Memoir of a Black Female Social Worker
Re-Collections on Black Women Parenting and Parental Involvement in the Education of Black Children

Embracing the Shift
From *In Loco Parentis* to Othermothering

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WHEN I THINK of the word *shift* it elicits a strong sense of profound change. Throughout my practice as a school social worker, I began to eventually understand the power that a shift can have within the school walls, between the students and school staff, and among parents and the communities where they live. A shift in discipline policies and procedures can have a dramatic effect on how students' inappropriate behaviors are dealt with in schools. A shift in curricular goals could impact upon the teaching and learning process. A shift in a school system's ability to maintain accreditation can create anxiety about inferior schooling and depreciated property value among the residents and business leaders in the community.

As I reflect on the influence shifts have on schooling, I re-collect a profound shift that I experienced.[1] It was August and my child was failing 9th grade biology. Okay…he wasn't actually failing. He had a "C" average, but in our home, anything less than an 80 is failing. After going online and reviewing his grades, I discovered three zero's in the place where grades should be marked for homework and class work.

"Charlie, where is your binder for biology?"
"Why?"
"Just give me the binder."
"Okay."

As he hands it to me I can already see papers hanging out of the contraption, and scrawled doodling marks with some girl's handwriting adorning the thing. Then I open it. Um, um, um. I've seen better organization from a Kindergartner.

"This thing's a mess. How in the world can you find anything?" He says something to me, but I can't focus on his chatter.

After organizing my son's binder I find a few graded quizzes- graded in the low 70's- which have comments from the teacher that are confusing, and daily warm-ups (some of which have the teacher's initials, some that do not).

"Charlie, these grades are pitiful. Looks like you've been doing absolutely nothing in this class!" (His eyes get big and he looks around the room - as if someone can help him- the deer caught in headlights look. He starts to speak).

"But mom..."

"SHUT UP... I'm still talking! This is pathetic. I can't believe you're beginning your first year of high school this way. You need to tell me what you plan on doing to get yourself out of this mess?"

"Mom, it's not me, she gave us a quiz on a chapter we haven't even covered yet and when I look up from my paper, she always tells me to get back to work."

"Okay, that's two incidents; tell me what else has you struggling in that class."

"I'm not struggling."

"You're not struggling… you're kidding me right? Look at that computer and tell me what you see!"(I need him to remove himself- away from me- before I do something rash. I'm not a violent person, but I find myself wanting to hit him. I just fold my arms across my chest to contain myself). He sits in the chair and scrolls down the litany of work and grades posted and says,

"Mom, my grades are not that bad." Counting to ten before I speak through my teeth, "So you believe that having a 'C' average is okay?"

"It could be worse. I know kids in my class that are failing. At least I have a 'C'."

"At least you have a 'C'? Boy you must of fell and bumped your head. Have you forgotten the many conversations we've had about what you need to do to get into college… cause a 'C' ain't gonna cut it?"

"Okay, okay mom… jeez."

"Alrighty then, you betta straighten up and fly right." Holding up the quizzes I found in his binder I ask, "Now tell me, what do these comments on your quizzes mean?"

"I dunno know. I can't read Ms. Johnson's handwriting."

"What about these warm-up assignments? Why are some of them initialed and others are not?"

"I dunno know. She just looks at them and initials them sometimes".

"Did you ask your teacher about these assignments?"

"Nooo… you don't ask Ms. Johnson nothing. You just get your work out."

This is how we begin the school year in 9th grade biology so I just go ahead and e-mail his teacher because at this rate, I'm going nowhere fast with Charlie.

From: Student Services - Anthony, J.
Sent: Thursday, August 21, 2008 7:48 PM
To: Brown High School - Johnson, M.
Subject: Charlie's progress in class

Good Evening Ms. Johnson,
I reviewed the gradebook and wanted to discuss Charlie's progress in your class. Please call me to discuss further. The best number to reach me during the day is (555) 555-5555(c) and (555) 555-5555(h) after 7:00pm.
Thank you,
J. Anthony

After I send the e-mail, I mull over the changes in my son. What happened from middle school to high school… over the span of one summer? I wonder if other parents have to run behind their children the way I have to run behind him. How are they supporting their children being successful in school? And with this last question, I am reminded of Ja'netta Clark's mother. Ms. Clark was the parent of one of the most challenging students I have had the pleasure of working with. As a gifted, straight 'A', Black girl, Ja'netta had one of the worst discipline records I had ever seen at the school. Her ability to achieve academically was only marred by her inability to control her temper; a trait she seemed to have inherited from her mother.

My first encounter with Ms. Clark was when she came to the school after receiving Ja'netta's final report card in June. Ja'netta was being recommended for 7th grade math for the up-coming school year because she made a 50 on the 7th grade placement test. So although she was a 6th grade gifted student, and each nine weeks she maintained at least a 90 average, the recommendation was that she be placed in 7th grade math instead of Honors math. When her mother received the "good news", the first thing she did was to come to the school to let us know a thing or two about our recommendation.

> Before the front office staff could say good morning, they were blasted with, "Ja'netta made all A's for each nine weeks. How ya'll gonna re- co- mend (separating the syllables in that word) she go to regular math over one test? What ya'll expect? Ya'll know you had a substitute teacher in that class a whole month before ya'll gave the damntest. Now because of one test she ain't good enough for gifted no more?"
> "Ma'am can I help you?"
> "Yeah… you can help me find out who responsible for messin over my baby!" "Front office to administration, we need an administrator to come speak to a parent." Needless to say, Ms. Clark's "visits" are legendary at Smith Middle School.

As I re-collected Ms. Clark's visit, her concern over her child's situation was placed into perspective. Although Ms. Clark's concern about her child's schooling was expressed in an atypical manner, it was a form of advocacy that stemmed from the long contentious history schools have had with Black parents. According to Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot (1978) for the American Black, "schools have always held out the promise and hope of liberation and

enlightenment at the same time as they have been recognized as social and economic vehicles of oppression and denial" (p. 125). The carrot of social mobility has always dangled in front of Black America's view with the promise that education would be the means by which one could achieve it; however, such aspirations were only meant for a select few.

Decisions regarding the formal education of Blacks in America have been described by Brooks and Newborn (1994) as a historical process that can be traced to court decisions that have constructed our understanding of constitutional law. "These decisions influenced policies and practices which initiated as separate-and-unequal (*Dred Scott v. Sandford*), progressed to separate-but-equal (*Plessy v. Ferguson*), and were eventually replaced with formal equal opportunity or FEO (*Brown v. Board of Education*)" (Brooks & Newborn 1994, pp. 792-795). From the fields of slavery, to the No Colored signs of Jim Crow, to the promise of we shall overcome of the Civil Rights Movement, to the now there's no excuse you've got Obama era, Blacks have traipsed the precarious tightrope between two Americas: the land of opportunity and the land of racism and oppression. Our lived experiences and family histories help shape our realities within these two Americas. The same is true within schools.

Comparing my perception of schools to that of Ms. Clark led me question how the schooling experience of two Black women, who were raised and educated in the South, could be so different. Initially it was difficult for Ms. Clark to share her experience with the navigation of the two Americas within schools because she distrusted me. As the school social worker, she saw my role as someone "snooping in her business" to eventually try to take her child away from her. It took several supportive interactions with her daughter for her to realize that I wasn't connected to Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and that I was more concerned with fostering Ja'netta's capabilities as opposed to reacting to her behavioral outbursts. The more comfortable Ms. Clark felt with me, the more she shared about her family history.

As a single Black parent who had to work two jobs to make ends meet, Ms. Clark was vehement about Ja'netta making good grades so that she could attain a college degree. After hearing her history with schooling, the reason for her vehemence became clear. As a student growing up in Georgia, Ms. Clark was placed in Special Education at the initiation of integration in schools. According to Ms. Clark, she had a quick temper that kept her in the spotlight with teachers and school administrators. She always felt that she was 'railroaded' into that placement and that it ruined her chances for college. She vowed that she would never allow the same thing happen to her daughter; that was why she was so distrustful of schools' motives regarding her child's education.

> "Ja'netta's much smarter than I was in school Ms. Anthony, and I ain't gonna let
> nothing keep her from seeing those college doors…you hear me?"

Not only did I hear her…I understood her. Don't I have the same dream for my son? Haven't I followed-up on him throughout his years in school to ensure that he was learning and thriving? Even now, wasn't I doing what I could to advocate for Charlie? Was what we wanted for our children so different? More than likely it wasn't; however, perceptions of how to support our children's schooling were very different.

Comparing our school experiences again, I found that the central difference between Ms. Clark and I was school personnel's care, or lack thereof. By the time I entered the school setting integration had been in effect for several years. Most of my teachers and classmates looked like me and I was afforded a more nurturing environment for learning. My teachers always

encouraged me to read as many books as possible and counseled me about what I needed to do to further my schooling with higher education. I always felt supported by school personnel and developed a more positive outlook on schooling. It is their support that helped me to understand that educator's demonstration of care for student learning is important and that this does not have to be a parental function alone. Because their example of support had such a profound effect on my life, I have tried to carry over the same care for students' schooling within my personal and professional lives.

Support of children's schooling is not new to research. Data produced by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement summarize that, "children with more family resources as measured by parents' education and household income are more likely than children with fewer resources to have parents who are highly involved in their schools, and children whose mothers and fathers are highly involved in their schools are more likely to have greater levels of social capital as measured by activities shared with parents and high parental educational expectations" (Winquist, 1998, pp. 1, 2). This summary makes the assumption that resources can be measured by education and household income. It also suggests that educational attainment and income provide parents with the resources necessary to participate in their children's education. However, what it doesn't take into consideration is that not all resources available to parents have to be material in order to support student education. I know that historically, Black mothers who did not have the income or the degrees created their own resources; my grandmother and my mother taught me that through examples.

As I think about the matriarchs of my family, I am reminded of the work the women in my family do. All of the women in my family work outside of the home as well as within. As a divorced parent of three children working full-time outside of the home, as well as recently earning my terminal degree, I now understand what it took for my mother, aunts, and grandmother to maneuver between the balance of work and home. Growing up in the 60's and the 70's, the children were 'women's work' (an ideology that has not changed much) and as such, multitasking between the complex domains of work is a skill that Black women have honed since slavery. bell hooks (2000) best described the historical sacrifice of a Black mother:

> From slavery to the present day, Black women in the U.S. have worked outside the home, in the fields, in the factories, in the laundries, in the homes of others. That work gave meager financial compensation and often interfered with or prevented effective parenting. Historically, Black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed black people were incapable of expressing (p. 133).

This humanizing work creates a space for care and nurturance which deepens communal relationships, reinforces positive self image, and fosters resistance against oppression within multiple locations. Constructing sites to sustain a people who traverse systems of discrimination, Black women work to keep our sons away from the drug, jail, and dropout statistics; we work to keep our daughters away from the pregnant teen, unwed mother, and welfare statistics. I could go on and on about the work as it is never-ending. However, our focus should not be drawn to the work. Rather, it is the labor that is a demonstration of care which liberates a people that we should focus on. I am reminded of this freeing work as I focus on my son's situation.

Although I didn't receive an instruction manual when Charlie was born, I use the resource that was modeled for me--othermothering…a resource that was handed down from a lineage of mothering.

> "Hey mama."
> " Hey Jacque, what you know good?"
> "Your grandson acting a fool up at that school."
> "WHAT! He smelling hisself?"
> "Might as well be. He ain't doing nothing in his biology class…messed around and got himself a C."
> "Hum - let me talk to him."
> I smile as I call for him ('cause I know what's coming). "Charlie, your grandma wants to talk to you." As he picks up the phone, I almost feel sorry for him…almost.
> "What's up grandma?" Whatever she's saying to him, he looks at me as if I've betrayed him. I nod with satisfaction as I walk off. Let him explain his foolishness to her...

My sister and I were raised in a two-parent household. We could tell that my father felt more comfortable with my mother handling the school issues. That's probably why we always viewed her as the authority on schooling. Still, I… like many others before me, rely on multiple family members (yes granddad too) to support me in raising my children. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), "…African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers… traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood" (p. 192). Thus, othermothering is not established as a resource due to deficits in the nuclear family. It is a communal care of a child. It is a generational act which is concerned with the nurturing, cultivating, and caring for people, the spaces they inhabit, and the quality of their lives. "To be generational involves more than the biological acts of conceiving and bearing children. To be generational is to be mindful of the effects of one's everyday and extraordinary acts for future generations" (Baker-Fletcher, 1997, p. 179). Perceiving othermothering as a generational act requires a shift in understanding mothering from the exclusive undertaking of the nuclear family to the participative function of many.

Black parents, such as Ms. Clark and I, have benefited from generational acts which have improved locations within our social, political, and economic environments. The task now becomes to ensure that our children benefit from generational acts that will improve their condition in life. Home, school, and community are sites that influence the direction and quality of a child's life. However, if these sites become contested terrains for ideological contradictions, then the opportunity for supporting a child holistically is threatened.

As educators, we cannot afford to ignore the how the generational acts of the home and community have added to a child's quality of life. Isolated work separates us from parents and the community--the very people who entrust us to keep children safe and educate them in preparation for a life beyond the school walls. Since schools exercise control over their children by what most states grant through *in loco parentis*, our work could contribute to the generational acts performed within communities and by parents like Ms. Clark through othermothering.

According to Todd DeMitchell (2008), with "…in loco parentis, educators have the right to act as parents when controlling students; concomitantly, they have the duty to act like the parent when protecting students from foreseeable harm (http://www.sage-ereference.com/

educationlaw/Article_n207.html). Therefore, *in loco parentis* provides school personnel the ability to assume parental authority over a child to educate, discipline, foster social skills, and promote their healthy physical, emotional, and mental well beings. But what about care? What about generational work that demonstrates love, deepens communal relationships, reinforces positive self image, and fosters resistance against oppression within multiple locations? Such work within schools would require a shift from prevailing discourse regarding parent involvement in schools and schools' function within *in loco parentis* doctrine.[2]

A shift from prevalent ideals regarding support for student learning could create space for a communal approach to parenting so that the home, school, and community are working together to improve a child's quality of life. An othermothering approach could extend parenting beyond the home and carry it over within the walls of the school building. Incorporating othermothering as a means of enhancing parent involvement in schools would only take *in loco parentis* one step further. Are there educators who distort the tenets of *in loco parentis* because of their family histories, values, religious beliefs (and any other influences that determine behavior)? Yes. For them, the notion of othermothering is problematic as they may have difficulties in embracing a shift in thinking from recognizing parent involvement as support only from parents and family members for school-based functions to collective communal efforts that share responsibilities for supporting a child's learning within the home, school, and community. Shifting our focus from just the parent or the community alone widens our gaze from conversely predominant ideals of parents' roles for supporting student learning to specific ideals of involvement, such as othermothering, that composite collective communal efforts in multiple locations that inspire students to learn and reach their highest potential (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

Autobiographical Roots: Critical Reflections on Othermothering

Discussions over parenting practices are in the forefront of public debate and will undoubtedly continue to be debatable among various groups including organizations that represent parents and children, policy makers, and researchers. It appears that no one is immune to the scrutiny of such discussion; not even Crefelo Dollar whose recent arrest has stirred debate over parents' use of corporal punishment as a means for disciplining their children.[3] This highly publicized incident had the metro Atlanta public weighing in with their opinions everywhere from their local beauty salons and barber shops, to the technical landscape of social media. However, although public opinion is passionate on matters such as children's disciplining, little thought is given to parenting that isolates families from one another from the communities where they live.

Much of what bell hooks (2000) referred to as isolated parenting has been accepted as the norm--engendering acquiescence to dominant ways of understanding child rearing in the United States. Although the discourse on child rearing has been hegemonized, "…the idea of an individual having sole responsibility for child-rearing is the most unusual pattern of parenting in the world, one that has proved to be unsuccessful because it isolates children and parents from society" (hooks, 2000, pp. 143-144). Accordingly, within some communities, child rearing is not seen as the sole function of the nuclear family. Indeed, in many Black communities, othermothering as a form of communal rearing of children has nurtured the growth and development of Black children within systems of domination.[4]

For those whose realities are entrenched within dominant ways of knowing, to regard the responsibility of parenting beyond the nuclear family will require a paradigm shift. Even as a school social worker employed by one of the metro Atlanta school systems, I have to interrogate professional goals that further the clandestine agenda of bureaucratic social structures and confront personal beliefs that position me within a hegemonic status with the parents and students I have assisted in various schools.[5] This interrogation and confrontation is not an assessment that is conducted intermittently. Rather, it is a continual extraction that "seeks out that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships" (Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 123). From this extraction I am forced to confront my past, assess my present, and contemplate my future to enhance the personal and professional. Part of what guides continual extraction requires a critical reflection on the origins of beliefs, goals, and dreams that have shaped who we are "in relation to those others with whom [we share] emotional, philosophical, and spiritual affinities, as well as political realities" (Braxton, 1989, p. 9). As I contemplate such origins, I re-collect a profound shift that occurred in my childhood.

It was 1970 when my parents sat me down one evening and told me, "Jacque, we're expecting." Expecting what? At nine I found out that I was going to be a big sister. When my parents left Jacksonville, Florida, they left behind all their family support to seek better employment opportunities in Atlanta, Georgia. Gone was the loving supportive network of Black women consisting of aunts, cousins, and grandmothers to be replaced by another kind othermothering described by Patricia Hill Collins (2000). I remember Black women like our next door neighbor, Miss Janet, who would fix my hair for me and take me to dance recital sometimes because, as my mother put it, she wanted to impart some wisdom on me. The fact that she had grown sons and no daughters would not have been a problem if somewhere in her experiences someone taught her how to fix a little girl's hair-- I looked a hot mess when she finished. I remember Miss Eula Mae who sat on the Mothers' Board at Zion Hill Baptist Church. She took it upon herself to make sure I knew the Lord by asking me each Sunday before Sunday school to quote a scripture from the Bible. If I said the scripture correctly I would be rewarded a dime. If I didn't, I would receive a two-hour lecture about the importance of Jesus in my life (okay I'm exaggerating, but it sure felt like two hours). I remember teachers like Mrs. Stroud, who nurtured my love of reading and who checked up on me long after I had been promoted from her class. I remember all of these Black women and more who made up the fictive kin that provided communal care for me.

So at nine, when my parents informed me that they were expecting, the groundwork for my place within this communal othermothering had been laid. Since, there were different expectations of me now, my parents, Miss Janet, and Miss Eula Mae especially, began preparing me for the day my little brother or sister would come home. That was when I first became aware that I had many mothers watching over me and guiding me. My tutelage within the long tradition of Black women caring for others' children began then. What I find to be notable in my family history is that there is a long tradition of Black women caring for others' children. It is my personal encounters as a child othermothered by grandparents, aunts, and fictive kin that have shaped and continue to shape the person I have become. These experiences with communal approaches to child-rearing have made me keenly aware of the Black community's contributions to Black children's lives and have led me to explore whether or not these contributions are discussed in parent involvement discourse.

This inquiry is meant to redress research, policies, and programs that restrict students' personal performance to achievement measures that categorizes their failure for not achieving at the level of their counterparts as pathology for which parents or individual schools are expected to repair. As I critically reflect on my experiences, I re-collect a counter-narrative of a Black female social worker to draw attention to all that is suppressed and silent within dominant ways of understanding Black parents' involvement in their children's education (Anthony, 2011). I begin to reflect upon my two selves as parent and social worker and recognize the significance of a generational othermothering that has traversed Afrocentric traditions and found a new home among the decedents of African slaves in the United States (James, 1993; Collins, 1994; Walker & Snarey, 2004). Steeped within a rich tradition of parenting, othermothering counters conventional narrative that suppresses Black parents' involvement in their child's life. Exploring parent involvement through my personal and professional experience enables me to unearth those suppressed and silent hegemonic narratives to understand who I am in Black children's lives and how I affect their success in school.[6]

Transcending Boundaries through Memoir and Fiction

In my inquiry I explore Black parental involvement by re-collecting my lived experiences as parent and social worker through memoir. Although the main characters in my stories are based on my family members and the parents and children I have assisted in various schools, I have fictionalized events, periods, and identities to protect myself and the people in my stories from the voyeuristic spectator without sensationalizing or trivializing my study. Fictionalizing provides access within the intricacies of a lived experience (Dillard, 1982) and allows me to highlight ways of knowing that may expand epistemology of Black parental involvement. Therefore, using fiction to discover an interpretative meaning of a lived experience engenders a shift in subjugated knowledge. This is what I believe bell hooks (1991) meant by critical fiction:

> [Critical fiction]…effectively intervene[s] and challenges[s] dominant reading practices [while compelling] the uncritical reader to put aside set notions of what literature should be or do and enthusiastically grasp new and different approaches…[The reader may be required] to relinquish privilege and their acceptance of dominant ways of knowing as preparation for hearing different voices.(p. 57)

Re-collecting or "remmemory" in Toni Morrison's (2008) term allows me to reflect upon my two selves as parent and social worker and reminded me of a generational othermothering that traversed Afrocentric traditions and found a new home among the decedents of African slaves in the United States (James, 1993; Collins, 1994; Walker & Snarey, 2004). Steeped within a rich tradition of parenting, othermothering counters conventional narrative that suppresses Black parents' involvement in their child's life. Exploring parent involvement through my personal and professional narratives provided an opportunity to for me to unearth those suppressed and silent hegemonic ideals to understand who I am in Black children's lives and how I affect their success in school.

There is a plethora of research that explores Black parental involvement as a means for increasing their children's achievement; however, few texts unpack the intersectionality of Black parents' multiple social identities to examine the ways they are already involved in their

children's schooling. By exploring the gaps in research, my inquiry problematizes Black parental involvement as a means for interrogating the process of teaching and learning in American schools. Drawing upon the work of Critical Race Theory (e.g. Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Watkins, 2001; Parker & Lynn, 2002), I explore parenting from a Black Feminist Thought standpoint (e.g. Collins, 1994; Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984/2007) to provide a revisionist interpretation of a communal mothering that nurtures the growth and development of a child's physical, emotional and mental interconnected selves (e.g. Case, 1997; Glenn, 1993; Henry, 2006; James, 1993; Lightfoot, 1978; Walker & Snarey, 2004). I draw upon the works of memoir and fiction as my methodology to complicate narratives in the home, school, and community (e.g. Harris, 2005; Braxton, 1989). Using memoir and fiction creates a space for imaginative activity in capturing a truth, a reality, a lived experience (Morrison, 2008). The use of memoir and fiction also free me to write about experience thematically as opposed to chronologically. I was therefore able to present Black parents' lived experiences with their children's schooling as a school social worker or as a parent throughout this study to expose a truth silent within research.

Using memoir and fiction enables me to share my experiences and to "use the interrelationships between researcher and other to inform and change social knowledge" (Harris, in Phillion, He, & Connelly, 2005, p. 39). Therefore memoir and fiction allow me to write my lived experiences as a Black female parent and social worker to provide the reader with what Morrison (2008) terms as discredited knowledge. This knowledge may be discredited by dominant ways of knowing because it acknowledges what "could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things…And some of those things were discredited knowledge that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited therefore what they *knew* was discredited" (Morrison, 2008, p. 61). Much can be learned from a knowing rooted in Black women's lived experiences; a knowing that may be discredited, but "fosters both…empowerment and social justice" (Collins, 2000, p. 289).

Researching the Silenced Narratives of Black Parental Involvement in the South

Towards my second year as a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University, I had the good sense to enroll in the Advanced Seminar in Qualitative Dissertation Writing class. The syllabus was 13 pages long and every single last page was worth the ink and paper required to produce it. In addition to orienting students to the stages of the dissertation process, we were freed to critically think about and develop our research proposal. It was during this process that I began to explore studies, theorists, and theoretical frameworks that I would use to develop my research. I became intrigued with Black feminists such as Audre Lorde (1984/2007), Patricia Hill Collins (1994; 2000), and Ana Julia Cooper (1892/1988) who made me think about the intersections of race, gender, and class within systems of discrimination. I was lulled by the narrative works of bell hooks (1996; 1997), and Angela Davis (1974) who illustrate how "the Black woman becomes a historian of her Black community" (Harris, 2005, p. 43).

Through discovery, I found that Black women writers such as June Jordan (2002), Maya Angelou (1969), Alice Walker (1967/1983), and Toni Morrison (1992; 2008) have created a space for women of color to contribute to the counter-narratives about their lives. From proposal, to prospectus, and eventual writing of the research, I was able to take what all these women offered in their texts to develop inquiry that represented the silent narrative of communal

parenting that supports Black children's success at school and in life. This work is the culmination of the influences of Black female writers upon my exploration into the parent involvement. Although I chose an autobiographical narrative as a means of reflection, analysis, and interpretation of my experiences as a parent and social worker, my use of memoir interrogated research that universalizes parental involvement in schools and provided counter-narratives to hegemonic beliefs regarding Black parent's involvement in their children's schooling.

I focused on the Black race within my study. As a parent of Black children who practices in a school system that serves predominately Black children and youth in metro Atlanta, I am concerned with growing debates surrounding achievement gaps between Black children when compared to their counterparts. Issues, including student achievement, graduation rate, and participation in educational programs have instigated discussions which have sought resolutions to the interactions Black parents and children have with schools. However, "a more comprehensive understanding of the origins of interaction among Black communities, families, schooling, and education will begin to elucidate the resounding themes and patterns that have merged over time and may point to their modern expression in political, social, and intellectual battles being waged today" (Lightfoot, 1978, p.130). Using what Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) termed a revisionist history of Black parents' involvement in securing schooling for their children during slavery and segregation, I was able to unearth what was hidden within subjugated knowledge. Exposing these counter narratives allowed me to interrogate hegemonic ideals which did not examine the socio-political and economic factors which have systemically affected Black students' achievement. Rather, their focus was to place Black children's lower rate of achievement as an issue that their parent could alleviate.

Although Black parents' response to clandestine agendas and racist practices regarding their children's schooling reflected tenacity and resourcefulness, this would not be enough to reverse the damage that had been done to impede the educational progress of Black students. If we view Blacks' interactions with schooling post the Civil Rights Movemnet, it suggests that only two generations of Blacks have had consistent equal access to schooling. To focus on measures of achievement and educational attainment of Black students and compare these measures to the progress of their counterparts without interrogating the history of socio-political systems which have disenfranchised Blacks and effected their educational progression since universal schooling was introduced is foolhardy at best.

I thought it was important to highlight the education of Blacks in the South because "the vast majority of African-Americans resided in the South until the 1950's….Although Black Southerners were formally free during the time when American popular education was transformed into a highly formal and critical social institution, their schooling took a different path" (Harris, 1994, p. 144). An examination of the divergent path of Black schooling in the South illuminates how schooling reproduced the social reality of Blacks. Issues such as state statues and policies that were used for practices such as gerrymandering school districts, enforcing school terms that supported Black child labor and the exclusion of Black youth from secondary education should be considered to interrogate clandestine agendas that marginalized and developed Blacks' schooling under such contexts (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). Using a revisionist history allows an examination of reoccurring themes which have affected Black parents' and children's experiences of schooling to gain insight into how those experiences reflect in present day occurrences between the school and home relationships.

Exploring schools as reproducers of power and privilege in my study helps me to

understand how hierarchies are created through the stratification of parent groups (Apple, 1995). Schools may use social categories of race, gender, and class as a means to establish hierarchal ordering or to create power relations among school personnel (Watkins, 2009; Olivos, 2006). Accordingly, as these hierarchies are perpetuated through the institutional, political and economic structures (to name a few), schools as social institutions then act as bureaucracies which normalize, validate, and propagate dominant beliefs.

Using what Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) work on intersectionality, I was able to reflect upon the mutually constructing identities of myself and re-collect the experiences of a mother whose child was mentioned previously in this study, Ja'netta Clark. I was able to examine how the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and identity impact on Black parental involvement and Black children's school success within systems of discrimination. In my work, the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and identity does not highlight 'difference' in black parenting as a subordinated group. Rather, it makes intelligible how the social systems of race, class, and gender mutually construct blacks' multiple ways of knowing and experiencing parenting. As Collins (2000) notes, "[intersectionality…untangles] the relationships between knowledge and empowerment [by shedding] new light on how domination is organized" (p. 246). Race, gender, and class are social identities that construct power and privilege in the United States. Schools reproduce these power and privilege constructions through the stratification of parent groups (Apple, 1995).

For instance, as a single Black woman with a meager income, Ms. Clark's (Ja'netta Clark's mother) race, gender, and class placed her in double (no triple) bind. Ms. Clark's race situates her in a history rife with Blacks' perilous journey through systems of discrimination in places such as the polling place, housing market, and employment offices. Black parents' issues with educating their children in public schooling situates them in yet another location of subordination and therefore has created a contentious relationship between them and schools (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 1995; Du Bois, 1903/2008; Hale, 1994; Harris, 1994; Lightfoot, 1978; Woodson 1933/2009; Smith & Chunn, 1989; Tate, 1997; Watkins, 2001).

Ms. Clark's caste within society placed her within an economically disadvantaged class which made it necessary for her to maintain two jobs in order to meet her monthly financial obligations. Consequently, her work schedule affected her involvement in school-based functions and rendered her activities in the building as nearly nonexistent to the untrained eye. Thus, her identity, as a low wage earning woman, locates her within yet another matrix of dominance that is rife within a historical struggle for access to middle income and unionized jobs that her male counterparts received routinely in the workforce. Julie Bettie (1995) noted that "as employment shifted from heavy industry to nonunion clerical and service-sector jobs, employers found themselves irresistibly attracted to the non-unionized, cheaper labor of women, and thus, increasingly to that of married women and mothers whose labor had been made cheap, in part, by the historic working-class struggle for a male breadwinner wage (p. 133). Thus, the class stratification of women like Ms. Clark is reproduced in schools as school-based frameworks of parental involvement restrict economically disadvantaged parent groups' participation to periods during the school day when most are unable to take leave from their jobs.

Single parent women are yet another category of social identity which is situated within a matrix of domination in schools. Hemogenized representations of single mothers reify their contribution to social ills of society (Bettie, 1995). This may be explicated by theorists who espouse that the care of children has typically been perceived as the role of women partly due to dominant patriarchal Western ideologies regarding gender functions (Collins, 2000; Glenn, in

Glenn, Chang & Forcey, 1994; hooks, 2000). School personnel who internalize these hegemonized ideals of care of children relate to parents of different genders accordingly.

The inclusion of the intersectionality of Black parents' varying social identities problematizes forms of involvement as categories of race, gender, class, and power further estranges parents from prescribed activities in schools. Although race, class and gender are diverse social identities, they are interconnected through their representations of difference and intersect phenomena (specifically parent involvement) which impact students' achievement in schools. As a parent, Ms. Clark constantly fights ideologies which either repress her involvement in her child's life or relegate it as nonexistent.

Invigorating Possibilities for Othermothering in Schools: Lessons from Black Parents

The U.S. Department of Education (2010) has documented several areas, including math, reading, and graduation rate, where Black children are achieving at lower percentages than their counterparts. It is important that educational researchers and practitioners begin to question practices that impede Black children's progress. I find that oftentimes, when Black children fail to achieve at the same rate as their counterparts, their failure is viewed as an issue with which to be dealt with either internally (within the child/family) or externally (within the school itself). Rarely is their failure used as a catalyst for interrogating the process of teaching and learning in American schools. It is for this reason that instead of questioning how to improve the involvement among Black parents to increase student achievement, I focus on questioning how the experiences of Black parents, specifically othermothering experiences, can challenge the meta narrative of parental involvement to improve teaching and learning experiences for Black children.

Reflecting on my dual identities as school social worker and mother, I explore the multifaceted ways Black parents support their children's learning. I highlight othermothering as means to expand the notions of Black parental involvement in schools to a communal approach to support Black children's education. I unearth silent narratives and raise challenging questions to disrupt the universalized constructions of Black parental involvement. Paulo Freire and Antonio Faundez (1989) recognize the need for asking questions so that people could achieve conscientização[7] to challenge the assumptions about Black parental involvement that continue to damage Black children. How do hegemonic conceptions of parent involvement affect communications and relations between the school and the Black parent? How do race, sex, class and the experiences of Black parents impact on their children's school success? How can school social workers and educational practitioners re-collect multiple experiences to improve the educational process for Black children and their families? How do the experiences of Black women contribute to the dialogue regarding parent involvement?

It would be disingenuous to debate the achievement of a child as if her/his physical, emotional and mental self could be separated from the social, political, and economic trajectories of their environment. Instead, by nurturing the minds and overall well being of the children in their care, educators can begin the transformational work of enriching the teaching and learning experiences at the school for the growth and development of the whole child. Studies from researchers such as Karen Case (1997) and Annette Henry (2006) have brought to light Black educators' othermothering of students which has implications for moving parental involvement beyond the school environment to ameliorate home, school, community relationships.

It is my hope that this study sparks an imaginative activity that reveals to policy makers, educational researchers and practitioners that there is a need for Black orientations to parental involvement in schools to redress universalization, hegemonization, and silencing of Black parents' engagement in their children's schooling; to recognize all that is suppressed and silent to gain insight of who they are and how they became who they are in the lives of Black children; to dismantle those individual, structural, and political agendas and practices that are pervasive and negatively affect Black children's success in schools and life; and to recognize how Black parents' varying identities inference their perceptions and interactions with their children's schools. This imaginative activity helps construct a dialogical relationship (Freire, 1970/1993) between the home, school and community that honors multiple ways of knowing about Black communal parental involvement that inspires all Black children to reach their highest potential (Walker, 1996). A dialogical relationship would minimize barriers to Black parental involvement created by school personnel's hegemonic status and bureaucratic social structures. It would also foster knowledge about school functions, curricular and educational standards that Black parents seek in accessing expertise that will further their children's success in schools.

Footnotes

1. I use the term re-collect as a means for describing a process for going back into a space that will allow the writer and the reader to draw upon a culture's knowing for understanding. It is a gathering, a remembering, or a bringing back of what was once forgotten, or lost upon history, or even hidden or lost within one's own consciousness (Morrison, 2008).

2. Numerous studies have assisted in defining parental involvement as "bake sales, back to school nights, volunteering in schools, attending school activities, chaperoning field trips, fund-raising, attendance at parent teacher conferences, participation in parent-teacher associations (PTAs), help with homework, influence over children's selection of courses, supervising children and monitoring how they spend their time out of school, and talking about school and what children are learning" (Zellman & Waterman, 1998; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

3. Crefelo Dollar is a pastor of World Changers International; a mega church located in the metro Atlanta, GA area. The publicized accusations of child cruelty charges that stemmed from a police report made by his 15 year old daughter has been covered in various media, including an article by Rhone (2012) in the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

4. Othermothers have been defined by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) as "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities [which is] central to the institution of Black motherhood" (p. 192). I use the term othermothering to depict the acts/work performed to othermother children and youth. Extended discussion on the concept of othermothering can be found in the work of (Collins, 1994; Collins, 2000; also Baker- Fletcher, 1997; James, 1993; and Walker & Snarey, 2004).

5. Bureaucratic social structures and school personnel's hegemonic status are reoccurring themes that have been identified by researchers as barriers to Black parents' successful involvement in schools (Lightfoot, 1978; Smith, & Chunn, 1989; Thompson, 2003; Watkins, 2009).

6. To review the inquiry in its entirety, see research in Anthony (2011) Memoir of a Black Female Social Worker: Re-Collections on Black Women Parenting and Parental Involvement in the Education of Black Children.

7. Conscientização is defined as "…learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions" (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 35). See Freire (1970/1993) for extensive discussion on his views on education.

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