities” (Levine, 2000, p. 201).

Entailed in this idea are questions related to issues of race, and how programs fail to adequately call for the critical analysis of these issues in varying contexts. Lastly, Levine argues that these programs falter due to “the mandate of community empowerment that demands that the Afrocentric school curriculum build and develop the communities where African American children and their parents live” (Levine, 2000, p. 201). Here, Levine asks questions related to the goals and objectives of the overall curriculum, the curriculum being taught to parents so that they may implement aspects of it at home, the ways in which the curriculum assists student’s families and communities, and the presence of community leaders in the developmental processes of the curriculum.

Other factors contributing to issues that plague these institutions include their independent nature, their lack of educators, and the relationships established between some institutions and their surrounding communities. The independent nature and content taught at these institutions limits the amount of federal funding that can be allotted to them. If they can receive any at all. With a lack of funding, you cannot acquire some of the most basic resources for sustaining a school. This point leads to the secondary reason why these schools falter. In the absence of adequate funding, it becomes difficult to properly fund salaries for educators. The most prestigious of educators want to get paid for their work, and not enough teachers are willing to work for free or lower wages, even if it is in efforts to better communities. Lastly, some of these institutions fail to create bonds within communities that effectively translate to the success of their students.

These prominent reasons, amongst many others, lead these institutions to fail. Although not perfect (as illustrated above), African-centered education can have positive implications on

Black students despite these many critiques. As with any form of teaching and learning, it must be experimented with in praxis to gain a true understanding of its impact and potential.

2.4 Parent Perspectives and School Choices

The perspective of the parent participants is perhaps the most pivotal aspect of this research. This brief section aims to demonstrate ideas African-American parents seem to share as they have traversed the educational system. Additionally, some of their ideas as it relates to school choices for their children will be explored.

Black parents notice that there are apparent deficiencies in America's schooling system pertaining to their Black children (McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn 2003; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2008; Stevenson & Arrington, 2012; Cooper, 2005). America's schooling system fails to offer Black students non-racialized forms of education. Hegemony, racism, sexism, and other varying forms of oppression constantly plague Black children in educational contexts (Stevenson & Arrington, 2012; Shujaa, 1993; Asante 1991; Hilliard 1995; McKay, et. al., 2003).

Stevenson and Arrington (2012) identify many key themes in relation to parents and their school-making decisions. The first theme, buffering racial/ethnic identity protection and affirmation, articulates the desires of parents to socialize their children. Specifically, socialization through racial/ethnic pride and legacy teaching. The second theme identified focuses on teaching racial coping and agency strategies. This theme explains how parents help youth resituate discrimination as the problem of the oppressor. The third theme centered on understanding the ways in which schools are natural sites of racial socialization (Stevenson & Arrington, 2012).

Fields-Smith and Williams (2008) found that Black parents feel that "institutional norms and structures within schools created destructive, rather than supportive, learning environments

for children of African descent” (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2008, p. 376). Additionally, parents have “experiences with, inequities, prejudice, discrimination, or racism in public and private schools,” and wish to provide more positive educational experiences for their children. In a study conducted by Eric D. Howard (2015), he articulates the perceptions of African-American parents on public school and their level of involvement. From his research, he found that many parents were heavily involved in their child’s education for varied reasons. When asked: “What do African American parents think the changes should be in the school district?” Many parents recognized a strong need for more teachers to be knowledgeable of the cultures of their children. They advocated for the presence of African-American teachers, and suggested that their students would perform better educationally and behaviorally as a result.

Cooper (2005) argues that parents of color select schools for legitimate reasons that are heavily influenced by the needs of their families. She finds that African-American mothers “educational views, experiences, and choices reveals that race, class, and gender factors are critical to their school decision-making, in which the mothers perceive traditional public schools as sites of sociopolitical and cultural resistance” (Cooper, 2005, p. 176). She goes on to suggest that there is such a disparity in African-American (and other minority groups) parental perspective and school choice literature because much of the established literature is firmly grounded in traditional views that are generalized to all parents. This traditional perspective does not adequately reflect the “decision-making, values, or beliefs of parents of color” (Cooper, 2005, p. 176).

In 2015, Brian Ray examined reasons why African-American parents choose to homeschool their children. Although in the context of homeschooling, the findings of this study speak directly to this research and ways in which African-American parents seek alternative

methods for educating their children. Ray found that some of these African-American parents choose to homeschool to give their child a better understanding of Black culture and history (Ray, 2015.) Specifically, he created a list of 21 possible reasons that could motivate these parents to seek an alternative form of education for their children. From this list, the six choices most commonly listed were: (a) the parents ‘prefer to teach the child at home so that you [parent] can provide religious or moral instruction’ (chosen by 96.3% of parents), (b) ‘for the parents to transmit values, beliefs, and worldview to the child’(95.1%), (c) ‘develop stronger family relationships between children and parents and among brothers and sisters’ (87.7%), (d) ‘to customize or individualize the education of each child’ (80.2%), (e) ‘accomplish more academically than in conventional schools’ (76.5%), and (f) ‘want to provide religious or moral instruction different from that taught in public schools (76.5%) (Ray, 2015, p. 83). Many of these ideas reflect those put forth in African-centered understandings of education.

In response to these prominent issues, Black parents find alternative methods for educating their children. The African-centered school offered a differing environment fostering many things that Black parents wished to see manifested in their child’s life. African-centered schools aided Black parents in creating ways to educate their children that would ultimately benefit them culturally, behaviorally, socially, and academically (Asante 1991; Nobles 1990; Karenga, 1995, Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000; Stevenson & Arrington, 2012; Howard, 2015; Brady & Simpson; Murrell, 2002; Fields-Smith and Williams, 2008).

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has provided a brief context to support the need for this study. We can see how African-Americans have made many strides to educate themselves, communities, and most importantly, their children for many years. Over time, African-American

parents became displeased with the ways in which their children were receiving education, and began to seek alternatives for properly educating their children. With the rise of independent black institutions and African-centered schools in the 1960's and 1970's we can see this alternative to traditional education come into fruition. Presently, we have a multitude of examples of thriving African-centered institutions and programs where African-American students grow academically and personally. Critiques of this form of education were discussed to illustrate issues that plague it, and ways in which it falters. Lastly, parent perspectives were explored. As they are key in this research, their perspectives in relation to the deficiencies in public schooling, and opinions on school choice is influential to this discussion. In the chapter that follows the researcher will demonstrate the methods that will be taken to ultimately uncover why African-American parents send their children to African-centered institutions, if the institution is having a positive impact on their child, and if the institution has equipped their child for the future.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

As a focus of this work, the researcher examined parents' perspectives on the influence of African-centered institutions on their African-American children's educational success.

Ultimately, the research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What motivates African-American parents to place their children in African-centered schools?
2. In what ways do African-American parents feel the African-centered institution is influencing the success of their children?

3.2 Site Selection

The Kilombo Academic and Cultural Institute is the site of recruitment for this research. This site was chosen for a variety of reasons. A main reason is the institution's "Vision":

The African centered educational process is holistic. It permeates every dimension of human existence-physical, spiritual, intellectual, relational and the communal. It is also a lifelong process.

Education is a physical endeavor...Education is a spiritual process...Education is an intellectual process...Education is relational...Education is communal (Kilombo Vision, n.d.).

Additionally, the institution's "Educational Philosophy":

We, the Education Council of the Kilombo Academic and Cultural Institute, assert that education is a spiritual and communal task. We understand education is a

lifelong process that occurs in many ways and extends beyond the walls of any one educational institution.

We recognize ourselves as part of a global African community and commit to serve the interests of African people wherever we are in the world.

We will educate children and adults using an African centered methodology. It will provide an education under girded with, permeated and guided by, our rich African heritage. We will be intentional about providing and developing Imani, a faith-based, moral, spiritual and ethical climate that cultivates a decision-making process grounded in African values (Kilombo Educational Philosophy, n.d.)

Lastly, as an African-centered school, it was important that they promote their use of African-centered methodology. They advocate for education that is highly immersed in the rich heritage of African people, and developing the individual and community. They “foster an academically excellent and culturally relevant education that produces students who are equipped to succeed globally and are committed to social justice” (Kilombo Mission Statement, n.d.)

3.3 Sample Selection

The participants of this study are African-American parents with a child attending the Kilombo Academic and Cultural Institute of Atlanta. The research consisted of 8 participants aged 30-55. Inclusion criteria included: self-identifying African-American parent and have a child between the 7th and 8th grades (as these students will be leaving the institution soon, and parent’ perceptions of the institution will be more informed). The researcher was able to recruit the bulk of parents through establishing contact with the founder of Kilombo Academic and Cultural Institute, Mama Aminata Umoja, and the use of fliers.

3.3.1 The Participants

The participants of this study were all African-American parents. For confidentiality purposes, pseudonyms were assigned to the 8 parents. All answers were personal, and about an African-centered institution, so the researcher found anonymity to be most fitting in illustrating parent's feelings toward African-centeredness and the institution. There were five female participants, and three males. Below, a table illustrates the participant's pseudonyms, ages, and occupations as to give the reader a sense of who the participants are.

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation
Natasha	33	Female	Personal Trainer/Fat Loss Coach
AK	41	Female	Senior Training Specialist
Tiff	42	Female	Educator
Mills	45	Male	Lawyer
John	47	Male	Dentist
Alex	47	Male	Educator
Elle Yvette	51	Female	Corporate Real Estate Agent
Shay	52	Female	Compliance Law Clerk

Participant educational levels varied, but all had acquired at least one college degree. For some parents, African-centeredness had been a part of their lives in some form (primary and

secondary schooling, mentorship programs, attending an HBCU, etc.), and wished to have the same experiences for their child. Others had very few experiences with African-centeredness, if any, and wanted to foster this sense of pride in their children that they felt they had missed out on. Overall, their collective and differing life experiences informed their perspectives in relation to the institution and how they choose to educate their children.

3.4 Design Type and Qualitative Approach

This qualitative research inquiry is a non-experimental descriptive study because it only involves observation of subjects. There is no form of intervention within the research. The development of common themes arose from the interviews with participants.

In John W. Creswell's text *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* he identifies five key approaches to conducting proper qualitative research. Creswell compares qualitative research metaphorically to an "intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of materials" (Creswell, 2007 p. 35). The five approaches used by researchers to conduct proper qualitative research are narrative research, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and ethnography. Although each approach has value in some regard, the phenomenology approach would be most beneficial to this research. A phenomenological study "describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (e.g., grief is universally experienced). The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Since this research looks at the influence of African-centered institutions on a group of students from the perspectives of parents, it would be appropriate to find out what experiences the parents share

and examine the study through this lens. This approach becomes problematic when the selection of participants is taken into consideration according to Creswell. Each participant must be selected carefully, so that everyone has shared similar experiences (Creswell, 2007).

3.5 Data Collection

There are various forms of data collection within qualitative approaches to research. For this study, the bulk of the research was collected via interviews with the African-American parents of 7th and 8th grade students that attend an African-centered institution. The interviews conducted were approximately 45 minutes in length, and were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Each interview consisted of various sub-questions pertaining to the overall research questions driving this study (see Appendix A). According to McNamara (1999), “Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic.” For a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews with as many as 10 individuals. The important point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it (Creswell, 2007).

3.6 Data Analysis

As it relates to analyzing the data, the researcher utilized various coding methods through the transcription process in order to properly use the phenomenology approach to qualitative research. From information and data collected from the interviews, the researcher decided that two coding methods would be appropriate for the coding process. Firstly, there is the values approach to coding. According to Saladana, “Values coding is the application of codes onto the qualitative data that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview...values coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but

particularly for those that explore cultural values and intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies” (Saladana, 2009). The questions posed and the responses received throughout the interviews were a direct reflection of the participant’s beliefs, values, attitudes, and experiences. One of the interview questions asks: “What things, if any, do you look for when selecting a school for your child?” This question forces the participant to express their own values within education, and call on memories of their own experiences within education to adequately answer the question. As a secondary method for coding, the holistic coding approach was utilized. This approach was perhaps most useful for the questions and responses that were received from the participants. Especially, because their responses to each question were so long and detailed. This approach allowed the text to be grouped into conceptual categories to be further analyzed and developed. According to Saladana, “holistic coding is applicable when the researcher already has a general idea of what to investigate in the data” (Saladana, 2009). Ultimately, through the utilization of both methods of coding the researcher aimed to create general themes for understanding the values, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of the participants.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

According to Bright Jr. (2012), “Validity and reliability are addressed in both quantitative and qualitative research as a necessary means to convey to the reader the extent to which the researcher has done due diligence in terms of meeting a certain level of rigor” (Bright Jr., 2012, p. 53) Internal validity refers to things that make a study accurate. An “Audit Trail” was utilized to aid in the reliability and validity of the data being collected. Tom A. O’Donoghue (2007) expresses the importance of the audit trail:

the development of an audit trail has become an accepted strategy for demonstrating the

stability of data and the development of theory in qualitative studies. The permanent ‘audit trail’ created in this study allows one, if required to ‘walk the readers through’ the work from the beginning to the end so that they can understand the path taken and the trustworthiness of the outcomes (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 100).

External validity refers to the “degree to which a study can be generalized” (Bright, Jr., 2012). To aid in generalizing the research, questions will be asked in a variety ways. This will show consistency in the responses received from participants and ensure the reliability of the research. Lastly, the reliability of this study lies in the logical connectedness of the responses of parents to the overall research questions driving this research. Additionally, the audit trail will increase the reliability of the research.

3.8 Summary

In this chapter, we explored the methodology that informs this research. The two main questions driving this research were listed. Additionally, the Kilombo Academic and Cultural Institute was selected as the site of recruitment because of their intense commitment to African-centered education. The sample population that was used included African-American parents with 7th and 8th grade students attending the Kilombo Academic and Cultural Institute. The data was collected via varying forms of interviews with the participants. This qualitative study’s design type is non-experimental, and the qualitative approach utilized is the phenomenology approach of inquiry. Next, the procedures for the interviews were explored. Then, the reliability and validity of this research was examined. Lastly, the analysis of the data was illustrated to show ways in which information was coded to create themes, and other pertinent data.

4 FINDINGS

The overarching research focus of this study deals with the implications of African-centered pedagogy on African-American students through the perspective of parents. The two main research questions are:

1. What motivates African-American parents to place their children in African-centered schools?
2. In what ways do African-American parents feel the African-centered institution is influencing the success of their children?

From these two questions, a set of thirteen sub-questions were created to aid the researcher in thoroughly investigating the two main inquiries. Eleven of the thirteen sub-questions are examined below, along with some of the participant's responses, as this information informed the development of key themes. Next, the key themes that developed because of the interviews with parents will be discussed. These themes include: cultural competency, issues with traditional forms of education, sense of self, commitment to students, and readiness for the future. Each sub-question below (placed in italics), in some way or another, placed this research into focus.

4.1 Exploring the Sub-questions through Parent Perspectives

What things, if any, do you look for when selecting a school for your child?

This question started the conversation for a rather specific reason. Because the African-centered educational approach is unique, I wanted to compare the ideals set forth by African-centered pedagogy with the responses given by the participants. When asked this question, the researcher received varying responses. Most parents looked for a school that would adequately reflect the values that they were already attempting to set forth in their own homes. Since their

children spend a great deal of time in school, they wished for their child's experiences to be encouraged, not repressed. Natasha states:

Most importantly for me is environment. It's important that my children look forward to going to school because the environment is one that fosters love, acceptance and greatness. It is not enough or even foremost for a school to be 'the best' academically. If my child must be in an environment the majority of their day, I want it to be one that instills in them morals and beliefs that are in alignment with our home values.

Other parents looked for some sense of cultural competency within the curriculum specifically, and the institution overall. For some parents, seeking out an African-centered institution was not their original goal in school-choice, but choosing an educational environment that is culturally competent was very important. Some believe that "the United States education system is whitewashed in terms of what is taught in school. The curriculum is the foundation of any school, and it should reflect all of its students" (Tiff). For others, the African-centered approach was very intentional in their school choice. Elle Yvette wanted the institution to give her daughter, "a little black girl with dreads," a place where she would feel "encouraged and embraced, and that would provide her with a sense of self. As well as some place that would "give her the educational background that I think is missing in some of these schools that aren't run by blacks or Africans."

In general, all parents argued for appropriate educational structure within the school they ultimately choose. Things like curriculum, teachers, administration, community outreach, class size, academic programs outside of schools, support for students (tutoring, counseling, etc.), amongst many other things were all taken into consideration by parents. AK states that "When selecting a school for my child I look for a school that can work with varying styles of learning,

is academically challenging, in terms of properly preparing my children for college, and culturally diverse environments.” Alex looked at other details like school ranking and reputation, the surrounding areas, the school’s mission and vision, and how long the school had been around. A last requirement in selecting a school that seemed to permeate throughout all responses was the necessity for positive relationships between students and teachers. Mills states that “In order for my child to succeed academically, the social composition of the learning institution must be grounded in support and positive youth development from educators.”

Overall, holistic approaches to the classroom and experiences of students were influential for parents when looking for schools for their children. These things coupled with strong support systems, and cultural understanding makes for great school options to these parents.

Do you have any pressing issues with traditional or public methods of education? If so, what are they?

This question sought to explore the issues that parents see in education. More specifically, the researcher was interested in whether these issues, or something else, motivated these parents to seek out differing forms of education.

Natasha argues that “It seems that character development and intense self-love and acceptance is missing from public institutions.” Mills states that “Historically, public education models have been European-centered... and exempt historical facts as it relates to non-European countries, specifically those located in Africa” (Mills). In reference to urban educational environments, Alex states:

In the urban schools that I have seen, a lot of focus has been on behavior management and more so about ‘controlling’ the students as opposed to a high focus on rigorous

academics. Also, a larger problem that I have in urban education is that a lot of the individuals that are making key decisions about the wellbeing of my children do not look like my children, and do not look like the students in the schools that they are mandating decisions for. Also, these individuals may have a theoretical understanding of the communities in which the schools reside, but do not have experiential knowledge about the community.

In many conversations, the constant idea that the traditional approaches to education were “a one size fits all method of teaching and learning,” and “they tend not to consider the individual child when addressing issues and concerns” (AK) was apparent throughout. Almost all participants stated, in some form, that an issue they had with this form of education is that their child cannot identify with it. According to Tiff:

My main issue is that my children cannot identify with the curriculum as it is. I have three black boys. They are half African American and half West Indian. They have roots throughout the southern states and Caribbean Islands. They never learn about the West Indies, and learn a very narrow concept of Black history during Black History Month only. It makes it seem like the identities of minority youth are an after-thought. They have to learn about everything white all day every day. I think this negatively effects minority students social-emotional and identity development.

Overall, these parents found many pressing issues with traditional and public methods of education, and sought out alternative methods as a result. Elle Yvette thinks that “these methods are so caught up in the old-school way of thinking, they’re still teaching students that Columbus discovered America. I just want her to know truths, and not just the ‘truths’ that they put

forward, but their truth and the real truth.” Hegemonic views of education that center European culture as absolute was the most common issue in traditional education for these parents.

Why did you place your child in the school they are in now?

This question was perhaps most pertinent to the overall purpose of this research. Again, there were varying responses from participants. Several parents argue that the values put forth by the institution led them to placing their child there. Some parents have unique experiences. For example, Natasha, recalls a story about her daughter:

My son started at Kilombo when he was in 6th grade. I chose that school for him because I loved the African-centered environment. But the biggest reason why all 3 of my children attend is because of my middle child. Hadiyah is now 10 years old and in 5th grade. During her 3rd grade year, Hadiyah attended an all-girls charter school. She was used to a smaller school environment and had a very tough year. She did not want to go to school each day and would cry or complain just about every morning. Out of a class of 25, she had about 2 friends and it took her about 5 months to make those friends. She did ok academically but the overall environment lacked caring, personal investment, respect for children and more. So, I enrolled she and my youngest daughter in Kilombo the following year. As a mom, I literally could have cried as my Hadiyah was excited to go to school each day. She began African dancing and thrived! She loved her school and her teachers and her friends. Kilombo gave her what she needed most to grow in her own way!

Some other participants felt that they placed their student in their current school because they would be able to learn without having to be negatively affected by certain aspects of society. AK

states that “Kilombo loves black children, in particular black males. My children can get a good education at Kilombo, without the interference of racial or gender bias affecting their education and learning.” A main factor for Alex was the mission of the institution and how “the school dealt with specifically helping the community in which the school sits”. Also, how “parent engagement was high-priority for the school, therefore the school believes in heavy parent involvement in school proceedings which I greatly enjoy, because that makes for a transparent environment” (Alex). A last parent, Mills, places himself in the shoes of his son, “When my son first enrolled, I walked into the school and asked myself ‘Would I want to go to school here?’ The answer was simple, the school accounted for all my non-negotiable educational needs for my child. It is a community, a family, and I feel at ease knowing my son is at peace learning and developing there.”

For this question, a need to instill cultural values in their children was apparent. For most parents, offering a different educational environment that fostered the positive academic and behavioral development of their child was the primary reason.

Did they come from an institution not utilizing African-centered pedagogy before this one? If not, what was this institution lacking?

Many of these responses were short, due to the nature of the question. But two responses stuck out to the researcher, and were worth stating. The first, from AK, she states that:

Prior to Kilombo, my children attended a Catholic school. I actually really appreciated the education that they were receiving in the Catholic School, but as my sons grew older, white teachers started to view them as men, rather than boys or children. Normal child behavior was starting to be viewed differently, even if it was the same behavior that their

white counterpart was displaying. I feel that Kilombo may not be as strong academically, but my sons are able to be children, and that is more important to me at the moment.

Mills, another parent, has a different experience in relation to the question. He states:

There was the African-centered approach prior to this, but not to the degree of the current school. This time around, it's not only an exposure to the history but practical applications where all the students explore and further advance the teachings of the ancestors.

Almost all participants' students did not come from an institution utilizing African-centered pedagogy and this was their first experience with something like this. For varying reasons, they decide to move their students to these institutions.

Did you attend an institution utilizing African-centered pedagogy? If not, do you wish you would have? Why?

This question was particularly interesting. The researcher found it most intriguing that many of the parents had had some experiences with or attended some institution utilizing African centered pedagogy. For the vast majority of participants, there African-centered experience occurred at the college level at their respective Historically Black College or University (HBCU). These institutions were created to offer African-American students opportunities to further their education in response to the predominantly white institutions exclusion of people of color. Alex reflects on his experiences at his HBCU:

For grade school, I did not attend an African-centered school, but for college I went to an HBCU (which was the best decision of my life). My blackness was affirmed and celebrated in every aspect of my college experience, and I wish I would have had that as

a young child, because I would have been more confident, and sure of myself as I was growing up.

Another parent, Tiff, reflects on this same idea:

I only applied to Howard University for this very reason. I knew what my 12 years of public education lacked and did not want to experience that again in college. All my children will be required to go to Howard University for their undergraduate degrees at least.

Other parents were lucky enough to have these experiences while much younger than their fellow participants. Natasha states, "I attended an Islamic school. I love what it instilled in me. It was what I needed at the time." Mills, on the other hand, recalls how important it was for his parents to have him attend an institution like this growing up. He states:

Yes, my parents were adamant that I and my siblings went to an Afrocentric Schools. I think it speaks volume to truly know who you are, where you come from, to be able to speak with a great degree of authority as to your history.

There was one response that resonated with the researcher. AK argues:

No, but my children will not be attending an African-centered pedagogy institution for high school. I will be sending them to a school that can better prepare them for college and real world diversity.

Perhaps this parent's experiences outside of African-centered institutions leads her to believe that these institutions do not adequately prepare students for a racially diverse world. Elle Yvette, who attended a Catholic school, argued for the importance of culture, but did not wish that she had gone to an African-centered school instead.

Parents had various life experiences. For many they had experienced African-centeredness in some form throughout their lives. In some instances, parents had no experiences, and wished for this to be different for their child, at least during their formative years.

How has your child developed academically as a result of attending this school?

In response to this question, parents had differing opinions. Some parents advocate for the institution, stating that “My youngest is advanced in reading. The differentiated instruction utilized at Kilombo allows them to meet her advanced reading needs and challenge her” (Natasha) and “They’ve shown positive academic growth in math and reading” (Alex). Mills goes in depth about the academic development of his son:

In short, he is whole. He can assess and analyze the world around through a lens most kids his age unfortunately do not have. He knows who he is, where he comes from and the value he brings to the world. He belongs to a community and approaches the world trying to build instead of severing. All the school work falls into place after that.

On the other hand, there was AK that felt her student may have benefited better academically in another institution:

Academically I feel that my children may not be as challenged compared to other private institutions in Metro Atlanta, however how they perceive themselves as black children is something that they would only receive from an African-centered pedagogy institution. My children love their black skin, they embrace their African culture and they are seen for who they are as individuals, not the color of their skin.

It is interesting that although this parent sees an opportunity for academic advancement, there is no argument against the cultural value of the institution. Also, her evaluation of academic

development directly contradicts that of Elle Yvette who states that “the coursework offered is rigorous. She’s always doing some sort of project, and is in accelerated classes. I’m fearful that when I remove her from Kilombo to a public or charter high school that she will not be challenged enough.”

Parents’ reactions to this question varied. Most the parents felt the institution had a positive impact on their child academically. There were few parents that either felt their child remained the same, or would have advanced academically in a different institution.

How has your child developed behaviorally as a result of attending this school?

Many parents feel that the institution has positively impacted the behavior of their students. Natasha states that “My middle child was no longer sad each day. She was excited and happy. My youngest is very busy and temperamental. The teacher worked with me to make sure she was getting what she needed at school.” Mills speaks on the matter in great detail:

The school’s approach to behavior is healthy. Its goal is not to correct but heal wounds and/or explain the reasons as to why we act the way we do. It takes a deep dive into the student’s emotional well-being. My son feels support and is held to a high standard of accountability. Consequently, his support has made ease for solid behavior. Be that as it may, my son knows he has his mother and I to answer to at the end of the day.

Shay speaks to the social development of her daughter. She argues that her daughter has “developed greatly socially, in that she has been exposed to many different peers, from many different walks of life. So, she has many different perspectives from her peers. She also understands high expectations, and strives to rise to any occasion.” AK found no worthwhile change in her child, but complimented the overall structure of the institution. She states,

“Behaviorally my children have remained consistent. What I appreciate about Kilombo is that they do not condemn a child for behaving like a child.”

Majority of parents were pleased with the behavioral development of their children. Even those parents who felt their student had remained consistent, still attributed some positive aspect of development to the institution.

Would you take your child out of their current institution for any reason?

This question was placed in the interview procedures simply to explore negative ideas that parents could have in relation to their experiences with African-centered pedagogy. Natasha suggests that she would remove her children if “they [Kilombo] were no longer teaching my children the values they currently teach. Or if another institution met the needs of my child but offered what is currently being offered at Kilombo.” Shay said that “In the event the school begins to retract from its mission and original focus of holistically educating children of color to be true change agents of the world, then yes, my child would leave immediately.” AK takes an interesting perspective in relation to the topic. She says that she is “content with Kilombo, however if tuitions increase too much, I would probably place my children in a school that can offer more, such as: sports programs, smart boards in the classroom, iPads, enrichment classes, a better campus, etc.” Other parents simply answered no for this question, implying that they see no issues that are worth removing their child from their African-centered institution.

For most parents, there was no reason that they would remove their child from their current institution other than the school altering their current approach in some way. As long as the school remained consistent with their values and continued to develop their student academically and behaviorally, they would not take them out.

If you could attribute the success of your child to one thing from the school, what would that be?

In asking this question, the researcher aimed to explore the factors that African-American parents attribute the success of their students. Many responses resulted from this inquiry. Alex stated that he would attribute the success of his child to the “consistent evaluations of their [the school] curriculum and instruction. They are not afraid to change or develop a program where there’s a need. I cannot send my kids to schools who are, ‘stuck in their ways’. I need a school to be flexible and willing to grow with society, technology, and developments in the field of education.” Some parents consider the success of their student to be intricately linked to the love felt throughout the institution and the relationships that are fostered as a result. Natasha says that “It’d be the fact that the teachers and administration love the school and love the children. When children are loved, they perform better. They work hard to let them know they are expected to be great.” Shay states that “the intentional relationships that teachers form with both the students and their families make the difference”. AK deems “high self-esteem and self-worth” as keys ideas that are instilled in this institution and aid in the success of her child. She goes on to say that “White schools and white teachers destroy our children’s self-worth.” Regarding the relationships fostered at African-centered institutions, Tiff says that “They know who he is behind the student id, behind the grades he makes, behind the face. Here we are a part of the larger family.”

For most parents, the success of their child was attributed to the work of the individuals in the institution. If it were not for the institution fostering the parents’ home values at school, caring for and loving their child, among other things, the child would not be successful.

Are you a part of the school community? If so, in what way?

All participants were a part of their school communities in some facet. These efforts included parent and teacher associations, volunteering at school related events, chaperoning trips, and donating when able, to name a few. The unheralded support by the parents speaks to the communal nature of these institutions utilizing African-centered pedagogy. For some participants, this idea spoke to the overall commitment made by the institution to involve the families of these students. In reference to her involvement, Shay states that her involvement stems from a “commitment to my child and the institution that is able to positively affect my daughter’s development.” Some parents are not as involved as others. AK is recorded saying “I attend parent meetings and activities that the school has. I work a lot and travel quite a bit, so I am not able to be as active as I would like.” She goes on to articulate how appreciative she is for the school, other parents, and surrounding community for being able to pick up where she falls short sometimes.

Being a part of the school community was a necessity for these parents. If not for communal reasons, at least for transparency with the institution in relation to their child.

Overall, how do you feel the school is influencing your child’s success? Why?

For this question, the researcher aimed to get detailed responses to uncover themes related to success. Natasha states:

For my children to be instilled with a deep love for their blackness and African ancestry is priceless. As they grow, I expect them to remember their roots when faced with challenges. I expect them not to be surprised if they encounter racism or sexism. I expect

them to be prepared. Preparation for the world they're in and what's ahead is crucial. I believe they're being prepared.

Another participant, articulates that "Overall, I like that Kilombo has the children work in groups with similar levels. This helps the children feel confident. My children love being black, how fabulous is that! Where else would they feel that!" Mills speaks toward the positive influence that these institutions have. He states that "I think they are a positive influence on my children. They've helped them build a stronger work ethic. They've strengthened their analytical, cognitive thinking, and socializing skills." In some instances, parents attributed the success of their child to various things. Some attribute it to influential teachers, others the rigorous curriculum structure, some the bonds that have been fostered with other classmates, and some base it on the fact that their home values are being constantly reinforced by the institution. The influence of real and potential success on students in African-centered schools is a primary factor in school choice for African-American parents.

4.2 Overview of Themes

Throughout the interviews, there were topics that were consistently reiterated by the participants. These topics were marked during both the transcription and coding analysis, because they directly reflected the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the parents. After noticing the frequency of these topics, the researcher could compile five key themes that were articulated by participants. The themes that developed as a result were: *cultural competency, issues with traditional forms of education, sense of self, commitment to students, and readiness for the future*. Below, each theme will be discussed in the context of this research with parent responses to aid in explanation.

4.2.1 *Cultural Competency*

The first theme, *Cultural Competency*, was perhaps the most influential in determining what factors led parents to choose African-centered schools. Cultural competency, in the context of schooling, can be defined as a person or institution's ability to take into account the varying cultural experiences of other individuals. There were many sub-questions that helped inform this theme, they include:

1. What things, if any, do you look for when selecting a school for your child?
2. If you could attribute the success of your child to one thing from the school, what would that be?
3. Did they come from an institution not utilizing African-centered pedagogy before this one? If not, what was this institution lacking?
4. Why did you place your child in the school they are in now?

Many parents desired schools that would be invested in the cultural needs of their students. More importantly, they wanted for institutions that would continue to build on cultural ideas that these parents were already instilling in their children at home. For example, Shay, when looking for a school, wanted the institution to create an environment that fostered "love, acceptance, and greatness" for her child. Acceptance was of particular importance to another parent because she is the mother of young black boys. She felt that her sons were always picked on by their teachers for their behavior at their previous institutions. She appreciated the ways in which the African-centered institution understands certain behaviors as cultural and normal rather than disruptive. She then goes on to argue that even in the event that her sons are acting out in school, with proper *cultural competency* in an institution, they will handle the issue differently. Additionally, she said that "If my child must be in an environment the majority of

their day, I want it to be one that instills in them morals and beliefs that are in alignment with our home values.” The level at which the institution could embrace, foster, and mold the cultural aspects of the child became integral in the interviews.

4.2.2 Issues with Traditional Forms of Education

As a second theme, *Issues with Traditional Forms of Education*, was a pressing topic for many of the participants. In this context, “traditional” methods of education refer to those methods that promote Eurocentric ideology as absolute. More specifically, those methods of education that purposefully neglect the contributions to society from other cultures. Three sub-questions aided in explaining this theme, they include:

1. Do you have any pressing issues with traditional or public methods of education? If so, what?
2. Would you send your child back to their previous institution?
3. Would you take your child out of their current institution for any reason?

For parents, they wished to offer their child schooling options that were not a “one-size fits all” approach to education. Many parents felt that today’s public schools lack adequate approaches to education that promote success among African-American students. Additionally, these public schools do not support the varying experiences of Black people. Some parents even spoke to larger societal issues at play within this theme. Alex argues that a problem that they have with traditional forms of education is “that a lot of the individuals that are making key decisions about the wellbeing of my children do not look like my children, and do not look like the students in the schools that they are mandating decisions for. Also, these individuals may have a theoretical understanding of the communities in which the schools reside, but do not have experiential knowledge about the community.” This point was unique, and worth reiteration,

simply because it places many of the *issues with traditional forms of education* in a larger context for parents. By placing this theme in the context of culture, one can see why parents would seek out institutions where the administrative make-up reflects the cultural beliefs of the parents and their families.

4.2.3 *Sense of Self*

The next theme, *Sense of Self*, was not articulated as obviously as the other themes by participants. This theme's definition is two-fold. First, the development of a sense of self allows the individual to place themselves in a larger context. In this case, the larger context would be society, and this sense of self teaches the student how to maneuver through it effectively.

Second, this sense of self instills tremendous pride within African-American students. This pride makes them more culturally adept. Two sub-questions articulated this theme:

1. If you could attribute the success of your child to one thing from the school, what would that be?
2. How has your child developed behaviorally as a result of attending this school?

For many of the parents, it seemed as if they wanted their children to grow up with a sense of pride for themselves and their people. More importantly, that they would be able to carry this pride forth with them long after leaving the African-centered institution. AK was ecstatic at how happy her children felt about actually being Black. She states "My children love being black, how fabulous is that! Where else would they feel that!" Instilling pride in students is a key component of the African-centered approach to education, and is something that parents seek when choosing schools. Natasha speaks about the troubles her daughter faced at an all-girls charter school before enrolling her in an African-centered school. She states that she disliked going to school and suffered emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. She states that the

institution “lacked caring, personal investment, respect for children, and more.” After removing her child from the institution, and placing her in an African-centered school the child flourished immensely. Her attitude toward school changed completely because the institution was able to foster her *sense of self* and nurture it. Her confidence even led her to pick up African dance, something her mother never thought possible.

4.2.4 Commitment to Students

Fourth, there is the theme *Commitment to Students*. This theme can be defined as the unrelenting devotion needed from institutions for students to be successful in any educational environment. In the African-centered institution, this definition is magnified. This theme was prevalent throughout all conversations. Parents felt a strong need for administration, faculty, and staff to commit to positively impacting all their students. Three sub-questions detailed this theme, they were:

1. What things, if any, do you look for when selecting a school for your child?
2. Why did you place your child in the school they are in now?
3. If you could attribute the success of your child to one thing from the school, what would that be?

Ranging from tutoring and mentorship, to the level of involvement that the institution asks of the parents and community, all spoke toward the high *commitment to students* that parents desire. John is recorded saying that "if the school is not committed to developing my child in more ways than academically, I probably won't send my child there." As with other themes, parents really wanted their child to feel at home, even if they are away from home. Committing to students involves much more than being present in the classroom. Educators are called to become parents, counselors, pastors, physicians, amongst many other things, while still

being effective in the teaching realm. This idea of a multifaceted intersectional approach to educating Black youth is influential in the African-centered method of education, and seems to be appealing to these African-American parents. When selecting a school for their children, many parents sought out this theme more frequently than some that seem more prevalent (in the opinion of the researcher). It is interesting to consider this in response to the many issues that parents find within traditional education. Shay, positions this theme in the context of traditional education by stating that “many public schools and their teachers very seldom commit to learning about the lives and experiences of their students.” Tiff expressed how grateful she was that “they [the school] know who he [the student] is behind the student id, behind the grades he makes, behind the face. Here, we are a part of the larger family.” This statement speaks directly to the *commitment to students* and their families that makes African-centered institutions unique.

4.2.5 *Readiness for the Future*

Lastly, *Readiness for the Future*, serves as a final theme developed from conversations with parents. This theme can be defined by the ways in which African-centered schools prepare their students for their future after leaving the institution. Three of the eleven sub-questions informed this theme. These questions were:

1. How has your child developed academically as a result of attending this school?
2. How has you child developed behaviorally as a result of attending this school?
3. Overall, how do you feel the school is influencing your child’s success? Why?

In response to how students developed academically, behaviorally, and socially parents spoke highly of their school and about their hope for their child’s future. In relation to the overall influence the institution has on the success of their child, parents felt that the institution was placing their children on paths to success for a variety of reasons. The researcher finds it

significant that the “future” for these students varies from parent-to-parent though. Meaning that the institution prepares each student in different ways depending on the future that parent wishes to see for their child.

For example, one parent was very adamant about removing their child from their African-centered institution before the student entered high school. There was no particularly negative reason. Instead, her justification for this was that she felt her child had developed so much from attending the institution that she would be more readily able to deal with “real world diversity.” More specifically, AK states that “By high school they will have a strong sense of self and be prepared to deal with Caucasians.” She compliments the institution for the cultural lens that it has given her daughter to view the world with because many students her age do not possess it. This is just one perspective in relation to parents and their ideas of readiness. Many other parents suggest that because of attending the institution, their children will be ready to be positive contributors to their Black communities because they have been equipped with such pride from their school. With the values, beliefs, and morals fostered at the school, parents felt that their students would want to reach back and impact their communities. Mills states that “He [the student] knows who he is, where he comes from and the value he brings to the world. He belongs to a community and approaches the world trying to build it up, instead of severing it.” A last perspective came from parents who wished for their children to thoroughly immerse themselves in the culture of Black people. These parents advocated for African-centered schooling throughout their child’s educational endeavors (i.e., African-centered high school programs, HBCU’s, etc.). For these parents, this school was the perfect foundation for the African-centered future that these parents see for their children. Overall, parents felt that these institutions made their children very well-prepared for the future. No matter what that particular future may entail.

4.3 Summary

In this chapter, the findings for this research were explored. Through a set of thirteen sub-questions, the main research questions could be brought into focus. Eleven of the thirteen questions were utilized to create five themes related to the main inquiries. In examining the sub-questions and responses from parents, the themes are validated. The five themes that arose from conversation with parents were: *cultural competency, issues with traditional forms of education, sense of self, commitment to students, and readiness for the future*. Upon establishing these themes, an overview of each theme was discussed in relation to the overarching context of this research. From this information, the researcher can draw conclusions from the research, and suggest recommendations for any future endeavors in relation to the topic.

5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Discussion

From its inception, this research aimed to detail the perceptions of African-American parents as it relates to school choice. Specifically, ways in which these parents' perceptions and experiences have motivated them to place their child in an institution utilizing African-centered pedagogy. The two main research questions that the researcher aimed to explore were:

1. What motivates African-American parents to place their children in African-centered schools?
2. In what ways do African-American parents feel the African-centered institutions is influencing the success of their children?

From these two questions, the researcher hoped to reveal and explore ideas related to the overall impact that these African-centered institutions could have on students. Each question was separated into a series of sub-questions that aided the researcher in delving deeply into these very critical overarching research questions. From these sub-questions, parents were able to articulate varying opinions in relation to their personal choices for their children. After a series of interviews with participants, five themes arose from their responses. These themes included: *cultural competency, issues with traditional forms of education, sense of self, commitment to students, and readiness for the future*, and were beneficial for depicting the process that leads African American parents to choosing African-centered schools.

In **Figure 5.1**, we can see an operational diagram illustrating African-centered school choice in relation to the themes of the findings. It is an adaptation of Shujaa's theoretical model. Shujaa's conceptual model for the framework represents a cyclical process in which individuals either reject or support the existing social order that promotes European-American ideals

throughout schooling and education. At various points within this conceptual model, the cycle branches off, explaining decisions that individuals must make pertaining to schooling. Unlike Shujaa's model, this operational diagram depicts a linear process linking all the key themes together to show their correlation to African-American parents choosing an African-centered institution. In a sense, the researcher's linear process details the fourth bifurcation of Shujaa's theoretical model. If the fourth bifurcation of this framework represents the decision parents make, then this research details reasons for this decision. This linear process explains this decision further by identifying key themes or elements that influence the decision-making process for these African-American parents.

In this model, issues with traditional forms of education can lead parent to seek out institutions that are culturally competent. Once the institution has been selected the overall commitment to students put forth by administration, faculty, and staff, coupled with the ways in which the institution promotes a strong sense of self for African-American students becomes pivotal. Once these ideals are met, the child's readiness for their particular futures after leaving the institution becomes influential.

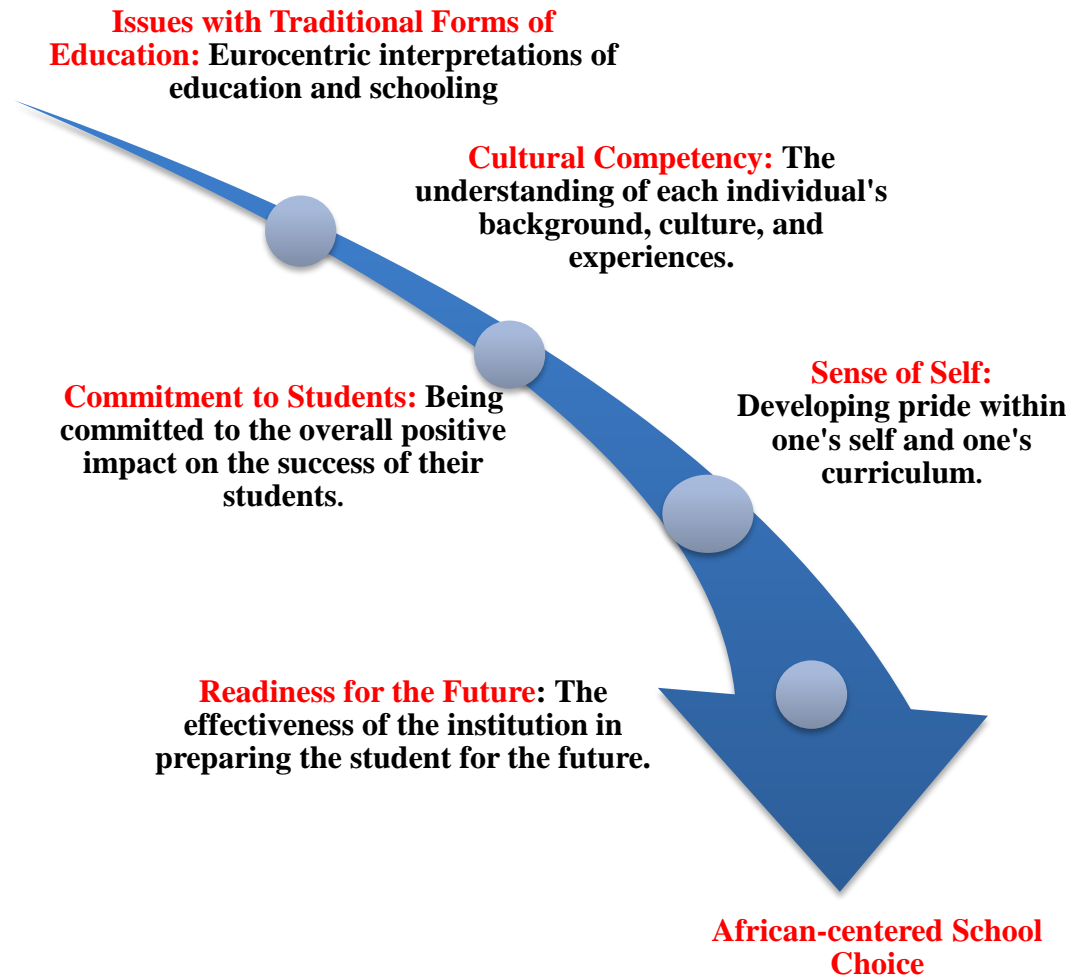


Figure 5.1

5.2 Conclusion

So, when asked, what motivates African-American parents to send their children to institutions utilizing African-centered pedagogy? There is no exact answer. There are a plethora of reasons leading these parents to make the conscious decision that they make. For most parents, it was a matter of taking their child's education into their own hands.

When asked, in what ways do African-American parents feel the African-centered institution is influencing the success of their children? Many parents felt that through genuine care, love, passion, commitment, and an understanding of their child, the institution was positively effecting the success of their children. In other words, these parents feel that these African-centered institutions positively influence their child's success because they directly combat the many prevalent issues in other forms of education.

Since Africans arrived in the Americas, they have made continuous strides to educate themselves and their children. Beginning after emancipation, we see slaves taking charge of their education through efforts with the freedmen's educational movement. Influenced by Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois, Carter G. Woodson, and Mary McLeod Bethune we see African-Americans become increasingly interested in the methods by which they were acquiring their education. Deciding between a vocational or intellectual approach to education, Blacks in America were thoroughly invested in creating better futures for themselves, their communities, and children. Efforts by Blacks were steadfast through the era of Jim Crow, including the development of Citizenship Schools amongst many other things. These efforts gained ultimate footing during the 1960's and 1970's. In response to the many issues plaguing Blacks in education, we see yet another shift in the ways African-Americans aim to control their education. With the founding of the CIBI in 1972, we can see a rise in independent institutions devoted to

strengthening the African-American community through proper education. Over time, these institutions would develop a unique approach to education now known as the African-centered approach to education. These African-centered approaches to education became groundbreaking methods for combating the Eurocentric approaches to schooling. For many parents, they desired to see drastic change, for others, they simply desired to see fundamental change within their child that would ultimately make them a better African-American, and human being overall. The African-centered institution became this alternative form of education for these parents.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

In the future, this research can be expounded upon tremendously. One main way is by increasing the number of participants. With more individual participants, researchers can attempt to make this information factual. In using a small number of participants, the scope is limited, and is harder to prove the inquiry to be true.

Spanning the population to other school districts, cities, and states utilizing African-centered pedagogy will aid in furthering research as well. For most people, their perceptions of life are shaped by their experiences and environment. One can assume that perspectives on school choice may vary depending on location. The hope is that it would not. But with similarities across geographical locations, it would further solidify the reasons why parents send their children to these institutions.

Next, developing more sub-questions to get an even more in-depth analysis of parent perspectives would be beneficial to future researchers. From the two main research questions, and the thirteen sub-questions, the researcher could uncover so much information. Much of the information received from parents stemmed from conversations related to these questions. One can only wonder the information that would have been gained if there were more sub-questions

to uncover these overarching ideas. Additionally, an examination of the differences that African-American parents have in relation to school choice would be fitting. In identifying these differences, perhaps researchers can build stronger arguments for why African-American parents send their children to African-centered institutions.

Considering other ways that this research can be furthered, a critical examination of African-centered pedagogy needs to be illustrated. There are very few (if any) comprehensive examinations of the "history" of African-centered pedagogy. For example, we are aware of influential scholars, prevalent works defining aspects of this pedagogy, and locations of schools, but there is no true examination of the origins of this form of education. Especially one that deals with this idea in the context of the African-American community. By this, the researcher means that there are no documents that detail the historical narrative of the impact of these institutions in communities, or how communities were involved in their fruition. Moreover, the literature lacks information related to why these institutions tend to fail. Many can speculate, but there is no information to justify any of the assertions. With an extensive historical narrative of the development of African-centered pedagogy, we as scholars can properly critique and analyze this form of pedagogy. We can uncover shortcomings, deficiencies, and many other issues within the pedagogy to improve, and ultimately perfect it for implementation. With this recommendation in mind, we must not neglect the work done by many scholars regarding this same idea. Overall, there is an abundance of literature examining African-centered pedagogy (Asante, 1991; Noble, 1990; Karenga, 1995; Shockley & Frederick, 2010; Lee, 1994; Lee, Lomotey, & Shujaa, 1990; Hilliard, 1995, 2000; Akoto, 1992; Dei, 1994; Giddings, 2001; Ginwright, 2004; King, 2005). This researcher recommends that there be strides made to create a single comprehensive and

extensive narrative that illustrates the history of this unique pedagogy. This way, the narrative can aid future researchers in exploring the topic further.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A- Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Participants will be provided a consent form to read and sign.
2. Participants and researcher will decide the best time to interview based upon the participant's availability. The interviews will be conducted at Georgia State University's Downtown Atlanta Campus in a manner that is most comfortable to the participants.
3. At the beginning of the interviews, participants will be reminded not to use any names or share information that can identify other people.
4. Interviews will be recorded and notes will be taken during interview.
5. Interviews will be transcribed and coded.
6. Participants will be given an opportunity to read over transcriptions and listen to audio recordings to ensure that they are valid and reliable, and are true to their story.
7. Sub-questions will include:
 - a. What things, if any, do you look for when selecting a school for your child?
 - b. Do you have any pressing issues with traditional or public methods of education? If so, what?
 - c. Did you seek out alternative methods of education because of these issues?
 - d. Why did you place your child in the school they are in now?

- e. Did they come from an institution not utilizing African-centered pedagogy before this one? If not, what was this institution lacking?
- f. Did you attend an institution utilizing African-centered pedagogy? If not, do you wish you would have? Why?
- g. How has your child developed academically as a result of attending this school? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways does the institution come up short?
- h. How has your child developed behaviorally as a result of attending this school? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways does the institution come up short?
- i. Would you send your child back to their previous institution?
- j. Would you take your child out of their current institution for any reason?
- k. If you could attribute the success of your child to one thing from the school, what would that be?
- l. Are you a part of the school community? If so, in what way?
- m. Overall, how do you feel the school is influencing your child's success? Why?

Appendix B- Informed Consent

Georgia State University

Department of African American Studies

Informed Consent

Title:

“Choose or Lose”: African-American Parents and the Decision-Making Process in School Choice

Principal Investigator: Jonathan Gayles

Student Principal Investigator: Marquis Baker

Purpose:

The purpose of the study is to evaluate African-American parent perspectives and experiences in the decision-making process in sending their child to an African-centered institution. A total of 10 participants will be recruited for this study. Participants will need to identify as African-American parents with a child in the 7th or 8th grade of an institution utilizing African-centered pedagogy.

Procedures:

If you decide to take part in this study, there will be 2 study activities for you the participant.

You will be asked to:

- Participate in a private, audio recorded, 1 hour in-person interview at Georgia State University's Downtown Atlanta campus.
- Review audio recordings and transcriptions of interview for accuracy. You should anticipate committing 1-hour to transcription review. You will be given 48 hours to review this information.

You will work directly with the Student Principal Investigator (Marquis Baker) in all aspects of these procedures. Your interview at Georgia State University will be scheduled once you provide your availability to the Student Principal Investigator. Overall, the research will take place over 3 months. You will only be required to participate in the 2 activities listed above.

Future Research

Researchers will remove information that may identify you and may use your data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for any additional consent for you.

Risks

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

Benefits

This study is designed to benefit you personally. You will have the opportunity to share your perspective and experiences as it relates to your child's education. Overall, we hope to gain information about the impact of African-centered pedagogy. This work will add to an existing

body of knowledge that examines the influence of this form of education on African-American youth.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in the study.

Compensation

You will receive a \$10.00 gift card to Target for participating in the study after your interview.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. If you begin the process, and are unable to participate for whatever reason, you will still receive your form of compensation. You may refuse to take part in the study or stop at any time, this will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Principal Investigator: Jonathan Gayles
- Student Principal Investigator: Marquis Baker
- GSU Institutional Review Board

- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews you provide will be stored in a locked safe in the home of the Student Principal Investigator (Marquis Baker) until the conclusion of the study. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you. Additionally, the audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be destroyed after the 3 month period of the study.

- **Contact Information**

Contact Marquis Baker at (313) 515-4724 or marquis.baker313@gmail.com; Jonathan Gayles at (404) 413-5142 or jgayles@gsu.edu

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

Contact the GSU Office of Human Research Protections at (404) 413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu

- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research

Consent

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

_____ Printed Name of Participant

_____ Signature of Participant

_____ Principal Investigator or Researcher

Obtaining Consent