Narratives of African American Mothers and Child Readiness:

Reading, Writing and Racialization

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Abstract

This qualitative doctoral thesis sought to explore African American parents’ experiences related to society and parenting in order to provide a counter-narrative to the mainstream narrative that suggests African-American parents are ineffective. Five Black females provided the data garnered from semi-structured interviews framed by critical race theory (CRT). Findings revealed the participants’ perceived their efforts were successful in readying their children for pre-kindergarten as evidenced by the children’s demonstration of phonemic awareness, numeracy, color recognition, and appropriate social skills. Interestingly, all the participants believed that racism was taught by White parents to their children. Though each participant cited deficit ideologies reflective of elitist, hegemonic enculturation of White supremacist ideologies in U. S. society, the data further reveal that the participants retained their cultural and traditional perspectives associated with oral traditions and an African ethic.

*Key words:* African American, parenting, child readiness, perspectives, racism, culture
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[people], White mother’s [daughters and] sons, then we who believe in freedom cannot rest until this happens’ (1964).
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Chapter One: Problem of Practice

African American child readiness in the United States (U. S.) in general stems from historical and cultural ideologies and practices that have been reinforced through social and institutional structures (Keyes, Smyke, Middleton, & Black, 2015, p. 27). Social culture is a dynamic repertoire of practices that is inherited and passed on through generations (Parsons, 2008, p. 139). It is helpful to view social culture through an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits in his ecological theory that life and learning take place within interrelated systems he identifies as micro, meso, exso, and macro. These systems reflect environmental and social interactions from which structures are composed to support an interdependent and cohesive system of values, beliefs, and mores that constitute cultural phenomenon (Capra & Luisi, 2014).

Social learning for African-Americans is challenging because they are situated within multiple cultural contexts (DuBois, 1903; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; Stmric-Pawl & Leffler, 2011). More specifically, they live in a culture that largely sees African-Americans as inferior. U. S. culture, though unique, emerged from its European predecessors’ development of modern discourse (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 259; West, 2003; Stansfield, 1985). The formalization and objectification of social science knowledge systems by Euro Americans, as a consequence, devalues the lived realities, cultures, and knowledge of historically oppressed people and ethnicities (Giroux, 1983; Guinier, 2004, p. 114). Subsequently, schools and educators (e.g. teachers and administrators) largely embody and employ ideological discourse that reinforces White supremacy and African American inferiority (Solomon, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005, p.13).
Teachers utilize language that yields specific societal distinctiveness related to perceptions about communities, their capacities, values, and mores (Giroux, 1994). Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade (2008) cite research findings (Boykin, 1992; Darder, 1991; Scheurich, 1993) that affirm “Many White teachers work from within a hegemonic, Western, epistemological framework, which often predisposes them to have lower expectations of Black students and a lack of respect for the students’ families and primary culture” (p. 49). By such means, schools function to legitimate particular types of epistemologies, speech patterns, and social relations that reflect class and familial practices of certain students. For instance, Takacs (2002) reports that some administrators and teachers at the collegiate level perceive poverty-stricken students of color who may speak Spanish as “deficits” that problematize instruction and whose “deficiencies” costs schools money (p. 4). Furthermore, dehumanizing ideologies couched in neoliberal corporate commodification of public elementary schools reproduce ideas that characterize some children as “investments, assets or productive units, or failing that, [others] as pint-sized human deficits who threaten our competitive capacities” (Kozol, 2005, p. 94). As such, schools “reproduce[e] [an] unequal system of social classes” (Anyon, 1981, p. 1). Anyon (1981) goes on to say, though teachers, students, administrators and staff construct meanings through their interaction, the educational context constricts and shapes the ingredients and structure of those meanings and as an interdependent network, fosters an agency and a milieu that replicates the status quo.

Radical educators, according to Giroux (1983), have asserted that rather than affording personal growth, increased societal status, and structural and financial power to subjugated citizens, schools’ primary role involves the mediation of the hegemonic perspectives, epistemologies, and competencies to reinforce wage exploitation (p. 1). Schools, then are
reproductively perceived by radical educators in three distinctive ways according to Giroux (1983):

First, schools provided different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in a labor force stratified by class, race, and gender. Second, schools were seen as reproductive in the cultural sense, functioning in part to distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, language, and modes of style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests. Third, schools were viewed as part of a state apparatus that produced and legitimated the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state's political power (p. 2).

Because schools reproduce the epistemologies and knowledge of the privileged that govern society (Counts, 1932) and theses ideologies reflect a modern discourse that perceives African Americans as abnormal and inferior (Baratz & Baratz, 1975; Briscoe, 2005; Keyes, Smyke, Middleton, & Black, 2015; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Stansfield, 1985, West, 2003), African Americans are cast as an outgroup (Bobo, 1999, p. 449) without status or claim to societal inclusion nor rights and privileges afforded Whiteness (Blumer, 1965; Harris, 1993). As a consequence, they are treated as lower-class, unwanted in perceived White spaces, like schools, (Anderson, 2015, p. 16), and are summarily disassociated from the normative ideal of concern for and involvement in their children’s education with regard to parenting (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Trotman, 2001; Watson-Hill, 2013).

The standards and expectations of parent involvement in schools are not impartial; they reflect the culturally reproduced notions of the dominating elites (Lareau, 1998, p. 74). Research finds that schools view the parental involvement ideal, though currently more associated with the term parental engagement, as a partnership that combines family, school and community life
Parents are expected to volunteer in support of school events, reinforce academic learning at home, and read with their young, all of which research (Lareau, 1998; Trotman, 2001; Watson-Hill, 2013) has shown to positively influence student assessed academic performance. But many African American parents may involve themselves in ways different from the norm and often go undetected by teachers and administrators, and many more do not fit the normative characterization of the family (Watson-Hill, 2013). Therefore, schools frequently disrespect and find suspect parents whose family compositions and interactions are different from those idealized by the White middle class (Abramovitz, 1992).

Because African Americans are negated and positioned as other in Euro American conceptualizations of humanity, they have been perpetually racially, economically, and socially segregated. African Americans typically have different perceptions and responses relative to parental involvement and engagement, as well as the roles of schools, teachers, and the educative process in readying their offspring (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004, p. 6). For example, barriers arise to the involvement and engagement of African American parents due to differences in parental and educator’s culture, unwelcoming environs, and staff insensitivity that leads to excluding and disregard of African American parents and their children in schools of this type (Watson-Hill, 2013, p. 27). These cultural differences coupled with the so-called “achievement gap” (Ladson-Billings, 2006), leads to students’ and their families’ being blamed for an “educational debt” that has been influenced by a history of oppression and present-day schools that largely have not been supportive or nurturing towards African American students (Delpit, 2006, p. xxiii; Sleeter & Stillman, 2013, p. 255).
Teachers and schools more broadly blame African American parents for their children’s challenges in school without consideration of the historical, social, cultural, and political context (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Moreover, African American parents are viewed from a deficit perspective (Woods & Kurtz-Coates, 2007, p. 101), with teachers relying largely on limited experiences and negative stereotyping of African Americans. Therefore, educators’ perspectives of African Americans as parents are incomplete, which makes it difficult for educators to be able to utilize the strengths of these families. In other words, teachers cannot be culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) with limited knowledge and deficit perspectives. Therefore, I, the scholar-practitioner engaging in this study, wish to explore African American parents’ experiences related to society, parenting, and how they rear their children in order to provide a counter-narrative (Cook, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, 1995) to the "standard" narrative that suggests African American parents are ineffective.

**Justification for the Research Problem**

At its broadest, readiness is considered to include the “social, political, organizational, educational, and personal resources that support children’s success at school entry” (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005, p. 9). The literature finds no single child readiness skill can foretell continuous academic or socioemotional development, but rather, entry level skills in a given disciple best predict consequent skills (Child Trends, 2012). This finding is supported by Clarke et al. (2012) whose study revealed that early social and family experiences shape the learning of fundamental skills children need for school success. But, teachers and parents hold contrasting views of child readiness, and Black and Latina teachers hold views divergent from White teachers (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005, p. 7). Additionally, most research devoted to child care’s influence on the
development of normalcy excludes African American and other children of color (Johnson et al, 2003).

The literature base reveals that social hegemony reifies the epistemologies and axiologies of Euro American elites socially and institutionally within U. S. culture (Giroux, 1983), which can lead not only to teachers’ reproducing ideologies of cognitive and sociocultural deficits about African Americans (King, 1991, p. 138) but can also influence African Americans’ perceptions of themselves, their children, and community (Patterson, 2010). Moreover, given most parents of Black children are single Black women, the fact that African American females and mothers in U. S. culture are demonized (Rhodes, 2012, p. 37) within this type ideology further complicates their varied perceptions of themselves, families and neighborhoods.

Relative to racialization, schools and educators largely employ ideological discourse that reinforces White supremacy and African American inferiority (Solomon et al. 2005). The import of this finding is that “Children learn to internalize dominate messages of race by age three” (Matias, 2016, p.1). Other research suggests racial discrimination and segregation affect not only a youngster’s health via neo-natal outcomes, but can also influence the process of a child’s maturation (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2011).

Overall, African American parents’ ideas about themselves, their children, and community often contrast with those held by teachers, and Black parenting differs from that of middle-class Whites (Delpit, 2006). These findings reveal a contestation between ideologies that inform Black parenting choices and those that support Euro American research practices, and perceptions of Black parents and their efforts in readying their children for formal education. These findings support this project’s examination of what Black parents have to say about
themselves, their children and communities, and through its scholarship provides a meaningful contribution to the literature on Black child readiness.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Many research investigations involving child preparedness are narrowly framed toward skill assessment to further programmatic interventions (Guerra et al. 2011) or policy initiatives, and few take a translational approach to child readiness studies (Shonkoff, Boyce & McEwen, 2009). In contrast to the current research project, most studies utilize quantitative methods that lack theoretical framing that would support an analysis of the ecological context of the participants and its role in supporting or undermining child readiness (Tamis-LaMonda, 2008). Furthermore, reliable assessment is problematized with regard to studies of African Americans because of the lack of congruence between assessments of parenting and Black culture given most measures of parenting are drawn uniformly from White middle class households (p. 339). Deficiencies in research methods and perspectives regarding African American parenting in preparing their children for formal education are affirmed by the analysis conducted by Swick, Brown and Boutte (1994). The authors stated that quantitative data presented in attempts to explicate why Blacks are impacted by negative social conditions, more than other ethnicities, are usually presented without any or sparse consideration of systemic causality or positive dimensions of Black life.

Lastly, McAllister, Wilson, Green and Baldwin (2005) posited that a myopic approach to policy analysis has led to an overemphasis on content knowledge for preschoolers to the detriment of socioemotional learning and the impact of the ecological context on children’s growth and development. Thus, many studies have focused singularly on cognitive skills, which in turn, narrows possible variables for explicating and forecasting behavior. Yet, even when
considered, parental and home environmental influences are stripped of their complexity and dynamism with regard to their relationship to school readiness.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

Considering that the entire process involving developing the research topic, questions, choice of methods, and identification of participants, data collection, analysis, and the report of findings is mediated through me, I along with the participants formed the initial audience. Now, the focus is to engage an audience of parents, children, teachers and principals in conversations about what the participants have shared and what might be learned that can improve Black child readiness. Another audience is the community of scholars whose research involves the project’s subject. It is hoped that the findings and questions raised by this study can at least add to the conversation underway or at best initiate new conversations and points for further research. The public at large who care about and understand the significance of education for Blacks represents an audience that would require a different media format that can encapsulate the enormity of this study into digestible portions but nonetheless, can broaden the meaning and utility of this project should it resonate with them.

The findings may situate me as a resource in supporting parents and children in our learning community. That means in my community, if people believe I am sincere and exhibit integrity in service, then they may accept me and support the work I seek to contribute. But, if I were to denigrate their trust, then I should not be valued or esteemed. This work has granted me broader understanding, knowledge, skills and dispositions to serve humanity by identifying and voicing the needs of my sisters, brothers and the nation’s children in our quest to establish the beloved community in this day, in this time, and in this life.
Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study are: 1) How do African American parents view themselves, their children, and community as dimensions of child readiness? 2) What can distort African American parental perceptions of these aspects of readying their young? 3) How is racialization interpreted by African American parents?

Significance of the Problem

Child readiness, or the ability of parents to prepare their children for school, (Podesta, 2014, p. 123) is important because it can afford children opportunities to effectively maximize their social emotional growth, academic development, and skill mastery over their life course (Child Trends, 2012). Parental support helps ready children to contribute to society as adults (Augustine, 2014, p. 243), and to work toward high quality community sustainability that undergirds continued national health and security (Stewart, 2014, p.24). But ecological differences experienced by families of color versus those of Whites inform not only parental perceptions of childhood readiness for formal education but also precipitate access to quality versus inferior educational opportunities and achievement outcomes (Aratani, Wight, & Cooper, 2011; Dixon-Román, Everson, & McArdle, 2013). This impacts sustainable adult life-health options (Shonkoff & Garner, 2011) and finally recapitulates as major stratifications in living standards (Blauner, 2001) that are often generationally reproduced. Indeed, the societal macrosystem’s interaction with African American and other non-European Americans’ phylogenies and ontogenies is radically different from its interrelation with European Americans (Parsons, 2008, p. 4).

Early childhood development has been found to be significantly influenced by maternal parenting (Podesta, 2014, p. 123), as well as a robust association of maternal socioeconomic
status (SES) with child readiness (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Women are most often the primary caretakers (Augustine, 2014) of children currently in our society. Approximately, 50% of African American families are headed by single women with average incomes under $22,000 (CDF, 2014). Compounded by racism and sexism, these factors can lead to overwhelming stress levels that can undermine quality parenting (Hill, 2001, p. 687; Taylor, Budescu, Gebre, & Hodzic, 2014). Moreover, the research of Rathburn and West (2004) suggests as the number of children’s family risk factors (e.g., being reared in single-parent households, subsisting below the federal poverty level) increases, children tend to gain less in reading and math than children with fewer family risk factors (Jeon, Buettner, & Hur 2014).

This research is also important for national security and our wellbeing. Guaranteeing children readiness for formal education supports future academic success, such as high school graduation (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). High school graduates rear healthy children and are more apt not be teenage parents or be incarcerated (Stewart, 2012). Research further reveals that students who leave high school before finishing represent a $260,000 loss per student which, over a 10-year period comes to approximately $3 trillion in underutilized potential (p. 29). These results make the United States less productive, less prosperous and more importantly, less socially secure. By better understanding the interrelatedness of culture, parenting, and child development within and circumscribing African American families and the subsequent life course outcomes they often produce, we can come to the realization that limiting high quality opportunities for African Americans and their children’s developmental success, as a consequence, limits the growth and progress of the nation.
Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) is a powerful tool employed in qualitative research because of its utility, not only as a theoretical framework that centers racism, gender, and class (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995) but also as a methodology (Cook, 2013, p. 183) that utilizes African American narratives to explore research questions and meaning making (Cook, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT is a sound choice for this project because it centers race as historically and culturally embedded in every facet of the American society in which our parent participants live, move, and engage their being. Secondly, CRT attests to the empirical validity of African American experiential wisdom and knowledge, gleaned through their storied lives and narratives, as meaningful data with respect to qualitative methods and as a means to transforming reality (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii; Creswell, 2013, p. 37).

In understanding the means by which the law structures race and reproduces racial domination (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995, p. xxv) CRT scholarship has designed tenets that guide examination, critique and revolutionizing praxis. The hallmark tenets of CRT embraced by scholars and identified by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) according to Ladson-Billings (2013) are:

1. Belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrant in U.S. society;
   (Racism is not random, individual or isolated acts but symbiotic)
2. Interest convergence or material determinism;
   (Whites only seek racial justice for Blacks if they benefit: Alignment not altruism)
3. Race as social construction;
   (Race is not a scientific reality, but a powerful social influence on life course)
4. Intersectionality and anti-essentialism;
(Respects multiple identities (race, gender, class, religion etc.) and group allegiance without stereotyping)

5. Voice or counter-narrative.

(Storytelling or narratives reflects ethnocentric or hegemonic views and counter narratives are about principals of justice)

The CRT ideologies postulated by these noted theoreticians, including the permanence of racism and interest convergence (Bell, 1988), Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson, Billings, 1995) were all pertinent in capturing and interpreting this project’s exploration of African American child readiness.

Lastly, CRT is an appropriate choice for this study because it allows for a critical critique of the literature base from which the research questions were garnered. CRT contextualizes researcher assumptions, methods, and findings to clarify and highlight deficit assumptions promulgated within the literature (Maxwell, 2004, p. 14) and reproduced within American culture.

**Positionality**

I am what Bronfenbrenner (1979) characterizes as a “developing person.” My development up to this point has been shaped by several influences. Because humans are socially constructed in relation to their culture and environment (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, p. 2), I reflect the historical and cultural contexts mediated within the United States as well as the upbringing of my parents. Being an African American male, Christian, and ethical scholar-practitioner informs my positionality.
I was blessed by GOD to be reared by my parents in rural Alabama in the 1960s. The community in which I was reared was probably 90% African American and included a renowned institution of higher learning founded by local African Americans. The family physician, teachers, bankers, troop leaders, choir directors, athletic coaches, and religious leaders I interacted with were African American. But the social mores and the political and economic systems were controlled by European Americans. My father was an ex-POW in WWII and my mother was a registered nurse. They taught me to pray and to worship GOD. I later accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I never lacked any of the necessities of life because of the hard work and sacrifice of my parents, and the supportiveness of our extended family and our community. My environment provided me and almost every child of our community the social and emotional underpinning to grasp requisite formal educational skills at home, and through day care providers and the local nursery school, paid for by my parents. My mother and father’s modest middle class status and willingness to sacrifice on behalf of their children afforded us the optimum pre-school experience available at that time. I later participated in Scouting obtaining Eagle Scout rank, 4-H through our public schools, swam on the local swimming team and played organized Little League and Babe Ruth baseball, Peewee football, and varsity basketball that were headed by dynamic men and women of African descent. Additionally, I was accepted by audition into the Alabama all-state choir and jazz ensembles where I was one of just two African American students, both males.

More importantly, my parents’ values, beliefs, and deportment extol the importance of learning. I was loved by my parents and lovingly recall my mother reading to me while I nestled in her lap. I remember we had a chalkboard with magnetized alphabets, where my sibling and I scribbled, drew impressionistic scenes, and spelled our names for the first time. Furthermore, our
parents’ means allowed them to subscribe to a diversity of periodicals and magazines such as *Ebony, Jet, Highlights, The Crisis, Life, Time* and various local and statewide newspapers. My mother being a lover of the arts and music in particular exposed me to her varied tastes ranging from jazz in the form of Duke Ellington, Arthur Prysock, and Ella Fitzgerald, to the gospel music of James Cleveland, Dorothy Love Coates, Rev. Cleophus Robinson, as well as the Beatles, Rare Earth and The Carpenters. We watched and enjoyed Red Skelton, Lawrence Welk, Diane Carroll, Sammy Davis, Jr. and *Star Trek*. These experiences influence my perceptions of what it means for parents to ready, or prepare their children for life.

My positionality is in deep contrast to many current African American children and families who through no fault of their own are born into financial deprivation (U.S. Census Data, 2010). My upbringing in a middle-class home has shaped my experiences and ideologies. My positionality is also different from current children’s because racism functions differently.

During my childhood, racism was used a catalyst for solidarity among Negros, as we were then designated, and educational achievement (DuBois, 1970). Religious and moral codes of the time, tempered single headed households, and extended families reinforced child development and enculturation that highly esteemed the “three Rs”: reading, writing and arithmetic (Reinhartz & Beach, 1997, p. 15).

As I was conducting this study, I was aware of my connection to the participants, being we had been colleagues for many years. With most of the participants I share many of the same characteristics relative to ethnicity, religion, vocation, and social status. Also, I could identify with some of their childhood stories because they reflected my upbringing, although I am older than they are. We share the same learning community and students. So, I felt we collaborated in composing the interviews. At times, the interviews seemed more like a dance. I would take the
lead in questioning, but sometimes I needed to follow as the participants led me to into different places of their lives, and then they would allow me to take the lead again to guide us into another movement as we collaborated in the composition and first performance. We danced the dance of truth in call and response fashion as we learned together, the rhythm and our dance. At times, it felt improvisational. Because positionality informs who we are and all that we do, so, it was embodied and invoked by myself and the participants collaboratively in constructing the process.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to describe the research encompassing parenting, teachers’ dispositions of African Americans, and institutional racism/racialization as interrelated dimensions that can foster or impede African American child readiness and consequentially, adult life course options. Following this discussion, Chapter 3 will delineate the methodological strategies utilized in this doctoral thesis, outline the research design, and provide the data collection approaches.

Culture

So-called “effective” parenting strategies (e.g. sensitivity, monitoring child activities, and consistent but not overly harsh discipline) are associated with psychosocial adjustment measures (Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2008). A review of the literature reveals these measures include academic achievement, positive self-esteem, appropriate social relations, and less externalized behavior (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002) but parenting, like all things, takes place within a context. The context here is U. S. culture. Culture is expressed by the values, beliefs, and behaviors mediated within the society. Over time behavioral patterns and symbols are exchanged within a group and transmitted to new members as a basis for future acts (Boyer, 2012; Kluckhom & Kroeberg, 1952). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits in his ecological theory that life and learning take place within interrelated systems he identifies as macro, exso, meso and micro. These systems reflect environmental and social interactions from which structures are developed to support an interdependent and cohesive system of values, beliefs, and mores that constitute cultural phenomenon (Capra & Luisi, 2014). But as previously noted, African Americans abide and thrive situated in ecological precariousness between the epistemological and hermeneutic tales of two cultures (APA, 2008; Bartz & Bartz, 1975; Kotchick & Forehand,
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2002; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). The first is the permeable micro and meso historical
culture of family and community (Parsons, 2008) and the second is the gated exso ecology
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which European American males have defined and promulgated the
knowledge deemed to be valid social cultural capital (Apple, 1985, p. 4). This ecological context
mandates the subsequent behavioral balancing act that embodies the idea put forth by DuBois
(1903) of the double-consciousness of African Americans and the historical-cultural necessity to
racially socialize their children to be proud of being Black to ready them for struggle in a racist
culture (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002).

Although culture provides the context of human interactions generationally, it also
excludes values, beliefs, behaviors, and people. For example, Gaitan (1990, p. 2) reports that
Americanization programs aimed at Latinas and Latinos were historically used to transform
“students’ language, dress, recreational activities, family traditions and home lifestyle”
(Gonzalez, 1990). The marginalization aspect of enculturation occurs as a consequence of
inclusive choices but is no less impactful, especially concerning the exclusive honoring of the
privileged group’s culture as superior and necessary for membership within the group. Thus,
non-members and others are accorded different treatment relative to privileged group members
(Briscoe, 2004; Foley, 2010; Frey, 1993; Parsons, 2008). In the case of Native peoples, for
example, White social hegemony was forcefully imposed through schools that viewed Native
culture as problematic with regard to educative approaches. Some instructors sought to civilize
and make Native children “less Indian,” distinguishing their cultural valuing of the collective
versus White American dogmatized individualism (Feagin & Feagin, 1999, p. 226). The
positionality of privileged groups that lead to a worldview and actions that reinforce their
qualities as normal and others’ traits as anomalous and inferior can be termed othering (Briscoe,
2004). Othering, according to Briscoe (2004), is a consequence of a century of mostly well-off White men, as the writers of social science, defining their own and others’ identities which propagates a supremacist universalism for the writer’s group and segregates all others (p. 5). Rather than employing universalism or othering, Frey (1993) uses the term monoculturalism to denote the socially acceptable privileged group’s disdain of the cultural, linguistic, gender, and socioeconomic perceptions and differences of ethnic persons, as well as the poverty-stricken and non-standard American language speakers who may be relegated to inferior educational contexts that mis-educate and limit their life course opportunities for social advancement (p. 2).

In the U.S., the scientific and educational literature combined with governmental and civic discourses specifically associated with African American females, collectively reify the historical-cultural racist and misogynistic notions of the Jezebel (temptress), Sapphire (“ball buster”), and Mammy (non-threatening), as well as contemporized caricatures like the welfare queen, crack mother and teenage baby momma (Rhodes, 2012, p. 17). An overwhelming assumption about poverty stricken Black women, according to Rhodes (2012) is that they intentionally become pregnant to increase their governmental subsidy thus denigrating Black reproduction. Yet, unwed White pregnancies are generally viewed not as illegitimate but rather denoting reproductive rights, which was exemplified in the media coverage of Bristol Palin, daughter of Sarah Palin the 2008 GOP vice-presidential nominee, who gave birth to two children out of wedlock (p. 18). But even more appalling and as problematic or in Rhodes’s words “soul-piercing” was a 2011 billboard erected at a major intersection in New York that displayed a photograph of an elementary age Black girl in an anti-abortion promotion under the heading “The most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb.” She further states that, though facts may be reported to provide information and mobilize support, en masse African
American females and mothers in U. S. culture are demonized (p. 37). Moreover, Lorde (2007) asserts that racism, sexism and other ‘isms’ represent ideas of supremacy that lead to dominating behaviors of individuals in a way that can deem everything that one is not a threat to one’s existence. The review finds that violence in all its manifestations directed against African American women intersects race, gender and class, and so distinguishes their oppression (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 358). Crenshaw (1989) defines Intersectionality, a theory she developed, as contesting single-issue analyses:

The point is that Black women can experience discrimination in any number of ways and that the contradiction arises from our assumptions that their claims of exclusion must be unidirectional. Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarity, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination” (p. 149).

Stevens-Watkins, Perry, Pullen, Jewell, and Oser (2014) center African American women in their research of cognitive stress related to racism and sexism. The researchers inquired as to the pervasiveness of racism and sexism in the lives of African American women, their interrelationships across life events to racial and gender discrimination, and the degree to which racism and sexism’s influence across African American females lived realities affect their levels of physiological stress. Two-hundred-twenty-four African American women comprised the analysis sample with average incomes of $17,000, 15% were college graduates, and 13% of the sample was married. These demographics were significantly below corresponding national
average data of income at $29,423, 24% with baccalaureate degrees and 26% in marriage relationships (p. 563), so the researchers employed sociodemographic variables in all models as controls. An innovative aspect of the study conceptualized stressful occurrences as endemic in order to examine the interrelatedness of racism and sexism’s intersectionality with a multiplicity of domains. Findings revealed racism and sexism were firmly correlated and somewhat associated with more common stressors (p. 566). Also, racism and sexism profoundly impacted cognitive distress having an additive effect to the extent that racism may sensitize African American women to sexist events, compounding distressful states of being. The research supports intersectionality as framing African American women’s social situatedness as unsafe and exposed to chronic life conditions and psychological stressors, which also aligns with the assertion of McLoyd (1990).

The macro historical-cultural ecology (Parsons, 2008) is not benign and for many African American women and mothers, reflects a greater, more enduring trauma. The review included research that explored the interrelatedness of neoliberalism, poverty, and illiteracy, as well as the rise of African American women’s incarceration as a consequence of the “War on Drugs” begun in the Republican Regan administration and accelerated by the Democratic Clinton White House (Alexander, 2010, p. 56). Alfred and Chlup (2009) employed critical race theory (CRT), of which intersectionality is a component, to frame a hermeneutical approach to clarify the connection of neoliberal welfare reforms and “get tough on crime” policies as catalyst for poor educational achievement that leads to poverty and gives rise to some African American women’s decisions to associate in illegal activities. Neoliberal polices place profits and the market at the center of American socio-cultural interaction while marginalizing investments in people and resources, so as to undo New Deal socialist policies, according to Alfred and Chulp (2009). This
cultural shift opened the gates to welfare reforms that transformed state provision to self-help. The study further reports that neoliberal corporate control of the media used race and sexism to depict African American women as lazy “ghetto” thieves, fornicating and making babies to prostitute the system; wasting taxpayers’ dollars (p. 244). Those women who were welfare-reliant and less educationally prepared were soon denied any further governmental assistance. Confronted with the problem of living or dying themselves, along with their children in some cases, some Black women chose to survive through crime (p. 245). These chronic life events (McLoyd, 1990) became more stressful during the initial era of “Take a bite out of crime” and mandatory minimums for nonviolent first time offenders. Though marketed and branded into the nation’s subconscious as a war on drugs, findings that decried the results seemed more a war on People of Color, especially given that 80% of state inmates were African American or Latino (Alfred and Chulp, 2009). Among other recommendations, Alfred and Chulp (2009) suggest that the fabrication that African American female welfare recipients do not desire work must be corrected. Also, there is a need to reaffirm the rehabilitation role of incarceration, rather than solely punishment. Finally, the researchers state, “We need to continue to tease out and tear down the societal structures contributing to illiteracy, poverty, and crime” (p. 248).

Indeed, studies of southern African American women, the demographic focus of this project, find they exhibit an exemplary work ethic but are excessively left to labor on jobs with nonstandard work schedules (Odom, Vernon-Feagans, & Crouter, 2013). The researchers conclude in their study of African American women in southern rural communities who worked nonstandard hours that work schedules may negatively affect child expressive language development at 24 months by reducing time for mothers to demonstrate sensitivity and cognitively engaging interactions with their children (p. 385). Children in these contexts are
cared for by their fathers or in situations other than center-based care. Additionally, research has shown negative associations between mother’s nonstandard work scheduling and children’s cognitive development in middle-income families (Augustine, 2014). These findings raise the question, “Is nonstandard work scheduling now a risk to child development (Rathburn & West, 2004)? If so, what are its implications for African American child readiness?”

The final research sample in a study (Augustine, 2014) which began in 1991 included 1,364 families of which 77% were Euro-American. The average income was approximately $36,000 and around 51% of the mothers worked part-time by the time the child turned 3 months old. Just 24% of the participants were ethnic minorities and only 11% of mothers did not finish high school. Based on U.S. census data 22% of the sample was designated poor. Employment measures such as work hours, occupation/status, and work schedules were activated when children were about 4.5 years old. Examining the influence of employment and education on quality parenting, Augustine (2014) found that for less educated women, part-time or higher work opportunities were related to improved parental quality. For more educated women there was no such correlation. But White working mothers who labored through nonstandard hours or low-status jobs, or were unemployed, showed decreases in quality parenting. This research confirmed the findings of Odom, Vernon-Feagans, and Crouter (2013). The research results speak to gender and class issues relative to readying children for schooling and may be associated with non-standard work schedules. Additionally, the literature review found home literacy engagement (HLE) correlates to early child literacy and language development along with the quality of shared reading experiences of parents and children. Dexter and Stacks (2014) investigated parenting, shared reading practices, and child development in 28 participants. Measures included naturalistic observations of parenting and shared reading quality, assessments
of child cognitive and language development, and home reading practices. The study found positive and significant correlations between higher quality parenting and higher quality shared reading interactions. The strongest relationship with shared reading quality was demonstrably interactive parental instruction, which was predictive of children’s receptive language outcomes. The addition of shared reading frequency only showed a modest relationship due in part, as suggested in the researcher’s analysis, to the small sample size (p. 406). Other research also revealed the importance of parent and child interactions in reading and HLE in developing children cognitively and culturally by examining middle class African American mothers’ racial socialization. Researchers inquired about African American mothers defining educational achievement mediated by academic socialization to ascertain what components of independence and interdependence are taught their 3–6 yr. old children (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). The research showed that African women understand and demonstrate the significance of: “(a) teaching children about African Americans’ history and their ancestors’ ‘struggle,’ (b) promoting educational achievement to overcome barriers of racism, and (c) promoting autonomy while maintaining close family relationships.” A major difficulty noted by the researchers for African American mothers in effectively socializing their children is that they must prepare their children to live in both the Black community and White society (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002; p. 289). The reviewed literature of research concerning culture noted most African American parents desire to provide for their offspring based upon their cognitive-behavioral perspective (Huanga, Caughy, Genevro, & Miller, 2005), demonstrate a willingness to work non-standard schedules even in difficult circumstances for unsustainable wages, and try to foster HLE’s in support of their young’s academic preparedness and racial socialization.
Parenting

Research asserts universally that a sensitive and loving relationship between the parent and child, complemented by a nurturing environment, is vital for healthy child development (Dexter & Stacks, 2014; Harden, Sandstrom & Chazan-Cohen, 2012; Shonkoff et al., 2010). The American Psychological Association (APA) suggests three goals of parenting that are expressed globally: All parents throughout the world want to provide for their children’s health and safety, prepare them for life as productive adults, and transmit their historical-cultural values to their young. Extending the former universal ecological conceptualization, Shonkoff et al. (2012) posit: 1) All children are born wired for feelings and ready to learn. 2) Early environments matter and nurturing relationships are essential. 3) Society is changing and the needs of young children are not being addressed. 4) Interactions among early childhood science, policy, and practice are problematic and demand rethinking.

Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowery and Snow (2008) sought to examine the literature base concerning methodological difficulties in the study of African American parenting across a 20-year spectrum. Their review found the literature supports racial socialization of African American children to live within their own community and White culture (p. 325) and four prominent types of racialization: cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. Cultural socialization by African American parents that includes their racial heritage, customs, and mores, along with group pride is evidenced in the research literature as beneficial due in part to lessening externalizing behaviors and physical altercations among boys and improving esteem among peers and cognitive results. Research finds mothers facilitated cultural socialization more so than fathers, whereas fathers were more involved in preparation of bias with their male children than their female offspring. African American youth
described higher locus of control and less depression when the father exhibited high racial socialization and the mother less, but opposite results occurred when the roles were reversed (p. 326). Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) also noted agreement among some scholars that authoritative parenting approaches correlate with negative results when utilized by Euro Americans but much less consensus surrounds this parenting strategy when employed by African Americans. The literature shows mixed behavioral results in studies of African Americans and authoritarian parenting styles, while on the other hand, research consistently reveals predictively beneficial results from authoritative parenting methods in both African and Euro Americans (p. 327).

Another challenge to research methods of African American parenting is sampling. Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) assert that due to sampling bias, African Americans tend to be characterized narrowly in relation to their parenting methods and how those approaches influence their children’s growth. The researchers caution that when sampling, special consideration need be undertaken with regard to socioeconomic status (SES), family makeup and portrayals of communal spaces, given that African American parents differ in their views and practices relative to varying ecological dimensions (p. 334). In the case of SES, though the literature shows the high incidence of poverty stricken African Americans where approximately 25% lived below the threshold (U.S. Census, 2004) including 16.1 million children of all ethnicities who live in poverty from 0-17 years of age. (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2013), yet over 73% of African Americans are high school graduates, currently outpacing Euro American graduation rates between 2010 and 2013 (U.S. News; Allie Bidwell, 2015). Ninety percent of African Americans above age 16 work, and 27% are reflected in supervisory and professional roles (Tamis-LeMonda et al., p. 328). This class difference is highlighted in the literature by studies regarding African American parental choices of discipline.
A particular study showed that SES was the predominate predictor of spanking as a form of discipline (Giles- Sims, Straus, & Sugarman, 1995) while another study found that education, in addition to poverty and low formal educative outcomes, correlated to maternal harshness in both African American and Euro American mothers (Shumow, Vandell, & Posner, 1998).

Tamis-LeMonda et al. noted that most of the research relative to African American parenting revealed quantitative approaches and primarily the “use of self-administered surveys or interviews on which parents report on their parenting views or practices” (p. 334). According to the researchers, qualitative methods are increasing and in-depth interviews have captured African American child rearing aims prioritized as “connection with family, emphasis on achievement and effort, respect for others, spirituality, and self-reliance” (p. 337). Observational research was found to be very effective in evaluating positive aspects of parenting and in some cases contrasted findings gained from interviews, although it is viewed as taxing and expensive.

In the case of measurement, Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) noted that a difficulty in regard to studies of African Americans is the lack of congruence between assessments of parenting and Black culture, given most measures of parenting are drawn uniformly from White middle-class households (p. 339). The synergy between emic and etic aims and research instrumentation further complicates gauging African American constructs. The utilization of focus groups derived from community stakeholders in the composition of research instruments can provide better aligned measures and “cultural experts” whose input can prove quite helpful (p. 341). Lastly, there exists an increased need for longitudinal investigations of African Americans. Tamis-LeMonda et al. (2008) suggest that the design of these types of studies moving forward should: “(1) incorporate rigorous retention strategies; (2) statistically contrast characteristics of
families who remain in the study versus those who drop out; and (3) apply strategies for handling missing data to minimize bias” (p. 348).

Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowry, & Snow (2008) reported little research focused on African American parenting between 1950 and 1995, finding only 45 empirical studies in PsychInfo that included the key terms “African American and parenting.” Twelve years later 400 peer-reviewed articles had been added to a research base that had reflected deficit ideologies through sampling techniques that compared poor African Americans with middle-class Euro Americans (p. 320). The researchers did note more studies are revealing increased heterogeneity within African American families and also report on seminal topologies (Baumrind, 1967, 1991) relative to parental conceptualizations of warmth and control which led to ideations about three parenting styles: 1) authoritarian/low warmth-high control, 2) authoritative/high warmth-high control, and 3) permissive/high warmth-low control. This framework established a fundamental basis for interpreting parenting but lacked generalizability to African American families. For example, research showed that the greatest assertiveness and independence was demonstrated by African American girls whose parents were assessed as highly authoritative. Furthermore, contrary to middle class Euro American parenting styles with regards to corporal punishment that generally forecast greater externalizing behaviors, studies showed that spanking of African American children by parents resulted in less aggression and externalizing behaviors (p. 322).

Similar differences between African American and Latino, and Euro Americans, are displayed in data on parental intrusiveness. Such research, according to Tamis-LeMonda et al., shows high control and high warmth demonstrated by African American parents has positively impacted their children’s development (p. 323). Moreover, studies show the more authoritative parenting style is descriptive of African Americans with low SES whereas less frequently
oppressed African Americans’ ideas and behaviors reflect the low parental control more associated with middle class Euro Americans (p. 324).

**Child Development**

Early childhood development, broadly inclusive of cognitive and physical domains, is crucially important (Bauchmüller, Görtz, & Rasmussen, 2014; Loeb, & Bassok, 2007; NRC and IOM, 2000) primarily because it provides either a firm foundation or unstable underpinnings for future growth and development (NRC and IOM, 2000, p. 2). Referred to in the literature as brain plasticity (Sripada, 2012), during the initial months including up to the first five years in a child’s life, the brain defines and arranges sequences for cognition and behavior. Early childhood experiences are encoded in our beings through interrelating with the surrounding environment. For example, the review finds that fathers in low income families who exhibit supportiveness behaviors have significant effects on the cognitive, language, and socioemotional development of their children at 2 and 3 years of age (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). On the other hand, if the child is exposed to adverse social and environmental encounters the result can be physiological or biological reactions that can limit stress response development, which can affect proper brain growth. These events can have negative outcomes by disrupting other physiologic systems and controls that can lead to ill mental and physical health throughout the child’s life course (Shonkoff & Garner, 2011, p. 13).

Upon entering kindergarten, achievement gaps, impacted by SES and ethnicity, have been long established (Loeb & Bassok, 2007). Children lacking readiness generally achieve less academically than their peers who were more prepared and the disparity likely remains during schooling and into the future (p. 13). Research reviewed in this study is consistent with the prior findings mentioned. Moreover, these findings have much import given that the interpretation of
school assessments of African American children has resulted in their disproportionate representation in special education and the fact that 3-year-old children of People of Color numerically outnumber European American 3-year-olds (Dale, Finch, McIntosh, Rothlisberg, & Finch, 2014).

Rushton and Jenson (2005) suggest, to the contrary, that genetics plays a more important role in learning outcomes than one’s social context. Reviewing data from specialist journal articles, monographs of scholars on intelligence, behavioral genetics, issues on social policy, and book reviews gathered from over 36 years of researching the difference of Black-White average IQ, the authors found racial group difference in IQ among East Asians, Whites and Blacks are consistent worldwide and appear in early life with predictive validity. They assert that the tests were, for the most part, culture-free but their validity in measuring racial difference was due, in part, to the participant’s involvement in the culture of the composers of the tests (p. 7). They further assert that in response to their findings genetics should be interpreted as more important than environmental influences and individual solutions to addressing inequities should trump justifications for redress, based upon the lack of group performance. On the other hand, Dale et al. (2014) investigated the employment of the Stanford–Binet Intelligence Scales (fifth edition) with an ethnically diverse sample of preschool children. They reported that African American and European American preschoolers correlated in terms of age, gender, and parental education displayed similar assessment patterns on composite and subsets. Their findings revealed comparable measurements of cognitive ability overall for both groups.

The review of research encompassing child development supports an association of child development with child readiness for formal education and clearly shows the interrelatedness of
proper child cognitive and physiological growth with quality academic and sustainable life course outcomes or low achievement educationally and a more dubious life expectancy.

**Child Care**

Review of the research finds that child care options can be viewed as either home-based or center-based programs and are classified in the research under review as Head Start preschools, licensed homes, and individual care givers (Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumbergerd, 2007). Center-based care is utilized by almost two-thirds of families with 4-year-old children (p. 2), and because research asserts that early child care can substantially benefit poor children and thus, society at large, investing in high quality early child care may help reduce inequalities in education and income (Bauchmüller, Görtz, & Rasmussen, 2014). Studies also show that early quality preschool experiences benefit middle-income and non-impoverished children as well (Barnett, Brown, & Shore, 2004; Bossack, 2010). For example, recurrent mental and vocal stimulation combined with attentive and thoughtful responses to children’s socioemotional and physiological necessities by child caregivers supports the development of school readiness in children who receive this type care, more so than those who are denied it (Trans & Winsler, 2011). The formation of secure attachment relations between caregivers and children is more likely when sincere caregiving infuses consistent affirming interactions, which gives rise to improved cognitive function, reduced externalizing behaviors, and proper socialization with peers (p. 2242).

Loeb et al. (2007) investigated the effects of different child-care arrangements on children’s cognitive and social proficiencies at the start of kindergarten. The study used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) to identify effects using ordinary least squares (OLS), matching and instrumental variables estimates. Their findings
showed early care raises reading and math scores but negatively affects social adjustments. The researchers also noted that substantial academic increases for bilingual Hispanic children were found without negative behaviors. More time in care increased academic benefits and disruptive behaviors for the same children with the exception of the previously described outcome. A major finding is that children who began center-based participation between 2 and 3 years of age displayed the most substantive cognitive benefit (p. 65).

Harden, Sandstrom, and Chazon-Cohen’s (2012) study investigated whether and how Early Head Start (EHS) and parenting improved the developmental outcomes of African American children at 36 months of age. They found EHS benefited children of African Americans’ language development, fostered attention span, peer interaction and limited externalizing behaviors. Parenting supportiveness also proved vital in African American children’s positive development and mediated EHS benefits (p. 579). But the benefit of EHS in this study relative to externalizing behaviors is contrary to the findings of Loeb et al. (2007).

Results of studies investigating issues surrounding the quality and benefits of child care represented in this review of the literature proved inconclusive (Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2012). For example, a study conducted by Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, and Carrol (2004) examined the quality of home care and center care available to poor African American women who entered welfare reform programs in 1998. Positive cognitive outcomes of African American children were associated with center-based care. Increased cognition was shown by children exposed to sensitive and attentive caregivers and those with minimum high school graduation. But the study revealed more behavioral problems were associated with family home care providers without changes in cognitive development. Conversely, Fram, Kim, and Sinha (2012), employing data from parent interviews taken from the ECLS-K cohort and direct assessment of children in
measuring school readiness, child participation, and demographic factors, found that children participating in non-parental or center-based care before 15 months of age scored more than 25% of a standard deviation less for self-control and 34% less with regard to externalizing behaviors compared to non-center based care, though the study did confirm the cognitive findings from Loeb et al. (2007). Furthermore, Hickman (2006) also sees inconsistency in the lack of social benefit alongside academic improvement for children in center-based care and reported findings gained from cross-sectional analysis that challenged those results. Controlling for fall test scores of kindergartners and first graders through the utilization of longitudinal analysis showed “that the cognitive effects of center care do not persist and that some social skills actually deteriorate” (p. 673).

The literature review findings are quite problematic. More center-based child care results in cognitive development but in some cases the benefits ‘fade out.’ In addition, added contact with care providers increased behavioral problems (Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2012; NICHD, 2002) except for English proficient Hispanics (Loeb et al., 2007), and in other research (Harden, Sandstrom, & Chazon-Cohen, 2012) EHS is found to limit externalizing behaviors. Lacking in the afore mentioned studies is the relationship of teachers/caregivers’ attitudes about African Americans and their children and how teacher dispositions might support or hinder African American children’s cognitive and or socioemotional development.

**Teacher Dispositions**

A reformation of teacher education discourse supported by professional organizations and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (INTASC) during the 1990s led to changing what had previously been formulated as knowledge, skills, and attitudes to knowledge, skills and dispositions (Freeman, 2003; Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010; Villegas, 2007)
in developing standards-based criteria for teacher preparation. According to Villegas (2007) developments in cognitive research suggest that prior knowledge derived from formal education and lived experiences that teacher candidates bring to teacher preparation programs not only forms what and how they construct meaning in their formalized training but what and how they deliver instruction in classrooms (p. 373). Villegas (2007) suggests “Dispositions are tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs;” thus it is vital that teacher education programs address the justice aim of developing within all teacher candidates the disposition to effectively engage racially, economically, and socially stratified students in ways that prepare them to participate and contribute to society given the unequal access to high quality public education, increasing populations of Black and Latino elementary and secondary students, and majority White faculties in U.S. public schools (p. 372). Schussler et al. assert that teacher efficacy combines meeting goals (successful teaching) and moral value (good teaching) (p. 351). The researchers set forth intellectual, cultural, and moral domains as aspects of a framework to assist teacher candidates’ dispositional cognizance (p. 351). They analyzed 35 teacher candidates’ journal reflections framed by the previously stated domains which revealed embedded expectations concerning students, teachers, instruction, and learning (p. 361). Findings show few of the participants demonstrated the capacity to self-critique their preconceived ideologies and assess how those assumptions may saturate their instructional choices and practice.

Irizarry (2015) provides research that shows elementary students’ formal schooling experiences can be understood through their relationships with their instructors. This study sought to explore the relationship of “race and teachers’ overall assessment of first grade students’ literacy skills” and to identify racial/ethnic gaps in the perceptions of instructors
concerning divergent student assessed performance (p. 522). Early formal educative experiences highly reflect the quality of student-instructor relations because the classrooms are most often self-contained and form a critical basis for positive interactions that can support student academic and socioemotional growth, or negative perceptions that prompt teacher criticism that can lead to avoiding student engagement (Delpit, 2006; p. 523).

Delpit (2006), in her seminal work, reported that the difficulty in establishing teacher-student relations reflected broader contexts, stating that communicating across cultures and inequitable power relationships is a major challenge of humanity and is of much significance in U.S. schools due to expanding diversity in student populations where the overwhelming majority of teachers are White Euro Americans (p. 66). The Center for American Progress (2013) reported that “The majority of children under age 1 in the United States today are children of color” while an article in the Huffington Posts’ Black Voices in May of 2014 written by Jason Holland stated “Almost half the students attending public schools are minorities, yet fewer than 1 in 5 of their teachers is non-White.” Additionally, Amos (2011) reports that studies predict public school students of color will represent half of all students served while the vast majority of teachers remain White in the next 4 years. In schools where students’ speech is nonmainstream English, other research finds there is great difficulty in developing reading proficiency (p. 58) though studies show dialect is not prohibitive of learning to read (Delpit, 2006). A possible reason put forth by Delpit (2006) is that the dialect of students can trigger instructors’ negative evaluations of students’ capabilities and give rise to low teacher expectations and less instructional effort on behalf of these students. Persell (2010) employs an even more comprehensive rationale in asserting systemic curricula dimensions, such as the expansion of standardized assessments, student tracking, and racially and economically segregated schools help frame teacher
expectations about students of color. Teacher education programming and the research literature base “attributes educational failures to deficiencies in the children” (p. 95), rather than critically analyzing how the structure of schooling, education policy, curricula, administrators, and teachers affect student learning (p. 100). Valencia (2010) echoes Persell (2010) by asserting that deficit thinking defined as “a pseudoscience founded on racial and class bias… “blames the victim” for school failure instead of examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning.”

King (1991) describes dysconsciousness as “an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given.” An explanatory discussion for the apparent dysconsciousness (King, 1991) of many teachers reified in most schools of education and textbook offerings is put forth by Brown and Brown (2010), who posit that the knowledge presented in textbooks utilized in k-12 curricula is important because the majority of teachers are Euro American, female, and middle class, with little personal exposure to the cultures of parents and children of color. Secondly, the knowledge base gained from their matriculation in U.S. schools and teacher education programs that maintain predominately White faculties that reflect similar deficiencies in knowledge and interactions with diverse populations, is problematic (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). Furthermore, a critical critique of documented “his-story” often “reveals hidden social interests in the curriculum and unmask a political and cultural role of schooling” (King, 1991, p. 141). The literature review shows most preservice teachers present little cultural knowledge beyond their own background, and much of that relative to people of color might be termed deficit thinking (King, 1991; Sleeter, 2001; Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010; Villegas, 2007). Sleeter (2001) reports that of 19
teacher preparation programs offered by Midwest Holmes Group only 56% mandated a single multicultural education course for its students, even though the faculty and student body was 94% Anglo. To address these issues, Sleeter (2001) suggests the recruitment and preparation of more prospective teachers of color is needed to better align faculties with student demographics in schools. Additionally, specifically selecting persons with the requisite knowledge, skills and dispositions (Haberman, 1996) would help provide a cadre of potential inductees to become effective educators in urban schools. The research of Thompson (2013) documents the dilemma of cultural and racial discontinuity between teachers and their charges, which affects pedagogical preparedness and effectiveness of Black pre-service students and educators as well. Her research also reveals the social reproduction of hegemonic ideologies and deficit thinking towards African Americans deemed lower class by others who would be identified phenotypically as African American but who see themselves in nonracial perspectives (p. 63).

Amos (2011) postulates that if cultural diversity causes the gap in educational achievement between Blacks and Whites then it is incumbent upon teacher education programs to develop curricula that produces cultural competence in Black and White teacher candidates (p. 482) but also acknowledges that student teachers’ prior dispositions can disrupt the accommodation of attitudes receptive of racial and ethnic diversity. Amos (2011) conducted a study of 23 male and 31 female Euro Americans that attended a predominately White university in which Amos was the instructor. The research data were drawn from reflection papers written by the students and notes from class meetings. The findings showed stereotypic negative and racialized beliefs about Black, Latino, and native peoples. Blacks were described as ignorant, criminals, and always playing the race card; Latinos were characterized as illegal workers and waiting for a government handout, and Native people as gaming den operators and alcoholics,
thus denying personhood, individual difference, and agency to members of the stereotyped group (p. 484). By contrast, the participants viewed themselves as unbiased, not racist, and as Whites who could personally refrain from allowing stereotypical views from affecting their work as teachers. The participants did recognize White privilege but simultaneously viewed themselves as being victimized by not receiving scholarships like Blacks and viewed affirmative action interventions as reverse discrimination, even though no participant had a friend nor was aware of an individual who had received a scholarship or was hired because of affirmative action. Amos (2011) noted the participants felt victimized by a hypothetical circumstance (p. 488) and as such used [reverse] victimization couched in issues of class to deflect moral accountability for supporting the subjugation of historically oppressed people and ethnicities.

To the contrary, teacher ideologies are not deterministic in overriding teacher decision-making and behavior. The review found research involving a calculus workshop at Berkeley by Treismen (1992), who saw the importance of analyzing his own, as well as his colleagues,’ prior held beliefs about the causation of collegiate students of color’s failures in math (p. 3). The four beliefs cited were: 1) motivation gap, 2) inadequate preparation, 3) lack of family support and, 4) poverty. Ironically, the research that asserted these beliefs were in error was performed by a faculty member, according to Treismen (1992), who had unashamedly believed the fallacy of genetically-based Black inferiority but readily admitted race represented only 4% of the failure rate, and as a consequence posited the problem might be in the institutional structure rather than the students (p. 4).

King (1991) prefigured the research of Amos (2011) with her conceptualization termed dysconscious racism. Many of King’s (1991) pre-service students expressed internalized neoliberal conceptualizations that aligned the encouragement of cultural diversity with
promoting racial isolation and unsettling national unity, and otherwise reiterated that societal injustices arise from sociocultural pathologies rather than advantages gained from the arbitrariness of being born into wealth (p. 133). But, the inevitable “browning” of the U.S. population, as previously reported in this review, elicited teacher candidate concerns regarding the devaluing of Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995), hegemonic influence, and safety by those enrolled in the course. From data analysis of teacher candidates’ written responses to the prompt “How did our society get to be this way?,” King (1991) contends that pre-service students’ reasoning “reflects internalized ideologies that both justify the racial status quo and devalue cultural diversity” (p. 134). Content analysis in this study found race inequality explained by students as an outcome of slavery (Category I), as a shortage of equitable prospects for Blacks (Category II), or as an aspect of a societal worldview that normalizes racialization (Category III). The findings taken from 22 essayed responses in 1986 were evenly dispersed between Category I (10) and Category II (11), and there was one Category III response. The 35 responses gathered in 1988 revealed Category I (11) and Category II (24) responses of the majority of students narrowly explained racial inequality as a result of slavery or discrimination and bias without identifying institutionalized racism’s support of the status quo, nor were explanatory connections made to other oppressive and exploitive social practices. Teacher candidates’ responses were stereotypic and reproduced ideologies of cognitive and sociocultural deficits about African Americans (p. 138).

The research of Amos (2011) and King (1991) is affirmed by Berlak (2008), a critical multicultural educator involved, as her colleagues, in preparing teacher candidates to contest the endemic reproduction of White supremacy in U.S. public schools. Berlak found it necessary to reassess her practice due to the contradictions in espoused beliefs and behavior identified in a
student teachers’ observation. One former student who had earned an A in her class as a result of confronting White privilege and power and having, in Berlak’s opinion, “unlearned” major dimensions of colorblindness, was observed during the next semester as a student teacher placing three Black boys’ names on a classroom board for behaviors similar to those exhibited by White boys in the class but were disregarded (p. 48). After having modified her practice, Berlak (2008) still recognized that only a small number of students exhibited an in-depth knowledge “that the vast majority of people in the United States naturalized White supremacy, White entitlement, and White superiority.” She further reported that the oppression of Blacks by Whites, normalized over centuries, devalues the identity and culture of historically oppressed people and ethnicities while simultaneously programming people of color to internalize inferiority and White superiority, to the extent that phenotype alone is associated with acculturated assumptions regarding “intelligence, morality, reliability, and skills” (as cited by Shipler, 1997, p. 280).

The review reveals that teacher dispositions are shaped by ecological contexts and their positionality. The ideas they bring to teacher education programs are embedded and as such, are rarely altered so that when employed these teachers reflect a general lack of cultural understanding of Black and Brown students, as well as knowledge of culturally responsive pedagogy. Subsequently, many teachers are inducted into predominantly African and Latino American schools with their biased thinking intact, unprepared by their teacher education experiences to effectively support students of color’s academic or socioemotional development. As a consequence, ill equipped and culturally dysconscious teachers reproduce ideologies and narratives within classrooms that reify the hegemonic epistemologies and capacities of those who would control Black people by institutional means. This ecological context need to be countered.
Racialization

john a. powell (2012), noted legal scholar, theorist and current director of the Hass Institute For a Fair and Inclusive Society at the University of California, Berkley defined racialization in his book entitled *Racing to Justice: Transforming Our Concept of Self and Other to Build an Inclusive Society* as “the set of practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that both reflect and help to create and maintain race-based outcomes in society.” He further states that since racialization is a grouping of historical-cultural developments it resists a single definition but rather “describes conditions and norms that are constantly evolving and interacting with the sociopolitical environment, varying from location to location as well as throughout different periods in history” (p. 4). This definition is supported by research that frames the interrelatedness of constructed arrangements and lived realities which contends that while structures construct lives, people simultaneously fashion, refashion and when necessary, challenge these very socioeconomic structures (Weis & Fine, 2012, p. 175). Relative to schools, Foley (2010) asserts recent scholarship in anthropological studies reveals a focus that provides educators and policy makers a more nuanced representation of the ways schools intentionally and unintentionally reproduce inequalities of race, gender, and class, and how groups and persons develop agency despite institutional controls (p. 223).

Institutionalized oppression targeted toward the African American community is most virulent and pernicious in nature due to socially authored and institutionally embedded ideological fallacies contrived to justify our prior history of enslavement and exploitation in the development of the American republic. Mendes France, a member of the United Nations five-member Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent just recently remarked in an article written by Andrea Germanos:
The persistent gap in almost all the human development indicators, such as life expectancy, income and wealth, level of education, housing, employment and labour, and even food security, among African Americans and the rest of the US population, reflects the level of structural discrimination that creates de facto barriers for people of African descent to fully exercise their human rights, (Common Dreams, 2016)

Ethnic assumptions and assessment tools utilized by social scientist (Bartz & Bartz, 1975) have created a misleading view of Black people that asserts that African Americans are either genetically defective or sociologically pathological (p. 32; Briscoe, 2005). We see, then, the social construction of institutions, as well as humans, is conducted within a cultural ecological context that mediates specific epistemological and axiological views. The power to control and impose these ideas and concomitant values is hegemony (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 20). In analyzing the meanings of social hegemony as described by Antonio Gramsci, Giroux (1983) states firstly, hegemony reflects the ruling classes’ capacity through rational and ethical leadership within political and educational processes to communicate ideologies enculturated within dominate cultural groups. Secondly, hegemony is the deployment of force and propaganda to retain the dominate classes’ power and control over the targeted group (Giroux, 1983, p. 275). A fundamental component of institutionalized oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 39) is that maleness, in patriarchal North American society, is deemed superior to femininity and has privilege and control over the most powerful institutions (p. 41). Smith (1972) echoes this analysis stating that the world organized and governed by [White] men rules over women and authors their circumstances (p. 1) by appropriating women’s inalienable right to name and define the totality of their lived experiences. Instead, women are left to employ foreign conceptualizations not of their making that alienate women from their own reality. Haraway
suggests these [White] male bounded concepts emanate from self-serving manipulations of power rather than inquiries to identify truths. To the contrary, research suggests hegemonic masculinity need not ignite social reproduction (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 8) given that maleness is mediated by class and historical dispensation and is not monolithic. Research that shows masculinity changes asserts that it should be framed post-structurally and as nonessenstialist, in that findings reveal that men can in one instance undertake a hegemonic stance and refrain from such identification in other situations. In short, the critique of hegemonic masculinity is made somewhat untenable by the underlying notion that “all men are alike” and can instead posit a positive hegemony.

Yet, research shows historically in the U.S., White supremacist ideology or racialization normalizes the unfair disbursement of resources that uphold White middle class privilege and prevents identification with historically oppressed people and ethnicities. The result reproduces the status quo’s (Guinier, 2004, p. 114) prohibition on African American social mobility to improve opportunities for their young’s preparedness. Similarly, the objectified state of cultural capital negates acquiring or transferring material goods or capital to non-group members without the benefit of a proxy (Bourdieu, 1983). As previously noted the relationship of racism and segregation, as endemic in racialization, parental income, residential housing, health, and quality educational resources, commonly perceived as isolated variables, is strongly associated with student achievement. Racial discrimination according to the National Research Council is “(1) differential treatment on the basis of race that disadvantages a racial group, also referred to as perceived interpersonal discrimination and (2) differential effect or treatment on the basis of factors other than race that disadvantages a racial group” or otherwise termed racial/ethnic residential segregation (Acevedo-Garcia et al. 2013; Blank et al. 2004). Racialized decision-
making segregates African Americans and people of color from equitable dimensions of these forms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1983).

A particular narrative promulgated by empirical research informed by societal hegemony to justify racial disparities is that Blacks do not value education (Hill, 2013, p. 2) and lack motivation to improve their morbid social condition (King, 1991). But the body of research findings has established that housing segregation (Williams & Muhammad, 2009) can configure SES by controlling opportunities for Blacks to acquire financial capital, quality residential accommodations, and educational resources. For example, studies show urban neighborhoods in large cities are segregated because of intentional practices for over a century of racialized and overt federal, state, and local guidelines for financial regulation, mortgage incentives, and social engineering to improve European American social mobility and impede the development of African Americans (Anyon, 1997; Eaton, 2007; Rothstein, 2013, p. 19). Furthermore, once racism practiced as segregation isolates African Americans it then can constrict their SES. Social economic status, structurally conceptualized, uses income, occupation, and education as indicators of societal rank and to assess social mobility (Wyatt-Nichol, Brown & Haynes, 2010; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Heckman, 2011).

Shapirio, Meschede, and Osoro (2013) found that racism and segregation combine to put downward pressure on African American residential values effectively capping their equity growth opportunities even in boom markets. Tracking a 25-year longitudinal study of the total divergence of White and African American family wealth, the researchers found an increase from $85,000 in 1984 to $236,500 in 2009. A glaring result of their findings revealed that over the same period an income increase of a dollar resulted in average income wealth of $5.19 for White households and only 69 cents for African American households (p. 5). Other research
using public micro-data samples and summary files from census data established that macroeconomic context and racial make-up impact disparities in racial group and gender earnings significantly. Of further note was women were more at risk from macroeconomics, residential racial segregation, and market dissection than males (Wong 2008).

These data show racialization seeks to shackle the ability of African Americans to increase their wealth portfolios and net income, impacting the quality of the educational resources and opportunities African American parents can provide for preparing their children for formal education. Yet, even when African American children are ready to engage American schooling, the consequences of racialization (e.g., segregation and poverty) continues to delimit educational resources and achievement in elementary and secondary schooling. Poverty-stricken and segregated schools, for example, are not perceived as attractive relative to salaries or workload by teachers and administrators (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2007). This adversely affects the induction and retention of highly qualified educators in predominately poor African American schools which are left to sometimes fill instructional vacancies with teachers in disciplines outside their training (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Contrasting research findings assert that inequality of skills is more responsible in driving the achievement gap in contemporary America rather than perceived discrimination (Heckman, 2011). The researcher states the skills individuals present to the economic market, including formal education and other aspects within the culture, govern their success. Statically significant findings showed Black males receive 25% less and Hispanic males 15% less wage earnings than White males. The disparities support African and Hispanic Americans fare worse than Whites in American society.
Given the question are these inequalities due to inescapable labor market discrimination or to breaches in skills, the research of Heckman (2011) suggests that in the market for employment, the difference in White and non-White wages reflects the value labor markets attach to skills, and is not a result of racial discrimination. However, looking through the lens of social capital to illuminate the institutional component of cultural capital, one would find the oppressive elitist White males of European ancestry define what skills are valued and the value of those skills within the society, and control the licensure and credentialing within those arenas (Bourdieu, 1983). Moreover, racialization, in most cases, not only undermines African American parental capacities to ready their children due to socially engineered constraints to improving their SES but puts at risk their own and their children’s health.

The World Health Organization defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100). Acevedo-Garcia et al. (2011) report that racial discrimination and segregation affect not only a youngster’s health via neo-natal outcomes, but can also exercise influence throughout the process of a child’s maturation. Racism, viewed as an external threat, initiates stress that can wear down and disrupt body function resulting in premature disease and death (Williams & Muhammad, 2009). Feinstein found that the lower one’s SES in general, the higher the individual’s rate of mortality (1993). Shonkoff, Boyce, and McEwen (2009) report that African Americans have earlier declines of health in a snowballing manner, evolving greater health disparities through their life course and experience death 4 to 6 years before Whites. Lastly, and most disturbing, the review suggests racialization influences the school to prison pipeline or as Keyes et al. (2015) state the “preschool to prison pipeline” (p. 29).
Their research reports racialization inhibits the poor and peoples of color’s right to “high quality care environments.”

The enculturated perception of African American children and especially boys throughout the society compared to Euro American children is consequential (p. 28). For instance, according to Goff, Jackson, Cullota, Di Leone and Di Tamasso’s (2014) innovative research which involves linking attitudes and behaviors within the context of law enforcement, Black boys are perceived as more mature and more responsible for their actions than similar White boys. Also, for persons “who hold dehumanizing implicit associations between Blacks and apes—even when they do not endorse traditionally prejudiced attitudes—Black children are seen as a decreasingly essentialized group” (p. 15). Additionally, data from 2011-2012 school districts with preschools showed 18% of children were African American but they represented 42% of one-time suspensions compared to White preschoolers who were 43% of the population but received only 28% of one-time suspensions according to The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014). These practices produce forfeited instructional time, negative feelings towards formal educative processes, internalized inferiority and as the Children’s Defense Fund (2009) reports, probable “lower educational attainment, increased risk for delinquency and substance abuse, and a lower quality of life as adults” (Keys et al., 2015).

Together, these systemic racialized occurrences, though horrendous, might aid in understanding the over-arrest, imprisonment and or killing of unarmed African American children, women, and men by enforcers of the law and civilians and the lack of prosecutorial indictments of police officers that has incited public demonstrations and protests surrounding the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Yvette Smith, Tanisha Anderson, Malissa Williams and Timothy Russell, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Akai Gurley, Tarika Wilson, Kathryn Johnston, Freddy
Gray and Laquan McDonald, just to name a few, as well as the genocidal apathy shown by federal and state officials accountable for the poisoning of children in Flint, Michigan. Freire (1970) forewarned that “dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed” (p. 47).

Though not the focus of this project, it need be noted that institutionalized oppression is colorblind, in that less educated Whites are undergoing very negative life trends associated with widening inequality. For example, from 1999 through 2013 there has been a dramatic increase in “all-cause mortality of middle-aged White non-Hispanic men and women in the United States” due to death by drug and alcohol poisoning, associated liver diseases, and suicide, while all other racial groups and ethnicities continued to demonstrate declining mortality rates for those middle aged and 65 and over during the same period (Case & Denton, 2015). Case and Denton (2015) also found the highest increase in mortality among less educated Whites. Of all the rich nations on the earth, this phenomenon is unique to the U.S.

**Summation**

Overall, the literature review finds social hegemony reifies the epistemologies and axiologies of Euro American elites socially and institutionally within U.S. culture (Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2011, Counts, 1932; Giroux, 1983; Keys et al., 2015). Racialization reveals the hegemonic powers’ intent to target, subjugate, and repress ideologies, narratives, and behaviors that would counter the status quo (Giroux, 1983; Patterson, 2010; powell, 2012). Thus, the review reveals a contestation of ideologies regarding African American parenting, racialization, teacher dispositions, and the normalization of White supremacist thought and values that could be likened to more traditional notions versus modernization.
In this case, African Americans can be said to reflect the epistemologies and beliefs attributed to traditional oral societies, such as their preference for a social ideation as opposed to the characterizations of literate Western European and U.S. ideologies that appear more aligned with an inanimate or instrumental focus (Shade & Edwards, 1987). When contrasted, the present ecological context illustrates a fundamental difference between the African “We” and the Cartesian “I” as world views and interpretations that form the reservoir from which each seeks to enculturate and socialize its young (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Furthermore, the contrast in cognitive framing provides a model for interpreting the hegemonic character and production of disparity in the lives of people who have been historically oppressed and whose legacies are also associated with oral traditions.

So, extending the concept of “Double Consciousness” posited by DuBois (1903), the ecological context theorized by Bronfenbrenner (1979) filtered by conceptualizations of the oppressed and the oppressor presented by Freire (1970) and Ladson-Billings’ (2000, p. 263) epistemological analysis of alterity and liminal positionalities within racialized discourse; coupled with research on oral and literate societies (Reagan, 2005), the researcher composed a synthesized construct. It expresses aspects of African American and Euro American epistemological, behavioral, and status differentiation inside the U.S. to be utilized to help interpret African American parental counter perceptions and narratives, thus, depicting an African ethic (Gyeke, 2011). As Tannen (1980) asserts “No individual is either ‘oral’ or ‘literate.’ Rather, people use devices associated with both traditions in various settings” (p. 3). Tannen also cites Havelock (1963), who in reference to oral reconstruction versus rote memorization states oral and literate tradition is not simply a “habit of expression but represents a difference in approach to knowledge and thought” (p. 1). The conceptualization put forth in
this study may also be an aid to “research that better represents indigenous and community knowledge” (Ladson-Billings, 2000, p. 266).
Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative doctoral thesis sought to explore how African American parents view themselves, their progeny, and communal spaces as aspects of child readiness and what might obscure these perspectives within a socially hegemonic and racialized ecology. Critical race theory (CRT) was employed methodologically to capture African American counter narratives. The power of CRT can be seen in its versatility as theory and method in qualitative research (Cook, 2013) and was a sound choice for this project because it centered race, gender, and class as historically and culturally embedded in every facet of American society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT identified the legacy of African American lives in surmounting oppressive dehumanization (Freire, 1970) and their heritage as liberators of the oppressed and oppressors, in stewardship of democracy, social justice and equity (Creswell, 2013, p. 32). Because this project explored African American participants’ lived experiences readying their offspring within historically and socially hegemonic constructs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), CRT represents a most capable theoretical frame.

Secondly, CRT attested to the empirical validity of African American experiential wisdom and knowledge gleaned through their storied lives and narratives as meaningful data with respect to qualitative methods and approaches and as a means to transforming reality (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii; Creswell, 2013, p. 37). CRT’s valuing of researchers, participants, or amalgamated voices allowed for counter representations in explicating African American conceptualizations of meanings that emerged from life, living, and preparing their children for formal schooling (Bell, 1987, 1992, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Lastly, CRT was an appropriate choice for this project because it afforded a critical critique of the literature base regarding African American child readiness
and by inference, African American parenting. The questions that guided this project and were grounded in research literature are: 1) How do African American parents view themselves, their children, and community as dimensions of child readiness? 2) What can distort African American parental perceptions of these aspects of readying their young? 3) How is racialization interpreted by African American parents? CRT contextualized researcher assumptions, methods, and findings to clarify and highlight deficit assumptions promulgated within the literature (Maxwell, 2004, p.14). For example, Baratz and Baratz (1970) suggest that the study of the Negro has been interpreted through what the researchers termed an “ethnocentric liberal ideology” that rejects cultural difference (p. 31). This ideology established a norm created in elitist Euro American likeness and culture but was operationalized and made meaningful by the behaviors of White middle class Euro Americans. By wrongly equating (Baratz & Baratz, 1970) the terms equal and same, according to the researchers, some social scientists were put in the unenviable job of researching African Americans as deviates from White middle class Euro American culture rather than providing an examination of African Americans’ unique history, culture, dispositions, and behaviors. CRT afforded this project the scholarly practice to highlight the latter.

An overarching goal of this project and any honest research was to improve our understanding of humanity and to interpret that knowledge, so as to promote the common good of the human family (APA, 1981). Research of this type is ethically just and moral. As to the role of the researcher, CRT demanded an adherence to the aims of justice which is the heart of its tradition and praxis (Bell, 1987). As a created being, I advocated the manifestation of freedom and justice for all people and creation. My belief in liberation and equity was formed by my life as a member of historically oppressed people and ethnicities. Critical ideology was most aligned
with my lived experience and perspective because it assumes that humans collaboratively compose their lived reality within historical and societal hegemony (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) and espouses justice, freedom and equity for all beings and an end to hegemony. According to Noddings (2007), critical theorists, beginning with Marx “have insisted on analyzing the social conditions that underlie, accompany and result from forms of domination” (p.72). Critical ideology also seeks to liberate the power of the oppressed through channels of transformative consciousness into choices that develop greater opportunities for sustainable living. As a critical ethical scholar practitioner, the research endeavor was an act of justice between researcher and participants (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001) framed by critical race theory (CRT) to illuminate racism’s role in shaping African American child readiness.

**Research Design**

This project employed a qualitative narrative approach, utilizing critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens (Cook, 2013) to capture an in-depth picture of the ecological relationships that impact African American child readiness and meaning making by the participants (Clandinin, 2013, p. 205). Qualitative methods characterized and analyzed the lived context of persons within the research focus by employing first-hand techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 200b), that resulted in eyewitness accounts of emic thoughts, emotions, and needs presented in the common vernacular of the people (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A qualitative approach employed narrative methods as means to document research participants’ firsthand knowledge and experience (Butin, 2010; Merriam, 1991; Ponterotto, 2005) and was thus an appropriate choice for this project. Another reason qualitative techniques were an effective approach for this project was that they provided for close proximity of the researcher to the research enterprise, so as to endorse co-construction in obtaining research findings through the
interaction of the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005). This was vital given the importance of direct interviews, a main feature of this instrument.

**Research Tradition**

This project utilized a counter narrative approach. CRT purposely “blurs the boundary between theory and method” (Cook, 2013). Theoretically, CRT mandated comprehension of institutionalized inequality, in all its manifestations, through the prism of race and racism. Methodologically, CRT centered the storied narratives of African Americans, which informed researcher approaches in resolving the “how and why” of choices (p. 183). The capacity of CRT as theory and method made it an immensely powerful instrument in its own right. Ledesma and Calderón (2015) proposed that many researchers viewed CRT as both a theoretical and methodological instrument and were encouraged to maintain its critical nature within narratives and to express its legal underpinnings in its examination of racialization in education. Clandinin (2013) echoed the duality of narrative inquiry stating it was “both a view and a methodology for studying experience” (p. 9). The literature revealed that “Method and theory are linked by people in concrete historical and ideational contexts (Noblit et al., 2004, p. 3). It need be noted that fundamental to the critical ideological paradigm is the belief, to which I currently subscribe, that humans collaboratively compose their lived reality within historical and societal hegemony (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Because racial superiority and oppression are embedded in American society, most social scientists utilized narratives that reinforce the normalcy of deficit ideologies and self-interested behaviors; on the other hand, CRT, as a methodological approach, employed “the counter-stories that arise from the lived experiences and understanding of people of color” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) to confront racism, gender-bias, and societal caste (Parker, 2015, p. 200) in the development of equitably sustainable human and ecological justice.
A narrative approach was an appropriate method meant to capture the voices of African American parents’ lived realities and perspectives that inform their ideas about readying their children for formal education. Inquiry from humans’ earliest experiences has led to practical knowledge and an understanding of experience or meaning expressed in stories. Hendry (2010) posited narrative inquiry is the development of meaning making and as such was fundamental to all inquiry. According to Hendry (2010), narrative inquiry encompassed the scientific (physical), the symbolic (human experience), and the sacred (metaphysical). Seen as complementary by the Greeks, Hendry (2010) further stated that these ways of knowing became dichotomized over time as positivistic and interpretive, or scientific and humanistic. Though narrative was mistakenly presented as a new form of inquiry that had no historical relationship to womankind’s questions or research, the bifurcation remained and according to the author, obstructs the necessary conversations across disciplines and divergent meanings that could affect a more comprehensive and translational discourse and substantive praxis (p. 2). Bazile (2015) supported the contention made by Hendry (2010) that all research was narrative, noting the illusory belief in cognitive rationality’s construction of objectively neutral and universal knowledge that frames facts, data, and validity. This would fail to be socially reproduced if not for narrative, especially, those mediated through major news outlets (p. 239). Though sharing the broad conceptualization of narrative (Hendry, 2010), Bazile (2015) suggested that CRT distinguished itself as being much more translucent politically in countertelling than those paradigms deemed normative. CRT rises from those oppressed who resist subjugation by bearing witness to their ongoing battle for liberation without pretense of neutrality, objectivity, or non-political motives. Bazile (2015), like Ledesma and Calderón (2015), perceived critical race counter storytelling as a historical-cultural political strategy of oppressed persons in “assert[ing] themselves and to resist being
completely swallowed up by the Eurocentric will to dominate” (p. 240) and as such, contends counter narrative was the modus operandi of CRT. A narrative approach supported an examination of the relationship of African American parental experiences and perceptions in preparing their offspring for formal education within a macro ecological context that is socially hegemonic (Anyon, 1981; Briscoe, 2005; Counts, 1932; Giroux, 1983; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Patterson, 2010; Stansfield, 1985).

Participants

The participants were African American female parents of pre-school aged children in a small southern city. Initially, I recruited African-American parents broadly, mothers and fathers. However, no fathers volunteered. At the initial stage of the research, the readiness of African American children was defined as the demonstration of prior knowledge and social emotional skills that led to academic and dispositional success in kindergarten. I utilized a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013). The sample size consisted of five self-identified African American females. Three of the five were sole heads of their households and two were married. With the exception of one participant, the remaining participants were mothers of at least two children. This method aligned with qualitative research approaches to examine “few individuals” (Creswell, 2013). Also, congruent with the sample size in qualitative research is the capacity for researchers’ detailed and rich descriptions of the participants and context (p. 157).

Recruitment and Access

Initially, I obtained authorization to undertake the proposed research from the institutional review board (IRB) noting my understanding of my responsibility and commitment to ethical scholar research practices. To further ensure ethical soundness in this qualitative
counter narrative project, I provided proper disclosure to all participants pursuant to 45 CFR 46.116(a) clearly communicating to all participants the purpose of the study, the reasoning behind their being asked to participate and their voluntary agency in deciding to or not to participate (Creswell, 2013, p. 153). The participant’s informed consent (see Appendixes, D-H) was a mandatory requirement for participation in the research study as evidenced by documented signed permission of each individual. Lastly, respect for participants was maintained by crafting a project that was more highly valuable than unfavorable for participants as we shared in the project’s labor and benefits.

I acquired parent participants from the area in which I work by contacting the District Superintendent (see Appendix, A) and the pre-school center in order to gain permission or written support (see Appendix, B) for this project and assistance in identifying parents willing to take part in our project. I composed an email document informing potential participants of the project (see Appendix, C). My initial efforts working with a local gatekeeper proved fruitless. Subsequently, I identified a faculty member at one of the schools I served who had a pre-school age child at a faculty meeting. After receiving permission to recruit participants, I approached the faculty member and told her of our research project and asked if she would be interested in participating. She readily agreed and gave me two other faculty members’ names who consented to participate. The snowball effect was repeated at the other school I served with two more persons agreeing to be participants. All the participants were thoroughly informed about the project, their right to stop their involvement, maintainance of anonymity, and any benefits of their participation (Creswell, 2013, p 153). For participants’ time, $25.00 gift cards were provided at the end of the project.
Data Collection

Context was an important feature of the data collection process. Properly documenting the scenario within which the gleaning of data occurred granted the researcher, as well as, the reader, a better vantage point from which to interpret participant responses and critique researcher analysis (Chenail, 1995, p. 5). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) state that racialization and oppressive ideologies construct, cement, and memorialize a “master narrative” within story-telling (p. 5) that embeds White privilege as normative and thus invisible and unconscious. To resist culturally sanctioned deficit narratives, this study utilized counter narratives as a research instrument to capture “stories of those people whose experiences are not often told” in “exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 10).

Secondly, appropriate participant data emerged from in-depth interviews by way of qualitative methods as a result of researcher and participant collaboration (Clandinin, 2013, p. 49) in an encounter of mutuality and respect for participants’ lived realities and narration (Bell, 1987, 1992, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Kvale (1996) states the interview is a moral endeavor that governs the means, as well as the outcome, of the investigation. The data included semi-structured interviews, field notes, and memos as raw material (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 11; Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 27). There were three rounds of researcher and participants’ one-on one interviews employing open-ended questions for approximately one hour and 30 minutes to two hours in a private place designated by the participants. All the participants were asked to choose their own pseudonym.

The researcher chose the pseudonyms for the participants’ children, the research site, and other cities or towns mentioned in the participant narratives and presented in this dissertation. Data were collected by the sole researcher by digitally recording participant responses to questions
drawn from an interview protocol. Only one participant interview was entirely conducted over
the phone. Seven transcriptions were made of the recorded data from participant interviews by
the researcher; the remaining transcriptions were transcribed by a reputable online transcription
service. All of the data and transcriptions were archived for further analysis by the researcher.

Data Storage

Digital recordings of participant interviews were maintained initially on the drive and
memory component of the recording device. Afterwards, the interviews were digitally
transferred to a portable hard drive connected to a desktop computer for storing. Transcriptions
of the interviews were composed and stored in this manner, as well. The desktop computer is
secured by a physical lock that prohibits access to turning on the computer except with the
physical key that is securely maintained. These measures helped ensure the confidentiality and
integrity of the research project.

Data Analysis

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) state that educative phenomena are being examined more
and more by means of narrative inquiry (p. 2). As the initiators of narrative inquiry in education
as “a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and re-storying as the research
proceeds” constructing “a relationship in which both practitioners and researchers feel cared for
and have a voice with which to tell their stories” (p.4). This idea was based on the
conceptualization within education research that all humanity tells stories and live personal and
communally storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). Wang and Geale (2015) further stated
that narrative inquiry was philosophically grounded in the work of John Dewy, who viewed life
and living as equivalent to experience and education (p. 196). The researchers further stated that Dewey utilized conceptions of interaction, continuity, and situation as a tri-dimensional narrative construct to examine not only individuals’ experiences but their relations with others, and as such, a framework to better understand emergent meaning.

Clandinin (2013) states that three–dimensional narrative inquiry employs aspects of sociality, temporality, and place and referencing Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), allowed researchers a panoramic perspective of the “social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (p.12). Creswell (2013) echoed the aforementioned research and posited specific features that circumscribe most narrative inquiry including: 1) Narrative researchers collect stories which are told or co-constructed by the participant and researcher, 2) Narrative storytelling illuminates past, present, or future experiences that inform personal identities and perceptions, 3) The contextual situatedness of the story is vitally important, and 4) Storied lives can be analyzed thematically, structurally, or dialogically (pp. 71-72). Therefore, the intent and focus of narrative inquiry was to value and respect the voiced reality of ordinary women and men and to investigate the “social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 18).

This being the case, narrative inquiry aligned very well with critical race theory (CRT) because, as Creswell’s (2013) citation of Parker and Lynn (2002, p. 31) reveals, CRT aims to tell stories regarding racialization gleaned from the epistemological and situated vantage point of historically oppressed people and ethnicities. For critical race theorists, narrative inquiry is an indispensable instrument in empowering and acknowledging historically disregarded voices (Bell, 2005, p. 79). Questioning the perceived atextuality of song, dance, and African American
oral traditions relative to storytelling and imagination as social text within a critique of legal scholarship, Lawrence (1995) posited the capacity to compose text, to center one’s self as topical, and to author your own story was foundational to humanness and liberty (p. 349). This is especially true for African Americans, given their enslaved ancestors were forbidden familial and tribal identities and were further objectified through their branding by their oppressors’ “Christian” slave names (p. 341). When societal critique was textually based and racialized, social hegemony’s attempts to silence the voices of the oppressed resulted in the oppressors’ becoming blind, deaf, and dumb to those deemed the “wretched refuse” and morally unconscionable (Lawrence, 1995, p. 348).

Moreover, narrative methodology viewed through the prism of CRT helped to facilitate the revolutionizing of social ecologies through radical assessments (Bell, 2005, p. 78). Apple (1996) affirmed that language was essential in characterizing meaning and goes on to say that language should be employed in destabilizing ways to call attention to injustice and domination. Just as affirmative action countered formal inequality by demanding equal treatment and a reallocation of power and access to correct exploitive results (Harris, 2005, p. 289) so too, the narrative voice “exposes, tells and retells, signals resistance and caring and reiterates the most fearsome power—the power of commitment to change” hegemonic narratives that reified the status quo (Bell, 2005, p. 80). By employing counter narrative within critical race framing, the researcher and the participants reclaim the right to name our reality and end dehumanizing domination (Freire, p. 88) to establish a truer dialogue as a basis for racial, gender, class liberation, and environmental transformation.

The collected data were analyzed employing first cycle coding, second cycle coding, and multiple-case analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). First, In Vivo coding was conducted
by the researcher, so as to glean from the participants’ responses words or concise phrases as codes (p.74). Next, second cycle or pattern coding was employed to identify and reduce commonalities, patterns, and divergences within the initially organized and coded materials including researcher notes regarding researcher reflections and comments (p. 87). Afterwards, multiple-case analysis was utilized to illuminate processes and results useful in explicating meaning development across the participants’ narratives within a case-oriented approach (p. 101) According to the research of Miles, Huberman and Saldana, (2014, p. 11) this analytic method reflects recurring analytic features.

Trustworthiness

I am aware that my prior knowledge shaped my research choices and decisions (Anfara & Mertz, 2006) and cognizant that the entirety of the research process involving epistemology, ontology, hermeneutics, theoretical framing, methodology, field work, analysis, and reporting of findings was mediated through me. Knowledge was constructed through the interaction of the questioner and the environment (Takacs, 2002) as I came to a richer understanding of how my positionality produced my biases and how my biases produced blind spots. With this in mind, it was important that I vigilantly practiced introspection and reflection to expose my biases that I might identify and confront these views in order to control my personal bias and opinions and “commit to being open-minded, skeptical and considerate of research data” (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p.19), as well as the participants from which the data are derived. Conversations with my advisor were immensely helpful in this regard. As a critical scholar practitioner, I maintained an ethical researcher stance in every endeavor.

The ethical implications were clear. As the authority figure within the interview setting, I was responsible for every aspect of the interview from the theme, design, examination,
transcript, and interpretation, to verifying and reporting data in ways that ensured the participants’ welfare, empirical soundness of the record, and my integrity (Kvale, 1996, p. 31). This was especially important because most ethical impropriety involves difficulties surrounding participant confidentiality and reports placed in the public domain (Mauthner et al., 2002, p. 1; Whittaker, 2014). Also, to further maintain the soundness of this project, participant responses, researcher observations, and field notes were triangulated throughout data collection and analysis.

Member checking was employed to further affirm the trustworthiness of the study by the project’s participants. Moreover, this project headed and demonstrated Ladson-Billings’ (2005) suggestion to situate African American stories in increased robustness and potent contexts that are the result of richly detailed and in-depth stories. Maintaining confidentiality and utilizing ethical interview and research practices, while respecting and honoring co-laboring participants and their vital contribution to this study’s reliability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 230) help to ensure this project’s scholarship.
Chapter 4: Findings

Presented here are the experiences and wisdom of five African American female participants drawn from their lived reality having been parented, as parents themselves, as community members, and as working professionals in the field of education with regard to child readiness in this qualitative research project conducted in a small city, Victory (a pseudonym) in the southeastern portion of the United States (U. S.). The findings represent participant stories framed as counter-narratives to socially reified notions of Blacks as ineffective parents and not valuing education in relation to child readiness. First, background data are provided about the participants. Next, a detailed picture and analysis is offered of one participant as a basis for further discussion and analysis relative to the research questions guiding our examination of readying Black children.

The research questions that guided this research inquiry and analysis were: 1) How do African American parents view themselves, their children, and community as dimensions of child readiness? 2) What can distort African American parental perceptions of these aspects of readying their young? 3) How is racialization interpreted by African American parents?

Participants

The participants in this study were drawn from two separate elementary schools in the small southeastern city of Victory. One classroom teacher, the counselor, and the reading coach were colleagues at one school while one classroom teacher and the school secretary worked at the other school. The researcher worked at both schools with all of the participants in this project. Only one participant was the mother of a single child, whereas four had given birth and were rearing two or more children. Three of the participants were sole heads of their households and two were married at the time of this project. Four of the five participants had worked as
classroom educators of elementary school aged children and one as a school secretary. Based upon our review of the literature, this sampling of participants is unique in studies of this type and is expected to garner knowledge and expertise those outside the profession might lack relative to child readiness. Yet, the universality of parenting should afford the study comparable data regarding parental nurturance, protection and enculturation of their offspring. Interview transcripts provided the data for the analysis described in the previous chapter.

**Sue**

*Sue’s view of herself as parent: Child readiness.* Sue (a pseudonym) is a 39-year-old, African American female parent of three girls, 5, 8, and 10 years of age. Sue had served full-time as an early childhood educator for approximately 15 years and worked part-time as an online tutor. Sue’s mother worked as a nurse, her father was a mechanic, and her grandmother played a very significant role in her childhood development. Sue was divorced from her children’s father.

Sue lives in the small southeastern community where she was born and raised which is about two and a half hours away from the larger but relatively small southern city of Victory (a pseudonym), where she worked as a kindergarten instructor. Currently, Sue and her children live in a majority White neighborhood. She said, “[T]here are two Blacks [families] on our street, myself included.” Sue stated her community is made up of mostly retired professionals including nurses, teachers, and paraprofessionals. Sue strives to be a role model for her children. As she put it, “I want my children to see that I’m someone they can look up to instead of the people they see on TV.” Sue also experienced meaningfulness in using her skills and talents as a classroom teacher, as well as assisting others in achieving their educational aims as an online tutor.

According to Sue, academic readiness meant children should know the alphabet, the sounds associated with those letters, and numbers appropriate for their age or grade level. Sue
said that children must be “ready academically in phonics, phonemic awareness [and] mathematics.” Sue was prepared for school at home by her maternal grandmother. “When I was a child…I came in [to school] knowing things that were necessary for my grade level like my colors, my letters, and my numbers.” Sue’s readiness included her understanding and the capacity to demonstrate what she had learned.

**Sue’s past: parent as child.** Sue’s mother’s work schedule required her to work 12-hour shifts, so Sue didn’t experience home care with her mother, nor did she attend pre-k. Sue was prepared for schooling by her maternal grandmother whom she characterized as “awesome!” Smiling broadly and laughing Sue said, “Oh, I was excited [about learning] when I was a child. I can remember my grandmother…sitting down and working with me…at the table.” These were individualized learning opportunities when Sue’s grandmother taught her in explicit and implicit ways the names of things and their color, and how to count on her fingers. Sue remembers being a quick learner but noted that her grandmother “was old school so if you didn’t get it right, you know she’ll tap that [physical discipline], but it helped me get it.”

**Sue’s view of her daughter.** Sue’s youngest daughter, now 5 years old, was born premature at 31 weeks. Initially, Sue had concerns there might be some cognitive disruptions with her child but to date her daughter was developing just fine. Sue described Mary [a pseudonym] as a normal and active child.

**Pre-school.** Contrasting Sue’s experience, Mary had been enrolled in a child care/learning center since she was 4 months old; where later, she was allowed to spend about 30 minutes in the classroom section of the center before returning to the day care section for nap and snack times. At home, Sue was Mary’s principal teacher, demonstrating her belief that preparation at home was vital for child readiness, while also reinforcing Mary’s pre-k lessons at
home. Sue said, “When we are at home, we’re doing whatever letters [and] sounds she’s on. [For example], she’s on ‘w’ this week. So [we find] anything with a ‘w’ on it or we write the letter ‘w’ or she’ll do the ‘w’ video.” As a parent who is also a teacher, Sue intentionally deferred to the instructional strategies Mary’s pre-k teacher had taught in order to help Mary learn different approaches to doing things.

Another difference between the way Sue and Mary were readied for school was that Sue felt she experienced much more one-on-one learning time than her daughters. This was due in part to the fact that Sue was the sole parent in the home and her attention was divided among three little girls. Sue said, “I can only give my children just the minimum.” One strategy that had emerged in their home was sibling teaching. Not only did Sue help to prepare her children, but her children also learned from each other. Sue explained, “I do like the fact that if I teach the oldest one, she’ll teach the middle and the middle teach [es] the little [one],” says Sue. This was one way they organized against the limited time.

Sue described her parenting style as one that combined love, discipline, respect, and patience. Sue further stated that when Mary did really well, as a consequence, she “[got] to sleep with mommy.” On the other hand, when Mary exhibited negative behavior, Sue described multiple options that could be utilized. Sue did not want to use corporal punishment, what she referred to as “the zone of paddling for everything.” However, there were times when it was warranted for Mary to understand the gravity of her actions. In other instances, Sue said she talked with Mary and at other times Sue sent Mary to her time out area where she sat quietly. After sending her to time-out, Sue said that Mary would “come back and we [‘d] talk and we try to fix whatever she did wrong.” Overall, Sue’s parenting style reflects an authoritative approach which is associated with prioritizing family bonds, determination, accomplishment and
individual reliance but also discipline that lessens externalizing behaviors (Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008). Sue believed that Mary benefitted from her parenting and readiness.

It made Sue happy that Mary enjoyed pre-k. Most of all, Mary loved her teacher and her friend Tom [a pseudonym]. She played mostly with other girls and occasionally with the boys. Mary continued building on the fundamentals she learned at home and at school. For example, when they would sometimes stop to eat fast food, Mary in Sue’s terms “love[d] to read the room.” Mary identified the letters in the restaurant with those she had been working on at school or she recognized letters on Sue’s tee shirt and sounded the letters out and sometime counted items on a table that Sue was working on. Given Mary’s growth, one would expect Sue to say that she felt she had or was succeeding in preparing her child for school. To the contrary, Sue stated “I wouldn’t say succeeding because she’s still growing. But, I can say we are applying what we’re learning and you know, we are getting to that point, where she can implement in other areas.” Skill development ultimately needed to lead to connecting knowledge across different spaces and contexts.

Social-cultural mediation. Another aspect of Sue’s role as preparer included social-cultural mediation (Tamis-LeMonda, Briggs, McClowery, & Snow, 2008). Sue, like all parents, sought not only to protect and nurture her daughters, but to also transfer her cultural traditions to her progeny (American Psychological Association). This meant enculturating a sense of racial pride and self-worth within Mary while simultaneously readying her to live in a racist society (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). Sue felt it was important for Mary to be racially conscious prior to entering school because “If I don’t educate her on her own color, if she doesn’t love her own color, how will she love another color?”
Sue’s view of the community. Sue was asked to share her view of the community during the interview.

Collaboration in community. In her description of the community, Sue asserted that despite their Whiteness, “They are all friendly and they’re…almost like family. When something happens we come together, we don’t look at what color we are. So, they’re real helpful.” Sue appreciated that she felt looked after and was notified of important matters by the community being she was a single mom. As an example, Sue stated that:

Whenever something is happening you know they come and let me know. So, even when we had a, sex offender on our street they notified me instantly and then… as a community, we had him removed from our street… My kids and my neighbor’s kids are the only kids on that street. So, we had him removed from the whole block.

Overall, Sue viewed her community as one where people worked collaboratively and supported other community members in need.

Challenges in the community. When prompted, Sue stated that the biggest challenge for her community was a lack of housing. Sue said, “We don’t have enough homes. I don’t mean section 8 homes. I mean like a real, like, like, you see on TV, [the] picket fence kind of environment. For African Americans, there are not enough homes.” Some Blacks, in her opinion, wanted to improve their living circumstances but the community lacked that opportunity relative to housing. Later Sue said “People just want to live in a safe environment.” Sue associated quality housing with safety. Sue equated suitable housing, the kind middle-class Whites have, with safe community environs where people live peacefully. This despite her recollection that, “Right in my back yard [laughing], we had a [Black] family, they were consistently, ah, fighting and they would shoot one another..” She described her frame of mind “[was] like, I moved to this
community to get away from all [that].” Sue’s perception was unsettled by experiencing gun violence in a super majority White community and her anxiety and fear were heightened by the events. As such, Sue’s responses concerning normative living standards and section 8 housing, though not directly mentioning crime filled neighborhoods of color, reflected deficit ideology. Sue did not connect her perspective to racialized social structuring that influences housing access nor how it could affect child readiness. This inability obscured Sue’s perception of her community.

Sue also mentioned along with housing, crime as a major challenge and the most difficult to address. Upon analysis of several interviews it became apparent that when speaking of crime, Sue was referring to the community where the school is located in which she works and not the community in which she lives. Sue’s perception was informed by her interaction with her students. As she stated in the last interview, “I have kids, their families are going through retaliation of violence just because someone doesn’t like their significant other or sibling.” Sue did note that it was a big challenge for the children experiencing this type circumstance to come to class and “function” effectively. She further suggested that how people were reared influenced their decision making. Also, Sue felt a growing sense of uncaring among some Blacks who simply looked out for their personal interests oblivious to the consequential impact on others, including their children.

*Connections to community.* Despite the enormity of these challenges, Sue realized she not only had a voice, but could utilize her voice politically in concert with community members and elected officials to make “things happen” to improve her community. She said, “I know I have a voice [and] if we speak up more, I think more things will happen.” Sue suggested three avenues for actions: 1) Vote, its free, 2) Express your concerns to those in power 3) Attend
public meetings to hear and be heard. She was aware of her own agency and was willing to collaborate with others for equitable change. Still, Sue did not connect the lack of quality housing, crime, and educational achievement that research has shown can and does affect child readiness as interrelated dimensions within her communities, thus, further hindering her capacity to view her community from its intersections of race and class.

Even so, Sue was becoming increasingly active in her community. She provided free tutorial services to children and parents. Twice a month she taught basic computer skills to adults in the all-Black congregation where she worshipped. During the summer months she prepared children to enter kindergarten and first grade. She advised that children need to show up at kindergarten knowing the basics. “[A] child can come knowing the basics, the basic letters, the basic sounds, counting from 1 to 10, knowing their real name that helps a lot.” According to Sue, when children arrive ready in this manner, she and teachers like herself can use that specific prior knowledge to then build vocabulary, sentences, and writing. Lastly, Sue felt good about child care services in her area because she knew the persons in charge and many were retired teachers. “I feel comfortable knowing that a retired teacher is on board somewhere” because their professional educational experience helps them to identify and diagnose problems to “make things better.”

**Sue’s view of racialization: Personal.** Sue’s views on racism began with acknowledging that racism was real but she immediately added “It’s more apparent with Black on Black.” She then stated that what she meant was there were instances when Blacks were in positions to hire but they often overlooked other Blacks because they possibly assumed Blacks were not knowledgeable of the requirements of the position. “So, they will in turn give it [position] to someone of another race just because they may feel like White is better and that’s not always the
Sue recounted this poignant incident.

I was hired for a computer lab position at a previous school. When a [White] third grade teacher was diagnosed with cancer, I was in turn moved from the computer lab to third grade on the days she could not come to work. After I couldn’t do it anymore the principal [who] was White ended up letting me go but kept the teacher on because she needed medical benefits. At that time I was pregnant with my first child and with the back and forth between two jobs, I ended up losing my first child.

Sue believed that because she did not receive negative comments or evaluations from the principal, that her job performance relative to the position for which she was hired was not the reason she was let go. She stated in no uncertain terms “[i]t was about race.” A consequence of White supremicist ideology used by the principal to protect the White teachers’ interests in this case, while simultaneously discarding Sue’s Black life, was that Sue had been made fearful, not just for her own safety, but her daughters’ security also. “I’m afraid for my children, personally, because they’re girls and I don’t want anyone to take advantage of them and that’s something that constantly bothers me.” Sue, justifiably, feared her female children may be discriminated against. The emotional cost of Sue’s resiliency after losing her job and compounded by losing her unborn child and tenure made her cautiously fearful not just for herself but because she did not want her girls “to go through what I did.”

**Sue’s view of racialization: Communal.** Sue posited that though she lived in a small community that had recently “merged the elementary and high school…[there’s] always going to be a divide” when the issue of race arose. She supported her perception with the example at that time “in the year of our Lord, two thousand and sixteen, instead of allowing the [White] kids to
go to school with us [Blacks] they will ship them to Democracy [a pseudonym].” It was at least a 30-minute drive to Democracy and the majority of White parents carpoole to share the expense of perpetuating their racialized segregation because as Sue stated, “They don’t feel like they can go to school with Black kids.” In getting to the heart of the matter, Sue stated, “I’m, I’m like this, kids don’t know until adults put it in their head.” Sue believed this ideology or way of thinking was not genetic, rather it was taught to children by their parents, thus affirming race and racism as socially reproduced phenomena. Sue believed if Black and White children in her community were left to engage each other as persons, without [White] adults’ interference, racism could possibly be reduced. Yet, when asked what her knowledge and experience boded for the future, she didn’t see much change coming for the better. Just making it to the next day was sufficient because the distant future didn’t look good at the time so “I can’t look towards the future. It’s like people have stopped caring, no one wants to support another person, everyone’s in competition.”

According to Sue, community activists appeared as cyclopes, only aware of their group interest. “I can scream Black rights all day and they can scream White but when do you come together?” In other words, Sue clearly perceived the need for a different and broader approach to ending the persistent enculturation of racism White supremacy by suggesting in order to help reduce racialization, community activists and advocacy groups needed to identify common issues that could move the community beyond race-based identity politics to possibly what Guinier and Torres (2002) called political race. Yet, realistically, Sue was not very optimistic that her community, nor American society at large, would express this type humanity in her cynical response, “When you get to that point, let me know.” As a person of faith, Sue believed in a
Supreme Being. A practicing Christian, Sue said “Praying a lot helps me and my writing helps me a lot.”

**What we learned from Sue.** Sue saw herself as a powerful, loving and nurturing person descended from “awesome” ones. She understood she had a “voice” and could join it with others to make things better. She undertook and embraced her role to ready Mary for school and to teach her to love her “color,” her family and others in support of Mary’s own esteem and her positive social and emotional development as well. Sue also developed scenarios to help her daughters engage others from different ethnicities. Additionally, Sue spoke of her community through a deficit ideology (Jupp & Slattery, 2010), in one instance, as a supportive place where “Folks don’t see race,” yet, she saw a neighborhood that helped one another and looked out for her as a single mother of three girls. At other times, though, Sue saw a segregated community where daily White flights to the town of Democracy revealed most Whites just didn’t want their children to go to public school with Black children; and gun violence left her fearful and anxious for her and her daughters’ safety at home and at work. Sue’s narrative countered mainstream ideologies of Blacks and their parenting capacities. On one hand, Sue was aware of micro-instance of racism, but she lacked a perspective on the role of hegemony or systemic racism’s influence on what she was experiencing in her life locally.

**Elizabeth**

**Elizabeth’s view of herself as parent: Child readiness.** Elizabeth (a pseudonym) is 31 years old and married with a 3-year-old girl, Queen (a pseudonym). Elizabeth perceived herself as part of a normal working class family that “believes in one God.” She finds meaning in her child and by inference, motherhood. “Everything that I do now, I think about her, and how would it affect my family. So now, my life is about my family, and the safeness of that, and [how] I can
Elizabeth understands her purpose is to listen to others which was drawn from her experience of people constantly talking to her. Approximately 450 people live in her small community, Freedom (a pseudonym). She has lived in this community her entire life. Currently a counselor for the past 3 years, she previously taught special education. She has also obtained a master’s degree and an educational specialist certification in school counseling. Both of her parents work in education, her mother as an elementary school secretary and her father as a physical education teacher and football coach. She commutes 35 minutes to work. After work, she stops at the day care facility to pick up her child, visits with her grandmother, does some work with her daughter, prepares dinner and then gets ready for the next day.

Elizabeth said that child readiness had to do with academic, social and mental preparation. In essence, “preparing the child for life.” She further stated child readiness was important “[b]ecause we want our children to be successful as adults and if we don’t prepare them to be ready they won’t be successful adults.” Elizabeth believed parents should promote social emotional development to spur their children’s desire for academic success and model what they want to see expressed in their child. “So, if they can see it in us we can help them be ready for life.” Elizabeth saw her role as making sure Queen knows as much as she can academically. As with Sue, letters, numbers, colors, including shapes, name writing and knowing the days of the week and the months are perceived by Elizabeth as basic and foundational knowledge for entering kindergarten upon which later achievement is built.

When Elizabeth was younger she thought, “All you have to do is just send them to school.” She thought it was totally the school’s responsibility to teach the child. But after college and becoming a teacher she “realized that oh my goodness, if you don’t have that home help” it
impacts retention. She goes on to say “It doesn’t necessarily have to come from the home, just someone that can [give] the child extra help” because “Repetition is very important in learning.” Now, Elizabeth understands that parents “can’t solely rely on the schools, the parents have to work with their children as well, to help them be more prepared and do better in school on an academic level and a social level.” She viewed parental involvement as supporting children outside and inside the school but expressed concern about a seeming lack of “parental involvement in schools.”

Patience, enthusiasm, and love are key ingredients for providing good kindergarten or child care services so Elizabeth said while noting she worked “at a school that has a great kindergarten.” Veteran teachers who taught her were still in the profession which Elizabeth found encouraging because she knew they demonstrated love, were very knowledgeable of students assessed learning, plus they kept the students and parents aware of their academic progress.

**Elizabeth’s past: parent as child.** Like Sue, Elizabeth did not attend pre-k or experience child care services outside the home but spent much of her formative years with her grandmother due to her mother’s work schedule. Elizabeth remembers going with her grandmother when she went to work as a domestic in the home of a Euro American household. It was a large house with an attic and a fully furnished basement. Elizabeth’s grandmother “cleaned from 7:00 am to 11:00 am and [while there she] was exposed to being around another race.” She said “They didn’t treat me any differently and they exposed me to a lot of different things” she could not have experienced in her own home “because they had more money.” This household owned farms where Elizabeth learned to milk cows. These lessons would prove valuable when her family became owners of cows and Elizabeth “was able to help.” Her grandfather was the cook for the
White family and she learned about cooking as well. Also, the lady of the house would talk with
Elizabeth and helped her develop her writing skills. Elizabeth said she “would sit there and
imitate her” and over time as she got better, Elizabeth wrote letters with the lady of the house.
She appreciated the benefits she gained from their generosity.

Kindergarten was an exciting time for Elizabeth because it was her initial experience with
other children her age, having been an only child for 9 ½ years. Elizabeth recalled entering
kindergarten on the same academic level as other students in her class. She knew her colors,
numbers and could write her name and tie her shoes, so she felt she knew the basics. By contrast
today, according to Elizabeth, without “some type of academic background before [children] get
to kindergarten it seems like they are kind of struggling before they enter school.” Elizabeth
speculated that possible influences for this occurrence were curriculum modifications or possibly
when she was a child, twenty-odd years ago, more parents worked at home as opposed to today.

Elizabeth’s view of her daughter. Elizabeth described Queen as being 3 years old with
long hair she’d rather her mother not comb, and an active child with a healthy appetite, who is a
class leader at school and loves being outdoors and with her father. She attends day care that
does have a certified teacher. Queen had stayed with her grandmother for 2 years prior to
entering day care so Elizabeth was glad to know that she didn’t like to hit, and plays pretty well
with the other children especially given she’s been the only child and has not had to share.
Queen, like Sue’s daughter Mary, loves “being with the teacher” because she bridges learning
with music which connects with Queens’ affinity for dancing and singing.

Pre-school. Elizabeth feels she is succeeding in readying her child but shared that her
biggest challenge is “She’s 3 and she doesn’t want to do it when I want her to do it [laughing].”
Elizabeth clearly recognized that learning opportunities are dictated by Queen. So, “When she
wants to [learn] I can’t be lazy, I have to go at it when she wants to do it.” Elizabeth beamed with pride when she stated at 3 years of age Queen can spell “her first and last name, she knows the days of the week, she knows her colors, she knows her shapes, she knows her numbers to 20, she knows her alphabet, she can recognize a, b and c and she can write a, b, and c.”

To celebrate positive behavior, Elizabeth and Queen high-five and share gummy snacks or Queen can play outside on the trampoline. “She gets to do fun things outside mainly because that’s what she really, really, wants to do.” Elizabeth thought she’d never be a ‘time out’ parent but because it’s used at day care they adopted it at home to redirect undesirable behavior. For example, if Elizabeth tells Queen to stop a behavior and she doesn’t respond in a timely fashion, Elizabeth says forcefully, “one!” and “she’ll jump up and I’m like this stuff works [laughing]. She uses this strategy more often than others, “But sometimes she does have to get a spanking.”

_Social-cultural mediation._ Elizabeth states that Queen “knows that she is Black.” For instance, Elizabeth recalled being at school and asking Queen “Who is that?” and “She was like, ‘That’s Colin (a pseudonym), he’s White.’” Elizabeth wasn’t sure how Queen came to this understanding because as she stated “I never taught her you’re Black or they’re White.” She thinks maybe “She learned on TV or she learned it at school.” But she believed Queen’s not aware of the negative social connotations associated with Blackness nor was she ready, at this age, for the knowledge of Blacks being mistreated because of their race or negative speech about race. Yet, Elizabeth thought it was important for Queen to know that she is Black in its positive light. Elizabeth, like Sue, felt hatred and dislike are taught to children. “[I]n my opinion if you hate another race or dislike another race I feel it’s taught because at a child’s age, she doesn’t know and if you never bring it up or talk against it they will never start those actions.” According to Elizabeth, Queen is ready for school now. “She knows how to socialize, she’s obedient to the
teacher, so, I think she’s ready now, for school just based on her actions.” Again, as in the case of Sue, Elizabeth also affirmed that children must demonstrate the skills they have acquired.

**Elizabeth’s view of community.** Freedom, (a pseudonym) is close-knit very small community of less than 500 people and according to Elizabeth, “[O]ur families have known each other for so long because we went to school together and my mom went to school with my friend’s mom’s and dad’s so, we all know each other.” According to Elizabeth, people ask each other to look out for their homes while they are away for extended periods. There’s just one store and a post office and the community doesn’t have a school, so parents must drive their children about 16 miles to school in Democracy or another town. Elizabeth stated “We sell different things to help the schools and in turn the school’s bands play [for] our parades.” The only restaurant in town, the bar & grill, is only open on weekends. The previous owners flew the Confederate flag but now that it’s under new management, the bar & grill entertains Black functions. Elizabeth says, “We have grown, we have come together.” Because Blacks and Whites participate in the Christmas Pageant and parade, Elizabeth perceives her community as supportive because members lend their time and effort to ensure the success of the towns’ events. Still, they drive out of town to shop in Blueton (a pseudonym) or when necessary they drive to Democracy. There had been an increase in burglaries but “it being a small town we pretty much know who they are [laughing].” Elizabeth feels safe and believes Freedom is “the perfect place to raise a child.”

**Challenges in the community.** The best thing about her community in Elizabeth’s opinion was its small size but there had been an uptick in thievery due to a worsening drug addiction problem. Elizabeth feels the community has the human capital but lacks the physical resources needed to support her child’s readiness. For example, Freedom doesn’t have daycare
services nor a pre-school, so Elizabeth utilizes the services in Victory, where she works. Also, a lack of recreational activities for young people is a real community problem for Elizabeth. “We don't even have a park where they can play basketball.” That means “We have to leave our town to do simple things.” The community hasn’t grown over the years and rather than stay and fight many people “just leave.” The biggest challenge for Elizabeth is reaching the younger generation. She says they may entertain conversations but it fails to lead to substantive change. It seems “They just want to get that off their chest.” Compared to persons her age Elizabeth, concurring with Sue’s perception said, “It's like they don't care.” For instance, her sister in college was presenting a challenge for their family considering they help finance her education. “[R]ight now it’s trying to get her to find a career, stick with it, finish school, or you don’t have to go to school. She [could] get a good job and start getting herself together.”

These challenges could hinder Elizabeth’s perception of child readiness and her community. Not providing pre-kindergarten or center-based child care services would itself undermine child readiness options for the families of Freedom. But any child readiness gains would be curbed by Elizabeth’s statement that young people are left without positively stimulating extracurricular activities. Recreation and outdoor activities certainly play an important role in the healthy physical and cognitive development of children and teens. Furthermore, Elizabeth does not correlate how the lack of resources may spark the negative attitudes she characterized in the young people as not caring. Might the lack of investment in the young people in the community be interpreted by them as uncaring and unconcern by adults? And, might the internalization of these ideas open a door for young people to be coerced to use drugs as means of escape? Secondly, Elizabeth’s close ties with family and friends in Freedom may skew her perception of the community being better than how it is experienced by the
younger people and the adults who decided to leave the community rather than “stay and fight.”

To her credit, Elizabeth acknowledges that her perception of the community as the best place to raise a child might be influenced by the fact she has not lived anywhere else. But without healthy recreational activities for young people, opportunities for negative behaviors like drug use and theft are increased. Overall, not having pre-k and child care services, nor positive extracurricular activities for young people puts the community as risk and weakens child readiness. Elizabeth’s proximity to the community may keep her from seeing the forest for the trees.

**Connections to community.** Lastly, Elizabeth viewed herself “as a big resource in [the] community.” She assists adults in filing applications and she allows other children to play in their yard when they host fun days. She also provides students in the community with learning enrichment opportunities and since her father is a minister she does a great deal of work in the church. Long term, Elizabeth would like to bring a nice park to the community for the children and parents to enjoy. Another option would be a community center so they could have community gatherings in inclement weather. A gas station would be good, too.

**Elizabeth’s view of racialization: personal.** Elizabeth said racism is real but described it in economic and power terms. “Like if they have more money, they want to keep it that way. I feel they don’t want us to be equal to them financially. I think [Whites] are satisfied when [Blacks] have jobs under them.” Elizabeth did not experience being mistreated by Whites while growing up nor when she attended a majority White college but she “was aware that it could happen though.”

Later in the interview however, Elizabeth did recall in college she had an experience where the majority of the class was White with perhaps six Blacks, yet the Blacks would be placed in a group of four with one White. “Most of the time the groups were separated by color;
the teacher did that.” Elizabeth said “Just getting out of high school, I thought that [racism] didn’t exist anymore. I’ve heard about it. I saw movies about it but that doesn’t exist anymore. As you get older, you realize, ‘Oh it does exist. It’s still here.’” She felt not being directly prepared for racism might have been a hindrance “because I had to come to the realization that this does still happen.” Elizabeth has since experienced being asked by White female shoppers on several occasions while standing in a clothing store to assist them. “I feel that’s just racism because they don’t go to the other White shoppers and ask them to help them.” The experience made Elizabeth angry. “It upsets me. It does because I don’t just walk up to anybody of any color and ask them to just help me. I know that she asked me because I was Black.”

Elizabeth, like Sue, recognized parents have great influence on children’s racial attitudes. Elizabeth wanted Queen to attend a diverse school because later in life she may very well live and work among different “nationalities, Whites, Asians, even Muslims.” This way Queen “would be more prepared” than if she went to “school with just her color.” Yet, Elizabeth expects her daughter will have to learn how to deal with “children saying things that they are taught.” As an example, Elizabeth noted that:

She’s going to preschool now. She has no problem playing with the other children that are not Black. They don’t even see color. That’s how I know things like that are taught because when [they] get older they mistreat each other.

In her statement Elizabeth knows that Queen sees phenotypic differences in persons but she does not believe that at her age neither she or other children are aware of the negative connotations about race that are promulgated in American society to the degree that it affects how they treat each other at play.
**Elizabeth’s view of racialization: communal.** As mentioned earlier, approximately 450 people are comprised by Elizabeth’s community. The Blacks live close together while Whites live near them but “deep in the woods.” Elizabeth stated that the Whites that live near them are cordial and speak as they go about their business but the other Whites do not speak to Blacks. “Some people that live in my community that are White I have never seen. When you see them it’s just a natural thing for me to say ‘hi’ but they don’t speak. I’m like, ‘That’s rude. That’s them.’”

Elizabeth stated the first Black female mayor was elected about two years ago. The Blacks worked hard to get her elected, because they first had to fight to not be excluded from voting because they lived outside the city limits, though they paid for utilizes. The Blacks prevailed in getting to vote. But when the mayor decided not to run again she didn’t let her Black constituents know nor did she tell them the Whites did not want to hold another election. Instead they wanted to simply swap positions with a White male on the board. The Blacks only became aware through unofficial sources considering that city meetings are not advertised. Elizabeth, though, felt Blacks were at fault for not demanding that the city meetings be advertised. Elizabeth believed as Sue did, that participating in town meetings can change how they are conducted as well as, their results.

**What we learned from Elizabeth.** Elizabeth saw herself as part of the middle class supported by Christian beliefs. Her daughter reflects the meaningfulness of her life as a mother, provider, and protector of her family. She fulfills her purpose, as one whom others are drawn to talk to, in her vocation as an elementary school counselor. Elizabeth viewed child readiness as essential to developing accomplished adults, as a result of prepared children. She felt it important that parents’ aid their offspring to embrace intrinsically the thirst for academic excellence, while
consistently exhibiting their expectations for their child or children’s growth and development. Thus, an important role for Elizabeth was to ensure Queen maximized her capacity for learning. Her perception of Queen was of a burgeoning leader, a lover of the outdoors, singing, and dance. Elizabeth also saw her daughter at 3 years of age ready for school and conscious of her “Blackness.”

Elizabeth described her community as small and tight-knitted socially but lacking fundamental resources for readying children (e.g. pre-schools and day care) and recreational opportunities for families and teens. Challenged additionally by the miscommunication between generations and increasing burglaries, Elizabeth lacked framing to express their commonalities as disruptors and added risks to the community and child readiness. Elizabeth understood racism is real and felt it was enculturated by White parents. She experienced microaggressions first-hand like being asked by White females to help them with their shopping without question, acknowledging White community members in passing without reciprocation and most regrettably disregarded by a Black elected official once empowered by the Black electorate. But, absent from her narrative was an articulation of how social systems beyond her local environ might be contributing to the challenges she raised to community cohesion and child readiness. In sum, Elizabeth felt good that she saw growth taking place in Queen and still felt Freedom was the best place to rear a child.

**Pam**

**Pam’s view of herself as parent: child readiness.** Pam (a pseudonym) is a novice classroom teacher with 4 years’ experience and at the time of this interview was enrolled in graduate school. She is 28 years old and mother of two boys ages 2 and 7. She is the head of her household but their father is involved in their lives. Pam was born and raised in Victory (a
pseudonym). Her parents live in Victory as well. Her mother was a social worker and her father was a wielder before becoming disabled. She works 7:45 to 3:30 and feels her work schedule allows for enough time for her to “help with homework…take him outside for a few, to do things with them.” Pam and Susan are the only participants that live in Victory and do not have to commute.

“[C]hildren being prepared for school, socially and um academically” is what came to mind when Pam thought about child readiness. Pam viewed herself as her child’s main instructional support but she recognized there were good pre-k and child care services in Victory. She felt “They expect the children to know a lot” today as opposed to when she was child. Pam went on to say “But then you look at pre-k, they have these play-based classrooms but when they get to first grade they’re wanting them to know things.” Pam sees a discrepancy between the skills and knowledge demands of first graders and the ways the play focus of pre-kindergarten is implemented in the school system.

Pam believes that being prepared in the earlier grades supports student achievement in later grades which is why child readiness is important to her but she doesn’t see much of a difference between readying children today than when she was prepared. “[I]t’s pretty much the same. You read with your children every night to build vocabulary. It’s basically teaching them the fundamentals, how to spell their name, letters and things like that.”

Pam says she’s contented. “I’m able to provide for myself and my children so as long as I’m able to do that I’m content.” Pam feels “Everybody’s life is meaningful” and so is her life especially in light of her children. Pam went into education “to make a difference” and so fulfill her purpose. Her purpose is expanded as a mother. For her this means being accessible to her children and “to give them the best life that they can possibly have. That’s my purpose for being
here.” Still, parenting is a challenge for Pam “because you only get one chance at raising them.” Pam wants to parent in such a way that she doesn’t “expose them to things that they shouldn't be exposed to” even while she’s trying to complete her graduate education. She said “staying focused” despite all life brings is challenging particularly when trying to balance grad school, work and parenting. That’s “my biggest challenge today,” she said.

**Pam’s past: Parent as child.** Pam experienced center-based care. She said she attended pre-k as well. Pam’s hesitance verbalizing and not remembering much about her experiences in child care was interesting. She did recall attending a Protestant church which provided pre-kindergarten services. The church supplied the space for the pre-kindergarten but Pam doubts the personnel were members of the church.

**Pam’s view of her son.** Pam describes her 2-year-old son as smart and a “happy child.” Family members are amazed at how conversant he is. Pam says Sensable (a pseudonym) responds like he’s older and “like he’s been here before.” He’s not enrolled in pre-k but stays with a baby sitter who is a member of the church she attends. Sensable loves to visit the school where Pam works. He is very outgoing with other children but has to warm up to adults. Pam addresses positive behavior by “always tell[ing] him that he’s doing a good job” and he enjoys being asked for a high five in affirming his behavior as well. Pam address negative behavior by letting “him know that it’s wrong.” She verbally states “That’s wrong” or “Don’t do that” combined with the fact that Sensable doesn’t want to disappoint “mommy,” helps him learn “right from wrong.”

**Social-cultural mediation.** Pam says Sensable is not aware of his race though “he knows his colors.” But Pam believes that it’s important for Sensable to know his race prior to going to school. She says being aware of one’s race before entering school is tantamount to knowing your
address [and] phone number. These are just normal things any child should know if asked, in Pam’s opinion. She admits that with her first-born child, his coming of age was the primary motivation for starting school. Also, the costs associated with paying for child care played a major role in Pam’s decision regarding 2-year-old Sensable, as she stated, “He will be in school when he’s five and it has a lot to do with paying for child care also, so of course, you want them to get in school [laughing] as soon as possible.” This is also why Pam is working hard now to get Sensable ready for school. From internet searches to conversations with other educators, Pam seemed relentless in meeting her readiness deadline. “I Google checklists on how to prepare your child for kindergarten and I try to do those things on the checklist. I talk to kindergarten teachers to ask them what they are looking for in entering kindergartners. So. I’m [going to] try to make sure he’s ready and not just with [his] age but skillwise as well.”

Pam takes seriously her role in child readiness and views it as vital. “I think my role is the most important because it starts at home.” She goes on the state “I’m [going to] try my best to get them prepared at the house because I know they don’t get everything at school.” Pam is cognizant that lessons begun at school must be reinforced at home which agrees with the perceptions of all our participants. Like other participants that taught professionally in the classroom, Pam’s perception of child readiness changed through exposure to the profession. “[I]t wasn’t until I became a teacher;” and her experiences as a fourth-grade classroom educator that she came to know how many “fourth-grade children are missing foundational skills.” For Pam, this was an eye opening and compelling experience. “I need to make sure that my kids are prepared so that when they get to fourth grade they won’t be struggling like the kids now are struggling.”
Pam’s view of the community. Victory is a poor community and Pam stated the worst thing about the community is its size. She associates the smallness of Victory with the lack of recreational activates for young people which she says led to violence and killings. Pam like Elizabeth, believed having “more things for the youth to do” helps reduce the potential for crime. “[I]f we want to do something fun we have to go to” to other communities forty-five minutes to an hour away. For Pam, the most difficult thing is that her children “have to grow up in this community with the violence” and very few positive outlets for their involvement. Pam recalled Victory being listed as one of the” most dangerous cities to live in” and she as had Sue, experienced anxiety and fear do to violence in the community. For example, she stated at the time, a fair had recently come to Victory and during the fair gun fire erupted. So, [when] “taking your child somewhere to have fun you have to worry about people shooting or acting crazy.” It “scares me sometimes and that’s why “I’m overprotective of them.”

Challenges in the community. Pam says the best thing is “the cost of living is cheap and my dad’s side of the family is here.” The state of the community, according to Pam, is the responsibility of “[t]he people that live in the community.” No mention thus far has been made by participants of macro or exo structural relationships influencing the local community. “Good parenting in her opinion was vital to combat community violence. Pam felt that “it starts at home.” She saw that reducing violence could allow for more business development in Victory. But, Pam hypothesized the size of the city may impact how violence is perceived. Her great desire is to see Victory grow and become better. She wants it to be a nurturing place for her children. But on the other hand, she felt that “half of the time I think the children are listening to older people” whose negative influence can lead to young people making bad choices. So, Pam stays committed to “doing what I have to do at home” to ensure her children “know right from
wrong.” Yet, Pam says “Sometimes I wonder, is there hope” because it appears things are worsening which makes it hard to remain hopeful. Pam recognized that elected office holders alone, cannot bring about needed changes themselves. “[W]e have to do things to better our community. It’s not just on one person. It’s no way that [the mayor] can do it by himself.”

Violence in the community influences and clouds Pam’s perception. Pam’s perceptions are shaped by all the negative realities associated with and reinforced by violence. Like, over policing for example, sets the stage for law enforcers’ lethal use of force on Blacks which can lead to decreasing business ventures that make the community unattractive and further impoverishes the community due to the money spent in other locales because of the lack of resources and safety issues; all of which were perceived by Pam. Yet, she did not identify their direct interrelatedness in her responses. These effects compound the fear and anxiety felt by parents and children that can be experienced as traumatic events that negate child readiness development and opportunities in the short term and student achievement in later life.

Furthermore, violence in the community clouds and overcasts hope and optimism for improving the community and forecasts conditions where people prepare to accept life without the cleansing power of the sun but rather concede to unpredictable moments of lights rays that hardly brighten and quickly fade. So, it should not be surprising that the hopelessness that Pam experiences is not simply her individual perception but could very possibly be representative of a communal malaise that she views as lack of community support for children and families. Again, Pam recognized her own emotional state, however, she did not connect what she was sensing to her community’s climate as a reflection of and response to the effects of violence and its obstruction of child readiness.
Though Pam said she didn’t feel the community provided acceptable support of families and children yet she felt there were good kindergartens and child care services. Free child care services were limited in Victory but Pam felt there was an ample supply of day care services that parents could pay for. In terms of effectiveness, Pam noted that a distinction needed to be made between “where they're actually teaching and not just babysitting.” For Pam, good kindergartens or child care services begin with the personnel. She said, “We need teachers that care. [T]eachers that are there for your child and want to see them better themselves [and] will do anything in their power to make sure that they succeed.” Also, Pam takes note of the area where the provider is located. As she said, “Parents, most of them, [are] going to look at the area before they send their child”

**Connections to community.** Pam described herself as a “pretty good community member.” She shops locally and tries to be supportive. Pam also sees being a teacher as a means of bettering her community” by trying to instill in [children] values and teaching them right from wrong.” Right now, Pam is not personally motivated to initiate community efforts but is more than willing to offer her support to positive projects when asked. She described, “I don’t do much. But, if I was asked, you know, to help, like I say, I’m [going to] support it.” Pam says she’s thinking positively. Victory elected a young mayor and “with the help of the community we are going to [restore] Victory.”

**Pam’s View of Racialization:**

Pam saw racism as real and associated it in a national sense with the ongoing killing of Black females and males across the country, many of whom were unarmed. She stated that not all of the law enforcers were White but it appeared they were “killing Black people just because they have some kind of authority.” Pam experienced a situation involving her role as a soccer
mom when she noticed while they “were sitting next to each other and the children were playing with each other, the [White] parent seemed so irritated by the children playing.” Pam went on to concur with Sue and Elizabeth stating “[c]hildren don't see color, so the children didn't know.” Meaning, it is not that children don’t recognize differences in phenotype but what they don’t see nor understand are the negative and deficit ideas that attempt to cement Black inferiority and White superiority in the minds of the citizenry and immigrants. Pam was upset by the incident.

For Pam, knowledge of racism by her children would help them to be aware so that “they [would] know when or if they're being mistreated by somebody so they'll be able to come back and let me know what's going on.” At the time of our interview Pam felt that racism did not affect her child because he was unaware of the negative and deficit ideas about Blacks and Whites enculturated in our society. Though Pam’s boys are very young she still felt the need to tell them how to respond to law enforcers. “Don't argue with them, just listen and do what they tell you to do.” Additionally, Pam gave an example of the permeation of racialization through the media. “One time [after] watching TV my son came to me and [asked], Mom, why Black people always mad at White people,” Caught off guard she just said “I don’t know.” When Pam was young racism was never discussed instead she said “I learned about it from watching TV and reading about it.” Here again, we see the role of media in transmitting racialized notions. Pam felt at times she was helped by the mediation of racism because “if I did come across [racism], it didn't really hurt my feelings because I understood what was going on, so I was aware.” Without this knowledge she said she “probably would have been confused and hurt”. Yet, Pam, like all of the studies’ participants, stated she doesn’t “assume that people are racist” so she engages people in conversation until they show they are disinterested. In other words, Pam refuses to stereotype Whites and treats them as she would want to be treated. Even in her classroom when the topic of
slavery is discussed, Pam made sure to tell her students that “all White people aren't the same.” In other words, she did not want her students to stereotype all Whites as evil. This is in stark contrast to how Blacks in American and, globally for that matter, are persistently portrayed as an incapable, criminal, unethical and a valueless group; mistreated ubiquitously based on transmitting a lie across generations despite thousands of years of history to the contrary. Pam stated starkly, “I don't think [Whites] can be changed. I don't think you can change how somebody feels about another group of people.” In other words, Whites, would themselves have to adopt and transmit to their young a different ideology concerning Blacks than White supremacy. Given her perception it follows that Pam believed many Whites are closeted racists and she suggests a reason for being closeted racists is the potential financial boycott of their businesses that might occur if they made public their true selves. Moreover, Pam affirms the idea that racism is a social construction stating “I think it's kind of learned behavior because “[White children] don't know color now, but of course their parents are going to teach them real soon.”

Pam supports Sue’s statement, when she said “[j]ust from watching the news [and] all this stuff going around the nation, I think [racism] is getting worse, so I don't think it's going to get any better anytime soon.” One way that Pam copes with racism is to not go where she is not wanted. Another coping mechanism is prayer. “I do have faith that God will work it out, whatever the situation is. Everything happens for a reason.”

**What We Learned from Pam**

Contented, was the word Pam used to characterize herself as the sole head of her household in making provisions for her family. She, too, derives meaning for life through her children. Pam entered education with the objective to help improve it, a purpose she continues in her home life by providing the best that she has for her children. Pam felt she was undoubtedly
the primary support in her child’s development. She described Sensable as a smart boy who may have been here before because of his ability to communicate. She affirmed his positive displays and corrected him when he was wrong. Pam utilized internet searches as well as, questioning kindergarten teachers about their expectations for students once enrolled to aid her in preparing Sensable to develop the necessary skills to be ready for formal schooling beyond simply being of age. She was probably encouraged in her efforts by identifying an incongruence, in her opinion, between the pre-kindergarten emphases on play versus the first-grade expectations of children’s knowledgeable ness in her school district.

Pam viewed Victory as impoverished and lacking leisure activities for youths which had led to increasing violence in the community. She has experienced fear and finds herself overly protective of her children because of such events involving guns. She felt positives changes could be made but was clearly aware that only a collaborative community approach could succeed, as opposed to the efforts of an individual. But, Pam did not state a perception of the comprehensiveness of poverty, violence, policing, out of town spending and the continuing underdevelopment of her community and how it undermines child readiness. This in turn inhibits her perception of the ecological context she faces daily. Pam also stated racism is real. She perceived the discomfort of a White parent as White and Black children played together but also spoke to the national epidemic of law enforcers killing Blacks with impunity. Even her older son has been led to questions of Black-White relations by the images mediated through television. Pam felt it vital to tell her male boys how to respond to police. Yet, Pam, as other participants, did not associate the relationship of the epidemic killing of Black children, women and men nor its mediation with systemic structures that undergird the poverty and violence she and her children experience in her community. Like Elizabeth, Pam believes racism is taught by White
parents to their children but she went further stating that Whites in her opinion, could never change. So, she doesn’t go where she’s not wanted, believes GOD will work it out because, “everything happens for a reason.”

Roberta

Roberta View of Herself as Parent: Child Readiness. Of the five participants, Roberta (a pseudonym) is the only one who has not worked as a certified classroom teacher in a public school and whose interviews were done entirely over the phone. Roberta is 38 and the mother of 5 children. Divorced from her children’s father Roberta sees herself as single and partnered. Currently, the father of her children doesn’t play an active role in their lives. She considers Big City (a pseudonym) her hometown though she was born in Victory (a pseudonym) and lived there until she was about 4 years old. She moved to Victory about 4 ½ years ago. Her mother lives in Victory currently and is retired from active military duty. Roberta works as a school secretary from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. In no conversation, did Roberta mention her father.

Roberta described herself as an army brat and sees herself as constantly growing and developing. Roberta felt “all life is meaningful” and that meaningfulness is found in existing and living for each other. Roberta stated without reservation her purpose is to grow, learn and to assist others in their growth and development. Roberta said her biggest challenges is discipline by which she meant “routine is always hard for me.” She constantly looks “for change or something different or something new out there.” Roberta didn’t identify any family challenges. She replied that they arise when “you try force those who are close to you to think, do or be, how you want them to be and that's only time you come to challenges.” Roberta described her outlook as almost always positive. There were a few occasions when negativity arose because of
focusing too much on the past. “I look into my past and try to bring it along with me but your past [doesn’t] belong anywhere but in the past.”

Roberta stated that she had more time with her children when she “was in a position when I didn’t have to work” but she still spends time with them. Roberta perceives child readiness as the ‘beginning’. To her, child readiness means being ready for kindergarten, college or a career. Roberta’s experience has shown her parents must “teach [their] children to love to read, to love to discover things, use their imagination and that comes about just talking to them.” Roberta believes that by talking, spending time and reading with children one can impart a love for reading, inquisitiveness and use of their imagination. Roberta uses an old adage ‘learning your child’ as the means for understanding their interests. Once discovered, Roberta says these interests must be fed; nurtured as it where, even as their interests frequently change. “You know when they’re younger it changes every other day.” But Roberta felt that learning ones’ child helps to set the foundation for the child’s facilitation of their learning. As she says, “once you set that foundation they want to learn and [that] makes their path easier for them.”

Roberta recognized the spiraling down of the curriculum saying that content her daughter is learning at 3 or 4 years old, she learned in kindergarten. (Of the teachers, Pam and Elizabeth have alluded to this point and its ramifications). Roberta posits the importance of parental modeling of reading and seeking knowledge. [So] “my children see me read and love learning” because children “do more of what they see you do than what you tell them to do.” Roberta states that she is reproducing what her mother taught her. “Like I say what I’m doing with my children, my mom did with me so, that’s where I get it from”

Roberta believes she plays an important role in readying her children after years of reading with them, teaching them to write and summer enrichment that’s aligned with their
interests as means to enculturating their love of learning. Roberta has always thought this way. Loving to learn has been her lifelong habit that she sought to transmit to her children. (She is the only participant who had this perception) “I feel that my children are doing very well in school.” Roberta views her children as succeeding in their preparation but refrains from saying she’s succeeding by acknowledging the children are “the ones doing the work.”

Roberta states she doesn’t have a particular parenting style. She said because each child is different it requires she employ differentiated approaches based on the child. Roberta goes on to relate that to treat them all the same would be unfair. “Everyone’s different, every single one them[’s] different so I can’t be the same.” Roberta perceived her biggest challenge was helping her 4-year-old become comfortable with school, working on discipline and learning to remain focused. Roberta asserts the necessity for preparing “your child to able to adapt to a changing world, to always be ahead and be prepared for it.” This in her mind is the import of child readiness.

Roberta’s past: parent as child. Roberta began day care at approximately 3 years of age. Roberta remembers not liking day care. She felt bored and believed she learned more from home. Roberta said she always loved school but never like having to get up in the mornings. Her mother purchased books for Roberta when she was a child. Loving to read and learn was instilled in Roberta by her mother. She also recalls spending time and learning with her great-grandmother. Roberta’s great-grandmother “was the neighborhood candy lady.” Roberta learned housekeeping skills, animal husbandry and meal preparation by shadowing her great-grandmother.

Roberta’s view of her daughter. Roberta’s daughter Bea (a pseudonym) is 4 years old. She loves to smile, dance and likes dinosaurs and can be stubborn at times. For example Roberta
said, today her homework was the letter ‘w’ and she was saying the ‘w’ says wuh’ I said no that’s the sound the ‘w’[makes] she [said] no the ‘w’ says wuh’ you know, like that’s what it’s saying. And I couldn’t convince her I just had to say ok, this is what ‘w’ says.” Once Bea has grasped a concept it’s hard to convince her otherwise. Bea likes engaging with others. She’s gregarious. Doing homework makes her feel confident because she’s involved in the same activity as her siblings. “Bea used to pretend to do homework before she started school [and]now [that]she actually has homework, it makes her feel big, it makes her feel special like she doing what the rest of them do.” Roberta further describes Bea’s behavior as that of any 4-year-old attempting to understand her limitations. Roberta proudly stated Bea could unlock and navigate her smart phone to sites of her choosing without assistance. Around children Bea wanted to play but around adults Bea was very communicative.

Roberta utilized verbal affirmations to reinforce and acknowledge positive behavior exhibited by Bea. Roberta felt the situation was important in determining appropriate measures to address negative behavior. Children are prone to “tell on themselves” and generally know when they’ve done something wrong, according to Roberta. There are times when talking will suffice but to teach the avoidance of dangerous mistakes Roberta remarked “Like, say when they are younger and you have to teach your child not to run out in the street, that’s something you have to put fear in their heart so they want have to do that.” After checking back with her for clarification of what Roberta meant when she made statement “put fear in their heart… she informed me that it could mean corporal discipline or speaking loudly but the appropriateness would be situationally based.

**Social-cultural mediation.** Roberta says that Bea is aware of the visual differences in people but she’s not aware of “my race.” Roberta states that “I really don’t teach them, you
know, that they are different” because “I didn’t grow up like that, so I don’t really teach them that.” Roberta doesn’t think it’s important for her child to be racially conscious prior to entering school. No other participant expressed this perception. In addition, Roberta feels that “all children are born ready” to learn. In her opinion, its parents that are unready. Meaning that if children are born ready to learn given they have no physical or cognitive inhibitors to developmental processes then children being unprepared would reflect the choices and actions of adults in their collective and interrelated roles as parents, teachers, administrator, elected officials, and designers and executors of state and federal policy. In short, Roberta implicitly suggests we are all accountable in varying degrees for failures in our children’s readiness. Roberta said specifically that the parents’ role is “to unlock that potential,” by identifying and cultivating the child’s interest or as previously stated by “learn[ing] the child.”

Robert’s view of her community. Roberta and her family live in public housing. She seems uncomfortable with the reality. It’s a poor area and Roberta doesn’t know her neighbors. When responding to the best and worst things about her community, Roberta doesn’t talk about the housing project where she lives but rather the larger city. The best thing was that it’s a small town, she said. Roberta sees the worst thing being the school’s focus on assisting students with academic challenges fails to challenge those students, like her own, that are doing well, like “gifted or exceptional” children.

Challenges in the community. Roberta viewed the biggest community challenge as “people not understanding their full potential” nor comprehending that it resides within themselves. Facing or eradicating the challenges of the community, according to Roberta, helps “[y]ou grow, you get stronger, you get wiser and that’s how things grow, that's how things get better.” To do this Roberta said it’s a matter of trusting your natural intuition or instinct. She
recognizes it is hard to maintain but insists it must be practiced every day. Roberta felt it becomes easy the more it is practiced so that “It's a way of life.” Roberta believes, as have all projects participants, that parents as people in the community are most responsible for the context of the community.

Roberta goes on to say the public has a measure of power through their tax dollars but the public remains silent in part because they really are not aware. “It’s the tax money that runs the school so, it’s really the public, they have control over it but the public doesn’t speak; [because] the public really doesn’t know.” Then, she goes on to state that parents are the most accountable, but “Responsibility [also] falls on the board, the superintendent, [and] the teachers, because they should know. They should be saying what I’m saying and then they should do something about it, you know.” Roberta approved of shared responsibility with the local educational authority and with teachers who should not only be abreast of educational concerns, but advocating and actively addressing issues. This perception has been expressed in a variety of ways by all our participants. Roberta affirms the concrete aspect of development in that hard work is absolutely vital in achieving the “desires or dreams you have.” She states “If you want to reach higher goals or a state of happiness or higher realms or just a better life, it takes effort, it takes work. It takes action. That's what you have to do. You have to work at it. You can't just sit there and wishing and hoping.” She understands personal responsibility as a crucial dimension of growth and development.

Roberta has not seen many instances of community support for families. Roberta is unsure if the community is knowledgeable enough to support children in meaningful ways. Here, I wonder is Roberta is referring to the public housing community as opposed to the city at large? Roberta speaks of a mindset she has encountered suggesting, “There’s a part [of the
community]” who thinks “Send your child to school so you won’t be bothered for 8 hours out of the day and that’s basically the mentality, you know. So, they’re just not very supportive.”

Roberta believes that most of the parents at the school where she works are not as involved as she feels they should be. “We have parents at school sometimes that do a lot but the majority of parents, you know, don’t.”

**Collaboration in community.** Good kindergartens, in Roberta’s opinion, should challenge children and not limit their capabilities. There are good pre-k services in Roberta’s community but those tend to be privately operated. Roberta’s prior experience with her older children informed her decisions regarding her younger children’s education. Roberta felt her child was ready for school. Prior to committing Bea to a school, Roberta observed classrooms on several occasions and requested curricula before deciding on placing her in a school. Roberta decided the private school was a better fit for her child which required she pay for access.

In this instance in our interview, Roberta identifies community as her place of work and her relationship with the students there. Roberta treats “every single one them like my own. You’re so loved you treat children with love and respect and hopefully they will rub of and learn how to love and respect themselves and that good feeling stays with them throughout their life.” For Roberta, this is the role she and all of us must play. “Children are the community.”

**Roberta’s view of racialization: personal.** Roberta associates wealth with power. Blacks may have been the numerical majority in some urban municipalities but they controlled minuscule wealth. Roberta said that she’s seen a smaller White percentage of the population control most of the wealth and thus controlled the metropolis and “That's the way it's going to always be.”
She stated she had not experienced racial discrimination individually; however, Roberta said she had experienced confrontations more of a religious nature because she did not go to church. Roberta felt in her experience Blacks were less tolerant relative to religion. Roberta believed that Blacks were disconnected from their culture and religion not realizing they did not arrive in America as Christians. She viewed Black Christians as “practicing the slave owner's religion with more zeal than the actual slave owner, which is ridiculous.” Roberta takes an ecumenical approach to religion. She challenged notions that view non-converts as wayward persons. Roberta said her African descendants “were considered medicine women” and went on to say the tradition came from practicing indigenous religion.

Roberta’s world would be one where people were led by the spirit. Roberta believes problems are generated when people deny their identities. “It causes a form of mental illness when you deny who you are; deny your own self. A spiritual sickness, which is a mental sickness.” Instead Roberta advised that you should follow “your heart, be happy with who and what you are.”

Follow your passions. Not something because you think you'll make money from it, or it looks good, because you're going to school for it. If you're not passionate about it, then what's the purpose? That's what an ideal world for me would be. I feel if that was the case with everyone, it would be a much better place, much better place.

**Roberta’s view of racialization: communal.** Roberta believes racism is “real and alive in the individual” though she said initially that she had not experienced racism directed towards her personally. Roberta recalled that when she was married her husband was frequently pulled over when she was seated in the back seat but it appeared it happened much less when she was seated in the front seat. She also thought because of his beard and dreadlocks he was racially
profiled “a lot” and “not just White cops, Black cops too [because] Black police racially profile too.” Roberta remembers being “pulled over more by Black cops than White cops.” She gave the following example:

It was like three police cars and they [started] searching the car when they found something. They tried to get us to confess that drugs [were] in the car. He just knew it was some kind of residue of cocaine. In the end it was cracker crumbs. The other policeman, the White policeman, got so upset. “Man, you got three units out here.” He started fussing and they just left and drove off. It was ridiculous. “Why you just trying to make us confess to something.” Then realizing it was little crackers one of the children had.

Roberta experienced a “disdain [for] that particular person” but further noted that she could not blanket everyone for the actions of an individual (not stereotyping). “I just, I wasn't raised that way and I didn't grow up that way.” Roberta states she does not discriminate “I treat everybody the same.” Roberta said her grandmother told her stories about racial incidents and “I guess they kind of prepared me” but she also said the stories didn’t impact her because she “just saw individual monsters. I just didn't blanket entire people.” Her perception certainly informs Roberta’s decision not prepare her children to deal with racism per say but rather “How do you handle when you're not being treated the way you should be treated?” Roberta believed that her deportment and dispositions established a non-racial climate and context that was internalized by her children. Yet, Roberta stated racism “probably affects us in ways we don't know because of things that have happened in history or in the past” but to think all White people are bad “really doesn't prepare the child for the real world.” Roberta perceived that “the results of racism, whether they’re present or in the past, it affects us all. It conditions the environment that we grow
up in and that we live in.” This statement affirms the literature that characterizes the U. S. ecological contexts as socially hegemonic.

When referring to the continuous killing of Black males, Roberta responded that she’d have a special conversation with her boys as they reach the age to drive. The current social conditions suggest her approach would be “obvious. I'd be a fool not to.” Roberta said the conversation would include the following: 1) Expect to be pulled over 2) Stay calm 3) Keep your hands on the steering wheel 4) Keep your wallet on the dashboard near the steering wheel. The last point was reiterated as very important so to refrain from reaching towards anything out of the law enforcers’ sight. Roberta also stated that one should make sure the car tag and driver’s license are current. Roberta did not expect that America would change in regard to racial profiling of Black males. “That's the way America is right now and I don't see it changing by the time my sons get of age.” But when Roberta talked about her daughters she felt that “She'll deal more with issues with just being a woman than she will just being a Black woman.” Here, Roberta attempts to isolate her daughters’ gender from her ethnicity in opposition to Crenshaw’s’ theory, intersectionality. Her eldest daughter wants to be an astrophysicist. Susan stated that the field was “dominated by White males.” She wanted her to be prepared to deal with the emotional and mental stress of being a woman in this field.

Roberta felt that desegregating public schools in Victory could help reduce racism. She further suggested that Black children interacting with White children could help dispel supremist ideas. Roberta did connect the images portrayed on TV with mediating White supremacy stating, “Children think that certainly the White people are above or better because of the images you see on TV.” But, Roberta failed to associate some Blacks’ feelings of inferiority resulting from
media images to the thinking and purposes of those who control the media, placing responsibility on parental upbringing.

**What we learned from Roberta.** Roberta sees herself continuously growing and developing; a person under construction. Her life is made meaningful in serving others. Roberta’s outlook on life is positive and hopeful in that she views every situation as an opportunity to learn and grow. To ready children for school, Roberta advocates parents must “learn your child,” meaning parents need to talk with and engage their young to ascertain their interests and once discovered their interests must be nurtured. Ultimately, a child needs to see the love of learning, of reading, and of inquiry modeled by parents. As Roberta stated, she simply taught her children what her mother taught her. Her mother bought Roberta books instead of toys but she too, learned much from her great-grand mother. Roberta perceived Bea, as a normal, smart and engaging 4-year-old who could be obstinate at times about what she had learned. Bea pretended to do homework prior to starting pre-k and now felt “big” like her siblings. But, Roberta was the only parent who felt it not important for her child to be conscious of her race because she wasn’t reared that way. She visited schools and settled on a private pre-school because she was sure Bea was ready to begin.

Roberta lives in public housing with her children and sounded not at all comfortable with it. She felt most community members were unaware of the great potential within themselves. She believed that community members are responsible for the condition of the community and that collaboration within the community could foster solutions for pressing issues. But Roberta, like Pam, sensed a mentality that informed behaviors that undermined community growth and that reflected a kind of hopelessness. Roberta said she hadn’t personally encountered racism but described several incidents where she was riding with her then-husband when he was profiled
because of how he looked by more Black officers, as she remembered. She like all the participants refused to stereotype all Whites for the actions of some. But, she did state that racism might affect us in ways we are not conscious of. She, like the other participants with male children, felt the need to talk about how to respond to law enforcers when stopped. Still, like other participants, Roberta did not relate in her narrative knowledge of systemic and institutional racial oppression. Rather than racism, Roberta talked about religious discrimination in that she felt Black Christians were intolerant of those who didn’t go to church or practiced their faith. She saw herself a descendant of medicine women with an indigenous religious practice drawn from Africa that encouraged her will to survive.

Triangle

Triangle’s view of herself as parent: child readiness. Triangle (a pseudonym) is 33 years old and the mother of a 5-year-old daughter Sophie (a pseudonym) and a 4-month-old boy. She is married to the father of her children. She had 15 years’ experience as elementary educator with 11 of those years as classroom teacher before becoming a reading coach. She grew up in a smaller town about 30 miles outside of Victory. Her mother worked at a grocery store when Triangle was a child but after rearing her children went on to college and had managed a health care facility for 14 years. Triangle’s father is a retired school custodian. Her parents divorced when she was very young. Triangle made a daily 50-minute commute from a much larger city to Victory to work.

Triangle, like Sue, found meaning for her life in her children, as a mother, as a wife, and in her profession. Even though Triangle works outside the home she still undertook the responsibility of traditionally held views regarding a housewife such as, “taking care of the family, the house, making dinner, making sure things are taken care of.” Triangle envisioned a
bright future for herself in meeting her goals, particularly, completing the program in which she was enrolled at the time. Triangle credited her positive perspective despite the challenges in her life to her faith. “I'm a Christian. I believe in prayer” and like all of the participants she stated “Everything happens for a reason.” Triangle instilled her Christian values in her children as she readied them for life.

For Triangle, Mondays were especially difficult in that they included a 1.5-hour faculty meeting prior to picking up her youngest from day care and making the hour drive home. Triangle said it was very hard to “get a five-year-old to do homework at that time when they're exhausted.” Like Sue, Triangle did not interfere with the skills and approaches of Sophie’s teacher. “I let her kindergarten teacher do the kindergarten skills and I'm pulling mainly first grade skills for her. We’re working on reading already. She's already recognizing numbers, she's learning how to add.”

Triangle talked of child readiness in two stages, teaching and parenting. “Preparing children for things that they'll have to learn in school. You doing your part as a parent and making sure they're getting what they need at school.” She sees teaching as preparing children for school and parenting as a means of monitoring their growth in school. Triangle also associated education generally with the idea of child readiness. Her experiences as an educator mainly with poverty-stricken students and communities had taught her “to work harder with your child because you know some of the downfalls they can have.” Triangle’s experiences also informed her decision to modify her approach with her youngest child. “I guess with being a new mom and not really knowing exactly what to do [at the time] I would let her watch cartoons. Now with Brian, if I turn something on it's educational. It's something that he can learn from.” For example, she’s exposing him to “Baby Einstein” movies. Triangle expressed in her story her
growth as a parent recognizing that past choices she made with her first child weren’t choices she would make today. “It was mainly whatever kept her occupied, keeping her busy, so you live and learn.”

Triangle viewed herself as her child’s first teacher. She proudly stated “I am the number one teacher. I was her teacher from day one.” Contrasting her experiences being readied for school, Triangle said I exposed Sophie “to music before she was born” and now she loves music. Sophie was placed in a primary daycare with a certified teacher which was more important for Triangle than simply having “someone to nourish her and make sure she was taken care of.” After beginning to walk, Sophie spent 15 minutes with her teacher and she experienced more time with the teacher as she grew older. “[S]he was at this primary daycare from six weeks of age until she turned four.” Like Roberta, Triangle believed that establishing fundamental academics along with high expectations for student success creates a foundation that will support students’ development the rest of their lives.

Becoming a teacher changed how Triangle viewed child readiness in that “It really was an eye opener how important educating is and starting at the beginning rather than waiting until she gets of age before I decide to change things.” Triangle felt she was succeeding in preparing her child for school. “It makes you feel good when you can see the growth, when you know from the beginning how she's improved.” Triangle’s biggest challenge arose in deciding to not allow Sophie to attend a predominantly White magnet school for which they had applied and were accepted. “I just think that she needs to know more about her race and be exposed to her people.”

Triangle described her parenting style as “extremely firm.” “I'm going to always tell her that ‘I want you strive harder.’ I'm going to be strict. With that little boy coming along I'm going to be even harder on him as well because it's hard for Black men right now.” She also felt the
training and educational development that she, as well as, her husband was involved in as a part of their vocations served, as in the case of Roberta, as models for their children. “I feel as if they see us working hard, they will strive even harder.” Ultimately, one challenge for Triangle that emerged was balancing the various responsibilities she had. Another challenge that arose undoubtedly influenced by the first, was taking enough time for herself. “I have to take care of myself, to not just put myself on the back burner all the time.” For Triangle, self-care was the biggest challenge to address.

**Triangle’s past: parent as child.** Triangle described her family as a child as “in the lower, lower, middle class.” Her needs were met but “I didn't have any extra.” Like Sue, Triangle’s mother’s work schedule prevented the type of relationship both probably would have preferred. Triangle was reared in a sole female headed household. Her parents completed high school and divorced when she was in first or second grade. Yet, they made clear their expectations for Triangle as she stated, “You knew you had to go to school and you had to make grades.” When Triangle was a child her mother “couldn't afford daycare” instead she “stayed at home with my grandma.” Her grandmother had “some education” and Triangle remembers her being good with numbers and they watched TV. Afterwards, she went to kindergarten where she recalled her mother being told that Triangle did pretty well having not attended pre-k. Her older sister who had attended Head Start and kindergarten helped Triangle with her homework. She stayed with her grandmother after school until their mother picked her and her sister up sometime after midnight to go home. That was their cycle. “Mom made us tough. I'm going to try my best to make children as tough as I am because we were independent but also dependent.” By this Triangle meant that she and her siblings depended on their mother to provide their necessities and extracurricular opportunities like playing in the band. Triangle recalled the
mother’s words “That’s another bill I’m going to have to pay, so you better take of that clarinet.”

Her own thinking at the time was that her mother really couldn’t afford the instrument. But, Triangle’s assertion that her mother also developed their independence was arrived at because her grandmother had limited education so “You were just on your own,” which spurred her independence. But her grandmother contributed to Triangle’s independence as well.

“Grandmother made me independent as far as taking care of myself, being able to feed myself, dress myself,” and teaching Triangle “respect, behavior, and life skills.” Triangle learned social skills from her grandmother. Her sister helped her with the academics. “[M]y sister showed me what she did at school,” playing teacher, so Triangle mimicked her sister. Throughout her scholastic development, Triangle used her work ethic to excel in academics so she would not have to work as hard as she had seen her mother work.

Contrasting the current generation of students with her development, Triangle said, “I don’t think a lot of kids have that will to say that I have to go to school and I have to learn. Some of them take education for granted and it's just because of the way that society [is now].”

Triangle also talked about the role of teachers instilling the importance of education. “If your parents don't put it in you at home before you come to school knowing that education is a priority then sometimes it's hard for the teacher to instill it in you.” She felt she had good teachers and she was prepared well.

**Triangle’s view of her daughter.** Sophie is active, likes to play and pretend to teach after school, she sings, and draws. She’s just a typical little girl “with a lot of her mother’s personality.” Triangle said Sophie loves to be around kids and loves her teacher just as Sue and Elizabeth observed in their children. Triangle said Sophie “uses what she learns. I hear all the
time in the car they do a chant, ‘A is a vowel, a letter in the alphabet. B is a consonant, a letter in the alphabet.’ She mimics the things that she does in class.” Sophie loves school.

**Social-cultural mediation.** Consequences for positive behavior included verbal affirmations, a trip to a favorite recreation center, pizza and movies or extra time with a digital device. Triangle believes “in corporal punishment” but she rarely has to use it. “Time out is enough for her” or sometimes withholding privileges or technology are other options Triangle, like Sue, employs time out for addressing negative behavior. In terms of race consciousness, Sophie called herself brown and would color a depiction of herself brown as well. She colors White cartoon characters white. She hadn’t called a person White though per Triangle. Yet, “She calls her dad White and she calls my mom brown.” Triangle went on to state that Sophie told her “Some of the students tell her that she speaks like a White girl.” Sophie didn’t comprehend her classmates’ comments and Triangle said “I couldn't explain it to her. I just told her “You're speaking fine, babe.” Triangle doesn’t want Sophie to stereotype her classmates but she doesn’t want Sophie stereotyped either. However, Triangle saw the importance of Sophie knowing her race prior to going to school in terms of “She needed to get used to being around more kids.” Triangle noted the heterogeneity of Blacks, by stating we come from different experiences and offer opportunities to learn diverse things.

Sophie’s readiness for school was in one way predetermined. “Really and truly she didn't have a choice but to go to school because mama and daddy had to go to work.” Triangle was surprised because her teacher thought that Sophie would be bored. “I noticed that she was doing more for her teacher than she could show me at home.”

**Triangle’s view of her community.** Triangle like Sue was one of only two Black families in her quiet upper middle class community. She lives next door to a pediatrician and
there are many veterans in the community also. Triangle said the best thing is that she feels safe. Her husband works about 20 minutes away and refers to their community as a “Lifetime movie neighborhood.” They have lived there eight years. The community has Halloween events and a person dressed as Santa passed out candy at the driveways during the Holiday season. Triangle felt the community was a “really family oriented neighborhood.” Her perception was reinforced by the signage she observed in the neighborhood “saying children are playing” and construction of speed bumps as ways the community supports children. Due to her schedule and parenting responsibilities Triangle played a limited role in the community. Her husband was more involved. The major community decisions were made by the older retirees who no longer had direct parenting duties. But Triangle said she would like to involve herself in the neighboring community more. Just a few blocks away she said a food bank was being operated by a church. “I didn't realize how many people relied on that food bank, until recently.” Triangle did provide tutoring help with homework for a seventh grade friend of her nieces’ while her mother worked.

Collaboration in community. Triangle, like other teacher participants, noted that good kindergarten and child care services expose children to academic and social emotional learning opportunities that reflect “keeping the whole child in mind.” According to Triangle, the better services for child care required weekly payment of fees. Based on state student performance data, Triangle said the school zone associated with her community was “one of the best in the county” so she felt her community had the resources to help her ready her child. “Test scores are not everything,” but Triangle saw them as an indicator of quality education.

Triangle’s view of racialization. Like all participants, Triangle stated that racism was real. But, due to the fact of her exposure to a homogeneous Black setting as a child, Triangle said she did not experience racism directly. Yet, not unlike Elizabeth, while shopping in a well-
known box store, Triangle had been asked on occasion by White females if she could assist them with their shopping. Triangle described being angered and offended by such incidents. Despite these experiences, Triangle did not perceive racism influencing her relationship with her child. She did recall that her daughter was aware of slavery and had mentioned to Triangle “that it was unfair.” Though racism is real, Triangle did not believe racism affects her female child even though what Triangle described as her biggest challenge arose in deciding to not allow Sophie to attend a predominantly White magnet school for which they had applied and were accepted and to which she replied “I just think that she needs to know more about her race and be exposed to her people.” Still, she felt that racism seemed more apparent in relation to her son. “I think I'll probably go more into detail with him than I will with the girl.” Triangle experienced fear when considering what the future may hold for her son.

“I have a son that's a Black male, and the way society [is now], it's scary how things will be when he grows up. He's a young, Black male, [and] already stereotyped.” Triangle found it frightening “to know that it's a possibility that he'll be judged not by what he does, but by the way he looks. It makes you feel as if he'll be cheated in life, that he wouldn't have the opportunities that other people have. It's definitely not over.” Triangle was aware that Blacks are perceived negatively. Her perception was also influenced by television in that she stated “Every time you watch the news, it's something that's going on that includes the young, Black males. It's not okay.” Triangle tried not to allow the challenges she faced to alter her mood. She tried to remain positive and recognized that “My challenges are only temporary.” But viewing racism solely in gendered terms is problematic.

Triangle thought her community appeared to reflect that “We're all in it together [with our] neighborhood watch, meetings, and different events in the neighborhood for the kids.”
Interesting were Triangle’s remarks about a family she described as Arab, who lived a couple of houses away, that “Their kids are real distant. I don't know why, but they are.” Here, Triangle did not speak to racialization nor Islamophobia as possible explanations for what she had observed. Seemingly, Triangle’s perception of the lack of overt racism demonstrated in her community signified it a non-issue. “As far as just racism and being a parent in the community, I'm quite sure it's there but they're keeping it limited now. It's not a problem. It's not an issue.” Again, Triangle doesn’t identify racialization with larger political, social and economic relationships that shape her community and her relationship to it. On the other hand, Triangle stated that even though she saw no political signs during the presidential campaign in her neighbor’s yards, she thought it likely some of them voted for Trump. “I’m quite sure there was a lot of votes from that particular area” but “No one was going to put a sign in their yard.” She concluded that working together within a community could reduce racism.

**What we learned from Triangle.** Triangle saw herself as a tough woman, strong and capable. She had been raised to be so and was determined to pass it on to her daughter. She said her parenting style was strict and she held high expectations for Sophie to achieve academically. She described herself as a Christian and one who prays. In readying children, Triangle perceived parents provided dual roles. Parents needed to teach to prepare offspring for school and parent or monitor their development in school. All our participants noted that the home plays the most crucial role in child readiness. Triangle noted that she grew as a parent with her second child, and so provided educational experiences that were regrettably missed with her first child. Still, she joyfully expressed that she was her child’s first teacher. Sophie was characterized as being active, a lover of music, and mimics teaching at home. She was ready for school but there wasn’t much choice because her parents had to work.
Triangle lived in a White upper middle class community of doctors and retirees. She felt secure in what seemed a family-oriented community. Her community provided her access to high scoring selective schools with majority White student populations. Though not experiencing racism directly in the Black community in which she was reared, she like other participants, was frequently interrupted by White female shoppers for help and was angered. Yet, she didn’t see racism influencing her relationship with her daughter or that it was a problem in her community. For Triangle, in proximity to her and her family, racism that was out of sight was out of mind. But, she noted from TV images that the societal struggle for Black males had intensified and she felt she would have to be stricter with her son because he was Black and male. However, Triangle didn’t express similar concern for her daughter nor an understanding, like all of the participants, of how what she was seeing and experiencing was related to social and institutional ordering that reproduces inequitable results.

Conclusion

We began this chapter with the narrative of an African American female parent derived from her perception of her life, family and community relative to child readiness. To this narrative, we added four other voices that told their stories, as the first, in relation to the research questions that guided this project: 1) How do African American parents view themselves, their children, and community as dimensions of child readiness? 2) What can distort African American parental perceptions of these aspects of readying their young? 3) How is racialization interpreted by African American parents? What we found in some ways was expected, yet we were led to concede the overall complexity of their lives and perspectives.

Findings establish that these Black parents effectively readied their children for formal education due to their children’s demonstration of foundational skills, communicative ability and
social emotional development. This was accomplished in spite of systemic racialized hegemony in the U.S. (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Powell, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). There was shared consensus regarding their view of themselves as intelligent, resourceful, committed, and professional women. Though they worked in schools in various capacities, the meaning for their lives emerged from those they’d given life to. Even as they served others’ children as their own, it was the children they bore, fed, clothed, housed, taught, nurtured, and loved that made their lives matter. The participants’ stories not only confirmed the generalization of parenting, so as to, provide for children’s health, safety, and becoming productive adults, but also emphasized the transmission of their culture and traditions, as they modeled in their lives the expectations for their children’s deportment, spirituality, and life course. They shared in unison that the home was the most valuable component of child readiness and that for change to be effective it must entail a collaborative approach. Thus, our participants strongly advocated an informed citizenry, civic participation and democratic ideals.

Challenges to their perspectives ran the gamut from lack of time, family issues, diminished community resources, violence, and poverty that at times overflowed into the lives of the students and schools they served. Four out of the five participants who had experience as classroom teachers agreed that teaching altered their perception of child readiness. Only two participants, Elizabeth and Triangle, stated they felt safe in their community, while the other three experienced varying degrees of anxiety and fear. Yet, their challenges never broke their perceptions of themselves, their children, GOD or their hope that some way, somehow things could get better, as the community worked together.

In matters of race, all the participants except Roberta, felt it was important for their children to be aware of their race. An Army brat, Roberta was not reared that way so didn’t raise
her children that way. But, all parented with the understanding that their children needed to know how to live in worlds beyond their homes and to be aware when they were being mistreated. Each participant experienced some form of microaggressions (Pierce, 1995), yet, none would stereotype all White people as racist. However, a common refrain voiced by our participants was their belief that racism was taught by White parents to their young. Their notion affirmed CRT’s assertion of race as a social construction. Having been victimized by racism, each reflected deficit ideologies, sometimes couched in mainstream narratives. At the same time, none of the participants expressed a frame for understanding the interrelatedness of their perceptions, its challenges, and racialization, and how they affect child readiness. As we look to Chapter 5, I will provide a discussion of what I have learned from our participant narratives, its implications and suggest recommendations for future research and concluding remarks.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

It has been our purpose throughout this doctoral thesis to amplify African American perceptions of readying their children as counter-narratives to the racialized falsehood of Blacks’ ineptness as parents, their singular blame for an “educational debt” and its disavowal of any accountability for the continuous construction of social, economic and political apparatuses that reify White supremacist ideology and hegemony. To this end, this study presented five narratives of Black female parents as storied testaments to their lived realities as individuals and community members rearing their young within a racialized ecological context in the U.S. The inquiry was steered by research questions drawn from the literature regarding culture, parenting, child development, child care, teacher dispositions and racialization. The research questions are: 1) How do African American parents view themselves, their children, and community as dimensions of child readiness? 2) What can distort African American parental perceptions of these aspects of readying their young? 3) How is racialization interpreted by African American parents? I begin our discussion with the findings presented in the previous chapter and what I have learned framed by critical race theory (CRT) and a theory of double consciousness (DCT).

CRT was the theoretical framework utilized in this research study and reasoning undergirding its employ. Firstly, CRT focuses race, gender, and class oppression as endemic historically and culturally in the U.S. (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT views racism as an inherent dimension of American life in general and Black lives specifically. Consequentially, this research study was contextualized by this reality. Secondly, CRT provides a critical critique of the literature regarding African American child readiness and by inference, Black parenting. Furthermore, CRT helped me interpret sound research and to identify ideologically deficit studies that might have biased methods and findings. Methodologically, CRT asserts the validity
of the lived experiences of Blacks in qualitative approaches to research and captures the counter-narratives derived from storying Black life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT allowed me to view racism in the micro lives of the participants, as well as in the larger meso, exso and macro ecological contexts circumscribing our society. Moreover, CRT helped position this researcher beyond the role of scholar practitioner, but rather, to co-laborer with the participants which aided this project immensely. CRT has proven to be a sound choice.

This research study assumes that American life is lived within an ecological context that is social and hegemonic. As previously reported in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, social hegemony is the power of the ruling elites to reproduce their ideologies by means of seemingly cogent and just governance within the dominating ethnic group, whereby force and misinformation are [weaponized] to retain privilege and subjugate targeted groups (Giroux, 1983). It is further assumed racism is indeed a White supremacist ideology which privileges Euro American phenotypes and oppresses other phenotypic depictions, resulting in racialized outcomes. For instance, Losurdo (2014) states “Differently put, in the United States democracy emerged first because it emerged as a Herrenvolk democracy, as a ‘master-race democracy’” (p. 321). This projects presumptions, reinforced by the researcher’s experiences, grounded and drawn from the literature are also framed by CRT. A theory of Double Consciousness (DCT) was used to interpret the participants’ deficit ideologies. An analysis is presented in the discussion of this chapter. The epistemological suppositions present here beg an answer to the question: Given racial ideation is normalized in American culture, can African American child readiness occur uninfluenced by racism?

Stories and narratives can animate an ideology from theoretical abstraction to build and reify collective assumptions about people, places, and things and afterwards become insentient
(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Not only can narratives transport ideas, they grant a lens to view lived experiences, themselves shaped by other narratives promulgated within society, culture, and institutions (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Thus, narrative storytelling often illumines past, present, and future experiences that help compose personal identities and perceptions (Creswell, 2013). But, for Blacks in this country much of the narrative, if not most, has told a story of vileness, bestiality, ignorance, laziness, and ineptitude simply because we are Black; not White. Needless to say, Blacks have, since time immemorial, countered this story with a truer narrative authored by themselves. Understanding the context of this research study and the participants projected through the framing of CRT led to a counter-narrative approach to this inquiry.

Counter-narratives contest racialization, sexism, and classism (Parker, 2015) and are brought forth through the lived reality and comprehension of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Within the deployment of counter-narratives lies an obligation to relinquish, as Bazile (2015) asserts, a neutral, objective or an a-political stance but rather, advance the principals of justice, equity, and the common good associated with the researcher’s training as an ethical scholar practitioner. Again, as was stated earlier in Chapter 2, a vital construct of hue-women and freedom is the ability to orchestrate and perform your own story (Lawrence, 1995). A counter-narrative approach has granted this research study the benefit of understanding the participants’ lived reality, the ecological contexts that surround them, and instrumentality to magnify their voices through their stories as opposed to examining Black life in contrast to White middle-class Euro American values and norms (Bartz & Bartz, 1970). From this backdrop, let us turn to the discussion of the findings presented in the previous chapter and analysis. Afterwards, I will examine the implications of my analysis, and posit recommendations for future research as well as concluding observations.
The Participants’ Views of Themselves: Child Readiness

The participants’ experiential knowledge (Dotterer, Iruka, & Pungello, 2012, p. 658) as parents combined with their professional experience as classroom educators fostered their understanding of child readiness (Mattias, 2016, p. 10) and their ability to prepare their children. The participants saw themselves as “effective” parents. They described themselves as strong, survivors, contented, middle-class, providers and protectors of their families. More concisely, they perceived themselves to be capable human beings. This contrasts with literature on African-American parents which suggests they are ineffective. More specifically, Bartz and Bartz, (1975) stated that social scientists posited Blacks were either genetically defective or sociologically pathological (p. 32; Briscoe, 2005). The data from this study indicate that the participants saw themselves as normal persons, good mothers, and competent professionals, which supports Chaney’s (2011) findings that “[F]eminine attitudes combined strength, sensitivity and sensuality and feminine behaviors were a mix of familial care, their own physical appearance and self-respect” (p. 522).

The initial finding gleaned from the data of this research project revealed four of the five parent participants believed their efforts were successful in readying their children for pre-kindergarten. Three of the five participants, Elizabeth, Pam, and Triangle, stated explicitly they felt their efforts in preparing their children were successful, whereas Roberta credited the children for doing the work of preparation. Sue felt her child had met her basic expectations but was still developing. Having kept their children safe and nourished their health in loving home environs, the participants took great pride in their children’s development and their role in fostering the context for their readiness. The stories the participants shared were told as they beamed with pride. Not braggadocious; they were doing what every parent desires to do, but the
pride that comes from the sense of a job well done. Participants talked about how good it made them feel to see the growth in their children. No event they recounted in the lives of their children was insignificant in their minds, but reflected a consequential step in their children’s ongoing development. The pride and pleasure these women took from parenting aligns with the literature on Black mothers. Chaney (2011) suggests many Black women find fulfillment in their roles as mothers and wives (p. 518). At the same time, there is a perception in the literature that African American parents are deficient relative to their lack of engagement with their children’s school (Luster & McAdoo 2002). But, other research shows home-based involvement equates with school involvement, and parental expectations for academic excellence have been correlated literally with educational achievement (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008, p. 291). The narratives from this study demonstrate that the participants nurtured their children as they were nurtured by their own families.

Additionally, there was consensus in the data regarding the participants’ perceptions of the skills they thought were foundational to child readiness. They stated that knowing the alphabet, their sounds, numbers, and social skills formed the basis for child learning (Dockett, & Perry, 2002). Studies show that cognitive development and familial experiences impact children's conduct, involvement, and attainment in kindergarten directly or indirectly (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999). Participants suggested if children arrived at kindergarten with a basic understanding of the alphabet, sounds, and rudimentary counting, classroom teachers could then facilitate children’s acquisition of vocabulary and subsequently, sentence composition. To the contrary, some research suggests that pre-kindergarten teachers and the like tend to promote socioemotional skills rather than educational content and knowledge (UNICF, 2012, p. 9). Still, the participants’ knowledge and expertise reflected in the data of this study was supported by the
literature base on child readiness. Research regarding the Child Trends (2012) investigation of
the relationship of children’s initial school preparedness and academic progress found that no
single child readiness skill can foretell progressive academic or socio-emotional development.
Rather, the best predictor of consequent skills are the skills in a given disciple that children
arrive with. Additionally, the research suggested that process and behavioral skills present at
student’s initial engagement with formal education are also predictors of skill development.

The literature regarding parenting established quality parenting was demonstrated by
parental provision for their offspring’s health and security, preparation for life as contributing
adults, and transferring to their children their historical-cultural mores (American Psychological
Association, 2008). The data from this study suggest that all of the participants believed that they
had developed a secure, nurturing, and loving atmosphere in the home that supported their
children’s readiness. As Collins (2000) states “A considerable portion of Black women’s time
goes into caring for children—their own and those of others” (p. 45). Every participant believed
the home was of vital importance to child readiness.

The participants understood that schools could not solely be relied on to prepare their
children, so they worked to make their homes, indeed, learning spaces. After their commute or
after work the participants’ homes were transformed into more than means of shelter. Instead,
they also became spaces where children reenacted lessons learned at school, participants as
teachers reinforced instructional strategies, homework assignments were addressed and mothers
tired from a full day’s work still harnessed moments to read with their children before bedtime.
Home literacy engagement (HLE) correlates to early child literacy and language development
along with the quality of shared reading experiences of parents and children (Dexter & Stacks,
2014). Moreover, research drawn from the literature concerning parental engagement posits that
reinforcing academic learning, as well as reading with children at home, are associated with increasing student academic performance (Lareau, 1998; Trotman, 2001). Whether reinforcing weekly classroom lessons after work or arranging 45 minutes of homework with an exhausted child after a commute, the participants found myriad ways to make themselves available for their young ones. However, participants recognized that in some instances the child dictated the most appropriate time for learning.

The study also found the participants viewed themselves as models for their children. They wanted to be seen by their children as successful, educated and committed people. The participants sought to transmit their culture, work ethic, spirituality, love of learning, toughness, and ladylikeness they had learned from their parents and grandparents in informal lessons to their children. Super and Harkness (1986) suggests ideas, aims, and beliefs help to form cultural models that direct parental choices and behaviors regarding child readiness. The cultural models are passed down from generation to generation as a part of daily life, though reinterpreted (Suzzio, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008, p. 289). For example, though Triangle and her husband had applied for their daughter, Sophie, to attend an exclusive majority White magnet school and she was accepted, Triangle decided to enroll her daughter in the all Black elementary school where she worked. She did state her decision was not an easy one but, Triangle felt that at Sophie’s age it was important that she continue to be exposed to Black culture through her interaction with other Black children and Black teachers. Triangle’s decision also affirmed her counter perception that despite the mainstream narrative regarding predominately Black schools as failing and assessed student learning results as poor, her daughter could succeed academically in a school segregated by race and class.
The Participants’ View of Their Children

All the respondents, with the exception of Pam, perceived their children were ready for school. Though the literature reveals there is no consensus on the definition of child readiness (Dotterer, Iruko, & Pungello, 2012), the research of Dexter and Stacks (2014), among others, confirms loving relations between children and parents within nurturing environs, and supports healthy child development and by extension, child readiness (Harden, Sandstrom & Chazan-Cohen, 2012; Shonkoff et al., 2010). The data in this study presented healthy and secure children who demonstrated basic skill acquisition and mastery of the alphabet, phonemic awareness, numeracy, colors, and sociable behavior and deportment appropriate for their developmental capacities. Moreover, the participants viewed their children as smart, communicative, lovers of play and their teachers, and as children who loved learning and school. The data also revealed the participants viewed their children as the most meaningful aspects of their lives. The participants expressed an ideological perspective and consensus that held all life had meaning and that meaning was deepened by children. This data reflect the conceptualization of intensive mothering put forth by Hays (1996) that suggests quality mothering situates their children’s needs above their own by committing all their resources to child rearing. The data showed the participants’ lives were made meaningful by parenting and by extension, their role as mothers. This centering of children is aligned with the research of Hill (1991) that suggests “Children are at the heart of the African American family” (Cureton, Crowley, & Mouzon, 2016, p. 3). Participants stated their thinking, decisions, and actions were focused on their children’s wellbeing and their capacity to protect and provide for them. Children were the center around which the participants’ lives revolved. Participants prioritized their children first, before husbands or jobs. Parenting for the participants was meaningful because they saw their children
as meaningful. They loved their children and husbands and though constituted differently, their love for their families exhibited by readying their children made all their lives matter.

The participants’ stories countered misogynistic ideations and misrepresentations of overly-sexualized government-assisted and drug-addicted teenaged mothers that has been branded onto the minds and bodies of Black women and society-at-large (Chaney, 2011; Rhodes, 2012). For example, Sue’s response to inquiries about the meaningfulness of her life was “I could go into online tutoring or teaching online class because the skills that I possess, it seems as though [they’re] helping other people, as well as myself.” Her and the participants’ skill sets highlight college educated, professional women who provided economic and emotional support for their children and families. As such, the participant narratives voice the counter reality of countless Black families who are engaged in the most important work of any society, the effective rearing of children. Here, it need be restated that four out five of the study’s participant’s work in public schools and have taught as certified classroom teachers at the elementary level. This being the case, the participants’ positionality as parents and teachers is not generally associated in research regarding child readiness. Thus, their perceptions may provide a unique lens in this type inquiry.

**The Participants’ View of Their Community**

Data analysis revealed that challenges to the participants’ perspectives were articulated as community challenges and external to themselves and their children. The participants did not express perceptions about personal stressors. This contrasted with research that suggests for Black women racism and sexism are firmly correlated and they have a profound impact on cognitive stress (Stevens-Watkins, Perry, Pullen, Jewell, & Oser, 2014). Findings in this study showed that the challenges expressed by the participants did not alter their view of themselves or
their children; but in three out of five participants their perspectives reflected their characterizations of their communities. These data could be the result of an encultured African cultural model emphasizing group importance over an individualist perspective (Harvell, 2010; Bentley-Edwards, 2016) that might inhibit recognizing personal stress while focusing attention on the community. One participant did cite multiple challenges within the community but retained a positive perspective of the community relative to child readiness and one participant did not report any challenges in the community and so continued to view the community as supportive of child readiness.

The participants characterized their communities in diverse terms. A community was described as White upper-middle-class, properly resourced and safe, another as middle-class, lacking resources for children and parents but safe, another as White middle-class, with minimal resources and unsafe, while other participants viewed their community as poverty-stricken, absent recreation, and violent. Only Elizabeth and Triangle stated that they felt safe in their community.

Beyond the participants’ diverse characterizations of their communities, a measure of consensus emerged from the data. First and foremost the participants stated the importance of collaboration. All the participants agreed that the status of the community was the responsibility of those who lived there. Most of the participants, three out of the five, spoke of collaborating in activities that supported community cohesion. Sue recalled the assistance the community provided for a family who lost their home to fire, whereas Elizabeth told of working together on Christmas pageants and raising funds for the school bands that played in the parades the community held. These participants’ narratives described active collaboration.
On the other hand, Pam and Roberta valued collaboration also, but did not relate how it was being actively implemented in their communities. Instead they spoke in aspiring ways about the need for collaboration to address issues they viewed as important. Bentley-Edwards (2016) reported some Blacks viewed “challenges as opportunities to fight against oppression and find communalism to be normative characteristics of Black life” (p. 91). In other words, there are some Blacks who identify with the community, view working together as a common aspect of their culture, and see societal obstructions to justice and equitably sustainable habitats as points for activism. Activism defined here includes attitude as reported in Livingston et al. (2017, p. 8). The prior finding was affirmed by the narratives in this study. For instance, to avoid the potential for violence in the community Pam chose, in some instances, to spend her money in other towns to enjoy fun activities with her children. But, Pam believed the community could come together to reduce gun violence and killings. In Roberta’s case, she felt that the public at large did not speak up because they were not aware of the power they had as taxpayers or how to wield it in order to address issues that needed to be changed. She, though, like Pam, still felt the community and stakeholders could work together to advocate for changes to improve education. These participants’ stories reflected the obligation to employ collaborative approaches to challenge the issues that opposed their sense of quality community life. Even though both groups recognized the importance of collaboration the data also revealed that individual responsibility was important to them, as well.

Within their narratives about their perceptions of community, the participants wholly suggested that individual responsibility was important. Expressed in terms related to child readiness, the participants concurred that parenting was a critical component of child preparedness. In this way the participants associated parenting with “home training,” a term they
used to refer to how a child was raised. In their view, choices a parent makes in supporting or prohibiting their offspring’s growth and development demonstrates individual responsibility and those choices can impact the community. For example, Elizabeth viewed a lack of parental responsibility in how parents in her community responded to their young people’s arrests for thefts because of drug addiction. She felt that if parents would be responsible and apply meaningful consequences for their youngsters’ actions instead of simply bailing them out of jail, then crime could possibly be reduced in the community. Her concerns are important for child and community readiness because as Zalot, Jones, Forehand and Brody (2007) state, the features of neighborhoods where children live can interact with children’s psychosocial regulation (p. 241). This is to say that, the conditions of the community, whether crime-ridden, violent, wealthy, or poverty stricken can influence children’s cognitive function. Sue described similarly the relationship of perceptions of the community with perceptions of individual responsibility that emerged from Elizabeth’s narrative in her work at school. Sue said that many times she had to provide emotional support to students who experienced differing types of circumstances that disturbed them due to what she perceived as adults’ poor decision-making and ineffective parenting. When asked about what she believed influenced the adult parents’ behavior she stated it was home training, again referring to child rearing practices. In Sue’s case, the impact of individual parental choice was felt most acutely by the child but the decision also influenced the classroom community, especially when viewed as a space where learning is constructed with other children (Watkins, 2005). Subsequently, the participants’ ideas about the community appear to be interwoven with their ideas about individual responsibility. Noting the subject-as-author position of the responsible individual, Polkinghorne (2004) cites Inden (1980) stating that human agency reflects “complex relationships with one another to reiterate and remake the world
in which they live in…such that human relationships that reconstruct reality may be and often are hewn from oppositional perspectives and strategies” (p. 51).

Dewey (1903) postulated that education should foster a balance between the nurturance of the psychological (individual) and the social (others) or evil results. For the participants, community and individual responsibility appeared not mutually exclusive but rather influencers of each other. They recognized that their seemingly personal choices in rearing their children reflected in one way their individual responsibility but they also understood those choices had implications for the community writ large. And, though the participants saw the relationship of human agency to their perceptions of their respective communities as safe, tranquil, poor, violent, or the food insecurity Triangle witnessed nearby, it did not dissuade them from believing that through collaboration with others they could change the reality they were experiencing.

Bentley-Edwards (2016) states, “Experiences of racism, poverty, and disenfranchisement can influence the critical awareness of one’s social status as a Black person in America (Mattis et al., 2009), and the need to take some form of action” (p. 77). Meaning, inequality, and unjust practices can cause Black individuals to recognize their mistreatment and question why this occurs, what it means, and what they can do about it. The data from this project affirmed the previous study as exemplified by Sue, when comprehending events that were beyond her control she still understood, “I have a voice [and] if we speak up more, I think more things will happen.” She believed that her voice and the voices of others mattered and together they amplified power for change. The data from the participant’s concerning their communities reveals they believed that collaborative responses could help address or elevate some of the challenges they faced. Relative to question two the data revealed that various challenges including lack of resources, violence, and poverty hindered three out of five participants perception of their community. The
participants understood the relationship of individual responsibility and group collaboration as a means of constructing and deconstructing community and social inequities, yet none of the participants expressed modified perspectives of themselves or their children.

**The Participants’ View of Racialization**

CRT provided the fundamental theoretical framing for our project by centering race, asserting race as a social construction, and composing counter-narratives (Delgado & Stefancic 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Critical race theory assumes that White supremacy is normal and endemic in U. S. society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw et al., 1995). The data taken from the participants’ counter-narratives corroborated this thesis. For example, all five participants in this study stated racism was real. They lived in and through countless microaggressions, which Pierce (1995) describes as “subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns” (p. 281). Two out of the five participants told of recurring occasions being interrupted by White females who thought they were the help instead of shoppers themselves. Sue told of a harrowing incident perpetrated by a White female administrator that led to an unwanted abortion of her child and her employment. She also saw White flight (Anyon, 1997, p. 62) in her community to avoid attending school with Blacks. Roberta recalled riding with her former husband when he was profiled by Black, as well as, White enforcers of the law.

The data further revealed four out of five of the participants thought it was important for their children to be racially conscious prior to entering kindergarten. Elizabeth, for example, enrolled her daughter in a diverse pre-school to prepare her for life, as she stated, among “different nationalities, Whites, Asians [and] Muslims.” Most Black parents socialize their children to be able to live in White society and their community (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). Termed racial socialization, it is associated with academic achievement, positive socioemotional
development, and reduced externalizing behaviors in Black children (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). Curenton, Crowley and Mouzon (2016) state, “A unique child-rearing cultural value that African Americans intentionally instill in their children is how to survive, and thrive, in a racist society” (p. 5; Stmric-Pawl & Leffler, 2011). Racial socialization studies affirm the participant data regarding their efforts readying their children for school.

Another important finding drawn from the data was all of the participant’s stated they believed that racism was taught by White parents to their children. The review of literature found no research that showed racism is promulgated singularly by White parental enculturation of their children. However, Patterson’s (2010) research on cultural reproduction asserts “Among Americans, political and religious attitudes and sports preferences are strongly vertically transmitted [by parents] which largely explains their stability” (p. 141). The lived experiences of the participant’s reflect these research findings. Further analysis of the data finding viewed through the lens of CRT and the research presented here suggests the participants’ perception could be interpreted to confirm race as a social construction (Ladson-Billings, 2013). In stating their belief that racial hatred or supremacist ideology is taught by White parents to their children, the participants deny any genetic flaw in Whites but rather highlight Whites’ right and agency to choose what to teach their children at home. Still, Bonilla-Silva, Lewis and Embrick (2004) state “Racial outcomes then are not the product of individual ‘racists’ but of the crystallization of racial domination into a racial structure” (p. 558). On the other hand, the current ideology of color-blindness suggests race no longer matters; it is divisive, and therefore should not even be discussed (Kirwan Institute Report, 2015).

Additional data provided that all of the participants held deficit ideologies about Blacks. Gorski (2011) asserts that deficit ideology represents, firstly, a world view that says those who
experience inequity in their lives are solely responsible for their situatedness. This world view in common parlance blames the victim. Secondly, and more to our point here, deficit ideology minimizes the role and impact of “systemic conditions,” like, racism White supremacy. That is to say, deficit ideology disregards the “practices, cultural norms, and institutional arrangements that both reflect and help to create and maintain race-based outcomes in society” (p. 4). This is powell’s (2012) definition of racialization. A question for further research is, would Blacks reproduce deficit ideologies absent White supremacy? All the participants expressed deficit ideologies in that none articulated a critical perspective that associated macro systemic conditions or institutional controls with what they were experiencing at the micro level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, Pam and Elizabeth alluded to the spiraling down of the curricula but did not articulate critically the responsibility for the design, development, and implementation of what they witnessed (Apple, 1992: Kozol, 2005) beyond the micro level. In describing a broader and more critical relationship between micro and macro workings in education, Watkins (2001) posits “the dynamics of power, control, racial subservience, and class conflict shape and construct education, particularly the curriculum, politically and ideologically” (p. 10).

All of the participants talked about the images depicted on TV and though each spoke, in some way, about the killing of Blacks by law enforcers, no participant expressed thoughts about the meaning or possible messages that might be internalized by viewing these type images. The images of Black males presented on so-called reality TV shows were often depictions of mad, potentially vicious, and sexually forward males that reinforced the idea that Blacks should be feared (Brooks & Hebert, 2006). The data reflected this in Pam’s narrative when after watching an episode on TV her seven-year-old son asked “why Black people always mad at White
people.” The participants did not connect historical or current imagery of Blacks portrayed as “scary disturbances” (Lesko, Simmons, Quarshie & Newton, 2008), and horrific monstrous criminals with the killing of not only Black men but Black women and children. Neither did their narratives concerning talking with their elementary-aged sons about how to survive an encounter with law enforcers reflect these associations. Moreover, the parent participants used various media and technology in support of readying their children, yet did not articulate ways media images and text could undermine their efforts at readying their children or transmit subtle racial messages (Apple, 1996; powell, 2012. To this point, one participant was surprised that her child was racially aware because she had not taught her directly about racism. Another participant, Roberta, stated that it’s obvious that Black children think that Whites are better because of TV. Research by Dr. Frances Aboud in Canada found television and daily experiences of pre-school age children were associated with negative perceptions of Blacks rather than being transmitted by their parents or schools (powell, 2012, p. 231).

Without broader understanding of the roles institutions, social structuring, and media play in shaping racialized outcomes many Blacks may draw precisely the same conclusions the supremacist ideological narrative perpetuates: that Blacks are solely to blame for their ineffectiveness as parents, their children’s poor educational outcomes, and the societal inequities that result. Secondly, as per the participants, some Blacks may accept the uncritical notion that White parental enculturation can thoroughly explicate the persistence of White supremacist ideology and behaviors. It is important that this ideological gap be filled to provide a more comprehensive and complex explanation for what Blacks experience at the micro level to counter the fallacies reproduced to justify Black oppression which can undermine their capacities to ready their children for formal learning and life.
Conclusion

The data showed that the participants’ perspectives asserted their efforts were successful in readying their children for pre-kindergarten as evidenced by their children demonstrating knowledge and mastery of fundamental skills including knowing the alphabet, the sounds of the letters, numbers, and colors in their varying stages of development. Also, the data revealed the participants viewed themselves as strong, contented, providers, protectors, and capable human beings. The data suggest they saw themselves as normal women doing normal things. They saw themselves as good mothers of their children, with good husbands, rulers of their homes, teachers of their children, and daughters and supporters of their mothers. The participants also viewed themselves as professional women, competent and committed educators, and assets to the community. They tutored children and adults at church and in their homes, helped people fill out and file applications, produced pageants and parades, and sought to teach their charges right from wrong.

Relative to their children, the research findings revealed participants saw them as ready for formal education. They described their children as smart, active, and sociable, who loved their teachers and enjoyed going to school. Furthermore, the data showed the participants viewed their offspring as the most meaningful dimensions of their lives and they experienced their progeny as reflections of themselves, in that they modeled in their lives their expectations for their young. Analysis of the data suggested the participants saw the home as the most important component in child readiness. The home was not only a learning center for reinforcing formal lessons from school, Internet searches, and bedtime stories, but an incubator as well, of the culture and traditions the participants transmitted to be reenacted and mirrored by their expectant
young. Overall, they were full time persons with full and vibrant lives that in turn, informed and strengthen their resolve to be the models for their children’s readiness and future success.

This contrasts with the preponderance of the research that demonizes Black women specifically (Rhodes, 2011) and views Blacks generally as socially pathological and or genetically inferior (Bartz & Bartz, 1970). Counter-narratives developed from data gleaned from the participants’ narratives and framed by critical race theory (CRT) contested content within the literature base by affirming the participant’s esteem of education and their commitment and sacrifices to ensure their children’s readiness. By prizing the participants’ lived reality as empirically valid and useful in qualitative approaches (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii) CRT afforded a lens to view Black lives in their unique heterogeneity, common struggle, and traditional splendor.

The study found the diverse challenges the participants recognized did not alter how they perceived themselves nor how they viewed their children. All of the participants recognized, as the data affirm, the importance of collaboration among community members and individual responsibility as mutual reinforcers. CRT helped explicate participant meaning making that emerged from the challenges to living and readying their children for formal schooling in a racialized society (Bell, 1987, 1992, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). A theory of double consciousness (DCT) aided in identifying reinterpreted and indigenous ideologies which informed behaviors that challenged and undergirded the participant’s communities and influenced their perceptions thereof.

The data showed that racism was real. All were exposed to racist behaviors or incidents. All the participants believed that racism was taught by White parents to their children. Four out of five participants, according to the data, felt it was important for their children to be conscious
of their race prior to starting school. All the participants spoke of the killing of Blacks and media portrayals of violence on TV. The participants with male children stated the need to teach their sons how to stay alive when encountering the police.

Despite the participants’ awareness of microaggressions (Pierce, 1995) and immediate instances of racism, most of the women were unaware of systemic racism (Howard & Reynolds, 2013, p. 204). An awareness of the connections between race and power (Crenshaw, 1995, p. 108), a foundation of CRT, was noticeably absent from all of the narratives. Given this void, conceptions of critical race, as a theory, did not fully allow me to describe participant’s experiences. One possible explanation of their experiences could be supported by DuBois’ (1994) conception of “double consciousness.”

According to DuBois, (1994) double consciousness in one way reflects Blacks being coerced to view themselves through the eyes of White values and mores that depict them inferior while simultaneously attempting to maintain a positive sense of one’s self and ethnic group. DuBois (1994) suggested that Blacks longed for acceptance as a “Negro and an American” in a society that refuses to accept Blacks as equals (p. 2). Consider Prager (1982) who asserted “the Black experience in America is distinguished by the fact that the qualities attributed to Blackness are in opposition to the qualities rewarded by society” (1982, p. 11.) In other words, Black people are penalized for being Black and are thus remanded to mainstream subjugation for the term of their natural lives without the possibly of parole. The participants, indeed, demonstrated an aspect of double consciousness, namely “internalization of American identity” (Gilroy, 1993, p. 126). More specifically, the participants in this study, saw themselves as fully American, even though society does not (DuBois, 1994).
The participants internalized White supremacist (Hooks, 2000; Pyke, 2010) ideologies that reify deficit ideologies (Gorski, 2011) of Blackness. For instance, Sue’s narrative concerning normative living standards and Section 8 housing, without directly mentioning crime or neighborhoods of color, associated “good” “safe” housing with Whites and “poor” housing with Blacks. This reflected deficit ideology because she did not connect the lack of quality housing to over a hundred years of social engineering that produces segregated communities in the U. S. (Rothstein, 2013). Double consciousness can help explain why all the participants did not articulate connections between what they were either experiencing locally or nationally with Blacks and systemic racial oppression (Bell, 2005). As such, it is not surprising that the participants reproduced deficit ideologies and that a critical critique of their ecological context was absent from their perspectives.

Values, traditions, and behaviors emerge from the interaction of individuals and their environment to form culture (Capra & Luisi, 2014). This socially acquired knowledge (Stansfield, 1985) can be reproduced and transmitted as cultural models through parenting (Suzzio, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008), as well as by other social means (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2001). The data findings from this study indeed express culturally acquired and shared understandings. Meaning, that despite being victims of racialization which influenced their reproduction of deficit ideologies, the participants still maintained a sense being Black women, Black mothers and members of the Black community due, in part, to their shared cultural experiences and perspectives (Chaney, 2011).

The participants collective valuing of the community over individualism and collaboration over competition is representative of their culturally indigenous and community knowledge (Boykin et al., 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000) drawn from an African ethic (Udokang,
2014). Although, the reporting of this analysis may seem trivial, it is in fact crucial for readers to understand that the participants’ narratives reflect aspects of their own culture. The participants’ narratives did not simply reflect measures of parenting derived from the study of White households (Tamis-LeMonda, 2008) nor simply deviances from White middle class standards (Bartz & Bartz, 1975), rather, they were representative of their ethnic and communal wisdom (Boykin et al., 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000) shared from the depths of their beautiful Black souls forged in the furnace of American society with ore from the motherland. Still, overall the research project found the participants’ counter-narratives contested racialized and hegemonic ideas about Black women and families, Black parenting, and Black child readiness in that the participants embodied and recounted an ideological understanding that cherishes Black identity, Black children, collaboration and personhood, and belief in GOD.

Implications for Practice

Black parent participants in this project perceived themselves normal. To say this is somewhat akin to declaring Black lives matter because in reality if these comments were a part of the mainstream narrative and sensibility neither would need be said. Given this state of affairs, data from this research study affirm the participants as parents live and rear their children within a hegemonic racist society that produces deficit ideologies of Blacks and they experience racial abuse and reproduce deficit ideologies, as do classroom teachers according to the literature. Then, the ideas that inform this ecological context and consequent behaviors have import for educative processes generally, and child readiness specifically. Therefore, I would propose to collaboratively form with parents, teachers, and children means to critically identify, address, and disrupt our reproduction of deficit ideologies by developing the capacity for such an undertaking within schools, communities, and among other supporters (Drago-Sevrenson, 2009).
Based upon constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 2000) which addresses the meaning making process of individuals in comprehending self and others in supporting adult growth, Drago-Sevrenson (2009) established four “pillar practices”: teaming, providing leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring as catalyst for change management and growth (p. 253). I would advocate looking at this model as a possible avenue within the school I serve because it is designed to focus on adult learning and developmental needs such as cognition, emotions, and interpersonal and intrapersonal capacity to improve efficacy in educative roles and responsibilities (p. 8). This strategy has the potential to positively impact our ideologically based deficit assumptions that inform our meaning making regarding Black children and parents’ humanity and developmental capacities relative to curriculum content and methods that can improve child readiness. The developmental outcome of a shared humanity regarding families of color and curricula can contribute to collaborative inquiries that might transform decision making and practice to improve student learning (Lambert, 2002).

In regard to racialization, I would also seek to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogy as the model for student and teacher interactions and for home literacy engagement (HLE) also. Culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) seeks academic excellence through content derived from the lived realities of students. Moreover, it offers an alternative narrative to the social hegemonic perspective permeated within society and schools that brands Blacks as inferior. Instead, instruction drawn from cultural relevance promotes caring, affirming words and images within learning encounters that validate students’ lives and communities.

Implications for Research

In conjunction with the implications for practice, ongoing research would certainly be required. Based upon our findings regarding deficit ideologies, further research could seek to
better understand its relationship to curricula materials utilized in center based facilities and the ways those materials may or may not reproduce negative ideas of Blacks or supremacist ideas regarding Whites. These materials could also be analyzed with regard to home literacy engagement (HLE) results. Another avenue of research could seek to understand the need or role of professional development in influencing positive assumptions and interactions between center-base care providers and families of color, given the current move at the state and federal levels towards increasing pre-school availability across the nation. Research of this type could support developing research concerning implicit biases and their effects on teacher-student engagement and children’s identity development. Other questions for guiding research studies could include: Will reducing deficit ideologies improve child readiness? Can counter narratives have a positive influence on student learning?

Limitations

All of the participants worked in education and four out of five had served as certified elementary classroom teachers. Two out of the five served in that capacity at the time of the interviews. This sample, though unique in child readiness studies, may represent a limitation regarding this study. The professional experience of the participants would have certainly influenced the participants’ behaviors and responses concerning the study’s focus on child readiness. The study did not examine the extent to which the participants’ professional experience informed their perceptions of themselves, their children and community. Mothers without professional experience as teachers may not be as knowledgeable about the topic of child readiness, or resources and strategies gained from being an educational practitioner, which could alter the findings and conclusions drawn from this study. Another limitation of the study was three out of the five participants lived in different communities. A narrow researcher assumption
of community may have prohibited what might have been a more detailed picture given a broader framing of the term, though it did grant a diverse representation of Black lives in community. Also, the particular southern geographical influence may limit generalizability of the project’s findings. Given all of the participants were female, being male may have hindered the researchers’ sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal cues during the interviews that a female researcher might have spotted and addressed. Lastly, being male and not having reared a child from birth may have influenced the researcher’s interpretation of the data. To address these issues, the researcher consciously recognized personal bias, intentionally maintained an open mind and took a cautious but respectful approach to the data (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, p.19).
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Appendix A
Interview Protocol
First Interview

Research Question 1: How do African American parents view themselves, their children and community as dimensions of child readiness?

Introduction: Thank you for allowing me to interview you and record your thoughts and experiences regarding child readiness. Let's talk about how you see your role in preparing your child for pre-school. But before we begin, let me remind you that you do not have to answer any of the questions I may ask and you can end the interview at any time. Shall we begin?

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   Probes: Where are you from? Where did you grow up?
   Probes: Where do/did your parents live? What did/do they do?
   Probes: Are you currently employed? What do you do?
   Probes: Describe your work schedule.
   Probes: How, if at all, does your work impact the time you spend with your child?
   Probes: How many children do you have?
   Probes: Are you married, single, or partnered?
   What is the status of your relationship with the child’s parent?
   Probes: How long have you lived here?

2. How has the meaning of child readiness changed since you were a child?
   Probes: What negatives or positives come to mind when you consider these differences?

3. Do you remember what it was like to prepare for kindergarten when you were a child?
   Probes: How was it different from your child’s experience?
   Probes: Did you experience home care or center based care before kindergarten?
   Probes: Describe the teachers and care givers you experienced at that time.

4. How do you see your role in preparing your child for kindergarten?
5. Have you always felt this way or if not, what prompted the change in your thinking?
6. Do you feel you succeeded or are succeeding in preparing your child?
   Probes: What is your biggest challenge?
   Probes: How would you describe your parenting style?

7. Why is child readiness important?

Parental Perceptions of the Child’s Role in Preparing for Kindergarten
1. Please, describe your child.
   Probes: Can you share a story that speaks to the type person your child is?
2. Is your child currently enrolled in pre-k or kindergarten?
   Probes: If so, what does your child like most about school?
   Probes: If not, how does your child feel about going to school?
3. Describe your child’s behavior with you and with other children.
   Probes: How do you address positive behavior with your child?
   Probes: How do you address negative behavior?
   Probes: Can you define what you just described?
4. Is your child aware of his/her race? Probes: If so, how did this happen?
   Probes: If not, should your child be made aware?
   Probes: Do you think this is important for your child to know before going to school?
5. How did you know (child’s name) was ready for school?

Parental Perceptions of the Community as a Dimension of Child Readiness

1. Describe the community where you live?
2. In your opinion, what is the best and worst thing about the community where you live?
   Probes: Based on your response, what or who is most responsible for these results?
   Probes: How, if at all, does the community support families?
   Probes: How, if at all does the community support children?
   Probes: Do you feel the community has the resources to help you ready your child?
3. What makes a good kindergarten or child care service?
4. Are there good kindergarten and child care services in your community?
   Probes: If so, what makes you feel good about them?
5. How do you see yourself as a community member?
   Probes: What role do you or can you play in improving this community?

Closing: Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and experiences in this interview. I appreciate your candor in sharing your perspectives. I may need to follow-up with you if I find the need to clarify any of your responses. Do have any questions or comments? Good. You have my contact information should something arise later. Thanks again for your time and have a wonderful day.
Appendix B
Interview Protocol
Second Interview

Research Question 2: What can distort African American parental perceptions of these aspects of readying their young?

Introduction: Thank you for again participating in this conversation about your perceptions and experiences regarding African American child readiness. In our first interview you shared your lived experiences and how you see yourself, your child and your community. In this second interview, I’d like you to talk about the things that can change how you perceive yourself, your child and community. Also, as before I’d like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question I may ask and you can stop this interview any time you wish. Shall we begin?

Distortions of Parental Perceptions

1. How would you describe your life?
   Probes: Do you feel your life is meaningful?
   Probes: How would you describe the purpose for your life?

2. What is your biggest challenge in life?
3. What is the biggest family challenge?
4. What is the biggest challenge for your community?
   Probes: Of all the challenges you described, which is hardest to overcome?
   Probes: Of all the challenges you described, which easiest to address?
   Probes: Describe how your life would be better if these challenges are resolved?
   Probes: What can be done to bring this about?

5. Have you experienced anxiety or fear concerning yourself, child or community?
   Probes: Please describe it for me?

6. You’ve described many challenges/you haven’t described many challenges, how do these challenges/how does your outlook affect your mood?
7. Do you feel you have enough support in readying your child for school? Probes: If so, please describe why you feel this way?
   Probes: If not, please describe why you feel this is the case? Probes: Knowing this, how do you see the future?

Closing: Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and experiences in this interview. I appreciate your candor in sharing your perspectives. I may need to follow–up with you if I find the need to clarify any of your responses. Do have any questions or comments? Good. You have my contact information should something arise later. Thanks again for your time and commitment to our project. Have a wonderful day.
Appendix C
Interview Protocol
Third Interview

Research Question 3: How is racialization interpreted by African American parents?

Introduction: Well, this is our third and final interview. It has been such a blessing for me to bear witness to the part of your life you have opened to us. As we close, can you talk about your ideas and experience(s) with racialization or what most folks call racism or White supremacy? Again, you do not have to respond to any question I might ask and you can end this interview at any time. Shall we begin?

Parental Perceptions of Racialization

1. Is racism real and if so, how would you describe racism?
2. Have you experienced racism directly or indirectly? Please describe a racist incident.
   Probes: What emotions did you experience as a result?
   Probes: How does racism affect how you relate to your child?
   Probes: How does racism affect how you relate to others in the community?
3. Were you prepared as a child to deal with racism?
   Probes: Do you feel it helped or hindered you personally?
   Probes: What do you do to help your child prepare for racism?
4. Do you think racism affects your child? How so?
   Probes: How does racism affect your community?
   Probes: How can the community help reduce the effects of racism?
   Probes: Have you ever said or done something that could be considered racist?
   Probes: If so, can you describe what happened?
   Probes: Can you explain why or what caused you to respond in that way?
5. How do you cope with racism or life in general?
6. If you had the power to do whatever you wanted, what would your world look like?
Closing: Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and experiences in this interview. My life has been enriched through experiencing your story. I may need to follow-up with you if I find the need to clarify any of your responses. Do have any questions or comments? Good. You have my contact information should something arise later. Thanks again for your time and your magnificent contribution to our project.