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INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS IN THE LIVES OF CHAGRIN FALLS PARK YOUTH

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN URBAN EDUCATION

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

MAY 2016

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# INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS IN THE LIVES OF CHAGRIN FALLS PARK YOUTH

ALISON KAUFMAN

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study researched how adults from a community center and school acted as institutional agents in assisting youth navigating between community and school settings. The research was conducted in the context of Chagrin Falls Park, a historically marginalized community in the Cleveland metropolitan region. The research included semi-structured interviews with eleven participants across three participant categories, including institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center and young adult Kenston graduates. The research explored: (1) the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institutional and community spaces within the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park; (2) how the racial-identity of adults influences their relationship with youth; and (3) whether institutional agents act as empowerment agents, viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency of schools to reproduce inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The research found that adults from both Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center acted as institutional agents in supporting Chagrin Falls Park students, but rarely questioned institutional policies that reproduced inequality. Findings support the importance of adults acting on behalf of historically marginalized youth, and underscore the potential when agents from multiple institutions work together to support youth.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This dissertation explores the ways in which adults from two institutions, a school and community center, acted as institutional agents for school aged youth shifting between their racially conflicted community and school. This phenomenon was explored within the context of a historically marginalized community in the Cleveland metropolitan area, Chagrin Falls Park. This research builds on a pilot project completed in 2013, in which I used a youth participatory action research (YPAR) project and a collective case study to explore the ways in which youth perceived and interacted with their community, community history, and school (Kaufman, 2013). The relevant findings from this pilot project are presented in Chapter 3. Building on the findings from the pilot project, the purpose of the study was to understand the roles and perceptions of adults from the community center and school acting as institutional agents for Chagrin Falls Park youth traveling between the polarized spaces of their community and school.

Presented in this chapter is a brief overview of the unique history of the Chagrin Falls Park community. Acknowledging the history of Chagrin Falls Park is critical in understanding the formation of the racially contradicting spaces in which the youth of

Chagrin Falls Park live and navigate. Therefore, the history of the community is essential piece in understanding the context in which adults influence and work alongside Chagrin Falls Park youth. Also presented in this chapter is a brief section defining the role of an institutional agent (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). This section serves as a guiding framework in understanding the case explored in this case study. Within the case study methodology used for this study, the case being explored is the institutional agents who interact with youth who live in Chagrin Falls Park and attend Kenston Local Schools. Thus, providing a working definition of what comprises an institutional agent is a necessity, while the history of Chagrin Falls Park introduces the context in which the cases exist.

### **Defining the Case: Institutional Agents**

A great deal of research has been done on the influence of adults in the lives of school-aged youth. Much of this research looks at the relationship between a parent and child and either credits or places blame on the actions of the parent in fostering success or struggle for the child. Beyond the parent though, a typical youth interacts with many adults who have the potential to impact the development of their identity in positive or negative ways. Natural mentoring relationships may develop through informal relationships between an adolescent and a non-familial adult. These relationships form in the context of already existing social networks, like within a neighborhood or community (Hurd & Sellers, 2013). In research done with Latino/a adolescents, having a natural mentoring relationship in the community correlated with positive academic outcomes in school. Additionally, when the mentor possessed high educational levels, Latino/a adolescents in the study displayed even higher educational outcomes and goals (Sanchez, Esparza, & Colon, 2008).

In research done with Black adolescents in natural mentoring relationships, Hurd and Sellers (2013) find positive outcomes for youth. However, these outcomes are correlated with a longer duration of the natural mentoring relationship, frequent interactions between mentee and mentor, and increased closeness within the relationship. Hurd and Sellers (2013) assert from their findings that just the existence of a mentor may not be enough, but a well-developed and strong personal connection is the key to positive development for youth. Additionally, research shows the need in community settings for adults to play roles in facilitating a youth's connection to their community. Sometimes this community mentorship happens organically through relationships between neighbors, as in the case of natural mentoring relationships, and other times it is facilitated through community organizations, for example a community center (Evans, 2007).

While youth have relationships with natural mentors in their community through preexisting social networks, there are also adults within institutions (i.e., school or social service organizations) who take on the unique role of an institutional agent. An institutional agent is “an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority” within an organization (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1067). An institutional agent has access to resources and uses her or his position to connect those resources to youth to act on their behalf. Many youth from historically marginalized groups are living in places geographically isolated based on race and lack of family income (Kerpelman & White, 2006). Chagrin Falls Park is one of these places. In situations where youth may be limited in terms of social and cultural capital, an

institutional agent can provide the necessary access to capital for positive youth development and/or social mobility (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Institutional agents exist within and outside the walls of the school. Community centers and after-school programming can serve as a linking point to institutional agents and provide institutional support, which may be lacking from the respective school system. Museus and Neville (2012) explore the role of institutional agents in relationship to college students who identify as a minority. The research found student participants noting the importance of institutional agents who share “common ground, such as racial background or similar educational experience” and who provide support that is “proactive” and “humanized” (p. 443). Stanton-Salazar (2010) builds on the role of the institutional agent and introduces the notion of an empowerment institutional agent. Simply having access to resources does not make an individual an empowerment institutional agent (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Frequently the structure of school and society promotes “cultural assimilation” and emphasizes “discipline and control” of any individual behavior outside of the cultural norms (p. 1088). An empowerment institutional agent understands the social forces promoting cultural assimilation and the social structures, which work to isolate certain groups of students. Empowerment institutional agents see their role as equipping youth to counter these structures.

### **Defining the Context: Chagrin Falls Park**

Of utmost importance is to situate this research in the appropriate historical context. DeGennaro and Brown (2009) note their participants as “walk[ing] amongst the shadows of their ancestors” (p. 15). This research operated under the same belief in the value of historical influence on present structures, attitudes, and behavior. While history



does not set forth a concrete path for the future, place-history literature suggests its' role in the identity formation of youth (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). This description of Chagrin Falls Park is intended to provide a context in order to understand the community in which the youth reside and the institutional agents interact.

Chagrin Falls Park, or known to many residents as “The Park”, is situated about 17 miles southeast of Cleveland, Ohio. The Park is a small neighborhood in Bainbridge Township in Geauga County, Ohio. The most recent population census shows 93,972 people living in Geauga County (Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning, 2013). Within Geauga County, the largest place is Bainbridge Township with 11,493 people. Chagrin Falls Park is a neighborhood of approximately 150 households in Bainbridge Township (Gauga County Auditor’s Office, 2015). Kenston Local Schools is the school district for all of Bainbridge Township.

Chagrin Falls Park borders the Village of Chagrin Falls, which is in the neighboring Cuyahoga County. The Village of Chagrin Falls is a separate city, while Chagrin Falls Park is a small neighborhood apart of a larger Bainbridge Township. It is important to acknowledge Chagrin Falls Park and the Village of Chagrin Falls as distinct places, but to recognize their proximity and connected history. Chagrin Falls Park not only shares a border, but also its name with the Village of Chagrin Falls. The Village of Chagrin Falls can be described as an “idyllic, classic American Main Street, complete with tree-lined sidewalks, shops, restaurants, waterfalls, and a gazebo in the village square” (Johnston, 1998). The Village of Chagrin Falls has been called “one of the most desirable places to live in Northeast Ohio” and is consistently updating the main street area to continue to attract residents and tourists (Bonvissuto, 2004; Johnston, 1998).

However, the “quaint home town atmosphere” of the Village of Chagrin Falls “that draws most White residents there” is an incomplete story, excluding the history of racism and negative “attitudes of residents towards Blacks and immigrant minorities” (Wiese, 1986, p. 23).

In contrast, Chagrin Falls Park is comprised of approximately 130 occupied households and 18 occupied Geauga Metropolitan Housing Authority units (Gauga County Auditor’s Office, 2015). Chagrin Falls Park is a part of Bainbridge Township and is surrounded by the rest of Geauga County and the Village of Chagrin Falls. The Chagrin Falls Park neighborhood is not readily visible from the surrounding areas, even though the community is only one mile from the “classic American Main Street” downtown center of the Village of Chagrin Falls (Johnston, 1998). Chagrin Falls Park is “hidden away amongst the trees” and to those unaware they “would easily drive right by it” (Hitchcock, 2012). From the founding of Chagrin Falls Park, the community was separated from the neighboring Village of Chagrin Falls by a large pony farm owned by C.S. Harris. C.S. Harris was a close relative of R.G. Gardner; Gardner being the original owner of the plot of land in the early 1900’s that would become Chagrin Falls Park (Matthews-Sharp, 1984). The pony farm has since been sold off and in the past decade a large senior assisted living facility was constructed and serves as a geographical buffer between Chagrin Falls Park and the surroundings.

Gauga County has the second highest per capita personal income in the State of Ohio at \$54,138. Only 5% of the county’s residents live below the poverty line (Office of Policy, Research, and Strategic Planning, 2013). The Village of Chagrin Falls has a median household income of \$53,709 (Chagrin Falls, OH, 2015). Both of these numbers

paint a picture of a wealthy section of the State of Ohio. Median household income data for Chagrin Falls Park is not currently accessible in a format that is aggregated from the rest of Bainbridge Township. However, median housing values can be compared to illustrate the disparity in wealth between the Village of Chagrin Falls, Geauga County, and Chagrin Falls Park. The average housing cost in 2013 in the state of Ohio is \$127,600. The median housing value in Geauga County is \$225,100 (Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning, 2013). The median housing value for the Village of Chagrin Falls is \$302,527 (Chagrin Falls, OH, 2015). Based on the most current Bainbridge Township database of housing values (Gauga County Auditor's Office, 2015), the average housing cost in Chagrin Falls Park is \$64,383 – almost half of the average of the State of Ohio, less than a third of the median housing values for Geauga County, and a quarter of the median for the Village of Chagrin Falls.

This significant disparity in property wealth is matched by the racial composition of Chagrin Falls Park compared to the surrounding areas. For years, Chagrin Falls Park has been an almost exclusively Black community. Occasionally there may be one family or a few individuals who do not identify as Black living there, but it is less than 1% of the population (personal communication, Executive Director, Chagrin Falls Park Community Center). In contrast, only .4% of the Village of Chagrin Falls identifies as African-American and only 1.1% of Geauga County identifies as African-American. A mere 3.9% of Geauga County identifies as non-White, with a concentration of county residents who identify as African-American living in Chagrin Falls Park (Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning, 2013).

**History of Chagrin Falls Park.** By exploring the historical forces that shaped Chagrin Falls Park, it becomes clear why Chagrin Falls Park is so different than the surrounding areas. With the start of World War 1, Black and Hungarian men were recruited to come and work at the Henry Iron Foundry on the outskirts of the Village of Chagrin Falls (Mathews-Sharp, 1984). In the first two decades of the 20th century, prior to the establishment of Chagrin Falls Park, individuals living in and around the Village of Chagrin Falls found employment at an iron foundry (Wiese, 2004). As more workers were recruited, the area began to see a slight increase in Black and immigrant residents. In a local newspaper, *Geauga Times - Leader*, a staff writer notes, “The foundry company recruited some Black men from Georgia to come up to Bainbridge Township and work. Before 1884, the county’s only Black family had lived in Huntsburg Township” (Kokish, 1990b, para. 3). Foundry workers were the first non-White individuals to move to the Chagrin Falls area, but the majority of African-American residents who would end up settling in Chagrin Falls Park moved to the area after the Henry Iron Foundry was closed in 1924 (Wiese, 2004).

The establishment of Chagrin Falls Park can be traced to the beginning of the 20th century. In 1909, R.G. Gardner inherited the 156 acres of land that would become Chagrin Falls Park from his father. For the next 11 years, Gardner farmed the land. In the winter of 1920 he sold the 156 acres to Benjamin Kauffman who worked for the Home Guardian Corporation. The official Geauga County land allotment document notes this surrounding land was sold to “people who did not live in the community” and “it is out of this beginning that the community came into being” (Gauga County, 1959, para. 2). The Home Guardian Corporation surveyed the land, graded the streets, divided the property

into 1,386 - 20x100 lots ready for development, and titled the suburban property Chagrin Falls Park. In the spring of 1921, Home Guardian Corporation teamed up with Samuel Rucker, the publisher [or editor] of *Jewish World*, a Yiddish-language Cleveland newspaper (Hitchcock, 2012; Wiese, 1986; Wiese, 1999). Rucker's hope was that Chagrin Falls Park would be used for Jewish families living in Cleveland to build summer homes (Hitchcock, 2012). Home Guardian and Rucker began offering "lots in Chagrin Falls Park as subscription premiums" (Wiese, 1999, p. 1502). However, Samuel Rucker struggled to sell any properties. Hitchcock (2012) credits this to "a group of residents of Chagrin Falls [finding] out about the scheme and true to form, [deciding] to burn a cross on the property" (loc. 371). After three years of failed sales, in 1924 the remaining lots in Chagrin Falls Park were sold to Grover and Florence Brow. Wiese (1999) makes mention that they "were also White" (p. 1503).

The Brows sold lots in Chagrin Falls Park for over 30 years to Black families from Cleveland (Wiese, 1999). Due to the low prices and desire for property ownership, these lots were purchased quickly and by the 1950's "the Park was settled by nearly 800 people primarily of African Descent" (Hitchcock, 2012). It was a desire of Black Americans from the South to live a more rural lifestyle than what was being offered in a densely populated Cleveland. Lots were advertised as "a piece of country life: open space for fruit trees, garden plots, and chickens and other small livestock" (Wiese, 1999, p. 1504). Residents of Chagrin Falls Park were "primarily working-class black Clevelanders who had migrated from the South" (p. 1505). In the 1920's, lot prices averaged between \$60-\$200 per lot, and during the Great Depression prices went as low as \$25. For most

working-class Black families in Cleveland, this was an affordable path to purchase property and own their own home.

Within Chagrin Falls Park, there were several local businesses including beauty shops, a school, convenient stores, service stations, bars, and restaurants, which not only provided necessities for residents, but also provided some opportunities for employment (Wiese, 1999). Women were the primary breadwinners for many of the families living in Chagrin Falls Park. Chagrin Falls Park was geographically far from the available jobs in Cleveland, especially after 1924 when the trolley from Chagrin Falls to Cleveland stopped operating (Wiese, 1999). Fortunate groups of men with employment in Cleveland were able to car pool or catch a bus from a neighboring suburb (p. 1510). Due to the insecurity in male employment, many women served as domestic servants in the Village of Chagrin Falls and the surrounding wealthy communities. Women also created soaps, were seamstresses, and performed a variety of other tasks from their home to generate income (Wiese, 1999, p. 1511).

In 1959, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* described Chagrin Falls Park as a “shanty town” (Wiese, 1999, p. 1495), but residents who lived there had a much different view. Residents had small lots and houses, but large gardens. They heated their homes from oil furnaces and accessed water from personal wells. Chagrin Falls Park residents “rejected city living, and...re-created rustic landscapes reminiscent of the region from which most had come,” originally the South (p. 1497). The surrounding forest provided residents opportunities to chop wood for fuel or hunt for meat. During the time of the United States’ Great Depression, people living in Chagrin Falls Park suffered less than their urban counterparts, as they were able to live off the land. Residents also used the

surrounding land and their homes to generate income. Many residents rented rooms in their home to new Chagrin Falls Park arrivals; others opened up their kitchens and sold prepared food.

Even during this time of vibrant growth and community, Chagrin Falls Park was vastly different than the bordering Village of Chagrin Falls and racism “made it unlikely that neighboring suburbs would annex, extend services to, or share schools” (Wiese, 1999, p. 1508). The city services available in Chagrin Falls Park were decades behind those in the Village of Chagrin Falls. Wiese (1999) notes the “rustic environment of many Black suburbs tended to reinforce white racism over time. Hence, rudimentary services persisted for much longer in early Black suburbs than in most comparable White communities” (pp. 1058-1059). It wasn’t until 1937 that electricity and a deep well pump arrived in Chagrin Falls Park. In 1946, Chagrin Falls Park paved its first street and in 1974, sewers and storm drains were installed.

Many of the updates to city amenities were made because of the founding of a one-room school in 1938, The Bainbridge Allotment School, known to local residents as Park Elementary. One teacher was hired to teach all eight grades (Wiese, 1986). A few years later a second room was added and a furnace was installed. By 1959, the school had eight teachers, a principal, seven classrooms, and approximately 200 students (Geauga County, 1959). This was a de facto segregated school, and in 1945 the NAACP in Cleveland petitioned to shut down the school and open up an “unsegregated elementary or grade school within the township for the benefit of all children residing therein without regard to race or color” (Wiese, 1986, pp. 39-40; Wiese, 1999). Wiese (1986) claims many residents did not show favor for the school because of its subpar resources and

inability to prepare students to attend high school when they graduated from the allotment school.

In the early 1960's the move to officially integrate the Kenston School District was in full force and Park Elementary closed its doors. Students were moved from Park Elementary, which was made up of all Black students, to a majority-White Kenston Local School District. It was not without controversy that Chagrin Falls Park students went to school at the Kenston Local School District rather than attending Chagrin Falls Exempted Village Schools. Many would argue it was a sign of the systemic racism perpetuated by the Village of Chagrin Falls residents against the Chagrin Falls Park community. Hitchcock (2012) illuminates the perception of many residents and those familiar with life in Chagrin Falls Park,

Further, as if separating these two communities [Chagrin Falls Park and the Village of Chagrin Falls], into two different counties [Geauga County and Cuyahoga County] was not sufficient to accomplish their nefarious goal of decimating their culture and way of life, the school district authorities directed that the children of Chagrin Falls Park be bused past Chagrin Falls schools, to those located eight miles away from home. Because of the way that the school district lines had been drawn, the children who, in many cases, were within walking distance of these schools, could not attend them, but instead were bused to either Bainbridge Middle School or Kenston High School. This situation remains the same today (loc. 319).

The drawing of county lines and politics of school districting are not the only evidence of racial inequality in the history of Chagrin Falls Park. On a much more visible level, the



Ku Klux Klan was incredibly active in this area. The first signs of activity were against the Jewish families moving into the newly formed summer home community. Wiese (1986) recounts some of the article headings in the *Chagrin Falls Exponent* between the years of 1922-1923, “1. K.K.K. Holds Meeting in Town Hall, The Klan Returns to The Town Hall, This Time with Locked Doors; 2. Ku Klux Klan Holds Conclave in Chagrin Falls; Light Fiery Cross on Grove Hill; 3. Meeting draws delegations from Northeastern Ohio - 8000 visitors jam street - initiation held on Perkins Farm - red lights eliminate path of marchers; 4. K.K.K. to Meet May 19th for Open Air Gathering in C.F.; 5. Extra! Last Day of Fair K.K.K. Day - Big Ceremony to be Staged... Public initiation with Fiery Crosses.” During the fair three crosses were burned on what is now the Village of Chagrin Falls High School football field (Wiese, 1986). Hitchcock (2012) also tells of the cross burning and signifies how this served as a point of division from the beginning of the Village of Chagrin Falls and Chagrin Falls Park.

It was typical in the downtown stores of the Village of Chagrin Falls for Black customers to be denied service, “Stores in the village would make [Black customers] stand by while they waited on White folks” (Wiese, 1986, p. 22). Restaurants in the Village of Chagrin Falls had similar occurrences, “I remember sitting in a restaurant, waiting for over an hour to order breakfast with my late Aunt Ella Long, before leaving just as hungry as when we had come in” (Hitchcock, 2012, loc. 346). Housing discrimination was another evident form of systemic racism. Until a Supreme Court decision in 1948, it was still considered legal for a property owner to write deeds that would not be transferred to interested buyers who were not White (Johnson, 2012). Many White residents preferred to live in all White communities. This was partly due to “fears

of violence and intimidation” (Tarasawa, 2011, p. 658). School integration was being forwarded by the federal government, but resistant White families could avoid these desegregation policies by moving to predominantly White communities and continuing to send their children to neighborhood schools with no racial diversity (Tarasawa, 2011). Even in the 1990’s, a newspaper article highlighted the racial tensions impacting Chagrin Falls Park residents. The article notes, “These tensions have manifested themselves in a variety of incidents... ranging from some White's negative perceptions of The Park to a reported instance of derogatory graffiti about Blacks at one of Kenston’s schools” (Kokish, 1990a, para. 10).

Chagrin Falls Park is currently less than half of the size it was when it peaked in population in the 1950’s. It is still almost entirely populated by Black residents and the surrounding Village of Chagrin Falls and Bainbridge Township remain almost entirely populated by White residents. Geauga Metropolitan Housing Authority has since added subsidized housing units in Chagrin Falls Park. As Hitchcock (2012) recalls, driving down E. Washington Street, there is still no sign or marking signaling the entrance into Chagrin Falls Park. There are no longer neighborhood stores, bars, churches, or clubs. While the Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC) is still an active part of the community, the elementary school and the social clubs are gone, which were foundations of community pride throughout the 1940’s and the 1950’s. Unstable male employment is still an issue, although many men have found labor jobs in restaurants and businesses in the Village of Chagrin Falls. Wiese accredits the decline of population to a shift in the view of predominantly Black suburbs, he says, “Pioneer suburbanites preferred a life-

style reminiscent of the rural South, but their children and grandchildren often saw these places as ‘the boondocks’” (1999, p. 1522).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Generally speaking this research is grounded in the discipline of sociology, with attention given to historical influences. The research operated with the belief that structural and cultural forces throughout history have influenced the ways in which communities and groups of people are isolated by the dominant culture (Wilson, 2010). In this specific research, these forces have led to the youth in Chagrin Falls Park living in an isolated all Black community and attending a predominantly White school. The isolated nature of these spaces was evident to the youth of Chagrin Falls Park and carried the potential to create a sense of tension in identity. My research acknowledged both the historical and current forces, which interact to shape the lives of the youth in Chagrin Falls Park. I hold firmly a belief that by exploring how these cultural and structural forces throughout history interact and are at work to perpetuate inequality, an individual or community can be equipped to counteract these forces (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The theoretical framework used for this research is expanded upon in Chapter 3.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since the 1920’s Chagrin Falls Park has been a racially and economically segregated community surrounded by predominantly upper class White suburbs. Chagrin Falls Park’s population peaked in the 1940’s and 1950’s, while the community thrived with the operation of an elementary school, social clubs, bars, shops, and a fire department. Chagrin Falls Park presently and historically has been isolated from its neighboring communities. Since the 1950s, the population of Chagrin Falls Park and

vibrancy of community organizations has decreased. However, the racial composition of Chagrin Falls Park and the surrounding communities have remained unchanged. The youth of Chagrin Falls Park live in a residentially segregated all Black neighborhood and attend a school which is almost entirely White. Based on 2013-2014 enrollment totals from the Ohio State Report Card, there are 2,960 students enrolled in the Kenston Local Schools district. Of these students, 2,655 identify as White/Non Hispanic (90.1%), 127 identify as Black/Non-Hispanic (4.3%), 87 identify as Multiracial (3%), 46 identify as Hispanic (1.6%), and 33 identify as Asian or Pacific Islander (1.1%).

My analysis of the data from my 2013 pilot project revealed tension for the individual between these two isolated spaces of community and school. Additionally, the youth of Chagrin Falls Park appeared to lack critical historical understanding of why their environments exist the way they do. Consequently, Chagrin Falls Park youth may feel isolated, voiceless, have tensions of identity, and lack connection to either environment. A review of the literature on institutional agents revealed the role adults could play in helping youth excel in institutions and spaces in which they are the minority (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). However, a gap in the research on institutional agents exists in exploring how institutional agents from two different institutions, the school and community center, are simultaneously helping youth in their development of identity while negotiating the predominantly White institutional space of schooling and the all Black community space.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Moving beyond the findings of the pilot project, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which adults from the community center and school act as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) in assisting youth as they navigate between

their historically marginalized community and school. This research explored the perceptions of these adult institutional agents, as well as the roles these adult institutional agents took in the lives of Chagrin Falls Park youth. This exploration was conducted through the voices of school adults who interact with Chagrin Falls Park youth, community center adults who interact with Chagrin Falls Park youth, and former Chagrin Falls Park youth (now adults) who navigated the daily transition between their community and Kenston Local Schools. In line with the goals of an instrumental case study, this research provides a rich description of the given case within its specific context, but also explores whether there were any assertions, which apply across different but similar contexts (Stake, 2000).

**Research Questions.** An instrumental case study was conducted to explore answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in terms of how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institution and community spaces within the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park?
2. How does the ethnic and/or racial-identity of institutional agents influence their relationship with youth from Chagrin Falls Park?
3. In what ways, if any, do institutional agents act as empowerment agents; viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency of schools to reproduce inequality?

## **Significance**

This research is significant for three reasons. The first is that the research adds to already existing literature on the importance of adults acting as mentors and institutional agents for youth (Sanchez et al., 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Adults can play a critical role in the development of youth who are a part of marginalized groups by providing key social and cultural capital, which youth can use to counteract the forces of inequality at work within their lives (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Within the context of this study, youth regularly interact with adults from the school and the community center. This research was the first to explore the roles of these adults in this specific context of Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park. It is the nature of an instrumental case study to deeply explore cases in a specific context in order to generate possible assertions about similar cases in comparable contexts (Stake, 2000). This research is significant in terms of adding to the literature on institutional agents, specifically in terms of agents' understanding and acting to help youth navigate between institutional spaces, which are racially segregated or otherwise polarized.

The second source of significance is provided by the transformative nature of the study. I have chosen to conduct this research within a Transformative Framework (Mertens, 2012). Research within a Transformative Framework explores marginalized communities and calls for action in terms of challenging oppressive forces. This research is significant because it serves to strengthen the ways in which adults from Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center interact and equip the youth from Chagrin Falls Park. The research process was transparent and the analysis of the research will be shared with the community center and school if these entities express interest.

This allows both institutions the chance to evaluate and potentially change the roles adults play in empowering youth as they transition between Chagrin Falls Park and Kenston Local Schools.

The final source of significance is that the study adds to a large body of research existing on the experience of Black youth in school. Research suggests that the inequalities and social hierarchies in society are reflected in school settings, many times positioning Black youth at the bottom of the hierarchical structure (Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015). Hope et al. (2015) suggest that Black students are viewed “as a homogenous group without consideration for within-group differences in student behavior” (p. 95). In school contexts, like in societal contexts, stereotypes exist that disadvantage Black youth. Students of color in majority White settings experience a variety of assumptions made by White teachers, students, and parents, including that Black students will not perform to the same academic level as their peers (Holland, 2012).

Chapman (2013) suggests Blacks students are tracked into lower level courses, are held to tougher standards in terms of behavior, are deterred from speaking about race, are encouraged to conform to normative practices, and feel the need to achieve higher academically to overcome stereotypes. The absence of spaces in school settings (both classrooms and curriculum) to critically examine race, justice, and inequality keep many of these accepted norms about the status of Black students unquestioned (Chapman, 2013; Landa, 2012; Woodson, 2015). This research is significant because it adds further exploration to the reduced educational opportunities of Black students in a majority White school.

## **Limitations**

A significant limitation of this study was the inability to gather the perspective of every individual and stakeholder in my study of this phenomenon. The nature of case study research calls for a holistic exploration of a well-defined case. Due to insufficient resources and my desire to complete this work in a timely manner, there was a limit to the scope of this project, specifically in regards to how many participants were interviewed. Another possible limitation was the status of my relationship with Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC). As a former employee of CFPCC, my connections were stronger with this institution than with Kenston Local Schools. This allowed me easier access to staff and volunteers from the community center. This may have also led to assumptions of understanding about the community center and the employees' roles and perspectives. To manage this bias, I used reflexive journaling, as well as being critically mentored by my dissertation committee.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

The terms below are used frequently throughout this research. Listed below are the definitions I used for phrases that are key to understanding this work.

**Institutional Agent.** An institutional agent is an individual within an organization who has access to a given set of resources and capital based on their position (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Included in this research are institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools (teachers and administrators) and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (staff and volunteers). These institutional agents hold a position in which they possess the potential and/or ability to transfer resources and capital to the youth of Chagrin Falls Park.



**Place-Identity.** Place-identity is also referred to as place-based identity or spatial identity. Place-identity is the sum of the interactions, experiences, cognitions, and perceptions an individual has about a given physical setting (Proshansky et al., 1983). In this research place-identity applies to relationships between the individual and community context, individual and school context, and the transition between these spaces.

**Place-History.** Place-history refers to the sum of all past happenings of any given place (Lim, 2000). These past events, such as the naming of a town or design of streets, shape the context of a given place and therefore impact an individual's place-identity. Place-history is representative of infinite interpretations of historical events (Wyse et al., 2012).

**Racial-Identity.** I made the choice to primarily use the phrase *racial-identity*, because the participants in this study more often identify with a racial group than an ethnic group. However, I include literature on racial-ethnic identity, ethnic identity, ethnic-racial identity, and any other combination of the words ethnicity, race, and identity. Recent research on ethnic-racial identity was used as a guiding framework for a more specific exploration of racial-identity (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). Ethnic-racial identity is defined “as a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic-racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time” (p. 23). For the purpose of this study, a modified definition will focus primarily on racial group memberships, rather than “ethnic-racial group memberships.”

## **Summary**

An instrumental case study was used to explore how institutional agents from Chagrin Falls Park Community Center and Kenston Local Schools perceived and acted on behalf of Chagrin Falls Park youth navigating between their community and school. The youth of Chagrin Falls Park live in a residentially segregated all-Black neighborhood and attend Kenston Local Schools, which are almost entirely White. The unique history of Chagrin Falls Park has shaped the community and created isolated spaces in which these youth experience life. A pilot project revealed some of the tensions of identity youth feel between their neighborhood and school.

Theoretically grounded in the discipline of sociology, this research uses literature on racial-identity and place-identity to understand the current and historical structural and cultural forces working to isolate the youth of Chagrin Falls Park. Stanton-Salazar's (2010) research of institutional agents, served as the guiding point in developing this study to explore how adults from the school and community center facilitate or hinder the youth of Chagrin Falls Park in counteracting this isolation and congruent tension.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Within the institutional structures of Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC) and embedded in the broader historical context of Chagrin Falls Park, are institutional agents interacting daily with the youth of Chagrin Falls Park. With the research focused on how these institutional agents perceived the transitions and acted on behalf of Chagrin Falls Park youth, it was critical to review the ways in which the literature provides clarity to the identity development of youth from racially marginalized communities. Presented here is a review of the literature on racial-identity and place-identity, specifically in relation to Black adolescent youth. The pilot project revealed that there was identity tied to being from Chagrin Falls Park, along with assumptions from community outsiders associated with Chagrin Falls Park residents. This led the researcher to explore theories of place-identity and the ways the physical contexts of an individual's life can shape identity. Additionally, theories about race are useful as they explore the experience of identifying as Black to overall identity development.

Both racial-identity and place-identity are presented as two groups of identity theory influencing the overall identity of youth. The primary focus of this study was how

adult institutional agents from the school and community center perceived the experience of Chagrin Falls Park youth and the ways the institutional agents acted on the behalf of the youth to support their transitions between community and school. Therefore, in order to understand the perceptions and roles of institutional agents, the research acknowledges the contextual forces and identity theories at work in the lives of Chagrin Falls Park youth.

Due to the distinct history of Chagrin Falls Park shared in Chapter 1, specific attention is paid to the relationship of historical perspectives or place-history to the study of identity and place-belonging. The history of Chagrin Falls Park uniquely shaped the racially polarized spaces of community and school and therefore has connections to both racial-identity and place-identity. Figure 1 portrays how these funnels of literature are related to each other, the individual, and the institutional agent in this research context.

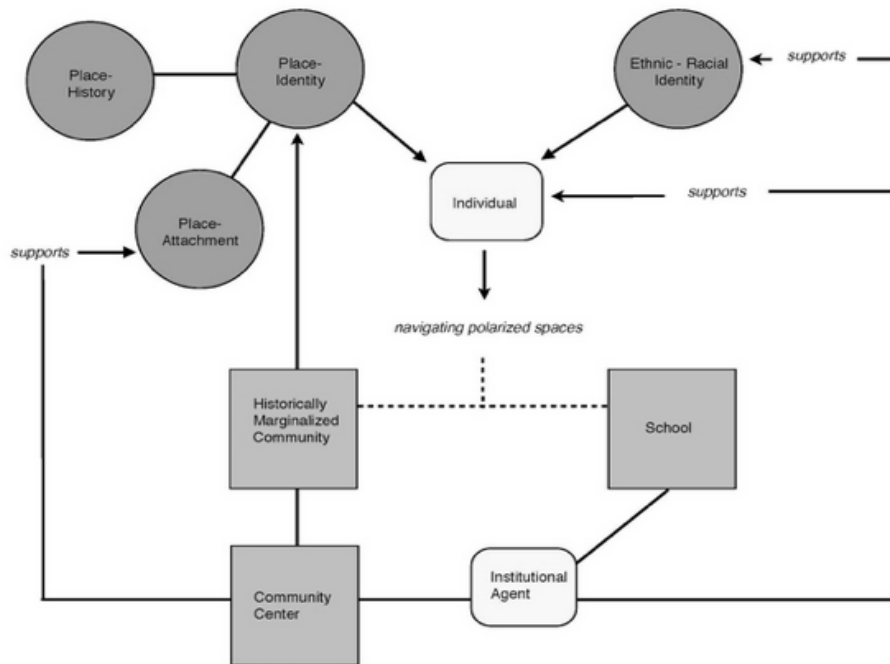


Figure 1. Relationships of Theory to Research Phenomenon

The figure highlights how institutional agents from the community center and school can be useful in supporting racial-identity and place-identity development for the individual. This in turn can influence the ways in which the individual navigates opposing spaces. Central to this specific research study was understanding how the institutional agents assist, hinder, and/or perceive the ways in which the individual is influenced by racial-identity and place-identity and thus navigates community and school. As reflected in Figure 1, developing identity, navigating different spaces, and carrying out the role of the institutional agent are not a linear process; rather, they are in a dynamic relationship of influencing and being influenced by one another. The following sections serve to present and weave together the relevant literature informing this research.

### **Racial-Identity**

Identity can be defined as a person's "perception of [her or his] characteristics, abilities, beliefs, and values integrated with perceptions of future development, awareness of group membership, expectations, social responsibilities and privileges according to group membership" (DeGennaro & Brown, 2009, p. 15). Identity is complex and includes a variety of defining factors as determined by the self and others. Race and/or ethnicity can be critical defining factors of an individual's identity, along with gender, social class, life experiences, personality, individual style, beliefs, and self-perception (Wilcox, 1998). Racial-ethnic identity (REI), ethnic-racial identity (ERI), racial-identity, and ethnic-identity encompass a heavily researched field of concepts (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Scott, 2003).

Across studies on racial and/or ethnic identity, there is some disagreement on what the appropriate use of the words *racial* and *ethnic* are in defining the components

influencing identity. A good deal of the field uses a combination of the words *ethnicity* and *race* to encompass research regarding diverse groups of people (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) use the phrase ethnic-racial identity (ERI) to comprise all aspects of ethnic and/or racial-identity across multiple people groups. They note the importance of not defining an individual based on “demographic markers,” but also not ignoring the “psychological meaning” of identifying with certain racial or ethnic groups (p. 42). For the purpose of this research, attention to both ethnic and racial-identity is given, but the primary concept used in this research is *racial-identity*. Racial-identity is used more exclusively when discussing “historically considered racial groups” (p. 41).

Crucial to racial-identity “is a positive sense of in-group belonging or pride in the history, traditions, and ways of being of one’s group” (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006). Based on how prevalent the construction of racial-identity and effects of racism are in America, it is unlikely an individual does not identify with at least one racial or ethnic group (DeGennaro & Brown, 2009; Scott, 2003). Identity can flux based on changes in time and context (DeGennaro & Brown, 2009). One of those contextual influences is how “out-group members” view the group in which an individual chooses to identify (Altschul et al., 2006, p. 1156). A strong racial-identity for adolescents may act as a lens through which youth view race in America and may lead youth to be sensitive and aware of individual and institutional discrimination (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009; Scott, 2003).

One common focus in the literature on racial-identity is the experience of minority students in academic settings. Carter (2006) closely examines how “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) is played out in school settings for low-income Black

and Latino/a high-school students. “Acting White” refers to a student’s perception of success being associated with “White” or dominant culture, rather than consistent with their respective cultures. Carter’s (2006) research explores how students of color move between socially constructed versions of dominant and subordinate culture through polarized versions of language and speech, dress, music, taste, friendships, social groups, and power dynamics (p. 315). In school settings that are racially integrated, when a majority of students enrolled in accelerated courses identify as White, then being “accelerated” may become synonymous with identifying as White. This potentially may dissuade minority students from enrolling in accelerated courses, as they do not want to identify outside of their racial group. School segregation can happen within integrated school buildings through tracking that creates a “racially stratified academic hierarchy,” or spaces in an integrated school filled with predominantly White students and other spaces filled with predominantly Black students (O’Connor, Mueller, L’Heureux Lewis, Rivas-Drake, & Rosenberg, 2011). Breaking through the socially constructed walls of these segregated spaces in a school can be challenging for any student.

From the perspective of many educational researchers, critical discussions about racial-identity become inseparable from discussions about academic outcomes. Rivas-Drake et al. (2014) perform a comprehensive review of relevant literature on ethnic and/or racial-identity, and find research strongly supporting strong ethnic and/or racial-identity as positively associated with academic outcomes for African-American, Latino/a, and Asian-American students. Minority students who identify positively with their racial or ethnic group, in turn show positive academic outcomes, which challenges some existing research on resistance of minority students to “acting White.” Carter (2006)

asserts minority students' resistance to "acting White" is less about academic achievement, and more about "particularistic cultural styles that are perceived to be incongruous with achievement and mobility" (p. 322). Frequently in school settings, Black students are defined by their "bad" behavior (O'Connor et al., 2011), such as being "loud," "acting up," or "acting ghetto" used in reference to "lower class Black Style" (p. 1243). Carter (2008) explores the lived experiences of Black urban high school students in terms of racial attitudes and achievement and stresses the importance of "positive racial-identity" for school persistence (p. 16). Positive racial-identity can come through a tangible relationship with an individual's group and identification of overcoming past group struggles. One participant notes, he "know[s] what [his] ancestors went through to...make it possible for [him] to just go to school and become successful" (p. 17).

**Measures of Racial-Identity.** There is no overarching framework for exploring ethnic and/or racial-identity. Highlighted here are some of the prominent theories used to measure or categorize levels of ethnic and/or racial-identity. Marcia (1966) sets forth four tiers of self-identity development showing how well an individual has committed to a specific personal identity; identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement. Building on this foundation, one of the most prominent theories of Black racial-identity is William Cross' Nigrescence (Sellers et al., 1998). The model explores stages of "racial-identity development that African-Americans experience as they develop a psychologically healthy Black identity" (p. 22). Nigrescence focuses specifically on the experiences of being Black in America through five stages (originally there were four): pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internationalization, and internalization/commitment. Individuals move from race being of little importance, to



having an experience linking race to their life and eventually progressing through three more stages of internalizing their racial-identity and putting it into action. Cross went on to develop the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) in 1991 and later expanded in 2000 (Worrell, Cross, & Vandiver, 2001). This expanded model looked at stages (encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization) and then several identity clusters (anti-White, intense Black involvement, Black nationalist, biculturalist, multiculturalist racial, and multiculturalist inclusive) to define Black racial-identity.

The Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS) is the primary measure of individuals' movement through the Nigrescence stages (Parham & Helms, 1981). Research by Seaton, Scottham, and Sellers (2006) found individual participants moving in both directions along the RIAS scale. The majority of their sample progressed in a standard upward direction through the stages. However, there were participants who moved downward or skipped around the stages. Parham (1989) introduces the notion that Black racial-identity development is not always linear and does not have a "specific end point" (Seaton et al., 2006, p. 1424). As individuals age or come in contact with new experiences or settings, they are forced to redefine what it means to be Black. Seaton et al. (2006) suggest individuals may come to a point in their life when they "discover an identity more salient than race," such as their religious affiliation or job (p. 1424).

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) "provides a conceptual framework for understanding both the significance of race in the self-concepts of African-Americans and the qualitative meanings they attribute to being members of their racial category" (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 19). There are several assumptions to the MMRI. First, "identities are situationally influenced as well as being stable properties" of an

individual (p. 23). Second, every individual possesses multiple different identities and these identities are organized into specific orders. Third, how individuals perceive their Black racial-identity is the “most valid indicator of their identity” (p. 23). This model places importance on how an individual perceives being a part of a Black racial group, rather than preemptively defining what group membership looks like. Finally, MMRI examines Black racial identity in the moment rather than looking at identity development.

The MMRI contains four dimensions. The first two, *salience* and *centrality*, explore the significance an individual places on race. The latter two, *regard* and *ideology*, look at the individual’s perceptions of what it means to be Black. Racial *salience* “refers to the extent to which one’s race is a relevant part of one’s self-concept at a particular moment or in a particular situation” (p. 24). The *centrality* dimension of MMRI looks beyond a specific moment or situation (as in *salience*) and focuses on how a person regularly defines himself or herself based on their race. The *regard* dimension focuses on the regard to which an individual sees their racial group. It measures the positive and negative perceptions a person feels. The final dimension, *ideology*, is primarily associated with the individual’s identity and is “composed of the individual’s beliefs, opinions, and attitudes with respect to the way she or he feels that the members of the race should act” (p. 27).

Sellers et al. (1998) define different categories of the *ideology* dimension. An individual with a *nationalist* ideology focuses on the “uniqueness of being Black” (p. 27). She or he appreciates Black culture and resists views encouraging African-Americans to conform to other groups’ definitions of what is acceptable. An individual adopting an *oppressed minority* dimension acknowledges the oppression of African-Americans, as

well as for those of other marginalized groups. The *assimilation* ideology embraces the idea of being an American citizen and attempts to fit into mainstream culture, even if it means foregoing some in-group culture. The final ideology is *humanist*. A *humanist* asserts that race is only a small aspect of broader identity and all humans are similar regardless of race.

### **Place-Identity**

Place-based identity, frequently called place-identity or spatial identity, is a common study in disciplines of environmental psychology, human geography, and earth sciences (Jack, 2010). Focus on place-identity is not as common in the field of education; however, parallels can be explored to show how a relationship with physical settings influences the identity of a student. Proshansky et al. (1983) define place-identity as “clusters of positively and negatively valenced cognitions of physical settings” (p. 74). Place-identity explores how the physical environment influences an individual and determines an individual's place in a larger physical world (Proshansky et al., 1983).

One of the overarching concepts in the study of place-identity is that an individual's identity is not solely a construction of their interactions with other people and social roles, but is also comprised of interactions with physical objects (Proshansky et al., 1983). These interactions contribute towards defining an individual's sense of self. “Self” is conceptualized “as a total system including both conscious and unconscious perceptions of [an individual's] past, [her or his] daily experiences and behaviors, and [her or his] future aspirations” (p. 58). Using place-identity as a conceptual framework encourages researchers to not only explore social hierarchies and roles related to identity, but to tease out how an “individual's personal identity is built in relation to his or her

physical environment” (Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011, p. 345). As will be discussed in further detail, researchers focusing on place-identity do not ignore social forces on identity; rather place-identity adds a foundational physical layer to the study of self-identity. Lim (2010) separates place identity into three primary dimensions: social, physiographic, and psychological. The *social* dimension examines “place” through the lens of its social and cultural characteristics, like human relationships or values. The *physiographic* dimension focuses primarily on the physical characteristics of a “place,” for example, architecture of homes, the amount of green space, and monuments. The *psychological* dimension looks at how place affects the physiological and psychological aspects of an individual.

Place-identity can also be looked at in terms of its functions (Proshansky et al., 1983). First, the *recognition function* serves to distinguish between what is known and unknown for an individual in any physical environment. Being familiar with a physical environment may provide an individual with meaning and deepened self-identity. When that physical environment changes drastically and the individual no longer recognizes the place, this may threaten their place-identity and thus their self-identity. The second function of place identity is the *meaning function*. This function moves beyond simple recognition and focuses on the “purposes” the place plays for an individual (p. 68). These purposes are a result of past experiences in the physical setting, future aspirations for the place, and outside forces. The *meaning function* explores the social norms and expectations associated with any physical setting. The third function is the *expressive-requirement function*. Individuals bring with themselves “unique experiences” and “personality characteristics,” which influence their desires for their relationship with a

physical setting. When the setting does not necessarily match these desires, an individual enacts the *expressive-requirement function* of place-identity. The fourth function of place identity is the *mediating change function*. This is an individual's belief in the ability in which she or he is able to change a place. This function also includes the skills and tools an individual possesses to make a change in a physical setting (i.e., finances, position, or social networks). The final function is the *anxiety and defense function*. An individual's place-identity can be seen as an expression of her or his ideal physical world, when this physical world is threatened, the *anxiety and defense function* is engaged.

**Social Context of Place-Identity.** Beyond place-identity dimensions (Lim, 2000) and place-identity functions (Proshansky et al., 1983), one of the overarching concepts of place-identity is the relationship of the physical world to the social world. Proshansky et al. (1983) go as far to assert, "There is no physical environment that is not also a social environment" (p. 64). Identity is not solely reflective of a relationship with a physical setting. Many times, what can be defined as "place" is created by social forces. Additionally, within most places there exist a variety of social groups and socially constructed roles (Wyse et al., 2012). The home, school, and neighborhood are significant places in the life of a student and carry with them unique relationships between physical attributes and social contexts influencing identity (Proshansky et al., 1983).

It is hard to ignore the social significance of a given place. When a place is seen as positive, it frequently involves people living in functional social spaces and acting out their social roles as expected. Even in the midst of physical settings, which can be viewed to many as "lacking," "poor," "decayed," or "rundown," there can be positive

experiences for an individual based on the social aspects. An individual may experience positive place-identity in the midst of battered physical settings if they are loved and supported by others in their community (Proshansky et al., 1983). Raill-Jayanandham (2009) notes “place does not only refer to physical landscapes, landmarks, buildings, towns, cities, and ecologies; place is also differentiated from space by the meanings it signifies for people (individual emotional bonds, positive and negative) and societies (social constructions, positive and negative)” (p. 104).

This branches into another main concept of place-identity, the notion that place and place-identity are not always an individual construct, frequently they are co-constructed and a collective representation of the physical, social, and historical aspects of a physical setting. Lim (2010) challenges Proshansky et al. (1983) and their pioneering work on place identity being “a property of individual minds” and calls rather for place-identity to be viewed as a “publicly shared dialogical process of collective identity development” (p. 906). A collective place-identity is viewed as a dynamic process embedded within the “larger socio-political context” and includes “various insideness and outsideness, multiple histories, and diverse narratives” (p. 906). The definition of a place should include multiple voices, narratives, and disciplines (Raill-Jayanandham, 2009).

**Place Belonging and Attachment.** Individuals possess varying degrees of place-identity, which influence self-identity in dynamic and distinct ways based on other aspects of identity. One of the main purposes of the concept of place is to “engender a sense of belonging and attachment” (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 61). Place-attachment is not synonymous with place-identity. Rather, place-attachment is one potential component of a broader place-identity. An individual can come to know a place in a short time,

however feeling connected to a place may take an extended period of time, developing “out of a large number of routine activities and everyday experiences, as well as more significant life events” (Jack, 2010, p. 757). Children begin developing feelings, both positive and negative, consciously and unconsciously, from a very early age (Jack, 2010). As children interact with their physical and social place, they act as “meaning-makers” in developing place-identity and giving meaning to their environments (Wyse et al., 2012, p. 1035).

Individuals are frequently unaware of their place-attachment until that place is taken away (Jack, 2010; Proshansky et al., 1983). When place is threatened or associated with negative things, whether the familiarity of home, community, or school, then an individual may develop “place aversion” or tension in place-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 76). These feelings can mimic the idea of “being torn between places” and challenge the individual in choosing or rejecting various aspects of identity related to place (Wyse et al., 2012).

Nowell, Berkowitz, Deacon, and Foster-Fishman (2006) researched a place-based initiative alongside residents in distressed neighborhoods. Residents were asked to capture photos of physical aspects of their community and then reflect on the meaning associated with the photos. Reflecting on photos of public spaces, such as parks, residents noted how “these places served as reminders of their own personal histories with and connections to the community” (p. 35). Connecting physical settings to personal history is evidence of residents’ place-attachment. Residents also commonly photographed landmarks or local monuments. Residents posit these landmarks show the importance of their community to residents and to outsiders and convey pride and value. The reverse

was true when residents took photos of negative physical aspects of their community (i.e., garbage, graffiti, foreclosed homes) and wondered what sort of negative image was portrayed to outsiders of their community. Even amongst negative physical settings, certain physical markers, such as a “neighborhood name placard, symbolically affirm a resident’s membership to that community by communicating to residents that they are part of something distinctive, important, and valuable” (p. 40).

**Shifting Identity.** Place-identity is deeply influenced by past experiences. In their definition of place-identity, Proshansky et al. (1983) consider place-identity as,

A substructure of the self-identity... consisting of cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives. These cognitions represent memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behavior and experience which relate to the variety and complexity of physical settings that define the day-to-day existence of every human being. At the core of such physical environment related cognitions is the “environmental past” of the person; a past consisting of places, spaces and their properties which have served instrumentally in the satisfaction of the person’s biological, psychological, social, and cultural needs. (p. 59)

An individual interacts with physical spaces everyday. These physical spaces all carry different physical attributes and social meanings. As explained above, place-identity is comprised of cognitions, some of which are memories and feelings derived from past experiences. Children spend a great deal of their formative years in the house, school, and neighborhood. It is in these spaces they begin to learn their social roles and appropriate



ways to interact with others (Proshansky et al., 1983). Self-identity formed during this time is likely carried into the future.

Place-identity is dynamic. It should never be looked at out of the context of past experiences, changing contexts, and relationships. As the physical and social world changes, so does the place-identity component of a person's full self-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983). Sometimes these changes are gradual, such as the shifting in roles from being a young child in a community to a more responsible adolescent or moving to a new school building. Other times changes in place-identity can be drastic and the result of an environmental disaster or extreme political force. Additionally, drastic changes in place-identity can happen when an individual is removed entirely from a familiar place, one example is being incarcerated or sent to boarding school.

No place is static and "every individual must deal with a changing society, with unexpected events, with advances in technology, with social upheavals, and any number of other phenomena that directly or indirectly have an impact on the physical world of the person" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 65). All individuals travel between physical contexts. The most common for a child or adolescent are the home, school, and the neighborhood. Typically home serves as the most significant place to an individual (Proshansky et al., 1983). For children of school age, school becomes another physical setting, which can deeply influence place and self-identity (Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011). Marcouyeux and Fleury-Bahi (2011) explore how students' image of their high school affects place-attachment, dependence, and their group identity. They found if students had a positive perception of their school, the students exhibited positive levels of place-identity in the

form of attachment, dependence, and group identity. The reverse was also true in negative situations.

Significant places cannot be studied within a vacuum. It is important to explore how places interact with each other in the individual's life. Place-identity not only represents one environment, but the “relationship of these environments to each other in defining the day-to-day activities of a person” (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 63). Place related identities should therefore be viewed as dynamic, plural, and in conversation with each other. Wyse et al. (2012) guided participants through a local-mapping activity to understand their multiple and intersecting place-identities. Students’ maps included drawings of important social and physical places, like “houses of friends, shops, and fields for playing sports” (p. 1028). The researchers note how “these static places were contrasted with ideas of movement” as students drew the routes they took between places. The students demonstrated how the places in their lives exist in relation to each other.

Place-identity does not travel in a linear direction from the physical place to the person. Rather, places impacts people and people impact places. Any individual living in a place takes on the role of place-influencer; some exercise this role more than others. Gruenewald et al. (2007) note, “The people who live in a place play a significant role as placemakers (or sometimes place destroyers)” (p. 235). As the place can influence a person, the person can also deeply influence the place, “When a place interacts with a person, the place develops its own unique and living meaning and the person develops a unique and living sense of the place” (Lim, 2010, p. 901). This interaction possibly

reveals a relationship between positive place-identity and increased citizenship. Strong “place-influencers” are frequently those who have a strong relationship with their place.

### **Weaving History, Racial-Identity, and Place-Identity**

Sellers et al. (1998) challenge racial-identity being studied in isolation. Racial-identity interacts with other identities to form the overall identity of an individual.

Umana-Taylor et al. (2014) suggest racial-identity interacts with “gender identity, social class identity, national identity, career identity, and political identity, as examples” (p. 29). They note how racial-identity works with other aspects of identity to create a unified self-identity. Place-identity and racial-identity dynamically interact with each other. Obviously, the two work together to influence an individual’s overall identity. However, there are some other potential points of interaction between these two types of identities.

One point of conversation is how racial-identity works to define the social expectations and roles existing in a physical setting. Social forces determine what is normative in a setting (Proshansky et al., 1983). These social forces typically are consistent with the expectations of the dominant culture and do not always take into consideration multiple voices and diverse narratives stemming from various racial and ethnic groups. Duncan (2005) labels the dominant culture’s social expectations as *respectability* (p. 12). *Respectability* includes morals, behavior, and accepted roles of women and men in society. For those born into a culture that lines up with these norms, *respectability* comes easily; for those born into a non-dominant culture it is much less clear-cut. Black teenagers are frequently viewed through this lens of *respectability* and their behaviors are labeled inappropriate. Black youth may be viewed as a “social problem” or a “mentally and emotionally debilitated social group” (p. 6). Duncan asserts

a common view of Black youth as being outside the realm of adapting to the mainstream norms of behavior. In the physical setting of a school, for example, a Black student and a White student may interact very differently with the physical setting based on the roles and expectations put forward by social forces. This would in turn affect their place-identity, racial-identity, and overall self-identity.

McInerney et al. (2011) paint a picture of “place” as the lens in which individuals, especially youth, begin to understand themselves and the world around them. In the context of place, an individual builds relationships and social connections. An individual's relationships with physical contexts and the people within them can define and develop certain aspects of identity, one of those aspects being racial-identity. It is important to note, through the development of racial-identity, place-identity, and overall self-identity, that every individual is different and carries with her/himself a unique set of experiences and perceptions (Proshansky et al., 1983). Each individual acts as her or his own “meaning-maker” through the social and physical interactions of their life (Wyse et al., 2012, p. 1035).

**Historical Perspectives.** The intersection between place-identity and racial-identity can be explored through the role of history. History not only shapes the construction of places, but it also influences expectations and norms for an individual to act within a specific place. Lim (2000) notes, “Historical consideration acknowledges multiplicity and marginalization in a place, thus, in turn, offers legitimacy, rights, and responsibility for everyone to be invited to participate in creating the place” (p. 905). When talking about racial-identity and place-identity, it is beneficial to reference multiple histories rather than a singular history.

Attention to history is evident in the literature on both racial-identity and place-identity. In research focused specifically on African-American participants' racial-identity, it is critical to look at the construct of the word *racial* through the "historical circumstances such as forced slavery and the forced severance from their indigenous African culture" (Seaton et al., 2006, p. 1416). The experience of African-Americans is unique to other racial and/or ethnic groups, being forced to America, defined as property, and then systematically discriminated against for centuries (Sellers et al., 1998). Weekes (2003) explores stereotypes associated with Black women and notes a stereotypical picture of a "physically and mentally strong superwomen or matriarchs, locating black femaleness within a historical discourse of slavery" (p. 51). Even though race as a biological classification is fallacious, the historical forces and social consequences of race have had grave impact. For Black Americans, "race is a socially constructed concept" that serves as the primary characteristic defining group membership (p. 18).

It becomes important to use a historical lens for studies with a focus on racial-identity. Umana-Taylor et al. (2014) suggest racial-identity should "consider the interface of multiple contexts." These contexts can be "bioecological," like the family or community, or they can be "temporal" and include "situational, developmental, and historical influence" (p. 33). To accurately explore an individual's racial-identity in multiple contexts is to give attention to place-identity and historical influence, since both shape outsider and insider perspectives of ethnicity, race, roles, and norms. Youth live and develop identity "simultaneously in the past and the present in all aspects of daily life" (DeGennaro & Brown, 2009, p. 15).

Lim (2000) introduces the term “place-history” as an important component of place-identity. The history of a place influences the present period of a place and therefore is related to an individual’s place-identity. History is evident and significant in place-identity through the naming of a place. Place-names can “evoke multiple associations and narrative in various contexts” (p. 900). Research by Wyse et al. (2012) used reading of the text *My Place* to trace the story of a singular house over multiple generations to explore how history influences place-identity. They highlight the ways in which place is consistently in the process of being defined by “the outside” and representative of “multiple identities and histories” (p. 1021). A historical analysis can reveal how certain groups and voices have been marginalized in specific contexts and places.

An example of racial-identity, history, and place-identity in conversation in the research can be found in the work of Mitchell and Elwood (2012). Through a participatory community project with a group of middle school females, participants interviewed various community members and stakeholders, leading to the creation of a community map of places and stories. Researchers discovered youth making personal connections from local history to their individual lives and saw strength in “relevance of content” (p. 151). Participants had critical conversations detailing the role place plays in generating insiders and outsiders and also questioning “dominant narratives about urban and national belonging” (p. 149). This research demonstrates how identity, both racial-identity and place-identity, is situated within historical contexts.

## **Implications of the Existing Literature**

The roles of racial-identity, place-identity, and history all have implications for education. It is critical to note here, education should not be mistaken for “schooling,” and includes educational instances within and outside the boundaries of school. This includes formal and informal institutions, as well as social relationships.

**Institutions and Institutional Agents.** Institutions and the adults in places of power in those institutions can act as forces to stunt the development of positive places and place-identity. Jack (2010) writes extensively on how public places have been institutionally limited for children. Adults in positions of power determine the norms, which dictate the behavior of a child in a community setting; examples include “staff to patrol neighborhoods and shopping centers... [and] the erection of signs prohibiting a range of activities such as cycling and playing ball” (p. 761). Policies like this may be viewed as necessary for safety; however, these types of institutional forces are generated from positions of power and set limits on the interaction of a child with their physical setting. Additionally, increased development and overpopulation, which have led to the reduction of open green space, take away the freedom of children to play creatively in unrestricted space.

A place does not carry a positive connotation for all individuals, especially to those living in a “squalid, unsafe, environmentally degraded place or one that is fractured by social, economic, and racial divides” (McInerney et al., 2011, p. 10). In these “fractured” places, individuals may feel a sense of shame associated with the place they call home, referring to their specific house or broader contexts like the community or even city or country. Nowell et al. (2006) found youth participants pointing out the

negative views outsiders might have of them as a person because of the physical appearance of their neighborhood. There can be a great deal of pride generated from where an individual lives; however, in the case of this study, “negative conditions were seen as reflecting negatively upon the people who lived there, consequently becoming a pervasive part of community life for residents” (p. 37). In the relationship between physical place and outsider perspectives, outside individuals and institutions may marginalize youth from fractured or divided communities. However, even in the midst of poor physical conditions and a potentially diminished sense of social identity, is the opportunity for individuals to thrive. Meaningful adults can play a key role in this success.

Helping marginalized youth develop a strong racial-identity may be one way in which a mentor or institutional agent can support positive youth development. Sellers and Shelton (2003) note how strong racial identity can “buffer” the consequences of racial discrimination (p. 1079). They found individuals who exhibited a “nationalist ideology” were in turn “buffered from the negative impact of perceived racial discrimination at event-specific and global distress levels” (p. 1089). An empowerment institutional agent’s role is not to pressure students to assimilate or integrate; rather, it is to empower students to challenge the very structures that marginalize them and impose assimilation (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). In order to transform identity and move towards empowerment, students need people who will “deconstruct stereotypes” and “allow youth to demonstrate their competence” (Gonzalez, 2009, p. 28). These empowerment institutional agents take on the responsibility to challenge the structural and cultural forces at work within the



school and community that socially reproduce inequality in the lives of youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

**Neighborhood and Community Resources.** Research shows youth feel a stronger sense of community in places in which they have voice and are responsible (Evans, 2007). Community centers and para-school programming can offer great opportunity for students to make critical connections in their identity between family or community and school (Byrd & Chavous, 2009; Wilcox, 1998). Wilcox's research notes the importance of understanding history and culture and feeling community connection. Participants described after-school programming as providing "support and guidance," the "opportunity to develop skills and self-confidence," the "provision of a safe space," and "the opportunity for exploration of self, new ideas, and opinions, and future possibilities" (p. 5). Additionally important is the opportunity for participants to connect with adults from the community center sharing "a common social and cultural/historical background" and also a diverse "professional and educational background" (p. 6).

Byrd and Chavous (2009) explain "neighborhoods offer both risks and resources to youth, some structural, others social" (p. 545). Even beyond the role of the family, communities with strong social networks and ample resources provide youth with a framework for success (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). Neighborhoods can also provide definition to a youth's perception about identifying as a certain race or ethnicity, and how their race and/or ethnicity connects structurally with economic and social opportunity. Institutional resources, like community centers, can be a place for youth to learn and celebrate their unique ethnic and/or racial history and culture, which may be lacking depth in their school curriculum (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). Wealthy, predominantly White

neighborhoods may provide great resources, but “pose some risks in terms of racial-identity” for students of color (p. 557), therefore research finds “neighborhood context matters in the meaning and functions of racial-identity among [Black] early adolescents” (p. 558).

**Current Educational Policy.** There are many political forces shaping place, race, and ethnicity. These forces have defined the borders of every city, county, state, and country. Even within cities, the placement of roads and public transportation routes make some parts of a place very accessible and others isolated. Cities have building codes about how wide a street can be, whether there needs to be a sidewalk or not, and how many square feet each lot is allowed. These are just a small slice of the many policies defining physical contexts. Then there are the political forces that affect the social perceptions of ethnicity and race. This is evident in historical political forces such as slavery and Jim Crow Laws, and more recent regulations on immigration and citizenship. It is important to acknowledge the policies that contribute to the role race, ethnicity, and place play in the life of any given individual.

Political forces appear at work in the educational leaning towards “high-performing” schools as measured by high scores on state tests and providing every child the right to attend one of these schools through closing “failing” schools and giving students the opportunity to enroll in charter schools outside of their respective neighborhood. There is no question all children have the right to equal educational opportunities; however, school choice and school closure can be critiqued through a place-identity lens. Jack (2010) notes the physical contexts people grow up in “form essential components of their identity, underpinning their feelings of security and

belonging” (p. 756). Attending schools embedded in an individual’s community may contribute to the development of place-attachment and security. While a student may be provided with qualified teachers or additional accelerated course options at a school outside of their neighborhood, they may also lose a sense of “home” associated with attending a neighborhood school. Gruenewald et al. (2007) note,

Teachers and schools tend to operate in near total isolation from their communities, with little or no engagement outside of the school building. A place-based approach reacquaints teachers and learners with the environments and communities that make [students’] living and learning possible and worthwhile (p. 234).

Place-identity does not serve as the primary reason why charter schools and school closure are critiqued. However, the notion of place and place-attachment should be a critical lens in which to view the migration of students from neighborhood schools to schools outside of their community context.

A current push in the educational landscape is towards the enforcement of national academic standards, which are measured through standardized testing. Both place-identity and racial-identity challenge this standardization movement and shed light on the importance of local knowledge and group differences. Place-based education (PBE) offers an alternative to national curriculum and standards. PBE gives a “distinct focus on local settings” by incorporating local knowledge into school curriculum (Lim, 2010, p. 904). PBE is “multidisciplinary and experiential” and is “primarily concerned with connecting place with self and community” (McInerney et al., 2011, p. 5). PBE encourages students to use their lived experiences to adopt a critical framework to see the

historical creation of places and role of power in maintaining the marginalized status of some groups (Lim, 2010; Raill-Jayanandham, 2009).

Place-based education does not exclusively focus on the local context, but rather uses the local context as the starting point to build additional knowledge. Outcomes of PBE found in the literature include, “depth of knowledge” (Gruenewald et al., 2007, p. 235), students caring “for the ecological and social wellbeing of communities,” improving “student engagement and participation” (McInerney et al., 2011, p. 5), breaking “down the isolation of school from life” (p. 6), and “locally produced knowledge” (p. 7). The goal of PBE is not simply acquiring knowledge about local history and culture, but students engaged “as social and political actors in their own communities where social history and place-based education begin” (Gruenewald et al., 2007, p. 240). PBE has become even more important recently as the purpose of education has shifted to economic gain, rather than citizenship and a healthy society (McInerney et al., 2011).

Research supports the importance of continuing to provide funding and opportunities for nonprofit and community organizations that promote education and identity development for youth. For example, museums can serve as “well positioned to act as a meeting group and resource for doing place-based social history,” which may not be able to happen during the school day (Gruenewald et al., 2007, p. 236). Nowell et al. (2006) explore how when individuals identify strongly with their community, they are more likely to participate in community betterment programs. As the community strengthens, the individual’s place-identity and attachment is likely to strengthen, which impacts the overall self-identity of an individual. Place is linked to self, and community

organizations can play a key role in developing places and allowing individuals to have critical conversations surrounding place. As much research exists on neighborhood factors correlating with performance in school, it seems critical that attention be given to the importance of increased place-attachment and community organizations, which facilitate neighborhood revitalization.

### **Summary**

Provided in this chapter was a review of the relevant literature on racial-identity and place-identity, with additional importance given to the impact of historical perspectives. Attention was also given to qualitative studies which explored individuals' relationships to their community and their community's history. The chapter closed with a call for integration between community and school and revealed some of the research on the effectiveness of place-based education and initiatives. The literature reviewed for this section shaped the methods used for this study. These methods value local and historical context and seek to explore how adult institutional agents can help youth better understand and navigate their identity as they shift between varying contexts.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Chagrin Falls Park is a community isolated from the surrounding predominantly upper class White suburbs. The youth of Chagrin Falls Park live in a residentially segregated all Black neighborhood and attend Kenston Local Schools, which are almost entirely composed of White students and faculty. There is a lack of integration between these two isolated spaces and students appear to lack understanding of why their environments are the way they are. Through a review of relevant literature, it is clear that both racial-identity and place-identity can work to influence the overall identity of an individual and affect how the student connects and acts in their school and community. Students from Chagrin Falls Park may feel isolated, voiceless, have tensions of identity, and lack connection to either of these primary environments. A review of the literature on adult mentors and institutional agents reveals some of the ways in which adults can act to help youth sustain positive racial-identity and gain access to essential social and cultural capital, which help youth to counter forces of isolation and marginalization (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Moving beyond the findings of the pilot project, the purpose of this study was to explore the ways, if any, which adults from the community center and school act as

institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) in assisting youth as they navigate between their historically marginalized community and school. An instrumental case study was conducted to explore answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in terms of how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institution and community spaces within the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park?
2. How does the ethnic and/or racial identity of institutional agents influence their relationship with youth from Chagrin Falls Park?
3. In what ways, if any, do institutional agents act as empowerment agents; viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency of schools to reproduce inequality?

Embedded within these research questions, was the desire to explore the institutional agents' understanding of how history, place, and race are interacting in the lives of the youth of Chagrin Falls Park.

### **Pilot Project**

The current study is based on research I completed prior to the development of this study. A youth participatory action research (YPAR) project took place during 2013 at the Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC). The project included a team of youth researchers (6th-8th grade) exploring the community history of Chagrin Falls Park through historical analysis, oral history, and creative products. The *Owning Our Story* YPAR project sought to answer the following two research questions,

1. How do youth researchers describe their life in Chagrin Falls Park?

2. What reactions do the youth researchers have to their discovery of the history of Chagrin Falls Park?

Through multiple after-school sessions focusing on community history, youth researchers examined historical artifacts, interviewed a local historian, and creatively engaged with historical data about their community. Data were collected through observation, audio recordings, video footage, reflective journals, and student creative products.

A Transformative Framework guided the research. As suggested by Mertens (2012), this framework lends itself to research with participants who have been oppressed and highlights action-orientated research. Community oppression was made evident to the primary researcher and youth researchers through the study of historical artifacts and an interview with the local historian. The project focused on giving the youth researchers voice and opportunity to steer the research process. The methodology for this research was participatory action research (PAR). Guided by the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (2007) and Rodriguez and Brown (2009), youth researcher participation remained a central aspect of the research. Youth researchers were “interactive” participants (Pretty, 1995) throughout the *Owning Our Story* after-school sessions. Youth creatively and dynamically engaged with materials and showed a desire to share knowledge with the broader community. The entirety of this research rejects value-free or neutral research. As transformative research and PAR frequently are, the process was very flexible and inductive (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2007; Mertens, 2012; Rodriguez & Brown, 2009).

The research existed not with the goal to create research for its own sake, but to foster research that benefited the youth researchers in the context of their community and school. The study included 9 middle-school aged, African-American, youth researchers



and the primary researcher, as well as two community members and a local historian. The youth researchers and community members all are residents of Chagrin Falls Park. All of the research activities took place over the course of four months during after-school programs at CFPCC. From the research activities, two themes, *Tensions of Self* and the *Role of the Community Center*, emerged from the pilot project data, which led to the development of the current research project.

**Tensions of Self.** The first theme *Tensions of Self*, explored the tensions youth feel between their community and school and their positive and negative perceptions of their community. The data suggested youth researchers positively perceiving the history of their community. Students demonstrated evidence of being intrigued with community history. Youth researchers were quick to generate questions they would ask in an interview with an older community member, Jamar said, “I would ask them - where was the fire station at?” Sam quickly responded, “What were the jobs? Were there fights?” The group of youth researchers generated an interview protocol for the interview with the local historian and also a protocol for the interviews with community members. As reflected on in the research journal after the session with the local historian, students “had pens and their note sheets for the interview... the students were engaged and respectful - I was very proud” (Kaufman, 2013, p. 11).

Youth researchers revealed positive perceptions about their life currently in the community. They articulated some positive aspects of their life being friends, family, the community center, the neighborhood store, and getting to play basketball on the community courts. Ariel responded in a reflective journal, “I have a good memory living

[here] because my family lives close to me.” Positive perceptions of the community center were illustrated through one group’s creative commercial product script:

*Sam:* What’s so good about the Park? Alright, they have the Center, you can do homework and study, and we play basketball in the gym. That’s nice.

*Jamar:* Yeah and they donate some sweet school supplies in the beginning of the school year. And they updated technology.

*Melvin:* Smart Tutors. We go on field trips.

Amidst these positive reactions to studying history and positive perceptions of youth researchers’ lived experiences in the community, there was much evidence of students feeling tensions with the outside community and expressing negative views of their neighborhood. Students were very aware of the racial difference between their community and their school. Terrence said, “Did you know it’s under 3% Black people who go to [Kenston Middle School]?” Sam said, “We have a bad reputation,” presumably referring to the Black students who live in their community. Terrence and Sam then reflected about how students from the community are treated at Kenston,

*Terrence:* We’re treated the same. Its just certain people be acting like we’re all bad and stuff and like there is gooder stuff. And they make fun of us because we talk a little different and we...

*Sam:* We act a little different.

Further, Sam shared an interaction he had with a friend, “One kid said - cuz I told him my mom gets paid a lot or whatever ... ‘Your mom can’t get paid a lot because you live in The Park. That doesn’t make sense because like... that doesn’t really make sense.’”

The tensions the youth researchers live with were further highlighted by the student's desire to leave their community. When asked in a reflective journal prompt about their future, students respond very similarly. Jamar wrote, "I want to be in the NFL and move somewhere new." Raymond, "I want to be on TV and I would love to move somewhere new." Terrence noted "I want to move to a big city so I can be recognized." Ariel said, "I would like to move somewhere that is nice." Melvin, "I want to be in the NBA... I want to move because I don't want to live here all my life." Sam, "I said I wanted to play basketball. I don't want to live here because it's very annoying. I want to move far away." When asked how far by the researcher, Sam responded, "Antarctica." These words may not be unique to all other adolescents in places across the country that likely feel similar things about wanting to leave their community. What stuck out to me though as an emerging theme was the intense fear the youth had of getting stuck in Chagrin Falls Park forever. Embedded in the conversations Chagrin Falls Park youth had about their future was a polarized idea of post-graduation plans, where success can only be achieved by leaving Chagrin Falls Park behind and failure is the only result of staying in Chagrin Falls Park. It appeared the youth had accepted no middle, where success was possible in Chagrin Falls Park and/or failure was possible outside of Chagrin Falls Park.

As youth articulated these words, I saw an emerging theme of tension between community and school. This spurred a desire to explore this issue more deeply and led to the review of literature on both place-identity and racial-identity, as well as the search for a response to this problem of tension. This phenomenon steered me towards the literature on institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). These meaningful adults play a potentially critical role in not only helping youth navigate the institution of school, but

also validating their community and racial-identity and providing youth with the capital necessary to counter the forces of inequality at work in their contexts.

**Role of the Community Center.** The second theme that emerged from the pilot study and was relevant to the current research is the *Role of the Community Center* in the lives of the participants. In reflecting on how students describe their lives in the community, students frequently highlighted the role of the community center, which served as the site for the pilot project. These findings were consistent with the work of Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts (2000) on community safe spaces. Amidst the tensions of identity students may feel between their lives within and outside the community, it was obvious the students felt connection through the community center. Data revealed students spoke negative about their community, but only spoke positively about the community center. Students highlighted the tutoring help, basketball courts, technology, field trips, school supplies, and friendships built through their time at the community center.

There was a level of comfort the youth researchers had with each other and with the setting, strengthening the project. Additionally, I was able to work alongside community center staff to ensure the appropriateness, flow, and acquisition of resources and artifacts over the course of the project. The existing data strongly supported the role the community center plays in the lives of these students. This was the primary reason I chose to continue using CFPC as the main site for this case study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research was grounded in the discipline of sociology, with attention given to historical influences. I operated under the belief that structural and cultural forces

throughout history influence the ways in which communities and groups of people are isolated by the dominant culture (Wilson, 2010). In this specific research context, isolation has led to youth in Chagrin Falls Park living in an isolated all Black community and attending a predominantly White school. The polarized nature of these spaces is evident to the youth of Chagrin Falls Park and creates a sense of tension in identity. My research acknowledged both the historical and present day forces, which interact to shape the lives of the youth in Chagrin Falls Park. By exploring how these cultural and structural forces throughout history interact and are at work to perpetuate inequality, an individual or community can be equipped to counteract these forces (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

More specifically this research worked within existing literature and theory by Stanton-Salazar's (2010) work on institutional agents and Proshansky et al.'s (1983) research theorizing on place-identity. Simultaneously, it was crucial to situate this research within the appropriate historical contexts at a local level through the study of the history of Chagrin Falls Park (Hitchcock, 2012; Wiese, 1986; 1998) and more broadly, through the unique experience of African-American populations in the United States (Ogbu, 2004; Seaton et al., 2006; Sellers et al., 1998). In this study, the institutional agents and the youth with whom they interact were situated within present and historical contexts and developed relationships with these contexts (physical aspect) and the people within them (social aspect). Central to this research was the consistent exploration of how context influences and is influenced by the physical, social, cultural, historical, and political forces operating within it.

Proshansky et al. (1983) define relationships with the physical and social aspects of a context as an individual's place-identity (1983). Embedded within place-identity, is an individual's relationship to the history of a place, or their place-history and an individual's sense of belonging to a place, or their place-attachment. Both place-history and place-attachment influence overall identity and therefore are relevant to understanding an individual's connection and transition between contexts. In this research, I specifically explored how adults acting as institutional agents perceived and acted on behalf of students transitioning between their differing contexts.

Functioning within these physical contexts or places of community and school are social forces and social networks, which influence how an individual is defined and the roles in which she or he are expected to fulfill. Social, historical, and political forces within a place determine what is acceptable behavior and also generate expectations and stereotypes associated with certain ethnicities and races. At this intersection is where theories of racial-identity become a piece in understanding an individual's identity and her or his connection to the contexts in their life (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). This research study was influenced by theories of racial-identity. These theories provided insight into the perceptions and behaviors of individuals based on their identification of belonging to a specific racial group. These theories, paired with place-identity theories and historical considerations, illuminate the ways in which society determines acceptable and expected behaviors for people based on their race.

A core point of exploration in my research was the perception an adult institutional agent has of a youth's identity within their community, within her or his school, and transitioning between the two environments. Also important was the role

these adults took in helping youth navigate these environments and developing their identity in both school and community. Meaningful adults in the school and/or community center who take an active role to empower youth are defined as institutional agents. This research was guided by Stanton-Salazar's (2010) defining work on institutional agents and operated with the assumption that meaningful adults can share essential social and cultural capital with marginalized youth to allow them to develop their identity and navigate any tensions. These meaningful adults, also known as empowerment institutional agents, can examine and challenge the structural and cultural forces at work within the school and community that socially reproduce inequality in the lives of the youth.

### **Research Paradigm**

This research worked within the guidelines of a critical research perspective. Operating from a critical standpoint, "education is considered to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation" (Merriam, 1998, p.4). The study was designed to uncover, identify, and challenge the reproducing factors at work within the school and community in which the study participants live, that continues to oppress and isolate the youth of Chagrin Falls Park. At the core of this project was the desire for "a project larger than self" (Fine et al., 2000). To match this desire the project was steered using a Transformative Framework (Mertens, 2012). Central to the Transformative Framework, "knowledge is not neutral and it reflects the power and social relationships within society," therefore "the purpose of knowledge construction is to aid people to improve society" (Creswell, 2013, p. 26). The Transformative Framework encompasses research, which lends itself to challenging

inequalities and promoting social justice (Mertens, 2012). There is a focus on culturally diverse communities, specifically those who have been marginalized (Mertens, 2012). Additionally, research within the Transformative Framework “should contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researcher’s lives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 26).

The history of Chagrin Falls Park is situated in a context of racial segregation and oppression. I made an intentional effort to deepen my understanding of the historical and cultural context of the community and the participants. Issues of respect and participant voice are central to the axiology of the transformative framework. The participants determine truth. Positions of power and privilege too often determine an accepted truth; however, this research was steered by the words of the youth in the pilot project and the words of the adult agents from the community and school, and Chagrin Falls Park young adult participants in the research. The outcomes of the research were transparent and will be shared with CFPCC. Emphasis was placed on a collaborative relationship of trust between researcher, setting, and participants.

### **Defining the Case**

An essential component of a case study is to define the case or the object of the study. It is important that a case has clear boundaries (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the case was adults who act as institutional agents for youth living in Chagrin Falls Park and attending Kenston Local Schools. For the purpose of this research, these adults are referred to as *institutional agents*. The institutional agents were interviewed to gather data for the case study. Young adult Kenston graduates were also interviewed as participants in this study, however, their interviews were for the purpose of providing context and



triangulating the interview data of the institutional agents. One goal of this case study research was to deeply explore the roles and perceptions of these institutional agents through a look at historical contexts, current physical settings in school and community, and the other contexts, which emerged through the scope of the research (Stake, 2000).

### **Research Approach and Justification**

To best answer the research questions, the research was conducted using a qualitative research approach. I sought to explore in-depth meaning, multiple historical and cultural contexts, and highlight the importance of participants' voices. Specifically, the research was designed with a case study methodology. Case studies are useful in gaining deep knowledge about an issue within a given context. Creswell (2013) notes, "case study research involves the study of a case within a real-life setting" (p. 97). As defined by Creswell (2013), case study research is a "qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case)... over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case-description and case themes" (p. 97).

The research design was inductive and allowed for flexibility in design and implementation (Merriam, 1998). After a rich-description of a case, typically resulting from case study research is a set of conclusions, assertions, or lessons learned (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). This set of "general lessons learned from studying the cases" (Creswell, 2013, p. 99) may develop into changes in practice within the organization or context of the case. The researcher hoped that by conducting this research, lessons were learned about how institutional agents can help youth thrive in community and school settings. The Transformative Framework guiding this research

calls for a project that has a critical orientation towards this type of change (Mertens, 2012; Stevenson, 2004). My continued hope is that this work will be useful to staff at Chagrin Falls Park Community Center and Kenston Local Schools in influencing practice to further equip adults to better serve the youth of Chagrin Falls Park.

Case study methodology is useful in focusing on contextual and cultural factors of a given case (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 93). Stake (2000) encourages the researcher to let case and context drive the design of the study (p. 435). Based on analysis from the pilot project, this case study focused deeply on present and historical factors that have isolated the Chagrin Falls Park community from the surrounding areas and Kenston Local Schools. Due to this emphasis, the present case study is classified as a sociological case study, because of the focus on contexts of community and institutions (Merriam, 1998).

Case study methodology encourages the use of multiple data sources (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2003). This research used multiple data sources and placed great importance on historical and present context. These data sources included interviews with school and community institutional agents, supporting interviews with Chagrin Falls Park young adults who were former students at Kenston Local Schools, historical artifacts accessed during the pilot project (i.e., newspapers articles, photos, yearbooks), transcripts and field notes from the pilot project, creative products generated by youth researchers during the pilot project, and the review of documents and reports from the community center and school district (i.e., CFPCC Annual Report and Kenston Schools Quality Report).

**Instrumental Case Study.** This case study moved beyond a purely descriptive or intrinsic case study (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, this research fell within the framework of an instrumental case study, mainly because the research encouraged a deep

exploration of the given case, as well as the identification and exploration of issues and themes in relationship with the case (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2000). My research focused not only on a description of the institutional agents' role and daily actions, but also the institutional agents' perception of the youth of Chagrin Falls Park and some of the broader contextual forces at work in Chagrin Falls Park and Kenston Local Schools. Instrumental case studies move beyond purely descriptive data to “illustrate, support, or challenge...assumptions held prior to the data gathering” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38).

The final product of an instrumental case study provides a “detailed description of the case,” which includes the role of institutional agents or the “day by day rendering of the activities” of institutional agents (Creswell, 2013, p. 101). This description is presented in the findings and discussion chapters. Additionally, there was a “focus on a few issues or analysis of themes... for understanding the complexity of the case” (p. 101). These six themes are explored in the findings chapter. Finally, “the researcher reports the meaning of the case... from learning about the issues of the case” (p. 101). This is presented in the discussion chapter. My hope was that this research led to a deeper understanding of the roles and perceptions institutional agents have in assisting the youth of Chagrin Falls Park as they navigate between community and school life. This rich understanding of the roles and perceptions of institutional agents was framed by the historical and cultural issues at work within Chagrin Falls Park.

### **Researcher's Perspective**

From a professional standpoint, I was the former Recreation and Summer-Camp Director at Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC) from 2007-2008. I also participated as a regular volunteer at CFPCC and maintain relationships with current

staff, community stakeholders, and many of the youth. Before this study, I have already conducted research at CFPCC alongside a team of middle-school youth researchers in a pilot project. This project lasted several months. These things being stated, I maintain a strong and ongoing connection with the staff of CFPCC and youth of Chagrin Falls Park. From a biographical standpoint, I spent my childhood in a community less than ten miles away and have over twenty years of perceptions and knowledge of the Chagrin Falls Park community from family stories and visits to the community and surrounding communities.

In qualitative research, especially qualitative research from a critical perspective, the subjectivity of the researcher is valued as important to the project (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). Fine et al. (2000) assert that qualitative “researchers are never absent from [their] texts” (p. 109). In this regard, I acknowledge my significant role as one of the primary instruments in this research. Braun and Clarke (2013) note “all research activity is seen as influenced, and the influence of the researcher” (p. 36). I own my unique perspective and celebrate the unique perspectives of the participants by using reflexivity as a tool for critical examination (Fine et al., 2000; Galletta, 2013). There is great strength, but also potential limitations to the researcher’s subjectivity. Within the relationship between the participants and myself, I used reflexivity to reflect on power imbalances, trust, and shared roles in the co-production of knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This was achieved through keeping a research journal to record “thoughts, feelings, and reflection about [the] process” (p. 37) and consulting with academic mentors and critical academic peers.

## **Setting**

This research was conducted in partnership with Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC) and Kenston Local Schools. Interviews were held at locations convenient for the participants. Two interviews were completed over Skype, one interview was completed at a participant's home, and the remaining interviews were completed at coffee shops throughout the region.

**Chagrin Falls Park Community Center.** A detailed history and geography of Chagrin Falls Park was presented in the introduction chapter. Chagrin Falls Park is a community located in Bainbridge Township in Geauga County. Chagrin Falls Park borders the Village of Chagrin Falls, which is in Cuyahoga County. Even though Chagrin Falls Park is much closer geographically (only one mile) to Chagrin Falls Schools and downtown Chagrin Falls, the county lines were drawn in a way that isolates Chagrin Falls Park from the Village of Chagrin Falls. Additionally, there is a large assisted living facility that serves as a buffer between Chagrin Falls Park and the Village of Chagrin Falls.

CFPCC is located in Chagrin Falls Park, and Kenston Local Schools are located eight miles away in Bainbridge Township. For decades, CFPCC has served an integral role in the neighborhood, offering social services to families, as well as academically enriching opportunities for youth. In school, these youth are the racial minority and almost all of the county's non-White population lives exclusively in Chagrin Falls Park. When the youth come to CFPCC they are surrounded by peers similar to them in terms of race and socioeconomic status. The institutional agents from CFPCC and Kenston Local Schools in this study interact with youth who were constantly shifting between these two

environmental extremes with little opportunity to discuss the structural forces and social processes that create their reality.

**Kenston Local Schools.** The Kenston Local School District serves students living in Bainbridge Township in Geauga County. Bainbridge Township is the largest place in Geauga County with over 11,000 residents (Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning, 2013). Geauga County has the second highest per capita personal income in the State of Ohio at \$54,138. Only 5% of the county's residents live below the poverty line (Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning, 2013). Youth attending public schools from Chagrin Falls Park attend Kenston Local School District, consisting of four schools, Timmons Elementary School, Kenston Middle School, Kenston Intermediate School, and Kenston High School. Based on 2013-2014 enrollment totals from the Ohio State Report Card, there are 2,960 students enrolled in the district. Of these students, 2,655 identify as White/Non Hispanic (90.1%), 127 identify as Black/Non-Hispanic (4.3%), 87 identify as Multiracial (3%), 46 identify as Hispanic (1.6%), and 33 identify as Asian or Pacific Islander (1.1%). Three hundred sixty-two (12.2%) of the students are economically disadvantaged based on State of Ohio standards.

Of students in the district, 97% of students graduated within 5 years. The school received a grade of "A" in achievement on state test scores. The Annual Measurable Objectives reveal inequality in the performance of various student groups. In terms of reading scores, 96.1% of White students are considered proficient, while 86.8% of Black students are considered proficient. In math scores the gap is wider, 93.9% of White students are proficient based on state testing and only 68.8% of Black students are

considered proficient. Additionally, the graduation rate for White students is 1.6% higher than that of non-White students.

### **Participants**

Participants for the study were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was used because the researcher believed that specific adults in the community center, school, and former students best helped explore the issue (Merriam, 1998). Snowball or network sampling was critical in the recruitment of participants in this study, and was used to further identify additional participants who met the criterion for participation and provided rich insight into the issue (Merriam, 1998). Young adult graduates from Kenston were asked to provide recommendations for teachers from Kenston Local Schools to interview. Teachers also provided additional potential teacher participants.

All participants signed a detailed consent form outlining the study, their role, and potential risks of the study. My goal was to interview a minimum of three individuals per category (Kenston graduate/young adult, community agent, school agent). I ended up interviewing five school agents, four young adults (two of which were also former community center agents), and two additional community agents.

Table I

*Participants*

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<u>Name</u>	<u>Racial-Identity</u>	<u>Participant Category</u>
Angela	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate
Jada	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate
Kendra	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate & CFPCC Agent
Will	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate & CFPCC Agent

Heather	<i>Chose not to racially identify</i>	School Agent
Jane	White	School Agent
Katherine	White	School Agent
Molly	White	School Agent
Tony	White	School Agent
Charles	White	CFPCC Agent
Robin	White	CFPCC Agent

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*Note.* All participant names are pseudonyms. Racial-identity was self-identified.

The community and school agents were interviewed as the primary case in this study. The young adults were interviewed to contribute to the contextual understanding of the role of the institutional agents. The research design allowed for flexibility in participant numbers. I recruited participants until I felt “the interview data [was] no longer producing new thematic patterns” (Galletta, 2013, p. 33). The sample size of each group of interviewees (Kenston graduate/young adults, school agents, community agents) was determined by the notion of saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When there was no longer distinct information about the research questions being provided, I stopped gathering new participant data.

**Young Adult Recruitment.** One participant was recruited through an already existing relationship I had with a former volunteer at CFPCC. From there, the first participant recommended several additional potential participants to contact. The second participant had additional recommended participants. All participants were 18 or older and at one time lived in Chagrin Falls Park while simultaneously attending Kenston Local Schools. I contacted these participants by phone and email to inquire as to their interest in the study. Two of these interviews were conducted via Skype because the



participants lived out of the state, and two of these interviews were done at local coffee shops.

**Community Center Recruitment.** Community center participants were recruited through a CFPCC contact. Participants included one former staff member and one current volunteer. The criterion for these participants was that they were 18 or over and had at least one year experience working with the youth of Chagrin Falls Park through CFPCC. I used email to inquire about the individuals being a part of the study. These interviews were conducted at coffee shops that were convenient for the community agent.

**School Recruitment.** School staff participants from Kenston Local Schools were recruited through recommendations by young adult Kenston graduates, and additional recommendations by other school staff. I recruited participants who had knowledge of and experience working with youth from Chagrin Falls Park. The criterion for these participants was that they were 18 or over and were employed with Kenston Local Schools, working alongside Chagrin Falls Park youth for at least one year. I contacted these participants by both email and phone. I reached out to several potential participants who did not respond or chose not to be a part of the study.

### **Data Collection**

Data was primarily collected through eleven interviews across three categories of participants. These interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and guided by a set interview protocol, but maintained flexibility and allowed the participant to co-create the interview process (Merriam, 1998). Interviews were co-created by the participant in three ways; 1. the protocol was flexible and allowed the participant the freedom to steer the direction of their responses and future questions, 2. the researcher

allowed the participant to choose their interview location, and 3. the researcher was transparent about the research process, and allowed the participant to ask questions and make suggestions about the structure of her or his interview. Interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour. Interviews were audio recorded with an iPhone application. Audio files were then stored on my password-protected computer. Audio files were erased off of the iPhone, but remain on my password-protected computer. I transcribed audio files into a password-protected text documents using pseudonyms for the participants' names.

Additionally, data from the previously completed pilot project discussed earlier in this chapter guided the formation of the interview protocols and the development of the contextual framework in which the cases exist. This data included historical artifacts (i.e., newspaper articles, photos, yearbooks, CFPCC annual reports), transcripts and audio recordings of ten hours of youth participatory action research sessions at CFPCC, creative products generated by youth during those sessions, and the researcher's journal from the pilot project. New data was collected through interviews with Kenston graduate/young adults from Chagrin Falls Park, community agents, and school agents. These interviews were audio recorded. Additional supporting data came from review of documents and reports from the community center and the school district, including recent CFPCC brochures, websites, and the Kenston Schools Quality Report.

**Interview Protocol.** Three separate interview protocols were developed, one for Kenston graduate/young adult, one for school institutional agents, and one for community institutional agents (included in Appendix A). These three protocols were used in semi-structured interviews and allowed for flexibility in the interview process to maximize

participant perspective and voice. I asked probing questions when appropriate to further mine relevant pieces of data. Interview questions were generated from the literature on racial-identity (Carter, 2006; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Sellers et al., 1998; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014), place-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983; Wyse et al., 1983), place-history (Lim, 2000), and institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010), as well as analysis of the pilot project (Kaufman, 2013). The interview protocol was designed to provide insight into the research phenomenon from multiple perspectives of former students and adults from the school and community. All of the interview questions were “clearly connected to the purpose of the research” and progressed “toward a fully in-depth exploration of the phenomenon” (Galletta, 2013, p. 45).

Questions included in the interview protocol for both school and community institutional agents directly related to the three research questions. Providing data for the research question, “What are the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in terms of how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institution and community spaces within the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park?” were questions 1-14 of the school agent interview protocol and questions 1-15 of the community center agent interview protocol. Providing data for the research question, “How does the ethnic and/or racial identity of institutional agents influence their relationship with youth from Chagrin Falls Park?” were questions 1 and 8-9 of the school institutional agent interview protocol, and questions 1 and 7-8 of the community center agent interview protocol. To provide data for the research question, “In what ways, if any, do institutional agents act as empowerment agents; viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency

of schools to reproduce inequality?” were questions 3-4 and 7-13 of the school agent interview protocol, and questions 3, 5-6, and 9-15 of the community center agent interview protocol.

The protocol used for Kenston graduate/young adults was used to triangulate the interview data from the school and community center agents. The young adults interviewed were not a part of the case of institutional agents; rather they provided a unique perspective into the perceptions and roles of institutional agents from the school and community center in their lives. These interviews also served as a source of information on the perception of the young adult participants of the history of Chagrin Falls Park. Question 1 created the opportunity for graduates to identify themselves racially and/or ethnically. Question 2 provided the context of the relationship the youth had to Chagrin Falls Park. Question 3 spent time establishing understanding about the history of Chagrin Falls Park. Questions 4-10 addressed the identities, relationships, and navigation of the youth between institution and community spaces. These interview questions were intended to provide data for the three research questions. Questions 11-14 focused on the roles of institutional agents and were intended to also provide data for the three research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2013) notes "a hallmark of a good qualitative case study is it presents an in-depth understanding of the case" (p. 98). The goal of my data analysis was to move towards a deep understanding of the institutional agents who work alongside the youth of Chagrin Falls Park. In case study methodology, the goals of analysis include moving towards a deep “description of the case” and exploring the “themes or issues that [are]

uncovered in studying the case” (p. 99). Yin (2003) values covering all topics related to the case, in order to manage the potential for researcher bias on the selection of topics covered. Based on these guidelines, my data analysis was thorough and recursive.

It is recommended in qualitative research that data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Merriam, 1998). The process of analyzing collected data allowed for the exploration of emergent themes, and was a “recursive” and “dynamic” process (p. 155). As interviews were complete, I transcribed the audio recordings from the interviews and then imported the text files into NVivo software. Additionally, data collected from the pilot project was imported into the NVivo file. All coding happened using this software platform. This pilot project data served as a source for triangulating findings from the current study.

Analysis was ongoing during data collection. Each interview was transcribed before the completion of the next interview. Additionally, after each interview, I reflected in either my research journal or through self-recorded audio. From the interview transcripts, I began a first cycle of *initial coding* to generate codes within the individual transcript. *Initial coding* or *open coding* was used as a way to break down the data into smaller pieces. This allowed for meaning to develop from these pieces. Within this *initial coding* process, I made intentional efforts to use *invivo coding* strategies to allow for participant voice to speak through the data (Saldana, 2013). *Invivo coding* generated codes based on the actual spoken words of the participant. All codes were maintained in NVivo, and grouped into appropriate folders based on category of participant (Kenston graduate/young adult, school agent, community center agent).

A second cycle of coding continued to refine the codes across multiple interview transcripts into categories. *Pattern coding* was used for the second coding cycle. This strategy allowed for the grouping of codes into themes or concepts in relation to the three research questions and other emergent patterns (Saldana, 2013). I explored relationships, similarities, and differences between groups of codes or categories and developed six broader themes that emerged from the data and related to the three research questions. Due to the nature of a case study, one analytical goal of this research was to provide a deep and holistic description of the case, institutional agents working with youth who live in Chagrin Falls Park and attend Kenston Local Schools (Merriam, 1998).

Throughout data collection and analysis, I kept a written log of analytic memos and stored them in NVivo (Saldana, 2013). Memo prompts included writing about the research questions, writing about emergent codes and their initial meaning, writing about emergent patterns, and reflections on the connections between codes (p. 44). The analytic memos provided a detailed trail of the analytical steps I made. These memos were recorded in NVivo and served to strengthen the trustworthiness of my data analysis. After each interview and throughout analysis, I took the time to reflect on my researcher bias, and the patterns and themes I began to see throughout the research. These memos were a critical part of the analysis process in NVivo.

### **Ethical Considerations**

At the core of the Transformative Framework is an emphasis on multiple realities, participants with expertise knowledge, and truth not being linked to privilege or power (Mertens, 2012). It was necessary within my research to critically consider how power

influences the participants as they shared their perceptions. To protect the participants, the youth of Chagrin Falls Park, and their voices, several factors were considered.

**Participant Privacy and Protection.** No other person beside myself has or had access to audio files and transcripts. Confidentiality was maintained as it related to all gathered data. All audio recordings are in a password-protected folder on my password-protected computer. Transcriptions of the session were coded and do not contain the names of the participants. Transcriptions were saved electronically on my password-protected computer. Pseudonyms of participants were used in the analysis of the data and in the writing up of research results. According to IRB requirements, actual copies of audio recordings and transcripts are being stored in a locked cabinet in Dr. Anne Galletta's office at Cleveland State University in Julka Hall room 370. Audio recordings and transcripts will always be protected and secured, but will not be destroyed for the potential of use which is not yet known as to how it will contribute to future research.

**Trustworthiness.** A transparent research process was used to ensure CFPCC and participants were informed about all aspects of the research (Creswell, 2013). I created a final summary of the research findings to be shared with the Executive Director at CFPCC. This summary presents CFPCC with information about how institutional agents from the school and community center are interacting with their students. One ethical consideration was connected to meaning making and truth creating. After interviews were transcribed, I offered the opportunity for participants if they so chose to read their transcripts and a summary of the analysis of their interview. All transcripts were emailed to the respective participant for their edits. This optional process allowed the participants an additional step to ensure their voice was present in the meaning-making process. This

served as a source of member checking to provide rigor to the data analysis and allowed the participants to determine if there was anything they felt they didn't want publicly shared.

Triangulation was used as a source of validity. This included the use of multiple groups of participants for interviews (student and adult perspectives), as well as the use of documents, field notes, and recordings from the pilot project to triangulate with the interviews. The use of multiple perceptions and data sources helped “clarify meaning” (Stake, 2000, p. 443). Additionally, I practiced reflexivity through the use of reflexive memoing in my research journal. Here is an example of a memo I included in my researcher journal after my interview with Will,

Will was the first male I interviewed, which could have explained some of the dynamic... I think the main reason was the reality that I am White and Will is Black, and there are experiences I will never understand, and a Black Male reality I can not even begin to put myself in. This was illustrated when Will shared the story about speaking different to me and in professional settings then he would to his brother or friends. I am a researcher. I am White. I am not allowed into certain spaces of his life.

Reflexive practices are “central to qualitative research” as they strengthen “the rigor of the design by attending to... thought processes, assumptions, decision making, and actions taken in order to locate and explore ethical and methodological dilemmas” (Galletta, 2013, p. 12).



## Summary

The past three chapters were intended to provide a detailed explanation of the methodology for this research in the context of a historically marginalized community in the Cleveland metropolitan area, Chagrin Falls Park. The purpose of the research was to understand the roles and perceptions of adults from the community center and school acting as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010) for Chagrin Falls Park youth traveling between the isolated spaces of their community and school. This instrumental case study explored answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in terms of how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institution and community spaces within the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park?
2. How does the ethnic and/or racial identity of institutional agents influence their relationship with youth from Chagrin Falls Park?
3. In what ways, if any, do institutional agents act as empowerment agents; viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency of schools to reproduce inequality?

Embedded within these research questions, was the desire to explore the institutional agents' understanding of how local history, place (Lim, 2000; Proshansky et al., 1983; Wyse et al., 2012), and race (Carter, 2006; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Sellers et al., 1998; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014) are interacting in the lives of the youth of Chagrin Falls Park.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

After implementing the methodology set forth in the previous chapter, six themes emerged across the 11 participant interviews. Interview data based on the interview protocol was collected, transcribed, and analyzed from recorded participant interviews. These participants included four Kenston graduates (two of which were also former CFPCC staff members), five educators from Kenston Local Schools, and two adults representing CFPCC. Participants' names, self-identified racial-identity, and participant category are represented in the table below.

Table I

*Participants*

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<u>Name</u>	<u>Racial-Identity</u>	<u>Participant Category</u>
Angela	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate
Jada	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate
Kendra	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate & CFPCC Agent
Will	Black/African-American	Kenston Graduate & CFPCC Agent
Heather	<i>Chose not to Racially-Identify</i>	School Agent
Jane	White	School Agent
Katherine	White	School Agent

Molly	White	School Agent
Tony	White	School Agent
Charles	White	CFPCC Agent
Robin	White	CFPCC Agent

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*Note.* All participant names are pseudonyms. Racial-identity was self-identified.

All six themes are labeled using an *in vivo* technique, meaning the direct words of the participants are used as the theme title. Participant voice was critical to this case study conducted in a transformative framework, therefore a large amount of participant quotes are used to elaborate on each theme. The six themes are as follows: 1. Here Comes the Park Kids - examines being labeled a ‘Park kid’ and the stigma associated with being from Chagrin Falls Park, 2. I Don’t Know How True the Story Is - explores the participants’ relationship with Chagrin Falls Park history, Black history, and how history is transmitted, 3. I Think About My Family - focus is on the sociological context of place-identity; specifically family, and how family connection is key to Chagrin Falls Park students, 4. Distance Between a Minority and Majority Population - looks at the difference in experience and access at Kenston Local Schools for students living outside of Chagrin Falls Park versus those living in Chagrin Falls Park, 5. Out of the Park - examines how student success and expectations for success are set for Chagrin Falls Park students, and 6. Everything I Possibly Can - evidence of the ways adults from Kenston Local School and CFPCC go beyond purely academic roles to support students from Chagrin Falls Park and in general.

## Here Comes the Park Kids

*“It was always crowded on the bus. And then um, when we pulled up its like - nobody ever said it, but it’s like - here comes the Black kids, **here comes the Park kids**. Two busses deep and we all just file off.” – Angela*

The Kenston Local School District serves students residing in both Auburn and Bainbridge Township. Chagrin Falls Park is a neighborhood that is a part of Bainbridge Township. Chagrin Falls Park is not its own township, city, or even village. It is a neighborhood made up of approximately 150 households embedded in a township of nearly 12,000 people. Will calls his community an “all Black neighborhood in the middle of the suburbs.” Will goes on to describe Chagrin Falls Park as a “very odd location to be honest... a suburban Black neighborhood with an urban feel.” Will, like Jada and Angela spent a portion of their childhood growing up in Chagrin Falls Park, 11, 4, and 18 years respectively. Jada attempts to describe her home, Chagrin Falls Park:

I really don’t know how to describe the Park except; this is where all the Black people live mostly. There are a couple who don’t live there, but mostly this is where all the Black people live. And I don’t know, it’s a development... where there is houses, apartments, and people live there.

Being from Chagrin Falls Park is not as basic as just living in a “Black neighborhood” or a “development where there is houses, apartments, and people live.”

Residing in Chagrin Falls Park and attending Kenston Local Schools is unique to living in any other development or neighborhood in Bainbridge Township, because being associated with Chagrin Falls Park brings a stigma, a label, or the designation of being a “Park kid.” A former Chagrin Falls Park Community Center (CFPCC) employee, Robin,

shares her perception of the experience students from Chagrin Falls Park have at Kenston Local Schools,

They're definitely stereotyped, because there is such a small percentage of them... And there was always a stigma attached to them, the kids from the Park. I'm putting that in quotes - "the Park kids" ... I think they gained a reputation from some of the school people and administrators and stuff for having difficulty dealing with families and parents, and there definitely was a cultural divide there too.

This stigma is not only voiced by employees from CFPCC, but also reinforced by a teacher at Kenston High School. Heather describes the stigma attached to students from Chagrin Falls Park in her statement that students embody an attitude of "I'm from the Park - don't mess with me, I'm from the Park," she goes on to say "you know, there is a stigma attached to it."

Adding an additional layer to the stigma associated with being a "Park kid" is the reality that even if a student has a low sense of connection to Chagrin Falls Park or a negative association with their community, she or he is still labeled a "Park kid" by teachers, classmates, and other Chagrin Falls Park outsiders. Kenston graduates and former Chagrin Falls Park residents articulate a struggle to identify with their community. Will says,

I would dread if I had to do it again, not based on academics, because again I never struggled, school is something I don't mind doing, but I just think the culture is terrible. The culture is downright terrible. To where sometimes it's better to just stick yourself. I went years without going out of the house, like,

especially around in the Park too. There were times when the Park wasn't necessarily the best place to be. So I went years of just keeping to myself and making my music and stuff like that.

Jada shares, "I don't want to say I don't identify with the Park because I do, but I don't."

Angela shares a similar struggle in her connection to Chagrin Falls Park, I don't even like to go back now. My parents still live there and I'll make sure I go down one street and go to their house. Like, I don't want to see anybody... There's just too much bad experience.

These former Chagrin Falls Park residents face varying levels of place-aversion to the community they call or called home. However, as students in the school setting at Kenston Local Schools, outsiders typically ascribe assumed characteristics that were closely tied to an individual's place of residence, regardless of that individual's community acceptance.

Being Black and being from Chagrin Falls Park are mistakenly interchangeable to many people at Kenston Local Schools. Kendra identifies as "Black, African-American" and attended Kenston Local Schools from elementary school through graduation. Kendra grew up in Bainbridge Township, but outside of the Chagrin Falls Park neighborhood. She reflects that people "make assumptions... because you live here or because you're Black you live there." Kendra recalls her first exposure to Chagrin Falls Park through an experience of her brother,

They would put him on the bus and then they would just drop him off at the community center [CFPCC]. He would go in there and call my mom - "I don't know where I am, they put me on this bus and I don't know." So that's like how

we found out about the Park, because so many people just assumed “Oh, you’re a Black kid, you’re going to the Park,” when nobody even looked at our address and saw we didn’t live in the Park.

Historically, the majority of Black students attending Kenston Local Schools resided in Chagrin Falls Park. In recent years, Geauga County has grown a small amount more diverse; however, this residential segregation is still fairly intact in Bainbridge Township. CFPCC volunteer, Charles notes, “Gauga County is a very very very segregated county.” Former CFPCC employee, Robin says, “We’re still in White Geauga County.” Kenston High School teacher Jane adds her perspective to the counties’ diversity. She explains, “It is just a small grouping... there are more and more African-American kids who are coming into the district and coming up, but it’s still really small.”

This residential segregation generates assumptions made by the majority White residents that attend Kenston Local Schools and hold little knowledge of Chagrin Falls Park. For students who identify as Black at Kenston Local Schools, it is not uncommon for them to experience tension in their racial-identity and/or place-identity tied to outsider perceptions. Kendra reflects on her experience being Black, living outside the Park, and attending Kenston,

Being Black in Bainbridge, that was hard because there aren’t very many Black people in Bainbridge who aren’t from the Park. A lot of people didn’t really understand that... especially in elementary school because kids just think, “Oh, you’re Black, you’re from the Park. Why don’t you hang out with those kids?” And you know, the kids that are from the Park, “We don’t know you, you’re not from where we’re from, you don’t know us... so, we’re not really open to being

your friend...” I was Black, but I wasn’t from the Park, but I was Black in Bainbridge. It was just one of those things.

This theme is important in laying a foundation for the next five themes. Regardless of whether a student positively identifies with Chagrin Falls Park, outsiders will likely label that student as a “Park kid.” The label of “Park kid” carries a negative connotation and negative assumptions that will be explored in future themes about socioeconomic status, parental involvement, the transmission of social capital, and educational ability.

Even though Chagrin Falls Park is a small residential neighborhood, it becomes an identifier for Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. The label of “Park kid” defines how youth are viewed across Geauga County, and especially in the Kenston Local Schools context. A great deal of this identification and association with what it means to be from Chagrin Falls Park is tied to the next theme, *I Don’t Know How True the Story Is*, which explores the perceptions and transmission of history. The history of Chagrin Falls Park is closely related to the assumptions people carry about Chagrin Falls Park residents.

### **I Don’t Know How True the Story Is**

*“And like I said, this is all things I’ve heard through word of mouth, so I **don’t know how true the story is** and how factual everything is, but that’s what I’ve heard.” – Kendra*

Explored in the prior theme is an exploration of the stigma and assumptions made about the Chagrin Falls Park community and its residents. Many of these assumptions are tied to various understandings of the historical forces that shaped the community. In Chapter 1, a history of Chagrin Falls Park is presented that draws from the work of two published books, historical documents, newspaper articles, a youth participatory action research pilot project, an interview with a local historian, and interviews with community



residents. Sorting through the history of Chagrin Falls Park is not exactly straightforward. Many variations of the founding and historical events of Chagrin Falls Park exist. A primary means of the transmission of Chagrin Falls Park history is through word of mouth, whereby stories about Chagrin Falls Park are communicated through generations of people living in the community and in the areas surrounding. Angela says, “The people I grew up with, they know that their family has been there forever, but as far as the actual history, I don’t know if they know. I definitely don’t think the people outside of the Park know.” The data reveal strong variation in the participants’ levels of understanding about local history.

Of the groups of participants in the case study, teachers seem to possess the least amount of knowledge of Chagrin Falls Park history. For new teachers entering Kenston Local Schools, their first professional exposure to Chagrin Falls Park is through a bus tour of Bainbridge Township. Tony recalls his experience, “You know what is funny? When I first got hired, I don’t know if they do this anymore, but they put us on a school bus and they gave us a realty agent.” Heather recalls her experience, “It was funny because, whenever a new teacher comes through the district, they take them on a bus tour and they take them through the Park.” Molly recounts, “On the very first day of new teacher orientation, we got on a bus and they toured us all around Bainbridge, and Auburn, and then into the Park. But I don’t remember much of it.” Even though the teachers reflect on this tour in a casual, even comical way, it is clear that Kenston Local Schools has a purpose for exposing teachers to the neighborhoods from where their students live, an emphasis possibly on the importance of place or socioeconomic status to a student’s identity and performance at school.

Whatever the reasoning behind this tour of Bainbridge Township, including Chagrin Falls Park, the new teacher tour fails to present a comprehensive or even consistent explanation of the history of Chagrin Falls Park. When the teachers interviewed were asked about their knowledge of the history of Chagrin Falls Park, they had different answers, some consistent with the history presented in Chapter 1 and others not. Tony recalls, “They took us to the Park and they gave us a little bit of the history. I might be incorrect here, but I want to say it started as... a servant’s community.” Jane shares, “I know that it was... a community that was built for the Chagrin Falls community... and through the years, I heard that... the line was drawn - the county line, and so there was the aspect of the have-nots and the haves.” Molly perceives, “I do know that at one point it was a part of Chagrin Falls, and it was annexed out and given to Bainbridge. That is about the extent of it.” Heather expresses growth in her knowledge of the history of Chagrin Falls Park,

I actually have found out quite a bit about the corporation, and bringing all the people up from the South, and the row houses and everything. I just learned that in like the last two years... And how many times it’s gone through legislations and how many times its been fought.

When Heather refers to “the corporation,” she is speaking about the Henry Iron Foundry and their recruitment of workers to the Chagrin Falls Park area.

As a result of personal research, Charles, a long-time CFPCC volunteer, displays the deepest understanding of the history of Chagrin Falls Park. He shares that Chagrin Falls Park is “the oldest residential community in Bainbridge.” He discusses the presence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the nearby Village of Chagrin Falls, and notes the largest

KKK group was from the Chagrin Falls area, where they regularly marched in parades and burned crosses. Charles notes, “If you’re an African-American, my guess is that that was pretty intimidating.” The KKK was not the only obvious form of racism Charles discussed. His research has revealed, “the Kenston School District actively fought integration and wanted no part of Chagrin Falls Park.” Charles shares,

When the decision came down, Brown versus Board of Education - [Kenston Local Schools] fought it. They fought it. And it took an individual from Chagrin Falls Park filing a federal lawsuit, who received legal aid from an organization... [and] took them to court. And it never reached actual federal court, and it settled out of court. Integration started gradually. The teachers, it’s in board minutes, teachers or teacher representatives came right out in public and said, “We don’t want these kids. We don’t want them...” It was just atrocious. And you have to understand that in Chagrin Falls Park, some of those students, at that time are now parents, well grandparents to some of the kids that are going there.

Charles deliberately points out the connection between the experiences of older generations to the experience of students today. In his eyes, the history of Chagrin Falls Park is relevant to the present, and specifically the relationship between Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park residents.

For those who are considered a community insider, current or former residents of Chagrin Falls Park, their understanding of history has primarily come from first hand experiences and word of mouth stories. Robin, former CFPCC employee, notes Chagrin Falls Park had,

Their own school, they had a fire department... they used to have several churches, bars, stores - they had really a self-contained community... the old Center was a mink farm... and I was in there before the new one was built.

Angela says, "My dad always told me they had their own fire department and school."

Jada reflects on the historical separation between Chagrin Falls Park and the surrounding communities,

The horseshoe... from what I've been taught, is that the Park... it was like annexed from Chagrin Falls and that is why Kenston is the school district for Chagrin Falls, even though Chagrin Falls is actually closer. So that part is now considered like Bainbridge Township, but in reality it is really Chagrin Falls.

Will shares,

I know little bits and pieces that my mom told me, she had some book or something that had the history of Chagrin Falls Park and my brother read it. I never got a chance to read it, but pretty much from what I know or understood, this area was almost supposed to be like a temporary living situation, where the train would come through and take us to Cleveland to work, and then kind of like shuffle us back. Then somehow, from what I've been told by my mom, like we never left. I think at some point they were probably planning to try and push us out, it just never happened, so we ended up in this all Black neighborhood in the middle of the suburbs.

Will's recollection of history is an example of how history can be transmitted through generations in the family. This retelling of the transmission of local history happening through family is common throughout the data.

**History Curriculum at Kenston.** The local history of Chagrin Falls Park is embedded in the larger narrative of Black history in the United States of America. Graduates of Kenston High School reflect on their sometimes-limited experience learning history in high school. This stands in contrast to participants' post-secondary education, in which they received an expanded historical narrative. Reflecting on history curriculum at Kenston High School, Jada says,

[Kenston teaches] you the basics because they have to. They don't really go in depth, because honestly a room full of White students aren't going to be like interested in that. It makes you not really want to learn about it when you are the only Black kid in the class, and everybody looks to you like you are a history book.

Jada perceives that White students are not interested in Black history. However, Black history is American history, and should be included in the history curriculum with the same consistency as all important historical events. In the eyes of Jada, what she learned in history class wasn't enough, "You learn more about like the Tea Party then you do about your own history. And like Black history is American history."

Before attending college, Kendra's exposure to Black history came primarily from her father. She says, "My dad taught me a lot about my history growing up... If I didn't have him to teach me that and to explain to me you know how important knowing my history was, I wouldn't have learned that at Kenston." After the transition to college, students had a greater opportunity to take Pan-African history and/or Black experience courses. Both Angela and Jada reflect on how important these courses were to their identity. Angela says, "After I took my Black Experience classes... I felt it was easier to

identify myself, and I didn't feel weird anymore." Angela describes these courses saying, they "took a deeper look into everything and actually went as far back as Africa and let you know that you come from kings and queen." Jada shares, "My eyes opened. I took all of the ones [the university] had to offer just because I wanted to keep learning more and more and more about who I am as a person in this country." Kendra, Angela, and Jada reflect positively on the importance of knowing Black history to their personal identities.

There is no data that supports Kenston intentionally limiting the scope of Black history being taught in the school district. In fact, students did recall an experience in high school, where the school district offered a specific Black history and women's history elective course. Kendra recounts that Kenston "incorporated a... Black history and women's studies kind of class, and it was only like half a semester." There were points of frustration, however, for Kendra with the scope of this course. She says,

The only thing looking back that kind of upset me is that the teacher we had... I mean she was a really sweet woman, so I mean we all loved her. But now after studying Pan-African studies... she didn't know very much. She knew pretty much nothing.

Kendra says Kenston "tried, but I don't think it was a success." Kendra shares a specific example of the limitation to the teacher's knowledge,

I will never forget... we had to do a project on one women and one African-American, and somebody did a project on Garrett Morgan. They gave their whole presentation, and said all of the things that he invented. And the teacher's like, "Oh my God, he did all of that?" And it was one of those things that was like - How are you our teacher if you don't know...this very important person in

history, not just Black history? That baffled me. At the time, we just thought it was funny. But after going to college, and like really studying Pan-African studies, it kind of made me mad. Like, oh my gosh, why would they do that? It was kind of a kick in the face. It was an insult at least for me now looking back. Kenston also permitted a group of students in an extracurricular club to put on a Black history program for the rest of their classmates. Angela shares, “I can’t remember if we were in the middle school or the old high school, but they let us put on like a full Black history program.” Kendra was also a part of it, “In high school, we put on a Black history program... I think I was in the 8th grade.” This program was initiated by students. Kendra notes, “We raised our money and we got permission. We used the community center to practice.” CFPCC allowed youth to use the space for rehearsals, and also supported the planning of the program. The program was a success in the eyes of both Angela and Kendra. From Angela’s perspective, the program was “fun, because I know that was like the first time that had ever happened, and they actually let us do something for once you know.” Kendra reflects,

I think a lot of people were really surprised and pleased with the program that we put on. Even a lot of our, you know, White classmates... I just remember somehow they did end up making like pretty much everybody go to this program in high school and a lot of people were complaining, “Oh my gosh, why do I have to go this, why do we have to sit through this,” but once they left the program, we got so many compliments, and a lot of people were so pleased with it. And that made me feel good, because I felt I was able to help educate some of my classmates who really don’t know.

This assembly is evidence of both CFPCC and Kenston Local Schools supporting students' desire to educate their peers on Black history. The offering of the Black history and women's studies elective, while not executed properly in the eyes of Kendra, was at its minimum an attempt of the school district to offer curriculum relevant to a diverse group of students. This could support the notion that both Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC acknowledge the importance of an individual knowing and connecting to their history.

**Importance of History.** Throughout the data, participants share stories that support the importance of history to personal identity. Kendra recalls an experience she had interacting with Chagrin Falls Park youth at CFPCC,

I just remember somebody told me... "Miss Kendra, that's in the past." I think I might have been talking about slavery, and they're like, "that's in the past."

And...it's not. It did happen in the past, but it's not in the past, and you should understand the importance of it. I think just really teaching kids the importance of their history, because I think that helps them to persevere when they know...

people have had this sort of struggle and they've gotten this far in life.

Agreeing with Kendra, are Kenston teachers who share their perspective on the importance of students knowing local history. Heather notes Chagrin Falls Park "stands for something bigger" than just a community. Tony shares "there is a lot of pride" involved in being from Chagrin Falls Park. Jane suggests residents of Chagrin Falls Park "could make something annual to celebrate their history in the Park itself, just to celebrate themselves and where they are." Even though teachers don't demonstrate deep



knowledge of the history of Chagrin Falls Park, they do recognize the importance of the community's history.

Kendra calls on people within and outside of the community to learn the history of Chagrin Falls Park. She calls the community a "hidden gem" due to its rich history, it is a place "you can really learn something from." The knowledge and understanding of history has the potential to shape an individual's present and future. This is evident in Kendra's life as she progressed from high school to college, and now to career,

It's made me realize... all of the history I've been missing... I feel like that's another reason I chose to go back to school and work on a Master's degree... because we have a history to learn and somebody needs to teach it... I don't necessarily think it is our education system that is going to teach it, so that's probably my big reason for not becoming like a teacher. Not necessarily to just teach it, but also to you know implement policies, or at least work on changing the policies that we have within our government. So, I think as a Black woman... a lot of people think of us as the ones who should be quiet... Because we're so much further than we were 50 years ago, but we have so much further to go. And as a Black woman, I just feel as though it's my duty to speak up and to work on those sorts of issues.

Kendra is connected to her history, and her historical identity is driving her educational and career pursuits. The perspective Kendra has demonstrates the importance of educating individuals on their historical backgrounds.

The history of Chagrin Falls Park is not completely understood, as made evident by the varying degrees of stories and knowledge the participants in this study have.

However, participants seem to agree on the importance of history, whether to personal identity, to develop community pride, or to better understand the present. A deeper understanding of both Chagrin Falls Park history and Black history could be a benefit to Chagrin Falls Park students and the adults who work with Chagrin Falls Park students. Through exploring the role of history in Chagrin Falls Park, it is clear that family plays a critical role in the perception and transmission of local history. The role of family is a common thread throughout the data, and is explored in the next theme.

### **I Think About My Family**

*“When I think about my family, I don’t really think about the Park. **I think about my family.** And the Park is just somewhere they live.” – Jada*

Reoccurring throughout the interview data is the importance of family to the young adult participants. None of the participants currently live with their family, however all of them speak of the influence family has on their lives. Will says, “I think what helps identify me is my family,” and later “my brother is the biggest part to why I am who I am today.” Jada goes into detail about the two sides of her family and how both sides have contributed to varying parts of her identity. She notes, “My dad’s side of the family, they are better off. I found out that every female on my grandma’s side has been to college and graduated.” She continues, “Education is very serious on that side of the family.” Jada’s maternal side of the family brings a different set of values to her life. She notes, “They are really just close knit.” Through them she’s been exposed to “how important food stamps can be to help someone get along until they get on their feet.” Beyond Jada’s connection to school or community, the two sides of her family have given her “an appreciation,” and an understanding of life, which has shaped her identity.

One teacher in particular at Kenston recognizes the connection Chagrin Falls Park youth have to their families. Jane perceives family connection being the true connection to the Chagrin Falls Park community for youth. Jane says, “I think it’s very much family connection... I think that’s the one thing... that is their one and only connection, their family.” Jane goes on to explain that from her perspective, Chagrin Falls Park youth are also connected to Kenston Local Schools through their familial relationships. She explains, “I really think that is the connection to Kenston... it goes back to family, it is that community social aspect.” Family connections are also a part of the relationship Jane has to Chagrin Falls Park students. She says, “I’ve taught brothers and sisters or cousins... it’s a generational thing... I think it’s that connection.” Kenston teachers seem to recognize the connection Chagrin Falls Park youth have to their family. Students also recognize this connection. Kendra reflects saying, “Bainbridge is definitely one of those places where people stay and don’t leave, whether it is the Park or Bainbridge or even Chagrin.” Kendra recalls, “teachers who said, ‘oh, I had your uncle or your mom or your dad.’” There is a sense of connection that may exist for an individual rooted in a history of family members attending Kenston Local Schools.

**Transmission of Capital.** The connection Chagrin Falls Park youth have to their family allows for the transmission of knowledge and cultural capital. Angela shares how her parents shaped her ability to make decisions. She says,

My parents were a really strong influence. Them being strict actually helped me a lot and I didn’t realize that until I got older of course. But it helped me a lot, just like making decisions and going to school, and finishing, and wanting to go back.

Will discusses the ways in which his mother helped him understand race and the experience of being Black in a predominantly White school. Will shares, “my mom gave me the speech like the first day of second grade...she said to let her know if anyone was treating me unfairly.” The conversation Will is referring to is a conversation about his racial-identity, and the perception people may have of him. Will’s mother spoke critically about racial-identity to Will; an example of the transmission of a valuable form of capital. Will explains being able to talk to his mom about certain experiences at school that he perceived to be racially motivated,

When I was younger, I definitely talked to my mom about it, different situations... I was lucky I was able to say that I didn’t have any racial experiences with my teachers per say. She was able to talk and talk to me, and make sure I knew that this wasn’t racial - it was this.

Will’s mother continues to provide support to Will by helping him complete scholarship applications and file for financial aid. He says, “My mom helped me a ton... my older step-sister went to college, so she knew a lot... she was helping me through it.” Will’s mother was an important part of Will’s success. Similar to Will’s experience, is the way Kendra speaks about her father, and the knowledge he passed on to her. She shares this story,

I will never forget... I was probably in Middle School...I used to get it into a lot of trouble... Being the Black kid in Bainbridge, I would get called names [by students within and outside Chagrin Falls Park]. I would always defend myself, and it was usually physically.... I think that’s why my father decided to start teaching me more about my history, and why I didn’t want to end up... a

statistic... First he told me about his uncle who was in the 60's... He lived in Birmingham... He would sit at counters and all that stuff. And he brought out this newspaper article with his uncle's name in it, and everything. And that was like, oh my gosh wow, I actually feel this connection with... the little bit of that history that we talk about in school. And then, also, one story that I had never heard of up until my dad told me... was the story of Emmett Till. And that story for some reason just put a fire in me.

Kendra did not grow up in Chagrin Falls Park, but her example is similar to the one Will shares above. These examples demonstrate the exchange of capital that can happen within families, the passing on of historical knowledge, decision-making skills, college support, and understanding of racial-identity.

**The Family and Academic Support.** Young adult participants share the value and capital family added to their life. However, not all teachers see the role of family in such a supportive way. Teachers at Kenston hold varying perceptions of how important family support is to the educational success of students. Tony notes the role of home life, I think home life is really important too. It has to be expected. If you come home and you're parents truly don't care, and they haven't cared your whole life... It's really hard for me. I could juggle flaming tennis balls, and the kid's not going to care. And that's something that politicians just don't pay attention to at all. They want to always blame it on me. I don't want to sound arrogant here. I'm very prepared. I'm very good at what I do. I try very hard to be. I put a lot of time into it.

In similar spirit, Tony continues,

I think everybody in our building, especially in our building, I'm assuming the whole district - but I think everybody is very dedicated, very serious, very good at what we do. But that only goes so far. You know. If you have a kid who expects it, or a parent that expects it, you get much different results, you know. So I think it's just kind of the philosophy on education at home.

Katherine notes, "I think that teachers as a whole, they do give a lot of time and it gets frustrating for them because parents aren't helping back. And it's like with any child, sometimes the parents don't help." Both Katherine and Tony put great weight on the importance of educational support existing in the home environment. As teachers, they are critical of parent(s) who they perceive as not supporting their child's pursuit of education. CFPCC volunteer, Charles seems to agree to some extent,

Parents more than anything else do a disservice to their kids by not pushing education, or only giving lip service to it, and not really going through with the actions to make sure that is a priority.... As a former teacher, I could tell you my experience. I coached football... Parents are much more apt to get involved about a sport, than about their child's education... it is upside down.

The sections of data above relate to perspectives shared about parental support (or lack of) for all students at Kenston Local Schools, not exclusively the perspectives held about parents of students residing in Chagrin Falls Park. These views act as a foundation for the next paragraphs, exploring the specific assumptions made about home environments for students from Chagrin Falls Park.

Adult participants from Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center hold varying views of the importance of home-life and families,

exclusive to residents of Chagrin Falls Park. Kenston teachers hold both positive and negative perceptions of Chagrin Falls Park families. Molly says, “I also have students, who have really supportive families from the Park,” and Heather says, “the parents... don’t necessarily have negative attitudes, you know, I have a lot of moms and dads who come in and they’re really involved.” Katherine shares a positive example of a mother’s influence from Chagrin Falls Park,

I had a mom, I had two boys from the Park, their mother worked at the hospital. She ran a tight ship. She was on those boys. She would work all night while they were sleeping. She would get home, get them up, and see them off, then see them when they came home. There are parents like that. She made sure she knew what her boys were doing.

On the other hand, adults from the school also share the perspective that families can negatively impact or hinder a student’s educational success. After sharing an example of what Katherine perceives to be a supportive mother, she goes on to share the opposite about a student’s mother from Chagrin Falls Park. Katherine says,

I reached out to a mother... at the very beginning of the year. I had her daughter last year, so I knew this. And then she came in, and I said something to the class about their summer read, *The Third Eye*. And she said, “*The Third Eye*, I didn’t read - no one told me I had to read.” I had her go up to the library and get the book. I emailed her mother. I got nothing back... She didn’t have the book. She went to the library though here at the school and she got the book. She hasn’t read it. And I feel like, I told you this, you know this. And every day I ask her about it, she’s like, “No, I didn’t read it.” I gave her the Cliff Notes today. The test is

tomorrow. I'm like, my hands are tied - what am I going to do?...The mother came in last year for a 504 meeting, so I thought okay good, she'll get it at home.

But, once again I don't know what goes on at home.

Katherine is frustrated by the actions of a student, and connects the student's behavior to what is happening in the student's home. Both teachers and community center volunteers share the frustration they have with the lack of educational support or positive educational messages Chagrin Falls Park students receive at home. CFPCC volunteer, Charles recalls an experience with a student he was tutoring,

I was tutoring a student and she was very inconsistent in attending... she wanted to learn. She had aspirations of finishing high school, and she would have been the first in her family to finish high school and go to college. She saw education as a way out, and she told me that. Yet she was very inconsistent in terms of getting help and this went on for months... I would come down to [CFPCC] and I would wait for her. When she came, it was a very productive type of situation. A lot of times, maybe a third, she just wouldn't show up. And so I talked to staff and I brought this to their attention because I was getting kind of frustrated... I was told... When this young lady was not there, she was at home watching her sisters and brothers, and even if mom was home, she was there watching her sisters and brothers... My background was, hey - this is kind of backwards, this is upside down. But I was told from the workers, that that is part of the culture of... this particular family.

Charles is frustrated about the student's inconsistencies in attendance. He questions his expectations saying, "I don't know if my expectations were... because I was a European



American.” Charles approaches the staff of CFPCC to help him understand his potential cultural gap in understanding. He continues, “I ran into that with at least two students from two different families. Now if it’s a cultural thing... there’s a rub there.” Rather than jump to quick conclusions about the reasons for this student’s attendance problems, he looks at this situation through a cultural lens.

Inclusion of this theme is not with the intent to answer what should or should not be happening in terms of family support for Chagrin Falls Park students. The data does not reveal best practices for home educational support. Rather, I explore here the ways in which Chagrin Falls Park families support students through the transmission of various forms of knowledge and capital. Family is very important to the participants (Kenston graduates) in this study. All four participants share stories of the value of their family to their individual identity. At some level, these stories of family support contrast with the perception of some agents that families in Chagrin Falls Park are not supporting education. Agents put a great deal of weight on the importance of family support for student success. It was the perception of some of the teacher participants in this study that home-life will determine the success or failure of a student. The next theme, *Distance Between a Minority and Majority Population*, will explore a great deal of other factors beyond family that impact the experience of Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools.

### **Distance Between a Minority and Majority Population**

*“It could be because of, not necessarily because of the distance, there’s actually the same distance between an Auburn kid and... a Bainbridge Park kid - Chagrin Falls Park. So it’s not about distance, but I think it’s a **distance between a minority and majority population**. Or a sense of inclusion that brings a sense of distance between the two.” – Jane*

For Chagrin Falls Park students attending Kenston, the most obvious difference between them and most other students at school is race. Kendra, Jada, Will, and Angela all identify as Black/African-American. The majority of students attending Kenston are White. Will says, “Kenston to me is just your average predominantly White school... I think a lot of those kids are completely oblivious to races outside of anything White.” Will describes his typical high school course, many of which were Honors level courses, saying, “I feel like there was some more minorities throughout some other classes, but it was very very low. It was either me or just like one or two other people.” Participants frequently speak about Kenston saying that it is majority White.

All participant interviews explored perceptions about racial identity and experiences of Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. These perceptions were based on the lived experiences of Kenston graduate participants, and the observations of adults from CFPCC and Kenston of Chagrin Falls Park students’ experiences. The data reveal that participants acknowledge race and racial-identity are factors in the everyday school experience for Chagrin Falls Park students. Charles shares his perception of the experience of Chagrin Falls Park youth,

Young people in Chagrin Falls Park start with so many strikes against them... from the very beginning, through no fault of their own. The mere fact that they are a minority population in a predominately European-American school district... Even if it isn’t spoken, my impression is that they sense they are treated differently... It’s not a good situation.

There were two instances in which the data revealed obvious racial discrimination or racial ignorance from the school and/or a school staff member. Both of these instances

were shared as experiences that had happened in the past. The first instance had to do with a former staff member. Heather shares, “the one person we had who was supposed to be our school social worker was openly racist... she’s no longer in the building thankfully.” The second is a situation shared by Tony,

When I was first there, they had the Kenston - I can’t remember what the patch was, but it was triple K. It was like Kenston [K]razy whatever - I can’t remember what it was. And you look at it, and are like are you serious? And somebody finally said, oh my God, this could be offensive, we’ve got to get rid of it. But [KKK] wasn’t like right in a row, it was spread out over [the patch]... I don’t think anybody was malicious about it when it was done. But it was one of those - okay we caught it, we got to get rid of [KKK] and change it.

Moving beyond these two situations of obvious racial discrimination, the data tell a story where race and racial-identity are significant parts of the experience of Chagrin Falls Park youth in school. A participant’s racial-identity varies based on the individual. However, in Jane’s words, “there is still that Blackness that they feel.” Jane recognizes that being Black at Kenston absolutely impacts the experience of a Chagrin Falls Park student.

Jane’s observation of students and their “Blackness” is echoed when Jada talks about her experience in school. Jada describes the general experience of Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston and an experience specific to her life,

They have a totally different experience because they have to live the Black experience every day and that’s...totally different... completely... After a while I

tried to ignore it, when I was in high school, but some days you're just the only Black kid in class, and sometimes it is hard to ignore it.

Both Jane (a teacher) and Jada (a former student) speak to the impact racial-identity has on an individual. As a teacher, Heather would agree with both Jane and Jada. In Heather's opinion, racial-identity is a component of a student's identity whether they hide from it or embrace their racial group. She says, "I think it is important. I think it is something that identifies them. I see, certainly some kids hide from it, and don't see themselves and try to blend in so hard that it makes them stick out." On the other hand, she recognizes "some kids wear it as battle armor and they're like, 'I'm Black, and everything is different for me... I'm wearing this on my sleeve and stamped across my forehead.'" Jane and Heather stress the importance in acknowledging a student's racial-identity. However, teachers' perceptions vary. Tony seems to disagree with putting emphasis on racial and/or ethnic identity. He shares his perspective,

I think sometimes we focus way too much on White, Black, Asian, Latino... This is going to sound maybe strange, but I don't give preferential treatment to anybody for anything because on that level... there is no point. We're all here to do, what we're all here for. Everybody is the same. And I think to truly have equality... or to truly have people be like comfortable all the way around regardless of ethnicity or gender or whatever, should have it the same way. And that is kind of my mindset I guess.

Each agent perceives racial identity to have varying levels of impact on a student's experience at Kenston Local Schools. However, the data overwhelmingly support the perception that racial-identity matters and race affects school experience.

As a teacher, Heather is critical of Kenston High School. She notes, “all cultural awareness is lacking” and there isn’t “a whole lot of support for the African-American community at Kenston...it’s a shame.” Additionally, she critiques Kenston for “the fact that [they] don’t not have any faculty... that are ethnic.” At Kenston High School there are no teachers or administrators who are Black/African-American. There is evidence in the data of school staff members showing bias towards Chagrin Falls Park students. Will shares two examples that he experienced firsthand. The first has to do with his basketball coach thinking he was struggling academically, when in actuality Will was excelling academically. Will shares,

I think [my coach] was able to learn a lot from me about the Park. He assumed... kids in the Park weren’t doing very well... they weren’t motivated. And I was one of the first students he ran into, who was actually on top of his stuff, and he was surprised and had no idea what to do... I can remember... the first report cards that were coming out for middle school, and he came to me... and was like, “Hey, if you need any help before the semester is over, let me know. I’m more than willing to help you.” And I was like, “I don’t know what you mean, what do you mean?” “Like if you need any help in school, please let me know and we’ll get you help.” “Why would I need help though?” And he was just like super confused. “Like, I have no idea what you’re talking about.” “Do you have your progress report?” And I was like, “yeah” and showed it to him, and the look on his face was like... he had no idea what do to. He was like, “never-mind” and just like left it at that. And was like, “it’s good that you do good in school” ... ever since then, he’s had so much respect for me.

When it came time to apply to college, Will was applying to academically competitive universities and seeking out academic scholarships. Traditionally the school guidance counselor plays a key role in providing access and necessary social capital (i.e., recommendation letters, interview strategies, essay preparation) to gain acceptance into college. The second experience Will shares involves his mother's perception of the Kenston guidance counselor. Will says,

For a while my mom was super worried that like this women was not going to be doing her job. So my mom [has] been nannying for years and years and years for a women named Patricia; a White woman. She's raised like all three of her kids since they were babies... She was going to have Patricia come talk to the school on my behalf, because she figured that if she as a Black women came in, she wouldn't be taken seriously. So she was going to have Patricia come in and say, "make sure we get him into a nice school."

These two experiences may not reveal explicit racism on the part of school agents, but they highlight underlying racial bias towards Black students and/or students residing in Chagrin Falls Park. From a teacher's perspective, Heather shares an observation about an administrator's interaction with athletes. She says,

We have an Assistant Principal that is so "rah-rah" sports that he just lets those kids get away with murder. But it's the African-American kids, it's not the White athletes... and I don't know why, maybe it's just because he feels like they need a little - and I get that, you know, but - I don't know.

This is evidence of an underlying racial bias a teacher or administrator may have that perceives students who are Black to need additional academic support. In turn the White

students experience privilege because these assumptions are not made about their academic levels based on their race.

The lack of diversity in Kenston school staff contrasts sharply with the racial make-up of students from Chagrin Falls Park. All participant agents in this study from Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC are White, and all participant Kenston graduates are Black. Tony shares two different experiences where race has played a part in his relationships with students of a different race. In the first experience, Tony defends his background and displays a sense of frustration in a student pointing out their racial difference. Tony shares,

I had a girl last year who was very very adamant, very vocal... confrontational even with me. And I was like, "You need to calm down, lets relax a minute." And she was like, "You don't understand, how could you?" And she kind of did throw the race card at me at one point. She was like, "You don't understand what it is like blah blah blah," talking about the relationship with the police. But the thing that she doesn't understand, or didn't understand, or didn't know, is a lot of my friends from high school, guys I grew up with, all went to prison... they're rough guys, that is the best way I can put it. So when we were younger, there was a decent amount of police activity and yes... I've seen police who are very professional and handle themselves properly, and I've also seen where we were doing absolutely nothing wrong and next thing I know, I'm getting cuffed with my buddies and we were just in the McDonald's drive thru... She was like telling me I wouldn't understand, but I have, I've seen it.

Tony cannot fully understand the experience of being Black at Kenston, or being from Chagrin Falls Park, but there is a sense that he wants his students to know that he understands and can relate to them. In a second experience, Tony reflects on a meeting he had with a student's guardian. Tony shares,

I've been in a meeting before where... somebody's Aunt, was like "You're doing this because he is Black." ...I get angry with that to a certain extent... Because no, it is not, it has nothing to do with that. It has to do with the fact that we really want him to perform a little bit, or to help himself and do some things differently, and the kid can, the kids can, and I sometimes feel like maybe you are holding him back from doing it.

The situations that Tony shared are experiences that only relate to minority students. Students who share the same racial make-up as their teachers, are not put into situations where a teacher is discussing whether or not race is impacting their decisions, motivation, or responses. There is evidence that teachers may be making automatic assumptions about what it means to be a White student at Kenston versus what it means to be a Black student at Kenston. The fact that Chagrin Falls Park students *always* are racially different than their teacher is a significant difference in experience for Chagrin Falls Park students compared to their White peers.

Moving beyond the significant racial difference between Chagrin Falls Park students and many of their peers, are some other factors that are related to the difference in experience for Chagrin Falls Park students. Addressed in the following sections are discussions that emerged from the interview data about self-esteem, socioeconomic status, peer groups, academics, and access to transportation. These factors are separate,



but related, as they work together to shape a disadvantaged experience for Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools.

**Self-Esteem.** Kenston teachers, Molly, Jane, and Tony all perceive minority students and/or Chagrin Falls Park students to possess lower self-esteem than their White peers. Jane sees Chagrin Falls Park students as having “a little lower self-esteem.” In explaining why she thinks there may be disparity in academic performance for Chagrin Falls Park students, Jane says, “I will speak for my staff, we don’t track because of race, we push every student period and work with them... but I know, self-esteem, I think is what it is.” Jane suggests this may be a result of Chagrin Falls Park students having to work a part-time job, or comparing themselves to others. Jane perceives that for a student “who needs to go to work at McDonalds or work elsewhere... there’s a self-esteem issue obviously...a ‘how well am I going to do, in comparison to even my group versus the other kids in the room.’”

Molly shares a similar observation, “I think that...students that come from the Park have their extra insecurities.” Molly doesn’t go on to explain the reasons she believes students have “extra insecurities.” Tony also acknowledges a perceived difference in self-esteem or self-confidence for Chagrin Falls Park students. Tony observes a possible difference in minority students being able to share during classroom discussions. He shares, “Occasionally, I’ll notice the minority students are a little bit more quiet depending on what it is and depending on who they are.” From the data, it is not obvious why this difference exists, but it is important to note that three Kenston teachers observe a difference in self-esteem. Jane suggests a driving source of low self-

esteem may be related to students having to work, or comparing themselves to others. This justification is closely related to differences in socioeconomic status.

**Socioeconomic Status.** Another source of separation for Chagrin Falls Park students is the difference in socioeconomic status for students living in Chagrin Falls Park compared to many students throughout the rest of Bainbridge. Katherine observes students at the middle school level,

When I look at [Chagrin Falls Park students], they mix well together. They don't seem like "Oh, I'm from the Park and you're from here," they seem to blend in. But then again, a student may say, "I don't have what [she or he] has," so they may look down on themselves.

Not all students living in Chagrin Falls Park are poor. Jane notes, "Some kids from the Park aren't necessarily in the lowest socioeconomic brackets." Also, there are students living in poverty in other parts of Bainbridge Township. There are pockets of poverty and pockets of extreme wealth, which exist across the entire Kenston School District. Tony explains,

The one thing that maybe I can tell, is just the socioeconomic piece of it, because it is such a bizarre place with that. I mean, I've had students who have had basketball courts built inside their house, and then I have another kid who is on food stamps, and then I have another kid who is a farmer. So you got like this really weird dichotomy of people coming together.

Katherine observes something similar,

Bainbridge does have a pocket of people who are very wealthy. And you have the kids that come in who have everything. They have the latest gadgets; they

have the latest cell phones that come out... Then you have Chagrin Falls Park, where they are still trying to keep up, and they just don't have it. Some of the students don't even come with the right school supplies.

Even if students from Chagrin Falls Park are not living in poverty, they are perceived to be poor because of the neighborhood they call home. Both race and socioeconomic status differentiate Chagrin Falls Park students from their peers at Kenston Local Schools.

Molly says, "I know there are students there that are handed kind of a lot, and I know that is not the typical scenario of a student that comes from the Park."

Molly reflects on how socioeconomic status may not only isolate students from their peers, but could create a disadvantage in access to technology. She shares her perception,

A lot of what we do right now is really driven through the Google Drive... I'm teaching all of my courses this year through the Google classroom. I don't assign much homework on it at home, but in the classroom we're working on the computer... So [not] having that access to a device at home to work on things, um I could see that as being a disadvantage as well. And that has come up in the past. A student in summer school over the summer, he didn't have a computer at home and we were doing some things that I wanted him to do at home on the computer. So, he did go to the library and made some extra efforts.

In addition to access to technology, Charles recognizes the ways in which low socioeconomic status can interfere with access to supplemental tutoring and academic support. He shares this example,

I was [tutoring] a group of students, and they were all struggling. They were trying to go on to higher levels of math, and they were all struggling, and they were all trying to help one another, but what they really needed was somebody to tutor them who... had expertise in [mathematics]. I approached [Kenston Local Schools]. I approached the guidance department in particular.... to arrange for either someone with a math background from the staff to either meet with the kids after school, and [CFPCC] could arrange the transportation back, or I said it would be much better if we could have actually someone come to [CFPCC]. [The guidance department replied], “Well, I don’t know, you’d have to approach the staff,” and I did. They all had a uniform answer, and the uniform answer was, “Sure, [the school can] help, but [the teacher will] want 38 dollars per hour per student.” So that really was a no... Nobody was willing to do it out of the kindness or responsibility... When the school day ended... everything that was done for these students, and my guess is any student - [Kenston staff] expected compensation. Well, if [a student is] coming from a socioeconomic background where 38 dollars [equals] 6 or 7 meals, they don’t have the resources for that, and either does the community center.

What Charles recognizes in this experience is that even though Kenston offers tutoring to students, it is not necessarily affordable to all students. This creates advantages for students who are able to afford tutoring, and disadvantages for those who are not. At an institutional level, Charles recognizes that this practice may be offered to benefit students, but is not benefiting low-income students, many of who live in Chagrin Falls Park.

**Peers.** Possibly as a result of these differences in race and socioeconomic status, Kenston teachers observe that Chagrin Falls Park students tend to stick together in social situations at school. Jane perceives Chagrin Falls Park students to mainly socialize with each other. Jane says, “[Chagrin Falls Park students] do stick together in social aspects.” Tony shares,

Was there a book like, *I know Why The Black Kids Sit Together at Lunch*, or something like that? Are you familiar with what I’m talking about? I can’t remember what it was... There is a little bit of separation with that, not a ton... Sometimes you have the African- American kids sitting around together, congregating together. And you know what is kind of an interesting observation, is kids who are mixed race, and how they split up. Because some kids will associate more with being African-American, and some kids will associate more with being White... it’s kind of an interesting dichotomy that way.

This perception of Chagrin Falls Park and/or minority students being separated or singled out is not limited to only the perception of teachers, former students also acknowledge this exists. As a high school student, Jada recalls an experience trying to recruit students to be a part of the Minority Achievement Committee, a club at Kenston High School.

Jada shares,

They tried to try to make you feel connected by doing the MAC program... A lot of people didn’t want to be singled out because of their race. Because there were a lot of multicultural students...but some of them don’t want to be singled out because of their race, so they didn’t want to participate and be a part of the Black group at school.

Heather agrees, “Sometimes the kids are singled out.” Teachers don’t necessarily examine the reason why they think Chagrin Falls Park students stick together with each other, or appear to be singled out, but they do observe this happening at Kenston Local Schools. Chagrin Falls Park students tend to hang out with other Chagrin Falls Park students.

**Academics.** Thus far, this discussion of the distance between the minority and majority student population at Kenston, explores how race and socioeconomic status isolate and separate students in school. In addition to the factors already discussed, participants from both CFPCC and Kenston Local Schools perceive the students of Chagrin Falls Park to need extra help academically compared to their peers. Katherine teaches a supplemental course focusing specifically on providing extra assistance to students who are struggling in their primary courses. She observes,

I have quite a few students from Chagrin Falls Park. And I’ve had quite a few over the years...academically they are behind. It’s the way it is because...I find they don’t get a lot of help at home...it’s tough on their parents to help them. Our curriculum has changed...the way they do math...I did not learn math back in my day. So, it is difficult for the parents to keep up with what is going on today, especially with parents that are both working. It’s hard.

Katherine perceives this shortcoming in academic preparedness coming from a lack of support from parents. Robin takes this observation a step further. Robin’s involvement at CFPCC allows her to observe Chagrin Falls Park students even before they enroll in Kindergarten. In her perception, “A lot of [Chagrin Falls Park students] are lacking when they hit Kindergarten. They’re like, ‘I don’t read or I don’t do this.’” Robin suggests that

one reason Chagrin Falls Park students are behind may be based on a lack of early-childhood education or a lower transmission of educational skills for preschool-aged children happening in the home.

Heather perceives this educational preparedness gap to be a result of what she calls “cultural educational practices.” She reflects,

[Chagrin Falls Park students] really do have potential, but there is this fundamental problem with kids not wanting to do homework or you know, perform...if you look at the numbers...the discrepancy of cultural educational practices, which I know stems from a lot of different things.

Additionally, in Heather’s perception, it is not all Black students at Kenston who struggle, but that this gap in educational ability is specific to students from Chagrin Falls Park. She notes, “the African-American kids that live in other neighborhoods, as opposed to the kids that live in the Park, the kids that live in other neighborhoods have way better academic skills than they kids living in the Park.” Jane shares, “These kids in Chagrin Falls Park need that extra lift and their parent do [too]. They need that education.” It is clear from the interview data that participants from both CFPC and Kenston Local Schools view the students of Chagrin Falls Park as less prepared academically than their peers.

**Transportation.** One of the most tangible examples of the distance between Chagrin Falls Park students and those living throughout the rest of the district is access to transportation. Participants across all groups reflected on Chagrin Falls Park students having limited transportation options and living geographically distant from Kenston school buildings. This geographical distance combined with socioeconomic status and the

work schedules of parent(s), contributes to the perception that Chagrin Falls Park youth do not have equality of access to transportation. Molly, a teacher, notes the difference, “I know a lot of times we have after school events or if you want to join a sport, having that transportation - that’s just like a given for everyone else.” Added to this is the geographical distance Chagrin Falls Park is from the rest of Bainbridge and the schools. Molly continues,

It’s not like “Oh, I can drop you off on my way by.” That other student would have to go pretty far out of their way. I know transportation is one thing, that is just something I notice quite often and it can be an issue.

In Molly’s perception, lack of transportation can keep students from participating in events,

We have the... Academic Academy after school, and I know that transportation is an issue with that, to and from. And then... access to sporting events. I guess not a whole lot of students ride the bus to school, especially as a Junior and Senior in high school, you are usually coming to school with a friend or driving yourself. So, I think there is a larger group of students who ride the bus to school and I guess that is a different kind of experience as well.

Kenston teachers share a fairly consistent perspective about access to transportation for Chagrin Falls Park students. Katherine says, “You have programs, but sometimes [Chagrin Falls Park students] can’t utilize them, because parents can’t pick the student up.”



Teachers may be able to offer extra academic assistance to students after school, in the form of programming like the Kenston Academic Academy or individual help, but attendance may be limited based on access to transportation. Jane explains,

After school would work unless there was a car issue. So anything that has to be done has to happen during those eight hours. If you had an extra van that could pick up early or take home late, that's lovely - which they do at the Park.

Jane is referring to the van service CFPCC staff are able to provide to ease some of the transportation limitations of Chagrin Falls Park students. This van will do extra pick-ups from school to accommodate students who participate in extra-curricular activities.

CFPCC volunteer, Charles introduces an additional dimension of how transportation interacts with culture to present a different experience for students from Chagrin Falls Park. He retells an experience that a student at CFPCC shared with him,

I know that one of the students that I work with was really upset because in the transportation department it seemed to her that the driver didn't like his job, didn't like going into the Park, didn't like the fact that they were a little bit louder. When I say they, I'm talking about the residents of Chagrin Falls Park, were a little bit perhaps louder than others. And that may have been just natural to those children, but it was looked upon as a discipline problem by the bus drivers. And they kept on going through bus drivers, because nobody wanted to take that route... [Chagrin Falls Park students] had to feel something.

Transportation is not only an access issue. As the experience above presents, transportation can intersect with assumptions about race and culture to create a negative experience for a student from Chagrin Falls Park.

This theme explored the difference in access and experience for students from Chagrin Falls Park and those who are not from Chagrin Falls Park. This theme dove in to specific differences that emerged from the data including race, self-esteem, socioeconomic status, peer groups, academics, and transportation. The data reveal how these factors are all interrelated. For example, a lack of transportation or inability to pay for tutoring sessions may keep a student from receiving after school academic support. Peer groups may be influenced because students participate in out of school activities that are consistent with others in their socioeconomic status (i.e., taking golf lessons or going to an expensive summer camp). None of these specific factors stand alone, they all work together to impact the experience of Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. These factors closely influence the next theme, *Out of the Park*, which builds on these factors, and explores differences in expectations and ideas of success specific to students from Chagrin Falls Park.

### **Out of the Park**

*I'm going to get out of the Park* - Angela

This theme explores the perspectives of success for students from Chagrin Falls Park in a variety of ways. First, there will be a focus on the expectations teachers and CFPC participants have for Chagrin Falls Park students. Second, focus will be placed on the perception Chagrin Falls Park students have towards success being synonymous with leaving Chagrin Falls Park. Finally, data will show the ways in which the school and community center facilitate access to college and/or career.

**Institutional Expectations.** When discussing expectations, there is no absolute emerging from the data. There are agents who set high-expectations for all of their

students, including those from Chagrin Falls Park, and there are examples of agents setting lower expectations for Chagrin Falls Park students. Robin has worked with Chagrin Falls Park students through CFPCC for decades, she believes,

[Chagrin Falls Park students] just deserve to have everything that everybody else did. And they are all smart. And they all deserve to have what everybody else has.

I'm so proud of them. I know some of them have had their issues. There is a couple who have struggled and are still struggling, but who doesn't... My family has struggled with issues like that. But I think the majority of them are going for it.

Robin then shares stories about a former CFPCC staff member named Gayle who is no longer employed at CFPCC. Gayle's name was brought up several times through interviews. Gayle regularly set high expectations for the students she worked with. Robin shares,

[Gayle] really knew what she wanted and she expected a lot from those kids, which a lot of people never held them accountable. She let [the students] know she expected this and then she worked with the teachers, and really earned their respect... I really think she did the most for that connection and for the kids in that community for the short period of time she was there.

Continuing on about the expectations set by Gayle,

Culturally, emotionally... [Gayle] took them to museums and expected them to act like ladies and gentlemen. She didn't put up with anything, "This is how I expected you to act and this is how you will." So there was just no fooling around with her.

And if you didn't like it, there is a door.

In Robin's perspective, Gayle transmitted valuable social and cultural capital to Chagrin Falls Park students through CFPCC. Charles also perceives that CFPCC is a place where high behavioral expectations are set for Chagrin Falls Park youth. He shares,

My experience has been that [CFPCC] will not put up with a lot of nonsense. And I think the kids understand that and respect that. And kids are very flexible; they will rise to the occasion that is set down for them. It goes back to expectations.

In sharp contrast are Charles' perceptions of the academic expectations set for Chagrin Falls Park students by teachers and administrators at Kenton Local Schools. He says, "There's a general feeling of ... low expectations from the staff towards the children... I want to include, that it's not just teachers, but guidance counselors and people like that." Charles shares an example to support his perception,

I get this impression from the students that I [tutor], and you have to consider that that is a very small group... I had a young man who was a junior in high school and he was struggling with written communication, things of that nature. Yet, he was getting relatively high grades, but he had wanted to go to college. He was getting mixed signals. So I was working with him in terms of writing and reading. And here he was getting pretty good grades and he was a junior and it seemed as if his writing skills stopped in the 9th grade. After he passed that 9th grade graduation test, writing instruction stopped for him. I don't know if that was based on the classes he was taking or not. He did have a learning disability. He had transferred in...and then he came to Kenston and he had an IEP with him... This is a sad story. His mom was an elementary school teacher... was aware that that IEP wasn't being followed... I talked to the mom and the student because something just wasn't

right. And the guidance department said, “Don’t worry, we’ll sign you up for the classes, the classes you need to take - you’ll graduate - everything will be okay.”

And he never received services that he was supposed to receive... He wanted to go to college, but he wasn’t taking college courses.

With firsthand experience working alongside CFPCC students, Charles approached the administration at Kenston Local Schools to address his feelings and see if they could come to a solution that would better prepare the students. He recalls,

I did talk to the guidance department just in general terms of, “Hey, I’m a taxpayer here. One of my sons graduated. I’m doing some tutoring, and I’m a little bit concerned about the mixed signals that kids are getting.” And I was politely listened to and [was offered] a response of, “We’ll look into it.” And that was it... I do know, I tutored the same student as a senior and... at least in terms of language arts, it was appalling.

Charles was disappointed that the school system was not preparing youth for experiences beyond high school. Charles’ experience speaks to the social reproduction that can happen in school. He notes he was “politely listened to,” but there was no action following the conversation. To Charles, a lack of action reinforces the cycle of low-expectations for Chagrin Falls Park students. What Charles describes are some of the institutional conditions within which Chagrin Falls Park students are attending school; an institution where students should be gaining access to social capital and critical resources. Charles notes, “they graduate with a piece of paper that says they went to high school, but they’re not as prepared as I think they should be.”

From a perspective within the school system, Katherine also sees low-expectations being set. However, differing from Charles' beliefs that low-expectations are set by teachers and administrators, Katherine view students setting low-expectations for themselves. Katherine shares her perspective,

[Students] don't see they can go beyond their expectations. They don't have expectations set high. They kind of feel like, well, I don't have to do this, I don't have to learn math, I'm not going to use it in my life. They don't set any goals high enough. They set the low ones, the easy ones to obtain.

Whether low-expectations are a result of teacher views, a lack of support from family, the attitude of a student, or a various combination of other factors, the data reveals a culture of low-expectations being set for Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. Even as students graduate high school, they may do so underprepared because of low-expectations.

In this study, were four young adult participants, three who resided in Chagrin Falls Park, and one who worked at CFPC and had close family ties to Chagrin Falls Park. All four participants graduated from Kenston High School, attended college (some graduate school), and have careers. They reflected on their experience in high school, including bias they experienced from the institution and the people a part of that institution; at times this bias was in the form of low expectations. Despite the forces that work to disadvantage Chagrin Falls Park students, the participants in this study and many others find success through college and in careers. Closely tied to succeeding for Chagrin Falls Park students, is the notion that success is tied to leaving Chagrin Falls Park.

**Leaving Chagrin Falls Park.** When students from Chagrin Falls Park graduate from Kenston High School, it is common for many of them to want to leave Chagrin Falls Park. From the perspective of CFPCC volunteer Charles, he says, “way to often, those individuals who have grown up in Chagrin Falls Park and become successful have moved away from the Park.” He reinforces this by sharing his experience with a student he was tutoring. Charles shares, “One of the students that I was tutoring, her goal was to get out of the Park.” The phrase “get out of the Park” was present throughout the interview data on several occasions. Angela and Jada look back on their desire to leave Chagrin Falls Park. Angela notes that from her group of friends, “majority of the people left.” Even now, several years after moving away, Angela hesitates to return to the community to visit her parents. She says,

I don’t even like to go back now. My parents still live there and I’ll make sure I go down one street and go to their house. Like, I don’t want to see anybody... there’s just too much bad experience.

Angela felt like she “was just on a different wavelength than everyone else.” She shares, “I wasn’t close with everybody, so... I just needed to get out.” Since leaving Chagrin Falls Park is related to being successful, there is a negative view associated with people who stay in Chagrin Falls Park. Angela perceives, “Even now there are people who are still doing the same thing when I was there and was doing that when my sister was there and like you know, there is better for you.” Jada shares a very similar perspective to Angela,

I don’t know, it’s just a bubble. You can’t get out sometimes. And people... not really my age but older, they’re still stuck out there... I wish they would stop and

do something. And some of them do work, but it's like little part time jobs and restaurants in Chagrin.

Expressed here is the view that people can get “stuck” in Chagrin Falls Park, which reinforces the idea of “getting out of the Park” as a source of motivation for success in school. Will talks about leaving Chagrin Falls Park being a driving force to his motivation in school. Since leaving for college and now in her career, Jada expresses a struggle when she returns to visit her family in Chagrin Falls Park. Jada shares,

Honestly, I don't have an issue with any of these people. I just don't have anything I can relate to. Like, I can't relate. I try to keep in contact with some people, but I haven't talked to them in two years. I can't. It's not that I don't want it, it's just that I don't have anything to talk to with them. Besides my family, I might say hi to somebody if I see them... I'll walk the dog and some people say hi. I say hi. I mean I have nothing against them, but I don't have anything I can have a conversation with them about. I get rude things said to me, I get told I'm stuck up. I get told that why don't you go back to college. I used to go running when I would come home from college, and they would say why don't you just go back to college. It's like, you're standing outside doing the same thing you are doing when I was a freshman in high school. Like, what's your issue?

These comments illustrate a disconnect between current Chagrin Falls Park residents and those who grew up in Chagrin Falls Park and have moved on. Success is related to leaving the community and failure tied to staying. For students who view success as leaving Chagrin Falls Park to attend college after graduation, there is a great deal of support offered by CFPC and Kenston Local Schools.



**Postsecondary Support.** The data reveal a variety of services that exist at CFPCC and at Kenston Local Schools to specifically support Chagrin Falls Park students as they move through high school and transition to college. These services reinforce the correlation between success and attending college. Molly, a Kenston teacher, says, “the general consensus at Kenston is that you are going to go on to college.” Several participants discussed LEAF (Lake/Geauga Educational Assistance Foundation), a program that provides support for students and their parents in completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. Will talks about the support he received in his college search process,

My mom helped me a ton. My stepsister... went to college, so she knew a lot, so she was helping me through it. I can't remember the women's name, but the LEAF organization was able to help me. I was meeting with her every Wednesday and we were discussing scholarships and where to apply and where to look. And then my guidance counselor, after she got on board, was helpful in that too. So I had plenty of people helping me, as well as being motivated myself.

Jada had less assistance at home in this process than Will, but notes the support of LEAF,

My mom didn't graduate from college... Kenston, they had, I don't know what they are called, but they come in and help you with your FAFSA and stuff. I like that they provided that resource. And I felt like they reached out more to like the African-American students to help them get on their feet... this is how you fill out a FAFSA form, this is what you have to do. So, I guess that was a positive thing, because they were like well, I want to help you succeed.

Jane also discusses the LEAF program, but feels there are areas of possible growth for Kenston Local Schools in terms of supporting students in the college search and financial aid process. Jane shares,

We already... work with a FAFSA company, called LEAF... There is... a representative who comes in every Wednesday to work with students, juniors and seniors to go over financial aid for college. I think that's what's lacking is something like that, our kids because of their self-esteem or lack of knowledge- even my parents did, they knew nothing. We, as an educational facility, I think we should make that more available, use [CFPCC], bring somebody down, make multiple meetings with parents... step 1, step 2, because they work, the work aspect of those guardians in the Park is very difficult. Go to the Park. Go to the house. [Teachers] can do that. We are not as large as Cleveland, [teachers] can do a home visit, [teachers] can do a weekend visit. I just think that is something that can prove to be instrumental in bringing the parents along, because the paperwork is so heavy.

Additionally, Jane makes the recommendation that there should be specific scholarships for Chagrin Falls Park students,

I think there should be some assistance with getting more grants, more money being filtered through. So, students could get assistance at the [CFPCC] level, but also there should be consideration for academic, continuing academic lessons - meaning going off to school. There should be some foundation, like the Cleveland foundation or something, they should have scholarships for these kids to get through school. You earn this, you earn that, especially for Chagrin Falls Park. We

don't have that. We have the Bainbridge Women's Club or Civic Club, but we don't have anything started for them financially that's strictly for that community. Jane has a passion for financially supporting Chagrin Falls Park students, possibly as a result of her personal experiences. She shares,

I have that level of understanding that you may be working, but it's nothing. It's the working poor and I understand that... you are doing your best to stay ahead of those financial aid things... That is why I left school, to pay for school, and go to work full time... and then went back to school. That's why I get this. That is a problem. And that's why I think there should be more influx of money to make it accessible for students to know they have a scholarship there and there is money to be had. And that's something that should be looked into.

Molly does note that Kenston High School is in the process of "hiring a guidance counselor that just focuses on career readiness and college applications." This could serve as another source of support for the college search and financial aid process.

In addition to college access support, Angela remembers CFPCC also providing career readiness skills. She recalls, "There was this program at the Center where they helped like get in careers and they helped us get jobs... I remember filling out my first W-2 and I-9 form." Graduates acknowledge an additional way they perceive Kenston Local Schools to prepare them for their future college and careers. Will shares,

Even though growing up I guess in an all White school seems bad, I also learned a lot about another culture. So, I was able to pick up those things as well and now I'm very very fluent in White culture because of it.

Jada agrees,

And even me as an adult, I work in a corporate office and in the whole entire company there is only two African-Americans... You can only imagine, that sometimes it's just different... so that is one thing Kenston did help me, I'm not going to lie, and prepare for because life is like that.

Angela has experienced the same thing,

I think it definitely prepared me for the real world. Just, you know, there were times I was the only Black person in my class for many years and then I would go to a job and I am the only Black person in the department. So, it kind of prepared me for life and I think that is important.

Three participants brought this unique type of preparedness up in their interviews. It's possible that the isolation Chagrin Falls Parks students experienced at Kenston Local Schools, prepared them for isolation within their professional community.

This broad theme focused on a variety of subtopics related to perceptions of success for Chagrin Falls Park students. There is a disconnect between Chagrin Falls Park students who leave Chagrin Falls Park and those who stay. Those who leave Chagrin Falls Park see it as a success and those who stay are seen as a failure. Both Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC facilitate success, by providing resources for career readiness and post-secondary support. However, there is evidence of a culture of low expectations being set for Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. Contrasting low expectations, are adults who set high expectations for students. Many of the Kenston and CFPCC adult participants interviewed in this study are the type of individuals who are setting those high expectations. The next and final theme explores the ways adults from

Kenston and CFPCC go beyond their job description to support students and help them succeed.

### **Everything I Possibly Can**

*“I’ll let them fail, but you know, I’m going to do **everything I possibly can** to get them to the point where they have every opportunity. Not necessarily giving them freebies. But just being there. Even if it is knocking heads.” – Heather*

The themes leading up to this final theme have focused on many of the historical, social, and cultural forces that are disadvantaging Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. Resonating throughout the data are examples of the ways adults, from the community center and school, act to support students from Chagrin Falls Park. By taking the role of teacher, individuals accept the responsibility to transmit knowledge to students. However, the data reveal that adults regularly see their role as extending far beyond academics. Adults demonstrate the ways in which they develop deep relationships with their students, make efforts to understand a student’s background, listen to students, share advice, demonstrate tough love, act as a cheerleader, provide safe environments, facilitate discussions on complex issues, transmit resources, share critical life skills, and various other supportive actions for all students, but specific to students from Chagrin Falls Park. Jada shares an example of the life-shaping impact an adult can have,

At Kenston... colleges come visit and you sign up for different slots to learn different things about different schools. It’s really personal meetings. And I actually met the recruiter for [a university] and... I did not have a GPA. Like, I’m not going to lie, I graduated with like a 1.5. I cared about sports, that’s all I cared about. And so, she saw that I really wanted to go to school. So, she is actually the

head of admissions. I didn't know that at the time. So, she personally took my application and took it to the school... Yeah. I don't tell people that... I think if it wasn't for Marlene, I probably would have been at [the community college] kicking it...She didn't have to do that...If it wasn't for her... [the university] was not even on my radar.

This story is a powerful example of a small action by an adult having a great impact in the life of a student. Jada went on to earn her Bachelor's degree from that university.

Robin thinks this kind of action from adults at Kenston Local Schools is becoming more common. She has been involved with students in Chagrin Falls Park for more than a decade, she observes,

I saw a definite shift in how the teachers and administration have really risen to... help the kids from the Park... give them advantages that they ordinarily wouldn't have, and to try and bolster where they lacked. Their test scores were lower... a lot of them had a lot of emotional issues to deal with too which is a hindrance to any kind of learning... A lot of [teachers] went above and beyond to be available to them.

Robin continues, "I just think [teachers] are giving [Chagrin Falls Park youth] more recognition just as being students instead of the Park kids." Robin gave no reason why she thought this happened, but acknowledged the shift that she perceives to have happened over the years she's been involved with Chagrin Falls Park students.

**Academic Support.** The evidence suggests that educators at Kenston and volunteers/staff at CFPCC promote academic success for Chagrin Falls Park students. As

a community member and individual involved with CFPCC, Will shares a little about his role in relationship to younger students,

Teaching [CFPCC students] how to act, how to use the words. Teaching them that... you can go to school, it's very easy to get into college if you get the grades, all you have to do is listen in class for the little time that you are there everyday and you can be successful. So that was kind of my job, just role model.

From a teacher's perspective, Katherine notes, "The community center does a lot to support the school... there are some retired teachers down there, and they're working with these students." Examples of CFPCC supporting Chagrin Falls Park students are abundant. Robin reflects on the every day work of the community center,

Just the tutoring program got scores up for reading... [Students] didn't have the support at home and not because the parents didn't want to. I think in a lot of cases it was because maybe they didn't have the background to help or they were working three jobs and didn't have the time... [The tutoring program] relieved a lot of stress having someone to sit down and have that homework done when [parents] came home from work. That was one of Donna's things, take the stress off the family, it's just one more thing we can help them do.

CFPCC reinforces the academic work teachers are doing at Kenston. The teachers in this case study express a firm belief in educating all students regardless of their background. Molly asserts "teachers are offering the same educational supports and the same advantages to all students." Katherine shares that teachers dedicate extra time to helping students who are struggling,

A lot of teachers will try if the students are failing a test... or not getting the math concept - come in at [homeroom], come in on your lunch, bring your lunch... they'll be there to help them work through it.

Tony conveys a mindset of pushing students to excel academically regardless of their background, "They can do it. They can perform, they have, [and] they will if you just ask them." The participants in this study reveal a commitment to educating all of their students. One way that participants are able to educate effectively is through building individualized relationships with students.

**Reaching the Individual.** Throughout the data are examples of adults individualizing or tailoring academic concepts to issues relevant to students. Robin shares an example of a volunteer tutor working with a student at CFPCC,

[The volunteer] tailored this program for [the student] to read with comic books and reading articles about LeBron James. And then they would do math about how far LeBron threw the ball. So she just tailor made this program, to catch his interest. You know. That's phenomenal. You know, you have to figure out what the kids want to do... I don't care if they read a book - yes I care if they read a book, but if comic books are better, it's still reading.

Molly believes she has "to learn each [student] on an individual basis." Teachers share example after example about connecting to their students on an individual basis. Jane stresses the importance of understanding a student's background and not making assumptions,

I just think teachers need to learn themselves, about themselves and about their community, and be truly aware of who they are teaching to. Because there is a



huge assumption because of where we live and I get very touchy about this, that there is a level of entitlement. There is a level of entitlement, there is, but you don't know who is sitting next to you. You don't know what house they came from, whether it is blue collar or less. You can't assume. I am a huge promoter and a pusher. I don't assume these kids are all coming from \$400,000 houses, because they are not.

Jane continues, "Teach to the individual student and don't generalize, don't stereotype and that's very difficult for humans." Jane is passionate about these sorts of deep and individualized relationships with her students. These types of individualized relationships are about academics, but they also include social aspects. Jane says,

You have to be attentive. That's part of your job description... If I were a teacher at the college level, or Principal... this would be part of my discipline for teachers that we look at each child separately, not only to teach them separately, you know differentiation, but to look at them as individual persons. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? So that's how I evaluate my students in class. When I grade their writing... we look at focus areas. What do you need to focus on versus little Johnny sitting next to you? It's not a sweeping assumption that you all need spelling or you all need commas... Teach at that level.

Moving beyond an individualized academic plan, Heather expresses thoughts on getting to know her students,

I think that we as a profession have gotten so worried about doing things the wrong way or being politically correct or whatever, and everybody has so much stuff on their plate at home too, that we forget about the fact that we are teaching

kids sometimes. And, if everybody would just take an extra five minutes to say, “Hey, Oh my gosh, did you get a new coat? That’s so cool” And I just, I try to make a point to say something to a kid, because they just want attention so badly.

Tony agrees, sharing the importance of an added personal component to being a teacher, I think the best relationships I had as a student were with teachers who were professional, but they also had that little bit of personal piece to it too. They’d stop, they’d listen, they’d maybe help you out and take an extra step. If you came to them and said, “Look, I had a really rough night last night for whatever reason. Hey, can I get you the homework tomorrow?” And to maybe cut a little break from time to time on those sorts of things. I think is just human and the way to kind of do things.

Jane emphasizes this point further,

You need to survey these kids, you need to really get to know them, but you also need to get to know on a day-to-day basis what they’re going through. I look at my kids everyday and [say], “You haven’t slept, what time did you go to bed last night?” and I tell them “When you getting to your barber?” and I’m on them. So I think it’s that need to be attentive, not only educationally, but personally.

Molly recognizes that her background may not naturally match up with the backgrounds of all students. For her, this does not become a reason to separate from students, but an opportunity to learn new things,

I think naturally that’s just how it is... I was raised in a community that wasn’t very diverse. And then I went to [college and we] were pretty diverse there. But then, coming to Kenston, again it’s not [an] extremely diverse neighborhood. So I

think naturally, I don't know... a lot of times; we talk a lot about holiday traditions and what people do. And I don't know what other cultures do, because I haven't experienced it. So it's definitely a learning experience... just being open to it and trying to teach the kids that too.

To be effective at her job, Molly feels, "it is a lot more of the learning the different culture and learning the background... I just have to learn each of them on an individual basis, whether they are from the Park or where they are from." This is similar to Jane's perception, when she suggests, "teaching to the roots of who these children are." A great deal of attention is given by agents to getting to know their students and teach to them personally.

The data reveal a perception from agents that being relatable or personable is an important part of being an effective teacher. Even beyond teachers, Molly notes having a "custodial staff that is very outgoing and awesome and goes out of their way to make a huge connection with our students." Jane stands in the hallways to make an extra effort to get to know students. She says,

Everyone laughs at me because... I'm out in the hall and I say hi to everyone. So if I don't know you in the classroom, I know you in the hallway. And I am kind of a figure in the hallway... I make sure that if there are kids in the Park in there, and most of the time there are, I'm just walking by and saying hi and checking in on them.

Jane's view of students goes beyond her job description, saying, "They're all a part of me, every kid." Heather's view is similar, "They know I love them, they do and I tell

them that all the time, and it's important. I mean, they're my kids. It's just an extension of family."

**Support from CFPCC.** Agents from the community center also demonstrate personal relationships and deep connections with Chagrin Falls Park students. Jada describes a particular agent who has worked at CFPCC for over a decade, she says, "They know their families. I mean... she lives there. She knows who is so and so's cousin and I think that is a good thing, because you can relate to them and things like that." Jada continues describing the rest of the CFPCC staff, "They know the kids and they keep up with them. They know their names and what makes them tick." The way participants talk about adults from CFPCC knowing students is different than their perception of how teachers know students. This is likely a result of several CFPCC staff and volunteers living in Chagrin Falls Park, and seeing students on a daily basis outside of formal academic programming. Therefore, CFPCC adults know Chagrin Falls Park students in a way that extends beyond academics. In the eyes of Robin, the community center provides individualized support for Chagrin Falls Park students that allows them to pursue additional opportunities. Robin describes the growth students demonstrate from involvement at Chagrin Falls Park Community Center,

They have learned a lot of respect for themselves and it shows... everybody learns differently and I think [Chagrin Falls Park students] learned that they weren't stupid; they just needed adjustments, different paths... I think the opportunities they did [at CFPCC]... it's just a chance to do different things and see that they had it.

CFPCC maintains strong supportive relationships with Chagrin Falls Park students. This support is definitely academic, but also expands into transmitting valuable capital to students through programming and relationships. Many of these supportive relationships involve adults who make extra efforts to listen and offer guidance to students.

**Listening.** Surfacing throughout the data are examples of adults listening to Chagrin Falls Park students and providing advice. Katherine says, “I think teachers are very important, especially if they listen.” Angela and Kendra both recognize Jane as a teacher that goes above and beyond in terms of listening to students. Kendra describes Jane,

[She] was a... teacher who I met for a summer, I think I was in summer school in like 5th grade and... even till this day, we'll talk every now and then, but... she was always someone to talk to.

Angela describes Jane,

She was just so cool... I never had her as a teacher, she wasn't even my study hall teacher, but I just felt like, you know, it was study hall time, I could just go in there and breathe and relax and she was funny, she made us laugh - she was just, she was just great.

Jane is a teacher who makes an effort to know her students well and listen to them. Jane says, “Be a presence to [students] in the hallways, talking... that's what I do. You are there already, you're there, so be a part of it.” She listens to students, she explores their backgrounds, and makes efforts to individually push and support them. Katherine also talks about her role as educator in relationship to listening and giving advice to students. She notes,

I listen to what they say and they'll tell me anything and everything and it doesn't go out the door. And I'll give them my opinion, this is what you should do, this is how you need to react and they are usually pretty good about it.

She continues, "It is important that we don't judge the children based on their background. I think that is why they feel comfortable talking to me, because they know I won't judge them."

Kendra reflects on the agents that listened to her, saying, "I can say I've always had somebody to talk to. So, although, I did have some not so pleasing memories growing up or going to Kenston, I did have lots of people who really supported me." She reinforces this point, saying, "I can honestly say that I always had somebody to go to and somebody to talk to, pretty much in every setting there are people helping me get to where I am today." In addition to teachers, like Jane, from Kenston Local Schools, are agents at CFPCC playing this role of a supportive listener. Will describes a staff member saying, "She was full of so much wisdom." Robin describes another, "She was loving and she was respectful and in a lot of ways she would sit down and talk with the kids about emotional experiences. She would pray with them. She was just - she just threw herself into it." Kendra describes her relationship with adults at CFPCC,

The one thing that, and the reason I think I came back to [CFPCC] for so long, was Leslie... she was just there for me to talk to. And, the things that we would talk about you probably wouldn't imagine a 16 year old talking to this lady who is in her 40's about. But we did, we talked about everything and she was just someone, when I was having a bad day I could go in her office and just unload. So being able to have that person, an adult who has... been through life and will

give you advice, but also isn't judging you or telling you what to do with your life. I mean, we all know right from wrong... [but] we all make our mistakes. So just having someone to listen when we just need a shoulder to cry on, that's really important.

Kendra feels privileged to have had these sorts of supportive adults in her life. However, she recognizes that not all youth have adults who listen to them. She says,

And I feel like a lot of kids, especially of color, don't necessarily always have that. Don't have someone who is just in their corner, for them to talk to, for them to vent to, who, I mean you want someone to give you feedback and you want someone to give you advice, but you also want someone to really listen to you.

And I think that listening piece is very important.

Being a good listener is a key quality that emerged in the data when talking about positive experiences with teachers and CFPCC staff/volunteers.

**Tough Love.** In addition to agents from the community center and school listening and offering advice, is evidence of adults showing *tough love*, in other words, challenging students in a way that is firm, but kind. Heather shares, "I'm kind of the tough teacher." Explaining this further, she says, "I do think that I'm one of the very few that hold the line, even if it means being labeled the mean teachers. And I think a lot of others, don't want that." In being tough though, Heather believes deeply in her students and offers them opportunities for success, saying,

I put the bar pretty high... I'll have maybe 1 in 100 that won't reach that bar.

And I feel like if you try to dumb down things to people, you know they resent it and you don't need to, they're smart kids... I mean, I'll let them fail, but you

know, I'm going to do everything I possibly can to get them to the point where they have every opportunity. Not necessarily giving them freebies. But just being there, even if it is knocking heads.

Heather notes, "I refuse to admit that a kid is going to fail." From a different perspective, Jada shares the benefits of having agents support students this way. Jada discusses one of her former teachers, "And that's what [she] always said, 'You're not dumb, you just need to do your work.' and I just never wanted to do my work." However, this teacher knew how to challenge Jada. Jada shares,

She would just check me... She was just a really nice lady. But she would just check me... I found a way to get through school by just kind of goofing off, and I didn't care if I got kicked out of classes, I just did not care. So, she would just kind of like check me and get your crap together and I don't know, it was like tough love, but she wasn't mean at all.

Will had a similar relationship with his basketball coach, acknowledging that being pushed or challenged benefitted Will. Will says, "He knew how to push me on the court and off the court, he instilled a lot of good things in me." The data illustrate a positive emphasis placed on teachers, and other adults, challenging students in a way that is also caring.

**Providing Safety.** Another form of support that agents demonstrate is through providing youth with safe spaces. This is definitely evident at CFPCC. Charles says,

The community center provides a safe environment. There are areas within Chagrin Falls Park that young people have told me, they will not walk down the street. They just won't do it... if you are a young person that has to instill a



certain amount of fear. Well kids have a difficult time learning if they are afraid...

That's the most important thing a school system can do - make a kid feel safe.

And, I don't know what it would be like to live in an environment where there is a part of my neighborhood that is not safe enough.

Heather would agree with Charles' thoughts on providing a safe space for youth learning.

She discusses the environment she strives to create in her classroom,

I think if [kids] are given a space that they feel safe... I have a lot of kids that I knock heads with... I lose probably ten kids the first day, because I give them a test the first day. And, you know we get to the middle of the year and I'm like "All right, this is where we are." And they're like, "You're not nearly as bad as we thought."

Along with safety, is the idea of consistency. Heather provides this in her classroom through implementing certain boundaries and expectations for students. She shares,

I think most kids want rules and boundaries because it makes them feel safe. And they want to feel safe. And they want to be led. Very few people want to be that person who stands out there on their own. But we talk a lot about that in all of my classes, if you know something is right then you need to stand up for what you think is right, and if you know something is wrong, then you need to speak out. Don't be a bystander.

Charles recognizes the value of providing consistency as well, "I think one of those things that young people need regardless is consistency. They need consistency. As much as they say they don't want it, they really do deep down need it." Both Kenston and

CFPCC provide spaces for Chagrin Falls Park students that are perceived as safe, and offering a consistent flow of support.

**Resources.** For students who may not have the same physical resources as other students, there is data that suggests adults going above and beyond to provide those physical resources to students. In Charles perspective, the community center meets a great deal of basic needs, like food and transportation. He says, “For many, that is where they get their meals, that’s where they get a lot of love and attention... it’s just a life saver for a lot of young people.” Charles notes that the community center has “two big vans and they [offer] transportation after school for certain activities.” Charles shares additional physical needs CFPCC meets,

I know the community center does a really good job and there are people who have moved into the subsidized housing part who really have nothing. Nothing. And the community center, they have their connections, and they arrange for furniture, they arrange for clothing, they arrange for bedding. They do all of that stuff. That’s God’s work as far as I’m concerned.

Agents from the school also provide these types of tangible resources to meet needs for students. Katherine shares,

Some of the students don’t even come with the right school supplies. And that’s kind of where I step in, because I always have it and make sure my students have what they need for class, especially those that I know. And there are poor Whites in Bainbridge, and it’s the same thing. I don’t discriminate, like “Oh you’re an African-American and I’m going to have to give you this, and oh you’re White

and I don't care." I treat them the same way. If you don't have it, I'm going to get it.

Katherine shares that she spends personal money to provide kids with school supplies that their parents may not be able to provide. Katherine is not the only teacher that does this. She explains, "I know our Science teacher – she'll get them a binder, she'll get them this... she does try to help the kids. There are a lot of teachers that are like that." Meeting physical needs is a key component in supporting Chagrin Falls Park students.

**Life Skills.** Beyond providing physical resources, agents provide students from Chagrin Falls Park with cultural experiences and life skills. There is evidence of a valuable transmission of this type of capital between adults and Chagrin Falls Park students. For Chagrin Falls Park students who attend the community center, they are exposed to cultural experiences, for example visiting the Cleveland Museum of Art. Robin shares,

So I know they benefitted from that and I know they benefitted from all the activities they were exposed to - the Art Museum and... the various experiences that they were allowed to have because they were transported and supervised.

And I think it's been a great thing for them.

Not only did students visit these places, but also Robin shares how they were held to high behavioral expectations while visiting. Robin also shares about "a lady who comes to work with [students] and they do community service in other communities." Agents from the community center are regularly providing resources to students that go above just academic support.

At Kenston Local Schools, both Molly and Tony share examples of life skills they value passing onto all of their students, including students from Chagrin Falls Park.

Molly has a passion to push students to learn how to accept differences and be comfortable with diversity. Molly says, “I definitely have an impact on where they are going and I hope even just, even if it’s not educationally, it’s the confidence and the accepting and looking at other people’s differences or not seeing other people’s differences anymore.” She continues,

I would love to see, its not just necessarily the Park, its the whole acceptance thing and having people want to learn about the differences and to accept others for their differences I guess - for students then to feel comfortable about it too.

Molly recognizes that pushing students to talk about their differences may be “very uncomfortable,” but has great benefits to the individual student and the school community in general. Tony’s example has to do with teaching students to work together and counter the school’s tendency to teach individualism,

I also think sometimes the American philosophy of the individual all the time in education... I sometimes bust on my kid when they are doing something or asking someone next to them about something. If they are directly saying, “Hey, what’s the answer to number 5?” But if they’re saying, “What part of the video is number 6 and 7 - did you see it?” Or when we were doing the WebQuest, “I missed the page, what page did you go to?” I’ll joke with them, “Are we in China or Japan?” [They’ll say], “What do you mean?” [I’ll say] “You guys know what I mean. We’re doing it as individuals,” joking with them. And they kind of look at me and say, “Why would we?” I know guys, it doesn’t really make a lot of sense. You

have a job. If you're on a job, there is plenty of times where you are going to ask somebody's advice or ask somebody's help.

Tony recognizes that teaching students to ask for help is a transferrable real life skill.

**Relevant Material.** What happens inside classrooms at Kenston Local Schools does not occur in a vacuum. Agents recognize the importance of bringing in current events and complex, relevant concepts into the classroom. Many of these topics include discussions on racial injustice and race in general. Jane, Heather, and Tony talk about the complex conversations they have in their classrooms. Tony shares,

I never force anybody to do anything you know. Like the Michael Brown deal, we talked about that last year. And I think also, regardless of what you are teaching, you have to stay current - you have to include current events, and if it is something that is major, that is on the news, and kids are talking about it. I mean, you have to let it go. Um. I taught a class... awhile back, where somehow it got onto abortion... It was like throwing gas onto a match, but I had this perfect split in the room and I let it go, because the kids were really respectful and really good about it.

Heather also has had classroom discussions about Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and how the situation connects to her course. She notes,

We talk about this a lot in [my] class... the White flight that happened in the 70's after the Hough riots and everything. And [students are] like, "Is that really real?" And I'm like "Well, lets demographically look at it." And, you know, the kids, I think they really become aware of that and it's just so different. And with all the

stuff that has happened with Ferguson and everything... we've really have had a chance to talk about these sorts of thing.

Heather recognizes how the curriculum she teaches can connect to current issues of racial injustice. She acknowledges the benefit of allowing students to explore their coursework in the context of the current landscape in America.

Like Heather, Jane sees the importance in this connection of relevance to curriculum, specifically related to racial injustice. Jane describes an experience in her class, in which students were asked to do a presentation. Jane explains,

We had a huge discussion this year because of the [racially tense current events] that are happening. I have one Black girl in my... class. She lives in Bainbridge or Auburn... full [family unit]... And they sat down and started talking about what happened here in Cleveland, [and] St. Louis... after we did presentations. These presentations are fantastic. They have to present a PowerPoint, they have specific directions for communicating, and nothing is actually written, it's all in the presentation and then they have to find an article... after all of this, she sent me Youtube videos about the doll test. Where you have these dolls, this one is the darkest, this is the next lightest, and this is the whitest, then they had little kids saying [which they preferred]... We watched these Youtube videos, she brought it in and the kids were like discussion, discussion, discussion... I love the nitty gritty. She said "We're talking about this at home, we're talking about the race riots."

Jane appears to be always looking for opportunities to connect curriculum with real life.

Heather does the same. She discusses teaching youth how to access information and research and says,

The biggest part of it is re-teaching [students] how to learn to research correctly and using good information and good sources and really push themselves outside the box. But, the race comes up in that. And that became a huge debate about police brutality and the cameras and that kind of catapulted. It's interesting to see what kids think.

Jane also puts an emphasis on using relevant and reliable information,

I think you should teach outside of the subject area. I'm a believer in teaching why or what this will be used for. If its not directly used for - if you aren't getting into civil engineering - where will you be applying this to certain degrees. So bringing in articles and being instrumental in bringing in situations, because of my background, I relate a lot of it to the business world.

In general, it seems that agents are encouraging students to connect beyond the actual subject matter and develop life skills that are relevant to not only job skills, but their current and future role as citizens. Jane shares,

You are always going to be selling yourself, so bringing outside world in and explaining to them this is where your person came from or your gender came from. Gender and race need to be truly integrated in all subjects.

Heather sees these skills as much bigger than just a classroom and has a passion to create opportunities,

I'm idealistic to a fault, but we have to find a different way. A better way to approach everyone – it's not just Black kids and White kids. It's everybody. To start seeing kids as kids and people as people. Even colleagues. You know. Kids need to understand that [the] person in front of them is a person, not just a teacher...Healthy dose of you know consideration would be nice all the way around. I don't know how we do that, but I think you could start with having some open conversations about things that people that really want to.

Agents at both Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC support Chagrin Falls Park students in a variety of ways beyond purely academics. One relevant way they do this is through providing opportunities to discuss complex current events, many of which focus on racial justice. Adult agents also transmit important life skills and cultural experiences, in addition to meeting basic needs and providing physical resources. Adult agents listen to students, provide advice, show tough love, and support students in a deep way by getting to know them as individuals.

### **Summary**

This chapter explored six different themes that emerged from the data. The first theme, *Here Comes the Park Kids*, looked at the label of being a 'Park kid' and the stigmas associated with being from Chagrin Falls Park. Next, *I Don't Know How True the Story Is*, was an exploration of perceptions of Chagrin Falls Park history, Black history, and the transmission of history. The third theme, *I Think About My Family*, focused on the sociological context of place-identity; specifically family, and the role of family to Chagrin Falls Park students' identity. The next theme, *Distance Between a Minority and Majority Population*, looked at the difference in experience and access for



students living outside of Chagrin Falls Park versus those living in Chagrin Falls Park. The fifth, *Out of the Park*, examined how student success and expectations for success were set for Chagrin Falls Park students. The final theme, *Everything I Possibly Can*, shared evidence of the ways adults from Kenston Local School and CFPCC go beyond purely academic roles to support students from Chagrin Falls Park.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Historical and political forces have shaped Chagrin Falls Park into a racially and economically segregated community surrounded by predominantly upper class White suburbs. The youth of Chagrin Falls Park live in a residentially segregated all Black neighborhood, Chagrin Falls Park, and attend a school which is almost entirely White, Kenston Local Schools. The data reviewed in previous chapters illustrates a difference in access and experience for Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools. A review of the literature on institutional agents explored the role adults could play in helping youth excel in institutions and spaces in which they are the minority (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which adults from Chagrin Falls Park Community Center and Kenston Local Schools act as institutional agents in assisting youth as they navigate between their community and school, with specific attention being placed on a student's place-identity, racial-identity, and the impacts of history. The research focused on the perceptions of adult institutional agents and the roles adult institutional agents take in the lives of Chagrin Falls Park youth. This exploration

was conducted through the voices of school adults who interact with Chagrin Falls Park youth, community center adults who interact with Chagrin Falls Park youth, and former Chagrin Falls Park youth (now adults) who navigated the daily transition between their community and Kenston Local Schools. The interview data collected from these eleven participants was analyzed to answer three research questions,

1. What are the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in terms of how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institution and community spaces with the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park?
2. How does the ethnic and/or racial identity of institutional agents influence their relationship with youth from Chagrin Falls Park?
3. In what ways, if any, do institutional agents act as empowerment agents; viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency of schools to reproduce inequality?

### **Institutional Agents in this Case Study**

Included in the first two chapters was a review of the literature on adult mentoring relationships and institutional agents. Stanton-Salazar (2010) is used as the primary literature on the definition and role of adults as institutional agents. An institutional agent is an adult who holds power within an institution, and uses her/his position to access resources and social capital, and then passes those resources onto youth. An individual becomes an institutional agent,

When, on behalf of another, he or she acts to directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued institutional support, defined for now in terms of

those resources, opportunities, privileges, and services which are highly valued, yet differentially allocated within an organization or society that is invested in social inequality and in hierarchical forms of control and organization. (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, pp. 1075-1076)

To answer the research questions in this study, it was essential to interview adults who could be identified as institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC. These participants were recruited by asking young adult Kenston graduates for recommendations of influential adults, and also by asking other staff/volunteer participants for recommendations.

The adults in the study, from both Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC, all hold two factors in common that are consistent with Stanton-Salazar's framework on institutional agents. First, all adult participants recognized that Chagrin Falls Park students have a different experience at Kenston Local Schools than non-Chagrin Falls Park students. Adults narrated varying explanations and sources of reasoning for this different experience, but they all agreed it existed. Thus giving some acknowledgement that there is hierarchy, imbalance, or inequality in Kenston Local Schools, regardless of the justification the adult provides for the experience. Second, all adult participants saw their role in some capacity as one that transmits capital and resources. Again, this transmission happened in varying degrees and with various intentions based on the adult, but the transmission did happen. The transmission at its most basic, was an adult providing a student in need with school supplies, but deepened as there was evidence of adults from Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC providing college and career support,

and was even more complex as adults facilitated opportunities for youth to think critically in discussions of racial injustice and historical inequality.

These differences will be explored throughout this chapter and in the efforts to answer the three research questions. As the adults in this study acted in various capacities to transmit support, it is concluded from the data that all of the adult participants in this study do in fact act as institutional agents by recognizing difference in experience and access for Chagrin Falls Park youth, and providing valuable resources to Chagrin Falls Park youth. It was essential to establish that the participants were institutional agents, before focusing more in-depth on the research questions. I will also use Stanton-Salazar's notion of empowerment institutional agents to explore action taken beyond transmission.

### **Research Question One**

*What are the perceptions and roles of institutional agents in terms of how Black youth construct identities, relationships, and navigate between institution and community spaces with the sociological and historical context of Chagrin Falls Park?*

The first research question focuses on the perceptions and roles specific to the institutional agents in this case study. These perceptions and roles are explored in connection to Chagrin Falls Park youth constructing identities, building relationships, and navigating between community and school spaces. Circling back to the Figure 1 (first presented in chapter two), institutional agents from the school and community center are theorized as supporting Chagrin Falls Park students in both developing identity (racial-identity and place-identity) and in navigating between isolated school and community spaces.

## **CFPCC Institutional Agents**

An agent's position in an organization allows her or him to have access to resources of value for students. For example, through CFPCC, Robin and Charles were able to provide students with much needed physical resources like meals in the summer, school supplies, and additional transportation to and from school. They also provided resources in the form of supplemental academic support, such as specialized math tutoring, Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) preparation, and access to computers with high-speed internet. A review of data also presented staff and volunteers at CFPCC conducting FAFSA and tax preparation support, providing job skills training, acting as employer references, and offering a variety of other opportunities to transmit capital to CFPCC youth and their families. These examples are all forms of valuable capital being transmitted to working-class, minority, historically marginalized youth, who tend to have less opportunity to acquire capital than their classmates with higher socioeconomic standing and different racial, ethnic, and/or cultural identification (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Stanton-Salazar is intentional about "redefining" social capital as "resources embedded in social structure - and in the possibility of acting counter to the structure" (p. 1087). Stanton-Salazar (2010) notes that,

Among lower-status members of society (e.g., youth from working-class and ethnic minority communities), access to institutional support is usually an extraordinary phenomenon, and happens through involvement through relationships with committed institutional agents through special school and educational programs, social service agencies, different and effective intervention

and mentor programs - *social capital* for purposes of intervention or empowerment. (p. 1077)

Based on Stanton-Salazar's assertions above, the youth of Chagrin Falls Park have access to social capital through intentional intervention of the programming, staff, and volunteers at CFPCC. Chagrin Falls Park youth "are able to accomplish meaningful goals through their access to resources not their own" (p. 1087) provided by intentional actions of CFPCC. The young adults in the study recognized the role of CFPCC, as did the teachers from Kenston Local Schools. In reference to the role of the community center in the lives of Chagrin Falls Park youth at Kenston Local Schools, Kenston teacher Jane said, "Their presence is just enormous."

The three young-adult participants in this study who grew up in Chagrin Falls Park, graduated from Kenston High School, graduated from their respective colleges, and are in professional careers throughout the Midwest region. These three individuals, along with many other youth in Chagrin Falls Park, excelled academically despite constraints in resources and capital. Stanton-Salazar (2010) would conclude that, "When low-status youth do *overcome the odds*, it is usually through interventions that embed them in a network of institutional agents connected to services, organizations, and resources oriented toward their empowerment" (p. 1097). CFPCC is one of these organizations with institutional agents like Charles and Robin providing youth with services and resources needed for success.

### **Kenston Institutional Agents**

It can be inferred that because CFPCC is dedicated solely to the service of the Chagrin Falls Park community, it is "easier" or "more natural" for staff and volunteers to

be acting influentially as institutional agents in the lives of Chagrin Falls Park youth. Additionally, at CFPCC it is hard to identify places of racial stratification or racial inequality within the community center, since the population served is from the same community and of the same race. However, CFPCC works closely to support the success of Chagrin Falls Park youth in their educational pursuits at Kenston Local Schools. As evidenced by the experiences described by youth and agents in the findings of this study, Kenston Local Schools are an institution in which inequality and difference in access for Chagrin Falls Park youth is evident. Therefore, the role of institutional agent looks differently for an adult acting within the Kenston Local Schools' context than an agent at CFPCC. The five Kenston institutional agents interviewed, all narrated varying and complex actions, intentions, perceptions, and motivations in their interaction and support of Chagrin Falls Park youth.

**Historical Knowledge.** First, school institutional agents hold varying degrees of knowledge of the historical context of Chagrin Falls Park. I find it striking throughout the course of this research how different every participant's knowledge is of the history of Chagrin Falls Park. No participant tells the same historical story. Institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools are exposed to the history of Chagrin Falls Park through a tour of Bainbridge Township at their hiring. Some institutional agents took additional steps to learn more about the history. Institutional agents from CFPCC have a deeper understanding of the history, because the community center has facilitated some past research and projects celebrating the Chagrin Falls Park history. Charles took a strong personal interest in the history of the community and has studied it thoroughly. Young



adult participants possess most of their knowledge of Chagrin Falls Park's history through stories transmitted between family members.

There is no evidence in the data of local history being taught in Kenston Local Schools. Chapter 2 explored the literature on the importance of history to identity. Lim (2000) reviews the concept of "place-history" being the sum of all the past happenings of any given place. These events, such as the naming of a community, or zoning laws, influence how the place is today, and therefore the relationship an individual has to the place, or their place-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983). Included in the previous chapter was a story Charles shared about the integration of Kenston Local Schools. Charles shared,

Teacher representatives came right out in public and said, "We don't want these kids..." It was just atrocious... You have to understand that in Chagrin Falls Park, some of those students, at that time are now parents - well grandparents to some of the kids that are going there.

The story illustrated how critical it is to have an understanding of history. Absent from the data were institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools narrating this type of deep historical knowledge of the historical context and relationship between Chagrin Falls Park and Kenston Local Schools. Understanding this history would deepen the ways in which institutional agents at Kenston Local Schools could understand historical inequality, and then the resulting accumulation of inequality that may have occurred from these past events, and directly influence the identity of their students who are from Chagrin Falls Park. Critical to Stanton-Salazar's conceptualization of an institutional agent, and especially an empowerment institutional agent, is the agent's acknowledgment

of oppressive forces within the institutional system, and in turn, their desire to equip youth with the social capital to counter those forces.

**Justification for Inequitable Experience.** The most obvious variation among institutional agents was their perceptions and explanations of why Chagrin Falls Park students have different experiences at Kenston Local Schools than their peers. At one end of the spectrum is CFPCC volunteer Charles, who throughout his interview regularly questioned if his perception and expectations of Chagrin Falls Park youth were rooted in his cultural upbringing. Charles acknowledged the way historical forces shaped Chagrin Falls Park. Charles questioned practices happening at Kenston Local Schools, and saw the way institutional practices, such as the high hourly rate for mathematics tutoring, were a disservice specifically to the youth in Chagrin Falls Park. Besides Charles' awareness of what Stanton-Salazar refers to as the "interlocking subsystems of stratification" (p. 1075), there were points where other institutional agents showed signs of critically examining institutional practices. This exploration primarily centered around discussions on inequitable transportation and the lack of diversity in the staffing of Kenston Local Schools. Both transportation and hiring practices will be touched on later in this chapter.

While Charles demonstrated a critical examination of some of the systems and institutional forces at work to reproduce and create inequality in this context, a great deal of the data reveal institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools ascribing inequality to individual factors, such as student self-esteem, lack of family involvement or value placed on education, and low family socioeconomic status. For example, Kenston institutional agent Katherine described how she'd go out of her way to buy extra school

supplies for students who do not have them. This is a task that extends beyond her role in the school and is a clear example of an institutional agent transmitting a valuable resource to a student. However, this action is paired with stories Katherine shared about the lack of involvement Chagrin Falls Park parents have in their child's education. The lack of parental involvement is accepted as the reasoning that Chagrin Falls Park students may not turn in homework, complete summer reading, have school supplies, or perform to the level of non-Chagrin Falls Park peers. Katherine, along with other institutional agents in this study, does not appear to critically examine why they perceive a lack of parental involvement.

At a few points within the data, Kenston institutional agents mentioned Chagrin Falls Park youth demonstrating lower self-esteem than their school peers. The interview protocol included no prompting questions about students' self-esteem, so it is interesting that multiple institutional agents brought it up. Both Katherine and Jane suggested links between self-esteem and low socioeconomic status, or having to work low-wage jobs. They suggested that possibly Chagrin Falls Park youth are embarrassed of not having the nicest new phone, or having to rush from school to make it to a job at McDonalds. However, Charles, Robin, nor any of the other interviewed Chagrin Falls Park former residents discussed this issue of Chagrin Falls Park students demonstrating low self-esteem. The perception of low self-esteem was isolated to institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools.

One possible explanation is that what teachers witness as low self-esteem may in fact be Chagrin Falls Park youth navigating between their culture and the dominant culture accepted at Kenston Local Schools. When youth are at CFPC and in their

community, they are not experiencing the same tensions in racial-identity or place-identity. For example in Chagrin Falls Park, the language youth use, the way they dress, the music they prefer, and social groups they have are all in line with the accepted culture of Chagrin Falls Park. However, when Chagrin Falls Park students are at Kenston, their racial-identity and place-identity are loaded with assumptions by outsiders (discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4). As Chagrin Falls Park youth are trying to fit in and excel at school, there could be some obvious tension in moving between the socially constructed and polarized versions of dominant and subordinate culture they experience at school (Carter, 2006). It is possible that this tension youth are experiencing comes across as absent critical awareness as youth exhibiting signs of low self-esteem.

Another possible explanation is that teachers simply hold a set of assumptions about how students should act, or specifically how a Black student or Chagrin Falls Park student should act. These assumptions could impact how teachers view a student's actions and behaviors, regardless of the individual differences among students. Institutional agents from Kenston talked extensively about differentiation and the importance of getting to know their students; however, the broad stroke assertion that Chagrin Falls Park students have lower self-esteem seems inconsistent with these actions.

Whatever the reasoning behind the perception that Chagrin Falls Park students have low self-esteem, this assumption is an example of institutional agents using individual factors to explain inequitable experiences rather than critically questioning institutional or even larger cultural forces. In this self-esteem narrative, teachers are tying the educational outcomes of students to a student's own personal responsibility or agency. By crediting academic success and/or failure solely to personal responsibility,

one ignores structural forces that may also be at work to privilege or disadvantage students. Teachers demonstrate that they are going beyond their job descriptions to support students, but as students still fall behind, they are forced to explore reasons why students continue to fail, and why there continues to be inequality in education for minority and low-income/working-class students.

The ability for teachers to think critically about the institution in which they teach and their efforts to question the way the school is reproducing inequality is a key component of being an empowerment institutional agent to the fullest of Stanton-Salazar's definition. It is especially necessary for an institutional agent to develop into the role of empowerment institutional agent, which will be discussed in research question three (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The discussion around actual and perceived self-esteem for Chagrin Falls Park students is a recommended area for future research, and in my opinion one of the most intriguing perceptions that institutional agents have of Chagrin Falls Park students' identities.

### **Research Question Two**

*How does the ethnic and/or racial identity of institutional agents influence their relationship with youth from Chagrin Falls Park?*

I began each of the 11 interviews by asking the participants how they racially and/or ethnically identify. Four institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools identified as White, with some focusing in on their ethnic identity. One Kenston institutional agent chose not to identify racially. Both Charles and Robin, from CFPCC, identified as White and discussed their respective ethnic identities. All four Kenston graduates, including Will and Kendra who also were involved with CFPCC, self-

identified as Black and/or African-American. In seeking to answer this research question, two categories emerged from the findings that will be discussed below. The first section of discussion focuses in on the absence of non-White teachers and administrators at Kenston Local Schools. This was discussed many times throughout the data. The second section of discussion explores the extent to which race interacts with privilege at Kenston Local Schools.

### **Absence of Teachers of Color**

In my very first interview with Jane, I asked if she had any recommendations for non-White educators at Kenston High School with whom I could potentially meet for an interview. She responded that there were none, with the exception of the custodian. This was confirmed throughout interviews, as Kenston graduates and other educators confirmed the lack of diversity of faculty and staff at Kenston High School and throughout the district. When I asked Jada about this, she responded in such a casual way, that I began to realize how many times institutional practices are accepted “as is” and are rarely challenged, even if they are so obviously flawed. This is how the conversation went,

*Alison:* What about hiring Black teachers or guidance counselors? I mean looking back, are you like every single teacher-

*Jada:* Was White? I mean, I didn't notice it at the time. I didn't really pay attention.

*Alison:* And all the students were White.

*Jada:* Yeah. Everybody else was White, so why not?

At times, even Kenston institutional agents accepted the lack of diversity as just the way things are. Molly says, “Now culturally, our staff is not a very diverse community. You know, we are what we are.” Tony justified the lack of staff diversity, by briefly questioning hiring practices, but then quickly focused in on the likelihood that minority candidates must not be applying to the district. Tony says,

I don't know if a whole lot of minority people want to teach at Kenston without knowing it... I don't really know enough about that, but maybe, if there was any place that could have a little bit of improvement, I would say hiring. But then again, I've never been in on interviews and I don't know who they pull in. I don't know who is applying and what is going on. I know it is highly competitive. I had to beat out 110 people.

Both Charles and Robin, institutional agents from CFPCC, spoke extensively about the “Whiteness” of Geauga County. They shared stories that illustrated a context in which questioning Kenston's homogenous staff would never cross people's minds, because being around only White people is a norm in majority of settings for the county's residents. Students, community center staff and volunteers, and even institutional agents from Kenston (although not all of them) recognized that students who are Black at Kenston are at a disadvantage by not having any (or very few) non-White adults as educators, and also by the biases that some educators carry into their classrooms and relationships. Kenston teacher Heather perceived that Chagrin Falls Park students are frustrated, and one of those reasons is that they don't “even [see] a professional adult that is of color” and this impedes the connections they can make.

A strong racial-identity comes through a relationship with an individual's racial group, and also by an individual connecting to the ways in which the group has overcome oppression and past struggles (Carter, 2008). This is why it is critical for Chagrin Falls Park youth to have adult mentors from their community. Will shared about his experience being involved with CFPCC. He was able to share with the students at CFPCC how he went to college and graduated top of his class. Through Will, the youth of Chagrin Falls Park were able to see a successful Black male who grew up in the same physical context where they are growing up. Will said, "Seeing is believing... if you see nothing but White people, you might assume that Black people don't become successful." In Will's perspective, it is critical for Chagrin Falls Park youth to see successful Black adults. Since almost all of the adults at Kenston Local Schools are White, CFPCC plays a key role in facilitating these relationships that youth have with adults of the same race. Like Will, Jada shared how she felt she was a role model to younger kids in the Chagrin Falls Park community. In Jada's perspective, she felt like she could "relate to [students] because of the color of [her] skin." Charles agreed that Chagrin Falls Park youth could benefit from interacting with more positive role models who are Black.

It was widely agreed upon by participants that the lack of diversity in the staff at Kenston Local Schools is a concern. Tony recommended the demographics of staff matching the demographics of students, noting that the staff should reflect the community. Jane felt strongly that a diverse staff is a step Kenston needs to take to provide Chagrin Falls Park students with role models who share their racial-identity. Will recounted his experience at Kenston, "It would have been helpful to have more color throughout the day." As evident as it is that the institutional agents from Kenston in this



study value building relationships with their students, there is something missing for Chagrin Falls Park youth, and all Kenston students, when an entire staff of educators at a high school is White. The data indicated multiple institutional agents who recognized this as a concern.

### **Race and Privilege in the Institution**

Across the board, institutional agents from Kenston shared with me how they teach all students equally, regardless of a student's racial identification. Kenston graduate Will agreed that he experienced teachers demonstrating equality in their teaching. However, there were places where the racial and/or ethnic-identity of a teacher interacted with the racial and/or ethnic-identity of a student and appeared to be a source of tension for both the institutional agent and student. Charles and Robin were aware of how this played out at CFPCC, and frequently throughout the data noted that their racial identification as White caused them not to be able to fully understand the experience of students of being Black. By acknowledging this, thinking critically, and seeking to understand potential cultural differences, there is a great deal of opportunity for institutional agents and students to learn and benefit from each other and develop deep relationships. This will be discussed in more detail in the recommendations section of this chapter.

Kenston teacher Tony seemed uncomfortable with acknowledging racial differences and how they could impact student relationships and his teaching. On one hand, he saw himself as a teacher who is fair across the board and values hard work, regardless of skin color, gender, socioeconomic status, or ability. Tony demonstrated a sense of pride in the way he grew up, telling stories about how he can relate to students

because he has friends who had negative experiences with the police, or he understood what it meant to grow up working-class. However, Tony shared examples where the racial difference between himself and Black students in his class is very evident.

First Tony shared about a time where he was in a meeting with a student and the student's aunt. The student was struggling. During the meeting the aunt accused Tony saying, "You're doing this because he is Black." Tony acknowledged how angry this made him because he said, "It has nothing to do with that." I don't know if Tony or the aunt's opinion is more valid, because this student could be struggling for numerous reasons not present in the data. However, I bring up this example because of Tony's response to the situation. Tony noted how frustrated he gets "in meetings where race has come up." Tony's hesitation to discuss race, or see race as a cause for tension in a situation, was opposite of the ways in which Charles and Robin were continually and critically evaluating their actions and perceptions in relation to students who identify as Black. Tony's discomfort to discuss or critically think about race, could be a hindrance in Tony acting as an institutional and/or empowerment institutional agent. It is critical that agents understand and challenge forces of oppression; racial inequality is one of those forces (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Tony's perspectives and experiences related to this research question were some of the more complicated to understand. Tony talks about a Black female student as being "very very adamant, very vocal... almost confrontational with [him]." In Tony's perspective, the student "[threw] the race card" at him. Tony appeared to feel that it was inappropriate to talk about race in this situation. Again, Tony got frustrated that this student thought he didn't understand what she was experiencing. Tony may share the

experience of growing up working-class or low-income, but Tony does not share the experience of being Black in a predominantly White context. Tony also does not share the experience of being a Black teenager in 2015, an experience which includes watching coverage of the murders of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, and countless other Black teenagers that have been lost to injustice while White figures of authority remain unpunished.

Racial-identity and connection to one's racial group can flux based on changes in time and context (DeGennaro & Brown, 2009). The context of America currently is one in which racial injustice is at the forefront of public debate, social media, and the news. Black students are confronted with these stories, experiences, and discussions regularly. When students identify strongly as being Black, this impacts the way they view race in America and in their schools (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009). What Tony perceived as "throwing the race card," could be this student demonstrating a strong, positive racial-identity. Positive racial-identity is important for school persistence (Carter, 2008). Tony is frustrated that a Black student thought he didn't get "it", and I imagine the student is frustrated that Tony thought he did. This exchange highlighted the tension that may exist between students and teachers of different racial identifications. The teacher may perceive themselves to be teaching and treating students equally, but subtle biases exist and may impede the teacher from being able to equip students to combat injustice, challenge forces of inequality, and truly acquire the social capital necessary to make significant institutional changes (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

Chagrin Falls Park students have a different experience at Kenston Local Schools, and being Black is a part of the reason for the different experience. In contrast, there is

not a stigma or reputation assumed about all Kenston students who are White. Robin talked about the “reputation” that Chagrin Falls Park students and families have at Kenston, and sites this as being a “cultural divide.” Charles shared about high bus driver turnover for the Chagrin Falls Park route. He retells a conversation he had with a Chagrin Falls Park student who noticed that the bus driver “didn’t like his job, didn’t like going into the Park” and the reasoning was because “[Chagrin Falls Park students] were a little bit louder.” The impacts of race are felt throughout this case study, in the lived-experiences of youth, and through the perceptions of institutional agents.

Institutional agents in this case study narrated how they treat and teach all students equally, regardless of race, gender, ability, and socioeconomic status. Throughout the data are examples of institutional agents acting in this way. However, race does impact the experience of Chagrin Falls Park youth, including the relationship students have with their White teachers. Later in this chapter will be a section presenting recommendations for teachers to think more critically about the impacts of race, and suggestions for Kenston Local Schools to add racial diversity to their teaching and administrative staff.

### **Research Question Three**

*In what ways, if any, do institutional agents act as empowerment agents; viewing their role as providing access to social capital for Chagrin Falls Park youth and/or working against the tendency of schools to reproduce inequality?*

This research question builds on the first research question. A step beyond an institutional agent is what Stanton-Salazar defines as an empowerment institutional agent (2010). In this framework, empowerment agents possess these five characteristics:

1. understand the social structural forces within society and within their institution that function to problematize the success of low-status students
2. possess critical awareness that the success of low-status students or youth within the institution is contingent on their receiving systematic and tailored provisions of ‘institutional support’
3. willing to *not* act on the established *rules* of social structure that serve the purpose of consolidating resources within the upper levels of the hierarchy
4. identify themselves as one of those agents responsible for advocating on behalf of the low-status students and for providing them with varied forms of “institutional support”
5. are motivated and willing to be identified by the larger personnel community that they are an advocate and an agent for low-status students. (p. 1089)

Specific to this current case study, to be an empowerment institutional agent for students from Chagrin Falls Park, an individual needs to first hold a position of authority within Kenston Local Schools or CFPCC. They should be aware of the ways Kenston Local Schools and/or CFPCC could be generating inequality for Chagrin Falls Park youth. The agent must understand that they hold valuable resources and social capital, which are embedded within Kenston Local Schools or CFPCC, that would be valuable if transmitted to Chagrin Falls Park youth. Finally, an empowerment institutional agent must be proactively challenging systems and rules that disadvantage youth, identify themselves as an advocate for Chagrin Falls Park youth, and be willing to speak to forces of inequality at a broader level within Kenston Local Schools and/or CFPCC.

Interview data suggested that no participant narrated all five characteristics embodying the role of empowerment institutional agent. However, there were institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC demonstrating the fulfillment of many of these characteristics, and contributing across institutions towards this level of empowerment for Chagrin Falls Park Youth. The next sections will explore Stanton-Salazar's (2010) five characteristics of empowerment institutional agents. Additionally, examples will be explored of how institutional agents are acting in these ways on behalf of Chagrin Falls Park students.

### **Acknowledging Forces of Inequality**

*The degree to which [agents] are aware of the social structural forces within society and within their institution that function to problematize the success of low-status students (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1089).*

There is one structural inequality that almost every agent interviewed discussed in some form, and that was access to transportation for students living in Chagrin Falls Park. Chagrin Falls Park is geographically one of the furthest points in Bainbridge Township from Kenston Local Schools. Jada recalls, "school is far... it takes about 10 to 15 minutes to get there." Fifteen minutes may not seem that far. However, a 15-minute drive must be considered in relationship with three other factors that created a wide gap in access to transportation for many Chagrin Falls Park youth. The first factor is that Chagrin Falls Park is significantly closer to the Village of Chagrin Falls school district than it is to Kenston Local Schools. Historically, the Village of Chagrin Falls took many steps to distance themselves from Chagrin Falls Park (discussed in Chapter 1). This distance remains in the reality of the way that the city, county, and school district lines were

drawn between communities. Kenston graduate Angela says, “It was just like, this school [Chagrin Falls] is down the street, I could practically walk there if I wanted to. But, I really didn’t think about it until I got older.” If Chagrin Falls Park students attended Chagrin Falls Schools rather than Kenston Local Schools, transportation would be a non-issue, as students could walk or bike to a school that is geographically convenient to where they live. Instead, Chagrin Falls Park students attend schools that are beyond a range for walking or biking to school, and students are forced to rely on rides provided by their parents or peers for any extracurricular events that happen outside of the normal bussing schedules.

The second factor relates to a lack of access to reliable public transportation. Chagrin Falls Park is a part of Geauga County. Geauga County does have a public transit system, but it is not a fixed route system that would be traditionally found in an urban area ([www.geaugatransit.org](http://www.geaugatransit.org)). The Geauga County Transit website explains that, “Unlike large urban systems that have fixed routes with scheduled time points, Geauga Transit provides a system that reflects the rural character of Geauga County.” Residents of Geauga County can schedule a pick-up through a phone or web reservation. For riders a one-way fare within Geauga County costs \$6.00, and out-of-county travel costs \$12.00. For reference, a one-way fare on the fixed-route and expansive public transportation system in the bordering Cuyahoga County (Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority) costs \$2.25 ([www.riderta.com](http://www.riderta.com)). The Geauga County Transit system is primarily targeted at county seniors (age 65+) and those who are disabled; this is evidenced by the fare subsidies provided to these two groups of people.

This leads into the final factor, not every family in Chagrin Falls Park has access to a car, and because Chagrin Falls Park is so out of the way peers are not always able to provide a way ride from school activities that happen beyond normal bussing schedules. Institutional agents recognized this, and they saw the ways in which transportation hindered a student from being involved in activities, such as sports, and other after school extracurriculars. One institutional agent even brought up how lack of access to transportation could prevent a Chagrin Falls Park student from attending social events, such as school dances, and in turn hinder a student from feeling connected to Kenston Local Schools. Kenston Local Schools are far from Chagrin Falls Park students, and many Chagrin Falls Park students lack access to transportation from a parent or friend. This disproportionate lack of access to transportation primarily affects Chagrin Falls Park students, and is a force of inequality that institutional agents from both Kenston and CFPCC recognized.

Beyond transportation, institutional agents did not widely recognize other institutional forces of inequality. Agents explored the issue of lack of diversity in staff (discussed above in research question two), but only a few examined how a homogenous staff disadvantages Chagrin Falls Park students and limits the development of White students' cultural fluency. There were some other isolated examples of institutional agents discussing these forces in their interviews. For example, Charles focused in on low expectations set by Kenston Local Schools for students from Chagrin Falls Park. Charles shared his impression that Kenston focuses too heavily on just pushing students to graduation without giving them the skills necessary for their next steps. Charles perceived that Kenston Local Schools holds lower expectations for students from Chagrin



Falls Park than those who are not from Chagrin Falls Park. Even without a child in the district, Charles acted on his perceptions and held a meeting with administration at Kenston. This is the type of action that an empowerment institutional agent would take in challenging policies and practices of an institution. This illustrated Charles' recognition of inequality, and not only voicing individual disapproval, but also taking a step to change the broader context, and create a more equitable experience for youth from Chagrin Falls Park.

My interviews were with a small sampling of educators from Kenston Local Schools. The data could not possibly encompass all of the ways educators create inequality or challenge inequality. By including interviews with Kenston graduates, I was able to get a more complete picture of the experience of Chagrin Falls Park students. Kendra shared a story that addressed a form of inequality at Kenston Local Schools that was absent from the institutional agent interview data; inequality in the form of silencing or downplaying Black history. Kendra tells the story of Kenston High School offering a Black history course. In Kendra's opinion, a teacher who was not qualified and lacked knowledge of Black History taught this course. Kendra's reaction towards this course is complex. The course was an elective and Kendra recalls her class being almost entirely made up of Black students. The elective nature of the course could be interpreted in different ways. On one hand, the elective nature of the course, communicated that Black history is important only to students who chose to learn about it. If the contents of this course were viewed as equal, they would be incorporated through mandatory history courses for all students. From a different viewpoint, an elective course carries the

potential to create a class filled with students who care about Black history and want to develop their knowledge; a safe space for students to learn and think critically.

Additionally, this course revealed institutional inequality in that someone who lacked expert knowledge taught the course. In a high-performing high school like Kenston, an under qualified teacher would likely never be found in a Chemistry or Algebra class. Within institutions such as the school, “resources and key forms of institutional support” are embedded within the “hierarchical structures” of that institution (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p.1083). In the institutional structure of Kenston Local Schools it is okay for an under-qualified teacher to teach an elective Black history class. Rather than going against the tendency of the school as a “reproductive social structure,” this course served to reinforce the institutional hierarchy; a school hierarchy where Chagrin Falls Park students narrated themselves as having a disadvantaged experience (p. 1085). I share Kendra’s experience to highlight two things. First, inequality exists in many forms at Kenston Local Schools, and sometimes it hides in the best intentions of the institution and its agents. Second, no institutional agent can possibly recognize all forms of inequality in a school. Teachers from Kenston regularly communicated that they teach all students the same, but fail to address how systemic decisions such as course offerings and curriculum can reproduce inequality.

### **Recognizing Institutional Support**

*Their level of critical awareness that the success of low-status students or youth within the institution is contingent on their receiving systematic and tailored provisions of ‘institutional support’ (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1089).*

There are a great deal of examples within the data of institutional agents from CFPCC and Kenston providing institutional support to Chagrin Falls Park students. These examples are explored in great detail in the previous chapter. Kenston institutional agents, Jane and Tony, used their working-class socioeconomic background to better understand the support that students need. Jane's background led her to recommend the school offer greater financial support for Chagrin Falls Park students. Additionally, both Jane and Heather demonstrated specific and tailored institutional support through their choice of curriculum and facilitation of critical discussions.

**Shared Working Class Connections.** Jane shared that she grew up working-class and had to work hard to put herself through college. Jane's experience gave her a passion to provide additional institutional support for Chagrin Falls Park students. She talked about a desire for Kenston to offer more FAFSA support and college scholarships specific to Chagrin Falls Park students. She understood that every student is different, and every student needs tailored support from the institution. As a teacher, she attempts to live this out, but expresses frustration in teachers who just sit in their classroom waiting for students to come to them. In Tony's narration of his childhood, he also spoke about growing up working-class. Tony perceived himself to be able to understand students who are working-class because of his own experiences. Tony believes all students can succeed if they work hard, and he feels it's his responsibility to push students to this level of work ethic.

Both Jane and Tony hold a partial personal understanding of what Stanton-Salazar means when he theorizes on the experience of "low-status" students within the institution of school (2010). Neither has experienced the hierarchical status occurring at

the intersection of race and social-class. Their understanding has to do with personally relating to students who come from low-income or working-class socioeconomic situations. Jane narrated the institutional support Kenston Local Schools could provide in terms of FAFSA and college scholarship help. Tony acknowledged the importance of teaching hard work and holding a deep belief that all students can succeed. Both recognize the necessity of institutional support for all students. However, Jane narrated support specific to Chagrin Falls Park students, whereas Tony tends to talk in a more generalized way.

**Tailored Institutional Support.** In addition to Jane, Kenston teacher Heather seems to hold “awareness that the success of low-status students or youth within the institution is contingent on their receiving systematic and tailored provisions of institutional support” (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1089). Jane and Heather both stressed the level of individualization and personal relationship they give to their students, especially the students they work with from Chagrin Falls Park. They asked about students’ haircuts, they knew about after school jobs, and they made themselves a presence in the hallway every day. Jane and Heather made intentional efforts to tailor their curriculum to include diverse and relevant material. They also encouraged critical conversations in their classrooms about race. All of these actions suggest a critical understanding of the importance of uniquely supporting Chagrin Falls Park students.

All four Kenston graduates in this study shared additional examples of adults from CFPC, Kenston Local Schools, and their respective colleges who acted on behalf of them in this way. They recalled these experiences as positive, supportive, and instrumental in the steps they took out of high school and into college and/or career. It is

not that other institutional agents and educators throughout Kenston Local Schools do not understand the importance of tailored institutional support for Chagrin Falls Park students, it's just that the actions and perceptions of Jane and Heather stood out the most in the data, because they took institutional support to the level of empowerment. Both narrated times where they intentionally included curriculum and discussions in class from diverse and non-dominant cultural perspectives. Stanton-Salazar (2010) says "the processes of empowerment go far beyond the provision of institutional support... entailed are a series of empowerment experiences that lead to a transformation of consciousness" (p.1091). The type of facilitation of critical discussion that Jane and Heather integrated into their courses is an "empowerment experience" with the potential to shape "consciousness."

### **Breaking the Rules**

*Their willingness to not act on the established rules of social structure that serve the purpose of consolidating resources within the upper levels of the hierarchy (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1089).*

The data do not do much to reveal institutional agents intentionally breaking rules to empower Chagrin Falls Park students and spread out resources. For the most part, teachers narrated acting within their given roles and boundaries as a teacher. Tony talked about being able to write new electives, and steer a great deal of his own curriculum. Molly shared about the course she started at Kenston. There was the example of Kenston administration supporting students to put on a Black history assembly, and CFPC supporting the production of the program. It appeared that Kenston Local Schools gives a great deal of autonomy to their educators, and there were not a particular set of "rules"

per say in the school that a teacher would need to break to offer a more representative curriculum. There is a great deal of opportunity for educators at Kenston to critically think about their role as teacher, and intentionally incorporate curriculum that distributes capital throughout all levels of students.

However not all “rules” are formal rules set by the institution, many come in the form of common practices and social norms. Kenston graduates, most notably Will, spoke about the expectations of Black students being better at sports than academics. Will narrated frustration in terms of how parents, coaches, and his guidance counselor viewed him as struggling academically, even though he was consistently on honor roll. Kendra spoke about the assumptions made about her brother as he was being put on the Chagrin Falls Park school bus by school staff even though he did not live in Chagrin Falls Park. The assumption being that because an individual is Black, they must live in Chagrin Falls Park.

Stanton-Salazar (2010) would group these types of situations as “cultural discourses” that exclude some individuals and privilege others. He says,

Those very cultural discourses and tacit rules that create forms of power and influence in social interaction among members of dominant groups and that create investment strategies and forms of support, simultaneously function in ways that exclude others from these same resources and forms of support. (p. 1087)

An example of an institutional agent challenging one of these rules would be Charles visiting the administration at Kenston to challenge the cost of after school tutoring, because he felt it disadvantaged Chagrin Falls Park students. CFPC, and its agents,

regularly act in ways that challenge these rules, formal and informal. Historically, there are stories of the Chagrin Falls Park community advocating for desegregated schools (Hitchcock, 2012; Wiese, 1986; Wiese, 1999). Presently, CFPCC advocates on behalf of students at Kenston, and fills in gaps of services that exist for Chagrin Falls Park students. For example, CFPCC offers a van pick-off and drop-off for students involved in extracurricular activities to allow Chagrin Falls Park students who are limited by transportation constraints to participate. CFPCC coordinates job-training nights, provides FAFSA and tax assistance, and has computers available for use throughout the week. While not necessarily “breaking the rules,” these services were put in place to disrupt the social reproduction of inequality, often invisible because it is unquestioned.

### **Identifying Their Importance**

*The contents of their identity and their ideological commitments—particularly, on whether they identify themselves as one of those agents responsible for advocating on behalf of the low-status students and for providing them with varied forms of ‘institutional support’ (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1089).*

This characteristic stood out the most in the data as the Kenston graduate participants narrated how important they were when they volunteer at CFPCC because it allows youth of color to see adults of color who are successful. This is consistent with the literature on racial-identity, as a part of racial-identity is positively associating with the same racial group, and positive racial-identity is important for students’ school persistence (Altschul et al., 2006; Carter, 2008; Umana-Taylor et al., 2014). Supportive community mentors also create an opportunity for youth to connect with their community and see their community in a way that develops a positive place-identity. Will recognized

his importance as a Black male from Chagrin Falls Park who excelled at Kenston and in college. Will strongly identifies with his culture, and demonstrates positive racial-identity. He saw himself as a role model, and a critical piece of influencing the lives of Chagrin Falls Park youth. Will's success allowed younger kids to be able to connect to positive aspects of their racial group. This contrasts the underlying tone of Kenston Local Schools, where all people in authority are White.

One of the questions in the interview protocol with institutional agents directly asked if the interviewee felt they were a part of the success of Chagrin Falls Park students. Overwhelmingly, institutional agents acknowledged their importance in not only being an educator, but also providing additional support in a variety of forms. The institutional agents a part of this study were identified by Kenston graduates as being instrumental adults. The institutional agents understood their importance; however, not all institutional agents would view themselves as an advocate specifically for Black students from Chagrin Falls Park (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Both Katherine and Tony would say that they act the same on behalf of all students, regardless of their status. The others institutional agents acknowledged their importance in specifically supporting Chagrin Falls Park students.

### **Changing the Institution**

*Their motivation and willingness to be identified by the larger personnel community that they are an advocate and an agent for low-status students (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1089).*

Agents narrating their roles in changing or challenging the institution is mostly absent from the interview data, therefore suggesting an absence of action and/or thinking



through this particular lens that sees institutions as influenced by relations of power. Charles is the only agent that indicated these types of actions, specifically when he approached the administration at Kenston Local Schools about his perception of low academic expectations for Chagrin Falls Park students. His action was not just a good gesture for one child he was tutoring at CFPCC, rather it was an intentional action to try to change the culture of low expectations for minority students in the institution; a step towards challenging the social reproduction of the institution. CFPCC staff and the policies they have pushed for reveal an intentionality in terms of willingness to challenge the inequality Chagrin Falls Park students experience at Kenston by the variety of services they provide. They are well known in the broader community and county as a place offering these services.

The institutional agents in this study narrated their deep care about their students, and were proactive in providing their students support extending far beyond their job descriptions. However, the data did not reveal examples of institutional agents taking the next step and really questioning, exploring, and changing the institution. It is accepted by most that Kenston Local Schools is a high performing good school district, with high graduation rates. However, this case study has explored the perceptions among educators, CFPCC staff, and several students of color, revealing how marginalization is experienced, observed, or overlooked. Institutional agents recognize this marginalization to varying degrees, and some go out of their way to support students marginalized by lack of access to educational opportunity. However, there simply is not evidence in the interview data of institutional agents challenging this marginalization at a broader institutional level.

## **Empowerment Institutional Agents**

Shared above were five characteristics Stanton-Salazar (2010) uses to outline the actions of an empowerment institutional agent. The agent acknowledges forces of inequality, recognizes institutional support, breaks the rules, identifies their importance, and changes the institution. All of this is done with the intention of empowering marginalized youth with the countervailing forces necessary to complicate the oppressive systems at work in their lives. Within the role of empowerment agent is someone who aims,

To empower low-status youth with varied forms of institutional support, and in doing so, are willing to disembody themselves from the reproductive practices of their institution or environment, and to become a moral agent for positive change in the *world* that both agent and youth inhabit (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1090).

The data revealed the presence of social and cultural norms so strong that they are unlikely to be questioned. However, shared above were some examples of institutional agents demonstrating varying degrees of these five characteristics, and working towards a level of critical awareness where these norms can begin to be questioned.

### **Place-Identity and Racial-Identity in Chagrin Falls Park**

Figure 1 (first introduced in Chapter 2) is used to show the ways in which place-identity, racial-identity, and history interact with the institutions (including institutional agents) to impact the individual students. The intent of Figure 1 was to highlight how institutional agents from CFPCC and Kenston could be influential in assisting students from Chagrin Falls Park in developing racial-identity and place-identity. Both positive racial-identity and place-identity for Chagrin Falls Park students helps them excel in the

polarized community and school spaces they navigate on a regular basis. Reflected in Figure 1 is the notion that developing identity, navigating different spaces, and the carrying out the role of the institutional agent are not a linear process; rather, they are in a dynamic relationship of influencing and being influenced by one another.

This case study sought to answer three research questions, which were discussed above. However, in addition to the research questions, emerging from the data were interesting patterns surrounding the development of place-identity and racial-identity for Chagrin Falls Park youth. Figure 1 separates racial-identity and place-identity as two separate components on an individual's identity. The data revealed a different picture, as institutional agents frequently collapsed place-identity and racial-identity for Chagrin Falls Park students into one thing, to be from Chagrin Falls Park is to be Black, and to be Black is to be from Chagrin Falls Park. Institutional agents narrated little to tease these two identities out, and explore what it could mean for a student to identify positively or negatively with their race, and separately identify positively or negatively with their community. In the context of Kenston Local Schools and the broader county, there is no doubt that place and race interact in unique ways, and to outsiders these identities are interchangeable. However, interview data with Kenston graduates revealed that place-identity and racial-identity are very separate parts of overall self-identity.

In fact, the Kenston graduates in this study frequently talked in ways that reveal strong connections to their racial group but weak connections to their community. Kenston graduates reflected on going to college and taking Pan-African studies courses and joining extracurricular organizations that deepened their connections to being Black. These types of experiences, paired with identity-development, are consistent with

theories of racial-identity. As individuals age and interact with new settings and information, they redefine what it means to be Black (Seaton et al., 2006; Sellers et al., 1998). Sellers et al. (1998) introduces four dimensions of racial identity, which include the following: salience, centrality, regard, and ideology. *Salience* and *centrality* focus on the significance an individual places on their race, and *regard* and *ideology* examine the individual's perception of what it means to be Black. Interview data revealed Kenston graduates not only placed higher importance on their race, but also demonstrated positive perceptions of being Black (some of these perceptions coming from college-level history courses). This developed racial-identity, allowed students to reflect back on events in high school through a critical lens and explore past experiences in relationships to their race (even if they didn't at the time).

However, the opposite seemed to happen surrounding place when Kenston graduates moved away from Chagrin Falls Park and attended college. These former Chagrin Falls Park residents spoke negatively about their community, and revealed a weak connection to place, almost to the point of place-aversion (Proshansky et al., 1983). Graduates talked about taking the back roads to visit their family to avoid interaction with other Chagrin Falls Park residents. They spoke in ways that communicated their disconnect with the Chagrin Falls Park community. Lim (2010) introduces three different dimensions of place-identity: social, physiographic, and psychological. The social dimension of place includes social networks, relationships, cultural characteristics, values, and community norms. In this case study, the social dimension would include residents' family relationships, involvement with the community center, and friendships. The physiographic dimension focuses on physical characteristics like homes, green space,

and street signs. Specific to this case study would be the descriptions former residents provided of their transportation to and from school; having to leave the physical boundaries of their community to be transported to a place that was not as familiar. The psychological dimension explores how place affects the individual. For residents of Chagrin Falls Park in this study, this includes the positive and negative attributes residents ascribe to their community, and the pride/shame residents demonstrate in being from Chagrin Falls Park. The data in this case study made it obvious that Kenston graduates and former Chagrin Falls Park residents carry a great deal of negative associations about Chagrin Falls Park. The college experience deepened racial-identity, but does not seem to connect former Chagrin Falls Park residents to the community they grew up in. While students narrated the positive impact of Pan-African history courses and extracurricular activities focusing on racial identity, these activities may not have offered former Chagrin Falls Park students a form of solidarity with their home community, nor a critical analysis of what has contributed to the isolation of Chagrin Falls Park.

Place-identity is not purely an individual construct. Lim (2000) builds on the foundational work of Proshansky et al. (1983) by adding that place-identity can also be collective. Relevant in this study are the collective assumptions made about Chagrin Falls Park by those living outside of the community that influence a resident's place-identity. Children begin developing feelings about their community, both positive and negative, from a very early age (Jack, 2010). These feelings can be influenced by the way outsiders view Chagrin Falls Park as a poor, rundown, problem community. History shows us neither the Village of Chagrin Falls, nor Kenston Local Schools "wanted" Chagrin Falls

Park and its residents. Participants in this study frequently talk about the stigma associated with being from “The Park.” These outsider perceptions influence how an individual identifies with their place, and could be used to explain why participants in this study speak so negatively about being from Chagrin Falls Park. It raises the question: do Chagrin Falls Park youth attending Kenston feel the need to reject their community to fit in to their school? Future research could explore this seemingly negative relationship between school-identity and community-identity for Chagrin Falls Park students.

### **Recommendations**

This case study was conducted under the umbrella of the Transformative Framework (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2012). Within the Transformative Framework is a desire for research to change society, challenge inequality, and promote social justice. It is critical that research in this framework “contain an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researcher’s lives” (Creswell, 2013, p. 26). From the beginning, it was the intention of this study to share any results with Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center. Below are recommendations that were generated from the data on how Kenston Local Schools and CFPC can better serve the youth of Chagrin Falls Park as they transition between school and community settings.

#### **Primary Recommendations for Kenston Local Schools**

Kenston Local Schools enrolls a little under 3,000 students across four school buildings. Of these students, 2,655 identify as White/Non Hispanic (90.1%), 127 identify as Black/Non-Hispanic (4.3%), 87 identify as Multiracial (3%), 46 identify as Hispanic (1.6%), and 33 identify as Asian or Pacific Islander (1.1%). Three hundred sixty-two

(12.2%) of the students are economically disadvantaged based on State of Ohio standards. The high school boasts a 97% graduation rate within 5 years. There is some discrepancy between the performances of Black and White students. The Annual Measurable Objectives reveal inequality in the performance of various student groups. In terms of reading scores, 96.1% of White students are considered proficient, while 86.8% of Black students are considered proficient. In math scores the gap is wider, 93.9% of White students are proficient based on state testing and only 68.8% of Black students are considered proficient. Additionally, the graduation rate for White students at Kenston is 1.6% higher than that of non-White students (Ohio State Report Card, 2013-2014).

The recommendations suggested below are not a solution to the gap in proficiency between White and Black students. However, it is likely that these recommendations could affect this gap. The recommendations are generated from the interview data with teachers, community center staff, and former students. My five recommendations for providing equitable experiences for Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local Schools are to (1) communicate with CFPCC, (2) develop a counternarrative, (3) diversify staff, (4) create critical spaces for staff, and (5) critically examine transportation practices.

**Communicate with CFPCC.** I was surprised throughout the interviews about the lack of involvement Kenston institutional agents had with Chagrin Falls Park Community Center. Institutional agents were aware of some of the services CFPCC provided, but there were not the active channels of communication that I expected to hear about. For example, both Katherine and Molly work specifically with academically low-performing students. CFPCC provides after-school tutoring. It would make sense that tutors and staff from CFPCC would be providing information to Molly and Katherine about the support

the student is receiving from their tutors, and visa versa. This was not necessarily the case. One probable reason is that CFPCC is much more active for students in kindergarten through eighth grade than for high-school students. However, there is still high-school programming at CFPCC, and I imagine collaboration between Kenston and CFPCC would be useful.

A few of the students shared about a time where CFPCC and Kenston worked together to support them as they put on a Black history month assembly at school. Kenston encouraged the students to put on the assembly, provided the space for the performance, and made attendance mandatory for other students. CFPCC allowed students to practice the program in their gym in the weeks leading up to the assembly. With the support of both CFPCC and Kenston, students reflected on how great of an experience it was to educate their peers on their history. The data shows that Kenston institutional agents are culturally very different than Chagrin Falls Park students. By partnering with CFPCC and keeping communication open and collaborative, institutional agents from Kenston could learn a great deal about how to support Chagrin Falls Park students in their classrooms. This could potentially eliminate some of the gap in cultural understanding between agent and student. Chagrin Falls Park and Kenston Local Schools are racially and economically distinct, but this does not mean the support for students needs to be fragmented between two settings. Empowerment and providing essential social capital to Chagrin Falls Park students includes understanding the entirety of the structures and systems, including school and community (Stanton-Salazar, 2010).

**Develop a Counternarrative.** Before this case study, I completed a pilot project with a group of Chagrin Falls Park middle-school students that explored the local history



of Chagrin Falls Park through document analysis and interviews. During that research, my first within the Chagrin Falls Park community, one idea that emerged from the data was how strongly the student participants wanted to leave Chagrin Falls Park. The data in this study revealed similar ideas about success being tied to moving-on from Chagrin Falls Park after high school. The intent of this research was not to answer the question of why students wanted to leave, however literature about place-identity can be used to speak into this emergent idea. Within theories about place-identity, these sorts of feelings would be considered “place-aversion” (Proshansky et al., 1983). The negative views Chagrin Falls Park residents have of their community are amplified by the negative and/or nonexistent views of people living outside of the community. Participants frequently spoke about outsiders holding negative associations tied to being from Chagrin Falls Park. My impression is that as students are successful in school, they begin to distance themselves from Chagrin Falls Park in order to assimilate to the dominant culture and ideas of Kenston. In doing so, Chagrin Falls Park is viewed negatively, rather than a place of rich history, strong family connections, and a place to establish roots and call home.

It is my recommendation that both Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center intentionally create spaces for students to develop a counternarrative about Chagrin Falls Park, one that highlights rather than silences the history of the community. These spaces dedicated to the counternarrative encourage students to develop positive place-identity, rooted in an understanding of place-history (Lim, 2010). It takes the history of Chagrin Falls Park from being invisible to being a source of learning and identity. One of the most obvious ways this could happen is through

incorporating local-history lessons into school curriculum and CFPCC activities. My pilot project revealed middle school youth benefitting from learning about the history of Chagrin Falls Park. Youth researchers in the pilot project were surprised to hear about some of the positive aspects in their community history, for example the volunteer fire department and traveling baseball team. The data in this study revealed Kenston graduates demonstrating a more positive sense of self as they learned more about their Black history.

Place-identity is dynamic and shifts based on an individual's experiences and interactions, positive and negative (Proshansky et al., 1983; Wyse et al., 2012). History has shaped the boundaries of Chagrin Falls Park and created the spaces in which youth experience life. Learning more about the history of a physical place can offer individuals "legitimacy, rights, and responsibility" in that space (Lim, 2010, p. 905). Several researchers have designed ways to develop place-identity through a study of history, through the use of a book to understand how place is defined by outsiders across generations (Wyse et al., 2012), through community mapping and interviews to understand dominant narratives and community belonging (Mitchell & Elwood, 2012), or through the youth participatory action research and oral history used in my pilot project. Projects like these emphasizing a place-based historical perspective could be utilized at Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC to create a narrative that counters the dominant discourse that tends to silence Chagrin Falls Park's history. This counternarrative could be a source of community pride for students from Chagrin Falls Park.

Research on place-identity and racial-identity demonstrate the importance of local knowledge. Place-based education (PBE) focuses on community by incorporating local

knowledge into school curriculum (Lim, 2010). PBE is linked to, increasing a student's "depth of knowledge" (Gruenewald et al., 2007, p. 235), students caring "for the ecological and social wellbeing of communities," improving "student engagement and participation" (McInerney et al., 2011, p. 5), breaking "down the isolation of school from life" (p. 6), and generating "locally produced knowledge" (p. 7). Students become engaged "as social and political actors in their own communities where social history and place-based education begin" (Gruenewald et al., 2007, p. 240). PBE encourages students to use their lived experiences to adopt a critical framework to see the historical creation of places and role of power in maintaining the marginalized status of some groups (Lim, 2010; Raill-Jayanandham, 2009).

In addition to local-based history and knowledge, it is recommended that Kenston Local Schools nurtures the development of a historical counternarrative to the absence and/or distortion of local history through embracing a more comprehensive history curriculum. This curriculum might connect local with national history, linking the lived experiences of marginalized peoples. Research supports that critical ethnic-studies curriculum supports positive academic development and achievement. One example is the Mexican-American Studies (MAS) curriculum in Tucson, Arizona. Such curricula is not without controversy. Even with increased student achievement, the MAS program in Tucson illuminates the resistance that can surround non-dominant curriculums because of the political, racial, and social implications, as the curriculum was removed by a state mandate (Cabrera, 2014).

Woodson's (2015) research challenges the limitations of history textbooks and curriculum for teaching Black history, calling for teachers to "enliven the curriculum

with autobiographies, guest speakers, photographs, and other historical artifacts that extend or challenge aspects of the textbook narrative” (p. 63). Landa (2012) further critiques the way Black history education is designated to the month of February and calls for spaces of “critical reflection and critical literacy” (p. 13). In this research, students narrated the growth and identity development they experienced through participating in Pan-African studies courses at their respective colleges. It is clear from the data that a richer Black history curriculum benefits the Black students in this study and holds the potential for also engaging White students and teachers.

Recall the story Kendra told about her experience as a student at Kenston Local Schools. Kendra spoke about the Black history elective course that mainly attracted students who were Black. This class served as an example of a space of sameness. CFPCC is another place, where students interact with other students who are racially and economically same or similar to them. Spaces like this can offer a safe environment for students to discuss critical issues and forces of inequality, such as the local history of Chagrin Falls Park. There is also the need for spaces where students come in contact with difference. Chagrin Falls Park students experience this in most classes at Kenston Local Schools. These spaces come with conflict, for example the ways institutional agents narrated the classroom discussions they had about the murder of Michael Brown or tense discussions about abortion, but they are opportunities for growth and expansion of thought (Moje & Martinez, 2007; Torre et al., 2008). Whether in spaces of sameness or difference, institutional agents can facilitate opportunities for students to experience the transmission of the empowerment social capital that Stanton-Salazar (2010) frequently

refers to, providing youth with the knowledge and capital to see their world critically and be able to counter the forces that marginalize.

**Diversify Staff.** Emerging from the data, and discussed in detail above and in prior chapters, is the fact that the staff of Kenston Local Schools is homogenous. There are no non-White teachers at Kenston High School. Participants suggested increasing the diversity of staff to better represent the 9.9% of students in the district who identify as non-White (Ohio State Report Card, 2013-2014). Black teachers are underrepresented everywhere, not just at Kenston Local Schools (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Farinde, LeBlanc, & Otten, 2015). What emerged from the data about the diversity of staff is consistent with existing literature,

Presently, a large number of Black students are taught by a predominantly White, female, mono-linguistic, middle-class teaching force, a teaching force in which many teachers indicate they do not see color and advocate for a colorblind classroom... While this view of the classroom is often held with the best of intentions, not seeing color suggests one does not acknowledge students, their individual cultures, dialects, environments, backgrounds, heritage, and different learning styles. (Farinde et al., 2015, p. 34)

This racial mismatch between teachers and students may create problems, as teachers perceive students' actions primarily through their own white middle-class cultural lenses. These lenses are shaped by the "broader, more racially charged contexts... [Supplying] images of ideal students and troublemakers" that would disadvantage Black and Hispanic students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2013, p. 15). The examples shared about Tony's perceptions of students being loud or throwing the "race-card" are consistent with

McGrady and Reynolds' research. Even with the best intentions, White teachers carry with them "personal frames of references" that impact their perceptions of Black people, and in this case study people from Chagrin Falls Park (Douglas et al., 2008, p. 57). This is why the recommendation above about creating spaces to explore a counternarrative of Chagrin Falls Park history is also so important.

Hiring more diverse teachers would not only benefit non-White students, but the entire student population. Teachers of color bring different perspectives, unique experiences, and "are invaluable in culturally and linguistically diverse school contexts" (Farinde et al., 2015, p. 48). Milner (2012) discusses teachers who are Black being as valuable as the "texts themselves," with the pages of the "texts" being "filled with histories of racism, sexism, and oppression, as well as those of strength, perseverance, and success" (p. 30). Milner (2012) writes an entire case study on a teacher he calls Ms. Shaw. Ms. Shaw had a strong Black racial-identity that she used to shape her teaching strategies, as "she would pose higher level thinking questions to help illuminate critical and transformational thinking among her students" (p. 37). This research paints the picture of a teacher whose racial identity shaped her role as an empowerment institutional agent, equipping students to challenge the forces of racial inequality that exists in their communities (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Also rooted in Ms. Shaw's teaching philosophy, was a desire to "shift from individual success... to collective/community success and achievement," which she credits to growing up in a predominantly Black community (p. 43). No Black teacher is the same, just like no White teacher is the same. However, increasing the diversity of the staff at Kenston would allow students to experience a wider range of cultural practices, and experience education in a way that an all-White

staff simply cannot provide.

**Create Critical Spaces for Staff.** Increasing staff diversity is not the only recommendation for creating a more equitable experience for Black and/or Chagrin Falls Park students at Kenston Local School. In fact, the race of a teacher doesn't necessarily matter as much as the teacher understanding diverse backgrounds of students (Farinde et al., 2015). This includes a teacher being sensitive to needs specific to students of color and "embracing cultural practices and values in the classroom" (Douglas et al., 2008, p. 58). Douglas et al. (2008) found that to Black students in a predominantly White school being taught by White teachers, the primary desire Black students have is to be respected by their teacher. In their research, several students had experiences in which they perceived being disrespected because of their skin color. All staff members, and especially those who are racially mismatched from their students, need to be critically examining how students perceive their actions. Just because a teacher says they teach all students the same, this does not mean a student of color experiences teaching in this way.

Stanton-Salazar (2010) sets up a framework for how teachers can act in ways to empower marginalized and low-income students with valuable social capital that not only allows them to succeed but also equips the student to change the systems that marginalized them in the first place. Using participatory action research or project based learning, similar to the pilot project for this study, could be a useful tool across audiences at Kenston Local Schools for creating these spaces. Institutional agents could interact with the history of Chagrin Falls Park, and potentially gain a more critical understanding of the marginalization of the community, and therefore Chagrin Falls Park students. In this current case study, based on the experiences of the student participants, and the

perceptions of the teacher participants, it is my recommendation that Kenston Local Schools create spaces and opportunities for teachers to expand their cultural awareness and think critically about the way they teach students who are non-White and/or from Chagrin Falls Park.

**Critically Examine Transportation Practices.** Transportation is touched on in detail throughout the earlier chapters. Due to the physical location of Chagrin Falls Park and boundaries of Bainbridge Township, Chagrin Falls Park students travel a significant distance to attend Kenston Local Schools. This is paired with the fact that not all residents in Chagrin Falls Park have access to a personal vehicle, and public transportation is not available throughout the area. Additionally, Chagrin Falls Park students live within walking distance to Chagrin Falls Schools. Paired together, these factors create a disadvantage for youth in terms of access to extracurricular activities and events that happen outside of the normal school bussing hours. Also evident in the data is the contempt among bus drivers that the Chagrin Falls Park route is one that bus drivers do not want to have, because Chagrin Falls Park students are considered “more rowdy.”

My first recommendation is that Kenston administration explores the attitudes of bus drivers. Multiple participants in this study perceived the driver’s attitudes to be negative specifically towards Chagrin Falls Park students and the Chagrin Falls Park bus route. This attitude should be addressed and the appropriate training, or repositioning of drivers should happen. Next, CFPCC does provide limited transportation services through a van that transports Chagrin Falls Park students home from some extracurricular events. In regards to transportation practices, I would recommend that Kenston Local Schools work with CFPCC to support the added van service they have for students participating in



extracurricular events. Chagrin Falls Park students live in a unique suburban setting, where an above-average portion of the residents are low-income, but there is no access to fixed-route public transportation, as there would be in more urban contexts. An extra van or bus route allows students more opportunity to attend after-school and weekend enriching events, events which their peers throughout the rest of the community have access to. I recommend that Kenston Local School explore if there are any ways they could better serve students from Chagrin Falls Park through transportation access.

### **Primary Recommendations for CFPCC**

Chagrin Falls Park Community Center plays a valuable role in providing necessary social capital to students from Chagrin Falls Park. There is no doubt that CFPCC is viewed as an important piece of the community by community members and institutional agents from Kenston Local Schools. From analyzing the research, there are two primary areas that I recommend CFPCC creating additional strategic programming to address. The first has to do with increasing students' connections to Chagrin Falls Park, or developing place-identity. The second is focusing on how CFPCC can leverage their resources to support Kenston Local Schools at an institutional level, going beyond support at the individual student level.

### **Developing Place-Identity**

Similar to the recommendation above for Kenston Local Schools, it is my recommendation that CFPCC make some intentional actions to promote students connection to Chagrin Falls Park. In summary from above, it was striking how negative a view Chagrin Falls Park students had of the community they once called home. Place-identity is dynamic and shifts based on an individual's experiences and interactions,

positive and negative (Proshansky et al., 1983; Wyse et al., 2012). CFPCC could provide experiences and interactions, which allow youth to positively interact with their community and community's history. One of the main purposes of the concept of place is to "engender a sense of belonging and attachment" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 61).

During the pilot project, a local historian visited youth with a large map, which detailed the original plots of their community, along with the original owners. Many students were able to find their family name, and some live on the same piece of land their family purchased several decades ago. From my observation, students were engaged and interested in this visual representation of their historical connection to Chagrin Falls Park.

One other suggestion for increasing community connection and positive outlook emerged from the data when Charles talked about creating a community hall of fame and recruiting successful people from Chagrin Falls Park back to Chagrin Falls Park. The norm is that successful people leave Chagrin Falls Park, and those who stay in the community are viewed as not succeeding. Charles recommended CFPCC doing some intentional work to bring in community role models to talk to students, and even creating a community hall of fame. These are small steps to show Chagrin Falls Park in a positive light and demonstrate the opportunities that exist for youth. From CFPCC's social media page, accessed in March 2016 is this mission statement, "The mission of the Chagrin Falls Park Community Center is to empower individuals and families to reach their full potential and unify the local and greater community." This mission makes it clear that community connection and pride is a key part of the role for CFPCC.

## **Support Kenston Local Schools**

One of the recommendations for Kenston Local Schools was to create critical spaces for teachers to explore issues of race, inequality, and culture in their classrooms. I believe one of the ways CFPCC could support Kenston Local Schools is to provide trainings and/or sessions on not only working with students from Chagrin Falls Park, but understanding the historical, social, cultural, and political forces that impact the lives of Chagrin Falls Park students. With the right funding, CFPCC could hire an individual specifically for the purpose of training and advocacy. This person could lead willing Kenston staff through relevant books about social and cultural foundations in education, bring in after school speakers to talk about poverty or racial-identity, or facilitate critical discussions around assumptions about students who are from Chagrin Falls Park. It is my perception that this kind of partnership between CFPCC and Kenston Local Schools, would help move institutional agents to the role of empowerment institutional agents, as they would be exposed to thinking about inequality at an institutional level, rather than only an individual student level.

## **Moving Forward**

The recommendations above represent the data specific to this case study, primarily what emerged from the interviews with Kenston graduates, Kenston institutional agents, and CFPCC institutional agents. The recommendations are based on my personal exploration of the community, relevant literature, and research data. This qualitative case study was done with great attention to detail and participant voice, and took several measures for trustworthiness (see Chapter 3). However, there were still limitations within the research, along with opportunities for future research.

## **Limitations of Research**

One of the main limitations of the study was the number of participants. This research included eleven participants representing three different settings.

Representatives from the school were mostly homogenous, White and female. Only one participant was male. This was not for lack of trying. First in regards to race, there are no non-White educators at the high school level. Second, I contacted through email and phone several male teachers, administrators, and coaches that were recommended by other participants. None of these individuals responded or were willing to be included in the research. Due to this, there was only one male representing Kenston Local Schools. This was definitely a limitation of the research.

A second limitation had to do with the high turnover of staff recently at Chagrin Falls Park Community Center. Two institutional agents that were spoken about in the study by young adult participants were unable to be interviewed for personal reasons I chose not to disclose to protect confidentiality. These two agents were talked about frequently throughout the interviews and it was clear they have influenced the community and students greatly. For me, this research feels a little incomplete without their valuable perspectives about their legacy and impact. One of the requirements I set forth for interviews was that agents had at least one-year experience working with Chagrin Falls Park students. There are several staff members at CFPCC who have not been employed for over a year, so they were not included in this research.

An additional limitation had to do with the Kenston graduates interviewed for this study. All four graduates attended college, graduated from college, and are employed and living somewhere other than Chagrin Falls Park. This research could have been enhanced

through interviews with Kenston graduates who still live in Chagrin Falls Park. Due to the use of snowball sampling, I only had access to the contact information of one potential participant who still lived in Chagrin Falls Park. She was contacted several times, and we had an interview set up. However, she had to cancel because of a car maintenance issue, and was unable to reschedule.

I recognized the final limitation as I began to analyze the interview transcripts. It was not until I was completed with interviews that I began to notice Kenston institutional agents collapsing racial-identity (being Black) and place-identity (being from Chagrin Falls Park). There are several times throughout the transcripts, where I wish I would have probed and clarified whether the institutional agent was talking more specifically about a student being Black or a student being from Chagrin Falls Park. At times, it was hard to tease these identities out during the analysis of data. Reflecting back after data analysis I realize this, however in the interviews I did not.

### **Future Research Possibilities**

In my perspective, there are two key areas that this research opens up for future and broader research opportunities. The first is to explore the importance of place-identity in school achievement at a broader level. How important is a positive view of community to student success? The pilot project and current research both revealed students from Chagrin Falls Park showing negative place-identity and a strong desire to leave their community. The research explored some possible contributing factors towards this, but there is much opportunity for future research in terms of how school intersects with place-identity. This type of research is relevant in the educational landscape, especially in urban areas, where there is a shift away from neighborhood schools towards

charter and/or magnet schools. When a student attends a school removed from their neighborhood, a school that may be made up of a different economical or racial composition than their neighborhood, how does that student's perspective of her/his home or place change? I think this is an important area of educational research, and a research need that is growing because of school choice.

The second recommended area for future research is in regards to collaborative efforts between community organizations and schools in terms of developing empowerment institutional agents at the school. Many times, community centers are staffed with the types of people who hold critical understanding of social, cultural, political, and historical forces affecting their communities. They understand the day to day of community life that a student carries with them to school every day. Staff at community organizations may also represent the demographics of the community, more closely than the school's teachers and administrators. I think a great deal of future action-orientated research could be done exploring programs that leverage the critical knowledge of community center staff, to train educators in local schools to act as empowerment institutional agents.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation explored the ways in which adults from two institutions, Kenston Local Schools and Chagrin Falls Park Community Center, acted as institutional agents for Chagrin Falls Park youth shifting between their racially conflicted community and school. This phenomenon was explored within the context of a historically marginalized community in the Cleveland metropolitan area, Chagrin Falls Park. This research also explored how racial-identity, place-identity, and local history interact to impact the

experience of Chagrin Falls Park students in academic settings. The research found that institutional agents from both Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC are providing Chagrin Falls Park students with social capital. However, the ability to foster in students a critical analysis as to how power relations ascribed to race, place, and class operate in their school, is not part of the narrative of the participants. Stanton-Salazar (2010) theorizes on the role of the empowerment institutional agent and places importance on adults acting in a way that equips students to challenge the forces of oppression and marginalization at work in their lives.

This case study is significant because it adds to a large body of research on the experience of Black youth in school. This case study reinforces research that suggests the inequalities and social hierarchies in society are reflected in school settings, many times positioning Black youth at the bottom of the hierarchical structure (Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Hope, Skoog, & Jagers, 2015). The absence of spaces in school settings (both classrooms and curriculum) to critically examine race, justice, and inequality keep many of these accepted norms about the status of Black students unquestioned (Chapman, 2013; Landa, 2012; Woodson, 2015). Additionally, the findings of this case study are significant because they add to the already existing literature on the importance of adults acting on behalf of marginalized youth (Sanchez et al., 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Institutional agents can play a critical role for students by providing capital, which youth can use to counteract the forces of inequality at work within their lives (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). This research is significant in terms of adding to the literature on institutional agents, specifically in terms of agents' understanding and acting to help youth navigate between institutional spaces, which are racially segregated. Finally,

significance was provided by the transformative nature of the study (Mertens, 2012). This research served to strengthen the ways in which adults from Kenston Local Schools and CFPCC interact and equip the youth from Chagrin Falls Park. This allows both institutions the chance to evaluate and potentially change the roles adults' play in empowering youth as they transition between Chagrin Falls Park and Kenston Local Schools.



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## **APPENDICES**

## **Kenston Graduate/Young Adult Interview Protocol**

1. How many years have you or did you attend Kenston schools?
  - How long have you lived in Chagrin Falls Park?
  - What are you doing now - attending school? working?
2. How much do you know about the history of Chagrin Falls Park?
  - Do you think the history of your community is important to your identity?
  - How well do you think other Chagrin Falls Park residents know about their history? What about people living in Chagrin Falls or Bainbridge?
  - Do you think it is important for “outsiders” to know the history of Chagrin Falls Park?
3. How would you describe Chagrin Falls Park to someone who knew nothing about it?
4. Do/did you feel connected to your community?
  - What sort of experiences or things make/made you feel connected?
  - What sort of experiences or things make/made you feel distant?
  - Can you share with me a personal experience you had in which you felt a part of Chagrin Falls Park?
5. How would you describe Kenston Schools to someone who knew nothing about them?
6. Do/did you feel connected to your school?
  - What sort of experiences or things make/made you feel connected?
  - What sort of experiences or things make/made you feel distant?
  - Can you share with me a personal experience you had in which you felt a part of Kenston Schools?

7. Do you feel students from Chagrin Falls Park have a different experience attending Kenston Local Schools than students from other parts of Bainbridge or Auburn Township? Why?
8. What things in your life make you who you are?
  - How important is where you are from to your identity?
  - How important is your race/ethnicity to your identity?
9. In your perspective, are/were there adults at school who helped you move through school and get to where you are today?
  - In what ways, if any, did they help you? In what ways, if any, did they hinder you?
  - Did you have interactions with adults at school that influenced your racial/ethnic identity?
10. In your perspective, are/were there adults in the community (or at the community center) who helped you move through school and get to where you are today?
  - In what ways, if any, did they help you? In what ways, if any, did they hinder you?
  - Did you have interactions with adults at school that influenced your racial/ethnic identity?
11. In what ways do you think adults in the school, community, and community center could help students succeed?

## **School Institutional Agent Interview Protocol**

1. How long have you been working (or how long did you work) at Kenston Schools?
2. What is your role in the school district?
  - In your role, can you describe your interaction with students from Chagrin Falls Park?
3. In your experience, do students from Chagrin Falls Park have a different experience attending Kenston Local Schools than students from other parts of Bainbridge or Auburn Township?
  - If yes, in what ways?
  - If yes, why do you think the experience is different?
4. Do you perceive the youth of Chagrin Falls Park to feel connected or attached to their community? In what ways?
  - How much do you know about the history of Chagrin Falls Park?
  - Do you think it is important to the identity of the youth of Chagrin Falls Park to know their local history?
5. Do you perceive the youth of Chagrin Falls Park to feel connected or attached to their school? In what ways?
6. What role do you feel race and/or ethnicity plays in the identity in school of students from Chagrin Falls Park?
7. Do you feel you personally are a critical part of the success of students from Chagrin Falls Park?
  - What about other adults?

- What capital (social or cultural) or resources do you see adults providing Chagrin Falls Park students with?
8. In what ways do you think adults from the school could help students succeed in school and beyond?
  9. In what ways do you think adults from the community could help students succeed in school and beyond?
  10. Is there anything additional you think the school could do to help Chagrin Falls Park students excel in school?



## **Community Center Institutional Agent Interview Protocol**

1. How long have you been involved with the youth from Chagrin Falls Park?
  - What is the nature of your relationship or your role with the youth from Chagrin Falls Park?
2. From your perspective, do students from Chagrin Falls Park have a different experience attending Kenston Local Schools than students from other parts of Bainbridge or Auburn Township?
  - If yes, in what ways?
  - If yes, why do you think the experience is different?
3. Do you perceive the youth of Chagrin Falls Park to feel connected or attached to their community? In what ways?
  - How much do you know about the history of Chagrin Falls Park?
  - Do you think it is important to the identity of the youth of Chagrin Falls Park to know their local history?
4. Do you perceive the youth of Chagrin Falls Park to feel connected or attached to their school? In what ways?
5. What role do you feel race and/or ethnicity plays in the identity of students from Chagrin Falls Park?
6. In what ways do you see the Community Center playing a role in students' lives?
7. Do you feel you personally are a critical part of the success of students from Chagrin Falls Park?
  - What about other adults?

- What capital (social or cultural) or resources do you see adults providing Chagrin Falls Park students with?
8. In what ways do you think adults from the school could help Chagrin Falls Park students as they move through school and develop their identity?
  9. In what ways do you think adults from the community could help Chagrin Falls Park students as they move through school and develop their identity?
  10. Is there anything additional you think the school could do to help Chagrin Falls Park students?
  11. Is there anything additional you think the Community Center could do to help Chagrin Falls Park students?