"All The Trappings Of Racism Are Here, And I Live In Them": Resistance, Counterspace, and Identity Socialization as Afro-Caribbean Women Raise Second Generation Immigrant Sons And Grandsons In a Racialized U.S. Southeastern State

Michelle D. Grace-Williams

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“ALL THE TRAPPINGS OF RACISM ARE HERE, AND I LIVE IN THEM.”; RESISTANCE, COUNTERSPACE, AND IDENTITY SOCIALIZATION AS AFRO-CARIBBEAN WOMEN RAISE SECOND GENERATION IMMIGRANT SONS AND GRANDSONS IN A RACIALIZED U.S. SOUTHEASTERN STATE

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DEDICATION

To my parents, for always believing in me and for your unwavering love and support throughout these years. You are my heroes, the wind beneath my wings.

and

To the Jamaican immigrant women in this research study. I have grown more as a scholar from listening to your stories:

   Your stories stripped me naked
   speaking you reinforced my resolve to
   lose fig leaves of uncritical multiculturalism
   baring the raced me
   I touched the complexities of all our stories
   speaking the word racism and not being afraid
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

_O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever_

*1 Chronicles 16 verse 34*

I am forever grateful to my friends and family who supported me throughout my dissertation work. Words cannot express my appreciation for your support, encouragement, and assistance in completing this journey. Thank you to my parents for your prayers, motivation, love, and inspiration. To my mother, I say a special thank you for sending me newspaper articles, YouTube videos, and photographs from Jamaica to keep me abreast of current events in my homeland to inform my research. Most of all I thank you, mom, for your stories and for igniting my critical awareness as a child. Thank you to Jerry and my siblings for listening again and again to my research and for sharing your thoughts.

To my emancipatory teachers and professors in Jamaica, I am indebted to you for exposing me to knowledge that made me cognizant of the socio-political challenges our country is still facing from years of British colonialism and for making me understand that our battle for true liberation is ongoing.

To my dissertation committee thank you for your patience, support, encouragement and feedback. Our journey together really began when I took your course, and you exposed me to critical frameworks that helped me to find the language needed to ground my research study. I am truly honored to have critical scholars on my committee who value my critical orientations and gave me the opportunity to grow.
ABSTRACT

This nine-month narrative inquiry explored the experiences of four Jamaican immigrant women (two mothers and two grandmothers) living in a southeastern U.S. state to gain insights about how they ethnic-racially socialize their second generation immigrant sons or grandsons in this racialized context. Research questions guiding the study were: (a) How do the women perceive racism in the U.S.? How do they choose to self-identify? What connection, if at all, exists between their perceptions of racism and how they choose to raise their children or grandchildren? (b) What ethnic-racial messages do they transmit to them and what purposes do they serve? and (c) What insights do the mothers’ narratives on the ethnic-racial socialization of their children or grandchildren provide about what social justice might look like for children from families like theirs? To understand and center the voices and experiences of the Jamaican mothers and grandmothers, I used critical race and decolonizing analytic methodologies, and employed ethno-poetic as well as traditional narrative structures to represent findings from the four case studies. Grounded in critical race theory, Black feminism, and counterspace perspectives, findings revealed unjust school practices including stereotyping and negative profiling as well as strategies used by the women to cope with and negotiate existing systems while teaching their sons or grandsons to survive and thrive within a racialized society. They overtly and covertly exposed their children to ethnic-racial messages in their home and or church that helped to affirm racial and ethnic identities and challenge the deficit and racist practices they encountered. Implications
provide insights for critical scholars conducting research focused on immigrant populations as well as for teacher training programs and schools to better equip in-service and pre-service teachers to support immigrant children by: (1) understanding the nuanced experiences of Afro-Caribbean families; (2) learning about families’ perceptions, experiences with, and responses to racism in the U.S. schools and society; (3) examining their own biases and using culturally relevant pedagogies in classrooms; and (4) collaborating with families to disrupt unjust school practices.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Colonial Girls School

Borrowed images/willed our skins pale
muffled our laughter/lowered our voices
let out our hems/dekinked our hair
denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers
harnessed our voices to madrigals and genteel airs
yoked our minds to declensions in Latin and the language of Shakespeare

Told us nothing about ourselves

There was nothing about us at all

(Senior, 1985, p. 26)

The phrase “told us nothing about ourselves, there was nothing about us at all” in the poem that opens this dissertation, mirrors the kind of invisibility and silencing that a growing number of Afro-Caribbean immigrants and their children often experience when their stories, identities, and experiences are absent from research and school curricula in the U.S. (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Guy, 2001; Henry, 1998; Jean-Marie 2014; Johnson, 2008; Kirkwood, 2000; Mahoney & Matthews, 2014) or when families are “overlooked in educational discourse” (Wiggan & Walrond, 2013, p.167).

Critiquing colonialism in Jamaica, Senior (1985) used phrases such as “borrowed images”, “lowered voices”, “dekinked our hair”, “harnesses our voices” and “yoked our
minds” to indicate how British colonizers sought to ignore the descendants of enslaved people’s identities, silence their stories, control their thinking, dominate, and relegate them to the margins of society. This dehumanization, as the poem portrays, occurred on multiple levels; race, ethnicity and gender which ultimately robbed the girls at Senior’s Colonial girl school of their voices.

In the U.S. racialized context, Black immigrant children, and their families are also vulnerable to the kinds of devoicing and dehumanization Senior (1985) critiqued in the opening poem. This is often seen in schools that focus on Eurocentric curricula which limit the academic success and psychological well-being of racialized children. Furthermore, since research scholars have argued that most U.S. Southern states with lower Caribbean immigrant populations (e.g. South Carolina) compared to other parts of the country, often lack the support system for immigrant children and their families (Gilpin & Beck, 2006; Marrow, 2011; Morris & Monroe, 2009), immigrants in this region might experience far more challenges than their counterparts in locations like New York where there is a higher percentage of this population (Foner, 2001).

Several researchers noted that there is a high Caribbean immigrant population in New York (Foner, 2001; Waters, 1999) when compared to other cities in the U.S. Dating back to the early twentieth century, Foner (2001) noted that the city was a popular destination for Caribbean immigrants who quickly established networks (e.g. communities and institutions) which supported new migrants to the region. According to her, “Today’s New York West Indian community is more than ten times the size it was seventy years ago” (p.5). Kasinitz (1992) also noted the presence of Caribbean neighborhoods (e.g. Southern Crown Heights, Flatbush) and businesses in New York,
which provided support for Caribbean immigrants. However, these kinds of social networks and support systems might not be readily available to Caribbean immigrants living in the U.S. Southeast where their population is significantly lower. For example, the southeastern state where the Jamaican immigrant women resided had no Caribbean neighborhoods, and the only Caribbean businesses were a few restaurants.

Because race is enmeshed in the society, as various critical race scholars have noted (Bell, 1992; Clarke & Thomas, 2006; Ladson-Billing, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), understanding how it plays a role in Afro-Caribbean children’s schooling and daily lives in the U.S. South could help shed light on how to address the challenges they face as Black immigrants due to their racial identity (Foner, 2001; Lorick-Wilmot, 2010; Vickerman, 1999, 2013; Waters, 1999). In congruence, Vickerman (2013) posited that learning about their experience with race is important because unlike African Americans they often find themselves “pulled in opposite directions by contending, powerful forces or cross pressures influenced by both homeland and American views of race” (p.179). Differences in how they might conceptualize race (Waters 1999; Jones, 2008) and the possible conflict between how Jamaicans mothers might perceive themselves and how they are perceived in the U.S., in his view, are reasons for further exploration to gain an understanding of these complexities.

**Type of Study and Research Question**

Given the aforementioned concerns, this research was designed to gain insights into the experiences of four Jamaican families with regard to the ethnic-racial socialization of their children. This narrative inquiry using performance (ethnopoetic), case study, and interpretive methodologies, was grounded in critical race, Black feminist,
and Case and Hunter’s (2012) counterspace theories. Its purpose was to explore critically the experiences of Jamaican immigrant women raising their children and grandchildren in response to the pervasiveness of racism in the U.S. (Bell, 1992). Employing data through triangulation (interviews, artifacts, field notes, research journal, and observations), my study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the mothers and grandmothers perceive racism in the U.S? How do they choose to self-identify? What connection, if at all, exists between their perceptions of racism and how they choose to raise their children?

2. What ethnic-racial messages do they transmit to their children or grandchildren? What purposes do these messages serve?

3. What insights do the mothers’ narratives on the ethnic-racial socialization of their children or grandchildren provide about what social justice might look like for children from families like theirs?

**Statement of the Problem**

In this section, I explore the arguments presented in literature in the field that indicates a crucial need for research on the ethnic-racial socialization of Afro-Caribbean immigrant children, especially in the U.S. South. In exploring research studies in multiple disciplines, I unearthed several gaps in the field which could have grave implications for the experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers and their children in schools and the wider society. The following discourse explores what I found to be the current gaps and issues in the literature concerning these immigrant families.
Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Immigrants

There is a gap in research on Afro-Caribbean immigrant families in the U.S. (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Beck, 2010; Dash, 2006; Fournillier, McLean, & George, 2013; Ho, 1999; Kirkwood, 2000; Rong & Brown, 2002; Rong & Fitchett, 2008) particularly in southern states where there is a lower population of these immigrants (Gilpin & Beck, 2006). Hence, suggesting that there might be significantly lesser support for families like these in this region (Marrow, 2011) in comparison to areas such as New York and Miami with high Afro-Caribbean immigrant populations and networks (Jones, 2008; Foner, 2001). According to some research scholars in the field, the absence of their stories in the literature means that there is insufficient information on how to address the social inequalities that they and their children experience in schools and the wider society (Butterfield, 2004; Kirkwood, 2000; Rong and Fitchett, 2008; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013).

Although research on other non-white groups such as African Americans and Latinos are helpful in shedding insights on the experiences of children from non-mainstream families, some researchers believe they lack the nuanced socio-cultural details of Afro-Caribbean families whose world view might be influenced by experiences in the parents’ home country (Joseph & Hunter, 2011; Kirkwood, 2000; Rong & Brown, 2001; Vickerman, 1999; Water, 1999). For instance, some researchers (Butterfield, 2004; Waters, 1999; Vickerman, 1999) asserted that in Jamaica, race is linked to color gradations ranging from white, light and dark skin whereas, in the U.S., race is mainly viewed as a Black-White binary. Thus, educators could benefit from learning about the different ways Black immigrant parents and African American parents are socializing their children. Joseph and Hunter (2011) described these differences as follows:
Black immigrant parents may have similar motivations as Black American parents for transmitting socialization messages; however, the content and nature of these messages reflect subtle distinctions that may have implications for the racial and ethnic identity development of second-generation Black immigrant adolescents (p. 346).

In light of these nuanced differences, my research addresses the current gap in research on Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers and their children which might cause these “subtle distinctions” to be missed by educators who are not knowledgeable about the identities and experiences of these immigrant families.

**Understanding Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Women and Their Children**

Afro-Caribbean immigrant women as Black women living in a racialized context are understudied in the field thus little is known about their experiences, including their parenting practices (Crawford, 2004; Nkabinde, 2010; Reynolds, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Yearwood, 2001). The very limited research on Afro-Caribbean immigrant women tend to view their parenting from a deficit lens (Reynolds, 2005), for example, finding that they are authoritative, or they teach their children to distance themselves from African Americans (Hine-St. Hilaire, 2006) but very few research focus on how they might be using their agency (Wilson, 2008; Reynolds, 2005) in their child-rearing practices to deal with the racism they encounter.

Because of homogenous categorization of all Black students, very few research exist that focus on Afro-Caribbean immigrant students’ intersectionalities (e.g. race and ethnicity) and how this might affect their lives while living in a racialized society. For instance, research studies suggest that they could be “under-served in U.S. schools due to
cultural misunderstandings, often related to a lack of familiarity with educational policies and practices domestically and abroad” (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, p.50). Likewise, some research scholars argued that homogenizing research studies often do not provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding their identities and socio-cultural experiences (Lewis, 2009), for example, how they might choose to self-identify or how they perceive issues of race. This view is consistent with the work of Tolulope, Akokoya and Clark (2008) who argued that “the homogeneous categorization of Blacks ignores the important national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, political, and even racial differences that exist within the population” (p.49). This argument is also supported by Butterfield (2004) who contended that it is important to learn about Afro-Caribbean immigrant children’s racial/ethnic identity because they might face “racial and ethnic dynamics vastly different from those in their home countries” (Butterfield, 2004, p.75).

To this end, Waters (1999) argued that West Indian second generation children might experience dilemma on how to identify themselves. Hence, scholars believe that the failure to tease out the variations among Black children, for instance, their ethnic and racial identities, may limit the effectiveness of researchers and educators in addressing the needs of these students (Foner, 2001; Rong & Brown 2001; Vickerman, 1999).

According to Jean-Marie (2014) “there is a scarcity of literature on the experiences of Caribbean people that explore endemic inequalities and patterns of marginalization, which persist in their desire for social acceptance in American society” (p.77). In this vein, some research scholars argued that there is a need for research to capture the narratives of Afro-Caribbean families to shed light on their identities and experiences in ways that could inform schools’ practices and policies (Reynolds, 2005;

The Myth of the Model Minority

Pierre (2004) contended that the myth of the model minority and ethnic theory emphasis on the “cultural distinctiveness” (p.144) of Black immigrants contribute to cultural racism and lead research discourse away from focusing on their racialized experiences. The reality is that Afro-Caribbean immigrants often experience racial and ethnic discrimination in schools and society (Johnson, 2008, 2000; Kirkwood, 2000; Matthews & Mahoney, 2005; Warner, 2010; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013) which could impact how they choose to self-identify and socialize their children, yet their experiences are often missing from social justice research discourse which might be influenced by research studies that continue to focus on the myth of Caribbean students as the “model minority” (Tillery & Chresfield, 2012; Waters, 1999) thereby ignoring the challenges they might also encounter in schools because of their multiple identities (Matthews & Mahoney, 2005).

Research studies in the field indicate, contrary to the overarching myth of Afro-Caribbean students as the “model minority” that some of these children like African Americans and other non-white groups, experience difficulties in U.S. schools associated with their racial and ethnic identities (Matthews & Mahoney, 2005; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013). For example, focusing on Caribbean immigrant children in New York, Matthews and Mahoney (2005) noted that these children run the risk of experiencing “psycho-
educational and socio-cultural dislocation” (p.69), misplacement in special education classes, and alienation in school, arising from xenophobia and racism. They believe these challenges are directly linked to the school’s ignorance of these children’s socio-historical background.

Afro-Caribbean immigrants are on one hand seen as “model immigrants” (Waters, 1999) while on the other they are racialized and relegated to the margins of society like other racialized groups in America (Archibald, 2011; Kasinitz, 1992; Kirkwood, 2000; Lobo, Salvo & Hurley, 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters, 1999). Given these contradictions on how they are perceived, and their rising numbers, it is felt by some researchers in the field, that “it is important to recognize the impact of their presence in American communities and schools, especially the specific, unique needs of students who come from these populations” (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, p.56).

**Racialization of Afro-Caribbean Families**

If my second-grade teacher and the principal had read Aronson and Steeles’ (2005) work on *stereotype threat and intellectual performance* or come from an education program that challenged their belief systems about the academic ability of seven-year-old Black boys, it is highly likely that I and my mother may have been treated differently…communicating with me or my mother in ways that promoted positive academic development was not part of their professional vocabulary. My mother and I (i.e., parent and child) were unimportant beings to the principal and teacher. Therefore, even if they wanted to communicate and engage optimally they could not because of how they viewed me and my mother
(and those that looked like us) in relationship to themselves (Warner, 2010, p. 159).

Warner’s (2010) preceding vignette illuminates the role that racism often play in the quality schooling that Black children receive (Bell, 1992; Coleman-King, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Vickerman, 2013; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). In this regard, his story concurs with that of the Jamaican immigrant women in this research who also believed that deficit perspectives about Black people in the society often impact teacher’s expectations of their ability to be academically successful. For example, Warner (2010) argued that as a gifted Black child, he was misdiagnosed and placed into the lowest second-grade class upon his arrival to U.S. school at age seven. Furthermore, he maintained that his mother’s racialized experiences resulted in her feelings of “disassociation,” “disconnection” (p.151) and alienation at his school leading to her decision to stop attending PTA meetings. His story suggests that by excluding his mother in matters concerning his education, the educators at his school, failed to build the kind of relationship that could maximize his chances of success in the second grade.

**Inadequate Support for Black Children in Southern Schools**

Black immigrants and their children influence educators’ perceptions of Black students’ academic or intellectual abilities. Immigrant gateway cities such as Miami, New York, Boston, and Chicago provide locales in which scholars have learned about various groups with some degree of substantive depth. However, the South remains in its infancy—at least comparatively speaking—with regard to investigations that explore the social and educational experiences of foreign-born, first- and second-generation Black populations. (Morris & Monroe, 2009, p. 30)
As the preceding quote indicates, there is a dearth of research on the experiences of Black immigrant mothers and their children in Southern areas that are not traditionally entry points for immigrants. Consequently, Mather (2009) asserted that southern states such as South Carolina, North Carolina, and Tennessee are experiencing difficulties in adjusting to the rising population of immigrant children in their schools. Following this line of argument, Rong and Fitchett (2008) also argued that “in many U.S cities where the Black immigrant population had doubled or tripled in the last 10 years, the awareness among educational leaders and policy makers of this new immigrant component remains negligible, and a timely response from schools to their different needs is rare” (p.36).

Given the increasing diversity in the ‘New’ South (SEF, 2010) research scholars argued that the current lack of knowledge about immigrant children suggests that educators might not be fully equipped to address their needs. Pointing to this critical issue in the U.S. South, some research scholars asserted that this problem must be urgently addressed because the region “has been a neglected site of Black achievement,” (Jackson, Bryan, Larkin, 2014, p.9).

Finally, there is a gap in research that consider “race and place” (Morris & Monroe, 2009, p.21) in Black people’s lives in general and how space impacts the lives of Afro-Caribbean immigrants’ including their identity negotiations (Hall, 2010) and response to racism. For example, Morris and Monroe (2009) argued that “most contemporary educational and social science studies ignore the South as a critical racial, cultural, political and economic backdrop in Black education” (p.21).
Research Purpose

As a Black Jamaican or Afro-Caribbean doctoral female student who have experienced various forms of discrimination like many other Black doctoral students in the U.S. (Gildersleeve, Croom & Vasquez, 2011; Gordon, 2012) I often look to research to gain insights on challenges that others with the same racial and ethnic background might face due to their racial and ethnic identities and I became deeply concerned about the insufficient information available on the identities and experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrants and their children in research especially in the U.S. South. Hence, like Wilson (2008) my research purpose emerges from a wish to contribute to the further development of an “intellectual space” (p.197) for understanding Afro-Caribbean immigrant families in this region.

As the preceding vignette asserts, the primary purpose of this research is to fill a gap in the field on how Jamaican immigrant women are ethnic-racially socializing their second generation Black Jamaican immigrant son or grandson living in the U.S. Southeast through listening to their narratives. In this research second generation children refers to U.S. born children of Jamaican immigrants (Alba & Waters, 2011). Since the U.S. is a “consciously pluralistic society with a variety of subcultures, in which racial, ethnic, and national identities coexist” (Rong & Brown, 2001, p.542) these narratives could help educators to learn more about them. For example, focusing on how they are ethnic-racially socialized could assist them to gain insight on their identities and experiences. This notion is supported by some research scholars who maintained that the ethnic-racial socializing messages that they receive at home might later influence their

Another purpose of this research is to increase the visibility of Afro-Caribbean women, as Black women in a U.S. Southeastern state who are raising their children in a racialized context. According to Stafford (1984), Afro-Caribbean immigrant women have been little attention in research even though “Caribbean immigration to the United States has been characterized by significant numbers of female immigrants, who often initiate the move or who are the first to establish households in the new society” (p.172). Speaking of transnationalism as a gendered process, Ho (1999) also asserted that Caribbean women play a fundamental role in constructing connections between the different worlds of their families. Hence, their stories, as overlooked Black mothers, could unlock insights about the complexities that Black families with their socio-cultural backgrounds face in the U.S.

Focusing on these Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers might be illuminating because “parents’ attitudes and behaviors transmit world views about race and ethnicity to children by way of subtle, overt, deliberate and unintended mechanisms” (Hughes, 2003, p.15). Operating from the belief that “a school that fails to recognize and tap into youth’s myriad identities and most salient identifications as valuable sources of knowledge is one that shortchanges learners,” (Dei & Rummens, 2010, p.51) I explore how the mothers affirm the racial and ethnic identities of their children and challenge deficit perspectives about them through the transmission of ethnic-racial socializing messages in their home and or church. Since research there is a gap in research on Black immigrants (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Blake & Shousterman, 2010) focusing on their
stories can help to provide nuanced understandings of Jamaican immigrant families and their children that could help educators, policy makers and researchers to address their needs.

Socialization plays a primary role in children’s learning and identity development (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Nieto, 2002; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984; Priest, Walton, White, Kowal, Baker & Paradies, 2014; Suizzo, Robinson & Pahlke, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978; Yearwood, 2001), therefore, it is imperative that researchers and educators focus on how they are socialized in general but also ethnic-racially in their home to gain insights about their identities and outside experiences. Understanding how they are socialized might particularly impact social justice work for Afro-Caribbean immigrants and their children because research studies have indicated possible differences in how some Caribbean immigrants perceive themselves and racism in America when compared to African Americans (Benson, 2006; Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1999). By listening to the narratives of the Jamaican immigrant women’s stories the status quo in schools might be disrupted in ways that provide opportunities for the leveling of the plane field for all racialized children including the understudied Black children from Afro-Caribbean immigrant families (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Fournillier, McLean, & George, 2013; Rong & Brown, 2002; Rong & Fitchett, 2008) who might face daily “cross-pressures” (Vickerman, 1999, p.5) on how to identify themselves in a racialized society (Hine-St. Hilaire, 2006).

The final purpose of this research was to explore the complexities surrounding the Afro-Caribbean mothers and their children by considering how living in a racialized society might impact how they self-identify, perceive their experiences and raise their
children. According to Harrison (2008), the connection between the Caribbean and the U.S. South is often unexplored in research. For the Afro-Caribbean immigrant families in this research, I believe that this unexplored socio-historic background present opportunities for educators to understand the connection between the colonial experiences of their homeland and the racialized context of the U.S. South in ways that could help effectuate social justice work through a nuanced understanding of their experiences.

**How I Came to This Research**

**Personal Story**

Where I come from/old women bind living words
across their flat chests/inscribe them on their foreheads,

and in the palms of the hands

[…]

Under their clothes/on white calico belly bands,
they have transcribed ancient texts/which soak into their stretched loins;

and when they seek cures for you/ their whitlow fingers Braille-read

medicine words/from the base of their bellies.

(Goodison, 2006)

Goodison’s (2006) preceding poem offers a feminist reading of the experiences of Black women in the Caribbean, which resonates with me because as an Afro-Caribbean/Black Jamaican female doctoral student with various intersectionalities (e.g. race, ethnicity, and gender) engaging in research in social justice I found that most of the research discourse did not speak to all of my identities, stories, and experiences and
therefore could not adequately address the challenges I face in a racialized context. I grew up amongst resilient women with storied lives of trials and triumphs associated with their race and gender, yet they remain invisible or negatively portrayed in the society, causing research scholars like Carby (1999) to call for a space for “herstory” (p.67) in the rewriting of the historical representation of Black women in the African Diaspora. My reflection on their experience and my own feelings of frustration associated with my triple invisibility due to my intersectionalities (race, ethnicity and gender), led me to think deeply about what this absence could mean for Afro-Caribbean families and their children as they navigate U.S. public schools and what I could help to capture their stories.

As a Black woman from the Caribbean, since I did not see much Afro-Caribbean women experiences represented in research in the U.S. I grew concerned because I believed that ignoring Black women’s “intersecting subjectivities results in rendering invisible their diverse within-group experiences” (Few, 2007, p.463). Hence, I began to wonder about what might be missing from research discourse when our stories are not heard. For instance, after the birth of my second generation Jamaican immigrant nephew in 2009, I wondered how my sister and other Afro-Caribbean mothers were raising their children in a racialized context in which they did not grow up as a child. Additionally, I wondered whether they would draw solely from their homeland experiences and understanding of race or whether they would adjust their parenting to deal with the social issues they face in this new context. I also wondered what socializing messages they would be transmitting to their children and whether these messages would prepare them to cope with the structural inequalities they would later encounter.
I came to this research partly because of the “wonderings” mentioned earlier, and my reflection on the role that my mother’s ethnic-racial socializing messages played in helping me to deal with being raced in this society as a doctoral student. Childhood memories of songs, poems and stories about my history, some told to me by mother, came flooding back to me as I experienced various forms of discrimination as an Afro-Caribbean/Black Jamaican doctoral student in the U.S. and they had a strong influence on how I chose to identify myself in this racialized context. Because I grew up with a keen awareness of my African roots, I decided to identify myself not only as a Jamaican or Caribbean woman but also as a Black member of the African Diaspora, who share a history of oppression with African Americans.

I grew up in a storytelling tradition that involved my mother passing on stories that she heard as a child. For example, she told me about that the maroons (freedom fighters) in Jamaica helped to free fellow enslaved people. She also recounted her childhood experience of Jamaica’s first Independence Day on August 6, 1962, and the Emancipation Day Jubilee song, expressing gratitude for the freeing of enslaved people of Jamaica on August 1, 1834, that my grandmother (born in 1912) loved singing around the house. My mother was also very critical of the practice of colorism amongst friends and family members who internalized racism. In this regard, my exposure to the ethnic-racial socializing messages of my mother not only made me cognizant of my Jamaica heritage but also of issues surrounding race. For example, from our history discussions I learned that my fore parents were enslaved because of their racial identity and I grew with the awareness that skin tone influenced attitudes to darker skin Jamaicans from listening to her critique of colorism in the society. For example, even though I grew up
around some critically conscious people I was also surrounded by individuals who internalized racism. These people would refer to people with darker skin tones as “Black and ugly” while referring to lighter skin tones as “pretty skin”. Hence, African physical features were often seen as something to be ashamed of while European features were perceived as more appealing.

As a doctoral student both my racial and ethnic identities were important to me and together they made me feel whole and grounded. I did not want to relinquish any of these identities to assimilate to a mainstream culture so I preferred to use the hyphenated labels such as Afro-Caribbean or Black Jamaica to accommodate both which I would not have done in the Jamaican context. However, I felt compelled to do so in this regard because of a greater emphasis on the Black-White binary in the U.S. society. As one of few Black students and the only Jamaican in all of my classes, these were points of struggle for me as I attempted to locate research studies and theoretical frames aligned to my bicultural perspectives and experiences as an Afro-Caribbean/Black Jamaican.

Reflecting on my personal experiences as a student from a different cultural background and my feelings of invisibility, I am convinced that educators could help students feel whole by gaining knowledge about all their identities and experiences and working to disrupt the status quo. I believe that one way of accomplishing this is to listen to the narratives of ethnically diverse parents. Although some researchers suggest that second generation immigrant adolescents might likely move away from their first generation parent’s ethnic identity (Alba & Waters, 2011; Butterfield, 2004; Waters, 1999), some researchers suggested that parents’ identity often impact their early
development (Csizmadia, Kaneakua, Miller & Halgunseth, 2013; Csizmadia, Rollins & Kaneakua, 2014).

Based on my childhood socialization in Jamaica, I believe that focusing on the ethnic-racial socialization of Jamaican second generation immigrant children might encourage educators to pay attention to the individual experiences of Black immigrant families to avoid the assumption that all children from a particular heritage will choose similar identities (Rong & Brown, 2001) or that all Black immigrants will be oblivious of or reluctant to engage in racial issues in America (Lewis, 2009). Although first generation Black immigrant parents might come from the same country, they come with different experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, levels of education and critical consciousness which might influence how they choose to socialize their children in the home and the identity that they might encourage them to embrace. Hence, I believe that not only is there a need to have a nuanced understanding of the different socio-cultural backgrounds of Black immigrant parents, but also of how they might perceive racism, self-identify and respond to racism in the U.S context, since these are factors that could influence the socializing messages that they transmit to their children.

Litany of Afro-Caribbean Familial Stories

My interactions with family members and friends who are either 1.5, second generation immigrants or first generation Black immigrants with children within those generations in the U.S., have provided me with an awareness of some of the challenges and “structural barriers” (Matthews & Mahoney, 2005, p.71) that they might experience in schools and the wider society. Some of these difficulties include increased risk of stereotype threats (Deaux et al., 2007), “racism-related stress” (Case & Hunter, 2014,
p.411) and reduction to a single story (Adichie, 2009) which might impede their academic performance, and affect their psychological well-being. Other challenges include how to identify themselves and cope with the discrimination and othering they face as members of a non-white group in this society (Archibald, 2011; Brown, 2008; Dubois, 2004; Foner, 2011; Johnson, 2008; Rong & Brown, 2002). Blake & Shousterman (2010) found in their research on second-generation Caribbean immigrants and their language in New York that they experienced complexities associated with their race and ethnicity. For instance, they explained that some of their participants in their struggle to identify themselves, “used labels such as ‘West Indian slash half African American’, or ‘Jamerican’” (p.38). Such choices suggest that ethnic identities are fluid rather than fixed (Cornell, 2000), and racism in the society might influence how Black immigrants self-identify thus underscoring the significance of listening to their stories.

In my own conversations with family members with second generation Jamaican immigrant children, I also learn that they, like other children from racialized groups, often struggled to deal with mainstream society’s deficit thinking about their identities. For instance, my first generation Jamaican cousin told me that in order to develop her second generation Jamaican immigrant sons’ self-esteem about their ethnic and racial identities, she often encouraged them to be proud of who they are, despite the negative stereotype ascribed to Black children in the society. Another cousin shared in a separate conversation that his biracial (Black and White) second generation Jamaican immigrant son was told by his peers at school that his skin was dirty because he looks Black. Concerned about his son’s self-esteem after this experience with racial discrimination, he explained that he showed his son a chocolate and vanilla ice-cream and told him, “this
represents me because I am black, and this vanilla ice-cream represents your mom,” and then he mixed the vanilla and chocolate ice-cream together and said “this is you, my son.” He then proceeded to explain to him that he should not listen to the negative stereotypes that society seeks to place on him due to his mixed race identity.

**Professional Story**

I conducted the majority of my research studies in Graduate School with immigrant families (e.g. Haitian, Puerto Rican, and Jamaican). In one of the studies I conducted, a Haitian immigrant mother described racism as a germ that she struggled to deal with in her daily life (e.g. changing schools because of encounters with institutional racism), so she tried constantly to develop in her second generation Black Haitian immigrant daughters, the self-confidence they will need to live in this racialized society. Additionally, in one of my teaching assignments in a Southeastern state, a Jamaica immigrant mother expressed concern about what she believed was an administrator’s racial discrimination against her son in a matter that could have prevented him from graduating from high school. These stories represent just a few of the many stories that I have heard from first generation Afro-Caribbean parents (especially mothers) about how they are coping with social injustices and socializing their children in ways that respond to the racialized contexts in which they are raising their children. Stories like these remind me of the dangers of the single story (Adichie, 2009) about people’s lives and thus indicate a need to learn more about unique experiences of Afro-Caribbean mothers and their children.

Based on the preceding stories, this research is borne out of my concern about what some researchers perceive as the laxity of public schools, inadequately addressing
the needs of Black children in public schools (SEF, 2010) and the overall invisibility of Afro-Caribbean parents and their children in research and school curricula. Through critical race and Black feminists, my research renders problematic schools that ignore the identities of Black immigrant children and “reproduce and legitimate inequality” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman, 2011, p.14). My conversations with these Afro-Caribbean immigrant parents point to the need for educators to talk with Black immigrant parents to gain well-needed insights about their children’s identities and the socio-political issues that they might face because of these identities (Kirkwood, 2000) in order to successfully address the challenges they might face in schools. Educators in the U.S. must come to an understanding of these complexities given the globalized world we live in, and especially since “school-aged children from the Caribbean represent one of the most rapidly growing single-immigrant groups in North America” (Matthews & October-Edun, 2014, p.139). Furthermore, they must become cognizant of how the racialization of immigrant families and their children could severely impact their chances of success in schools and the wider society (Lopez, 2002).

Operating from the notion that “identity is an important site of knowing.” (Dei & Rummens, 2010, p.51) and “the shaping of the identities of Afro-Caribbean and other immigrant children typically begins in the home” (Fourniller, McLean & George, 2013, p.266) I believe that colonial modeled schools like the one detailed in the preceding poem that ignores students’ racial and ethnic identities are not only ignoring their ways of knowing and being in the world but also the socio-political issues that they might experience as a result of these identities. This could be especially detrimental for second generation Afro-Caribbean immigrant children because several research studies indicate
that they often struggle with how to identify themselves in the U.S. (Bailey, 2002; Butterfield, 2004; Waters, 1999) especially because they “like their parents, must cope with living in cities (and societies) where they experience prejudice and discrimination on accounts of being labeled black” (Foner, 2011, p.254) and xenophobia (Rong & Fitchett, 2008) because of their family’s heritage.

Underscoring the issues surrounding racial identification in the U.S, the Times and Democrat newspaper, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, in February 2012, noted that more and more people in America are choosing not to identify with the racial categories on official documents and opting instead to include “write-in responses” on these forms that they believe more adequately reflect their identities. For instance, drawing from the 2010 census, the newspaper report noted that some people wrote in identification labels such as “Haitian,” “Jamaican” and “multiracial” because they felt that the prescribed racial categories inadequately addressed their identities since some might choose to identify themselves not just racially but also ethnically. Unfortunately, public schools in the U.S, like these census documents, often do not acknowledge the multiple identities of students from diverse backgrounds (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

**Significance of the Study**

Several previous studies about Black immigrants tend to focus heavily on our “cultural distinctiveness” (Pierre, 2004, p. 144) but very few explored how the U.S. racialization process impact our daily lives like other racialized groups in the country (Pierre, 2004). Hence, this research attempted to fill this gap by exploring how these immigrants and their children from a historical background with colonial racism were attempting to cope with the racism they encountered in the U.S. society.
Since racism often influences Black parents’ socialization practices (Lesane-Brown, 2006), focusing on how they ethnic-racially socialize their children in this context could shed light on how educators can help to develop these children’s positive self-esteem and enhance their academic performance (Csizmadia, Kaneakua, Miller & Halgunseth, 2013). Hughes, Smith, Stevenson, Rodriguez, Johnson and Spicer (2006), constructed the term ethnic-racial socialization, to describe the messages that parents transmit to their children in order to develop their ethnic and racial identities. They categorized these ethnic-racial messages as follows: (a) cultural socialization (e.g. heritage, history), (b) preparation for bias (e.g. talks about discrimination) (c) promotion of mistrust referring to “wariness and distrust in interracial interactions” (p.757) and (d) egalitarianism which they described as deemphasizing racism.

Learning about the ethnic-racial socialization practices of the Afro-Caribbean immigrant women in this research provides opportunities for empowerment for these women because scholars suggested that in the U.S., Black women like the girls in the poem are often dehumanized and negatively portrayed as “unfit and unworthy teachers and mothers” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.88). Hence, focusing on their socialization practices could provide counterstories to this majoritarian story about their lives. Furthermore, from a critical race and Black feminist standpoint I believe that making the stories of the Afro-Caribbean mothers visible in research about Black women and their children, might help to disrupt the social inequalities that seem to pervade their lives (Collins, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Phoenix, 2009). These critical lenses form part of my guiding framework because I hold the belief that “the construction of the
Other is tied to a history of patriarchal, racist, colonial relations” (Cherland & Harper, 2007, p.91).

Previous studies focusing on Black immigrants to the United States tend to concentrate heavily on their “cultural distinctiveness” (Pierre, 2004, p. 144) but very few have explored how racialization in the U.S. racialization process impacts their daily lives (Pierre, 2004). Hence, this research contributes to filling this gap by examining how five Jamaican immigrant mothers and grandmothers and their children and grandchildren with a historical background Colonial racism coped with racism they encountered in the United States. Thus, this study offers findings from four case studies to provide insights about four women in Jamaican immigrant contexts in the United States.

**The Growing Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Population in the U.S.**

Afro-Caribbean immigrants have a history of migrating to the U.S. as early as the 19th century to seek a better life (Hine St. Hilaire, 2008; Vickerman, 2013). In June 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau Fact for Features News reported that there are approximately 2.7 million people in the U.S. population of West Indian ancestry with 1 million specifically of Jamaican heritage. Ferguson, Bornstein and Pottinger (2012) also reported that “approximately 87% of the 38 million foreign-born individuals in the U.S. are non-European, and nearly 3 million are of African descent” (p.1486). Afro-Caribbean immigrants comprise 25% of the Black population in cities such as New York and Miami (Case & Hunter, 2014). Hence, the presence of these Black immigrants marks an overall increase in the Black population who are racialized in this society, significantly shifting “what it means to be black in America” (Benson, 2006, p.219). Such heterogeneity in the Black population, requires a nuanced understanding of their identities and “intersecting
forms of oppression” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, p.2011) in order for educators and researchers to dismantle exclusionary power structures in schools and the society that renders them invisible (Brown, 2008; Coleman-King, 2014; Johnson, 2000; Labennett, 2006; Lewis, 2009; Matthews, 2014; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013).

American Dream and the Realities

Given the rise in the Black immigrant population in the U.S. since 1965 (Rong & Fitchett, 2008), I concur with Akbar, Chambers and Thompson (2001) that “for researchers to have a comprehensive view of the African American child, they must include children throughout the African Diaspora. This effort must include children from the Caribbean, West Indies, and mainland Africa” (p.341) as well as other global locations. By this I mean African American children in the public school system come with multiple identities (Butterfield, 2004) and experiences that should not be left unexplored by educators.

For second generation Black immigrant children from the Caribbean, identity development might be very complicated because of their family heritage (Waters, 1999) resulting in a feeling of “in-between-ness” as they are caught between two worlds (Lorick-Wilmot, 2014, p.74). Understanding these complexities might help in the furtherance of social justice work for Afro-Caribbean immigrant children who face marginalization in the school system. To this end, research scholars argued that in North America these immigrants, must be given more attention in the classroom and in the research field (Fournillier, McLean & George, 2013; Kirkwood, 2000; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013) because unlike immigrants from the dominant group, they will face racial
discrimination in their host country as they become not only a part of America but also Black America (Kasinitz, 1992).

For our racialized visible minority students, an educational curriculum that is relevant to lived experiences and reflective of diversity is key…rather than devalue or diminish the social histories, identities, experiences, and cultural or collective knowledge that our students bring with them to school, we need to incorporate them directly into the learning process itself (Dei & Rummens, 2010, p.52).

In keeping with the arguments in the preceding quote on the importance of including the identities and experiences of children who have been racialized in the society, this study is significant because it helps to fill a gap in research about the ethnic-racial socialization of second generation Black immigrant children from Afro-Caribbean immigrant homes living in the U.S. South, particularly in a southeastern state where there is a significantly lower population of these immigrants when compared to states such as New York. As Foner (2001) argued this is particularly important since findings in New York should not be generalized to describe Caribbean immigrants in other cities in the U.S. Likewise it is important because according to Hughes et al. (2006), “regions of the country vary in their racial histories, racial composition, and patterns of intergroup relations and these differences may shape the nature of parents’ ethnic-racial socialization” (p.760).

Learning specifically about the ethnic-racial socialization of the second generation immigrant children from these homes will help to shed light on the experiences that could influence their racial/ethnic identities in ways that could
encourage educators and policy makers in the South to create socially just school curricula that are inclusive of their identities and experiences thereby eliminating possible cultural border clashes between Afro-Caribbean immigrant parents and school personnel due to misunderstandings linked to their socio-cultural backgrounds. The phrase “border clash” (Cooper, 2004, p.35) is a dancehall trope used in the Jamaican Dancehall music culture to represent lyrical contestation between singers. Using this trope, I am coining the term cultural border clash to represent the different world views and experiencing occurring between Afro-Caribbean parents and their children’s school (Kirkwood, 2002; Mahoney & Matthews, 2014).

This research is also significant because it could also illuminate how Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers make sense of their racialized experiences and choose to self-identify thus possibly influencing how their children might view themselves and the world in which they live. Such a research emphasis could significantly help to broaden social justice work for Black children in the South because it could help to tease apart variations of experiences in the Black community, including Black mothers socializing practices, that could help social justice researchers and educators to tailor their work to meet the unique needs of their children based on not just local but also global experiences (Wiggan & Hutchison, 2009) that might add to understanding identity work intra-group as well across different racial and ethnic groups.

This research is also significant because a focus on the socialization of the 2nd generation Black immigrant children will help further understanding of how their presence impact their schools and the wider society (Rong & Fitchett, 2008). For instance, studying Afro-Caribbean in this area of the South where they are few in
numbers could help to build on the insights that researchers such as Waters (1999) and Foner (2001) gained in New York about these immigrants’ identity development. As some researchers asserted race, place and space matter (Hall, 2010; Jackson, Bryan, Larkin, 2014; Morris & Monroe, 2009) when studying Black people so conducting this research in the U.S. South might add another layer to understanding the complexities Black immigrants face in particular U.S. locations with unique historical legacies of oppression.

Finally, this research is significant because it will help to amplify the voices of the understudied Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers (Reynolds, 2005; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013) concerning not just how they choose to socialize their children but also their racialized experiences. The narratives of these immigrant mothers are significant to the field of education because “immigrant parents and people in local communities are stakeholders in the education of their children. Their insights and support provide legitimacy to school-based reform efforts and policymaking processes” (Rong & Fitchett, 2008, p. 41). Likewise, their counter stories could help to dismantle deficit majoritarian stories about their families.

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions guide the use of specific terminology as it is utilized in this dissertation:

- **First generation**: refers to individuals born outside the U.S. (Glick & Hohmann-Marriot, 2007).

- **1.5 generation**: refers to children who immigrated to the U.S. as children (Alba & Waters, 2011).
• **Second generation:** “is usually reserved for children of immigrants who are born in the host society (Alba & Waters, 2011, p.1)

• **Afro-Caribbean:** is the term used refer to people with African ancestry “from the Anglophone Caribbean, including the mainland nations of Guyana and Belize” (Alba & Waters, 2011, p.254).

• **West Indian:** refers to English-speaking Caribbean people of African ancestry (Kasinitz, 1992).

• **Racial socialization:** “verbal and non-verbal (e.g., modeling of behavior and exposure to different contexts and objects) messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity” (Lesane-Brown, 2006, p.403).

• **Ethnicity:** “Ethnicity refers to a subset of people whose members share common national, ancestral, cultural, immigration, or religious characteristics that distinguish them from other groups” (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew & Freeman, 2010, p.440).

• **Ethnocentrism:** is defined as “the belief in the superiority of one’s own culture” (Alleyne, 2002, p.12).

• **Eurocentrism:** refers to “a type of ideology and world view that included practices that privilege Western historical and cultural experiences, values and concerns of people of European descent at the expense of others” (Few, 2007, p. 460).
• **Ethnic-racial socialization**: the “process through which parents transmit information about ethnicity and race to their children” (Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way & Foust, 2009, p.606).

• **Racial identity**: “refers to a psychological process in which one makes meaning of one’s own race and meaning of Blackness” (Barr & Neville, 2008, p.136)

• **Intersectionality**: “means the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.57).

• **Afro-Caribbean**: refers to people of African descent from the Caribbean
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter commences with my conceptual framework which entails details on the different lenses that informed my study. Thus, it includes a discussion of critical race theory, Black Feminism and Case and Hunter’s (2012) counterspace perspectives to show how they were useful in making sense of the Jamaican immigrant women’s stories and experiences.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theory is not something done to you; it is your way of viewing your world

(Cooper, 2009, p.5)

As a Black Jamaican doctoral student, I view my world and research work through critical lenses. In order to arrive at a deep understanding of the way racism impacts the daily lives of the Jamaican immigrant female participants and their children, I grounded this narrative inquiry with critical race, Black feminism, and counterspace. These theories put racism at the center of discourse about the schooling experiences of racialized students and help to challenge their dehumanization in the wider society. They interrogate the use of school curricula that draw from one way of knowing as opposed to the multiple ways of knowing that children bring with them to school and the absence of their funds of identity from school curricula (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Funds of identity refer to “historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-
understanding” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p.37). In this sense, I am not viewing identity as fixed but as something that is influenced by the past, present, local and global experiences of people.

**Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged from critical legal studies (CLS) which focused on deconstructing the traditional legal scholarship that sought to maintain the status quo (Taylor, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). However, some Black legal scholars felt that CLS did not adequately address racial discrimination in America, so they developed critical race theory to address this socio-political issue (Ladson-Billings, 2009). According to Taylor (2009), “CRT comes from a long tradition of resistance to the unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial and gendered lines” (p.1) that is evident in the American society.

In grounding my work in CRT, I drew from the following tenets or assumptions that helped me to explore the role race and other areas of domination like ethnicity play in the unequal schooling of children from non-white groups in America, to discuss my belief that research with a focus on Black children from these groups must provide a platform for their stories to be told, and to shed light on how a “color blind” approach in classrooms can help to maintain the status quo in schools. The tenets that will guide my work are as follows: (a) Race and racism are endemic and permanent in American society (Bell, 1992; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011) (b) Naming one’s reality and unveiling racism through stories or counter stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009) is a useful means of resisting the “majoritarian stories” of the dominant culture and (c) Racism often intersects with other forms of dominations (e.g. ethnicity, gender and class) in the lives of
people from non-white groups in America. Critical race theory is integral to this study because it “presupposes the historical and contemporary role that racism plays and has played in education, and asks a more penetrating question: “How has racism contributed to educational disparities, and how can it be dismantled?” (Howard, 2010, p.99).

Racism as endemic in America. Racism is ever present in everyday social interactions on micro and macro levels in America (Bell, 1992) and it is often linked to people’s beliefs, assumptions and perceptions of individuals from particular racial backgrounds (Zamudio, Russell, Rios and Bridgeman, 2011) and as a permanent structure of this society (Bell, 1992) I believe that its effect on the lives of Afro-Caribbean immigrants and members of other racialized groups must be examined so that we can arrive at effective means of decentering the dominant culture in schools and the wider society. Framing my research with CRT is important because the Jamaican immigrant women and their children faced racism and racialization in schools and the society. Additionally, CRT was a useful frame for me to articulate the need for future research studies to explore critically how these women cope with and teach their children to deal with the oppression they face daily. From a CRT lens, I was also able to unveil the need for a reworking of school curricula to make it inclusive of the knowledge and experiences of Black children. Moreover, CRT helped me to couch my research analysis in the socio-political milieu that surrounded the schooling of the Jamaican immigrant women’s son or grandson in this research and critical articulations of the need to disrupt the status quo of schools (Gay 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Meier, 2008) that suggest a complicity in the disproportionate discipline of these students and the overall
reproduction of social inequality in the society (Zamudio, Russell, Rios and Bridgeman, 2011).

Using CRT as a guiding frame, I unveil in this research the connection between race and the deficit perspectives held by some members of the dominant culture about Black immigrant children and their family. Addressing racism in schools is very important because it is in these settings that “conceptual categories like ‘school achievement,’ ‘middle-classness,’ ‘maleness,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘intelligence,’ and ‘science’ become normative categories of whiteness, while categories like ‘gangs,’ ‘welfare recipients,’ ‘basketball players,’ and ‘the underclass’ become the marginalized and de-legitimated categories of blackness” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.19). By framing my work with critical race theory, I was able to move race and racism from the periphery of research discourse about Black immigrants to the center to understand how they were responding to the racism in the society.

Locating my research in CRT provided me with the justification for making centering race in this research (Roithmayr, 1999, p.5) and helped me to challenge “oppressive structures and discourses” (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p.9). Additionally, through CRT, I attempted to refute the notion that integration in schools means equal education for all (Roithmayr, 1999; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999) and interrogate the color blindness that keeps institutional racism intact. (Bell, 1992; Roithmayr, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT also provided the lens through which I critically assessed the silencing of racialized students and the maintenance of a status quo (Parker et al., 1999) that is disconnected from their outside experiences.
**Naming one’s reality through stories or counterstories.** Critical race methodologists use stories or counterstories to challenge majoritarian stories, to honor the voices of Black people and to name their reality which includes their experiences with racial discrimination (Delgado & Stephanic, 2012, Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). In their discourse on counter-story as an analytical framework for educational research Solórzano and Yosso (2009) defined counterstories as “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told,” which can be used to, “shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race and further struggle for racial reform” (p.138). In building their argument that counterstories can be a “cure for silencing” (p.49) Delgado & Stephanic (2012) made the following argument:

Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated… powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of correction in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity (p.50).

Recognizing the significance of stories to unveil oppression, I used a CRT lens to capture the stories of discrimination that the Jamaican immigrant families encountered in their daily lives.

**Intersectionality.** CRT as a frame helped me to show the intersectionality of race and ethnicity the Jamaican immigrant families’ experiences with different forms of oppression (racism and ethnocentrism). Unpacking these families’ racialized experiences, I used CRT to “move beyond essentialized notions of students of color to capture the
intersecting forms of students of color experience” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios and Bridgeman, 2011, p.40) that threatened not only their academic performance in schools but their psychological well-being.

**Black Feminism**

As a child I liked to help my mother in the kitchen because I thought that’s what girls were supposed to do, but my mother often told me to leave the kitchen and go study my book because she did not want me to end up like her, meaning not fulfilling her dreams of going to college. In reflection, I now realize how much of a feminist my mother was throughout my life, especially in pushing back against patriarchal ideals that I had to be domesticated as a Black woman. Importantly she taught me how Black women even in a patriarchal world, often use their agency in the attempt to secure a better future for themselves and their Black children.

In this research, I engage in the work of Black feminist thought primarily because of its focus on the empowerment of Black women, as my preceding journal entry seeks to highlight. Additionally, I am drawing from this perspective because it: (a) challenges the multiple oppressions that Black women experience in the society (b) explores how they negotiate their intersectionalities (e.g. race, gender, ethnicity) and (c) addresses deficit perspectives about their life (Few, 2007) which makes it an appropriate paradigm for viewing the experiences of the Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers in this research.

Significantly, for the purpose of this research, one of the major themes presented by Patricia Collins, that undergirds this perspective is that “Black women empower themselves by creating self-definitions and self-valuations that enable them to establish
positive, multiple images and to repel negative, controlling presentation of Black womanhood” (Taylor, 1998, p.234 & 235). From this standpoint, the opportunity exists to explore whether the way Afro-Caribbean immigrant woman choose to self-identify in the U.S. could be interpreted as an attempt to empower themselves and their children in a society that relegates them to the margin. Equally important, Black feminism is germane to this research because it encourages scholars who study Black families to avoid generalizing Black experiences (Few, 2007). Hence, as a research paradigm, it offers the opportunity for me to gain a nuanced understanding of the identities and experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrant women and their children.

Black feminist thought is a salient frame for this research because this lens the voices and experiences of the subjugated and understudied Jamaican immigrant women and their children could be centered and used to illuminate their resistance to racism in their homes. Locating my research in this theoretical paradigm is also crucial to this research because it interrogates the intersectional oppression (race, gender, and ethnicity) of Black women in the society and is committed to social justice work to address this oppression (Collins, 2000). Through its emphasis on the visibility of the lived experiences and perspectives of Black women, its usefulness in this research also lies in its valuing of the taken for granted knowledge of these women. To this end, Black feminist thought is integral to this research because it is a lens through I explored their stories as not just immigrants but as Black women who are balancing survival and resistance in the racialized context of the U.S. South.

**Counterspace perspectives.** The concept of counterspace was first introduced by CRT scholars Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) in their research study about the racial
microaggressions African American students face on college campuses and how they created counterspaces on these campuses as a means of coping with the racism they encountered. Building on this concept, Case and Hunter (2012) discussed counterspaces as a form of adaptive responding (learning to cope with stressful circumstances) by counterspace members to their oppression in the society. They defined counterspace as “settings, which promote positive self-concepts among marginalized individuals (e.g. racial, sexual minority individuals, a person with disabilities, etc.) through the challenging of deficit-oriented dominant cultural narratives and representations concerning these individuals” (p.261). Also calling counterspaces, identity-affirming settings they argued that these spaces help to affirm the identities of the oppressed groups.

Case and Hunter (2012) noted that counterspace members challenge deficit perspectives by two mechanisms: (a) self-enhancement and, (b) self-protection which help to promote their psychological well-being. They also identified three frequent “domains of challenging processes” as: (a) narrative identity work which refers to the use of narratives in the counterspace to affirm the identities of its members and to challenge negative stereotypes about them, (b) acts of resistance refers to actions that challenge deficit mainstream perspectives by providing counterspace members with the opportunity to “think, feel and act in ways that are consonant with their own identities but are typically devalued by the larger society” (p.264) and (c) direct relational transactions which refers to “the narrative an individual holds about herself” (p.264). In other words, direct relational transaction refers to narratives that are used to “recraft self-concepts” (p.264)
My personal experience with counterspace. On a personal level Case and Hunter’s (2012) counterspace concept holds significance because as a child growing up in Jamaica, my home was a space where I first learned about my ancestral history in a manner that challenged mainstream perspectives about Black people around the world. While sitting on the verandah (patio) of my home, I keenly listened to my mother’s stories different aspects of my heritage including maroons in Jamaica, Africa and Emancipation Day, which helped to affirm my identity not only as a Jamaican but a child of African descent. In Figure 2.1, is a photograph of the verandah where I listened to several of my mother’s identity affirming stories:

![Figure 2.1. My personal counterspace](image)

Informed by my own experience of the significant difference that home place can make in a child’s life I was drawn to the role that the Jamaican immigrant women’s home also play in their son or grandson’s life in the racialized context of the U.S. South.

Locating this study in counterspace perspectives afforded me the lens through which I could explore how the Jamaican immigrant women were responding to the
racism they encountered in the U.S. society. Thus, using this perspective as a guiding frame, I learned that the women were exposing their children to strategies in their home and or church to help them cope with racism in the society. In this vein from this counterspace perspectives, I explored these setting as spaces that affirmed their son or grandson’s identity and challenged the racialization they experience in the society. Using this frame also helped me to view the Jamaican immigrant women as Black women who are claiming power by using their “homeplace” (hooks, 1990) to resist dehumanization and protect their children. Grounding my work in counterspace perspectives provided me with the opportunity to move away from mere multicultural details to viewing the women’s church and or home as political sites to counter the negative messages of the outside world.

**Literature Review**

This section explores literature from multiple disciplines (e.g. literature, sociology, anthropology, education and history) related to the complexities associated with the ethnic-racial identities of Afro-Caribbean immigrant families in the U.S, which could influence how the immigrant women choose to self-identify and socialize their children.

After providing this socio-historical backdrop of the conception of race in the Caribbean region, the literature then examines the identity of first generation Afro-Caribbean parents in the U.S., underscoring the complexities involved and the identity negotiations these parents often make in their new racialized context. Next, the literature focuses on their 2nd generation Black immigrant children to shed light on the challenges they could also face due to their family’s socio-cultural backgrounds. From there the
literature explores the notion of the family as a raced institution to illuminate how race impacts the Black family. Additionally, the literature focuses on the role that Black mothers play in socializing their children. Due to the limited research on Afro-Caribbean mothers in the U.S., here the literature will also include the socialization practices of these mothers in Canada and U.K. The rest of the literature focuses on research in the field on the ethnic-racial socialization of Black children and how this might influence their identity development. Following this section, the literature moves on to explore the connection between identity and learning and then finally closes with a focus on race, Black immigrant student, and schooling.

Because a nuanced understanding of the Jamaican immigrant women and their children in this research is crucial to making sense of their stories, the literature commences with their socio-historical background. First, I explore a connection between the Caribbean and the U.S. South, then provide details on Caribbean transnational conceptions of race/racism with subcategories on colorism in the Caribbean and race in Jamaica.

**Socio-Historical Background: Slavery in the Caribbean and the U.S. South**

At this desk
in this cell
in this womb

the slave sweats
cottonfields of Oxford
whiplash of political office

Demerara bleeds
Anguilla bleeds
Kingston breeds felonies
The fettered shanks
Walk with me to the
Auction block

(Brathwaite, 1973)

The preceding extract from Brathwaite’s (1973) poem *Trade Winds*, provides a historical synopsis and critique of the well documented forcible removal of West Africans by European slave owners, who later shipped the enslaved people to the Caribbean resulting in “dominantly black communities” in this region (Murdoch, 2009). According to Black (1983), Africans were taken to Jamaica from West Africa by Spaniards prior to 1517. Pointing to the stripping of identity that was involved in this inhumane practice, Fergus (2013) explained that “on the auction blocks the new arrivals were sold as cattle; this degradation was followed by branding them with the names of proprietors’ estates and imposing new personal names that also applied to plantation cattle or social rejects” (p.13).

Slavery in Jamaica first began with the Spaniards who landed in the island in 1494 after Christopher Columbus, through what was perceived by some researchers as his capitalistic ambitions (Murdoch, 2009) to find a new trading route to India, accidentally landed in the Caribbean. This occurred because he believes that he would arrive in India by sailing westward (Augier, Gordon, Hall & Reckord, p.1969). The first inhabitants of Jamaica were native Indians called Arawaks and Caribs who were brutally exterminated by the Spaniards who later took Africans from West Africa (Augier, Gordon, Hall & Reckord, 1969; Black, 1983; Diptee, 2010). When the British conquered Jamaica from the Spaniards in 1655, they continued slavery which was not abolished until 1838. Providing insights on the increasing numbers of West Africans taken to
Jamaica during slavery, Warner-Lewis (2002) reported that “between 1673 and 1703 the population of African slaves grew from ten thousand to forty-five thousand” (p.89). Murdoch (2009) also reported that during the period of 1680–1786, 610,000 newly arrived enslaved Africans were sent to Jamaica from a total of 2,130,000 Africans imported to the Americas. Additionally, between the periods 1701 to 1801, Diptee (2010) reported that an estimated 1,090,000 Africans (women, men, and children) were taken from Africa to Jamaica.

The Caribbean and the South are connected through a shared history of slavery leading some researchers to argue that it is important to probe further into the link between these territories (Burnard & Hart, 2012; Smith & Cohn, 2004). For example, according to Harrison (2006), “the interrelations between South Carolina and the Caribbean are integral to understanding the multidimensional social and cultural history of the South” (p.9). Citing historical links between the two regions, she discussed the transmission of emancipation messages during slavery, from the Caribbean (e.g. Haiti) to the South, the movement of the Black Loyalists, during the Revolutionary Wars, from the South to Caribbean regions such as Bahamas and Jamaica and the socio-cultural, political and economic relationships between the Caribbean and Southern states such as Louisiana and Florida. Also establishing a connection between the Caribbean and the U.S. South, Waters (1999) noted that enslaved people were often seasoned in the West Indies and then shipped to the U.S. Additionally, Dunn (1971) reported that European Planters from the West Indies were instrumental in founding a new colony and introducing slavery in South Carolina. He explained that these planters came from various Caribbean islands such as Jamaica, St. Kitts and Barbados, which had the highest percentage of planters
migrating from the Caribbean to this new colony. Some of the reasons for these planters’ migration according to him, included disease conditions and overcrowding in the smaller Caribbean islands. Further punctuating the connection between the Caribbean and South Carolina between 1669 and 1737, Dunn (1971) noted that during this period half of the states’ governors originated in the islands.

**The Caribbean transnational conceptions of race/racism.**

As I bid farewell to friends in Jamaica in the process of leaving for the U.S., I was greeted with advice from two different people. At church, one of my friends, no doubt drawing from the narratives she heard about the South, said to me “be careful of racism in the South,” and at work, another friend remarked, “You will be alright in the South because you are light skinned.” Now reflecting on these statements I realized that they represented two different perceptions of race that seems to be part of the discourse in the Caribbean. One reflecting the belief that having a lighter skin tone does not matter in the racialized society I was entering while the other believed that the privilege enjoyed by some light skinned women (mixed with class) in Jamaica would buffer me from racial prejudice in the new context.

The different conceptions of race in my preceding vignette, reflect what scholars (Hall, 2010; Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1999) have observed about transnational understanding of race and racism in the Caribbean context. Since this research will focus on Afro-Caribbean mothers ethnic/racial socialization of their children in the U.S. shaped by their own perception of themselves, race and racism, this section of the literature
review will explore how race and racism is perceived in the Caribbean context to provide insight on how this experience might inform the world view of these immigrant mothers.

While Waters (1999) acknowledged that the Caribbean and the South share a similar history of slavery, she also noted that some important differences should not be ignored especially in the attempt to comprehend how race operates in the two regions. She explained that in the Caribbean, Black people were in the majority since several slave plantations had absentee landlords who preferred to remain in Europe but in the U.S. the white planters outnumbered the enslaved people. The social construction of race was another critical area where she felt that there were notable differences between the Caribbean and the U.S. In the former she asserted that race might be linked to class and different shades of color while the latter race was mainly defined by a Black-White binary. In congruence with her perspective, Foner (2001) explained that:

The very notion of who is considered black also differs in the West Indies. Whereas in the U.S. the category “black” includes those who range from very dark- to very light-skinned, in the West Indies blackness is a matter of ancestry, skin color, hair type, facial features, and socioeconomic status. People defined as “black” in the U.S. belong to different groups in the West Indies, where there is a keen consciousness of shade—the lighter, the better (p.12).

Waters (1999) also noted differences between the Caribbean and the U.S. in terms of slavery, was the emancipation of enslaved people. She pointed out that in the U.S. enslaved were emancipated after a Civil War resulting in the defeat of the planters and the crumbling of plantations followed by 100 years of a socio-political system of exclusion of Blacks and deprivation of privileges enjoyed by the whites in the South. On
the other hand, she explained that after the enslaved people in the Caribbean were emancipated, some of these formerly enslaved people continued to work for planters alongside indentured servants from places such as India and many of them were able to acquire land resulting in the growth of peasantry. Painting a picture of the differences between the struggles against social injustice in the Caribbean and the U.S. Waters (1999) made the following remark:

In the Caribbean the struggle against injustice has often been perceived as a struggle against colonial exploitation, anticolonialism and antiracism are very much intertwined for Caribbean people. Racial domination and the struggle for racial equality in the U.S. had more immediate and personal targets” (p.33).

Her juxtaposition of Afro-Caribbean and African Americans social justice struggles in their various socio-cultural contexts, centered on the idea that Black people from diverse backgrounds might perceive and experience race and racism differently. It is in this vein that Lewis (2009) suggested that “race must be defined and explored as a transnational and multidimensional social construct” (p.1003) this she believed could foster the kind of “cross-cultural engagements” (p.1003) needed to advance the fight for human rights. She particularly emphasized the need for deeper probing into the experiences of Black immigrants and a movement away from the notion of “authentic blackness” (p.1009) which seems to ignore diverse Black American experiences.

Coleman-King (2014) in her book entitled The (Re-) Making of a Black America Tracing the Racial and Ethnic Socialization of Caribbean American Youth also argued that a transnational perspective on blackness is needed because it will “allow us to move away from deterministic and static notions of blackness to incorporate a wider array of
diasporic realities” (p. 10). Making an argument for the need to probe further into how transnational relations might impact immigrant identity formation in their host country, Lewis (2009) also explained that personal histories and experiences might affect how Afro-Caribbean identify themselves and perceive issues of race in the U.S. In alignment to her argument about a deeper understanding of Black Immigrant experiences, Hintzen & Rahier (2013) contended that these immigrants’ presence in the U.S. have resulted in a disruption of the meaning of blackness, as some people might view it, that should not be left unexplored in scholarly research especially given the globalized world in which we now live.

Pessar (2013) argued that a limiting factor in some research on immigration is the over simplification of the identity formation of immigrants in the U.S. resulting in a failure to realize the complex hybrid identities and the new understandings of their blackness that some immigrants might develop in their host country. He offered instead a nuanced understanding of blackness in research that includes the transnational contexts of these immigrants. According to Charles (2013), Caribbean immigrants might view race differently because of the socio-historical contexts of their home country. He explained that although skin color was a factor in the development of Haiti and some other Caribbean islands, race relations were fluid due to the ways in which Plantation societies were formed in those locations. According to him, a combination of skin color and class often play a role in the classification of people in these regions rather than the binary classification that he experienced in the U.S. Therefore, he asserted that Caribbean Immigrants’ perception of blackness, drawn from prior experiences in their home
country, can serve as a framework for arriving at new understandings of blackness in their host country.

Like Charles (2013), Olwig (2007) in her ethnographic research study of three Caribbean families, mentioned that color and class were very much a factor in the social classification of people in British West Indies. She noted that operating in these islands were “social technologies of control tied to notions of inherited social positions based on a system of racial inequality, as well as more recently introduced colonial social technologies of citizenship linked to the British middle-class culture of individual improvement and achievement” (p.30). She also articulated that the Caribbean immigrants often enter Western countries expecting that the ideals of meritocracy will help them to climb the social ladder and become “respectable citizens” (p.30), but instead they encounter unanticipated racial discrimination which impacts how they view themselves in this new context. For instance, in the face of “racial othering” (p.4) Parascandola (2005) explained that some Caribbean Immigrants living in Harlem during the 1920s and 30s chose to align themselves with African Americans because of their collective struggle against racism. In his book on the achievements of Anglophone Caribbean Immigrants in the Harlem Renaissance, he highlighted the social justice work of Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, two Jamaican immigrants who aligned themselves with African Americans to address the injustices they were facing. He explained that during the New Negro movement of the 1920s, Caribbean immigrants represented twenty-five percent of the people living in Harlem and that Marcus Garvey, as a member of this immigrant group, significantly contributed to the fight for social justice in America for example, through his Universal Negro Improvement and African
Communities League (UNIA), which he described as the “largest Black movement in America to that time” (p.51), the Negro World newspaper and a shipping company called the Black Star Liner. Parascandola (2005) also explicated that Claude McKay as a Caribbean poet, essayist and writer, was a prominent member of the Harlem Renaissance through his literary work which, like other Caribbean Immigrant writers, focused on race, migration and language. According to him “the forceful messages of these Caribbean immigrants, so unprepared for what they found in America, helped to raise a powerful voice of protest” (p.34).

**Colorism in the Caribbean.** As Charles (2013) alluded to, the complexities surrounding race and class in the Caribbean is seen by some researchers as intricately linked to its history of slavery and colonialism. For instance, colorism is seen as one of the symptoms of the race and class stratification that existed during and after slavery. Adding to the discourse on colorism in the Caribbean, Brown-Glaude (2007) discussion on the practice of bleaching in the island further revealed the connection between race and class that seem to be pervasive there. She noted that “constructs of beauty in Jamaica have historically been determined by one’s proximity to whiteness and, as such brownings are perceived as more desirable than their dark-skinned counterparts” (p.40) which she believed is the subliminal message sent in local advertisements and the selection of lighter skinned beauty queens to represent Jamaica. Hence, she asserted that some Jamaicans might choose to bleach to acquire social capital. However, Charles (2003) suggested that bleaching does not result from self-hate but from a miseducation that “the only standard of beauty is the one defined by European ideals” (p. 726). In this vein, the literature in the field indicates that practices of colorism in the Caribbean are a
direct result of the region’s slavery legacy. For example, unpacking his argument on the creation of West Indian identity between the periods 1945-1971, Robotham (1998) explained that this historical legacy led to the notion that “white is on top of brown, which is on top of black” (p.308). He further explained that this colonial color bar led to deficit perspectives about blackness and the belief in the superiority of whiteness which greatly influenced the formation of postcolonial identities. Illustrating how this mindset impacted the social choices that Caribbean people, at the onset of the postcolonial period, he detailed that the markers of “respectability” were seen as:

The ability to speak so-called Queen’s English; to marry ‘right’ so as to lighten the skin of the children and thereby enhance their chances to achieve upward cultural mobility and to translate this to social mobility where possible; to have ‘pretty hair’ and a ‘cool’ complexion; to adopt a pseudo-British manner (p.311). In her auto-ethnography, Neegan (2008) recounted similar experiences with colorism growing up in Jamaica. For instance, she explained that “some family members treated me as inferior vis à vis lighter-skinned relatives” (p.274). Additionally, Muir (2013) noted in his memoir that “because my mother, Edna Aaron, was darker than my father’s fair-skinned mother, Mrs. Laura Ward, called Gangang by her grandchildren, she was implacably opposed to the marriage of Edna to her son, who could pass for white, and treated Mama as a servant she disliked” (p.xi).

**Colorism and Jamaican women.** As Muir’s memoir indicated the practice of colorism affected the treatment of Jamaican women. According to Rowe (2009) in 1955, the racialization of Jamaican women was ironically evident in the “Ten Types” (p.43) female beauty competition in the country that featured ten different female winners of
various skin tones or shades. She explained that this was done in an attempt to establish Jamaica as a multi-racial country, and to include women of different skin tones particularly darker skin women who were previously excluded. Thus, the competition resulted in ten winners from ten different skin shades. Below are the titles and skin shades:

Miss Ebony-A Jamaican girl of black complexion
Miss Mahogany-A Jamaican girl of cocoa-brown complexion
Miss Satinwood-A Jamaican girl of coffee-and-milk complexion
Miss Golden Apple-A Jamaican girl of peaches-and-cream complexion
Miss Apple Blossom-A Jamaican girl of European parentage
Miss Pomegranate- A Jamaican girl of white-Mediterranean parentage
Miss Sandalwood-A Jamaican girl of pure Indian parentage
Miss Lotus- A Jamaican girl of pure Chinese parentage
Miss Jasmine-A Jamaican girl of part Chinese parentage
Miss Allspice-A Jamaican girl of part Indian parentage. (p.44)

Rowe (2009) asserted that these beauty titles were problematically divided the Jamaican population into categories, relegating the majority dark skinned women to a mere fraction of these categories. Thus pointing specifically to the problem of colorism she argued that “the ‘Ten Types’ competition replaced race with a gendered ideology of color in which brownness symbolically desensitized racial confrontation and blackness was marginalized” (p.53).

Race in Jamaica. In order to provide a nuanced understanding of the socio-historical context from which the Jamaican immigrant mothers emerged, this section of
the literature review will provide a brief overview of the issues surrounding race in Jamaica which some researchers believe might account for the differences in how some Jamaican immigrants view themselves and race in the U.S. (Butterfield, 2004; Johnson, 2008; Vickerman, 1999, Waters, 1999; Lorick-Wilmot, 2010).

Dear Editor,

The issues of colour, class and racial prejudice and injustice are still with us in Jamaica as it is in America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and across the globe. (Plummer, 2014)

Jamaica has overcome the crippling effects of racism since gaining Independence in 1962, according to former mayor of Montego Bay, Shalman Scott. Describing the period from slavery to Independence as a ‘long and tedious struggle against racism’, Mr. Scott said the island has managed to incorporate its racial diversity into the development of the country (Sanford, 2002, JA Has Overcome Racism, para. 1)

As the preceding letter to the editor and newspaper report reveal, there are racial-ideological complexities in Jamaica resulting in “ambivalence and ambiguity” (Alleyne, 2005, p. 194) concerning the perception of race. Jamaica’s local media discussions surrounding race often indicate that some Jamaicans believe that racism is still a factor in our society (Charles, 2013; Espeut, 2010). On the other hand, other Jamaicans believe that there are those who believe that it is a thing of the past, (Alleyne, 2005; Paul, 2009; Vickerman, 1999) therefore influencing their perception that it has little or no bearing on their daily lives today. The conflicts and contradictions between these two viewpoints, according to some researchers (Brown-Glaude, 2007; Kasinitz, 1992; Parascandola,
Plantation societies in Jamaica and the racial stratification. Several researchers asserted that the social meaning of blackness in the U.S. and the Caribbean are different (Foner, 2001; Johnson, 2000; Waters, 1999). While elaborating on the notion of a difference between interpretations of blackness in these countries, Vickerman (1999) claimed that blackness in the former is linked to a continuum of more pervasive negative stereotypes while in the latter the stigma associated with being black is not as pervasive and it is not a complete hindrance to social mobility. Hence, he argued that Black immigrants upon arrival in the U.S. often derive new understandings of what it means to be black. He also postulated that there is often this difference between how Jamaicans view themselves and how some outsiders might see them because of the contradictions surrounding race in their society. He provided the following backdrop to these inconsistencies:

This society has defined race so broadly that the exact meaning of racial designations is subject to a good deal of negotiation; and, overall, has been quite racially conscious, yet strong social norms prohibiting race thinking have effectively convinced many in the population that race is not a factor in Jamaican society” (p.26).

Exploring the reasons for the contradictions on issues of race in the Jamaican society he examined a classic model (Figure 2.2) detailing racial relations during slavery. This model, he suggested, revealed a social system built on race and class, with the white
planters on top, the colored or mixed race people in the middle, and the large black slave population at the bottom. Below is my illustration of the model as he described it:

![Diagram of Jamaica’s Slavery Three Tiered Social Structure](Vickerman, 1999)

In discussing this pyramid, Vickerman (1999) explained that the social system is not as simple as it appears because “internal differentiation based on occupation and race characterized each segment, and the society afforded individuals some latitude for defining the latter” (p.27). In this regard, he explained that variations of color and “occupation” within each segment of the pyramid influenced the level of privilege one received. According to Henke (2001), the plantation system first started out with a class system with only planters and their staff but later a middle class developed with freed people, filling occupations such as midwives and artisans. He also noted that the lighter skinned enslaved women worked in the Great house on the plantations. Detailing how class and race functioned after Jamaica received its independence in 1962, Vickerman (1999) pointed out that the gaining of political power and economical procurement by the majority black people in the society resulted in their opportunities for upward mobility giving them a sense that class, not race, is the cause of conflicts between social groups.
even though the white and brown elites still had most of the wealth in the country. His arguments coincided with the following 2010 Jamaican Gleaner newspaper commentary presented by Peter Espeut, a Jamaican sociologist and human development consultant:

There are many people who claim racism in Jamaica is a thing of the past, but that what we see now is lots of class prejudice. They must have their heads buried in the sand, for racism is alive and well in Jamaica. I can understand why many people would think so. Ever since slavery, there has been a strong link between race and class in Jamaica, and maybe the two have become confused. For it was the Europeans (the whites) who owned the land and their African slaves (the blacks). Thereafter, in Jamaica, the 'haves' have been light-skinned while the 'have-nots' have been dark skinned. Emancipation, the 176th anniversary of which we celebrated last Sunday, may have made slaves legally free, but it did not break the link between colour and class in Jamaica (Espeut, 2010, A Legacy of Racism, para 1-3)

Concurring with Espeut’s (2010) and Vickerman’s (1999) account of Jamaica’s history of stratification by color, Clarke (2006) also detailed that during the 18th-century social status was closely correlated to color. He explained that mixed race people were particularly given voting privileges depending on how light they were in skin tone which resulted in the practice of people deliberating attempting to “raise their color” through interbreeding with lighter skinned people.

Alleyne (2005), noted that the racial division in white, brown and black which began during the plantation system, developed into the class divisions of upper, middle and working classes. He also asserted that although the basic color division still exists in
Jamaica, some blacks are able to climb the social ladder into middle and upper classes. However, he pointed out only a few black people are able to accomplish this shift in social status, and the movement is very slow. Additionally, he explained that perceptions about the correlation between race and social mobility in Jamaica are divided. Some Jamaicans, according to him, believe that race is not a factor because by acquiring a good education they can obtain economic success. Conversely, he noted that “there is also the persistent perception that, regardless of the economic status of a black person, he or she does not belong, or cannot rightly aspire to, the highest echelons of the social order” (p.193). He further explained that, though not a widespread notion, some people associate their poverty with being black especially those who live in the tourist resort. Like Vickerman (1999) and Thomas (2004) he argued that while the Jamaican motto “Out of Many One People” seem to promote ethnic unity it also seems to “represents some degree of denial of, and distancing from, the concrete reality of the dominance of black in the ethnic composition” (p.194).

According to Johnson (2005), the “non-racial framework for nationhood,” (p.160) served as a means of minimizing conflicts amongst the different ethnic (example, Indians, Chinese and Jews) groups during Jamaica’s early nation-building years. However, she argued that there also exists a “rival framework for understanding nationhood” (p.190) constructed through the African diaspora, Afro-Caribbean diaspora, and various transnational activities. For example, she postulated that two groups in Jamaica that helped to sustain this alternative framework are the maroons (freedom fighter) and the Rastafarians (an anti-colonialism spiritual group members) who celebrate Jamaica’s African roots (Lewis, 2014) while calling for changes to Eurocentric practices in the
Jamaican society (Cooper, 1995). She also postulated that these groups along with the black power movements in the 1960s and 1970s represented efforts to foster Black Nationalist sentiments in Jamaica that significantly challenged the government’s national nonracial agenda. However, Lewis (2014) explained that the Black Power movement in Jamaica which began on October 16, 1968, aimed to address racial discrimination and other legacies of colonialism including the “negative stereotyping of Africa, and the internalization of self-hate” (p. 55) still prevalent in the country even after independence in 1962.

Contemporary discourse on race and racism in Jamaica point to the belief held by some that the country still wrestles with colorism as a form of internalized racism. For instance, Francis’ (2014) newspaper report entitled “Racist’ textbook draws ire of parents, educators”, revealed that some Jamaica parents and teachers are aware of the impact these practices can have on children. The report showed parents’ objection to a primary school textbook that attributes beauty to being light skinned and closer to European features. Below is an extract of the report including comments from Dr. Sonjah Stanley Niaah, a senior lecturer:

A troubling section of the book, which has some up in arms, reads: Nita has brown eyes and neatly trimmed eyelashes. Her hair is long and black and is always neatly combed. A round face with a slender nose and brown complexion make her pretty and likable…This is of concern to us because we don't see in this text, even in the use of adjectives, some kind of balance. If it is, that beauty, what is pretty and what is likable, are being associated with features that are European,
this is exactly what we are trying not to have happen in our country (Francis, 2014, ‘Racist Textbook Draws Ire of Parents, Educators, para 3 & 5)

This newspaper report is consistent with the continued discussion in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean about issues surrounding race, culture, and class that still trouble the region (Bauer & Thompson, 2006). For instance, in 2013 Dominican Republic was accused of practicing racism and xenophobia by some newspaper reports in the area, for passing a 2013 law that denied citizenship to children of Haitians parents who were born in the island. According to an editorial report by Jamaica’s Gleaner Company, “the court held that anyone born in the Dominican Republic after 1929, whose parents were not citizens of the country, are themselves not Dominican”. Although this law also applies to other foreigners, the report asserted that Haitians are more likely to suffer the greatest disadvantage because, over the 84 years, a significant number of Haitians cross the border of their island to work as migrant workers in the Dominican Republic. Calling this act a “racist agenda” the editorial suggested that the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) should address this issue so that the human rights in Dominica are protected.

**Identity and Afro-Caribbean Immigrants in the U.S.**

**The identity of First Generation Afro-Caribbean immigrants.**

All immigrants, as they become familiar with the complex racial, ethnic, and cultural tapestry of the U.S., must reassess their identity. But for Black immigrants like West Indians here …the ultimate challenge for these immigrants is to develop the ability to move between race and ethnicity, to acknowledge and cope with their double status of Black and foreign (Johnson, 2000, p.66)
As articulated in the preceding quote several researchers in the field asserted that Black immigrants with a different world view and perception of what it means to be Black (Benson, 2006; Foner, 1985, 2001; Johnson, 2008; Waters, 1999) often acquired new understandings of their identity in the American context mainly because they experienced the “racial othering” (Parascandola, 2005, p.4) associated with being part of “America’s most consistently oppressed minority group” (Kasinitz, 1992, p.32).

However, Parascandola (2005) asseverated that some Caribbean immigrants might not choose a single identity. Building on Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic as a diverse group of Black people, he explained that Caribbean immigrants often chose multiple identities, for instance, “describing themselves as Black, as West Indian or Caribbean, as British, as Jamaican” (p.4). Kasinitz (1992) explained that the Caribbean immigrants who entered the U.S. during racial segregation were more likely to choose between their ethnic and racial identities but those who came after 1965 had a better chance of maintaining both identities because of transnational opportunities which made it easier for them to connect with their homeland. He explained that these Black immigrants “often express both a deep sense of kinship with other African Americans and a heartfelt urge to retain and perhaps institutionalize their ethnic distinctiveness” (p.37).

In her discussion on Black immigrants in the U.S. particularly in the Boston area, Johnson (2000) highlighting the complexities, associated with their identity choices explicated that they often faced ‘double invisibility” (p.57) in this new context because of their national and racial identities. She also elaborated that some of these Black Immigrants in an effort to avoid negative stigmas associated with their blackness sought
to separate themselves from African Americans. However, consistent with the notion that some of them chose to maintain multiple identities she also explained that they often retained their ethnic identity while developing new identities in their host country. According to her, “they eventually projected four main ethnic identities: their island/national identity; a pan-West Indian identity; a British identity; and, in many cases reluctantly, a Black American identity” (p.61).

Waters (1999) in her research on the Black identities of West Indian Immigrants in Brooklyn, New York, noted that they regularly negotiated their racial or ethnic identities based on the situation they faced. For example, from her interviews with some West Indians, she explained that they often racially identified themselves in situations in which they experienced racial discrimination. However, she cautioned against assuming that they were choosing one identity over the other. She argued that Americans, tend to “misunderstand the strong regional, national, or ethnic identities of West Indians as a denial of racial identity” (p.64). Similarly, Bauer and Thompson (2006) in their research on Jamaicans in North America and Britain argued that some of them did not choose to relinquish their ethnic identity even when they assumed other identities. They further explained that “not just the social structure, but also how people feel about it, which shapes evolving identities” (p.108). By this, they mean that Black immigrants like the Jamaicans in their research might make identity choices based on their personal experiences (positive or negative) in their host country. Several other researchers (Foner, 2001; Rogers, 2001) also stated that West Indian immigrant tends to maintain both ethnic and racial identities, but one might become more salient given their social or political circumstances.
According to Benson (2006), racial identities are “complex constructs with multiple dimensions” (p.224). Hence, in his research on the racial identities of Black immigrants in the U.S., he emphasized the importance of looking at two dimensions of racial identity that he termed racial group identification and racial group consciousness because he believed they would glean more nuanced understanding of how Black immigrants make sense of their racialization and respond to it in their host country. He defined both terms as follows: “racial group identification is the degree to which black migrants identify with other blacks in the U.S., and racial group consciousness is the meaning black migrants attach to their U.S racial identity” (p.221). His analysis of the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality (MCSUI) household adult surveys gathered from Black immigrants between the periods 1992-1994 in the regions of Boston, Atlanta, Detroit and Los Angeles revealed that perception of race was “shaped both by the skills and ideologies migrants bring with them and how they are treated within the U.S. context” (p.240). He further explained his findings as revealing that length of stay influenced Black immigrants’ development of a shared racial identity with African Americans, but their interpretations of their American racial identity varied according to their origin.

Benson (2006) noted that shared racial identity between Black immigrants and African Americans increase over time, because of their increased exposure to racial discrimination. He explained that “after years of being subjected to the same type of racial discrimination as native-born blacks…black migrants also come to see their skin color as a crucial factor that shapes how they are received in America society” (p.243). For instance, Bell (2013) in her article entitled Bearing Black, explained that while living
in Jamaica she was seen as a privileged “browning” or light-skinned woman because of her skin color and social class, however in the U.S. as part of being raced, she quickly learned that she was perceived as an “inferiorized black woman” (p.123). It is this kind of racialized experience that Johnson (2008) believes might influence Black immigrants’ construction of “counter identities” (p.92) as they attempt to negotiate their identities to adjust to their new social realities. She asserted that in order to escape the “master status” associated with blackness in America some black immigrants might choose to maintain the “non-racial distinctiveness” (p.92) tied to their homeland. However, what might also be influential in their identity formation in their host country is the Black consciousness in the Caribbean that existed between the periods 1972-1980 because during those years, there were stronger identification with Africa as seen in the support of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and reggae music that addressed social injustice in the world (Robotham, 1998).

Second generation Afro-Caribbean Immigrant Children in the U.S. Waters (1999) defined second generation West Indian immigrant children as children born in the U.S. to West Indian immigrant parents. Henke (2001) described these immigrant children as caught between two worlds; their parents’ world connected to their homeland and the U.S. where they live. Hence, in his view, this in-betweenness is at the crux of the identity crisis they might face in this context. According to Awokoya & Clark (2008) “Black immigrant youth, racial and ethnic identities are fluid and complex. Thus, many do not strictly identify with the rigid and dichotomous Black/White constructs through which racial and ethnic identities are based in the U.S.” (p.50). Several researchers in the field (Foner, 2011, Matthews & October-Edun, 2014; Rong & Brown, 2002; Vickerman,
asserted that it is important to pay attention to the identities that they might form because while their first generation immigrant parents might likely maintain an ethnic identity, because they were born in America they have the option to move away from this identity to embrace a racial one, resulting in them becoming more stigmatized in the society (Foner, 2011; Kirkwood, 2002; Rong & Brown, 2002). For example, Vickerman (2001) explained that “while Jamaicans do not associate race with achievement, Americans tend to view blacks as low achievers” (p.210). In line with this argument, Henke (2001) asserted that the issue of race “becomes the most important component in the second generation’s quest for identity” (p.130). Hence, it is believed by researchers like Waters (1999), that it is important to focus on this group’s socialization practices as a means of gaining insights on how they might respond to the world in which they live. In her research on West Indian Immigrants in New York, although she found that peers and schools had some influence on how second-generation children self-identified, she noted that the home messages that the ethnic-identified immigrant children received from their parents influenced on how they self-identified. In explaining this she noted that:

The social networks of parents also influenced the type of identity the children developed. Regardless of social class, parents who were involved in ethnic voluntary organizations or heavily involved in their church seemed to instill a strong sense of ethnic identity in their children (p. 290).

The ethnic identity, however, is one of three identities that Waters (1999) asserted that these second-generation children might develop, for instance, she suggested that they could develop an American or immigrant identity. She explained, as mentioned earlier, that those who develop an American identity will assimilate into the African American
population whereas those who develop an immigrant identity (new immigrants) will maintain an identity that is tied to their homeland in a bid to escape the racial and ethnic identity labels ascribed to Black immigrants in America. The latter identity she noted is different from the development of an ethnic identity in that they tend to maintain a more neutral approach to race relations in America. However, she argued that these identities that the second-generation immigrant children could develop are not fixed but fluid and might vary depending on the context in which they live. In congruence, with this view, Foner (2011) postulated that “the place where the children of immigrants grow up and live shapes how they come to see themselves. Context matters” (p.251). Also describing the different contexts that might shape the identities of 2nd generation Black immigrant children, Awokoya & Clark (2008), argued that these immigrant youths are constantly exposed to pressures from their Black peers to prove that they are “Black enough” (p.53), from their ethnic communities to excel academically and develop a “pan-Black” (p.53), identity while also facing deficit perspectives from some of their teachers about their ability to excel in schools because of their skin color.

The Black Family as a raced institution. Speaking of the family as a “race institution” (p.369), Zinn (2010) asserted that in the globalized world that we live, race is “a social system of inequality, an axis of power, a focus of political struggle and a fundamental force in shaping families everywhere” (p.357). In this sense, some research scholars assert that it might be useful to learn how different families perceive race and respond to living in a racialized context. However, Afro-Caribbean immigrant families remain invisible and understudied in research (Ferguson, Bornstein & Pottinger, 2012; Fournillier, McLean & George, 2013; Jean-Marie, 2014; Rong & Brown, 2001; Wiggan
& Walrond, 2013). Hence, little is known about how they might be socializing their children to deal with the “double barriers of xenophobia and racism” (Rong & Preissle, p.132) that they face in the society and how they might be playing a significant role in shaping their children’s ethnic-racial identities (Neblett, Rivas-Drake & Umanza-Taylor, 2012) to cope with these challenges. As leaders in the migration to the U.S. (Foner, 2001, López, 2002), mainly for socio-economic reasons, research scholars suggest that they often feel compelled to make decisions about how to socialize their children to cope with the racialized context in which they now live (Reynolds, 2005). Making the argument that race should be a central consideration in exploring the experiences of Black immigrants, Rong and Brown (2002) argued that “researchers need to examine the role of structural assimilation and racial hierarchy in Black immigrants’ identity formation and explore the issues related to Black immigrants’ perceptions of and strategies to cope with racism” (p.252).

From this vantage point Hewett (2009) also maintained that social barriers associated with race and ethnicity, “prevent immigrant mothers from sharing their stories as well as the need for them” (p.122). In this sense, Hilliard (1995), argued that it would be important to consider the “historical and cultural milieu within which parenting takes place, and which gives parenting its definition and character” (, p.50). However, although there is a significant body of research on mothers from other non-white groups, some researchers noted that there is still a very limited research on Afro-Caribbean mothers (Rong & Brown, 2001) who could provide a nuanced understanding of their experiences of living and raising their children in a racially stratified society (Reynolds, 2005). For instance, Csizmadia et al. (2013) suggested that there is a need for researchers to learn
about how non-white parents like these ethnic-racially socialize their children in order to support their development.

**Black Mothers and the Socialization of their Children**

“For women of color, the subjective experience of mothering, motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial, ethnic communities—one does not exist without the other.” (Collins, 1994, p.47)

In the preceding quote, from a Black feminist standpoint, Collins (1994) argued that mothering is shaped by the socio-cultural issues experienced by mothers in their daily lives. For instance, she explained that women of color often have to deal with the challenges of helping their children develop a positive racial identity in a racialized society that discriminates against black people. The discourse which follows will explore how some Afro-Caribbean mothers are raising their children in a racialized context, particularly the ethnic-racial messages that they might be transmitting to their children in order to cope with the challenges they might encounter.

**The matrifocality and Afro-Caribbean family.** The term matrifocal was coined by Smith (1996) to refer to families with mothers as the center of the household even if the fathers are present. By using this term he was referring to “women in their role as mothers who come to be the focus of relationships rather than the head of the household as such” (p.42). Several researchers asserted that Afro-Caribbean families who are usually matrifocal in nature, (Chamberlain, 2003; Crawford, 2004; Navara & Lollis, 2009; Plaza, 2000) played a pivotal role in shaping the ethnic identities of their Afro-Caribbean immigrant children. Matrifocal families are defined by Navara and Lollis (2009) as “ones in which women occupy a central position while not necessarily
implying female domination over males” (p.443). They explained that this does not mean that fathers are always absent, but that family life centers on these mothers. From their interviews with these adolescents, they discovered that in many of their participants’ family, the mother or grandmother played a pivotal role in the family. For example, one of their participants remarked, “my mother is the hub of the family” (p.448). They also found that these mothers or grandmothers were very instrumental in transmitting cultural practices such as cooking traditional Jamaican dishes for their children. Additionally, they learned that these immigrant women used storytelling to share their values, experiences and history to their children. In congruence, Yearwood (2001) also noted in her research on Jamaican immigrant child rearing practices, that a significant feature of their socializing practices was exposing their children to the culture, history, religious beliefs and values as a means of connecting these children to their home country. In addition to shaping their children’s ethnic identity, some research studies on Afro-Caribbean mothers also reveal that some might also help to develop their children’s racial identity as will be discussed in the following section.

Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers and their children in a racialized context.

“Race and racism also inform social constructions of black mothering and their mothering experience.” (Reynolds, 2005, p. 3427)

Reynolds (2005) conducted research on the identity, experiences and practices of forty-first, second and third generation Caribbean immigrant mothers (aged 19-81) living in London during 1996 and 1997, which revealed the challenges that mothers like these might experience while raising their Black children in a racialized context. Using a Black feminist framework, she argued that the Caribbean mothers used “child rearing
strategies to resist and respond to their marginalized and racialized location” (p. 246). She described the strategies they used as follows: a) preparing their children mentally to deal with racism b) monitoring of their children’s education c) celebration of Caribbean heritage and d) the “policing and monitoring of children in public spaces” (p.246). While she challenged a homogenous notion of mothering, she pointed out that there were some common themes among the mothers in her research. For example, she found that they often transmitted positive messages about their children’s racial identities that served as counter-narratives to the deficit perspectives of Black people in their society. Below is an example of an interview from one of her participants:

> When people say bad things about black people, that we’re muggers and robbers, for example, I tell them [children] to ignore it. You know they’re not talking about you, you know what you’re about. As long as you know that you have done nothing wrong, you can hold your head up high and have a sense of pride because black people have also achieved a lot of good things (p.1608).

In addition to explicitly talking to their children about racism, Reynolds (2005) also found that some of the mothers in her study also used the Black church as means of helping their children to deal with the challenges they might face because of their Black identity. She explained that for the first generation immigrant mothers this church was a “primary site of resistance” (p.1280).

**Racial Socialization**

Race not only plays a significant part in children’s socialization and in their academic pursuits, but also plays an important part in forming and transforming
adult’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, reflected in their parenting styles and intergenerational communication. (Rong & Brown, 2002, p.252)

Garrett and Baquedano-Lopez (2002) defined socialization as the “process through which a child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community” (p.339). Consistent with the views of Rong and Brown (2002) in the preceding quote, Hughes (2003) asserted that issues of race and racial socialization were particularly salient to families who have been marginalized by society, because of their experiences with discrimination in the society.

According to Lesane-Brown (2006), Black parents play an integral role in socializing their children about ‘the structural and psychological implications of race as a stratification status” (p.401). She also maintained that this is essential for these children’s mental and physical wellbeing. Also focusing on these children’s academic well-being, several researchers in the field argued that it is integral to focus on how children are socialized as a means of gaining insights about the identities that they might develop which could impact their learning in school (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002; Hymes, 1974; Nieto, 2002; Peele-Eady, 2011). While they agree that understanding socialization, in general, is necessary, other researchers in the area of social justice research also posited that it is of particular importance to focus on the racial socialization of Black children to learn how this might impact the construction of their racial identity, their perception of race or racism in their world (Barr & Neville, 2008; Joseph & Hunter, 2011; Lesane-Brown, 2006) and their development of a positive self-esteem (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002).
In their research on family relations, school attitude, and perception of racism in Caribbean and Filipino adolescents, Rousseau et al. (2009), asserted in order to construct effective programs that address discriminatory issues in the society it is important to focus on how immigrant families might influence how adolescent perceive these issues. Racial socialization, according to some researchers (Csizmadia, Kaneakua, Miller & Halgunseth, 2013) can have a positive impact on the development of children from non-white groups in America. The term racial socialization does not have a fixed definition because it is a “complex and multidimensional construct.” (Lesane-Brown, 2006, p.403). However, according to Barr and Neville (2008), racial socialization is “an important way in which parents prepare their children to negotiate inter-and intraracial interactions. It involves various strategies parents use to inform their children about their (a) personal and group identity, (b) intergroup and interpersonal relationships, and (c) social position” (p.131 &132). They also argued that racial socialization messages can have a positive psychological effect on children especially in areas such as self-esteem and academic performance. Additionally, they contended that there is a relationship between racial socialization and racial belief. For instance, they asserted that perception of racism, particularly “color-blind racial beliefs” (p.138) might be connected to how an individual was racially socialized. They also postulated that there is also a connection between “parents’ racial beliefs and their racial socialization behaviors” (p.145). In congruence with this view, Jackson, Bryan and Larkin (2014) asserted that in order to gain an understanding of the socializing practices of parents who are marginalized in the society, it is important to look particularly at how they perceive their family’s social position in the society.
Ethnic-Racial socialization messages. Several researchers developed categories or themes to describe the various messages that parents might transmit to their parents. For example, Rodriquez, McKay and Bannon (2008) in their research on racial socialization and how it impacts youth behavior, asserted that including racial socialization themes in research, such as spirituality and religious involvement is significant given the role that the church plays in the lives of African Americans. They explained that spiritual and religious coping messages are “rooted in the belief that religion and faith can help overcome negative life experiences, can promote prosocial involvement and internal coping” (p.38). Building on this idea, Lesane-Brown (2006) asserted that parents can transmit intentional or unintentional racial socializing messages verbally and non-verbally to their children. She also explained the following about verbal and non-verbal messages:

Verbal messages are communicated through direct conversations between parents and their children, and through indirect parental conversations that the child observes… take a variety of forms, including modeling cultural or ethnic behaviors…structuring children’s environment, or selectively reinforcing children’s behaviors (p.404).

In addition to this broader description of socializing messages, Hughes et al. (2006) coined the term ethnic-racial socialization and provided detailed descriptions of the messages associated with this term in order to encourage more cohesive discussions on racial socialization in the field. They argued that racial socialization and ethnic socialization are broad and non-specific terms used to refer to “the transmission from adults to children of information regarding race and ethnicity” (p.749). They argued that
more focused, descriptive and unambiguous terms should be used to discuss the ethnic and racial socialization of children in order for research findings to be more useful.

In looking at ethnic-socializing messages, Hughes et al. (2006) asserted that the following themes are often prevalent in research studies in this area: (1) cultural socialization (2) preparation for bias (3) promotion of mistrust and (4) egalitarianism and silence about race. The theme cultural socialization, according to them, refers to “parental practices that teach children about their racial or ethnic heritage and history; that promote cultural customs and traditions; and that promote children’s cultural, racial, and ethnic pride, either deliberately or implicitly” (p.749). Some examples of cultural socialization that they discussed include conducting history discussion within the family and encouraging children to speak their parents’ native tongue. They defined the theme, preparation for bias as parents’ efforts to make their children cognizant that discrimination exists in the society and to prepare them to deal with it. Promotion of mistrust was the theme that they used to refer to “practices that emphasize the need for wariness and distrust in interracial interactions. Mistrust may be communicated in parents’ cautions or warnings to children about other racial groups or in their cautions about barriers to success” (p.757). The theme egalitarianism and silence about race were used by them to refer to parents’ decision to focus more on individual abilities rather than group membership or to avoid discussing race with their children.

Ethnic-Racial socialization messages and Black males. According to Csizmadia, Kaneakua, Miller, and Halgunseth (2013), some parents might vary their ethnic-racial socialization messages according to the gender of the child. They explained that these parents might emphasize preparing their sons for racial discrimination in the
U.S. because of their perception that black men often experience more racial
discrimination in this society than women. In their research focusing on the racial
socializing practices of African American parents of young children, Caughy, Nettles and
Lima (2010), also found that there are variations in the kinds of ethnic-racial socialization
messages that parents of boys and girls emphasized in their home. They explained that
the parents of girls tended to focus on cultural socialization whereas those with boys
emphasized cultural socialization, discrimination, and promotion of mistrust. Likewise,
Thomas and Speight (1999) found in their research that parents with sons focused more
on sending socializing messages about negative stereotypes associated with their race and
providing strategies to deal with racial discrimination in the society. On the other hand,
they found that parents in the research tended to emphasize cultural pride messages in
their interactions with their daughters. Similar findings were discussed in Thomas and
Blackmon’s (2015) research on African American parents’ racial socialization after the
Travon Martin’s shooting incident. They discovered that 86.3% of the parents who
complete their questionnaire indicated that they worried more for their sons because they
believe they are at a greater risk of being discriminated against in the society.

**Ethnic-racial socialization and identity formation.** The literature in the field
reveals that several scholars believe that there is a connection between the ethnic-
socialization messages that children receive from their parents and the ethnic-racial
identity that they might develop (Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umana-Taylor, Hughes, 2012;
Hagelskamp, Way, & Foust, 2009). In congruence Peck, Brodish, Malanchuk, Banerjee
and Eccles (2014), noted that parent socializing messages tend to shape the later self-
concept of adolescents.
Joseph and Hunter (2011) in their research on the ethnic-racial socialization messages in the identity development of second-generation Haitians, also posited that the “type of ethnic-racial socialization message received…may impact the degree to which individuals explore or commit to a particular racial and ethnic identity” (p.347). In establishing a reason for focusing more on the identities of Black immigrants, they explained that these immigrants have separate ethnic and racial identities. According to them, this means for example, that Black immigrant children might receive different ethnic or racial messages from their parents. They also asserted that Black immigrants are at risk of being “dually stigmatized” (p.348) in the society, which means that they could face both racial and ethnic discrimination associated with these separate identities.

Adding a transnational dimension to research discourse on racial or ethnic identity development, “Anglin (2006) suggested that the different racial experiences of West Indian and other Black people in the African Diaspora, “may have profound implications for group socialization practices and racial/ethnic identity development” (p.458). Hence, she suggested that research must focus on the socialization practices and identity development of black people across ethnic groups to get a more comprehensive picture of how they operate in the different groups. She also emphasized a need to get a deeper understanding of how unique individual experiences might influence how people of African descent choose to self-identify since in her research on the connection between racial/ethnic self-labeling, group socialization and identity in people of African descent, she found that “the language used to label oneself is not only connected to group identity but also associated with specific socialization experiences” (p.462). In congruence with this view, Neblett, Rivas-Drake, Umanza-Taylor (2012), argued that given the racialized
society in which young people live, positive messages about their ethnic and racial identities could help them to feel “competent across multiple domains” (p.299). Also, explaining the importance of examining parents’ socialization practices and the identity formation of their children, Stevenson and Arlington (2013) asserted that learning particularly about the racial identity of an adolescent can help in providing insights on dealing with cultural diversity in schools. They explained that since all students might not identify as African American or live in a community with a high percentage of people from their racial group, it is important to learn how the particular context in which they live might impact their schooling experiences.

Identity and Learning

Nieto (2010) argued that “learning and achievement are not merely cognitive processes, but that learning needs to be understood in the broader context of the sociocultural and sociopolitical lives of students, teachers and schools” (p.49). Making a similar argument, several scholars argued that schools should be equitable spaces for second generation Black immigrant children because their success in American society hinges on their academic accomplishment in public schools (Alba & Waters, 2011; Portes & MacLeod, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, literature in the field of education indicate that like other children who are marginalized in this society, schools often do not meet their academic needs through a failure to recognize the multiple identities and cultural experiences they bring to their learning in the classroom (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Campano, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Matthews, 2014; Rong & Brown, 2002). For example, Campano (2007), in his research on immigrant children found that schools quickly teach them that their “realities don’t matter, except as a barrier
to learning” (p.15). This disconnect between students’ identities and school practices conflicts with the views of socio-cultural who contended that children’s cultural identities and learning are intricately linked (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, this section of the Literature review will focus on the connection between these two things and why some scholars believe it is important for educators to learn about the identities of all children including immigrant children to facilitate their learning in an equitable environment. However, rather than only focusing on multicultural details that underscore the connection between identities and learning, in general, the literature in this section will also explore how issues of race and ethnicity might complicate schooling for Black immigrant children.

**Socio-cultural perspectives on identity and learning.**

Educators need to recognize and accept each immigrant student’s own preferred identity, respecting their individual past experiences, and socio-cultural orientations. This recognition will promote children’s self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-belief in working and learning apart from what is dictated by the larger society (Rong & Brown, 2002).

Scholars like Rong and Brown (2002) who contend that students’ identity is connected to their learning in schools often draw from a socio-cultural perspective to illustrate how children’s outside experiences could provide them with multiple identities, funds of knowledge and experiences drawn from their socio-cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2002; Souto-Manning, 2013) which could be used by educators to build their self-esteem and maximize their performance in schools. Sociocultural theorists believe that there is a correlation between social interactions and the cognitive
development of children and as such the study of children should include a look at their social setting (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). They believe that this cognitive development is accomplished with the help of the competent expert (Vygotsky, 1978) in their communities. In addition, they strongly hold the view that these home experiences should be used as a bridge between old and new knowledge (Nieto, 1999). From this stance, immigrant children and their families are viewed as “competent others” in matters relating to their cultural experiences and as such they argue that these children should be given the opportunity to contribute to their own learning experiences (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Sociocultural scholars have argued that educators should create a space in the classroom for the exchange of ideas where everyone is simultaneously teachers and students (Nieto, 2002). However, Souto-Manning (2013) argued that deficit perspectives about immigrants that promote the notion that they are inferior and culturally deprived continue to be roadblocks to their learning. Therefore, she asserted that teachers of immigrant children in the U.S. must embrace culturally relevant teaching approaches that draw from students’ knowledge, identities, and experiences in the classroom.

**Conclusion to Chapter Two: Race, Black Immigrant Students, and Schooling**

A fitting conclusion to this chapter, which outlines my conceptual framework and reviews relevant literature, is a look at three issues that are ultimately foundational to this study: race, Black immigrant students, and schooling. Scholars have argued that the role that race and racism play in schools must be included in discourse on the education of Black immigrant children because of the racial hierarchy that exists in the U.S. which often limit the progress of children with African ancestry (Kirkwood, 2002; Mahoney & Matthews, 2014; Rong & Brown, 2002). For example, Kirkwood (2002) noted that some
Black Jamaicans students are often placed in ESOL classes despite the fact that English is their native language. She also maintained that their ethnic identity is often ignored in classrooms where educators view all Black students as belonging to a homogenous Black population, and she also expressed concern that these Jamaican students often become ignorant of their heritage because it is often de-emphasized by schools in America. Hence, she argued that to meet the academic needs of these students; their culture must be included in the curricula which she believed would help to address the absence of the history of the Caribbean and its connection to the U.S. in most History textbooks.

Adding to the discourse on the unequal education of Black immigrant children, Matthews and October-Edun (2014) asserted that some of the challenges that Afro-Caribbean children in New York often encounter, reflect similar problems that other black children face in a white dominant school system. For example, they noted that some of these children reported experiencing racism, ethnocentrism, and linguicism in schools which could derail their ability to perform well in school systems that do not provide “culturally relevant services” (p.137). This is what Adair (2014) called “cultural, racial and linguistic” disconnects (p.643) between immigrant children’s home and school. In her research article in which she examined whiteness and how it might impede positive relationships between immigrant families and schools in the U.S., she unveiled how race, particularly whiteness can influence some educators’ negative perception of immigrant children thereby impacting the kind of services that they receive in schools. Using critical race theory (CRT), she argued that “whiteness when maintained as a dominant, unquestioned perspectives prevent teachers from approaching immigrant families positively and equitably (p.645). According to her, she learned in her focus group
sessions with pre-service and assistant teachers, that positive relationships between immigrant families and educators were being hampered because some educators blamed the immigrant families for the negatives features of not only their town but also their school and did not have an intimate knowledge of the daily experiences of the immigrant families. Problematizing whiteness in schools of immigrant students, she argued that such negative attitudes could manifest themselves in the pedagogical practices of these educators. Hence, she contended that whiteness must be challenged to ensure that immigrant children are not deprived of equal educational opportunities.

Expounding on the problem associated with institutional racism, Albetini (2004) contended that racism in schools put all children from non-white groups at risk of failing in schools. For example, he explained that West Indian children also have to cope with various obstacles in their school and the society that African Americans also encounter on a daily basis because of their race. Like Henke (2001), he also asserted that West Indian immigrants often enter the U.S. with optimism, but this is challenged by negative expectations of school, failure to harness their abilities, and ignorance of their identities. Disagreeing with the notion that assimilation facilitates immigrants’ success in this new context, he maintained that West Indians who retain their cultural values are more likely to have better accomplishments. In his research on the level of mistrust among West Indian and Haitian middle school children, he found that fifty percent of them indicated racial distrust of teachers from the dominant group which he posited could indicate a need to address the psychosocial well-being of these students. To address this problem, he suggested that educators must engage in inclusive practices in their classroom which would give them a sense of belonging and positively impact their academic achievement.
Incongruence with Albertini (2004)’s argument that racism threatens the psychological well-being of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, Davies (2013) asserted that Black immigrant mothers must learn about how racism operates in the U.S. especially if they have sons who are at a greater risk of oppression in the society. In this vein, she argued that their “‘reading’ of racism” (p.181) in this society is important because it “is a system of dominance, a system of oppressive practices on these subordinated groups such that every aspect of their lives is affected (p.179). She further contended that this system is reproduced by the media and in the society affecting the lives of those who are living in the margins.

These issues all underlie the data and findings presented in this dissertation. With this foundation, the following chapter focuses on the research methodologies used to examine the questions grounding this study.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This section provides details about my research design and justification for using it in exploring Jamaican mothers and grandmothers’ ethnic-racial socialization of their second generation Jamaican immigrant son or grandson living in a southeastern state in the U.S. Using decolonizing (postcolonial) and critical race methodological constructs I have centered the voices and experiences of the participants through the use of a narrative inquiry and ethnopoetic approach. By employing these methodological constructs, I use their stories to break the silence in research on their marginalized experiences as Black female immigrants. From a Black feminist perspective, using their voices and knowledge to challenge the status quo is important because historically “oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group” (Collins, 2000, p.vii).

I commence my discourse about methodology by justifying my use of a qualitative design. Then I discuss the significance of a narrative inquiry approach in exploring the experiences of the Jamaican immigrant women and their son or grandson. This follows with a brief description of arts-based research practices in qualitative research and why I think such practices can be useful in focusing on participants’ experiences. From there, I discuss my use of ethno-poems as part of a crystallization methodology blending different epistemologies (scientific and arts based) together in ways that privilege the stories of the mothers and grandmothers in my research. It is my
overall intent to assert that by honoring and projecting their voices in the ethno-poems that I construct I might be able to draw attention to their identities and experiences to provide a nuanced understanding of who they are as individuals and shed light on how they attempted to cope with living in a racialized context.

Since one of my research aims is to move beyond homogenizing research that ignores diversity in the Black community, I focused on conducting a narrative inquiry to capture the stories of the Jamaican immigrant women. Using a critical race methodology I specifically explored the complexities they and their children experienced in schools and society because of their identities. Thus, through this research methodology, I attempted to provide researchers and educators with a nuanced understanding of their identities and experiences (Awokoya & Clark, 2008) to contribute to social justice research for Black immigrant children in U.S. public schools. Since they add to the heterogeneity of the Black student population currently being underserved by these institutions, learning about their stories or counter-stories could help educators to attend specifically to intra-group variations in constructing inclusive school curricula for all Black students who are racialized in school and society. Drawing from the critical race, Black feminist and counterspace perspectives I aimed to unveil the way the Jamaican immigrant women respond to the problem of racism in the society. In order to gain insights about the Jamaican immigrant women and their family this research sought to answer the following research questions.
Research Questions

1. How do the mothers and grandmothers perceive racism in the U.S? How do they choose to self-identify? What connection, if at all, exists between their perceptions of racism and how they choose to raise their children?

2. What ethnic-racial messages do they transmit to their children or grandchildren? What purposes do these messages serve?

3. What insights do the mothers’ narratives on the ethnic-racial socialization of their children or grandchildren provide about what social justice might look like for children from families like theirs?

Justification for a Qualitative Research Design

“Qualitative data tell a story” (Patton, 2002, p.47)

The challenge of those of us in the academy is not how to make those outside the academy more like us, but rather to recognize the “outside academy” identities that we must recruit for ourselves in order to be more effective researchers on behalf of people who can make use of our skills and abilities. We must learn to be ‘at home’ on the street corners and in the barrios, churches, mosques, kitchens, porches, and stoops of people and communities so that our work more accurately reflects their concerns and interests. Our challenge is to renounce our paternalistic tendencies and sympathetic leanings to move toward an empathic, ethical, and moral scholarship. (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005, p. 298).

As a Black Jamaican/Afro-Caribbean female researcher, with a history of colonial domination, I am guided by the belief, as articulated by Ladson-Billings & Donnor (2005), that research based on “empathic, ethical and moral scholarship” (p.298) should
focus on learning about people’s lived experiences and telling their stories accurately. Since it was my intention to gain insights about the Jamaican immigrant mothers’ ethnic-racial socialization of their children, as a means of learning about their identities and experiences in the U.S., I employed a qualitative inquiry approach in this research as opposed to a quantitative one. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative research is “a broad approach to the study of a social phenomenon. Its various genres are naturalistic, interpretive, and increasingly critical, and they typically draw on multiple methods of inquiry” (p.3). As scholars have argued, this approach is often useful for research who have been oppressed because it provides researchers’ with the opportunity to listen to the participants’ story in order to make their world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore a qualitative approach allowed me to provide rich socio-cultural contexts while exploring cultural nuances in participants’ conversations (Awokoya & Clark, 2008) through the qualitative research practices of listening, interpreting and retelling their stories (Glesne, 2011) that yielded rich descriptions of their lived experiences (Merriam, 2002) including their racialization in the U.S and how they chose to socialize their children as a result.

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research begins with a particular worldview and involves processes such as the:

Collection of data in natural setting…data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants; the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action” (p.37).
Such an approach, which “focuses on meaning in context” (Merriam, 2009, p.2), is especially important given my research focus because I believe that qualitative research could be used to help advance social justice work by providing a researcher with the opportunity to engage in “seeking and telling the truth about what particular people do in their everyday lives and about what their actions mean to them” (Erickson, 2010, p.113). I think it is important to note, as Erickson (2010) explained, my use of the word “truth” does not mean I am referring to “objectivity” but to naming the reality of people’s lives (Ladson-Billings, 2009) consistent with CRT scholars of unveiling the oppression of non-white groups in the society. Significantly I also used qualitative research because it is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.3) thus providing room for me to be self-reflexive (Glesne, 2011) which I believe is a necessary practice since I came to this research, not as a detached objective observer, which is often deemed to be the case in quantitative research, but as a researcher with acknowledged positionalities and insider perspectives that impact the way I view the world. By this, I mean that as a Black Jamaican female my lived experiences in the U.S. help to form the prism through which I view my participants and interpreted research data.

Qualitative inquiry was the best approach for my research because, through data collection methods such as interviews, observation, and artifacts I was provided with opportunities to interact with participants and allow their voices to be heard on issues that affected their daily lives. This, in turn, will encourage others in the field to develop a deep understanding of their participants’ experiences perhaps to view the world differently (Glesne, 2011). Additionally, the qualitative inquiry was a useful approach to
gain insights from the Jamaican immigrant mothers because it “starts from the notion of
the social construction of realities under study, is interested in the perspectives of
participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge” (Flick, 2008, p.2). This is
all very integral to research in which I sought to move beyond merely documenting their
lives to situating their experiences in the socio-political issues that surround them as
Black Immigrant families. For example, qualitative inquiry helped me to learn how they
make sense of their world (Merriam, 2002) as it pertains to issues associated with their
race and ethnicity. Their stories helped unlock their understanding and perception of
racism in the U.S. and how these things influenced their parenting decisions. Likewise,
this approach helped me shed light on their unique experiences as Jamaican/Afro-
Caribbean women, often missing from research discourse (Reynolds, 2005).

**Narrative Inquiry**

*GPSing Me*

*On my journey somewhere*
*in the middle of two worlds*
*of blackness here and there*
*I searched feverously for my GPS*
*Yes, my global positioning status*
*I thought would guide me to*
*Understanding ...*
*Re-directing, it led me*
*to the stories I left behind*
*The stories pulled me in*
*Held me accountable*
*Demanding a space*
*to let them speak*

As my preceding poem indicates, the stories I have heard in the past led me to a
greater understanding of my own racialized experiences in the U.S. and that of others. In
recognition of the power of stories to bring attention to people’s experiences, I employed
a narrative inquiry approach in this research. By allowing the Afro-Caribbean immigrant women to speak through their stories, my goal was to address the invisibility of their experiences in research.

According to Clandinin (2007), there are different conceptualizations of narrative inquiry as evident in the divergent ways narrative inquirers use this approach. She argued that debates amongst narrative inquirers “highlights a distinction within narrative inquiry…we are studying either lived experiences as a storied phenomenon or the stories people tell about their experience” (p. xiv). For the purposes of this research, I focused on the latter to come to an understanding of the four Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers’ and grandmothers’ experiences in the U.S. from listening to their stories. By listening to their stories learned about their perceptions of racism and connections between their perceptions, how they chose to self-identify and raise their children in the racialized context of a southeastern state. I also employed this approach to unveil the mothers’ stories and to develop a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding them as Black immigrant women. Finally, a narrative inquiry approach provided me with a space to reflect on my own story as a Black woman living in the U.S. As Clandinin (2006) argued, “narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but need to find ways to inquire into participants’ experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences” (p.47). Hence, my intention in using narrative inquiry was to focus on the stories of the mothers to capture emerging themes for analysis that are guided by my research questions.
Oral storytelling in the Caribbean.

“Oral stories…have been the mainstay in explaining the ways of the world, life at home and abroad, and the genealogy of Caribbean life” (Lowery, 2013, p.104).

“Jamaican oral tradition is a reservoir of cultural capital dating back more than 200 years into slave society” (Campbell, 2006, p. 204).

As the preceding quotes indicate, stories are cultural capitals in the Caribbean often used to explain everyday occurrences. Hence, drawing from our oral storytelling tradition, allows me to provide insights on how the Jamaican immigrant mothers make sense of their experiences in the world. Moreover, drawing from a tradition in which I also grew up was helpful in constructing a decolonizing methodological approach geared towards humanizing the Jamaican immigrant mothers through their stories. Additionally, drawing from this oral storytelling tradition helped create a space through which I could unveil counter-stories about their identities and lived experiences in the U.S. Hence narrative inquiry in conjunction with oral storytelling traditions of the Caribbean provided an avenue through which I was able to decenter majoritarian stories while simultaneously centering participants’ stories.

Challenging majoritarian stories. According to Yosso and Solórzano (2002), majoritarian stories are problematic because they are “not just stories of racial privilege, they are stories of gender, class, and other forms of privilege” (p.28). Hence, focusing on the Jamaican immigrant mothers’ stories in this research help me deconstruct the privileging of majoritarian stories that often make deficit assumptions about experiences and intersected identities (race, gender, national origin). For example, since Black women are often negatively portrayed in the media as sex symbols or angry Black
women (Collin, 2000; Hooks, 1989), using a narrative inquiry approach allowed me to open a space for the kinds of counter-narratives and stories that Black feminists and CRT scholars (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) believe can help dismantle majoritarian stories. Hence, a narrative inquiry approach helped me provide counternarratives that problematize research studies that seem to downplay the role race and other forms of oppression play in their lives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Narrative inquiry is also germane to this research because of its “interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them” (Chase, 2011, p.421). With regard to the Jamaican/Afro-Caribbean immigrant mothers in this research, unlike quantitative research methods, a narrative inquiry method helped unlock and center details about how they viewed themselves and their experiences. Through their own voice, they helped me understand the experiences that influenced their self-identification and child rearing choices. As Webster & Mertova (2007) argued, “quantitative research is typically looking for outcomes and frequently overlooks the impact of experience, while narrative inquiry allows researchers to get an understanding of that experience” (p5). In this vein, narrative inquiry was useful in helping me unveil research findings about participants’ self-authored “storied lives” (Connell & Clandinin, 1990, p.2) that are more likely to be “illuminative, novel and accessible to readers” (Bold, 2012, p.2) and transformative because of the empowerment it provides.

**Addressing invisibility and marginality.** Since this research sought to address the invisibility and marginality of Afro-Caribbean mothers and their children, narrative inquiry was a useful research method to empower them (Daiute, 2014) by making visible the challenges they encountered in their daily lives while ensuring they are not cast into
the “roles of victims, needy and helpless” (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p.13) as is often the case in colonizing research. By this I mean narrative inquiry provided an opportunity to learn about their marginalized experiences while unveiling how they might use their agency in resisting this marginalization. Part of this resisting was apparent in the stories they told about how they viewed themselves and the world. Lorick-Wilmot (2014) described the power of narratives to address marginalization in the following way:

The experience of marginalization and historical subjugation are considered important motivations for the telling of narratives because the need to resist invisibility or feelings of being subsumed within another social group is heightened for those who are excluded. In this regard, narratives become more than ordered accounts of the past or stories that are related in a specific context. They become tactics of the marginalized to gain and assert power over defining ‘self-who am I?’ Through authoring their own stories (p.81).

Lorick-Wilmot’s (2014) preceding quote articulates how narrative inquiry helped me make their experiences visible through the use of their own voice.

**Unveiling nuanced stories.** Because “stories do not exist in a vacuum but are shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives,” (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p.2) using a narrative inquiry approach in this research provided contextual information to deepen understanding of Afro-Caribbean immigrant families. For example, as records of human experiences, (Webster & Mertova, 2007) including significant life events, the women’s narratives provided rich socio-historical information (Lorick-Wilmot, 2014) about the homeland experiences of the Afro-Caribbean mothers thus providing an opportunity to gain a nuanced understanding of their family’s lived experiences.
(Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Lewis, 2009). Likewise, narratives helped unveil complexities and challenges faced by the Afro-Caribbean mothers and their children associated with “double barriers of racism and xenophobia” in the society (Rong & Preissle, 1998, p.132). Finally, a narrative inquiry approach in this study led to a nuanced understanding of four Afro-Caribbean mothers as Black women with a unique frame of references from other women of Color living in the U.S.

As part of the research process, a CRT counter-storytelling also helped me to articulate how my own story as a Black Jamaican/Afro-Caribbean woman, with a personal history of colonial, patriarchal, and racial domination influenced how I chose to collect data, interpret and present them. For example, the CRT, Black feminism and postcolonial lenses used in this research were informed by my lived experiences and world view. Hence, focusing on my own nuanced story in the self-reflexive process, allows me to make the argument that “narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants’ experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process” (Clandinin, 2006, p.47).

**Arts-Based Research Practices in Qualitative Research**

According to Barone and Eisner (2012) in 1993, the term “arts-based research” was first coined by Elliot Eisner during an educational event at Stanford University. Since then art based practices, which are “methodological tools used by qualitative researchers,” (Leavy, 2009, p.2) have been used in qualitative research across disciplines. Ethno-poems, as a part of my critical race and decolonizing methodological constructs helped me: (1) raise critical consciousness about the power imbalance in the society and
challenge dominant ideologies (2) address the stereotypes or deficit thinking associated with certain identities (3) encourage dialogue through emotional, empathetic or political appeal (4) open a space for multiplicity of views drawn from multiple lived experiences and (5) bring “academic scholarship to a wider audience” (Leavy (2009, p.14) through the use of representational strategies that not only make research more accessible to people outside the academy but also draw from the voices and knowledge of the research participants. I agree with King (2005) who noted in her discussion on the “Ten vital principles for Black education and socialization,” (p.20) that the “ways of knowing provided by the arts and humanities are more useful in informing our understanding of our lives and experiences and those of other oppressed people than the knowledge and methodologies of the sciences” (p.20).

**Ethno-poems in qualitative research.** Because the anti-racist/anti-colonial poems of Caribbean and African Americans poets (e.g. Claude McKay, Edward Brathwaite, Langston Hughes and Maya Angelou) helped to give birth to my critical consciousness, as a researcher I was drawn to the possibility that employing ethno-poems in my research could help project the stories and counter-stories of the Afro-Caribbean mothers in this research and decenter majoritarian stories about their lives. Specifically, I created ethno-poems by analyzing interview data to construct patterns, approximate voice, and create a representation of findings that would speak from the participants to the reader in direct and passionate ways while also reflecting the rigor of the data collection and analysis processes. In the following sections, I describe how ethno-poetry impacted the analysis and the presentation of data.
**Ethno-poetry and fostering a deeper understanding of the interview transcripts.**

Experimental form is an opening, a clearing in the woods of research regularities. The clearing away of accustomed practices releases a rare feeling of reflective play in interpretation and language… the clearing ruptures traditional patterns of scientific knowing and notions of research purposes (Glesne, 1997, p.218).

Glesne (1997) in the preceding quote postulated that including experimental form, like ethno-poem, which is a poem that contains extracted words from interviews (Sjollema, Hordyk, Walsh, Hanley & Ives, 2012), provides an opportunity for new ways of doing research and interpreting data which could help researchers to obtain greater insights from their research findings. Other researchers across varying disciplines contend that ethno-poems—also called found poems (Burdick, 2011) or research poems (Furman, Shears & Badinelli, 2007)—could be useful in fostering a deeper understanding of the interview transcripts and the phenomena of focus in the research (Sjollema, Hordyk, Walsh, Hanley & Ives, 2012). For instance according to Burdick (2011), “Qualitative researchers might discover the potentials of using arts-based methods in the form of varying genres to better understand and analyze their research data. Different ways of writing and seeing can jointly provide a more multidimensional discussion inquiry in education” (p. 2). In addition to creating a deeper understanding of interview transcripts, some researchers believe that ethno-poems might also be useful in fostering empathy, “through forms that are evocative and compelling” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p.3), for research participants and in helping to present research findings in a manner that make them seem more personal and easier to digest by readers (Furman, Shears & Badinelli, 2007).
As I incorporated the use of ethno-poems in my work, it helped me to arrive at deeper insights from the interview data. I believe that it will also help readers of my work to arrive at better understandings of the participants’ experiences which might help to advance social justice work. Through ethno-poetry, readers can examine closely how participants perform different identities, selves (Denzin, 2003), how they make meaning. Ethno-poems help me (and the reader) “re-see” (Burdick, 2011) and “re-present” the data (Glesne, 1997; Norum, 2000). Additionally, I was drawn to ethno-poetry because “it could be used to contextualize and add richness to the existing data” (Furman, Shears & Badinelli, 2007).

Since my research focused on the ethnic-racial socialization practices of the Afro-Caribbean mothers, viewing the data as a performance (Denzin, 2003) helped me examine more closely how the participants viewed, represented and positioned (Hall, 1994) their identities during this process. According to Denzin (2003), “the interview is a way of writing the world, of bringing the world into play…the interview functions as a narrative device that allows persons who are so inclined to tell stories about themselves” (p.80). In this sense then, looking at the interview as a form of performance can help me to learn about our participants view the world. For instance I might be able to get insights into how they view themselves and issues of race and racism in the society as well as how they might be agentic in ethnic-racially socializing their children, since “poetry can be understood as data about the human experience in compressed form”(Langer & Furman, 2004). Additionally since the interview could be seen as a “way of writing the world” I could gather insight about their world as I used data to create ethno-poems which could provide me with a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and help
me move away from an essentialized view of participants to a deeper understanding of
their world. Significantly, since I believe that “how we re-present data on the page
matters” (Norum, 2000), I believe that using ethno-poetry allowed me to center the voice
of my participants in ways that will help me to gain deep insights into their lives.

*The role of ethno-poetry in self-reflexivity and performance interviews.* In
addition to drawing from the concept of performance and ethno-poetry to gain insights
about my participants’ lived experiences through interviews, I also used it engage in self-
reflection about my own experiences as a means of acknowledging my positionality.
Since “the interview is an active text, a site where meaning is created and performed”
(p.81) I used it to acknowledge that, as an interviewer I bring my own view of the world
to the interview process that might or might not reflect the opinion of my participants.
For instance, I believe that my perception of racism and other forms of discrimination
could possibly be different from my participants so instead of imposing my own view on
the participants I wanted to reflect on ways in which my views converged and deviated
from theirs as a means of increasing the transparency of my work. Hence, I included in
the findings my own reflections or interpretations of the performative interview in ways
that highlight how my view differs or converges with theirs particularly on social issues
such as racism. In doing this, I drew from Langer and Furman’s (2004) idea of the
“interpretive poem” they explained that this kind of poem can be used to “create an
evocative and moving document which allows for the subjective responses of the
researchers” (p.7). In this regard, I was able to use the interpretive to project my
participants’ voice while also sharing my insights as a researcher (Langer and Furman,
2004, p.10).
Ethno-poetry and honoring the voices of participants.

My knowing and being/speaking through you,
writing between lines and stanzas/BELCHING out my inner thoughts,
I see the BIRTHING of understanding/leaping from the pages,
framed by experiences of here and there/I carve out a voice that is
struggling to BREAKTHROUGH!

As my breakthrough poem above illustrates, poems can be useful in articulating people’s thoughts and experiences. From a CRT, postcolonial and Black feminist perspective, they are also a powerful way to “talk back” in ways that address discriminatory experiences (hooks, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is in this vein that ethno-poems have been used by several researchers across disciplines to not only obtain deep insights from the interview transcripts but also to honor the voice of participants. For instance, Ciardiello (2010) posited that “Poetry of social justice is not politically neutral. It is biased toward democracy. For the oppressed and marginalized, this poetry represents power as the voice of the dispossessed” (p.466) Embracing a similar mindset, in their research on homeless immigrant women Sjollema, Hordyk, Walsh, Hanley and Ives (2012) used found poetry to allow the women tell their own stories while Glesne (1997) in her research on Dona Juana, tried to “keep enough of her words together to re-present her speaking rhythm, her way of saying things” (p.205).

In my research about the Jamaican mothers’ ethnic-racial socialization of their children I used ethno-poems to honor their voices as they shared their lived experiences in the U.S. Ethno-poetry became a means of allowing them (and me) to speak back to the center and draw from decolonizing research methodologies (e.g. social justice arts-based approach) that could contribute to “radical social change” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.3) in the schooling of Black immigrant families and other marginalized groups in America.
Allowing their voices to stand out in my research is important because I believe that silence helps to maintain the quo by “privileging the abuser” (Moreira & Diversi, 2010, p.470). Since arts-based methods provide the opportunity for “epistemological diversity” (p.47) in the research I wanted to use ethno-poems to project the alternate knowledge base that my participants bring to the interview process which helped to center their experiences and world view.

“Stepping Out”: Ethno-poems as part of critical race and decolonizing methodologies.

To step out is to break away from something, crossing boundaries to embrace something else that the stepper carries in the imagination in relation to his/her identity and existence. The Caribbean intellectual tradition, although negatively impacted by the legacies of colonialism, nevertheless has offered counter-narratives and discourses that consistently have sought to challenge and reconfigure the (post)colonial order. (Heron, & Hume, 2012, p.28 & 25)

Drawing from Heron and Humes’ (2012) metaphor of “stepping out” in the preceding quotes about the Caribbean’s tradition of colonial resistance, I used ethno-poetry as part of my critical race and decolonizing methodologies to “push the boundaries of qualitative work” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p.238) by “stepping out” in ways that centered the Jamaican immigrant mothers’ voices, knowledge, and experiences (Burdick, 2011; Ciardiello, 2010). Like a bricoleur or “maker of quilt” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.14) through crystallization, my focus was on quilting together a critical race and decolonizing methodology with an arts-based approach (ethno-poems) to create a socially just research approach.
Critical Race Methodology

According to Solórzano & Yosso’s (2002) critical race methodology (see appendix E) is guided by the following five themes that are pertinent to my research: (a) “the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, (b) challenge to dominant ideology, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) centrality of experiential knowledge and (e) transdisciplinary perspective” (p.25 & 26). Hence, critical race methodology is germane to my research because it allowed me to problematize Scheurich and Young (1997) what call the “epistemological racism” (p.5) that might be in evident in some research. By this, they refer to the use of epistemologies in research that are racially biased. Since the Jamaican immigrant mothers in this research have been “epistemologically marginalized” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.36) like other non-white groups in the society, honoring their stories in my research through a critical race methodology, serves as a form of empowerment for their family.

Using Solórzano & Yosso’s (2002) of critical race methodology, I foregrounded my work with a critical race perspective throughout the research process (research questions, data collection, analysis and presentation of findings). Merging this perspective with Black feminism and post-colonial paradigms I not only considered racism but also other forms of domination (ethnocentrism, patriarchy) operating in the lives of Jamaican immigrant mothers. Additionally, centering their voices in this research I aimed to challenge the “traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories” (p. 24) that often use cultural deficit models to explain their experiences. Drawing from multidisciplinary discourses (e.g. education, literary studies, history, sociology, anthropology) I sought to problematize traditional research methods that seem to ignore,
silent, and distort the knowledge and experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) of these participants. Hence, through a critical race methodology, I contend that “if methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize people of color, then methodologies can also give voice and turn the margins into places of transformative resistance” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p.143).

Storytelling presented in the form of ethno-poems was a key component of the critical race methodological construct that I employed in this research. As CRT scholars have argued (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, 2002), I hold the belief that stories and counter-stories can be used in research to name the realities of people who face oppression in the society. Thus, by creating a space for participants to narrate their own stories, I was able to help unveil some “contradictions inherent in the dominant storyline that, among other things, blames people of color for their condition of inequality” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011, p.5).

Stories and counter stories could also provide insights on how non-white individuals respond to the oppression that they encounter on a daily basis. Hence, as part of my critical race methodological construct, counter stories helped to shed light on how understudied (Johnson, 2008) Jamaican immigrant mothers choose to self-identify and socialize their children in response to their experiences in the U.S. Acquiring these insights from the mothers allows me to increase their visibility as racialized Black immigrant women, and advance social justice work driven by an nuanced understanding of their worldview.
Decolonizing Methodology

If you believe that schooling is about somebody’s story, somebody’s history, somebody’s set of memories, a particular set of experiences then it is clear that one logic will not suffice (Giroux, 1992, p.14).

Giroux’s (1992) preceding quote forms part of my rationale for wanting to use a decolonizing methodological construct (see appendix D) in this research because it calls for the centering of multiple stories, history, memories and experiences in schools. For the Afro-Caribbean mothers and their children in this research such inclusion of their epistemologies in schools as marginalized Black immigrants can be transformative. Since “research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized” (Smith, 1999, p.7), a decolonizing research methodology helps to resist this kind of domination by drawing from the perspectives of participants facing marginalization.

Chilisa (2012) defined decolonization methodology as “a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization are given space to communicate from their frames of reference” (p. 14). She explained that it calls into question Western research methods that ignore the knowledge of the “colonized other” (p.12). However, in this research I held to Smith’s (1999) argument that:

Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes (p. 39).
Operating from the belief that through naming the problems associated with the marginalization of non-white groups in the U.S. we can begin to deconstruct the mainstream power structures in the society, I maintain that decolonizing research as detailed above provides an opportunity for transformation of our lives.

According to Bristol (2012), decolonizing or “postcolonial methods can be conceived as tools that are culturally appropriate to the context and educational problem being engaged” (p.27) in research making it more socially just for marginalized participants. She also explained that these methods can help to interrogate what counts as knowledge and research in the society by problematizing Western discourses. Hence, I believe that postcolonial methods in research might be transformative, particularly for oppressed groups, because they could compel us “to remember who has been silenced, erased, and oppressed within colonial/postcolonial contexts and to rethink the predominant stories in order to include multiplicity and reflectivity” (Bauchspies, 2007, p.2985). In the field of education, these methods can help to further social justice research studies with an emphasis on equal education for all students. In drawing from this idea, I view colonial/postcolonial contexts as not limited to a geographical space in which former colonies exist but as situations in which a colonial mindset of domination might be still operating to relegate people from non-white groups to the margin of society. In using ethno-poems to represent data drawn from interview transcripts, I attempted to align my work with a postcolonial method approach of centering the voices of my participants to arrive at deeper understandings of their lived experiences. I believe that this centering is particularly important for Afro-Caribbean/Black Jamaican
immigrant families who have not been given much attention in school curricula and research (Wiggan & Warlond, 2013).

Ethno-poems, as a part of a post-colonial approach, allowed me to capture participants’ stories in ways that provide historical and cultural contexts needed for arriving at a deeper understanding identities and experiences. Taking this approach was particularly important to me because I concur with Bristol (2012) that postcolonial research methods should draw from the narrative traditions of the community or people being researched, that they should “emerge out of the oral traditions of storytelling, proverbs, speech-making, and singing through which the history and culture are passed on to the younger generation” (p.28).

As a researcher stepping out methodologically for me was paramount because it allowed me to find a more critically conscious means of making sense of the stories of my participants. In a critical race sense, to “step out” from “Babylon”, a metaphor for dominant oppressive forces in the society (Heron & Humes, 2012), for me, means to construct ethno-poems from transcribed interviews to represent participants’ racialized and intersected ethnicized experiences in the U.S. society. In the post-colonial sense, these stories could provide me with the space to allow their voice to speak back to the center in ways that could also be transformative for them. In this sense then I not only had the opportunity to learn about their identities and experiences but also to learn about the socio-political issues that were part of their lived experiences.

**Case Study and Cross-Case Analysis**

In addition to the methodologies described above, I drew from case study methodology in this work. Case study research is defined by Creswell (2007) as “a
qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information . . . and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p.73). Using a case study research method provided me with in-depth details (Creswell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Saldana, 2011) about the women and their sons or grandson and helped to unveil how they were responding to racism in the society. Hence, my intention in using this case study approach was to understand these racialized experiences (Gagnon, 2010) rather than to achieve representativeness. As Glesne (2011) asserted in using a case study method I was interested in the “complexity within the case, on its uniqueness, and its linkages to the social context of which it is a part” (p.22).

According to Khan and Robert VanWynsberghe (2008), the cross-case analysis is “a research method that facilitates the comparison of commonalities and difference in the events, activities and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies” (p.1). Thus, I also conducted a cross-case analysis to explore significant connections across the cases that could provide deeper insights on the complexities the women faced and how they were responding to the challenges they faced. Conducting a cross-case analysis was important in this research because although the women are all Jamaicans they all had unique experiences, and levels of critical consciousness that not only helped me to understand their individual stories but also their shared experience of oppressions and varied interpretations of their racialized experiences. For example, through a cross-case analysis, I learned that the women did not all agree that racism is a problem in Jamaica. In fact, only Bev maintained that racism is still an issue in our home country. Hence,
cross-case analysis helped to unveil the complexities, tensions, contradictions as well as areas of intersections across the women’s stories.

**Context**

The participants in this study were four Afro-Caribbean women (two mothers and two grandmothers) living in a southeastern state in the U.S. with a low population of Jamaican immigrants when compared to cities such as New York, Miami, and Georgia. Consequently, they did not have the support of well-established ethnic communities that might help them cope with the challenges they face in a racialized society as seems to be the case for Jamaican immigrants in states such as New York and Florida. Because the participants were first generation immigrants from Jamaica to the U.S., it is important to the context of this study to understand some history of Jamaica and the history of colonization and immigration to the U.S.

Jamaica is located in the Western Hemisphere (see appendix A & B) and is the third largest Caribbean island (Yearwood, 2001). The current population in Jamaica stands at approximately 2.6 million (Kadrich, 2003) and the languages which are spoken by Jamaicans are Standard English, and Jamaican Creole called Patois. It was first colonized by the Spaniards after Christopher Columbus claimed that he discovered Jamaica in 1492. According to Zonta and Zonta (2001) “in 1670, Great Britain gained formal possession of the territory, and the British Parliament abolished slavery in 1834” (p.291). During the British colonial period, Africans were taken from West African to Jamaica where they were enslaved and forced to work on cane fields. Hence, in this regard, African Americans and Jamaicans share a common history of the enslavement of their foreparents from Africans. James (2001) reported that involuntary migration (Ogbu,
explained that the “first shipment of Blacks to the Virginia colony in 1619 consisted largely of persons of African descent who were born or had lived in the Caribbean” (p.1126). He also mentioned that “many residents of Charleston, the cultural capital of the antebellum South, were immigrants or the descendants of immigrants from Barbados” (p.1126).

As early as 1898, after the Spanish-American War, it was reported that voluntary Black immigrants (Ogbu, 1998) from the Caribbean began to immigrate to America in large numbers (Capp & Fix, 2012). Thomas (2012) in a report for the Migration Policy Institute reported that there are approximately 1.7 million Black immigrants from the Caribbean living in the U.S. making up over half of the total Black immigrants. In 2008-2009 he reported that 638 Jamaicans emigrated here and his report also indicated that from 1980 there has been a steady increase in the population of Jamaicans in the U.S. According to Capp and Fix (2012), between 1990 to 2009, the number of foreign-born Blacks in the U.S. more than doubled, from 1.4 million to 3.3 million” (p.1). Hernandez also reported that within that same period “Black children with immigrant parents rose from 7 percent to 12 percent” (p.75).

**Participants**

I used criterion sampling to select the four participants for this study. Criterion sampling was important because I sought only participants who met particular criteria (Maxwell, 2005). The criteria that guided my selection of participants were that each participant must: (a) be a Jamaican mother or grandmother, (b) have children or grandchildren attending public school in the U.S. and (c) be living in the Southeastern
U.S. Hence, participants were purposefully chosen (Patton, 2002; Glesne, 2011) because as Maxwell (2005) asserted such approach allowed me to address my research concerns. Furthermore, purposeful sampling allowed me to select “information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 2002, p.230).

This sampling approach was particularly necessary because of the gap in research on the identities and experiences of Afro-Caribbean/Jamaican immigrant families affecting the extent to which educators in the region could meet their unique needs and understand their experiences. As members of the new diverse majority population in the South, this approach helped me to unveil the complexities of their lives and how they were attempting to cope with the day-to-day challenges of racism. Additionally, I chose these participants because I felt that it was necessary to fill the gap in research on how racialization in the U.S. society impacts their lives. Table 3.1 details the demographic background of the participants.

Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Year of Entry</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bev</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Psychiatrist</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Boy: 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tanya</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Boy: 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bev

Bev is a 1.5 Jamaican immigrant mother who entered the U.S. with her parents at the age of six. Her family settled in a southeastern where she attended elementary school
all the way to the university level. She is divorced and has a 10-year-old second-generation immigrant son in elementary school. She now lives in another southeast state in the U.S. where she is a member of a Seventh Day Adventist Church community where she plays an active role in the music ministry. Her son attends Sabbath School (similar to Sunday School) each week at this church.

**Tanya**

Tanya is a first generation Jamaican immigrant mother. She is also a high school teacher who lives with her three-second generation immigrant children and mother in a working class community in a low socio-economic background. She came to the U.S at age 17 to join her father who was already a citizen of this country. She is a member of the Church of God faith with a congregation of predominantly African (Nigerian) immigrant membership where she regularly attends church services with her children. She also takes her children to Jamaica annually to visit family members and learn about their heritage.

**Ms. May**

Ms. May is Tanya’s mother who came to the U.S. in 2000 to join her daughter. She became an LPN nurse after migrating here to increase her socio-economic opportunities in this country. She plays an active role as a grandmother in the children’s lives. Her involvement includes helping with the children’s extra-curricular track and field activities and helping to supervise their homework activities. In her home country, she was a member of the Seventh Day Church of God faith (worships on Saturdays) since this denomination does not exist in her community in the U.S, she worships at home and sometimes visits a Church of God tabernacle on Sundays.
Ms. Dell

Ms. Dell is a teacher who arrived in the U.S. in 2014 to live with her second generation grandchildren; nine-year-old Sasha-Gaye and 12-year-old Damion, as well as her Jamaican-born daughter and son-in-law. She taught at the elementary school level in Jamaica for thirty years and held the positions of Dean of discipline and senior teacher prior to leaving her home country. She is a member of a Seventh Day Adventist Church where she serves as a choir member and a Master Guide (teacher) in the Pathfinder Club. This club is designed for young people in the church and the surrounding communities with the aim to teach them about the bible, life skills (e.g. leadership and survival) and encourage them to engage in missionary outreach.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected and analyzed over a nine-month period (June 2015 to February 2016) mainly through semi-structured face to face and telephone interviews, but other forms of data such as artifacts, research journal, observation and field notes were used to achieve triangulation and to provide rich details. I collected data from their home and church (except for Ms. May, who mainly worshiped at home) where they spent a significant amount of time to gain insights about the kinds of ethnic-racial messages they transmit to their children.

Data collection methods were based on a qualitative narrative inquiry model with an interpretive and critical mindset (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009) using the interpretive epistemological perspective involves three main purposes: to describe, understand and interpret. This provided me with in-depth context for this research. Data collection methods were also aligned to what Merriam also termed
the critical epistemological perspective which focuses on challenging the status quo. With this approach in mind, the methods that I describe below were chosen because I believed they would help me to gain rich insights on the women’s ethnic-racial socialization of their son or grandson. Triangulation was achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, research journal and artifacts.

**Interviews and Ethno-Poems**

According to Skachkova (2007), feminist scholars argued that “interviewing is the most appropriate method applied by women to study other women” (p.702). In congruence with this line of argument, as a Black Jamaican/Afro-Caribbean woman with a shared history of colonial domination with my participants, I view my use of interviews in this research as an opportunity to tell their stories or “talk back” (hooks, 1989) while also unearthing and reflecting on my own. In so doing, my aim was not to essentialize our experiences but to engage in a critical use of the interview process (e.g. centering race and ethnicity) to learn about their racialized experiences and to gain insights needed for transforming schools.

**The creation of the ethno-poems.** Tape-recorded semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method in order to unveil and center stories from the Jamaica immigrant mothers about their lived experiences. As part of my critical race and decolonizing research methodologies I constructed ethno-poems as disruptive creative strategies (Roulston, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009) to center the knowledge of participants and dismantle majoritarian stories. In this vein, some of the stories presented in my crafted ethno-poems drew from aspects of participants’ oral storytelling tradition and home language (Campbell, 2006) as means of honoring their voices and experiences.
The creation of the ethno-poems in this study was shaped by my theoretical frame, research questions and insider perspectives of the complexities and tensions involved in being triply marked (Black, woman, and foreign) in the society. I pulled keywords and phrases from the interview transcript that provided insights on the women’s concerns and struggles as Black mothers. I wanted the ethno-poems to physically re-present the tensions and conflicts I heard in their stories, and so I used gaps, spaces and shifting lines not merely for aesthetic purposes but rather to illustrate the complexities of their stories. My interpretations of these tensions and conflicts were informed by my bicultural experiences and the challenges I also experienced as I reflected on my own story. The Jamaican Patois was included in some of the ethno-poems to stay true to the speech patterns of the women as we went back and forth between Patois and Standard English during our conversations. The dialect was also used to unveil areas of strong emotions, for example, when the women were upset about an unjust incident and deeply concerned about the well-being of their son or grandson. Patois was also used in some of the ethno-poems, as part of my decolonizing methodology, to draw from our home language and frame of references. This approach is consistent with Gadsby’s (2016) argument that “even in the midst of great hardship, Caribbean women use language to resist, to challenge, and to mobilize for retaliation” (p.6).

The Jamaican immigrant mothers were interviewed between 60-90 minutes at least twice monthly, over a seven-month period and member checking continued for another two months. Interviews were used as relevant data collection methods in this narrative inquiry because of their potential to make visible (Jeong-Hee, 2016) the stories
of the understudied Jamaican immigrant mothers in this research. Likewise, they were significant because they unearthed alternate epistemologies that countered mainstream epistemologies in schools and the society. To help me to gain these insights, I used interview questions that were “broad, conversational probes in order to ‘respectfully listen and honor the life stories’ of participants” (Roulston, 2010, p.71) and to co-construct meaning with them as I reflect on my own experiences. I also allowed space for their “discursive agency” (Campbell, 2006) to learn more about their perception of and response to racialization in the U.S.

Given my critical race and decolonizing methodical constructs, interviews helped to effectuate a social justice agenda by providing a space for me to center participants’ voices to help decenter “Eurocentric frames” in research (Fournillier, 2011, p.558) known to subjugate the knowledge of oppressed individuals in the society. In this vein, I concur with Skachkova (2007) that “by telling their own stories, women resist the colonizing practice of presenting them as victims” (p.703).

**Observation**

In order to learn about the lived experiences of the Jamaican immigrant mothers, I interacted with the women in their home and church. Focusing on cultural artifacts (e.g. flags, souvenirs, literacies, and photos) and engaging in social interactions with them I maximized my chances to learn about their worldview and how this might influence their choices (self-identification, coping with discrimination and raising their children) as Black mothers living with their children in a racialized context. Table 3.2 provides a summary of interaction and observation of artifacts in the participants’ home and or church:
Table 3.2.

*Interaction and Observation of Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Observation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Home</td>
<td>cultural artifacts (flag, souvenir, photos, music CD), the language used, idiomatic expressions, social interactions between mother &amp; child, literacy materials, school materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Church</td>
<td>social interaction in Sabbath/Sunday School, literacy materials (e.g. church programs, flyers, bulletin boards), demographics of congregants and songs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the preceding table indicates, I interacted with the women in order to obtain “tacit understandings…aspects of the participants’ perspective that they are reluctant to directly state in interviews” (Maxwell, 2005, p.94) or to derive additional values, beliefs and practices of which they are not cognizant.

**Field Notes**

Interpretive and descriptive field notes (Glesne, 2011) in conjunction with the other data collection methods, served as a means of naming the realities of the immigrant women in this research. While interacting with them in their home and or church community I engaged them “critical conversations” about their experiences in the U.S. (Beeman-Cadwallader, Quigley & Yazzie-Mintz, 2011, p.5) and to allow their epistemologies to counter-majoritarian stories about their lives. Interacting with them as a partial insider rather than as a detached observer yielded rich information about their life and concerns that might not have been readily available to outside researchers.

**The Research Journal**

I used a research journal to document my reflections (sometimes in the form of poetry) throughout this research process and to keep track of emerging interpretations.
(Bogdan and Balkan, 2007; Jacobs-Huey, 2002). These journal entries were reviewed at least twice monthly after each home or church visit to help me gain rich insights from field interactions. They helped me to identify emerging concepts which helped in my coding and analysis. Keeping a research journal provided me with the opportunity to interrogate my own thought processes and feelings while interacting with the participants. Additionally, some of my reflective poems in this research journal became “part of the final text, the researcher’s story woven into the stories of others” (p.77). In this vein, I have merged the craft of a poet with my research (Cahnmann, 2003) to arrive at a deeper understanding of not only my participants but myself as a researcher in this process.

**Artifacts**

Operating from the mindset that “communities carry with them a host of artifacts, and if we pay attention to these artifacts, new voices can be listened to” (Pahl & Roswell, 2010, p.8) I collected artifacts or took pictures of them to learn about the Jamaican women’s experiences. According to Glesne (2011), artifacts are objects that help a researcher to learn more about the culture and setting in a research study. Therefore collecting these research artifacts helped me to learn more about the women’s unique background and specifically gave me insights on the ethnic-racial socializing messages that their children were receiving at home or church. Artifacts such as church programs, flyers, schoolwork, pictures, and artwork were collected from the family during my interactions in their home and or church. I also invited the mothers to provide examples of narrative materials (e.g. poems, song lyrics, proverbs) from their cultural experiences that would help me to learn more about them and their experiences (homeland and U.S.). These artifacts were sometimes used to initiate conversations surrounding the family’s
identities, experiences with discrimination in school and the society and the ethnic-racial socializing messages that were transmitted to the Jamaican immigrant women’s son or grandson.

**Obtaining Human Subject Approval (IRB)**

I obtained informed consent through the use of consent letters (see Appendices C and D) that the participants signed and returned to me. These letters were sent with my application to IRB to obtain approval for my dissertation research. The letter provided details on my research purpose, how I planned to obtain information from my participants, the duration of the time I would spend interacting with them, their right as participants to withdraw from the research at any time, the benefits and possible risks involved in the research.

**Trustworthiness, Triangulation, and Member Checking**

I sought to foster the trustworthiness of this study through the use of member checking, self-reflexivity, and detailed descriptions of the context (Glesne, 2011). Additionally, triangulation was achieved through the utilization of the multiple data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, observation, field notes, research journal, and artifacts). In order to increase the trustworthiness of this study I was transparent about my socio-historical background, personal experiences with racism and other forms of oppression.

Member checking with each participant was regularly conducted over the nine-month research period to ensure that I accurately portrayed their stories. This took the form of emails, telephone and face to face conversations. Since I consider myself as a partial insider in this research, I was self-reflexive throughout the research process to
heighten my awareness of how the participants and I co-constructed meaning throughout the research process and to explore how my experiences informed my data collection and analysis.

**Research Timeline**

In order to gain insights on the Jamaican immigrant mothers and grandmothers’ ethnic-racial socialization of their second-generation immigrant children, I followed the research plan outlined in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using a qualitative interpretive approach (Glesne, 2011) which provided me with the in-depth information I needed to learn about participants’ experiences. My analysis was guided by my research questions and theoretical frame.

**Coding.** In order to make sense of the data collected from the participants I first hand coded the interview focusing on in vivo codes (Saldaña, 2013) to establish early patterns within and across these families. Next, I coded using the NVivo software to add descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2013) within each case. In this research, I analyzed the data through three processes: (a) hand coding (b) NVivo coding and (c) poetic transcription
coding to identify emerging themes and to represent the data. My manual hand-coding process involved manually highlighting themes in the transcripts which were later used to create a codebook to for my NVivo coding process. In my third phase of coding, I categorized and merged themes for analysis.

Poetic transcription. In conducting poetic coding, I drew from Glesne’s (1997) poetic transcription approach to analyze, center and represent the women’s voice about their storied experiences. From the participants’ interview transcript and arrange them in ethno-poems or found poems to analyze further the data and to capture the women’s stories. Arranging the participants’ conversations in these ethno-poems helped me to explore further patterns and variations across the mothers in this research (Glesne, 1997) while “representing holistically what otherwise might go unnoticed” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p.234). First, I read through the interview transcript to highlight keywords and phrases. Because I wanted the women’s voice to be central in my ethno-poem, I focused heavily on creating these poems by using their exact words. Like Glesne (1997) it was crucial to keep their words together to stay true to their “speaking rhythm” and “way of saying things” (p. 205). In this vein, I only included my own words in instances where they would help to enhance the flow and clarity of the ethno-poems. In order to unveil the complexities in the women’s stories, I used uppercase letters and spaces to reveal strong emotions and tensions respectively. Thus, in creating these ethno-poems I recognize that I was not a detached observer of their experiences but was actively making meaning from the women’s stories through my arrangement of their words on the page. Table 3.4 illustrates one stanza of an ethno-poem I constructed from my conversations with Ms. Dell about her grandson’s in school suspension.
Table 3.4

Poetic Transcription of Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ms. Dell’s Original Transcript</th>
<th>Ethno-Poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme: Racialization of Black Males</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She also said that in the United States, from the child reach grade three, especially the boys, they are destined for prison. It is like they want to put them there. They don’t get the right grades, they get, they are discouraged are not encouraged.</td>
<td>She said in the United States grade three the boys are destined for prison they want to put them there they don’t get the right grades they are discouraged not encouraged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positionality**

As a Black Jamaican/Afro-Caribbean doctoral female student, I brought my own experiences and beliefs systems to bear in this research. Because of my in-depth knowledge of my country’s socio-historical legacy (slavery, patriarchy, and colonialism) as a trained Caribbean History teacher, I come to this research with the knowledge that historically the voices and experiences of the “colonized Other” are often missing or distorted in research discourses (Smith, 1999). Based on my own experiences with racism, sexism and ethnocentrism in the society I am also inclined to view the world through a critical race and Black feminist lenses because they help to unveil and interrogate these experiences. Since I align myself with the experiences of people of African descent in the African Diaspora and other oppressed people, I have an avid interest in research that focus on social justice. Thus, informed by critical perspectives aforementioned, I hold the belief that institutionalized racism and other forms of
discrimination (e.g. ethnocentrism) in the society must be critically interrogated to help interrupt cycles of oppression.

As an Afro-Caribbean doctoral student, my own feelings of invisibility and marginality guided my interest in learning about the stories of the Afro-Caribbean immigrant women and their son or grandson living in the U.S. South in order to find ways in which teachers could understand the need for a classroom counterspace. Because I have experienced racial discrimination as a woman of African descent, I was also interested in learning about their racialized experiences and how they made sense of them. As someone who aligns myself with the history and struggles of African Americans, I believe that silence on racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination in research and the society as a whole is problematic. Like Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, who recognized that racism affected all Black people regardless of national backgrounds, I believe this research helped to illuminate transnational dimensions of race and shed light on how some Black immigrant women might be responding to living in a racialized context.

Given my bicultural experiences, I have knowledge gleaned from living in both Jamaica and the U.S. that could further research in social justice. For example, my knowledge of the work of postcolonial Caribbean writers (e.g. Michelle Cliff and George Lamming), the maroons (freedom fighters) and Rastafarians (revolutionary spiritual followers of Haile Selassie) in Jamaican who challenged the status quo of oppression has influenced my philosophical outlook on the importance of research studies about Black immigrants that are not blind to issues of race (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003). One of my favorite American expressions “Speak the truth and shame the devil,” is very applicable
to how I view research as an Afro-Caribbean student. Throughout this research, I aimed to be truthful about how I view race and racism so as to make my positionality transparent. In this vein, I acknowledged that there is no one objective truth in research but rather there are multiple ways research participants might view issues of race and racism in the society. Hence, making my position was a means of helping readers to see possible parallels and differences between my perspectives and the Jamaican immigrants’ perspective which could help broaden research discourse on these issues.

**Insider and outsider considerations.** In this study, I viewed myself as a partial insider (Naraya, 1993) to the five Jamaican immigrant women (four mothers and one grandmother) and their families because of a shared national heritage. However, I still had to build rapport with them to build a trusting relationship (Gregory & Ruby, 2011; Jacobs-Huey, 2002). Since I in no way intended to or believe that I can extricate myself from my Jamaican experience, I will use my self-reflexivity to enrich my interpretations, bringing experiences and insights that helped to provide nuanced details that outside researchers might not be able to provide.

I also viewed myself as a partial outside researcher because even though I share a national heritage with my participants we lived separate lives and had other intersections and experiences that shaped how we view the world. For instance, as a Doctoral student, I recognized that I had experiences and knowledge that differed from theirs and they, being immigrant parents with children in the U.S., had experiences associated with their various roles that are outside my realm of experiences. Thus, as a partial outsider, there were many aspects of the Jamaican immigrant mothers’ lives that I had to learn and fully understand. Such acknowledgment helped me in my attempt to break from colonial
research traditions (Smith, 1999) in positioning my participants as experts with epistemologies that could help to transform their own lives.

I am aware that some in the research field might view my partial insider status as problematic. As other Black female scholars noted from their own insider research experience, there is always a chance that my research might be viewed as “irrelevant to the knowledge base” (Generett & Jeffries, 2003, p.7) because it focuses on my own community. However, I hold the belief that it could help social justice researchers and educators come to a better understanding of the complexities that Afro-Caribbean immigrant women and their son or grandson face in the society. Rather than a weakness, my insider status helped me to draw from my own cultural knowledge to help create more nuanced understandings of their cultural background.

As I mentioned earlier, I claim multiple identities (Jamaican, Afro-Caribbean, Black, woman) that provide me with a personal awareness of oppression in the society. Therefore my aim in focusing on Afro-Caribbean/Jamaican immigrant families was not to essentialize or separate them from the experiences of other marginalized groups but to help share their stories in order to address their own experiences with oppression.

**Ethical Considerations and Reciprocity**

**Respecting participants’ privacy and knowledge.** As part of my decolonizing research methodology and good qualitative practice, I focused on respecting the Jamaican immigrant women’s private space and information to prevent intentional harm. During our conversations, they revealed some personal information that I did not include to protect and respect their privacy. In order to address possible problems associated with privacy, I also used pseudonyms to identify the women and the sites in this research.
Additionally, in order to address possible researcher-researched issues of power (Roulston, 2010; Smith, 1999), I positioned myself as a learner in this process and informed them to share information that was not too personal.

Secondly, respecting participants’ knowledge was germane to the purposes of this research. As part of a decolonizing standpoint, I focused on engaging in data analysis and interpretations that acknowledged and centered their knowledge in the research discourse.

**Potential benefits.** The primary benefit of this research was to provide a platform for the women’s voice to be heard on matters pertaining to their identities and experiences in the U.S. South. This platform also provided a research space to challenge deficit perspectives about their family. In this research, I aimed to encourage more dialogue on the need to deconstruct the current status quo in schools that often threaten the academic performance and psychological well-being of black children from these groups. Finally, educators and researchers, in particular, might benefit from the continued dialogue that my study encourages especially about Black immigrants and their family.

**Reporting back.** I reported back to participants as form part of my ethical and respectful research approach (Smith, 1999). I shared my ethno-poems with the Jamaican immigrant women as means of honoring the role they played in sharing their stories throughout the research process. During this time, I encouraged their feedback as part of my members checking to ensure that their stories were accurately represented.

**Considerations.** Since I only interacted with four Jamaican immigrant women in a specific time, context and geographical location, I cannot make the claim that this research is generalizable to all Jamaican immigrant women and their family. However, my findings, while not generalizable across all Jamaican immigrant women, provided
insights about their experiences with racialization that may resonate with other Jamaican immigrants in similar settings or may prompt expressions of different experiences. Also, because the time spent in the field was short (nine months) and divided between each of their homes my research did not yield the kind of in-depth details I would have probably obtained if I was working with only one mother or if I had a long time to spend conducting research. However, my research study contributes to the field by adding insights on the challenges Black immigrants might experience living in a racialized society and how they might attempt to cope and teach their children to cope.

**Conclusion to Chapter Three**

Growing up in Jamaica I was exposed to oral and written performance texts (Denzin, 2003) in the form of songs, plays, pantomimes and protest/anti-colonial poems that interrogated and challenged colonial domination as is the case with Oliver Senior’s poem “Colonial Girl School,” “The Ruins of a Great House” by Derek Walcott, “If We Must Die” by Claude McKay, and “Ballad of Sixty Five” by Alma Norman. In addition to these poems, songs such as “Get up, Stand up for Your Right” by Bob Marley all helped to develop in me a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) that I bring to my own research studies.

I bring all of these experiences in addition to my knowledge of qualitative research methodologies to present a study anchored in poetry for social justice. Venkateswaran (2007) asserted, and I believe, that “poetry has the uncanny ability to present the complexity of a culture that has been colonized.” Hence, as I present my social justice research, I frame my thinking using the following words from Bob Marley’s *Redemption Song* that I often used in poetry lessons in Jamaica:
Old pirates, yes, they rob I; /Sold I to the merchant ships,
Minutes after they took I/From the bottomless pit.
But my hand was made strong/By the 'and of the Almighty.
We forward in this generation/Triumphantly.
Won't you help to sing/These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have/Redemption songs/Redemption songs.

Songs like these remind me of the power of decolonizing texts (Asher, 2009) that speak back to the center and challenge dominant forces in the society. As Cooper (1995) wrote, songs just as these can “telescope time, compressing a whole history of exploitation and suffering. The heroes of Empire are demythologized, reduced to common criminals” (p.123). It is in this sense that I present findings from my research. My hope is that my ethno-poems will offer counter arguments that challenge mainstreams ways of viewing the world which otherwise obliterate the experiences of many people.

As a child growing up in Jamaica by performing poems or songs that interrogated social injustice at school events, I became keenly aware of their penetrating force. They had the ability to draw people’s attention to critical issues existing in the society. Later as an undergraduate student majoring in Literatures in English I was again reminded of the power of performance texts through my exposure to resistant poems written by Caribbean poets such as Martin Carter. I also watched live dub poetry performances— a “lyrical form that captures the musical quality of the spoken vernacular by crafting phrases and building the rhythm of Jamaica popular speech (creole) into the total expression” (Hill, 2010, p.4). It was not only used to entertain but also to critique social injustice in the society. It was performed on the university campus and elsewhere and drew me to the
fact that it grew out of everyday knowledge and language to challenge dominant forces. In the words of Damion Marley, I believe that “justice ah weh di youths dem need overall” (Justice is what the youths need overall) so I was pulled toward the use of a social justice arts-based research method and to ethno-poems in particular because it can call attention to the need to challenge the status quo. Thus, this dissertation is a form of “stepping out” for me, embracing a research approach that allows me to center the voices and experiences of Afro-Caribbean mothers.

My use of ethno-poems is “an act of intervention, a method of resistance, a form of criticism, and a way of revealing agency” (Denzin, 2003, p. 9) that I believe can contribute to social justice work in the field of education. It is an intentional choice to move way from knowledge production in research studies that further oppresses marginalized participants (Moreira & Diversi, 2010). Likewise, I believe, as Moreira and Diversi argued, this “create[s] a narrative space for visceral knowledge to advance decolonizing discourses that may lead to more inclusive notions of social injustice” (p.457).
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

My skin is black/My arms are long
My hair is woolly/My back is strong
Strong enough to take the pain/inflicted again and again
What do they call me/My name is AUNT SARAH
My name is Aunt Sarah

My skin is yellow/My hair is long
Between two worlds/I do belong
My father was rich and white/He forced my mother late one night
What do they call me/My name is SAFFRONIA
My name is Saffronia

My skin is tan/My hair is fine
My hips invite you/my mouth like wine
Whose little girl am I?/Anyone who has money to buy
What do they call me/My name is SWEET THING
My name is Sweet Thing

My skin is brown/my manner is tough
I’ll kill the first mother I see/my life has been too rough
I’m awfully bitter these days/because my parents were slaves
What do they call me/My name is PEACHES

*Four Women* by Nina Simone is a fitting song to introduce this section of my

narrative inquiry research on the four single Afro-Caribbean immigrant female

participants because it portrays four different women and their experiences with

oppression. It is also salient to the unique issues explored in this research since it

addresses the issue of identity and societal labeling as seen in the question “What do they
call me?” Also significant, is that the song intricately weaves together race and gender

issues that often affect the lives of women of color.
Participants

As described in Chapter Three, the participants in this study were four Jamaican immigrant women – mothers and a grandmother – with children attending public school in the U.S. South. They include Bev, a 43-year old 1.5 Jamaican immigrant mother with a 10-year old son; Ms. Dell, a 58-year old grandmother and a Jamaican teacher living with her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren; Tanya, a 40-year old mother, and her 61-year old mother, Ms. May. Tanya was a high school teacher and first generation Jamaican immigrant mother of two daughters and one son, all of Jamaican and Nigerian heritage. Ms. May was an LPN nurse and first generation mother and grandmother who was also a pastor of a local church in Jamaica.

Since “racism is so personal” (Weems, 2003, p. 13), words from the Jamaican women’s narratives have been crafted into ethno-poems and monologues as I share interpretations of their realities in ways that might encourage conversations about their experiences that could help them, and others who are marginalized in society, to have their voice heard. The women’s narratives also help to unveil their personal experiences as Afro-Caribbean women with being marginalized by the society in ways that add nuanced understanding to the discussions about social justice in educational research.

From critical race, counterspace and Black feminist perspectives, this chapter explores how the narratives of four Black women can help to unveil the social injustices they experience in the society, challenge majoritarian stories which the “ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009, p.134) while also revealing areas of resistance and empowerment in the women’s personal lives. Viewing their narrative through this lens also help to name realities associated with the unique
challenges Black mothers face in raising their children in a racialized society (Gadsby, 2006; O’Reilly, 2004). These realities include their attempt to transmit ethnic-racial messages and create counterspaces to help their children cope with the oppression of Black people in the society. Drawing from a critical race lens, Case and Hunter (2012) defined the counterspace framework as a conceptual tool that provides the opportunity to understand how individuals attempt to participate in or create spaces or settings to cope psychologically with their marginalization in the society. Hence, interactions in the counterspace help to promote positive self-concepts in counterspace members.

Understanding Ethnic-Racial Socialization and Counterspaces

In this research I drew from Hughes et al.’s (2006) notion of ethnic-racial socialization which refers to the different kinds of messages transmitted by parents to inform children about their racial and ethnic identities and the notion of counterspace which was introduced by Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) in their exploration of the spaces of empowerment for African American students who faced racial microaggressions on college campuses. Counterspace refers to a setting “which promotes the psychological well-being of individuals who experience oppression…by challenging deficit-oriented societal narratives concerning marginalized individuals identities” (Case & Hunter, 2012, p.257). Since these two concepts factor significantly in my findings, prior to my discussion of data in this chapter, I provide an overview of how this work informed and allowed me to reflect on the data I collected.

Hughes et al. (2006) offered the following four ethnic-racial socialization themes which summarized the significant research findings in this area: (a) preparation for bias which refers to practices that foster children’s awareness of racial bias in the society, (b)
cultural socialization which focuses on practices that expose children to their racial and ethnic heritage, (c) promotion of mistrust which refers to practices that promote mistrust of other racial groups, and (d) egalitarianism which refers to messages transmitted by parents that encourage children to “value individual qualities over racial group membership” (Hughes et al, 2006, p. 757).

As I discuss later in this chapter, my findings in the present study revealed ethnic-racial socializing practices consistent with preparation for bias, cultural socialization, promotion of mistrust and egalitarianism. In addition to these themes, I identified what I term faith socialization as another significant theme in this research. By this, I refer to practices that seem to foster in children a faith identity to help them cope with life’s challenges including those associated with racism in the society. Promotion of mistrust, as an ethnic-racial theme, was evident in the mother’s distrust of schools to adequately meet the needs of their Black son or grandson. However, even though the women transmitted messages of hard work associated with egalitarianism there were some points of departure in my findings from Hughes et al.’s (2006) articulation of this theme.

**Egalitarianism and points of departure.**

_Gazing up the hill boy, how can you get up_

_if you don’t try?/though you stumble_

_never be downcast/ try and try/ until you succeed at last_

The preceding gem is one my mother remembered reciting in primary school which encapsulates the meritocratic ethos of hard work and perseverance that form part of Jamaica’s cultural experience. In addition, I also grew up hearing in my home and the
wider Jamaican society the proverbs “if yuh want good yuh nose a go run” (if you want good your nose will run) and “yuh haffi learn to suck salt through a wooden spoon” (you have to learn to suck salt through a wooden spoon) both of which speak to learning to survive life challenges through embracing these cultural values. Such homeland narrative seems to shape the content of the Jamaican immigrant women’s socialization messages in the US Southeast even while they also attempt to resist their racialization in this society. Thus, the women are mothering through a double consciousness (immigrant and Black) which manifest itself in some of the contradictions and complexities in their stories.

Though the content of the women’s narratives does not neatly fit in Hughes et al.’s (2006) definition of egalitarianism, there is some evidence that the women associate their children’s future success in the U.S on some level with hard work as other researchers discovered in their research with first generation Caribbean immigrants (Reynolds, 2005; Waters, 1999). However, complexities exist in fully applying this kind of interpretation to my research because the Jamaican women’s narratives and my observation revealed that they are not encouraging their children to adopt these values in lieu of embracing a racial and ethnic group membership nor are they ignoring issues of race in the society. Rather, while fostering pride in their children’s racial and ethnic identities (e.g. Black church membership, transnational activities and display of cultural artifacts) the women encouraged the development of the meritocratic cultural values of hard work and perseverance as a means of survival in the face of racism. Thus, contradictions exist in the women’s narrative, in that they internalized meritocratic ideologies while also preparing their second generation immigrant children for bias in the society.
The Jamaican immigrant women in this research often encouraged their children to defy the odds against them by rising above what society expects them to accomplish as Black children. For instance, the women’s narrative of hard work and perseverance were often used to challenge school’s low expectation of Black children. Nevertheless, tensions in the women’s narratives exist due to differences between the interpretations of the discourse on hard work by critically conscious individuals in the racialized U.S society versus the women’s homeland understanding of hard work as a vehicle to success. However, because their racial identity exposes their family to discrimination in the society (especially their sons), it is difficult for them to deny that race impacts their daily lives.

As part of the critical race and decolonizing methodological constructs, counterspace as a conceptual tool provides me with the opportunity to not only center the women’s voices but also center the spaces in which narratives and or counternarratives are used to deconstruct deficit perspectives about them. It also helps me to unveil how the Jamaican immigrant women seek to empower their family to counteract the powerless they often experience in the wider mainstream society (Gadsby, 2006; O’Reilly, 2004). Regardless of where they are on the continuum of critical consciousness, the mothers and grandmothers articulate an attempt to ethnic-racially socialization their children or grandchildren in ways that could help them to cope psychologically and survive in the racial context in which they live. As Case and Hunter (2012) noted, this practice of using the home to buffer the challenges in the society is very much aligned to hooks (2015) notion of the homeplace as “a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many wounds inflicted by racist domination” (p.42).
Research Questions

The upcoming discourse about each of these women was informed by but also contributes to my understanding of the notions of ethnic-racial socialization and counterspaces. I offer this discourse in response to research questions asked to gain insights from Afro-Caribbean mothers’ and grandmother’s stories. Those questions were:

1. How do the mothers and grandmothers perceive racism in the U.S? How do they choose to self-identify? What connection, if at all, exists between their perceptions of racism and how they choose to raise their children or grandchildren?

2. What ethnic-racial messages do they transmit to their children or grandchildren? What purposes do these messages serve?

3. What insights do the mothers’ narratives on the ethnic-racial socialization of their children or grandchildren provide about what social justice might look like for children from families like theirs?

The discussion about each participant begins with a brief biography. Next, I explore themes pertaining to the participant’s perceptions and or experiences with race and racism in the U.S. This is followed by details about how each participant ethnic-racially socializes their second generation Jamaican immigrant children or grandchildren. Each narrative concludes with the participant’s articulation of how schools could work towards being more inclusive of children who are marginalized in the society.
Bev

Introduction

Bev is the first Jamaican immigrant mother that this chapter will explore to gain insights on her perception of race and racism in the U.S, how she chose to self-identify, ethnoculturally socialized her son in the racialized context of the U.S South and articulated what she considered to be social justice in school for him and other Black children who face marginalization in the society. Part of the title of this research (“all the trappings of racism are here, and I live in them”) comes from her direct articulation of the belief that she lives in a racialized society. Hence, I choose to begin with her story because it best set the stage for unveiling the complexities that surround all the women as they raise their second generation Jamaican immigrant children in the U.S. Her narrative helps to articulate the need for a nuanced understanding of their experiences as Black women in a heterogeneous U.S Black community.

Complexities and contradiction in Bev’s narrative. Throughout Bev’s narrative, I discuss areas of complexities and contradictions to underscore the challenges Black immigrants face in the U.S and to unveil how nuanced understanding of their lives could broaden discourse on social justice in education. Coming from the colonial history of Jamaica, Bev often included in her narratives, perspectives from both her home country’s historical legacy and the racial context of the U.S. Her story revealed some of the complexities that often surround Black immigrants who are trying to come to terms with living in a racialized society (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Butterfield, 2004; Rong & Preissle, 1998). Such complexities, for example, include the challenges involved in coming from a Jamaican society where race is de-emphasized especially by government
officials (Vickerman, 1999) to live in the Black-White binary of the U.S (Waters, 1999). The tensions and conflicts involved in trying to survive, but also finding ways to cope with and at times resist racialization is a dominant theme is her story. It is during these moments of tension and conflict that her story revealed her critical consciousness on one hand and some internalized mainstream ideologies (e.g. meritocracy associated with egalitarianism) on the other. As evident in the proceeding discourse, she admitted to experiencing this tension and feeling the need to “check” herself in situations where she might demonstrate this kind of internalization. In this vein, her narratives at times revealed that it is possible to both resist domination and still also experience internalization (hooks, 2013). Hence, a significant argument that Bev introduced in her reflection on these kinds of tensions is that we all need to “check” the contradictions in our own stories.

**Bev’s use of the terms “Negroid” and “Caucasoid”.** In my exploration of Bev’s narrative, I mention the words “Negroid” and “Caucasoid” as terms that she used intentionally during our conversations instead of the words black or white. I am aware that these words are derogatory and problematically linked to scientific racism. However, by highlighting them as part of her narrative, I seek to reveal the tensions, complexities and contradictions in her story.

Amidst the complexities mentioned earlier, Bev’s narratives revealed the overarching ethnic-racial socialization messages (Hughes et al., 2006) of preparation for bias, cultural socialization, faith socialization and egalitarianism. All ethnic-racial messages except egalitarianism seemed geared at introducing her son to racial issues and preparing him to cope with living in what she calls a “racist world” by building his self-
esteem. As a single mother, she expressed the need to protect his psychological well-being so that he will not be affected by deficit majoritarian stories about “Negroid” people in the society. Her arguments in this regard, is aligned to critical race scholars’ observation that majoritarian stories focus on “stock stereotypes that covertly and overtly link people of color, women of color, and poverty with ‘bad’, while emphasizing that White, middle-to-upper class people embody all that is good” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2009, p.136). Within these complexities, there were some indications that Bev used narratives in the home that helped to create a counterspace for her son by challenging deficit perspectives of Black people while affirming his racial and ethnic identities.

Biographical Background

Bev is a 43-year-old psychiatrist who also holds a B.A in nursing. She is a 1.5 Jamaican immigrant mother of a 10-year-old second-generation Jamaican immigrant boy, residing in the U.S. for 37 years and 25 years in the U.S South in particular. She migrated to the U.S. Southeast in the 1970s with her parents and older siblings (two brothers and one sister) when she was only six years old. Her family moved here mainly for economic reasons because her parents wanted to provide a better life for their children. Her earliest memory of her migration from Jamaica to the U.S was of her parents saying that she was a “good girl” and they were going to move to the U.S where they promised she would get the opportunity to learn how to play the piano. This promise came to fruition as she now attends a Seventh Day Adventist Church in her neighborhood where she is one of the pianists.

As an immigrant youth in the U.S, she attended public elementary, middle, and high school where she excelled. She explained that she was an avid reader and committed
student, so she did not experience academic challenges in schools. Reflecting on those
years, she did not recall experiences with racism, but she mentioned that in elementary
school she was teased for speaking “proper” (Standardized English) and at times felt
ostracized on the playground because she was from a different cultural background from
her White and Black peers. During her college years, she also recalled instances when she
felt ignored by some of her White classmates but again did not experience overt racism.
However, she argued, “to me it is very clear that all the trappings of racism are here, and
I live in them.” She also explained that she became more critically aware of this issue on
her own through reading critical research and books such as Malcolm X during her
undergraduate years.

Prior to emigrating to the U.S, Bev attended grade one in a primary school in
Kingston, Jamaica, where she was born. There she enjoyed playing ring games during
lunch and recess. One of her most memorable ring game was called “Bull in the pen”
which required all the children in the game to hold hands as tightly as possible while one
child representing the “bull” in the middle of the ring would try to break free through the
weakest link. When the child as the “bull” breaks free, all the children would chase him
or her and the first person who makes contact would become the bull. The words of this
ring game chant are “Bull inna di pen and him cyan come out!” (The bull is in the pen
and cannot come out) which is repeated until the bull finally breaks free.

Bev’s childhood ring game is a fitting metaphor for exploring her struggles as she
tried to cope and teach her son how to cope with the legacy of racism in the U.S society.
The tensions involved in with being restrained and trying to break free is evident in Bev’s
resistance to her racialization in the U.S. yet being constrained by some of her thoughts
which indicate internalization of mainstream ideologies. From our conversations, she seemed both aware and unaware of some of these contradictions in her narratives. Hence, in the discourse which follows, this game will be used as a metaphor for exploring the complexities she encounters as a Jamaican immigrant mother raising a second generation Black son in the U.S. South.

**Perception of Race and Racism in the U.S**

*The legacy of racism*
*from the physical traits*
*what is considered beautiful*
*to a sense of accomplishment*
*like who has done what*
*the scientist all of that*
*through television*
*the news*
*the stories*
*through books*
*we live in a racist world*
*you have to really W-A-T-C-H*
*you have to be very careful*
*they are very subtle at times*
*but sometimes it is not so subtle*

During our conversations, Bev expressed concern about the marginalization of Black people in the U.S. stemming from the country’s legacy of racism. The ethno-poem above, constructed from her words, revealed her belief that various structures (e.g., media) in the society help to maintain what she called a racist world resulting in economic, academic and health care disparities. Recognizing that racism can be overt and covert in the society, she articulated a need for watchfulness. This emphasis on “watching” was also noted by Jamaican immigrant mothers in Vincent, Rollock, Ball and Gillborn’s (2012) research in the U.K, who were watchful of the environment in which they lived in order to protect their children from the racism in the society. Drawing from
her background as a psychiatrist and her experiences as a Black mother, Bev particularly emphasized that Black parents need to watch out for the self-esteem of their children living in “the war situation” presented in this racialized context.

**A War situation.** The racialization of Black people in the U.S creates what Bev believed to be a war situation. In defining this “war situation”, she referred to social and economic conditions that place us at the bottom of the well (Bell, 1992). During one of my members checking on our earlier conversations, she shared with me that her thinking about the oppression of Black people over the world is influenced by Bob Marley’s song entitled War. Below are some lines from this song:

```
Until the philosophy which holds one race superior
and another inferior/ is finally and permanently discredited
and abandoned/everywhere is war/me say war

[...]
That until the basic human rights/are equally guaranteed to all
Without regard to race-dis a war

[...]
We Africans will fight-we find it necessary
And we know we shall win/ as we are confident
In the victory of good over evil, good over evil yeah!
```

In this song, Bob Marley speaks of a “war” against racism and the oppression of Africans in the motherland and the diaspora. He presents racism as a philosophy that must be discredited and expressed confidence in gaining “the victory of good over evil.” Drawing from Marley’s perspectives and aligned to CRT tenets, Bev believed that the war situation that Black people face in the world requires actions on our part to address this problem.

**Tensions between resistance and survival.** Her notion of war was also drawn from her belief that racism is not only an illness but a battle between good and evil, a Christian belief that I will explore later in this section. She argued that while Black
immigrants can reflect on experiences outside U.S. racism, African-American “don’t even have a little space, a little chance to take a break from it.” She also mentioned that in this context “there’s no freedom just to be human.” Reflecting on this war situation, she contended that there is a need for Black people to make conscientious decisions to persevere and survive despite the challenges in the society. Such ideas were evident in the following ethno-poem that I crafted from her words:

We are in a WAR for our very life,  
and the WAR now is not let me go take a gun and spear  
like we did in the Civil War  
the WAR is to create some stable families

Let’s make sure everybody finishes high school and college  
let’s make sure everybody knows it is OK to be Negroid  
let’s make sure everybody has a job  
let’s make sure that everybody is doing something that helps their community

Bev maintained that Black people in the U.S are battling for their lives so they should develop coping strategies to help them survive this war situation. She explained that her belief is drawn from her experiences as a psychiatrist and the issues that she often had to address in this practice. She contended that it was important for us to do what we can to improve our condition by giving back to the community, building stable families, and completing our education.

Although she spoke about the problem of white privilege in some of our conversations, she articulated a belief that Black people in this racialized society should develop survival strategies in spite of this problem. However, her survival strategies, as illustrated by the gap in the last stanza, revealed tensions like a “bull inna di pen” between an awareness of the problem of racism in the U.S. but a limited understanding of how structural racism operates. For example, her statement “Let’s make sure everybody
finishes high school and college” follows a mainstream narrative of meritocracy which fails to recognize the role that institutional racism plays in derailing the academic progress of Black students (Gillborn, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Hence, like the “bull inna pen” game she attempted to challenge racism but was also constrained by some of her belief about how this problem should be addressed. During our conversations, she admitted to struggling with being cynical of decisions that she considered being poor survival strategies for living in the war situation presented by a racialized society as seen in the following poem:

*I hear myself saying “they.”*
*why do they dress like that?*
*why do they talk like that?*

*Don’t call your child Shaquanda*
*you don’t see that you are living in a racist world?*
*but then I am thinking,*
*why would a person avoid calling their kid Shaquanda?*
*under what circumstances?*

*Living in a racist society,*
*how are we going to be successful,*
*financially, emotionally and spiritually?*
*How are we going to be free?*
*How are we going to be happy?*

*Do what you can to address racism,*
*but at the same time do what you can to be happy,*
*be self-sufficient and survive*  

The ethno-poem above reflects what hooks (2013) describes as “split-mind enacting behaviors that reinforce patterns of racist stereotypes even as they may voice anti-racist sentiments” (p.195). The metaphoric “bull inna pen” in Bev’s childhood game aptly describes the complexities she experienced while living in a racialized context.
Bev’s internal conflict was between figuring out a way to address racism and trying to survive in the society. For example, throughout our conversations, she talked about the need to be strategic in challenging racism in a “war situation” and her personal desire to find a way to live a happy life in the midst of this problem. Hence, in the last two lines of the poem, her words suggest that living in a racist society is a balancing act between resistance and survival. Like Bev, Tanya at times also demonstrated the same tensions in balancing resistance and survival. In those instances, her response to her family’s racialization was contradictory in nature. For example, although she critiqued racism in society and prepared her son for the bias he will encounter, she also insisted that her children dress and talk in a manner that was more acceptable to mainstream society.

**Unchallenged racism.** As mentioned earlier, during our conversations about racism in the U.S, Bev acknowledged that she also struggles with the internalization of racism and recognize the need to work constantly on decolonizing her mind. She explained that we all often struggle with this internalization because racism is often left “unchecked” in our lives. Hence, quoting Bob Marley’s *Redemption Song*, she argued that we must check ourselves in order to emancipate our own minds from mental slavery. Such sentiments are echoed in her words captured in the following ethno-poem:

```
We have racism so solidly intact because
we all carry that within us unchallenged
racism exists
because racism exists
in the minds of all

We are not checking it as individuals,
Therefore, when it occurs,
wherever it occurs
it is a part of us
```
There is a kind of acceptance
we feel we are from this class
so we cannot marry into that class
you go to Jamaica and “well we have light skin
and pretty hair.”
we have to keep that going

I feel on some metaphysical level
that is why racism is really allowed to stay intact
We are not checking and challenging it ourselves

In discussing the problem of the “unchecked racism” Bev drew from both a nuanced understanding of race in Jamaica (e.g., colorism, conflation of race and class), as seen in the third stanza, and her understanding of racism in the U.S. In discussing this problem, she argued that racism is reproduced in the society by all of us because we do not challenge our thinking and the actions associated with our own internalization. She maintained that the day-to-day racism is often ignored and only gets everyone’s attention when there is a major event like the shooting in Charleston, South Carolina.

**Borderless Racism**

Bev expressed the view that we live in a racist world thus creating a sense of her understanding of what I term borderless racism. This notion of a borderless racism is seen in her remark that “I do not operate with the expectation that there is no racism anywhere on the planet, so I do not have it in my mind that up there in the North this is awesome. For me in England, in Canada, New Hampshire, South Carolina in Miami in Jamaica the racism is alive and well.”

Drawing from the standpoint that racism is a global issue, Bev’s narrative included a discussion of the Jewish Holocaust, the oppression of Mexicans in the U.S, British colonization of India and Gandhi’s fight against their colonial domination. She
also contended that Jamaica should receive reparation from Britain for their involvement in the slave trade. Hence, her conversations were informed by both a local (U.S) and global understanding of the problem of racism and other forms of oppression experienced by people around the world. Her references to the colonization of Jamaica and India also revealed that she was drawing from a postcolonial discourse and how colonial racism impacted the lives of colonized people. She also brought this kind of postcolonial reading to her discussion of the racial climate in Jamaica and the U.S South.

**Nuanced differences in the social climate in Jamaica and the U.S South.**

*Some of the things African Americans experienced in this country, we just didn’t,*

*so that didn’t get tape recorded on our brains*

*The same way it got tape recorded on their brains*

Bev’s narrative revealed her awareness of nuanced differences between the social climate in Jamaica and the U.S. society and how this might influence differences in interpretations. However, she challenged commonly held assumptions that racism does not exist in Jamaica by referring to the practice of colorism in our home country. The ethno-poem below illustrates her thoughts on this problem:

*In Jamaica, there is not that constant onslaught of marginalization is that really true?*

*is it just a coincidence that some*
prominent families in Jamaica
look exclusively the way they look?

For decades, generation after generation,

is it a coincidence?

No, it is not a coincidence!
although we don’t see
the systematic racism that is here [U.S]

is it because we are free of systematic racism?

or is it that there are such fewer numbers
of Caucasoid people,
so we don’t see it the same way?

We have to ask that question,
at one time too, I thought
we didn’t have this in Jamaica!

In Jamaica, we have a large population of Negroid
some who are successful, very highly educated and wealthy,
so it looks different, but it is still there,
you better believe it!

As my constructed ethno-poem reveals, Bev was very reflective of the differences
between racism in the U.S and Jamaica. In Jamaica, Bev described the class system and
practice of colorism originating in the country’s slavery and colonial history (Waters,
1999; Vickerman, 1999). She argued that in Jamaica, racism looks different because it is
mixed with class and the opportunity exists for the majority Black people to move into
the middle class because of their academic accomplishments. However, interrogating the
economic disparities in Jamaican she contended, “look at the 5% of Caucasoid people in
Jamaica, what fraction of them are poor? I would say it is much smaller than the fraction
of the “Negroid” people in Jamaica!” Offering her insider perspective, her statement in
the preceding ethno-poem, “you better believe it”, counters some people’s belief that
racism does not impact life in Jamaica. In alignment with Bev’s observation, Cliff (1984) argued, this disbelief about the existence of racism in the country might be influenced by the fact that “it was so easy to lose sight of color when you were constantly being told that there was no ‘colour problem’ in Jamaica” (p.100).

*Colorism in Jamaica.* During her discussion of colorism in Jamaica, Bev revealed that her mother had a preference for light skin, long hair and thin lips which she described as a symptom of the kind of internalized racism that is still evident in some Jamaicans’ attitude to darker skin tones and African features. Her ethno-poem unveils this issue:

```plaintext
My mother born in the 1930s
is from the Jamaican school that says,
light skin is better,
long hair is better,
light eyes are more beautiful
her aunt and friends in the community also said,
long hair,
lighter skin
and thinner lips are nicer.
```

As revealed in the ethno-poem, Bev noted that the kind of racism she is describing in Jamaica is not the blatant day to day racism or structural racism existing in the U.S., but the kind that is associated with colorism. She explained that “it is a racism like they are not as pretty as us, not as handsome as us, I would prefer to marry a lighter one.” In congruence, Robinson-Walcott (2009) maintained that colorism forms part of the complexities of race in Jamaica. However, she noted that “black may not always mean poor, but poor still essentially means black-and African-in Jamaica” (p.109).

The emphasis on lighter skin tone illustrated by Bev’s arguments referred to subliminal and overt messages in the Jamaican society that still continue to ascribe
certain privileges to those who are light skin. For example, commenting on the 2015 Miss Universe Jamaica Beauty Pageant, Alkins (2015) argued that the dark skin women are often overlooked. He contended that Jamaicans “seem to celebrate and glorify only one type of beauty, perhaps because of insecurity about race, class and skin colour.” In a 2015 newspaper report commenting on the same beauty pageant competition, Dayton Campbell, a local Jamaican politician, also argued that “beauty pageants are a reminder that Jamaica continues to have a serious problem with race and class.” In congruence with his argument, Cliff (1984) in her novel Abeng portrayed the problem of colorism in Jamaica through her main character Clare Savage. She described this character as a light skin 12 years old girl, who thought “she was a lucky girl—everyone said so—she was light skinned…she lived in a world where the worst thing to be—especially if you were a girl—was to be dark. The only thing worse than that was to be dead” (p.77).

**Self-Identification**

Bev self-identified in her daily interactions in the U.S as a Jamaican Seventh Day Adventist. She explained that both identities were vital aspects of her life. Although she came to the U.S. at a young age, Bev self-identified as a Jamaican because she felt closer to her Jamaican roots than the American culture. She explained that she lived in a Jamaican community in another state in the U.S. South and recalled eating Jamaican food, interacting with other Jamaican friends and relatives. She also mentioned that she was raised with Jamaican cultural values that influenced how she raised her son. She also identified herself as a Seventh Day Adventist because she believed her faith identity kept her grounded and helped her to cope with life’s daily challenges. In several of our conversations, she also included herself as part of what she called the “Negroid people”
which suggested that she was also tapping into a racial identity. Other times she also drew from Caribbean and Pan-African identities to discuss issues of race. This was seen for example when she discussed the need for an apology and reparation for the crimes of slavery. Additionally, she embraced the notion of having multiple identities when in one of our conversations she noted that we all might view racial issues differently because “Negroid, Caucasoid and even amongst different West Indian people we have different ways, cause our ethnicity is only one of many identities.”

Resisting the negative connotation of the Black label. In my conversations with Bev about her experiences in the U.S, she constantly used the words “Negroid” and “Caucasoid” instead of saying the words black and white when asked about her choice of words she noted:

Negroid and Caucasoid are scientific terms,
free of a lot of the b-i-a-s-e-s,

white has a lot of positive connotations,
purity, mild, all these kinds of things,

black has a lot of negative connotations

given the severe problem that exists,
these terms could be helpful
they also spark discussion!

Bev’s arguments revealed the complexities associated with self-identifying in the U.S context. Additionally, they indicated her attempt to resist the “black” label by using instead the word “Negroid”, drawn from her scientific background, to describe herself and people of African descent. She argued that it is a term that is free from the negative connotations often associated with the word black. Hence, she articulated a preference for the term “Caucasoid” because she believed that it removed the unfair privileging of the
word “white” in the society. However, in using the word “Negroid” unknowingly used another label that is equally problematic because of its scientific conception of race, a practice that was prevalent in the U.S. up to the 1950s (Teslow, 2014). Hence, her preference for the word “Negroid” represented another example of her struggle with internalization even while trying to resist racialization (hooks, 2013).

Bev also critiqued other forms of descriptors used in the society such as “white privilege.” She explained that the term did not accurately convey what she observed in the society. She argued that the term “white privilege” is problematic because privilege was not willingly given to members of the dominant culture but was forcibly taken in the past through oppressive measures such as colonialism and slavery and then passed on from generation to generation at the expense of Black people. Hence, she contended that this term must be re-evaluated to reflect this fact fully. According to Delgado & Stefancic (2012), “‘white privilege’ refers to the myriad of social advantages, benefits, and courtesies that come with being a member of the dominant race” (p.87). Bev’s partial knowledge of structural racism, reflected in this argument, factors significantly in the kinds of ethnic-racial socializing messages she seemed to transmit to her son.

**Ethnic-Racial Socialization Messages**

The ethnic-racial socialization messages Bev transmitted to her son were preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, cultural socialization, faith socialization and egalitarianism. Preparation for bias refers to the direct and indirect messages she transmitted that were geared toward helping him realize that racism exists and that he will experience certain challenges associated with his racial identity. Cultural socialization refers to the direct and indirect messages about cultural values, customs, and knowledge
that she used to help him to cope in a racialized context. These messages were drawn from a collective African Diaspora culture. Additionally, faith socialization messages were used to help her son to both learn about and cope with racism in the society. These ethnic-racial socializing messages are significant because the overarching theme emerging from Bev’s conversations about her son was his psychological well-being as a Black male living in a racist world.

During our conversation about racism in the U.S, Bev talked about having a strategy or plan to deal with these kinds of social issues. She recounted that while growing up, she was told by her mother “just ignore that, don’t touch those race issues.” Although Bev noted that she would not advise anyone to bury their head in the sand, she explained that there was some wisdom to what her mother told her because she was trying to prevent her from becoming too angry and worried about racism as a child. Hence, she explained that she felt psychologically free to focus on getting good grades in school. However, she explained that now she is cognizant that American children are forced to think about these issues especially because of the recent events in the news (e.g. shooting of Black males, Black Lives Matter movement and debates about the confederate flag). Therefore, she explained that “with my son I am trying to introduce these ideas [about racism] but in a way that leaves him empowered and not bitter about racism” which she believed would prevent him from developing the healthy self-esteem required for survival in the society.

Bev admitted that she did not follow her mother’s advice to avoid focusing on the race issues during her college years, but argued that to rise above the anger is “the most powerful thing for a Negroid person to do in order to rise intact.” This line of argument is
aligned to hooks’ (2013) belief that “when any black person embraces the notion that the ‘white world is an all-powerful constant enemy they lose the will to live” (p.188). By this, she refers to the importance of Black people developing a healthy self-esteem despite the presence of white supremacy. Bev explained that focusing on the psychological well-being of her son is important because she recalled, at first, being infuriated in college when she began reading about racial issues in the U.S, but later learned to cope with these issues without developing the bitterness that would be self-destructive. When I asked her why she decided to take a different socializing approach from that of her mother, Bev explained that her mother could afford to take that stance because they were living in a Jamaican community in the U.S. South with a high Jamaican population, which insulated them from the day to day racial issues, but noted that she cannot afford to take that approach because she now lives in a white dominated community with a Black son who has to be protected from the racism in the society.

**Preparation for Bias: The Story of the Pink President**

A pink president!
When I took my son to see President Obama,
I asked him,
if you were the President of the United States,
what kinds of things would you do?
He said,
first of all, I want to be a pink president

RIGHT DEY SO MI SEE MI HAVE A PROBLEM!
MI HAVE A PROBLEM!

he had that perception already,
got messages from wherever,
that the Caucasoid people are always these nice shiny wonderful people
and the Negroid people are these problematic people
so I say
No,
No,  
I have to deal with that!

The ethno poem refers to a time when Bev took her 4-year-old son with her to an event to see President Obama because she wanted to expose him to a Black male role model. She explained that her son often used the color “pink” to describe “Caucasoid people” (a problematic racial label that she insisted on using), so he was, in essence, saying that he wanted to be a white president. She expressed disbelief that he was directly told by anyone that being white is better, but she noted that he seemed to internalize already the subliminal message that being “Negroid” is a problem. Hence, she explained that this was her first indication that she had to begin preparing her son for the bias he will face as a Black male. Speaking in Jamaican Patois, she acknowledged that she had a serious problem that must be immediately addressed. Hence, in discussing coping strategies to help counter deficit perspectives about his racial identity, Bev articulated her intention to help her son develop a solid self-esteem.

**Solid self-esteem.** In preparing her son for bias, Bev explained that during their bedtime routine, she would often validate him as a Black male in ways that could help build his self-esteem as illustrated in the following ethno-poem:

```
I am building self-esteem
I tell him that I love him
how God made him
I say
he is so smart
and courteous
he has such
beautiful skin
beautiful nose
beautiful lips
beautiful cheeks
beautiful hair
```
Living in a racialized society influenced Bev’s decisions about the socializing messages she transmitted to her son. She argued that it is important that people who are marginalized by the society “watch out for their self-esteem” and be mindful to interrupt these perspectives to guard their psychological well-being. She also noted that prepared him for biases in the society that might affect his self-esteem by explaining the problem of racism in a childish way so that he could understand but not become traumatized. She stated that “I always give graphic details of what I think is tolerable to my son without making him go crazy traumatic wise, I have the luxury of my son understanding that a battle is going on between evil and good, so I put it in that context for him.” She argued that the Jews tended to discuss their oppression during the Holocaust from a religious angle which she also aimed to do with her son.

**Faith Socialization: The Story of the Battle between Good and Evil**

Bev attended a Seventh Day Adventist church with predominantly white congregants in a middle-class community. Her church also had representations of congregants from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds (e.g., African Americans, Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Haitians, Zimbabwe and Venezuelan). She played an active role in the Music Department and served in other capacities when needed. Her son accompanied her to church and attended Sabbath School classes where he learned about various Bible characters through Bible stories, songs, and Bible passages.

Bev and her mother collaborated on telling the children a Bible story in the adult church on one of the Sabbaths I interacted with them in that setting. The story was about David and Goliath and how the Lord gave David the strength to defeat the giant with a stone and slingshot. Bev played the piano to provide sound effects for the story while her
mother provided the details. At the end of the story all the children sung, “David slingshot goes around and around.” The story pointed to a battle between good (David) and evil (Goliath) which is also present in many of the stories in her son’s *Children’s Quarterly* (Bible story texts given to the children per quarter). Hence, what follows is a discussion on how Bev attempted to draw from this concept of good and evil to introduce ideas about racial issues in the society. As mentioned earlier, Bev introduced her son to the racial issues existing in the society through the Bible’s account of the battle between good and evil. She explained to her son that the legacy of racism began during a time when some people from the dominant culture “violated the rules of sharing, cooperating, and being kind.” Hence, her narrative also focused on racism as a violation of God’s moral rules.

Since her son’s 10th birthday, Bev explained that she planned to expose him to more aspects of his history. She recalled that learning about the legacy of Black people in her 20s was transformative, so she wants him also to learn about their history. She noted that her intention is to expose him to the knowledge that he needs to protect himself in the society but also teach him, from her Christian perspective, to love and forgive those who would treat him differently because he is Black. The ethno-poem reveals her strategy:

```
I SPIN it [the marginalization of Black people]
that this is a kind of great evil
the devil has worked,
I tell him that racism is
one of the most powerful tools
that the devil uses to separate people
it is important for you to understand this evil
to defend and protect yourself
```
However,

There is one holy spirit and it is not you,
your job is to forgive
with the forgiveness
and the love
in his TOOL BOX
I feel like I can tell him
because the only thing he is going to do after that,
is to love and forgive
but at the same time, I leave him with a free heart

hooks (2013) argued that “love as a way of life makes it possible for us all to live humanely within a culture of domination as we work to change” (p.199). In congruence with her argument, Bev’s used the phrase “spin it” in the preceding ethno-poem to describe her strategic attempt to prepare her son for bias, but also prepare him to love and forgive. Hence, her strategy represented a balancing act between critical consciousness and the Christian values of love and forgiveness as seen in the Charleston shooting incident when family members of the nine victims publicly expressed their forgiveness to Dylann Roof, the shooter. She remarked that in taking such an approach “I don’t spare him any valuable information that he needs to have.” In the next section on the cultural socializing messages that she transmitted to her son, I will explore how Bev also provided her son with heritage knowledge (Jamaica and African Diaspora) as a means of illustrating to him that “Negroid people are valid” in the world.

Cultural Socialization

According to Bev, she directly transmitted cultural socializing messages to her son drawn from her Jamaican heritage. She explained that she often cooked traditional Jamaican dishes such as ackee and saltfish, speak Patois around him and tell Patois jokes from her childhood days in Jamaica. Reflecting on these cultural practices, she argued
that it is her job to teach her son about his cultural background, but she believed that “it’s the school’s job to honor and respect every child who walks through their classroom door” which for her meant accepting children for who they are regardless of their identities and cultural background.

In this research, my exploration of Bev’s cultural socialization messages did not include a focus on traditional multicultural details (e.g., food and dress) though important, but on the cultural knowledge and values that she transmitted to her son in order to teach him about the validity of Black people. Although Bev noted that she placed a high value on education, she argued that school knowledge might not be useful in helping him to cope in a racialized society. Hence, her cultural socializing messages in the home are those that provided counter knowledge drawn from the African Diaspora, which helps fostered in her son a positive self-esteem and pride in his historical background.

**The representation of Black people and promotion of mistrust.** Bev transmitted messages overtly and covertly that promoted mistrust in mainstream society and school to provide positive representations of Black people. She argued that “it is very dangerous for us and our children to be participating blindly in a racist world like this.” Hence, she explained that she often attempted to expose her son to books that portrayed black people in a positive manner and represented the history accurately. Whenever she visited the library with her son, she explained that she was very “watchful” of the kinds of books he was selecting so that he was not exposed to deficit perspectives about his identity. The ethno-poem below reveals Bev’s critical assessment of the books at the library to determine their suitability for her son:
As the above ethno-poem indicates, one of the dominant themes that consistently arose out my conversations with Bev was the need to be watchful of the messages about Black people that are transmitted in the society. She explained that she was watchful and ready to interrupt negative messages. In our conversation, she indicated that her church literature is not exempted from this level of scrutiny. She shared with me that one of her son’s religious magazines had a story with stereotypical details about a Black male and she refused to expose her son to those kinds of things. She said that this “Negroid boy was from Bermuda and the story started with him riding on a broken down bicycle and saying “why are we so poor?” Bev declared that “My son nah read dat dey book dey” (My son will not read that book).

**Diaspora literacy.** King (1992) believed that diaspora literacy can help to validate children of African descent through exposure to ancestral history. She defined diaspora literacy as knowledge that aids in “‘cultural re-memory’” (p.320). From observing and talking with Bev, I learned that her son received cultural socializing messages through some African Diaspora literacy materials and music in the home that encouraged him to take pride in his African roots. For example, at one of their social interactions with some of Bev’s Jamaican friends I heard reggae songs from Rastafarian
artistes that transmitted messages about his Africa ancestry. One of these songs was Garnet Silk’s song, *Hello Mama Africa*. Below are some of the words:

```
Hello, Mama Africa, how are you?
I'm feeling fine, and I hope you're fine too
Hello, Mama Africa, how are you?
I hope when you hear these words
Your grays turn blue; grays turn blue

I'm saying these words to let you know
How much I care and I won't let go
Even though I'm oceans away
You're with me day by day
Memories of you keep flashing through my mind
The very thought of you make my time
```

The song is a celebration of an African ancestry which served as another example that Bev embraced a Pan-African identity. Connection to this identity was also apparent in some of her statements about the need for decolonizing knowledge in the homes of Black children. In addition to listening to these kinds of music in her home and social settings, she read books in the home that tapped into the African heritage. Below is a photo image of one of these books:

Figure 4.1. African Proverbs and Wisdom book in Bev’s home
Bev noted that she grew up hearing Jamaican proverbs as a child which sparked her interest in this book. She explained that she enjoyed reading Stewart’s (1997) book on African proverbs and wisdom because she believed that a book like this could help her expose her son to his cultural heritage (e.g., African and Jamaican experiences) and provide him with the cultural knowledge that is absent from schools’ curriculum. In addition to this book she also had Caribbean artifacts (e.g., art and craft items) displayed in her home that also exposed him to his cultural background. Below is a picture of a Haitian wall décor that she displayed in her home.

Figure 4.2. Haitian artifact illustrating traditional Caribbean images.

The picture in the cultural artifact (Figure 4.2) displayed a Caribbean landscape with people dressed in traditional Caribbean attire. It also portrayed a woman carrying a basket that is reminiscent of my childhood memory of women in the rural areas carrying their baskets on their heads to and from the market. In addition to this Haitian artifact, she also displayed Jamaican cultural artifacts (e.g., pencil holder) purchased at a craft market in...
Jamaica on one of her many visits to her home country. In conversations about these cultural artifacts in her home, she explained that she wants her son to develop a “solid self-esteem.”

As part of exposing her son to his cultural background, Bev also shared with me a list of books that she would like her son to read when he gets older to provide him with positive Black male role models such as Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey and Sidney Poitier and to teach him about his history using books that give accurate accounts of the experiences of Black people. She explained that “these authors describe racism very accurately and have genuine respect and love for what it means to be Negroid.” She also argued that “it really rests with the parent and the home to give what Negroid males need in school for education.”

Bev explained that although her mother built her self-esteem, she did not necessarily develop her critical consciousness because she never discussed issues of race. She explained that what helped her on her journey to critical consciousness was a “deliberate kind of reading and noticing Negroid people are quite valid,” she also explained that in her early 20s, while in college, in her spare time she began reading Malcolm X’s autobiography, Kunjufu’s (1982) *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Males* and Hacker’s (2003) *Two Nations Divided Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* and “research about Negroid people in Africa and their inventions.” She explained that these texts made a difference in her life, so she placed them on a list of materials that she wants her son to read when he gets older. She expressed frustration with the absence of these kinds of information in school and mainstream society that she believed would help support Black males. Below is an ethno-poem illustrating the
counter-knowledge she mentioned learning from reading critical materials in her early adulthood years:

> We invented societies and industrial tools, machinery, all of that kind of thing, Aesop fables, the foundations of a lot of the great religion, a lot of the big time stories in Christianity, Islam and Judaism, you will see occurring in Negro Spirituals thousands of years before so the slaves were not people who were just hanging around.

In the above ethno-poem, Bev’s words provided a counter-narrative to the majoritarian story that civilization was introduced by Europeans. They also demonstrated her knowledge of the accomplishments of people at the margins of society and her subsequent concern that these kinds of information are ignored and undermined by mainstream society.

During our conversation, she was very critical of television programs like *In Living Color* that she believed portrays Black people in a disparaging manner. She contended, “I don’t watch dem things dey (I don’t watch those kinds of things) because all those images are consistently making fun of Negroid people.” However, she noted that she enjoyed watching *Oliver*, a local Jamaican comedy, starred by comedian Oliver Samuels, which though comical, might also be perceived as disparaging to Black people because it also reinforced negative stereotypes about Black people. She reflected on this bias and commented that this may be as a result of her perception of the racial issues in America. Bev’s refusal to expose her son to disparaging movies was linked to her wish to foster a positive self-esteem in her child as she remarked, speaking in both Standard English and Patois, “I do not encourage any of that, so I am not going to let my kid see
any of that. After solid, respectful, loving, relationships have been forged with people of color, then him can look pon dem foolishness dey!” During our conversation, she explained that she is not completely opposed to him seeing these things later when he develops a positive self-esteem and perception of his racial identity.

Bev explained that she often made a deliberate attempt to watch television shows in her home that were uplifting to her family. For example, she explained that she watched the documentary *Dark Girls*, a documentary that explores the impact of racism and colorism on Black girls and women, in her home with her mother and best friend to have serious conversations about how racism psychologically affects Black people.

She shared that she included Sidney Poitier in her list of positive male role models for her son because she admires his accomplishments as a Black actor but particularly liked his role as Dr. Prentice in the movie in *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner*, in which he made the well-known statement to his father “Dad, you’re my father. I’m your son. I love you. I always have and I always will. But you think of yourself as a colored man. I think of myself as a man.” This is consistent with Bev’s own critique of the negative connotation of the Black label and her argument that people should be recognized as a human being and not reduced to a label. By this, she meant that the black label is often used as a means of dehumanizing individuals in the society. In reference to Spencer Tracy’s line, she explained that she wants her son to be successful in the world and not feel inferior or better than anyone. Hence, though she transmitted messages to encourage her son to be proud of his racial heritage, like Tanya she critiqued deficit labels that dictated what he is expected to accomplish in life because of his color. Although, some individuals might interpret her comments on Spencer Tracy line as a colorblind
worldview, my conversations with her revealed that she believed it is important for her son to be proud of his racial and ethnic identity. However, she expressed concern that the racial structure in the society set barriers to what he is expected to accomplish because of his race.

**The Creation of Socially Just Schools**

Bev admitted to being cynical about the possibility of achieving true social justice in schools because she believed that individuals who run these institutions must themselves be free of the legacy of racism which threatens inclusiveness in those settings. Hence, feeling disenfranchised and frustrated with what she perceived to be the failure of schools to address this issue, she declared that the home is the most powerful place because she can develop her son’s self-esteem and provide him with the counter knowledge to better support him as a Black male. However, she conceded that there are things the school could do to support Black children, but it must be done in collaboration with the home.

**Connect with student’s home.** Bev expressed a lack of confidence in school officials’ willingness to make the radical change she believed would interrupt the inequalities that exist in this institutions. In this vein, she perceived a seesaw relationship between the home and school as the ethno-poem below indicates:

```
We either going to have a powerless school
and a powerful home
or a powerful school
and powerless home
which do you choose?
I CHOOSE the powerful home
and the powerless school
God forbid you have to make such a choice!

the home is already the most powerful place
```
what those kids are seeing in the home
forms their opinion of the world,
themselves, God, economics and safety

the home is already the most powerful place so
if the home is not on board
with what you are doing
you have a long way to go!

if the home is already the most powerful place
what can the school do?
it cannot exclude the home
it has to incorporate the parents!

Aligned to the belief that counterspaces can make a difference in the life of Black families (Case & Hunter, 2012), Bev repositioned the home in the society as a powerful place because of the influence that parents can have on their children. Hence, she believed that schools must connect with parents if they actually want to make a difference in the lives of children who are racialized by the society. Her juxtaposition of the powerful home and powerless school and vice versa reflected her belief that the school and home are often not in sync with each other. Hence, she argued that “until the school is willing to have genuine conversations, they [school officials] can keep that [superficial attempts] the onus is on the family and the home.”

“Build capacity for dialogue.” Throughout our conversations, Bev suggested that the disparities in schools might be addressed if school officials build a capacity for dialogue with people within the community. Below is an ethno poem with her articulation of how this can be done:

Go where people are,
churches, schools, wherever people are
interface with them
build a capacity for dialogue
be peaceful along the issue of race
engage and keep the relationship going
Bev maintained in the preceding ethno-poem that dialogue is key a component for addressing social issues in schools. Bev also contended that we must focus on “where we would like to grow now.” Drawing from her psychiatric background, she argued that “the goal of the first therapy session is to make sure there is a second therapy session.” She explained that fostering dialogue is important to her because she thinks about what future she is creating and helping to create.

**Create an environment of wholeness.** In discussing her perception of the academic disparities in schools, particularly for Black males, Bev argued that “the problem is the social chrysalis in which the children are coming into.” The ethno-poem below reveals her frustrations with what she perceives as the failure of schools to address this problem:

*The school can find some way to connect with parent create an environment of wholeness they are just doing lip service they are not really interested in the genuine solution to the academic disparity seen amongst Negroid males until they do something radical I say keep it! I say keep it!*

In the above ethno-poem, Bev shared her view that the school must connect with students and create a wholesome environment. She expressed concern about the social climate in which Black children spend their time at school. Given her views about the inequality existing in school, she argued that educators should demonstrate a willingness to genuinely address the disparities children encounter in that setting.
Fostering the psychological well-being of the “Negroid” boy. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of Bev’s main concerns was that her son develops a solid self-esteem as a Black male despite mainstream narratives about his racial identity. Therefore, she argued that schools should create environments that help to foster his psychological well-being. Given her mistrust in the school system, she explained that at the beginning of each school year, she often asks her son’s teachers questions to assess their readiness for teaching him. The ethno-poem revealed the content of her interrogation:

What experience
doyouhave
in teaching and speaking to
the unique self-esteem needs of a Negroid boy
in the United States
or anywhere in the world,
where you have racism here on our planet?

In the ethno-poem above Bev challenged her son’s teachers to develop unique skills to address the self-esteem needs of Black males especially because of the pervasiveness of racism. Bev explained that whenever she asked his teachers these kinds of questions at the beginning of the school year, she believed that they helped these teachers to “open their mind to the idea, there’s something different or additional or something that I have to pay attention to with this young man.” She also believed they helped to hold the teachers accountable to addressing the self-esteem needs of Black males in the classroom.

Set high expectations for Black males. The following ethno-poem reveals her belief that parents should also advocate for their child in the school by requesting that teachers set high expectations for their child:

The parents have to
seek out the teacher
the home has to come
into that teacher’s space
Bev believed that social justice in school might require the advocacy of parents who could encourage teachers to develop strategies to increase the academic performance of Black males in the schools. Her use of the word “wake up” seems to indicate a belief that some teachers are not focusing on the issues that these boys face. She explained that she is aware of the work of Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu and other people who have written about the need to watch out for the self-esteem of young black males especially in America so she believed that “the fact that the teacher knows that I am looking for that she will at a minimum make sure that she is not doing any of those practices [repeating deficit perspectives] as unconsciously as she would if she didn’t know that.”

**Decolonizing knowledge.** During my conversations with Bev she expressed mistrust in schools’ willingness to provide knowledge that validate her family’s cultural and historical backgrounds. Therefore, contesting what she perceives as the often exclusive school curricula, Bev articulated that social justice for her would include all the aforementioned things as well as her ability to provide decolonizing knowledge to her son. In congruence with *Bob’s Marley’s Redemption Song* that talks about emancipating the mind, she mentioned that there is a need for the decolonization of the mind to cope in a racialized society. Hence, in the ethno-poem which follows, her words offer a roadmap to Black parents in the U.S for providing counter knowledge for their Black sons:

```
You not going to mek him read
any of the things in the schools,
except to make good grades,
show him Kunjufu,
take him to Africa
show him the validity
```
and the OKness of Negroid people,  
it’s all about the education that you give,  
separate and apart from what inna di school

The ethno-poem reveals her concern that the school’s curricula do not include the history and knowledge of people of African descent. Hence, she contends that Black parents must find ways to provide their children with information about their cultural background. Feeling constrained by the walls of oppression in the racialized society in which she lives, Bev’s resistance narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012) in the ethno-poem offer fellow parents an opportunity to break free from these walls like the “bull inna di pen” in her childhood ring game.

Ms. Dell

Biographical Background

Ms. Dell is a 58-year-old grandmother who taught in several elementary schools in Kingston, one of the two capital cities in Jamaica, for a total of 30 years. She held a diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree in education and worked as a sixth-grade senior teacher and a Dean of Discipline at Diamond Primary School (pseudonym) prior to migrating. She was born in the parish of St. Thomas, but she lived in Kingston since the age of two. She traveled to and from the U.S as a visitor from 2009 to 2013. In 2014 she migrated to the U.S South to live with her daughter, grandchildren, and son-in-law, all residing in Penview City (pseudonym) in a Southeastern state. Ms. Dell explained that her main reason for migrating was to help support her grandchildren academically. She was encouraged to migrate to the U.S. by her grandson’s primary school teacher who told her that “your grandchildren are going to need your expertise as a sixth-grade teacher.” She explained that her decision was also influenced by reports that she heard from a
Jamaican immigrant woman living in the U.S. who told her about the school to prison pipeline while she was conducting research in Ms. Dell’s classroom in Jamaica. Although she was in disbelief about this issue at the time, she decided to come to support her grandchildren.

Ms. Dell has two American-born grandchildren; nine-year old Sasha and twelve-year-old Dwight. Sasha is in third grade at Belle Elementary (pseudonym), and Dwight is in sixth grade at Frankton Middle (pseudonym). Both schools are located in Cheriton School District with a predominantly African American student population. 45% of the students in this school district are on free or reduced lunch. Both grandchildren lived with her in Jamaica for nine months during the time her daughter was completing a B.A. in nursing in the U.S. South. While there, Dwight attended Diamond Primary School where she taught. Ms. Dell proudly explained that he was placed in grade one at the age of five where he made the Honor Roll.

Migration factored significantly in Ms. Dell’s personal narrative in several ways. She is not only a migrant but also a child of a migrant mother who settled in England during her childhood years. She told me that she never saw her mother again until she met her in the U.S. as an adult. During our conversations about her life, she explained to me she faced life challenges in Jamaica that helped her to reflect on her identity and purpose in the society. Below is an ethno-poem that details her memory of some of the problems she faced in her home country and how they helped her to become self-reflexive:

*I did not grow up with a mother or a father
My mother left when I was six weeks old
and went to England
In those days when people leave the West Indies*
and go to England,
most times they leave the kids behind with grandparents

My father got married and
we couldn’t live with him,
we had to live with his aunt who was our grand aunt
we couldn’t live with our grandmother,
because she couldn’t have children
who were born out of wedlock living at her house
So most of our life were spent with our grandaunt,
until we were able to move out and leave her,
it was very heartbreaking, but I had to do it at the time
cause I already had a daughter
without a father who was not taking care of her

I said to myself this is not the end,
Who am I? Wake up you can make something of your life,
I asked myself who am I?
What do I want to achieve? I don’t have to be here
Why am I here? I have to play my part in the society

The preceding constructed ethno-poem, with Ms. Dell’s words, reveals that she had a challenging childhood in Jamaica, but she benefitted from the support of her grandaunt during those difficult times. The last stanza of the ethno-poem reveals that these early experiences made her self-reflexive about her identity and purpose in life. In the section which follows, I explore the complexities involved in making sense of this identity in the U.S. context and how she chose to self-identify in ways that empowered her.

Self-Identification

Ms. Dell’s narrative revealed tensions associated with being labeled as Black in America. Like Bev, she expressed concern about the deficit perspectives related to this label and her wish to be seen as much more that this label. As will be revealed in her narratives which follow, her concern also influenced the kinds of ethnic-racial messages she transmitted to her grandchildren in their home.
Resisting the Black label.

“I would say I am of African origin. I think that would be something better to put on a form.”

Ms. Dell expressed concerns about the word “black” on official forms requesting her racial identity. She remarked that she would prefer an option that allows her to self-identify as someone with African origin rather than the word “black” because of its negative connotation. Hence, she explained that she self-identifies as black whenever she feels compelled to do so on official demographic documents that limit her choices. However, she shared an incident when she tried to break free from this label when she visited the American Embassy. The ethno-poem which follows sheds light on how she attempted to accomplish this:

Sad tooooo say
they don’t give you much of a choice!
they usually say
black,
Hispanic,
or white
I just say black because I have no choice!

Nobody is black!

If I put something black beside me
I don’t look black
I would say I am of African origin
I think that would be something better to put on a form

The first time I went to the American Embassy,
I use it as a joke; I put chocolate!

The preceding ethno-poem indicates that Ms. Dell associated the word “black” with a skin tone that is negatively marked in the U.S. context. Hence, to free herself from this label she satirically chose an alternate means of self-identification. During our
conversation, she expressed frustration with not being seen as a human being because of
the black label. She also articulated the belief that people who are labeled “black” in this
society are subject to dehumanization. The ensuing ethno-poem is both a counter-
narrative and resistant narrative (Case & Hunter, 2012) detailing how Ms. Dell viewed
herself in the racialized context of the U.S. South.

\[
\begin{align*}
I \text{ am a human being,} \\
\text{human being} \\
\text{human being} \\
I \text{ am God’s creation,} \\
\text{God’s creation} \\
\text{God’s creation} \\
I \text{ am somebody just like you,} \\
\text{somebody} \\
\text{somebody} \\
\text{just like you}
\end{align*}
\]

In the preceding ethno-poem, Ms. Dell identified herself as a human being, God’s
creation and somebody like members of the dominant culture. Through the identification
of herself as God’s creation, she introduced a counter faith narrative about her identity. I
am coining this term to refer to the use of one’s faith to create stories that counter deficit
thinking about one’s identity and experiences. As a Seventh Day Adventist Christian,
several times throughout our conversations, she placed emphasis on the fact that she is
God’s creation, which seemed to be used by her as a means of validating herself in the
society. As detailed above Ms. Dell’s contestation of the word “black” as a means of self-
identification is based on the negative stereotypes associated with this skin tone that she
experienced or that she witnesses. When asked what category should be on official U.S.
demographic forms she stated, “I would say I am of African origin I think that would be
something better to put on a form.” She told me that she preferred to identify herself as a
woman of African descent because “we were taken from West Africa and distributed all over the world so that would be better.” Hence, her discomfort with this black label did not mean that she is rejecting her African heritage.

**Racism, Ethnocentrism and Promotion of Mistrust**

In private social settings, Ms. Dell explained that she self-identifies as a Jamaican migrant. However, she expressed concerns about experiencing ethnocentrism whenever she chose to self-identify this way or whenever she spoke with a Jamaican accent. Hence, she transmitted messages in her home that promoted mistrust of some people in the U.S. society who might treat her family unfairly because of both their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Below is an ethno-poem that shares her thoughts on this issue:

```
Sometimes when people hear my accent
they think she is not supposed to be here,
just like my grandson was born
at the U.S. military hospital,
and they want to find out
if he is Jamaican
because his mother
is Jamaican
```

Ethnocentrism is the dominant theme in Ms. Dell’s preceding ethno-poem. She explained that her accent often led to her othering in the U.S. society. Additionally, she linked this experience to a time when her daughter was asked to send her grandson’s birth certificate to his school after he was accused of deliberately taking a spatula from his Science class. She explained that her grandson was doing an experiment in his Science class, and he forgot to return it to the Science teacher at the end of this class. However, his Music teacher saw him with the spatula and realizing his mistake he asked permission to return it to his Science teacher. Ms. Dell told me that his Music teacher sent him to the principal because she believed that he deliberately removed it from his Science class. Ms. Dell read
her grandson’s experience as a combination of racism and ethnocentrism which heightened her mistrust of mainstream society and public schools as seen in the ethnopoem below:

They thought that he was not an American,  
That he is a migrant because  
he was asked to produce his birth certificate,  
his mother said she was not sending it!  
it was given to the school before  
She said I am not going to let anybody put him down  
because he is black

As a result of this incident, Ms. Dell’s grandson was given three days in-school suspension for having a spatula from Science class. She explained that she was very concerned about the teacher’s unfair accusation of her grandson. Her concern about this incident will be further explored in the section on preparation for bias. Ms. Dell viewed her grandson’s experience as not only an example of racism but also an example of ethnocentrism because the next day his family was asked to produce his birth certificate which was already submitted at the beginning of the school year. She noted that these kinds of experiences helped to shape her perception of race and racism in the U.S. South where she currently resides.

Perception and Experiences with Racism in a U.S. Southeast State

Because you are black  
they think you must stay back  
Because of race  
and I am not really  
from this country  
racism is just in your face,  
unfair treatment  
because you don’t speak  
white American
As the above ethno-poem indicates, Ms. Dell believed that Black people are marginalized in the U.S because of their racial identity. She defined this racism as an unfair treatment of individuals in the society because they are perceived as different. She also noticed that it is sometimes mixed with other forms of oppression (e.g., ethnocentrism and linguicism) that together cause people from non-white groups to feel dehumanized.

Although she was only in the U.S. Southeastern state for one year, she told me that she was racially profiled in two separate incidents. She also told me that her daughter and grandchildren, particularly her grandson, have experienced institutional racism. She was unique among the mothers in that prior to migrating to the U.S., she had conversations with her daughter and a Jamaican immigrant woman that personally exposed her to the problem of racism in the U.S. However, living in the U.S. South and experiencing it firsthand helped her to make better sense of the issues they introduced. The discourse which follows unveils her perception and experience with racism in the U.S. South and the complexities she was working through as a new migrant to the region.

**Racial profiling.** Ms. Dell recalled two incidents when she experienced racial profiling. She did not use the phrase “racial profiling” in the conventional sense associated with driving while Black. She often used this phrase to describe any experience that she perceived to be an unfair treatment because of the color of her skin. The first incident was when she went to a local government organization, and she experienced difficulty with getting her paperwork processed. After waiting for four hours and going back and forth in one day between her home and this government office to provide required documents, she declared to the attendant in the office, “You know what it is? I am being racially profiled, and if I am not being racially profiled it is some form of
prejudice!” In making sense of this experience, Ms. Dell was not only thinking about race but the possibility that some other prejudice was at play. The second incident occurred at the airport when she was waiting to check her luggage. She objected to what she thought was preferential treatment given to a white lady also waiting in line behind her as detailed in the ethno-poem below:

*I have experienced racism in the South*  
*I was going back to Jamaica*  
*I was in the line to go up to the counter and*  
*the clerk called the white lady behind me*  

*And I said “Oh no you don’t,  
  this must be racial profiling or something.”*  
*“I was in the line before,”*  

*No, I don’t play that game at all,  
All men are equal in God’s sight!*

Reflecting on this incident, Ms. Dell explained that, as a teacher in Jamaica she would often risk her life to go into dangerous places like the “ghettoes” or inner cities of Kingston to seek out students who had prolonged absences from school. She explained that her fearless attitude in risky circumstances in Jamaica influenced the way she addressed racial issues in the U.S. context.

**Adjusting to a racialized society.** As a new immigrant to a U.S. Southeastern state, Ms. Dell often described her adjustment to living in a racialized context as a learning process. However, although she believed in growing wherever she is planted, she explained that she will not compromise her personal stance against racism. This idea is revealed in the ethno-poem below:

*Grow where you are planted  
I try to treat people the best way I can  
although I am not a person  
who will quail up like a leaf,*
if I see injustice, I will talk
if it happens to me or anybody else
even if I am going to be arrested

Ms. Dell’s statement “grow where you are planted” indicated a belief that wherever you are in the world, you must be able to learn and grow from your experiences. She explained that despite the prevalence of racism, she tried to be cordial during her daily interactions with those who might discriminate against her. However, she explained that she is not the kind of person to “quail up like a leaf,” which is a Jamaican idiomatic expression that refers to fading away in the background because of difficult or unpleasant experiences. Although I am uncertain about the origin of this idiomatic expression, her statement is reminiscent of a mimosa pudica plant in Jamaica called “Shame Old Lady,” which when touched immediately folds in to protect itself. Therefore, Ms. Dell’s statement indicated that her strategy for dealing with oppression is not to fold inwards and remain silent.

In a follow-up conversation about the airport incident, Ms. Dell explained that she does not usually “back-back” from the difficulties in this society. By using this Jamaican idiomatic expression, she was expressing fearlessness in addressing daily challenges posed by the marginalization of Black people in the society. This fearlessness is evident in her remark that “if I see injustice I will talk, whether it happens to me or anybody else and even if I am going to be arrested.” Her comments revealed a willingness to break the silence on injustice in the society whether it is directed at her or other people who are marginalized by the society. Ms. Dell explained that her response to racism in the U.S. was often influenced by her country’s own experience with slavery. The following
section will explore this history as a means of unveiling the experiences that shaped Ms. Dell’s world view.

**Nuanced Differences in the Social Climate in Jamaica and the U.S. Southeast**

When asked what in her homeland experience accounts for her fearless attitude to issues of race in America Ms. Dell replied, “Slavery, of course, cause we know what we went through, and having to teach children about slavery.” She explained that she taught about slavery in Jamaican as part of the school curriculum on heritage. She also stated that the children learned about “our heritage and they learn about how we obtained the freedom we now enjoy during heritage week. We were enslaved by the British. First, the Spaniards came, and then British pushed out the Spaniards, and we became slaves on their plantations.” Hence, on some level, she made a connection between slavery in Jamaica and her racialization in the U.S. South. However, besides Jamaica’s history with slavery, like Tanya and Ms. May, Ms. Dell did not perceive racism as a problem in Jamaica. Instead, she felt that the country has more of a problem with classism.

Ms. Dell explained that while growing up in Jamaica, she did not have to deal with the racism that her grandchildren now face in the U.S. context. However, she talked about classism and the disadvantages experienced by poor people in the Jamaican society. To encourage her students who were mostly from the “inner cities” of Kingston, she explained that she often told them that they can accomplish their dreams regardless of where they live. Often using biblical references she told them “Jesus came from Nazareth, and they said nutting good can come out of Nazareth, but he was something good.” This argument represented her counter-narrative to deficit thinking about children’s ability to succeed academically because of their background. She also
recounted stories of her experience in Jamaica with children who lived in poverty but were able to rise out of their condition by excelling in schools. Later in the section on cultural socialization I, will explore how these kinds of homeland experiences shaped how she is helping to raise her grandchildren in a U.S. Southeastern state.

**Ethnic-Racial Socialization Messages**

According to Fanon (1967), often in “the collective unconscious, black=ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality” (p.192). These ideologies are part of the mainstream deficit narratives often transmitted in the wider society about Black people. As a child growing up in Jamaica, I heard competing narratives about Black people. On one hand I heard reggae music that encouraged Black pride and on the other I heard messages that also transmitted negative stereotypes about us. For example, this kind of contradiction is played out in Jamaican reggae singer Major Mackerel’s song “Pretty Looks Done” spoke disparagingly about Shaka Zulu and used his image as a symbol of ugliness in the famous lines “Yuh fava Shaka Zulu” (You look like Shaka Zulu). What was missing from this song was the mentioned of the accomplishment of Shaka Zulu as a South African chieftain. Later, Tarrus Riley’s song “Shaka Zulu Pickney” in which he celebrated Shaka Zulu’s prowess as a warrior contesting Major Mackerel’s deficit narrative and provided a counter-narrative about him (Cooke, 2012). Both songs show the competing narratives about blackness that we are usually exposed to as Jamaicans.

Mainstream narratives about blackness like the ones detailed above threaten the positive self-esteem of Black children (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Steele, 2009). Ms. Dell’s narrative which follows reveals an attempt to use ethnic-racial messages that counter these kinds of deficit narratives by affirming her grandchildren’s racial and ethnic
identities while also preparing them for the challenges they faced in the society as Black children.

**Preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust.**

*My grandchildren have to learn
whatever they do in life here
whether they go to school
and waste time
mi tell dem,
they have to work
three times as hard
as the white man
for dem black*

As indicated in the preceding ethno-poem, Ms. Dell often told her grandchildren to work harder than their white counterparts because they are black. She explained that she formed this belief from her daughter’s experience with racism at a college in the U.S. South. She shared that her daughter was attending a college in a rural location in a southeastern state to pursue an LPN degree when she experienced institutional racism. She stated her daughter was doing well throughout college but in the end, she was told that she could not graduate because she failed the finals by 0.38 points. Ms. Dell stated that her daughter was devastated, but she told her “don’t give up, apply to other places” which she did. Here she encouraged her daughter to persevere to accomplish her dreams. She proudly explained that today her daughter is a nursing supervisor. Hence, this experience strengthened her belief that “you have to especially teach Black Kids to persevere.” However, her emphasis on perseverance does not indicate a belief that institutionalized racism should be ignored or left unchallenged as the following ethno-poem indicates:

*It is here
and it is [racism] b-l-a-t-a-n-t*
we told my grandson, 
we are NOT sending 
him back to that school 
He wants to go back, 
My daughter was saying 
she was going to put 
him in a private school

As mentioned in the previous section, Ms. Dell’s grandson received three days in-school suspension when he was seen with a spatula from his Science class. She argued that he forgot to return it as he was transitioning to his Music class and that he should not have received this punishment. The ethno-poem reveals Ms. Dell’s mistrust of school officials, frustration with her grandson’s placement in-school-suspension and her belief that this was due to blatant racism. It also reveals that she transmitted messages in the home that promoted mistrust of mainstream society and prepared her grandson for bias as a Black male since she spoke openly about this problem and discussed his mother’s plans to place him in a private school.

**School to prison pipeline and the marginalization of Black males.**

She said
in the United States
grade three the boys are destined for prison
they want to put them there
they don’t get the right grades
they are discouraged not encouraged

I said
no, they couldn’t be that I mean!
if you really love children
you are gonna want to see them succeed!
their success is also yours
I didn’t believe it
but now sometimes when some of these things happen
I am led to believe!
Ms. Dell’s narrative reveals that she made sense of her grandson’s experiences in school by drawing from a previous conversation with a Jamaican immigrant woman about the unequal treatment of Black males in school and the school to prison pipeline. Making this connection, with what she perceived as her grandson’s experience with institutionalized racism, moved her from a position of disbelief to belief about the challenges that Black males experienced in schools. She explained that her awareness of this issue influenced her decision to help her grandchildren, especially her grandson, cope with these kinds of challenges by transmitting messages that build their self-esteem. She noted that after the incident with the spatula, her grandson became demotivated in the Music class because he felt he was unfairly accused of misconduct. Hence, she noted that music was the only class that he failed thus missing out on being on the A Honor Roll. She explained that although her grandson loves music, he wanted to drop it because of this experience.

Another incident at her grandson’s school that deeply concerned Ms. Dell was a time when her son received a second in-school suspension because he was “about to fight!” She explained that he was being bullied by a group of boys who were calling him names and pushing him so, he dropped his bags in anticipation of defending himself. She was concerned that the teacher did not address the bullying but gave him a referral even though he did not actually fight. She argued that instead of suspending her grandson the school should have sent him to the guidance counselor to address the problem he was facing at school. She stated that she is concerned that for the Black male, the solution to issues in school seems too often to be suspensions and referrals.

**Psychological risk and building self-esteem.** Throughout all our conversations, Ms. Dell expressed concerns about the self-esteem of her grandchildren given the
racialized context in which they live. The ethno-poem which follows captures her thoughts:

Even if they are  
from the island,  
or they born here  
there is this THING  
that is here  
that causes Black children  
to think less of themselves

As illustrated in this ethno-poem, Ms. Dell believed that all Black children are at risk of developing low self-esteem because of the messages they might receive about their racial identity. Hence, she attempted to create a counterspace which helps build her grandchildren’s self-esteem. Below is an ethno-poem that provides insights on how she used oppressive narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012) to help her grandson cope with the bullying incident at his school:

My grandson told me they called  
him names at school,  
I said, what is your name?  
What is your given name?  
the name that your parents gave you?  
I said, love your name be proud of it  
and don’t let your skin tone affect you  
I always tell him never mind what they are saying  
you are not whatever they say  
and they can’t make you be what they say

In this ethno-poem, Ms. Dell’s words reveal an attempt to help her grandson develop a positive self-esteem despite this bullying incident which she believed the school failed to address properly. By saying, “don’t let your skin tone affect you,” she explained that she did not want his self-esteem to be affected by how unfairly Black males are often treated in schools and the society. She also connected the school’s response to her grandson in this bullying incident to his father’s experience with racial profiling when driving while
black. She also told me that she is well aware (from watching television news) that Black males are racialized in the society. The last line of the ethno-poem “they can’t make you be what they say” was a consistent theme in our conversations. In the sections on faith and cultural socialization messages, I will further explore how the narratives and counter-narratives in her home and church community helped to transmit ethnic-racial messages that fostered the development of her grandson’s self-esteem despite the negative labels that he received from the society because of his racial identity.

**Faith socialization.** Ms. Dell and her grandchildren are members of a historically Black Seventh Day Adventist church near their community with a predominantly African American congregation and an African American pastor. They are all members of the church choir for their appropriate age groups. Ms. Dell took her grandchildren to church every Sabbath and on days when they had other events (e.g., choir practice, Vacation Bible School). She explained to me that her faith is central to coping with life challenges and that she taught her grandchildren about God to help them with the problems that they also face in life.

During our conversations, she also explained that she tried to counter the negative messages that they receive from the society about their ability to succeed as Black children by repeating for them “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” located in Philippians 4:13 of the Bible. Additionally, she recounted that she used her faith narratives to inform them that God made all men equal. She felt that this was an important message to transmit to them after her daughter and grandson experienced with institutional racism which made her aware that messages in the schools and wider society could cause them to develop low self-esteem. Her use of faith narratives to counter deficit
perspectives about people of African descent is what I term counter faith narratives.

Below is an example of how she often attempted to use counter faith narratives to challenge mainstream narratives about Black people:

\[
\text{I am a Christian,} \\
\text{from my faith I say} \\
\text{to my grandchildren} \\
\text{all man are equal} \\
\text{in God’s sight} \\
\text{nobody is better than you,} \\
\text{you are not better than} \\
\text{anybody}
\]

The above ethno-poem reveals that one of the faith socialization messages that Ms. Dell transmitted to her grandchildren is that in God’s sight “all man are equal.” She explained that regardless of the stereotypical racialized messages they receive daily in the society she wanted them to focus on how God views them. Hence, in the above ethno-poem, she drew from her Christian knowledge to provide counter-narratives or what I term counter faith narratives to the mainstream narrative about people from non-white groups. During Sabbath worships at her church, I also noticed that in this setting there were also other counter faith narratives that helped to create a counterspace in the church for Ms. Dell’s grandchildren and other congregants. The ethno-poem below was created from one of the sermons I heard that illustrates the use of counter faith narratives:

\[
\text{I don’t care how dark} \\
\text{your skin is or how light} \\
\text{God made us all} \\
\text{You are somebody} \\
\text{Say I am a child of God} \\
\text{I was made in the image of God} \\
\text{Stop responding to names} \\
\text{that are not on your birth certificate!} \\
\text{You are somebody} \\
\text{You’re God’s workmanship}
\]
In congruence with Ms. Dell’s argument, the ethno-poem indicates that her grandchildren were receiving messages that countered stereotypical labels associated with people of African descent. The pastor in the poem urged the congregants to resist negative labels that society wants to cast on them, and he affirmed them by declaring that “you are somebody.” In another sermon focusing on finding peace in Jesus, the pastor declared “When they say you are black and ugly, just remember Psalm 119 versus 165, great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.”

While interacting in Ms. Dell’s church, I also heard oppressive narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012) in the form of Negro Spirituals that spoke to the collective struggles of African Americans in the society. For example, during a divine service at Ms. Dell’s church, the senior choir sang “How I got over” by Mahalia Jackson, who spoke about God’s help in overcoming challenges in the society. Below are some of the words in the song:

How I got over/How did I make it over
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over/How I made it over
Going on over all these years
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over

Tell me how we got over Lord
Had a mighty hard time coming on over
You know my soul look back and wonder
How did we make it over
Tell me how we got over Lord
I’ve been falling and rising all these years
But you know my soul look back and wonder
How did I make it over
The above Negro Spiritual reveals the kinds of narratives often transmitted in Ms. Dell’s church that through direct relational transactions (Case & Hunter, 2012) in that setting seem to help encourage congregants and assure them of the ability to cope through God’s help.

Narratives of identity work (Case & Hunter, 2012) was also very common in Ms. Dell’s church. These narratives specifically help to foster the development of a Christian identity and thus create a counterspace for her grandchildren. This is illustrated in the following song that I heard her grandchildren singing on the choir during one of our Sabbath worship:

I know who I am/I know who I am
I know who I am/I am yours
I am yours/ And you are mine
Jesus, you are mine/You are mine
Jesus, you are mine...
Lord, you are my identity
I am forgiven, I am your friend
I am accepted, I know who I am
I am secure, I’m confident
That I am loved, I know who I am

The above song, as a “narrative of identity work” (Case & Hunter, 2012, p.262), helped to affirm her grandchildren’s faith identity. Phrases such as “I know who I am,” “Lord, You are my identity” and “I am accepted, I know who I am” provided positive messages about their identity in Christ and their faith. The phrase “I am accepted” indicated that Ms. Dell’s grandchildren were socialized to believe that contrary to some of their experiences in the wider world, they were accepted just as they are by the Lord. This idea was congruent with Ms. Dell’s own belief that they are not inferior to anyone in the society because they were fearfully and wonderfully made by God. She explained that she expressed this same sentiment to her granddaughter after she was called fat by her
peers at school. She explained that in the home she often sings Denice Williams’ song *God Made you Special* to help build her self-esteem. In the section which follows, I will explore her cultural socialization messages to indicate how she used them to create a counterspace in her home that both supported and validated her grandchildren.

**Cultural socialization.** Cultural socialization refers to the direct or indirect messages Ms. Dell transmitted to expose her grandchildren to cultural knowledge, values, and heritage in the home. While interacting in Ms. Dell’s home, I noticed several Jamaica cultural artifacts displayed in the living room. I also noticed that she spoke Jamaican Patois and cooked Jamaican traditional dishes. However, in this section, I moved away from mere multicultural details to focus on her transmission of cultural values and knowledge that further helped her to create a counterspace in her home.

**Transnational texts.** As mentioned earlier, Ms. Dell was a Jamaican teacher for over 30 years. When she migrated to the U.S., she took several Jamaican textbooks and novels with her to help support her grandchildren with their assignments and expose them to their Jamaican heritage. Ms. Dell also brought her grandson’s grade one projects and schoolwork completed in Jamaica. She explained that he stayed with her in Kingston and attended schools for several months while his mother completed her nursing degree. The books she brought included those written by Caribbean authors such as C. Everard Palmer and displayed stories, idiomatic expressions, knowledge, and customs that are unique to the region. Figure 4.3 is an example of one of the books she brought from Jamaica for her grandchildren.

The story is set in Jamaica and told of a boy named Kendal who had a pet cow called Boy. His pet followed him to school and caused disruption of classes, so his
mother told him to sell his cow to the butcher. In the end, through demonstrations and hunger strikes, he managed to convince the butcher to save his pet’s life. Ms. Dell shared that texts like these helped her grandchildren to learn more about the Jamaican culture.

Figure 4.3 Jamaican novel taken to the U.S. by Ms. Dell

In addition to homeland texts, Ms. Dell shared exposed her grandchildren to Jamaican proverbs and Anansi stories in the home. For example, Ms. Dell told them an Anansi story about Anansi and his thin waist. She explained that this story was a lesson on not becoming greedy in life because “greed can get you into trouble.” She explained that she also used this story to tell them “you must be yourself and don’t let people lead you astray.”

**Making a difference in the society.** Ms. Dell placed significant emphasis on making a difference in the society so other people who are marginalized in the society can be encouraged. Aligned to her theme of perseverance, she argued that several Black people contributed significantly to the development of the U.S., and she used that knowledge to encourage her grandchildren to work hard so they can also become positive role models for others to emulate. She explains this in the ethno-poem below:
Their life might be one that somebody wants to emulate, because most time Black people are put down they think that they can’t make it

**BUT**

there are numbers and numbers of Black people who have done something, some of them are now famous for what they created or invented, and others work behind the scene

**BUT**

their input makes this United States what it is today

Ms. Dell’s ethno-poem indicates that she encouraged her grandchildren to try to live a life that others might later want to emulate. It also reveals her awareness that the society might “put down” Black people leading to their discouragement. However, she shared the counter-narrative that several Black people made significant contributions to the society. Again, she redirected and repositioned her grandchildren in ways that focused their attention on the positive things that Black people have accomplished despite their challenges. In the next section, I will explore her thoughts on what school can do to support racialized children in the society.

**Egalitarianism, Meritocracy, and Points of Departure**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter the women’s narratives included complexities, contradictions and tensions associated with mothering through a double consciousness (immigrant and black). Coming from an experience with colonial racism in a meritocratic Jamaican society at times shaped how they perceived and responded to racism in the U.S. society. Ms. Dell’s narratives revealed an emphasis on hard work and perseverance to motivate her grandchildren and counter the low expectations of Black children in school. However, these narratives also reveal her internalization of meritocratic ideologies and partial understanding of structural racism in this society.
Hard work and perseverance. As noted in other research with Caribbean immigrant mothers (Reynolds, 2005), Ms. Dell held the meritocratic belief that hard work and perseverance are keys to obtaining a better life. She drew this belief from her experiences in Jamaica and working with children in the “inner cities” who excelled and later improved their economic conditions. This kind of thinking shaped how she was helping to raise her grandchildren in the racialized context in which they live. An important insight emerging from our conversation about classism in Jamaica is how she used narratives to strategically reposition “ghetto children” and to encourage them to persevere despite the economic challenges they faced. Below is an ethno-poem illustrating how she repositioned her Jamaican students to build their self-esteem:

I taught my students that there was no ghetto,
there are no ghetto people
I said to them being in the ghetto
doesn’t make you ghetto,
Jesus was in a ghetto and
they say nothing good can come from there
just like dem sey ghetto people
can’t turn out to be anybody
many children in Jamaica who come
from the so-called ghetto areas
do well academically,
where you live doesn’t
have to make you

In the preceding ethno-poem, Ms. Dell articulated the belief that where someone lives does not define who they are. In so doing, she rejected labels such as “ghetto people” and focused her Jamaican students’ attention on Jesus and other people in that society who came from a low socio-economic background and did well. Hence, she placed value on perseverance despite challenges in the society including deficit perspectives about one’s identity. In this vein, her overarching belief is that students should not allow socially
constructed labels to affect their self-esteem and deter their ability to succeed in the society. Consistent with this kind of thinking, Ms. Dell repositioned her grandchildren into thinking positively about their ability to be successful in life by using positive role models like Obama. Below is an ethno-poem that illustrates her thinking:

It doesn’t matter where you come from
or where you live
you can make it

Put your hands to the wheel
nobody is going to hand you
anything on a platter
you have to work for it

When Obama won the presidency
I said to my grandson you know
that could be you in a few years
so you have to make sure
you go to school and work hard

In the preceding ethno-poem, Ms. Dell revealed that she often encouraged her grandchildren to work hard in order to be successful in school and the society. She explained that she placed special emphasis on hard work because her grandchildren must learn to work thrice as hard as their white counterparts to be successful in life. Even though she believed that they will still face challenges in the society because they are black, citing her daughter’s experience, she argued, “You have to teach Black kids to persevere.”

On the walls of Ms. Dell’s family home is a cultural artifact from Jamaica with the following quote aligned to her belief: “Even if everyone says to you, you don’t stand a chance, don’t give up on your dreams.” Ms. Dell also took several books with her from Jamaica, some of which also echoed this idea. For example, in her home, she encouraged her grandchildren to read Hoffman and Binch’s (1991) Amazing Grace. In this book, the
main character Grace is told by her Nana that she can accomplish anything she wants if she believes in her ability to do so. During our conversations, Ms. Dell also shared that she often sings Donnie McClurkin’s song “Yes you can! You can do anything if you try,” to her grandson so that he would persevere in his school work.

**Socially Just Schools**

*Some teachers need to be re-trained, re-socialized,*

*You see what is happening in the South now? I think if it means getting rid of something, for people to unite and live and to know that no matter the tint of your skin, we all are one, then get rid of it!*

*Children need to know that they are accepted for who they are.*

**Re-training and re-socialization of teachers.** The preceding ethno-poem reveals Ms. Dell’s belief that some teachers need to be better equipped to deal with racial issues in school. Her call for re-training and re-socialization of these teachers revealed her belief that a school makeover is needed to create an inclusive school environment for children like her grandson. Drawing from discussions in the news at the time of data collection about the confederate flag, she also suggested that getting rid of racialized practices and symbols might be a positive move to acquiring social justice for all regardless of skin color. The last line of her ethno-poem point to her belief that addressing racialization in the wider society might lead to changes in the schools so that Black children can feel accepted for who they are.
Ms. Dell’s call for retraining and re-socialization of teachers of Black students is aligned to the perspectives of critical race scholars (Gillborn, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009;) who contended that schools seem to put more vested efforts in maintaining the status quo rather than tailoring the curricula to meet students’ unique needs. Hence, they have also argued that “schools, in particular, have played a powerful role in creating racial inequality” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman, 2011, p.4).

**Inclusive classrooms.** Ms. Dell also argued that teachers must work to create a classroom atmosphere in which Black children feel welcomed, accepted and respected as individuals with ideas and experiences that they can share in the classroom without fear or feelings of inferiority. The ethno-poem which follows provide insights on what she thinks social justice in schools would look like for these children:

> Each child has been socialized differently,  
> and each child does not come to you blank,  
> Get him to feel comfortable in your atmosphere,  
> 
> Prepare for the child so he or she would feel free to learn  
> and express himself or herself  
> and by doing so, be able to feel comfortable  
> in the classroom where he or she is placed  
> 
> With no feeling of inferiority or anything  
> the child is better able to express himself or herself  
> and at the same time learn new things  
> once you set that kind of atmosphere,  
> 
> Every child can succeed!  
> don’t let them feel that  
> they are overshadowed by all that you have  
> do not only focus on your world  
> give them a chance to share from their world

Ms. Dell argued that students should be given a voice in an inclusive classroom atmosphere where they can feel comfortable to share what they already know. She also
suggested that educators must prepare for their unique needs and embrace a philosophy that all children can succeed. By stating that these students should not be “overshadowed by all you have,” like Bev, she maintained that the classroom space should be one that allow alternative knowledge to be expressed. She also explained that she believed her grandchildren and other children of African descent would feel more comfortable in this kind of classroom atmosphere because of the potential to develop their self-esteem.

Tanya

This section begins with Tanya, a 40-year-old high school teacher with a Master’s degree and a first generation immigrant mother of three children; one nine-year-old son and two daughters; ages 10 and 12 years old. She currently resides in a southeastern state with her children and mother (Ms. May). Although her mother lived in the same household, I explored their stories as separate cases, to garner broader perspectives from Afro-Caribbean women of two different generations and roles (mother and grandmother) in the family. Examining these women’s narratives separately helped me to unveil and provide richer details on their unique experiences with racism and the kinds of ethnic-racial messages they each transmitted in their home.

Tanya migrated to a state in the U.S. Southeast at the age of 17 years to live with her Jamaican father and African American step-mother in a rural area of the state. She recalled that her immediate intention when she arrived, was to attend college to become a teacher because she commenced her first year of teachers’ college prior to leaving Jamaica. She explained that she was encouraged to enter teachers’ college by her high school teacher who believed that she would be a good Spanish teacher. She is a member of the Church of God faith, and she attends a church with a predominantly African
(Nigerian) immigrant membership. She began attending this church with her Nigerian ex-husband, but she decided to continue attending this church even after they divorced to expose her children to this heritage. She described it as a space where she feels free to express herself in the way she prefers to worship and as one in which she gets the chance also to connect with other Jamaican immigrant families who attend this church.

The struggle with institutionalized racism, particularly with Black males, factored significantly in Tanya’s story. Her narratives revealed a belief that she has experienced overt and covert racism since living in the U.S. South. In them, she provided insights on how she first reacted to these experiences and how she has learned to become more strategic even while fighting for the rights of her son at a public school. Her story unveils her frustrations with a public school that she believed did not set high expectations for him even though he is in advanced placement classes but instead unfairly gives him in-school suspensions and referrals. She expressed concern about the treatment of Black children in general, but she believed that the Black male is at greater risk in schools and the society. Hence, although she also mentioned concerns for her daughters, the greater focus of this study is about her son because of the challenges she encountered at his school.

**Self-Identification**

> When I am filling out a form
> at one point I use to put OTHER
> but I don’t put anything on the line
> at one point instead of black
> you would see African American
> or you would see Caucasian.
> in recent years
> I have seen black
> so I said OK, I guess that’s what I am
> so I began checking that
Tanya explained to me that she self-identifies as Jamaican because that is how she would usually self-identify in the Jamaican context. However, she noted that on official forms in the U.S. she often experienced a dilemma, as the above ethno-poem reveals, because a category for nationality is usually absent. Hence, she usually checks the word “other” without writing a description of her identity. She noted that she selected the word “black” in the more recent forms. However, her statement in the last stanza, “I guess that’s what I am,” indicated that like Bev and Ms. Dell she did not embrace the “black” label. When I asked about her comments, she explained that her discomfort with this label did not mean she is rejecting her racial identity. She stated that “We [Jamaicans] understand ourselves as black, but it is almost like black and proud and not oh woe is me, or you are better than me.” Hence, she maintained that her concern is about the stigma associated with the word “black” in the society and the perception of inferiority.

Drawing from her global knowledge and experiences, Tanya noted that in regions such as the Caribbean, South and Central America people identify themselves nationally when asked to self-identify. For example, she pointed out that when she lived in Colombia for one year, she did not see the kind of racialization that occurs in the U.S. She explained that while there, she noticed that the word “black” was used mainly for descriptive purposes. She stated that although she cannot argue that it was not utilized in a belittling way, she noticed that there seemed to be a difference with how such label is used in the U.S. context. She reasoned that in South America “it was not packed with hate, or it was not packed with the idea of OK I am superior to you.” On the other hand, she observed that the word “black” has a more negative connotation in the U.S. society. Hence, she maintained that the racialization of individuals in the U.S. society makes the
label “black” problematic. The following section explores her perception and experiences with this kind of racialization in a southeastern U.S. state where she resided with her children and mother.

**Perception and Experience with Racism**

Tanya’s narrative unveiled her flat-footed truths (Bell-Scott & Johnson-Bailey, 1998) about her experiences with racism as a Black woman living in the U.S South. The naming of these daily realities underscores the importance of understanding how motherhood is shaped by the context in which women live (Collins, 1994). This is particularly the case because “for women of color, the subjective experience of mothering/motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial, ethnic communities—one does not exist without the other” (p.47). Her story shed light on how her racialized experiences influence the kinds of ethnic-racial messages she transmits to her children. Drawing from Weems’ (2015) creative, experimental approach, I attempt to explore and accentuate the dramatic effect of her narrative in a series of monologs and ethno-poems to reveal the challenges she faced as a Black woman and mother.

**Being followed and policed.** It was evident from our conversations that Tanya believed that Black people in the U.S, are marginalized in the society. She explained that she came to this conclusion based on her own experiences and observations of day-to-day racism in the news and in the workplace. For example, she noted that silencing often occurs at the work place environment because “someone who is black may not be given the same opportunity to express opinions, or even if you express your views it seems like it is thrown away.” In 1992 when she first arrived in the South, she also recalled her shock and disbelief after two incidents with overt racism. The first incident was when she
went to the store with her African American friend to shop for clothing. She recounted with dismay that she noticed one of the store attendants following them around. She immediately read this experience as an assumption by this store attendant that, “you guys are good for nothing, and all you are here to do is to steal and waste people’s time, so listen I am going to follow you, I am going to watch you.” The ethno-poem which follows recounts her store experience and how she responded to being raced:

\[
\begin{align*}
I \text{ said, } & \text{“Ma’am, what’s the problem?”} \\
\text{She said, } & \text{“me?” I said “yes.”} \\
\text{Everywhere I turn in this store you are following me} \\
\text{Following} \\
\text{Following} \\
\text{Following} \\
\text{Following me} \\
\text{I have never stolen anything a day in my life} \\
\text{I feel very uncomfortable that you are following me} \\
\text{Come on man; people are here to look at what they are buying} \\
\text{You just look at me and start thinking the two Black girls are here to steal!} \\
\text{Following} \\
\text{Following} \\
\text{Following me}
\end{align*}
\]

Tanya explained that she spoke up and addressed this problem because she felt that it was a discriminatory act, and she was not accustomed to being treated this way in Jamaica. However, she stated that her friend advised her that it is probably unwise to do so because in the U.S. society people who speak up are usually presumed to be guilty, so she advised Tanya that the best option is just to leave the store.

Tanya also described another incident, when she was 20 years old, in which she experienced overt racism in the early years after arriving in the U.S. South. After purchasing pizza, she was waiting with friends outside the Santin pizza store [pseudonym] for her father to pick her up after a day of fun at the state fair. In the
monolog below she recounted that the police was called while she was standing with her friends outside this store.

**Part I, Scene I: The police came and told us to leave!**

*My dad dropped us off, my friends and I were at the fair and then we walked over to Santin Pizza nearby, we were just standing around eating our pizza when someone called the police, and said there’s a gathering of kids I assumed they said Black kids or something and the police came and told us to leave!*

The above monolog illustrates Tanya’s shock that the police asked her to leave with her friends even though they did nothing wrong and she was just waiting for her father. She read this experience as a form of racial discrimination since they were all Black young adults waiting outside the store. In the second part of this dramatic monolog, she made a distinction between how they were treated as opposed to their white counterparts who were also hanging out with their friends. It also details her reaction to once again being raced:

**Part II, Scene I: What kind of place have I come to? What is this?**

*I said, “But I am waiting on my dad to pick us up we can’t go anywhere; I don’t have a car we are done with the fair; we bought something in Santin Pizza.”*  
*He said, “Yeah the Santin Pizza store called and said you guys need to leave.”*  
*There was a grocery store close to the Santin Pizza store where there were about four white kids standing there drinking they were standing there just hanging out too and they [the police] didn’t say anything to them, so I thought wow, what kind of place have I come to? What is this?*

Congruent with media accounts of racial profiling, Tanya argued that she was being raced because the police officer did not ask her white counterparts to leave although they were also hanging out with their friend in the same vicinity. Her comments in the last stanza of
the monolog reveal her interrogation of her experience in a place where she was now living. Her question “What is this?” indicated her attempt to make sense of this new experience. As mentioned earlier, she explained that she did not experience this kind of racialization in Jamaica although she acknowledged that the country has issues with classism.

**Different Zone of Proximity in Jamaica and the U.S.**

In my experiences from back home
I have never been exposed
to anything like that
there’s no restriction to
what level of education you want to get
nobody looks at me
and say no you are not qualified
to reach right here
there’s no restriction
or oh no you can’t stand here
because you are Black
there’s no restriction

During our conversations, Tanya used the phrase “different zone of proximity” to describe what she perceives as the differences in her experiences in Jamaica and the U.S. as a Black woman. In congruence with Vickerman (1999), she described a social landscape in Jamaica where working class Black people can move upward into the middle class through education. She also explained that in her home country, there was no racism to restrict your academic progress. Additionally, she noted that she was not followed or policed because of the color of her skin.

**Classism in Jamaica.** Like Bev and Ms. Dell, Tanya also explained that in Jamaica “social distinctions are made from class to class.” Additionally, she stated that at school she could identify those children who were in the middle class because they were often the ones who had car rides to and from school while the other children would have
to take the local public transport each day. She also revealed that the most affluent people in Jamaica were more likely to live in communities located in the hills such as Beverley and Stony Hill. Making a connection between class and colorism in Jamaica, she also mentioned that she observed that these people also tend to be of lighter complexion. However, she explained that there were no barriers preventing people with darker skin tone from moving up the social ladder. Hence, she did not experience feelings of inferiority which accounted for her shock when she first experienced overt racism in the U.S. Southeastern state where she lived.

Given the contrast between her experiences in a southeastern state where she resided and Jamaica, Tanya explained that she was very concerned about her second generation Jamaican immigrant children, especially her son. Hence, she shared that she communicated messages to them to prepare for bias but also survive and thrive in the society. In the upcoming section, these ethnic-racial socialization messages in her home and church community are explored to provide insights on how she is attempting to accomplish these goals.

**Ethnic-Racial Socialization**

According to Collins (1994) mothers of color are often caught between feelings of powerlessness in a racialized society and their efforts to empower themselves and their families. She maintained that these “women’s struggles for empowerment concerns the pervasive efforts by the dominant group to control the children’s minds” (p. 54). In such conflicting circumstances, Black women often attempted to transmit ethnic-racial messages in their homes that exposed their children to narratives and counter-narratives that affirmed their identities. In this vein, Tanya’s narrative discussed in this section
indicates that she directly or indirectly expose her children to ethnic-racial messages as a means of coping in the society.

**Preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust.**

_I talk about racism directly,  
I say look!  
especially to my son,  
look!  
you see the different things going on?  
it is always some Black male,  
*Trayvon Martin was shot,*  
because he was a Black male

_Certain things I see in my son,  
in terms of how he thinks  
I want to cultivate and not chop down  
but this society in the South,  
it is almost like  
it is best to keep him quelled down  
and not try to bloom too much  
because he is a Black male  
so I am worried_

The ethno-poem that commences this section indicates that Tanya had direct conversations with her children, particularly her son, about the problem of racism in the U.S. and promoted mistrust in certain members (e.g. racist people like Zimmerman who killed Trayvon Martin) of mainstream society who might treat them unfairly because of their racial identity. She explained that she often discussed the news to their attention to open discussions about the risk they face in the society as Black children. She also shared concern especially for her son because of recent news reports detailing the killing of Black males by police officers. Recognizing that Black males are marginalized in the society, she expressed concerns about how far her son will be allowed to progress in this environment. She maintained that she taught her son about the appropriate way to speak to a police officer and how to dress to help him survive as a Black male in the society.
However, she explained that her son’s experience with racism at his school has compelled her to take on a more active advocacy role in his life.

**The marginalization of Black males in schools.** Tanya maintained that since her early encounters with overt racism, she became more docile as she learned to “do what the Romans do when in Rome.” By this, she meant that people who are racialized in the society rarely overtly confront their oppressors. She reasoned that after a while, “you realize you can’t really change a person’s mindset just by yelling at them, and I’ve had to realize then that this is (emphasis) a different society. It is not where I grew up so why come now and just yell at the person to change?” However, she argued that she is still outspoken whenever she believes her children are being treated unfairly in schools because of their skin color. In this section, Tanya’s story will unveil what she perceived to be the racialization of her son at the public school he attended and how the direct and indirect messages she transmitted helped to prepare him for bias and covery encouraged mistrust of mainstream society and the upholders of the status quo.

**Criminalizing language and the Black male.** The following scene commenced at Alphine Elementary [pseudonym]. In this scene, she described an incident when her son was playing on the playground at a school in Kindergarten and “kicking up dust,” which accidentally got in the eyes of his white classmate. Following that incident, she expressed concern about not only the teacher’s decision to put a referral on her son’s file but also the teacher’s choice of words in writing this report:

**Part III, Scene I: An unjust statement and unjust classification**

*I was very much displeased because they noted ASSAULT on a student when the description at the bottom said he kicked sand, and it got in the girls’ eye and, like I told them in the office, I also work in this district, and I know if I write a referral on a student and check off assault on a student, this means that there is*
bleeding, someone got punched, got kicked you know something physical. I thought it was a UNJUST statement, UNJUST classification. He really did not deserve a referral!

As the preceding monolog indicates, Tanya believed that her son unfairly received a referral for an accidental incident on the playground. Furthermore, she was very concerned that on this referral “an unjust statement and unjust classification” were used to describe what happened. As an educator, she explained that she immediately recognized that this was a “record” that could follow her son, and she did not want him to be stigmatized as she explained in the following monolog:

**Part III, Scene II: I have had to be an advocate**

I didn’t want that stigma to be following him. I recognized where I live; this is the South. He is a black male. This is the South. I have experienced it. I came here in 1992, and I have experienced the low expectations for Blacks, and it is worst for boys. That certain height they won’t get to. They are just gonna be in certain groups and this where they stop. This is not what he is, and I had to say that, even on that second referral. I said it to the teacher. I have had to be an advocate, and I would suggest every parent, whether an immigrant or not you can’t just sit back and let anything just be said on a referral because these things stay on the record.

Tanya’s monolog revealed her concern about the criminalization of Black males, particularly in the U.S. Southeast state where she resided. She also expressed concern about what she perceived as the low expectations for Black children and the unfair punishment they often experience in schools. For instance, her son received a second referral in Kindergarten because he pulled strings from his teacher’s carpet. She explained that she was very alarmed when she saw the word “VANDALISM!” checked on the referral which she believed was yet another “unjust statement and unjust classification.”
Based on her experiences, Tanya argued that parents should be advocates for their children so that they can address discriminatory issues at their school whenever they arise. She noted that when she visited the school to discuss the second referral which her son received in third grade, she found out that the first referral from Kindergarten was still on his file even though the school assured her that this “record” would not follow him. Hence, demonstrating her mistrust in schools, she explained that she said to the school, “I need this thing EXPUNGED!”

Working as her son’s advocate, Tanya has begun to interrogate the practices at his school. At 6:49 am on a Friday, I received a text from her asking me to review some statistics from her son’s school. She received these statistics from asking some of the following questions: “How many African American boys are in advanced placement? How many referrals were issued by the school within this year? How many were given to African-American boys?” Below is an ethno-poem I constructed based on the data she shared with me.

Friday
6:49 am
“Look” on some stats from my son’s school
I requested data!

3rd grade Advanced Reading
3 African American males of 22 students
3rd Advanced Math
13 African American males of 36 students

159 referrals written for
63 African Americans, 4 white
13 girls and 54 boys
a total of 67 students

I don’t see
rigor nor
high expectations for my son
If he is in Advanced class, where are the challenging tasks?

Tanya explained that she requested this information because she was concerned about the lack of rigor in her son’s advanced classes and the apparent disparities in the punishment of African American boys at her son’s school. The data she received from the school district indicated that boys received more than twice the amount of referrals than girls. Additionally, they revealed that African American boys were the highest group that received referrals at the school while they seem to be underrepresented in the advanced classes. Her question, “where are the challenging tasks?” is aligned to her overall concern about what she perceived as the low expectations for African American boys in schools. She explained that her concern about this low expectation was both informed by her son’s experience as well as her observations as a teacher.

**Protecting the self-esteem of the Black male.** Like Ms. Dell and Bev, Tanya also stated that she is concerned that the unfair treatment of Black males in schools and the wider society might affect their self-esteem. She explained that this is what drives her advocacy work for her son because she believed constant referrals could transmit deficit messages that might lower his self-esteem. She explained her thinking in the monolog below:

*Part III, Scene III: What you call a child…forms his thought life*

> From my religious understanding of things, I firmly believe, what you call a child, certain things that you say, help to mold his life, form his life, form his thought life, and hence affects his future so if it is a situation where I am allowing him to get these frivolous referrals over and over then he starts seeing himself as the bad kid that goes to in-school suspension. He then begins to act in that role, and I REFUSE IT. I often remind him, all of them, that they are representing the family, representing the home, we pray every morning before we leave. They have an understanding of who they are.
Drawing from her religious background, Tanya argued that the subliminal messages that her son received in schools might help shape his future. Hence, she maintained that she will work to interrupt the cycle that would cause him to develop low self-esteem. The last two lines of her monolog, suggest that faith socializing messages were also used by her to counter deficit perspectives and discriminatory practices in the society. The section which follows explores her faith socializing messages and how they helped to build her children’s self-esteem and develop counter identities (Johnson, 2008) that challenged the labels they received in the society.

**Faith Socialization**

From interacting with her family at home and their church, I discovered that the faith socializing messages that the children received in both spaces helped to build their self-esteem, foster the development of a counter identities and provide counter faith narratives to the deficit perspectives in mainstream society about Black people.

During my interactions with Tanya and her family at their home, I noticed several wall decors with scripture passages and other religious messages. Tanya explained that she likes to surround her children with faith messages to remind them of who they are. By this, she referred to what she considers their identity in Christ. She stated that “I want them to understand who God is, who he is to them and who they are to him…it is very important for them to know who they are and who is in charge of their lives.” In Figure 4.4 is an image of one of these religious wall decors which reveals the kinds of faith socializing messages Tanya transmitted to her children. In addition to displaying these kinds of images in the home, she also explained to me that she conducted family worship every morning before they go to school. They also attended mid-week Bible studies and
Sunday services. She also stated that she includes her children in her “prayer points” for a prosperous future. By “prayer points”, she referred to specific things that she prays for daily. Also included in these prayer points, were prayers for their protection outside the home and positive role models for her children.

Figure 4.4. Religious artifact in Tanya’s home

Celebrating the Black child. During the course of this research, I visited Tanya’s church to get a sense of the socializing messages her children were exposed to in this space and the purpose they served in their lives. Her church was warm and inviting and immediately as I entered this space I sensed jubilation in the air. It was the first of the month which is usually a time of special festive celebration in the church. The majority of the congregants were dressed in beautiful bright, colorful African dresses. Most of the women’s hair were either braided or in their natural form with intricate designs or head wraps. I was ushered to my chair by a woman dressed in African attire.
The service began with Bible study and a discussion on paying tithes, guided by a lead teacher. After Bible study, the congregants immediately went into praise and worship which had a combination of African gospel songs and American traditional gospel songs. The church had a group of musicians playing various instruments with the drum being the main feature. Everyone was invited to stand on their feet, move around and dance in worship to Baba (God). The congregants sometimes sang in different African dialects and the pastor urged visitors “if you don’t know the dialect just dance to the music.” The worship songs included words such as “Holy Spirit, have your way oh Lord, You are the reason why I lift my hands.” The congregants sang to an up-tempo Nigerian music mixed with what I recognized as reggae rhythm.

From interacting with Tanya and her children at their church, I noticed and heard faith socializing messages that validated the Black children present through celebrations, prayers, and counter-narratives. In this space, they were not undermined but celebrated by their family and church community. While there, I participated in the celebration of the christening of a baby girl, born to Nigerian parents. As part of the celebration of this child, I joined the rest of the congregants in dancing around the church several times singing “I’ve never seen this God before wonder, wonder, wonder and Jesus nawa o, nawa ya o [I’m amazed].” After this child had been blessed, the pastor called for the older children to come to the altar. They were then ushered from Sunday School while the congregants sang and danced around the church. They were led to the front of the church for prayers, and the congregants were told to stretch forth their hands towards the children and pray for them as well. In his prayer, the Pastor asked that God would bless and protect them.
Counter faith narratives. The sermon delivered by Tanya’s pastor was entitled “Who Are You?” and it seemed to focus congregants’ attention on recognizing an identity in God. He also transmitted faith messages that countered the stereotypical labels given to them by mainstream society. He argued that some members of mainstream society might say that Black people have evolved from apes, but he used Psalms 139, verse 14 to challenge this deficit perspective and to affirm his congregants as human beings created by God. The text says “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” The following ethno-poem illustrates how he wove this counter faith narrative in his sermon:

Your identity might not be known to other people
But the question is, who are you?
Your identity as a child of God
must be known by you
yes, neighbors might have their opinion,
but what do you say about yourself
irrespective of what others say?
who are you?

There are some who don’t believe
that everybody is a child of God
but I am a child of God
Who are you?

You are born a child of God
You should be free to say it,
because that’s your identity

I am fearfully and wonderfully made
I look in the mirror and
say that guy is handsome
so if you say I am not handsome
that is your own cup of tea
it does not change the fact that
I am fearfully and wonderfully made
Who are you?
As seen in Ms. Dell’s church, the sermons in Tanya’s church often offered counter faith narratives like the one represented in the ethno-poem above. Hence, the church functioned as a counterspace (Case & Hunter, 2012) for her children because it is a space where they are not dehumanized but celebrated as human beings created in the image of God.

Tanya’s church also functioned not only as a faith community but also an ethnic community with a membership of mainly Nigerians and some members from the Caribbean. As, mentioned earlier this kind of environment provided her children with the opportunity to keep in touch with their Nigerian roots from their paternal ancestry. From, listening to the messages in this space, I also learned that the church helped to support Black immigrants families with their various challenges in the society. For example, during one of the church services I attended, congregants were invited to share their testimonies and five members quickly moved to the front of the church. The testimonies ranged from giving thanks for healing in health problems, life, and resolution of immigration issues. Each victory recounted by the members was met with affirmation and praise.

In the section which follows, I explore how Tanya transmits cultural socializing messages in her home that also seem to support and affirm her children. As seen in her church community, these direct and indirect messages seem to provide her children with ways of coping with the challenges they might face living in a racialized society and build their self-esteem.
Cultural Socializing Messages

During my interactions with Tanya and her family, I noticed that she was transmitting cultural socializing messages that exposed her children to their Jamaican heritage. Her home was filled with Jamaican artifacts (e.g., flags, t-shirts, bracelets, wall decors and bags), she also spoke Jamaica Patois to her children and exposed them to Jamaican music and history. Additionally, the family visited friends and relatives in Jamaica bi-annually which exposed the children to other aspects of the culture and created a transnational counterspace. However, rather than the traditional multicultural details (for example, food and dress), I focused on how she transmitted cultural socializing messages that connected them to their history, exposed them to cultural values and strategies to survive in mainstream society.

Fostering a transnational Jamaica identity and counterspace. In one of our social interactions, Tanya mentioned that she celebrates Jamaica’s Emancipation and Independence Day with her children, even though she is now living in the U.S. South. Emancipation Day is celebrated in Jamaica annually on August 1st and it marks the day on which slaves were emancipated from slavery in 1834. Independence Day is August 6, and it marks the day when Jamaica received its independence from Britain in 1962. She shared with me that in addition to celebrating these national holidays at her home in the U.S., all of her children learned the Jamaican National Anthem even though they were all born in the U.S. Figure 4.5 is a wall decor with Jamaica’s National Anthem displayed in her home. The Jamaican National Anthem is a prayer asking God to bless the land and protect its inhabitants. It also includes a prayer for the development of virtues such as “respect for all”. The image of the anthem in the home illustrated one of Tanya’s attempts
to transmit cultural socializing messages that could help to foster the development of a Jamaican identity. During our conversations, she often emphasized the importance of her children knowing their Jamaican roots so they can know who they are and learn about their fore parents.

Figure 4.5 Jamaican National Anthem in Tanya’s home

Tanya also fostered a Jamaican identity by speaking Patois in her home. This is a local dialect spoken by Jamaicans in addition to Standard English. It was formed during contact between the Europeans and slaves in Jamaica. Hence, Patois is a mixture of African, Spanish, French and English languages. In addition to speaking Patois, she also had cultural artifacts in the home with words written in this dialect. Below is one of the artifacts displayed in the family’s kitchen (Figure 4.6).
Figure 4.6 Jamaican Patois in Tanya’s kitchen artifact.

Translation:

*Lord bless our little kitchen with whatever we can afford to cook*
*Whether it is dumpling and butter or chicken back and rice,*
*As long as our belly is full/We thank you Lord/
So please continue to bless us. Amen*

The cultural artifact in Figure 4.6 indicates Tanya’s pride in speaking Jamaican Patois. However, although Tanya placed high value on her home language and other non-standardized languages, she also taught her children to code switch. Fostering what Du Bois called a double consciousness, she encouraged them to speak Standard English outside their home. She explained that they needed to learn to code switch and survive in the racialized society in which they lived. The following ethno-poem reveals the ethnic-racial messages she transmits to them:

*You are representing yourself,*
*You are representing this family,*
*when you leave this house,*
*be mindful of your dress code,*
*your voice,*
*what you say,*
*no broken grammar*
*speak please with proper diction*
Tanay explained that, from her background as a Spanish teacher, she is well aware that Jamaican Patois is rule-governed. However, she mentioned that her children’s speech will be judged by mainstream society if it is not Standard English. In this sense, she strategically created her home as a counterspace where her children can freely speak their home language but where she could also prepare them to cope with the racism in outside world.

**Hard work and perseverance.** During our conversations, I also learned that Tanay transmitted egalitarian messages aligned to her cultural values of hard work and perseverance. What follows is a discussion about how she encouraged her children to work hard and persevere in school. Like the other women in this research, her statements have meritocratic overtones, but they also revealed that she is using the narrative of hard work and perseverance to set high expectations for her children in order to counteract the low expectations they experience in school.

Tanay held the belief that by working hard her children will stand a better chance to live a successful life. She drew this viewpoint from her cultural background in Jamaica where she observed that people in her community advance economically by working hard and excelling in schools. The ethno-poem which follows reveals her belief that hard work made a difference in the Jamaican context:

*In Jamaica, our motto is “Out of many one people”,
because there are different racial groups there,
however, the majority of us are black
in Parliament, in the education offices, in ministries,
you have leaders who are black

People work hard for what they achieve,
hard work is the order of the day,
you have to work hard for what you want,*
even though I mentioned
the upper echelon of the society
no matter what I look like,
if I go up to a certain standard of education,
that is my way out of financial strain

Tanya’s statement reveals that the class structure in Jamaica allows for the movement of Black people from the working class to the middle class and beyond, much like that expressed by Waters (1999). Additionally, she indicated that hard work is greatly valued as a means of advancing in the society with education as the main avenue to achieve this. Hence, this reflected a point of conflict and internalization of the myth of meritocracy giving the sense of a split mind resistance and internalization (hooks, 2013). Although Tanya was aware of the problem of institutional racism (e.g. The excessive referrals given to Black males) she still held on to the notion of hard work and saw it as a way for her children to counter racist and deficit views. In addition, she attempted to counter the low expectations her children encountered in their schools with her own high expectations for their achievement. Her views are portrayed in the ethno-poem below:

I can’t have any of them
slipping through the c-r-a-c-k-s
I want them to be vigilant about their work,
we have a goal and
we’re working towards that
I am not looking for mediocre work

The above ethno-poem articulates Tanya concern that her children might fall through the cracks because of the low expectations in schools. She attempted to interrupt this cycle by encouraging her children to rise above mediocre work. In the next section about socially just schools, Tanya continued to interrogate and at times challenge the structures in schools that marginalize and discriminate against her children, particularly her son.
Socially Just Schools

My findings in this section reveal Tanya’s views on what school officials and educators could do to create socially just schools for Black children. Given her son’s experience with institutionalized racism, her narrative focused specifically on the need to address what she perceived as the criminalization of Black males in school and the low expectations that educators might have about their ability to excel academically. Additionally, she placed emphasis on the need for educators to know their students and to refrain from a one size fits all instructional approach that ignores their unique needs and abilities.

Meet students’ individual needs and set high expectations for learning.

You have to really teach
the different styles of kids
you don’t expect them all to
fit in one box
they are not all the same

I don’t want him grouped with the idea
you came in thinking
because he is Black, this is what he can do
no, no Ma’am, take him for who he is
I know the potential they have and
it is way past what you are thinking
that’s the stance I take every school year

Social justice for Tanya, as portrayed in the above poem, meant meeting the unique needs of her children. She argued against the one-size-fits-all approach that ignores their diverse learning styles, abilities, knowledge, and experiences. She also maintained that children’s academic performance might improve if teachers would take the time to get to know their students.
In the last stanza of the poem she also argued for equality in teachers’ expectations for Black children, especially Black males who she believed experience more challenges in schools. She contended that educators should not lower their expectations for these students. In advocating for her son, this is the kind of message she sent to his teachers each school year. In her home, she established high expectations for her children by challenging them with extra school work which she assigned daily. She argued that this is necessary because, overall, schools do not seem to encourage high performance as often in Black children as they do with their white counterparts. Therefore, she contended that social justice in schools means changing any mindset that encourages a lower expectation for these students. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tanya complained about the lack of rigor in her son’s advanced classes. Therefore, like Ladson-Billings (2009) she argued that setting higher expectations for Black children includes making sure there is rigor in their coursework.

**Interrupt the marginalization of Black males.** Tanya noticed that, at her son’s school, far fewer boys were in advanced classes while they dominate the statistics on in-school suspensions and referrals. Hence, she shared the belief that more needs to be done to support Black males. She argued that her son’s school spent more time giving “frivolous referrals” than on setting high expectations for his learning. Thus, she contended that these referrals often contain “unjust statements and unjust classifications,” that stigmatized him as a “bad kid.” She also maintained the belief that the negative subliminal messages that the school transmitted to her son could affect his psychological well-being.
Although her son was not underachieving in school, Tanya believed that ultimately this kind of stigmatization may shape his self-concept and later derail his future accomplishments. She explained that in her work as a teacher she noticed that some of the Black males at her school seemed demotivated because of deficit perspectives about them in school and society. The following ethno-poem reflects her thoughts on this issue:

_They see it [racism] not just within the institution,_
_they see these things in the society_
_and probably think if the whole structure is like this,_
_why one person must fight against it?_
_that one person trying to fight_
_is just gonna end up not being heard,_
_so it would not make a difference_

As the ethno-poem reveals, Tanya believed that Black males are constantly fed with deficit perspectives about themselves resulting in demotivation in their school work. Hence, Tanya contended that a socially just school must make the effort to interrupt racism in schools.

**Ms. May**

_Tears slowly swim to her eyes_
_And sadly she sits and sighs_
_Oh Lord, tell me why_
_Black mother prays_
_Ohh ooh ooh_

_Life is so very hard, ah yeah_
_But I keep on pushing on_
_Got to see my children grow_
_To find the happiness I’ve never known_
_So help me to find the strength_
_Ohh ooh ooh_
_Cause what I’ve got is already spent_
_And if it is not one thing it’s another_
_And my faith takes me near near near_
I choose to commence Ms. May’s narrative with one of her favorite songs, Tarrus Riley’s *Black Mother Prays* because it encapsulates her journey as a Black mother and grandmother. She explained that this song resonated with her because it reminded her of the economic struggles she faced while raising Tanya, her daughter, as a single mother in Jamaica and it also reflected her current struggles against racism in the U.S. society.

Ms. May is a 61-year-old Jamaican immigrant mother and grandmother who migrated to the U.S. South in 2000 to live with her daughter and her grandchildren. Her highest level of education in Jamaica was a secondary education. However, since she migrated to the U.S., she returned to college and became an LPN nurse. She also attended Early Childhood classes to obtain her certification in that area. She is a member of the Seventh Day Church of God faith which means that she believes the seventh day of the week is a special day set aside by God as a Sabbath day of rest. Her church differs from the Seventh Day Adventist Church that Bev and Ms. Dell attended because of its Church of God doctrines. There was no Seventh Day Church of God house of worship in the U.S. South where she lived, so she either attended church on Sunday or worshiped at home on Saturdays. However, she is a pastor of a self-owned small church in rural Jamaica where she returned at least twice per year to visit with friends and family. On those occasions, she also spent time preaching in the church. She is not a trained pastor, but she explained that she felt that God called her to minister to others. Hence, Tarrus Riley’s song also resonated with her because it spoke to her belief in the power of prayer and God to transform people’s life. In the section on her faith socialization messages, this belief will be further explored to shed light on how she helped her grandchildren cope in an oppressive society.
Given the racialized context of the U.S. society, Black immigrants living in the U.S. are often forced to make choices about how to self-identify (Vickerman, 1999; Waters 1999; Showers Johnson, 2008). They could choose to embrace both racial and ethnic identities given their cultural background. However, some might opt to self-identify ethnically because of the stigmatization of Black people in the U.S. South. They might also embrace multiple identities with some appearing more dominant given the context. The section which follows focuses on how Ms. May chooses to self-identify to shed light on the complexities that Black immigrants might experience in a racialized society.

**Self-Identification**

From our conversations, I learned that Ms. May preferred to self-identified as a “Jamaican first.” Hence, she expressed concern that most official demographic forms do not acknowledge the different nationalities represented in the society. However, she explained that since this category is absent from most of these forms, she has self-identified differently depending on the options available to her. In the ethno-poem below she explains her choices:

```
Sometimes I put
African American
Other
African Jamaica
[Laughter]

If...
there is something for black
I put black
because Jamaicans have no problem
with saying we are black

My fore parent is Paul Bogle
He was a freedom fighter
```
That culture is instilled in me  
So I have no problem saying  
I am Black

This ethno-poem unveils how Ms. May often attempted to negotiate her identity based on the options available to her on demographic forms. It also reveals that although she declared that she preferred to self-identify as “Jamaican first,” she had no problem self-identifying racially as well. She explained that this is not an issue because her heritage includes Jamaican national hero Paul Bogle, who fought for the rights of ex-slaves by leading the Morant Bay Rebellion against the colonial government in 1865. Later in this section, Ms. May’s faith socializing messages reveal that she also embraced a faith identity.

**Perception and Experiences with Discrimination**

Some people were  
culture shock  
with my accent  
I was culture shock  
with their racism

Since migrating from her home country, Ms. May stated that she has experienced racism and ethnocentrism at college and on the job while living in the U.S. South. She noted that she was unaware of what it is like to live in a racialized society until she migrated to this region, so she was very shocked to see the prevalence of racism when she first arrived. While she acknowledged that racism exists in other parts of the U.S., she noted that she never lived elsewhere since migrating from Jamaica, so all her references are drawn from this region.

During our interactions, Ms. May mentioned that because of her experiences with various forms of discrimination on her job she has changed workplaces frequently to
cope psychologically with the daily stress and challenges she faced. She declared that she was very “culture shock with the racism” she encountered and at first had a difficult time dealing with the unfair treatment that she experienced. She explained that she was also confused when she experienced discrimination from other Black women because she was from another country. As a result of all these experiences, she built a defense wall to protect herself while still fighting for the right to be treated as a human being.

**Linguicism.** Several times in our conversations, she mentioned that during her daily interactions she noticed that people seemed “culture shock with her accent.” She described her frustration whenever she was asked by some of these people about whether she speaks English because she talked to them with a Jamaican accent. The last four lines of the ethno-poem which follows illustrate her response to these kinds of questions:

> What do you speak?
> Do you speak English?
>
> What other language do you speak?
> Aren’t we having a conversation?  
> We’re talking English!  
> Why are YOU asking if I speak English?

Ms. May also explained that she experienced this kind of frustration in her College English class taught by a White male professor who constantly ignored her whenever she attempted to participate in the class. She stated that whenever she made a comment or asked a question he would give her a blank stare as if he did not understand what she was saying and then moved on to another student. She believed his actions created a classroom atmosphere in which her fellow classmates also felt it was alright to ignore her. Feeling invisible and ignored, Ms. May explained that she dropped the
English class that semester and later enrolled in another class the following semester when she finally completed the course.

**Nuanced Differences in the Social Climate in Jamaica and the U.S.**

In articulating her surprise about the racism she experienced in the U.S. South, Ms. May explained that she did not experience racism but classism in Jamaica. Thus, she argued that she noticed in her home country the emphasis was on being in the middle or upper classes. She provided further details in the ethno-poem below:

*In my time*
*People in the upper class*
*worked in offices,*
*drove a car,*
*lived in big houses*
*lived in Beverly Hills*
*and uptown*
*however,*
*because Jamaica is a*
*Black rule country*
*you find light skin people*
*but also dark skin people*
*in the middle class*
*who advanced through*
*education*

Consistent with the arguments of the other mothers in this research, Ms. May reasoned that classism is a problem in Jamaica. She also contended that skin tone does not limit movement into higher classes because by acquiring education Jamaicans can advance up the social ladder of that society. In contrast, she noted that in the U.S. context she quickly learned that skin color can limit one’s access to a better life. However, she explained that despite her racialization in this new environment she has remained resolute in being proud of her racial identity as revealed in the following ethno-poem:

*No one can do anything to make*
*me feel ashamed of my blackness,*
*my race*
Drawing from her historical background in Jamaica, Ms. May maintained that despite the racialization of Black people in the U.S. South, she does not have low self-esteem but she expressed concern for her grandchildren who were born in this context and what their experiences with racism could do to their psychological well-being. Given her concerns, in the section which follows, I explore how she prepared her grandchildren for bias in the society and how she attempted to provide them with coping strategies to deal psychologically with their racialization.

**Preparation for Bias and Promotion of Mistrust**

As soon as I walk out the door, race is waiting, like a watchful stalker ready to grab me and keep me in place, ready to remind me that slavery is not just in the past but here right now ready to entrap, to hold and bind. No wonder then that I want to spend most of my life inside, in the sanctuary of home where there are no shackles, no constant reminders that there is no place free of race” (hooks, 2013, p.185).

The preceding quote points to the pervasiveness of racism in the U.S society (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and the impact it often has on the psyche of Black people. Like hooks (2013) Ms. May’s narrative reveals an awareness of racism as an inescapable problem that she had to learn to cope with in her daily life. She also articulated a need to prepare her grandchildren for the bias they will encounter in the society because of their racial identity. This section explored her concerns about this social problem and the messages she transmitted to her grandchildren as means of
helping them to become critically aware of the challenges they were likely to encounter in the society. It also unveiled her attempt to provide them with coping strategies to deal with their racialization.

The racialization of the Black males in schools and society.

I send stronger messages
to my grandson because
here in the South
they will try to cut down
Black males
That’s why they are building
more prisons instead of schools
I try to walk him
through certain things
because of what I see
I tell him to be careful

Like her daughter Tanya, Ms. May explained that she often transmitted preparation for bias and promotion of mistrust messages to all her grandchildren. However, she contended that she sent stronger messages to her grandson because she believed that Black males were at greater risks of facing oppression in the region. Elaborating on this problem, she explained that she was very upset when her grandson was accused of assault in Kindergarten. She noted that she told her daughter to remove him from that school because she did not want him to be stigmatized. She also explained that she observed several other unfair treatment of her grandson at school which has caused her to be mistrust school officials and deeply concerned about his self-concept. For example, she noted that she was very displeased when her grandson’s teacher wrote the words “messy” on his spelling test even though he did well and she believed his work was neat. Ms. May explained that she was not opposed to the teacher encouraging him to be neater if his work was not neat enough, but graphically looking at his test paper made
her think that this was yet another example of his marginalization. In Figure 4.7, is an image of the spelling test she shared with me during our conversation.

![Spelling Test Image]

Figure 4.7 School artifact showing Ms. May’s grandson’s spelling test.

This image illustrates that the word “messy” is positioned way above the hundred percent that Ms. May’s grandson received for the spelling test. She believed that this word and its positioning undermined his efforts to do well in the class and represented the typical undermining of Black males in schools and society. The positioning of the word “messy” thus unveiled the problem of institutional racism and its impact on the school experience of Black students.

Ms. May explained that in preparing her grandson for this kind of bias, before going to school, she often gave him pep talks to remind him of her expectations for conduct. For example, she told him to report bullying and other issues immediately to his teacher. However, she expressed concern that, in most cases, even when he attempted to report his problem to his teacher he was often silenced. Explaining this issue, she
recounted an incident in which her grandson was hit and pushed by his classmates while in line at school. She mentioned that he received a referral after he retaliated because the teacher ignored his explanation. Hence, to help him psychologically cope with what she perceived as an unfair school incident, she told him to draw a storyboard to illustrate what occurred at school. During one of my visits to their home, Ms. May shared the following picture depicted in Figure 4.8.

![Storyboard](image)

Figure 4.8. Storyboard recounting an unfair experience at school

The picture depicts her grandson’s description of and feelings about the incident at school. For example, it illustrates that he was angry when his classmates hit and pushed him and that he was also disappointed that his teacher gave him a referral without listening to his side of the story. By engaging her grandson in drawing storyboards to express his feelings about his school experiences, Ms. May worked to make their home a counterspace to help him cope with these kinds of challenges at school. Additionally, by validating his side of the story, she attempted to counteract the silencing that he experienced outside the home.
The next section will explore how Ms. May also attempted to create a counterspace in their home by exposing her grandchildren to faith narratives that affirmed them and provided coping strategies to deal with the challenges school and society.

**Faith Socialization**

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.*
*Impress them on your children.*
*Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road,*
*when you lie down and when you get up.*
*Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

*Deuteronomy 6 verses 6-8*

Ms. May shared that faith plays a central role in her family and that the preceding scripture passages guided her decision to conduct weekly worship with her grandchildren. She explained that, during their worship, they read the Bible and pray together. Before her grandchildren leave for school each day, she also prays with them asking God to protect them throughout the day and help them to be successful in whatever they do. As a minister, called by God in 2006, she believed that it is her responsibility to help them to understand that God can help them through difficult times. Figure 4.9 is an image of a cultural artifact in the home with words from Psalms 27, which also portrays the kinds of socializing messages she transmitted to her grandchildren.

In congruence with some researchers’ observation that faith is often used by Afro-Caribbean immigrants to cope with challenges in their host country (Chatters, Taylor, Jackson & Lincoln, 2008), Ms. May argued that her faith keeps her going in challenging times on her job and in the society as a whole. She explained that her faith also helped to give her grandchildren the additional psychological support they need to accomplish their
dreams. Additionally, she believed that, through their faith, they will develop a positive self-esteem that is often not fostered in schools and the wider society.

![Image of a daily prayer card](image)

Figure 4.9 Faith artifact in Ms. May’s home

In addition to helping her grandchildren cope with life challenges through a connection to God, Ms. May explained that she also drew from cultural values and knowledge to help support them in developing additional coping strategies that would help them to preserve in their school work despite mainstream deficit perspectives about the ability of Black children to perform well in school.

**Cultural Socialization**

Counterspaces in the lives of subjugated people often help to promote psychological well-being by affirming identities that are demeaned in mainstream society (Case & Hunter, 2012). In this research, the cultural socialization messages that Ms. May transmit in her home created a counterspace for them by encouraging pride in their identities and providing them with strategies for coping with the racism they will encounter in the society. Though discourse about hard work is problematically linked to
notions of meritocracy in the U.S, she articulated her messages of hard work and perseverance in ways that encouraged them to resist an inferior position in the society.

**“Don’t stay back”: Hard work and perseverance.**

Don’t stay back  
Don’t stay down  
Put yourself up  
Go ahead of the class  
Be above the class  
A- W-A-Y ahead!  
(Ms. May)

If you’re white, you’re all right.  
If you’re brown, stick around.  
If you’re black, get back.  
Light is white.  
White is right  
If you’re light, you’re all right.  
(Robinson-Walcott, 2009)

Countering the mainstream narrative “if you are black get back” (Robinson-Walcott, 2009), Ms. May’s words, in the above ethno-poem, encouraged her grandchildren to persevere in school because, like the other women in this research, Ms. May believed that Black children have to work harder than their white counterparts to be successful. She shared that she noticed that her granddaughter seemed to be losing confidence at school, so she encouraged all of her grandchildren to be confident and participate more in class. She also encouraged them to work hard and read their books ahead of what they are already covering in class so they can stay “away ahead” of their school materials. She explained that she taught her grandson at home before he reached school age so when he began school, he was able to perform well. She also stated that she often assisted them with their homework in the evenings after school and also assigned them extra academic practice when needed. She argued that setting these high
expectations was integral because they face both ethnocentrism and racism in the society.

The ethno-poem which follows portray her ideas surrounding these issues:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Although they were born here [U.S.],} \\
\text{Some people might discriminate} \\
\text{against them because of our culture [homeland culture]} \\
\text{and because they are black} \\
\text{so they will easily put them aside} \\
\text{that’s why I tell them} \\
\text{to put themselves out there} \\
\text{To be heard and seen}
\end{align*}
\]

In anticipation of the dual discrimination (Rong & Preissle, 1998) they are likely to face in the society, Ms. May encouraged her grandchildren to “put themselves out there” which means make themselves visible by getting involved in class activities. She explained that she transmitted these kinds of messages because she realizes that low self-esteem, resulting from their marginalization and discrimination against them in school and in the society, could prevent them from doing their best in school. In order to build their self-esteem, she transmitted the kinds of self-affirming messages portrayed in the ethno-poem below:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{You are you} \\
\text{There’s nobody like you} \\
\text{There will never be anybody like you} \\
\text{You are smart} \\
\text{You are wise} \\
\text{You are you} \\
\text{There’s nobody like you!}
\end{align*}
\]

Ms. May’s messages portrayed in the preceding ethno-poem affirmed her grandchildren’s uniqueness and their ability to do well in school.

In addition to encouraging her grandchildren to believe in themselves and excel academically, she also encouraged them to excel in extra-curricular sporting activities.

The summer I began this research, Ms. May told me that her grandchildren were involved
in Track and Field. Many of my scheduled interviews were either before or after their athletic training at a nearby school. She explained that coming from a country where athletics is greatly emphasized she always wanted one of her grandchildren to be involved in this sport. She taught them how to run alongside the river like she did as a child, pretending to out-run its flow. Both Ms. May and her daughter Tanya also mentioned that the children’s involvement in sports is also an attempt to help pave their way to attaining scholarships to help fund their college tuition and to become well-rounded individuals who will later play their part in making a difference in the society.

**The Creation of Socially Just Schools**

*You are standing in front of a class*  
*with people from*  
*different backgrounds*  
*different homes*  
*don’t limit yourself to one area*  
*learn to teach to diversity*  
*listen to everybody*  
*listen and understand*  
*You need to learn*  
*You need to be trained*  
*in the field of culture*

The preceding ethno-poem, which is Ms. May’s open address to educators, reveals her belief that teachers must be trained to teach diverse students. She drew her conclusion from her own college experiences when she felt ignored and invisible in her English class because she spoke English with a Jamaican accent. The ethno-poem also helps to articulate her belief that, in a socially just school, no one should be silenced. Instead, she argued that teachers must be willing to listen to different perspectives to learn about their students’ unique ideas and needs.
Reflecting on her grandson’s school experiences, Ms. May argued that a socially just school must also create an environment in which Black children feel that they are valued and accepted. She believed that teachers should support and build the self-esteem of all students but especially Black males who face far more oppression in the society. She also contended that school discipline should not be racially biased and that teachers should take the time to listen to all sides of the story when an incident occurs in school.

Finally, Ms. May argued that a socially just school should create an environment where not only parents but also grandparents are welcomed in school matters pertaining to their grandchildren. She explained that it is important for educators to understand the significant role that grandmothers play in the Jamaican culture. She noted that in several of the incidents involving her grandson she did not visit the school to address these issues because she felt that the school did not seem to accept her presence readily because she is not his mother. As a result, Ms. May argued that educators could benefit from learning about the significance of the extended family in the lives of some children. She explained that from her cultural background, grandparents are usually treated with the same amount of respect as the parents. In alignment with Ms. May’s arguments, Plaza (2000) also noted that “a grandmother’s readiness to assume responsibility for her grandchildren is a central aspect of this pattern of childbearing in Caribbean society” (p.79).

**Conclusion to Chapter Four**

*My skin is black/My arms are long*

*My hair is wooly/My back is strong*

*Strong enough to take the pain*

*inflicted again and again*
This chapter unveiled the narratives of four Jamaican immigrant mothers or grandmothers, who like the women in Nina Simone’s song *Four Women*, are oppressed in the society. Their narratives revealed that although they were at varying levels of critical consciousness and reflect the complexities of understanding and responding to racism, these women were attempting to provide their children with spaces that helped to counter deficit perspectives about their identities and racist actions from mainstream society.

There were similarities as well as differences in the way these mothers articulated and addressed their marginalization in the U.S. South. For example, feeling disenfranchised and frustrated with what she perceived as the inability of schools to fully address the inequalities between Black children and their White counterparts, Bev tried to claim power in her home by exposing her son to the problem of institutional racism through the Bible account of the battle between good and evil. Her preparation for bias messages, though present, were not as direct as the other women in this research because she wanted to provide her son with details that she deemed age appropriate. However, she attempted to use narratives to affirm her son and to help him to build a positive self-esteem about his racial identity to counter subliminal messages that would lead him to declare “first of all I want to be a pink president!” Ms. Dell, Tanya and Ms. May, on the other hand, all transmitted direct messages about the racialization of Black people in the society. This might be influenced by the fact that their son or grandson experienced what they perceived to be overt racism at school as seen in excessive in-school suspensions and referrals for Black males. Both Tanya and Ms. May also perceived overt racism in the low expectations that schools seem to have for them.
One of the dominant themes from the findings is that, in this racialized context, all of the women were concerned about the psychological well-being of their Black children. The mothers and grandmothers referenced the news on the killing of Black males in the society as a major cause for concern. Hence, where girls were present, the women made attempts to develop spaces that help support all children, but particularly their Black sons. Ms. Dell, Tanya, and Ms. May all believed that the stereotypical ways in which some teachers address behavioral issues involving Black children might affect their motivation in school. Ms. Dell explained it this way: “When you let children feel as if you have some doubt about them then they will become discouraged, and they might think she is not listening to me so why bother to try.”

According to Case and Hunter (2012), “counterspace members draw on setting-level narratives as well as identity-affirming experiences within counterspaces to re-craft self-concepts” (p.264) that have been made vulnerable by mainstream narratives. The actions of the mothers and grandmothers in this research, seen in the presence of narratives and counter-narratives in their home that validated and supported their children indicate attempting to create counterspaces to help counter overt and subliminal messages about their own and the children’s racial identities. For example, Bev’s declaration of the home as powerful space was very much aligned the counterspace perspective and its emphasis on empowering oppressed people.

There were differences in the extent to which some of the women’s church functioned as counterspaces. For example, both Ms. Dell and Tanya were members of predominantly Black churches that transmitted more direct positive messages about their racial identity. Both their churches had sermons that told the Black congregants that “they
were fearfully and wonderfully made” to counter mainstream deficit messages about Black people. As a predominantly African American church, Ms. Dell’s church also provided counter knowledge and coping strategies that specifically drew from the history of the struggles of Black people in this country (e.g., Negro Spirituals). On the other hand, while Bev’s church provided messages about Christian values which she used to help develop her son’s faith identity, it did not specifically provide narratives that countered deficit perspectives of Black families. Hence, her church did function as a counterspace for her son. The implications of this finding will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

The Jamaican immigrant mothers and grandmothers’ messages are not without complexities and contradictions, for example, hard work is typically understood in the U.S. to be part of the narrative of meritocracy which blames the lack of progress of Black people on their failure to work hard (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, Bridgeman, 2011). However, as Waters (1999) noted and as this study’s participants seem to believe, in the Jamaican context, poor Black people can move up to the middle class despite their skin color, if they work hard. Hence, it appeared that the mothers are drawing from their homeland understanding of hard work to cope with their challenges with racialization in their host country. This might reveal that, although some of the women have some knowledge of structural racism (e.g., school to prison pipeline), they might not fully comprehend how it operates in their new society. Exploring their nuanced understanding of the racial context in which they live, as seen in this research, could help educators and researchers to come to a better understanding of the complexities surrounding the lives of Afro-Caribbean immigrants which could aid in social justice efforts for their children. In
chapter five, I attempt to deepen the conversations surrounding Black immigrant families and their children by exploring the insights I have gained across these women’s narratives.

The Jamaican immigrant women’s mistrust of their children’s schools was evident in their narratives with varied intensity. Tanya and her mother Ms. May showed the strongest mistrust of schools to meet the unique needs of Black males. They mentioned the excessive punishment and lowered expectations as examples of how they are often underserved in these institutions. Like them Ms. Dell also demonstrated mistrust in schools’ ability to employ unbiased practices when dealing with Black children in general and Black males in particular. This is also an area where Bev converged with the other women when she also noted that schools do not provide the cultural knowledge that would validate Black children. Thus, their narratives point to the need for classrooms to become spaces where racialized children can feel that their knowledge and experiences matter. From listening to the women’s story and reflecting on my own, I decided to lose my fig leaves of multiculturalism as my dedication poem to them stated. I chose to be brave in putting the problem of racism at the forefront of this study as the women were in telling me their stories. These stories might bring healing to others who are also being raced.
CHAPTER 5
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Jamaican immigrant women in this research all reported that racism is a social problem in the U.S. that threatened the well-being of their families. However, although these women are from Jamaica, their stories revealed not only similarities but also differences in how they articulate their perception of racism in the U.S. and choose to raise their children. By providing a cross-case analysis in this section, I hope to highlight the importance of listening to their individual and collective stories to gain insights into the complexities they all face in negotiating a racialized society. The research questions beneath each major subheadings point to the critical issues explored in the women’s narratives and help to structure my discussion on the insights I have gained from listening to their voices and interacting with them in their homes and church. In alignment to critical race theory (CRT) emphasis on creativity, I constructed the ethno-poems used in this section to represent their voices and to draw attention to their racialized experiences.

Facing Racism in a U.S. Southeast State

How do the mothers and grandmothers perceive racism in the U.S.?

I was culture shock with their racism
they marginalized your family to death
most time Black people are put down
and are unfairly or quickly judged
because of the color of their skin
Surveying the Jamaican immigrant women’s narrative through a CRT lens, I found that race shaped how they perceived their experiences in the U.S., how they self-identified and raised their children or grandchildren. Yosso (2005) defined CRT as a “framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses” (p.70). From a CRT standpoint, I am thus able to provide an interpretation of their experiences and how they are attempting to cope with their racialization. Exploring their perception and experiences with racism helps me to move the discourse about Caribbean immigrants away from deficit divide and conquer research narrative to focus on how all of us as Black people are being raced on a daily basis (Pierre, 2004).

CRT acknowledges that race intersects with other forms of oppressions, for example, those associated with gender and nationality (Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). The narratives of the Jamaican immigrant women include these intersections and the complexities associated with them. By naming their realities, they help to add rich insights needed for understanding the experiences of Black women from diverse backgrounds.

“Racism as a strange phenomenon.”

As illustrated in my constructed multi-voiced ethno-poem, all the women in this research perceived racism in the U.S. as a social problem manifesting itself in daily discriminatory practices (e.g. racial profiling, linguistic discrimination, lowered expectations for Black children) against Black people in schools and society. Bev defined racism in both religious and medical terms drawn from her faith and professional backgrounds. As illustrated in the following ethno-poem, she defined it as a battle
between good and evil that divides people along racial lines and as a global disease involving the othering of “Negroid people”:

\[
\text{Racism is a} \\
\text{strange phenomenon} \\
\text{Non-Caucasoid hypersensitivity syndrome} \\
\text{a huge sin problem} \\
\text{the most creative and sharp, well-tuned tool} \\
\text{that the devil has come up with} \\
\text{to cause divisiveness and straight hate}
\]

Ms. Dell also perceives racism as a problem in the U.S. society but spoke about it in terms of the day to day unfair treatment of Black people that she called racial profiling. She explained that she has experienced “blatant racism” in the society and indirectly through her daughter and grandson in schools. Hence, she, like the other women, is beginning to learn about the problem of institutional racism although she still struggled with the internalized notion of meritocracy influenced by her Jamaican cultural values of hard work and perseverance. Tanya also perceived racism as a social problem that is pervasive in the U.S. and “packed with hatred” of Black people. She argued that “racism may be stronger in some regions, but it exists throughout the U.S. though people may not have confederate flags and different emblems displayed openly.”

\text{Racism, ethnocentrism, and dehumanization.}

It takes a multitude of the oppressed to make their voices heard and felt. But what about the voices that do not fit into one single category of oppression?

Will social progress let them slip through the cracks?

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.63)
The women’s narratives underscored the importance of listening to the voices of those who face multiple oppression in the society and are at risk of slipping through the cracks as noted in the above quote. Their stories reveal that as Black Jamaican immigrant women, they are operating within “an intersection of recognized sites of oppression” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.57) resulting in their feelings of triple disadvantages in the society (Rong & Brown, 2002). These women are vulnerable to multiple oppression in the U.S. society because they claim both racial and ethnic identities. In alignment to my observations, Roger (2001) argued that:

Racial and ethnic identities are complex, fluid categories. Individuals may have multiple identities that they hold simultaneously and manage differently within the varying contexts of their social and political lives. Accordingly, Afro-Caribbean immigrants may embrace both their ethnic and racial identities without contradiction (p. 166).

Associated with their racial and ethnic identities, most of the women’s narrative revealed that they faced both racism and ethnocentrism in the society. At times, some of the women were unable to decipher which form of oppression was occurring in certain circumstances. For example, at a local government office where Ms. Dell faced challenges, she told a supervisor that either she was experiencing racially profiling or some other form of prejudice was at play.

Unveiling their experiences with multiple oppressions, both Ms. May and Ms. Dell included experiences with ethnocentrism and linguicism in their conversations about racism in the U.S. They explained that during these experiences they felt othered and dehumanized because of their accent and cultural background. Ms. May believed she was
ignored and silenced by her white professor in her college English class because she had
a Jamaican accent. Likewise, Ms. Dell expressed concern about the discrimination she
faced in the society because she did not speak “White American.”

Expressing concern about ethnocentrism even within the Black community, Ms.
May shared experiences on her job when she felt she was unfairly treated not only
because she is black but also because she is from a different cultural background than her
co-workers. For example, she recounted an incident when as an LPN she was told to
clean the toilet by her supervisor. She explained that she refused to do it because she
knew that this was not part of her job description and out of frustration with such
experiences she left the job. As a Jamaican immigrant woman, she felt that this was a
blatant form of discrimination. She also expressed concern that her second generation
immigrant grandchildren might also face this kind of discrimination in school because of
their Jamaican heritage. Ms. Dell also shared this concern when her grandson’s school
requested his birth certificate after he received an in-school suspension for having a
spatula from his Science class. She believed it was discrimination against him based on
his racial and cultural background, so her daughter refused to resend it to the school.

“We Don’t Have that Back Home”: Perceived Differences in U.S. and Jamaican
Society

I don’t rememb racism
from where I grew up
it use to bother mi a lot
when I just come here
but after learning,
figuring out di problem
I realized this is the
way it is here

The women narratives revealed that they went through a process of what Ms. May
called, “figuring out di problem” of racism in the U.S. by reflecting on their homeland
experiences. Their bicultural lens acquired from living in both locations shaped their perception of racism in the U.S. and how they chose to raise their children. As portrayed in the preceding ethno-poem, Ms. May described going through a learning process which led her to believe that racism is endemic in the society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). She described living in the U.S. southeast as a learning process since she was unaccustomed to dealing with this problem in her home country. All the women except Bev concurred with Ms. May that racism does not exist in Jamaica. Bev, on the other hand, maintained that racism exists in their home country, but it looks different. I share her belief that racism is present in Jamaica and is seen for example, in our colonial structures (e.g. legal system), practices of colorism mixed with classism, skin bleaching and tourism (owners of hotels are usually White or light skinned, and menial workers are generally Black). Intensifying in 2009, Jamaican government’s call for reparation from Britain for their involvement in the slave trade and the enslavement of our ancestors point to the fact that we are still grappling with the effects of racism.

The Jamaican immigrant women’s interpretations of the hostile racial climate in the U.S., and how they believed it differed from their homeland experiences, concur with Ho’s (1999) discussion of the differences in the social structures of the U.S. and the Caribbean and how they might contribute to the challenges Caribbean immigrants experience in a racialized society. She explained that these immigrants migrated from regions that contained a three-tiered system (Black, mixed and White), and no one drop rule, to a two-tiered system (Black-White binary) in a “bipolar North American structure” (p.101). Hence, she argued that the differences in social structures in both regions mean that “‘blackness’ in the new country acquires a more painful meaning, making it difficult
to change ‘social colour’ by cultural means” (p.100) as the women all noted in their narratives. By this Ho (1999) meant that Caribbean immigrants quickly learned the harsh reality that they could not move up the social ladder as they would in the Caribbean (Vickerman, 2013) because being black relegated them to the margins of the society.


Tensions existed across the women’s narrative concerning the existence of racism in Jamaica. As mentioned earlier, unlike the other women, Bev’s conversations about racism in the U.S. included references to the different ways it also manifests itself in the Jamaican context. For example, as noted by some researchers (Ho, 1999; Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1999), she mentioned colorism and its conflation with classism, as one of the major indicators that racism still exists in her home country. In alignment to Bev’s argument, Wiggan and Walrond (2013) also maintained that:

Although Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association and the subsequent formation of the Rastafarian movement aimed to correct much of these misconceptions and belittling of Black culture and African heritage, the social system still privileges European ethos and aesthetics, rather than valuing both cultures equally (p. 23).

Contesting Bev’s belief that racism is still an issue in Jamaica, as also implied in Wiggan and Walrond’s (2013) preceding quote, the other women argued that classism and not racism is a major problem in the country. They argued that people in the middle and upper classes usually live in better neighborhoods and have a wider range of social capital. Ms. Dell explained that “In Jamaica right now, what they really talk about is uptown people [rich people] and downtown people [poor people] and ghettos.” Given
this “different zone of proximity” between the two countries, as Tanya described it, these
dwomen shared surprise encounters with racism in the U.S. because they never
experienced it in their home country. However, Bev viewed the racism in society as
unsurprising because she believed that the discriminatory practices of the past are
constantly being reproduced in the society and that racism is a global racism.

Explaining the factors that might influence differences between Caribbean
immigrants’ and African American perception of racism, Bashi (2007) contended that the
social structures and the population composition (majority black versus minority white
and vice versa) in their countries might account for this difference. Below she maintained
that:

All things being equal, in societies where there are more whites than blacks the
influence of racial discrimination may be easier to see than the influence of class,
whereas in black-majority societies the influence of class may seem greater than
of race” (p.219)

As Bev argued, the above quote indicates that the social composition of a country could
influence how readily individuals might be able to identify racism or classism in the
society. Hence, she raised the point that Jamaicans might struggle with identifying racism
in Jamaica because the population is predominantly Black. Nevertheless, Bev argued that
racism exists in the country like other parts of the world since most of the wealth are still
own by white or light skinned Jamaicans (Vickerman, 2013).

Constructing a middle ground between the women’s argument, several recent
reports in Jamaica appear to acknowledge that both classism and racism exist in the
country. For example, a 2016 Jamaican newspaper report entitled “Usain Bolt Beating
Classism and Racism in Jamaica,” noted that the Olympian experienced both in Jamaica from some light-skinned members of the upper class living in his community. He articulated the belief that, as a dark skinned man from a poor socio-economic background, they resented his rise to fame which afforded him the privilege of now living in their wealthy communities.

In their narratives, both Bev and Tanya drew from a global lens to discuss racism in the U.S. society. Tanya compared her experiences in the Caribbean and South America to highlight the harshness of racism in the U.S. society. While comparing racism in the U.S. and Jamaica, Bev also discussed racism as existing all over the world giving a sense of what I term borderless racism. Hence, Bev drew from a broader global lens than the other women in discussing racism and other forms of oppression across the world. For example, she mentioned the British invasion of India and the Jewish Holocaust as indicators that racism is a global problem. Hence, while the other women talked about racism as an issue in the U.S., she perceived it as a problem that extends beyond its borders. As some researchers have argued (Clarke & Thomas, 2006; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013), Bev contributed to the conversation by articulating a need to understand racism as not just a local U.S. issue but also a global one.

**Learning what it means to Be Black in a U.S. Southeast State**

*People who are white get preferential treatment, THEY ARE LISTENED TO*

*their point of view is given some value*

In the preceding ethno-poem, Tanya’s words reveal her understanding that being black in America means being silenced and ignored while people from the dominant
white culture are “listened to” and their opinions are valued by mainstream society. Ms. May also learned about the problem of silencing when her interjections during her English class discussions were ignored by her White professor. Although, they also reported being ignored by their college professors, both Tanya and Bev shared that they sometimes felt ignored by their college mates.

Drawing from her global experiences in the Caribbean and South America, Tanya talked about the racialization of people as a unique social problem in the U.S. because she did not experience the unfair labeling and marginalization of Black people in those territories. Though she acknowledged that racial classifications existed in the other countries, she explained that they were not packed with the hatred she experienced in the U.S. South.

**Not totally oblivious to racism in the U.S. society prior to migration.**

Although the Jamaican immigrant women did not fully understand what it means to be black in the U.S., they were not totally oblivious to racism in this country prior to their migration. Unlike some of the participants in Water’s (1999) study in New York, the women in my research all explained that they understood themselves to be black prior to migrating to the U.S. Though they heard about the discrimination in the society, they shared that experiencing or observing it first hand was alarming. Like them, I knew about racism in the U.S. prior to coming to this country but I describe my migration as the moment when my textbooks came alive because although I took African Diaspora courses that exposed me to the problem of racism in the U.S. and saw evidence of it in the media, it was different experiencing it personally. Gradually, I learned about the micro-aggressions, overt and covert forms of racism and institutional racism which
helped to broaden my understanding of the serious challenges that all Black people face in this society.

As Foner (2001) discovered in her research on Caribbean immigrants in New York, I found that although some of the women learned about racism in the U.S. through accounts from other immigrants or the media prior to their migration, “they were unprepared for the degree of interpersonal racism they encountered in their day-to-day experiences” (p.22). Hence, I found that they did not come to America with “eyes wide shut” (Grant, 2005, p.1) when they arrived but they lacked the repertoire of experiences that would help them to gain a full understanding of their racialization in this society. This is, for example, seen in Ms. Ms. May’s declaration that she was “culture shock with the racism” in the U.S. society. Her daughter also began interrogating the racial climate in her host country after being shocked by the racism (e.g. being policed and followed) she encountered in the early years after her arrival in the South. Ms. Dell was aware of the racism in the U.S. society, through her daughter’s experience with institutional racism and conversations with a Jamaican immigrant prior to her migration but she was still very surprised by what she called blatant experiences with racial profiling in the society.

The women did not all share overt personal experiences with racism. Bev, unlike the other women, did not recall experiencing direct personal encounters with racism though she firmly believed it to be a social problem in the U.S. and the rest of the world. She described her journey to learning about racism in the society as one that occurred from reading critical literature on her own during her undergraduate years. She explained that she was raised in a home where her mother encouraged her to ignore racial issues. Additionally, she noted that while living in a Caribbean community in another
southeastern state she did not have any encounter with the daily overt racism that the other women experienced. Nevertheless, her readings in college led her to begin thinking more deeply about the disparities (education, health, and housing) in the society and how they were connected to the racism in the society.

**Racism as a threat to psychological well-being.** Unveiling her psychological experience with racism, Ms. May remarked, “all the time in the South, I felt too confined and filled with stress, but whenever I go to Jamaica I feel stress-free, and my mind is free.” Her comments concur with Bev’s observation that Caribbean immigrants might be able to take psychological breaks from the trauma of racism by connecting to their homeland while African Americans do not get a break from it. In keeping with this line of argument, Bashi (2007) argued that for Caribbean immigrants “access both to immigrant network resources and to their foreign-born perspective create a cognitive transition that allows them to distance themselves from the experience of race and racism” (p.210). While the Jamaican immigrant women in this research were not distancing themselves from racism, their transnational travels and or networks (Facebook, WhatsApp, and SKYPE) at times helped them to cope with it through the creation of a transnational counterspace which affirmed their identities.

Ho (1999) maintained that living in the U.S. could affect Caribbean immigrants psychologically because they were accustomed to being a part of the majority in Black rule countries. She argued that their self-esteem and confidence might be affected because they “growing up as members of a majority, are unaccustomed to perceiving themselves as a minority or to defining themselves in opposition to a majority that is physically different” (p.100). Likewise, the women all expressed concern about the
impact that racism could have on their children’s psychological well-being as detailed in the following multi-voiced ethno-poem:

There is this THING that is here that
causes children to think less of themselves
WATCH OUT for your self-esteem,
be mindful to INTERRUPT things that could affect it
I instill positive things in my grandchildren so
they won’t feel lower than the rest
because I firmly believe what, you call children
and certain things that you say help to mold their life

This ethno-poem indicates that the women perceived racism as a threat to the self-esteem of their children or grandchildren. Ms. Dell argued that racialization in the U.S. society often caused Black children to develop low self-esteem whether they were born here or in the Caribbean. In congruence, Bev maintained that the legacy of racism in the country demands that “Negroid people” be watchful and protective of their self-esteem. She explained that she used the phrase “legacy of racism” because “there are so many pieces of it going on now which leftover things from the past are.” Coming from a “Black rule country”, Ms. May explained, has helped her to develop a strong self-esteem. However, she expressed concern that her grandchildren might struggle to develop a positive self-esteem because of the deficit perspectives of Black people in the society.

Adaptive responding. “Adoptive responding” (p.259) as defined by Case and Hunter (2012), refers to the attempt made by oppressed people to psychologically cope with our oppression. According to them, as oppressed people we often respond to our oppression by two interconnected means: (a) self-protection because of the discrimination we face and the desire to protect our self-concept, and (b) self-enhancement which refers to our attempt to claim our humanity and self-worth in a racialized society where we are constantly dehumanized.
The Jamaican immigrant women’s narratives reveal that their level of adaptive responding was shaped by what they observe in the society and or their unique experiences with racism. As a form of adaptive responding to their marginalization (Case & Hunter, 2012), all the women overtly or covertly used strategies (prayers, transnational travels, Christian songs, cultural artifacts/activities and counter-narratives about their identities) that they used to build their children or grandchildren’s self-esteem and to protect them from the negative impact of racism. For some of the women, adaptive responding to racism involved advocating for their son at school. Such advocacy is seen for example, when Bev asked her son’s teachers the question, “how are you addressing and taking care of the self-esteem of my little Negroid boy in America?” or when Tanya refused to have her son stigmatized in schools by asking her son’s school to expunge his records. These were also examples of the mistrust in schools that the women’s narratives often revealed.

**Racism and the Stigmatization of Black males in Schools and the Society**

From the standpoint of critical race scholars (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Gillborn, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009), racism is the root cause of unjust school experiences of Black children in U.S. schools and society. Likewise, from a CRT stance Duncan (2002) in his critical ethnography on Black males in schools, noted that racist stereotypes held by school officials often result in their negative school experiences (e.g. poor academic performance, school dropout and lowered self-concepts). In congruence, Howard (2013) argued that “African American males… continue to be one of the more academically and socially marginalized students in the U.S. schools” (p.54). Recognizing this problem, during our conversations, all mothers articulated concern for their black son
or grandson because of the racialized context in which they live. They expressed concern about the killing of Black males by the police and the overall negative stereotypes often ascribed to them in the society.

Tanya noted that black males are often viewed as a threat to the society and Ms. May, her mother, also believed that the U.S. society tends to “cut down Black boys.” By this, she referred to what she perceived as unfair treatments in schools and the society that often impede their progress. Their observations support Lopez’s (2002) contention that “on a daily basis, men of African phenotype are subjected to numerous micro-aggressions in public spaces that stem from the hegemonic view of dark-skinned men as hoodlums and criminal suspects” (p.73).

All the women, except Bev, talked about a son or grandson who has directly experienced what they perceived to be institutional racism manifesting itself in unfair referrals and suspensions of Black males in schools that threaten their academic performance and psychological well-being. In keeping with their observations, Gillborn (2009) contended that Black children are more likely to be recipients of unfair disciplinary actions than white students. Using, words such as “expunge” and “remove from the record,” Tanya’s narratives revealed her own fight against this kind of unjust treatment of Black children in schools. She complained about the use of criminalizing words such as “assault” and “vandalism” as unfair labels for minor incidents in school that did not warrant referrals and suspensions. Ms. Dell also contested the unfairness of her grandson’s referrals and the use of criminalizing languages. For example, she critiqued one referral that he received with the teacher’s statement that he was “about to fight” at school. She also critiqued the school’s assumption that her grandson had
intentions to use the spatula from Science class as a dangerous weapon. Like Tanya and Ms. May, she expressed concerns about how quickly schools labeled Black males and argued that they are never given the benefit of the doubt.

**Lowered expectations for Black children.** In addition to the unfair discipline often meted out to Black males in school, the women were all concerned about the reduced expectation for the academic performance of Black males. Bev expressed concern about the disparities between Black male and their white counterparts in school fueled by what she perceived to be the legacy of racism. As an insider to the U.S. education system, Tanya drew from her experiences and observations as a teacher, to note that Black students are often not encouraged to succeed like their white counterparts. She articulated this view in the proceeding ethno-poem:

\[
\text{I n-o-t-i-c-e-d} \\
\text{a lot of white teachers,} \\
\text{I have o-b-s-e-r-v-e-d,} \\
\text{where the emphasis would be} \\
\text{placed on white students} \\
\text{to make sure they do the work,} \\
\text{“come on, come on you can do it!”} \\
\text{and then with the Black ones [hiss teeth]} \\
\text{“he doesn’t want to do it,”} \\
\text{and no “come on you can do it”,} \\
\text{I know it is not just my mind} \\
\text{I have seen it} \\
\text{and I am like nooo man!}
\]

In congruence with Tanya’s observations on the low expectations for Black students, Ms. Dell also maintained that they might develop lowered self-esteem and become demotivated when they sense that their teachers do not expect them to perform well in school. For example, she shared that her grandson became demotivated in music class after he received an in-school suspension for having a spatula from his Science
class. She explained that her grandson’s perception that his teacher viewed him negatively because of this incident resulted in his poor performance in that subject. Also contending that the disproportionate discipline of African American males negatively impacts their self-esteem, Townsend (2000) argued that there is a need to:

Examine the messages transmitted to students suspended at rates two and three times their percentage in the school age population.

When the vast majority of school exclusions are meted out to African American students who comprise a minority of the school population, it is easy for those students to interpret this disparity as rejection and to suffer from lower self-esteem as a result (p. 382).

As mentioned earlier, the women all believed that Black students faced lowered expectations in school and are at risk of developing lower self-esteem. Hence, in order to address this problem, they all attempted to use narratives that set higher expectations for their children or grandchildren in their home. Tanya articulated the need for Black children to resist giving into the lowered expectations of the society. She argued, “if they are saying you can’t do it, why should you dress back [give into this belief] and don’t do it?”

What do They Call Me: The Dilemma of Identifying in the U.S. Context

How do the women choose to self-identify?

The question of identity has always been particularly salient for the immigrant. Arriving as a stranger in a new society, the immigrant must decide how he or she self-identifies, and the people in the host society must decide how they will categorize or identify the immigrant (Waters, 1999, p.44).
Self-identifying in the U.S. context was a complicated issue for the Jamaican immigrant women in this research. Their narratives revealed that they immediately faced a dilemma on how to self-identity when they entered the racialized context of the U.S. society because they faced the same racial discrimination as African Americans in the society (Bryce-Laporte, 1972; Foner, 2001; Kasinitz, 1992; Rong & Brown, 2002; Water, 1999). They experienced tensions between how they prefer to self-identify and the Black labels ascribed to them by mainstream society. As several researchers have indicated (Butterfield, 2004; Rogers, 2001; Shower Johnson, 2008; Waters, 1999) because of their ethnic background, these women could self-identify ethnically, racially or claim multiple identities. Waters (1999) describing Caribbean immigrants as having a “portfolio of identities” (p.91). She explained that they could claim “racial identities as black or mixed, national identities as Jamaican or Trinidadian, regional identities as West Indian or Caribbean, along with new possible identities as ‘immigrant’ or ‘American’ or as a ‘hyphenated American’” (p.91).

Given the stigmatization of Black people in the society as Waters (1999) found in her research, the Jamaican immigrant women in this research generally preferred to self-identify first ethnically but unlike most of her participants, the women in this research also expressed pride in a racial identity and did not distance themselves from the problem of racism in the society. Furthermore, their reasons they gave for identifying as Jamaican was not to distance themselves from African Americans. For example, Tanya noted that she prefers to identify as Jamaican because this is the way she is accustomed to self-identifying in Jamaica. Bev also chooses to self-identify as a “Jamaican Adventist” because she believes that both her ethnic and Christian identities keep her grounded in the
racialized society in which she lives. In her social setting, Ms. Dell self-identifies as a Jamaican migrant because she is not yet a U.S. citizen. Ms. May also preferred to self-identify as a Jamaican first because she spent most of her life in Jamaica but reported more negotiation between other identities that she associated with a collective Black identity (e.g. African-American, African Jamaican, Afro-Caribbean and Black).

While all the women self-identify as Black on official demographic forms, because an option for nationality is usually absent, most of them expressed concern about the stigmatized black label assigned to them in this society. Some of the women used “resistance narrative” (Case & Hunter, 2012, p.264) to interrogate this label. This kind of story served as a “form of psychological resistance in that it represents marginalized individuals’ rejection of the notion that they are somehow inferior and that their oppressed condition is their deserved lot” (p.264). For example, Ms. Dell argued that the word black has a negative connotation, so she prefers to put African Jamaican on official forms because it acknowledges both her African and Jamaican cultural backgrounds. She recounted an attempt to challenge the status quo by putting the word “chocolate” to self-identify on her U.S. Embassy visa application. She also used what I called counter faith narratives to self-identify as “God’s creation.”

According to Waters (1999), context and consciousness can influence how someone self-identify. In her research, she found that some of her Caribbean participants negotiated between ethnic and racial identities because their “racial identity as black is foremost in their consciousness” (p.63). Ms. May demonstrated this kind of negotiation in explaining her self-identification in the U.S. context. She noted that despite the stigmatization associated with the word “Black,” she does not have a problem self-
identifying as black on official forms because she is from a Black rule country and a rich ancestral African history. Her perspective is aligned to my own reason for also not having a problem with self-identifying as Black as detailed in my constructed ethno-poem below:

WHEN I SAY, I am Black
I know I am from a rich historical legacy
I say it because
I want to taste it in my mouth
I want to hear it ringing in my ears
I want to see it with eyes that span the diaspora
I want to feel its richness in the palm of my hands
WHEN I SAY, I am Black
I am rewriting your stories
I am standing tall in my skin
I am claiming my own chat
I am choosing to love me
I am choosing to be free

The above ethno-poem from my reflective journal seeks to indicate that for me self-identifying as black is both motivated by my pride in my own heritage and my wish to take a political stance against my own racialization and others like me in the U.S. society by rewriting what it means to be black.

Rejecting Stigmatization Not Racial Identity

We refuse to be
What you wanted us to be
We are what we are
That’s the way it’s going to be
If you don’t know
You can’t educate I
For no equal opportunity
Talking bout my freedom
People freedom and liberty
Bob Marley’s song *Babylon System* speaks to a refusal to be defined by oppressive systems in the Jamaican society. In my home country, Rastafarians used the word “Babylon” to refer to oppressive structures (e.g. colonial) and the keepers of them (e.g. colonizers, government officials, and the police) who through unjust actions impede the progress of poor Black people struggling to survive. The song’s resistance narrative “we refuse to be what you wanted us to be”, also echoes the Jamaican immigrant women’s response to being labeled by the mainstream U.S. society.

Although some of the women in the research appear to reject the black label, their narratives revealed that they are proud of their African ancestry. As mentioned earlier, contrary to some researchers’ (Rong & Brown, 2002) assertions that claiming an ethnic identity might reflect Black immigrants’ attempt to de-emphasize race, I found that all the women expressed pride in their racial identity. They all spoke with pride about their African heritage and taught their children to value it. For example, Bev talked about the inventions and accomplishments of her African ancestors that are missing from school’s curriculum. Tanya also spoke about embracing the notion of being “black and proud and not woe is me.” Ms. Dell and Ms. May also spoke about their African ancestry as significant part of who they are in the society. Thus, these women embraced both a racial and ethnic identity but reject their stigmatization in the U.S. society because of the color of their skin. My conversations with them revealed that as a means of dealing with their racialization in the society, the women are often negotiating their multiple identities (e.g. racial, ethnic and faith) rather than choosing one identity (Roger, 2001).
Raising Second-Generation Immigrant Jamaican Children in a Racialized Society

What connection, if at all, exists between the Jamaican immigrant women’s perceptions of racism and how they choose to raise their children?

According to Joseph and Hunter (2011), Black immigrant parents’ socializing messages might be influenced by their racialized experiences in the U.S. Hence, they argued it would be illuminating to learn about the kinds of messages they transmit to their children and the identities that they are helping to develop in them. As they have implied, I have found that the Jamaican women in this research expressed similar concerns as African American mothers about how their children might be affected by racism in the society. However, their narratives revealed that their articulation of this concern is shaped by their bifocal lenses (home country and the U.S.). Additionally, I learned that Jamaican immigrant mothers’ narratives revealed similarities and differences in how they attempted to help their children cope with their racialization in the society.

Like other Black families in the U.S., it was evident in this research that race mattered in the women’s daily lives and the messages they transmitted to the children in their homes. As mentioned earlier all the Jamaican mothers or grandmothers perceived racism as a social problem resulting in the racialization of Black people in the society. They also perceived it as a threat to their children’s psychological well-being and academic progress. Hence, they each attempted to prepare their children or grandchildren for the bias they will encounter because of their racial identity. Though there are similarities, they each also transmitted messages that underscored their unique perception of the challenges they face. However, as Bev articulated in the ethno-poem I created from
her words below, they all believed that they must do whatever they can to help protect their children from the negative impact of racism:

I think it is very DANGEROUS for us and our children to be participating blindly in a world like this

As some researchers have noted about the intent of racial socialization (Lesane-Brown, 2006), the preceding quote reveals Bev’s belief that it is important for Black families to be cognizant of the problem of racism in the society in order to help their children successfully cope with it. Her use of the word “dangerous” particularly indicates that she sees it as a threat to the well-being of families like hers.

**Protecting Their Children**

Expressing concerns similar to the women’s concern about raising their Black son or grandson, Guyanese poet Grace Nichols, in the following last three stanzas of her poem *Fear* illustrates the kind of fear mothers often feel when raising a Black child in a racialized society:

I come from a backyard
Where the sun reaches down
Mangoes fall to the ground
Politicians turn cruel clowns

And here? Here

Sometimes I grow afraid
Too many young blacks
Reaping seconds
Indignant cities full of jail

I think my child is too loving
For this fear
Bev, fearing for her son like the other Jamaican immigrant women in this research, articulated the need to introduce the problem of racism to him. However, whereas the other women overtly discussed racial issues with their children or grandchildren, Bev covertly addressed this issue in ways that she believe are age appropriate. According to Hughes et al. (2006), it is not uncommon for parents to gauge their ethnic-racial messages depending on their child’s age. They explained that “the frequency of some aspects of ethnic-racial socialization may increase as children get older…discussion of more complex social processes, such as discrimination or wariness of other groups, may not emerge until children reach middle childhood or adolescence” (p. 758).

Though Bev shared plans to directly teach her son about the legacy of racism when he is older, she covertly introduced this problem through the bible’s account of the battle between good and evil. She reasoned that introducing the problem of racism from a Christian angle would help prevent him from becoming bitter and angry. From our conversations, I learned that Bev firmly believed that Black people must “rise intact” psychologically. Therefore, she argued that taking this approach with her son would help him to be aware of the issues he will face but remain psychologically whole. Like the African American parents in Winkler’s (2012) research, in order to protect her son’s psychological well-being, Bev was selective of the movies he watched and the books he read in their home. However, although she placed great importance on buffering the deficit perspectives about their racial identity in the media, she struggled with deciding on the appropriate age to have more in-depth overt discussions about racism with him.
During my interactions with the other women, I learned that Tanya and her mother, Ms. May, often discuss racially charged incidents in the news directly with their children or grandchildren to help them understand that they will face discrimination in the society. Such conversations helped prepare them for bias both in schools and the society. However, both women mentioned that they placed a greater emphasis on the preparation for bias messages they transmitted to their son or grandson because of the elevated danger that Black males face on a daily basis. Like Bev, they argued that given the racism in the society it is important to build the self-esteem of their children or grandchildren but especially the Black boy. All the women, except Bev, directly warned their son or grandson to be careful of their conduct at school because Black males are likely to receive excessive in-school suspensions and referrals. Ms. Dell talked about her daughter’s experience with institutional racism in nursing school and used this experience as a means of not only educating her grandson about racial discrimination in the society but also about persevering in the society even when faced with this problem.

**Fostering Pride in Racial and Ethnic Identities**

In challenging mainstream deficit perspectives associated with the racialization of their family, the women helped to foster in their children pride in their heritage through cultural socializing messages that helped to build their self-concept and create counter-identities (Shower Johnson, 2008) that challenged the U.S. Black-White binary. According to Mcadoo, Younge and Getahun (2007), “it has been demonstrated that some Caribbean immigrants and their children attempt to avoid racism directed toward the African American community by emphasizing ethnic over racial identity” (p.104). However, my findings revealed that the Jamaican mothers or grandmothers in this
research were not choosing an ethnic identity over a racial identity; instead they were strategically fostering the development of multiple identities (ethnic, race and faith) in their children which helped to affirm and buffer deficit perspectives about them.

The women’s “narrative of identity work” (Case & Hunter, 2012, p.262) revealed that they sought to affirm their racial and ethnic identity in their home. Case and Hunter (2012) defined narrative of identity work as “the process by which individuals or collectives give meaning to themselves and others through narratives” (p.262). For instance, narrative of identity work was used by Ms. May when she proudly told her grandchildren about Paul Bogle, a national hero, and Jamaican freedom fighter, who fought for the rights of slaves in Jamaica. In the U.S., Tanya also celebrated and taught her children about our Independence Day (August 6, 1962) and Emancipation Day (August 1, 1838) in Jamaica when we received our independence from Britain and our ancestors were freed respectively. Additionally, Bev exposed her son to reggae music that tapped into a Jamaican and Pan-African identity that is consistent with her conversations about reparation and Africa as her ancestral homeland.

Creating Counterspaces through Ethnic-Racial Socialization Messages

What ethnic-racial messages do the participants transmit to their children or grandchildren? What purposes do these messages serve?

In this research I explore a connection between Hughes et al (2006) notion of ethnic-racial messages and Case and Hunter’s (2012) concept of counterspace which indicated how the mothers or grandmothers in the research are attempting to provide their children or grandchildren with strategies to help them cope with racism and the
associated deficit mainstream narratives about them in a society where Black people are often dehumanized.

The concept of counterspace refers to settings where deficit perspectives about people oppressed by the society are challenged through narratives that affirm their identities and resist negative stereotypes ascribed to them (Case & Hunter, 2012). First introducing the concept of the counterspace, Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000), found that African Americans, when faced with microaggressions at college, created their own counterspace to deal with institutional racism. Building on their concept of the counterspace, Dyrness (2011) also discussed how Ophelia’s (one of her research participants) kitchen became a counterspace for Latina immigrant women who were fighting for equitable education for their children in California. She described this counterspace as a setting where the women were engaged in “naming and recording the experiences that had been suppressed, rejecting the controlling images that framed them as unworthy or ‘problem parents” (p.140).

In exploring parents’ ethnic-racial socialization in the literature, Hughes et al (2006), identified four ethnic-racial socialization themes: (a) preparation for bias (building awareness of racism), (b) cultural socialization (exposure to ethnic/racial heritage, values and knowledge), (c) promotion of mistrust (fostering mistrust of other racial groups), and (d) egalitarianism (ignoring racial issues to focus on universal human qualities). My findings revealed that the Jamaican immigrant women transmitted all four of these themes. Egalitarianism (e.g. encouraging to work hard) in their narratives revealed complexities as it pertains to both resisting and internalizing racism. In addition, to Hughes et al’s (2006) theme faith socialization emerged as another significant themes
in this study. My use of this term refers to the children’s direct or indirect exposure to faith narratives that helped to: (a) foster the development of a faith identity in them, (b) provide a community of fellow oppressed members as support, (c) build positive self-esteem, (d) buffer deficit perspectives about Black people in mainstream society and (e) provide coping strategies.

Focusing on how the transmission of certain kinds of ethnic-racial messages helped the women to create counterspaces for their children provided me with insights on how they were addressing the challenges they faced as Black women raising their children in a racialized context. The illustration in Figure 5.1 reveals that, in order to cope with racism and to also help their children cope, they transmitted ethnic-racial messages directly or indirectly in their homes that provided a counterspace for the children. Some of the women’s church community also functioned as a counterspace for them as will be explained later in this chapter.

The findings in this research indicate that the Jamaican immigrant women used ethnic-racial messages and counterspaces to affirm their children and foster their psychological well-being because of what they perceived as the pervasiveness of racism in the U.S. society (Bell, 1992).

According to Neblett, Rivas-Drake and Umaña-Taylor (2012), previous research studies in the field generally indicated that ethnic-racial socialization messages, as “protective factors”, are responsible for “enabling youth to think more positively about themselves and equipping them with specific strategies and skills to successfully negotiate the challenges they encounter” (p.297). In alignment with their argument, the women in this research attempted to protect their children or grandchildren by directly
or indirectly transmitting ethnic-racial socializing messages to help the children in their home develop a positive self-esteem and counter-identities. For example, Bev’s bedside conversations with her son every night included an affirmation of his abilities and his physical features as beautiful to counter mainstream racist narratives about what it means to be black in this country. Ms. Dell used songs such as Donnie McClurkin’s song, “Yes you can, you can do anything if you try, just try. Yes, you can, but you have to believe and rely on what you have inside. You can make it through your trials” which she used to build her grandchildren’s self-esteem, teach them to persevere and trust in God to give them the strength to cope with trials in life.

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**Figure 5.1 Summary of coping strategies used by the women.**
In addition to creating counterspaces in their home, my findings revealed that Ms. Dell and Tanya’s church, as Black churches, operated as counterpaces. In these settings narratives and counter-narratives (songs, sermons, scripture texts, and activities) were frequently used to help validate their identities and experiences while also providing them with coping strategies for dealing with their racialization. For example, Ms. Dell’s church had an annual International Day when people from different ethnic backgrounds got the opportunity to share their cultural knowledge and experiences. The church also celebrated Black History Month and invited speakers to share historical information about the struggles of Black people in the country. In this light, her church affirmed both her racial, ethnic and faith identities while also providing opportunities to challenge deficit perspectives about these identities. Likewise, Tanya’s church operated as a counterspace especially for Black immigrant families who were exposed to narratives of encouragement and support (e.g. testimonies and praise songs) specifically aligned to their immigrant experiences.

The Transmission of Ethnic-Racial Messages

**Preparation for bias.**

*I don’t mean to confuse you But…*

*My dear nothing you will ask me about this language will be confusing to me go ahead with your question, what you mean by you don’t mean to confuse me? No sir, you can’t confuse me!*

CRT counter-narratives, and counterspace “oppressive narratives” (Case & Hunter, 2012, p. 263) are often used by oppressed people to unveil their realities and
address stereotypical challenge mainstream narratives. For example, the preceding ethno-poem portrays an interchange between Tanya and one of her white male college students during a Spanish class who in asking her a question declared he did not want to confuse her. Using “oppressive narratives” (Case & Hunter, 2012), she explained that she is often undermined in the society, because of her racial identity, so she placed particular emphasis on providing her children with positive messages to build their self-esteem. As mentioned, Ms. May and Ms. Dell also used “oppressive narratives” (Case & Hunter, 2012) to achieve the same outcome. For example, Ms. Dell used this kind of narrative when she explained to her grandchildren that Black people have to work thrice as hard to be successful in the society.

In Table 5.1 I connected the Jamaican immigrant women’s preparation of bias messages with Case and Hunter’s (2012) “narratives of identity work” (p. 262) which they divided into three different kinds of narratives: (a) oppressive narratives which refer to counterspace members’ narratives about oppressive experiences, (b) resistance narratives refer to narratives that indicate their attempt to resist oppression, and (c) reimagined personal narratives are reflected in narratives that “re-craft self-concept” (p.264) threatened by mainstream deficit perspectives. Table 5.1 includes examples of these narratives from my conversations with the women. The table provides details on the kinds of preparation for biased messages the Jamaican immigrant women transmitted to their children or grandchildren. It also illustrates that these ethnic-racial messages as counterspace narratives of identity work exposed the children to the challenges they might face in school and society.
Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counterspace Narratives</th>
<th>Examples in the Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Oppressive Narrative</td>
<td>“I tell them it is very tough in the society for Black people” (Tanya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Most time Black people are put down” (Ms. Dell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I began to tell him certain thing about the legacy of racism and what is happening now because of it” (Bev)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Resistance Narrative</td>
<td>“He might start seeing himself as the bad kid that goes down to ISS [In-School Suspension] and then begins to act in that role and I REFUSE IT!” (Tanya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“People will easily put you aside so I tell them you have to put yourself in front and put yourself out there don’t stay back in class you must always put yourself out there that you be heard and be seen.” (Ms. May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“It’s all about the education that you give separate and apart from what inna di school.” (Bev)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reimagined Personal Narrative</td>
<td>“You are you, and there’s nobody like you, and there will never be anybody like you, and you are smart, and you are wise, and you don’t look upon somebody as better because they have a different color.” (Ms. May)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I know the potential they have, and it is way past what you [teacher] are thinking” (Tanya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“There is so much more to our experience than the skin color” I always tell him never mind what they are saying you are not whatever, and they can’t make you be what they say” (Ms. Dell)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultural socialization.** While Bev did not transmit overt messages that prepared her son for bias, like the other women, she conveyed both overt and covert cultural socializing messages that fostered pride in his racial and ethnic heritage. For instance, some of the reggae music and literacy texts in her home helped to counter the negative portrayal of Black people in the society by exposing him to positive messages about his racial and ethnic identities. Additionally, all the women had Jamaican cultural artifacts in the home that exposed their children and grandchildren to their Jamaican heritage and
affirmed their ethnic identity while also acknowledging their racial identity. For example, below is a picture of a Jamaican five hundred dollar bill that Tanya brought to the U.S. after one of her bi-annual trips to our home country. She shared it as one of the many artifacts that she often used to teach her children about their Jamaican heritage (Figure 5.2):

![Jamaican Five Hundred Dollar Bill](image)

Figure 5.2. Nanny of the Maroons in the Jamaican Five Hundred Dollar Bill

The five hundred dollar bill bears the picture of Nanny of the Maroons, a freedom fighter from Jamaica who helped to free slaves during slavery in Jamaica and is now recognized as a national heroine of our country. Tanya shared that she taught her children about Nanny of the Maroons so they can learn how their foreparents fought for the freedom that Jamaicans now enjoy. Ms. Dell also reported sharing these kinds of cultural socializing messages with her grandchildren to connect them to not only their Jamaican roots but the struggles of Black people in the Caribbean. She was the only one who noted that she brought textbooks from Jamaica to not only help support her grandchildren academically but also to expose them to aspects of the Jamaican culture. Other examples of cultural socializing messages are illustrated in Table 5.2.
Table 5.2

*Cultural Socializing Messages and Counterspace Narratives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counterspace Narratives</th>
<th>Examples in the Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4. Oppressive Narrative | • “I tell them that our foreparents went through slavery” (Ms. Dell)  
• “I tell them that our fore parents went through slavery” (Ms. May) |
| 5. Resistance Narrative | • “When I go to the library I look for books that represent us and our history in a positive light at least an accurate light” (Bev)  
• “The people in Jamaica don’t back back once we know our rights” (Ms. Dell) |
| 6. Reimagined Personal Narrative | • “I let my grandchildren know they need to be proud of our culture and ourselves.” (Ms. May)  
• Display of the words of Jamaican National Anthem (Tanya) |

According to Vickerman (2013) in the U.S. “a widespread expectation is that most blacks will not do well, which runs against the immigrant ethos held by many Jamaicans” (p.180). He asserted that a part of this ethos is that education is important for social mobility. In keeping with that line of argument, I found that although the women talked about the prevalence of racism in the society, they all articulated the meritocratic belief that by working hard their children or grandchildren might stand a better chance of achieving success in this society. This belief is aligned to Bev’s argument that there is a need to both resist racism but also survive on a daily basis. Coming from a country where they struggled economically, the mothers expressed dreams of their children achieving success despite the obstacles they faced in the society. Hence, in addition to transmitting heritage messages (e.g. Jamaican Anthem in Tanya’s home), the women all transmitted messages that emphasized the significance of hard work in achieving success. Their meritocratic narratives on hard work revealed complexities in that they were not ignoring
the notion that structural racism could derail success in the society, but they are holding on to their home country’s ethos of perseverance as a means of survival.

Ms. May, Tanya and Ms. Dell emphasized the need to persevere despite the challenges their children or grandchildren might experience in the society. In punctuating this point, Ms. Dell referred to her daughter’s college experience with institutionalized racism resulting in her failure to graduate and how she persevered by attending another college where she successfully graduated as a registered nurse. The mothers or grandmothers were all oblivious of the fact that in the U.S. context meritocracy is associated with the very racism that they are trying to challenge in their home. It appears from talking with them they are drawing from their understanding of how hard work operates in the Jamaica context where people from the working class can move into the middle and upper class through their efforts.

**Faith Socialization.** Religion and spirituality are greatly valued by Jamaican immigrants (Yearwood, 2001). According to Yearwood (2001), church often holds significance in their lives as a support system and a means of socializing their children with values they deem important. Corroborating significantly with my observations, she also argued that “for some disenfranchised groups, the church has been a place where each individual is respected for his or her abilities and is supported in individual development as a contributing member of the group” (p.9).

From my observations and conversations with the women, I found that faith socializing messages were transmitted directly and indirectly in the women’s home and faith community. However, the content of these faith socializing messages varied, to some extent, across the women. Table 5.3 illustrates some of these messages:
### Table 5.3

*Cultural Socialization Messages and Counterspace Narratives*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counterspace Narratives</th>
<th>Examples in the Home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Oppressive Narrative</td>
<td>• Negro Spirituals (e.g., How I Got Over by Mahalia Jackson) Ms. Dell’s church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Resistance Narrative | • “You are somebody, say I am a child of God (Ms. Dell’s church)  
| | • Negro Spirituals (e.g., How I Got Over by Mahalia Jackson) (Ms. Dell) |
| 3. Reimagined Personal Narrative | • “God made you special, for special you are.”  
| | • “I tell him I love how God made him. He is so smart, and he is so courteous, he has such beautiful skin such and beautiful hair.”  
| | • “In Psalm 139: 14 it says I am wonderfully and fearfully made.” |

The preceding table represents the kinds of faith counter-narratives that I heard in the women’s church or information they shared with me during our conversations. From conversing with the women, I learned that they often used these kinds of messages to help their children or grandchildren cope with the challenges they might experience as Black children in the society, foster their development of a faith identity and build their self-esteem.

Ms. Dell and Tanya’s church transmitted messages (e.g. songs, bible stories, bible texts, sermons and faith posters displayed in Sabbath School) that specifically created a counterpace for their Black children or grandchildren. As predominantly Black churches, many of their sermons and events drew from the knowledge, language, history and experiences of Black people. For example, I observed African American English, Negro Spirituals, Black History month celebration in Ms. Dell’s church. However, Bev’s church did not draw from these kinds of cultural experiences though it provided other forms of
support (e.g. socializing at potlucks, camp meetings, sporting events and sermons of encouragements) to all its members.

Critiquing what he perceives as the marginalization of the African American Christian faith in CRT, Paradise (2014) argued that faith is part of their experiential knowledge that could be illuminating if given more attention. In congruence with his line of argument, in this research, I found that by viewing the women’s faith narratives through a CRT lens I discovered that they were helping to provide their children with counterpaces that affirmed their identities and fostered the development of positive self-esteem. The following ethno-poem reflects my thoughts on Tanya’s church functioned as a counterspace:

What struck me in this church
was how much this space celebrated and affirmed the Black child
witnessing the baby blessing ceremony,
I thought, “what an entrance to the world!”
The celebration of the child
as the mother took her dance,
symbolized for me
the value that the parents
and the rest of the congregation
place on the Black child
where is this value,
in the rest of the society?

As my constructed ethno-poem articulates, Tanya’s church functioned as a counterspace for the following reasons: (1) The children are celebrated in the church through prayers for blessing and protection, (2) their Nigerian heritage language is included in songs and discussions, (3) their Jamaican and Nigerian cultures are also incorporated in the worship experience through dance and music, and (4) counter
discourse from the Bible is used to validate them as human beings who are created in
God’s image and included in God’s family.

Bev’s faith messages included a discourse on the battle between good and evil as
an explanation of racism. They also included an emphasis on love and forgiveness of
people who are discriminatory which are aligned to the messages she often transmitted to
her son in their home. Unlike Bev, the other women did not use the notion of the battle of
evil to explain racism to their children they instead speak about this problem directly.
Their faith messages were specifically geared towards countering deficit perspectives
about Black people and fostering their self-esteem. They also transmitted messages of
overcoming life challenges through a reliance on God as illustrated in the following song:

\[
\text{Wahamba nathi, oh wahamba nathi (You walked with us, oh you walked with us) } \\
\text{Oh wahamba nathi, siyabonga (Oh you walked with us, we thank you) } \\
\text{Siyabonga Jesu, Siyabonga ngonyama yezulu (we thank you Jesus, Lion of heaven) } \\
\text{Siyabonga Jesu, Siyabonga (we thank you, Jesus, we thank you) }
\]

The preceding song gives thanks to God for his continued protection through life’s
journey. As a choir member, Ms. Dell participated in singing its original South African
dialect and English as part of the church’s praise and worship ceremony. It reveals that
Ms. Dell’s church like Tanya’s exposed her grandchildren to not only faith narratives but
also African Diaspora narratives fostering the development of multiple identities (e.g.
faith and racial identity). On the other hand, I did not hear or observe these kinds of
narratives when I visited Bev’s church.
Creating Socially Just Schools for Black Children

What insights do the mothers’ narratives provide about what social justice might look like for children from families like theirs?

*Educators need to take culture class because children need to know that they are accepted for who they are set high expectations for them so they can experience equality in schools*

In congruence with Ladson-Billing’s (2009) argument on culturally relevant teaching, Ms. May in the above my constructed multi-voiced ethno-poem argued that educators need to be better equipped to teach children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Like her, Ms. Dell also maintained that educators must learn to accommodate the diverse needs of their students so they can feel accepted for who they are as individuals. Both grandmothers shared experiences with linguicism in school or the wider society that helped to shape their perception on how their second generation Jamaican immigrant grandchildren should be accommodated in their schools. All the women concurred with Bev that educators should “love and respect all the students” in their classroom regardless of cultural background. By this, she means that educators need to value students’ identities, knowledge, and experiences in order to help create an atmosphere where they feel loved and respected. She also believed that educators must be mindful of using language that would help build the self-esteem of children especially those who are constantly exposed to deficit perspectives about their identities.

As CRT scholars (Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009) have argued, all women believed that schools need to set high expectations for Black students. However, Tanya emphasized this issue more because she did not believe that her son’s school work was
rigorous enough. Consistent with the views of some researchers (Bell, 2009; Matthews & Mahoney, 2005; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013), both Tanya and Ms. Dell, argued that lowering the expectations for Black children might result in their demotivation and underperformance in schools. Hence, like Ladson-Billings (2009) they argued that social justice means that the curricula must also challenge Black children. Although their son or grandson was performing well in school, they held the belief that future success is being threatened by unfair in-school suspensions and referrals given particularly to Black males. Recognizing that racism plays a part in her son’s school experiences, Tanya maintained that less emphasis should be placed on unfairly disciplining Black males and more on setting high expectations for them so they can become successful in the society.

Bev held the belief like CRT scholars (Bell, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Zamudio, Russell, Rios and Bridgeman, 2011) that schools are often reeling from the legacy of racism reproduced by some of the individuals who run them. Hence, unlike the other mothers, she is very skeptical of the extent to which the school is willing to make the radical changes that she thinks would better support Black children. For example, including counter knowledge from their African heritage. She reasoned that the home is a powerful space where Black families give Black males the support they need to face the outside world filled with racism. She maintained the belief that regardless of what the school is doing, Black parents should provide the cultural knowledge missing from school curricula. However, she conceded that schools must collaborate with parents to ensure that Black children receive the same access to quality education as their white classmates.
Acting as an advocate for her son, Bev explained that each school year she often attempted to sensitize her son’s teachers about the need to help her son to develop a positive self-concept by being cognizant of practices that might lower his self-esteem. In this regards, Tanya concurred that Black parents must be advocates for their children to ensure that educators are held accountable for providing quality education to them. Although Ms. Dell and Ms. May, as grandmothers, also shared this perspective, they were hesitant to converse directly with school officials about their concerns because they feared their views as grandparents would not be welcomed.

My cross-analysis of the women’s narratives in this chapter revealed that the women are all concerned about the racialization of their Black sons or grandsons in school and society. Tanya and to a lesser Bev, have made attempts to advocate for their sons in school while the grandmothers, Ms. May, and Ms. Dell focused on providing support in their home for their grandchildren. All together though the “narratives of identity work” (Case & Hunter, 2012) and or counter-narratives to which they expose their children (in the home and or church) helped to affirm their identities and counter negative messages about their identities. In this vein, the women in this research helped to provide counterspaces outside school that helped to promote their psychological well-being.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I provide concluding remarks about the insights I have gained from exploring the Jamaican immigrant women’s narratives which provided details about how they perceived racism in the U.S., self-identified and socialized their children in this racialized context. I discuss key findings across all four cases as they pertain to my research questions. Drawing from Black feminism, critical race theory, and counterspace perspectives, I consider areas of complexities and resistance in their lives while living in a state located in the U.S. Southeast. This discussion will be followed by implications for practice and recommendations for future research. It is my hope that these implications will assist in broadening discussions about Afro-Caribbean immigrant families and their children in the U.S. to include more nuanced understanding of their experiences in general, but their racialization in particular, which could provide well needed insights on how Black immigrant women perceive and respond to racism while raising their children in this context.

This narrative inquiry emerged from my concern about the gap in research on the racialized experiences of Black immigrants, and Afro-Caribbean immigrant women in particular. Hence in conducting this research my aim was to fill gaps in education research by focusing on:

- Afro-Caribbean immigrant women and their perception of and experience with racism;
How these Afro-Caribbean immigrant women are coping and helping their second-generation children, particularly their sons, deal with racism;

The nuanced experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrant families living in the U.S.;

A geographic area (U.S. South) and a southeastern state where Afro-Caribbean immigrants have been understudied when compared to areas such as New York;

How schools can better support Afro-Caribbean immigrant families facing racialization in the society;

Grounding research on Afro-Caribbean immigrants with critical lenses that help to unveil the power dynamics and racialization that impact their lives (Pierre, 2004).

By providing insights on the Jamaican immigrant women’s experience in the U.S Southeast, I wish to move research about Black immigrants beyond divide and conquer narratives that do nothing to advance social justice for racialized families.

Conclusions: Interpretations about the Racialization of Four Black Immigrant Families in the U.S.

As Jamaican poet Oliver Senior in the poem Colonial Girl School and African American Nina Simone in the song Four Women articulated, Black women are doubly racialized by mainstream society as being both black and woman. Adding another layer of racialization, researchers also argued that Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. also face triple racialization because of their national origin (Ho, 1999; Kirkwood, 2002; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Rong & Brown, 2002).

All the women in this research articulated the belief that racism is a social problem in the U.S. society. For example, Bev argued that the legacy of racism causes disparities between members of the dominant culture and Black people. However, although, the women heard about the existence of racism in the U.S. prior to migrating
here, Ms. Dell, Tanya, and Ms. May were very surprised when they personally experienced it. Since Bev was six years old when she arrived in the country, she did not share an awareness of this problem when she first came. However, she gathered knowledge about racism in the society from critical readings during her college years and, as a result, grew concerned about the U.S. legacy of racism.

According to Wiggan and Walrond (2013), “Caribbean parents and their children are not insulated from the effects of discrimination” (p.93). Therefore, regardless of their level of awareness at the beginning, all women quickly learned that they cannot escape the racism that is permanent and pervasive in the society (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). Their awareness of this problem, as articulated in their narratives, seem to also influence their attempt to prepare their children for racial bias and provide them with coping strategies to address this problem.

“*They Can’t Make You Be What They Say*”: Complexities in Self-Identifying in the U.S.

Racial and ethnic identities are complex, fluid and ever-changing (Davies, 2013; Rogers, 2001) which explicate the significance of learning about the identities of Afro-Caribbean women and their family. Equally important is understanding the dilemma they often face in self-identifying in the U.S. (Butterfield, 2004; Foner, 2001; Waters, 1999). For instance, Rogers (2001) asserted that this dilemma is often associated with the fact that they have “access to both racial and ethnic markers of group identification” (p.165).

My findings revealed tensions between how the Jamaican immigrant women prefer to self-identify and how the U.S. society chooses to identify them. For example,
Ms. Dell insisted on being identified as a human being and God’s creation, and she refused to be labeled black which she associates with dehumanization. She articulated pride in her racial identity but found the black label problematic because of her understanding of what it means to be black in the U.S. society. Thus, she like Ms. May shared a preference for being identified by her African ancestry rather than her skin color. I can relate to these women’s struggle with their racialization and the labels that come with this process. As a Black Jamaican/ Afro-Caribbean doctoral student in my first year of studies as part of my own resistance to racialization and the resulting stigma, I wrote in my journal a poem entitled “Keep Your Labels” which challenged mainstream derogatory labeling of people who were Black like me. I later learned to claim a definition of blackness associated with a strength that was in opposition to mainstream definitions.

From my conversations with the Jamaican immigrant women in this research, I learned that they consciously or unconsciously tapped into and negotiated multiple identities in their daily lives based on the context in which they were operating. On official demographic forms, when they felt that their options were limited they selected the word *black*. Ms. May, however, challenged this label when she visited the U.S. Embassy by putting *chocolate*. For the most part, though, in the public domain, they selected *black* but on the private domain in their homes and social settings they all self-identified as Jamaicans.

The tensions the women felt in self-identifying had implications for how they chose to raise their children. In interrogating and challenging the stigmatized Black label in the U.S., the women articulated a need for their family to be identified in ways that
were positive. Thus, they attempted to foster the development of positive racial and ethnic identities in their children by transmitting ethnic-racial messages that not only help to build their self-esteem but also counter mainstream deficit perspectives. Additionally, rather than encouraging their children or grandchildren to choose between a racial or ethnic identity, their narratives and social interactions in their home and or church revealed that they were fostering the children’s development of multiple identities.

**Different “Cognitive Frames of Reference” in a Heterogeneous Black Community**

Though the women all claimed a racial identity, Bev argued that certain things in the U.S. society got taped recorded on Caribbean immigrants’ brains differently from how they were taped recorded on African Americans’ brain because of differences in experiences. She further explained that the differences in experiences could influence how we all view our experiences with racism. This same argument was also shared by Rogers (2001) in his discussion on differences in the “cognitive frame of reference” (p.167) impacting how Afro-Caribbean immigrants and African American might conceive their racial identity articulated below:

Individual Blacks may experience their racial identity differently and embrace it with varying degrees of intensity…by virtue of their immigrant status, Afro-Caribbeans define themselves from a different frame of reference than their native-born counterparts…African Americans’ sense of their racial identity derives from their socialization within a set of institutions to which Afro-Caribbeans may have little or no connection” (p.167).

My findings are consistent with Roger’s (2001) preceding argument. In discussing their racial identity, the women all referred to African, slavery and emancipation in
Jamaica as opposed to the Jim Crow Laws, segregation, and the Civil Rights War in America because although they seem to have some knowledge of U.S. racial history, they nor their immediate ancestors did not have these experience. Thus, the complexities of the women’s narratives unveil a need for a nuanced understanding of their experiences with racism in the U.S. society. There is also a need to learn how they are socializing their children in response to their racialization. Embracing this research approach might help to broaden social justice discourse on Black immigrant families and create a counterspace in research for all those who face racialization in the society.

**Implications for Practice in Schools**

The Jamaican immigrant women’s narratives revealed their belief that K-12 educators and school officials throughout the U.S. must be willing to make changes to the status quo of schooling to better support Black children who are racialized in the society. For instance, Bev argued that the radical changes needed in schools can only be implemented if White educators and school official learn to interrogate any racial bias they might have towards Black children. In this regard, she remained doubtful that the majority would be willing to do the introspective work such interrogation requires. Nevertheless, she like the other women provided insights on some practical things that educators and teacher training institutions could do to disrupt unjust school practices. In this vein, Table 6.1 summarizes implications for practice that will be later explored in this chapter.

While some of the implications in the Table 6.1 are not new knowledge as it pertains to the experiences of African American students, when also included in the conversations about the school experiences of Black immigrant children they might
Table 6.1

**Implications for Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning How to Create a Classroom Counterspace for Racialized Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Implement professional development and training that would educate and sensitize educators to the impact of the historical and contemporary racialization of students and their families in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitate training that engages in-service and preservice educators in understanding and interrogating how mainstream society has socialized them in ways that may lead to their failure to recognize how they might be engaging in practices of racialization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social justice educators and researchers should work to help disrupt disproportionate disciplinary practices seen for example, in excessive in-school suspensions and referrals given to Black males when compared to their White classmates (Howard, 2008, 2013; Townsend, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher education programs should help preservice teachers recognize the importance of engaging in non-discriminatory classroom discourse and practices to help build the self-esteem of all children but especially those who are constantly exposed to deficit perspectives about their identities in mainstream society (Boutte, 2016; Delpit, 1995; Kirkwood, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development for teachers should focus on helping teachers to build capacity for dialogue with parents, develop a trusting relationship and allow their perspectives to help shape the development of culturally relevant texts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ongoing training is needed to help educators develop competency in culturally relevant teaching in order to better serve children of African descent. As part of this pedagogical approach, they should be taught how to draw from their students’ heritage knowledge, raise their critical consciousness, set high expectations for their learning and build capacity for dialogue with families (Boutte, 1992; Gay, 2010; King, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2009).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further help to underscore the need to interrupt unjust school practices that often affect the psychological well-being and academic progress of all racialized children (Boutte,
2016; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; Ighodaro & Wiggan, 2010; Kirkwood, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009). These implications for practice are focused on first recognizing a need for a classroom counterspace and then learning to create their own with the help of professional developments and training organized within teacher education programs.

**Learn to Create a Counterspace in the Classroom: “They are Somebody’s Children” (Ms. Dell)**

My research findings indicate that teacher education programs should conduct professional development and training that help in-service and preservice teachers to recognize the need for a classroom counterspace and, support them in learning how to create it. The data garnered in this research indicate that the Jamaican immigrant women in this study exposed their children or grandchildren directly or indirectly to ethnic-racial socializing messages that provided counterspaces for them. Thus, educators should work to transform their K-12 classrooms into a counterspace that enhance the well-being of students who are racialized in the society and disrupt the cycle of discrimination in school.

Creating a classroom counterspace is integral because, like their Black peers in the U.S., second generation Jamaican immigrant children living in the homes of the mothers or grandmothers in this research also face racial discrimination (Butterfield, 2004; Holger, 2001; Kirkwood, 2002). By doing so, educators could address the women’s concern about the children’s psychological well-being in a racialized society. Ms. Dell mentioned that there was a “thing” in the U.S. that could cause them to develop low self-esteem. By this, she referred to the pervasiveness of racism and the stereotypical labels ascribed to Black people as a result of this socio-political issue. While Ms. May contended that she can cope with these racially biased mainstream messages because she
has a positive self-esteem, she expressed concern that it might be more difficult for her grandchildren to do so because they were born in the U.S. Also observing this issue Holger (2001) argued that second-generation Caribbean immigrant children are:

Lacking a psychological fallback position their parents’ generation was able to rely on when faced with discrimination and racism… they do not have the comparison their parents can make with life a society where black people are the majority and not as openly discriminated against as in the United States (p.129).

Given the challenges they believe their children will face in the society, the women exposed their children to psychological buffers geared towards helping them to cope with oppression. These buffers come from ethnic-racial messages in the home and church that: 1) reposition them in society through positive messages about their racial and ethnic identities 2) celebrate their cultural background 3) expose them to alternate knowledge and experiences about Black people and 4) challenge mainstream narratives that seek to dehumanize them in the society.

Educators could learn to replicate these strategies to promote the well-being of Black children might develop lower self-esteem because of the racial bias in the society. As part of a culturally relevant approach, such strategies could help to transform schools for all racialized children. In this vein, this research adds to research in the field by exploring how educators can learn to create a classroom space that mirrors the counterspaces in Black immigrant children’s outside world by using culturally relevant strategies in their lessons. For example, these identity affirming spaces could include classroom libraries with books that affirm students’ ethnic and racial identities, history and experiences. Extending outside the classroom to the wider school environment, they
can include poetry and book clubs that offer students the space to share their experiences and raise their critical consciousness.

Foster the Psychological Well-Being of Racialized Students: How are YOU taking care of the self-esteem of my little Negroid boy in America? (Bev)

The Jamaican immigrant women’s concerns about their children’s psychological well-being indicated that teacher education programs should help preservice teachers recognize the importance of engaging in non-discriminatory classroom discourse that builds the self-esteem of racialized students. Bev’s question echoes the concern of critical researchers about the self-esteem of Black children and how they support children’s performance in school. For example, Steele (2009) argued stereotype threat might affect how well Black students perform in school. He defined this threat as one associated with the negative stereotype ascribed to the children’s social group. Therefore, he argued that wise schooling practices should make “situational changes…that reduce the stereotype threat these students might otherwise be under” (p.181) in schools. He also argued that these situational changes should include “direct affirmation of their belongingness” (p.183), which refers to fostering in students a sense of intellectual and social belonging in the classroom. In congruence, my findings reveal that educators should work to challenge the status quo of schools by fostering the psychological well-being of all students, especially Black students’ who are exposed to stereotype threat daily because of their racial identity.

Since Black children are racialized in the society and often hear deficit perspectives about themselves in the wider society and endure discriminatory practices regularly (Bell, 1992; Boutte, 1992; Delpit, 1995; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009), classroom narratives and practices should transmit messages that counter these
perspectives. The mothers all expressed the belief that enough effort is not being made in schools to develop their children’s self-esteem. For example, in the following ethno-poem, Ms. Dell explained that this a view that is shared by other people at her church:

\[
\begin{align*}
I & \text{ know people} \\
& \text{at church} \\
& \text{who decide that} \\
& \text{they don’t want their children} \\
& \text{in public school} \\
& \text{because they are exposed to} \\
& \text{too many things,} \\
& \text{children commit suicide,} \\
& \text{children develop low self-esteem}
\end{align*}
\]

The preceding poem speaks to the overall concern about the well-being of Black children in schools and the society (Boutte, 1992, 2016; Delpit, 1995; Kirkwood, 2002; Matthews & Mahoney, 2005; Wiggan & Walrond, 2013). Like some researchers (Ochieng, 2010; Seaton, Caldwell, Sellers & Jackson, 2008; Steele, 2009), Ms. Dell built on this idea by contending that Black children could develop low self-esteem because of the pervasive racism in schools and society. In discussing this problem, Bev remarked, “My main immediate concern, kind of my only concern is I want my son to have a good sense of self,” a sentiment shared by all the women.

From interacting with each of the women, I noticed that they used narratives that affirmed their children’s or grandchildren’s identities. For example, Bev shared that she often transmitted messages to her son to inform him that the “Negroid boy is OK.” Ms. Dell told her grandchildren that God made them special to build their self-esteem. Both written and oral narratives in the families’ church setting also seem to affirm their identities. For example, the pastors at both Ms. Dell’s and Tanya’s churches were heard telling their congregants that they are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. Ms. Dell’s
church celebrates both International Day and Black History Month which expose her grandchildren to ethnic-racial messages (preparation for bias, faith, and cultural socialization) that affirm their multiple identities.

Holding the belief that words have the power to shape children’s destiny, Tanya noted that she refuses to allow her son’s school to transmit messages that stigmatize him. Thus, my findings suggest that educators should engage in culturally relevant teaching in the classroom to specifically affirm their students’ identity and challenge deficit perspectives of those who have experienced racism in the society. This has implications for the kinds of texts that are used during instruction and included in school curricula. Educators should critically assess the materials they use in the classroom so that they interrupt the replication of deficit perspectives about Black students from mainstream society. Bev’s critique of the kinds of books her son reads is instructive since she refused to allow her son to read books or watch movies that portray Black people in a stereotypical manner. Such home practice should be supported by schools through the inclusion of liberating texts which provide a “validation of Blackness and Black culture” (Jackson & Boutte, 2009, p.114).

**Disrupt Disproportionate and Unjust Disciplinary Practices**

In order to help teachers develop the ability to construct a classroom counterspace for their racialized students, teacher education programs should assist them to recognize the need for them to disrupt disproportionate and unjust disciplinary practices. The disproportionate disciplining of Black boys was another major area of concern for all the women except Bev whose son did not experience this issue in school. Concern was specifically raised about excessive referrals and in-school suspensions given to these
boys. Tanya and Ms. May contended that these unjust punishments threaten the self-esteem of their son or grandson. In congruence, Ms. Dell also argued that these unfair disciplinary practices often result in demotivation in school which might ultimately affect academic performance. Hence, all the women of an affected son or grandson maintained that social justice for them means addressing this problem by “checking” unjust practices that could further marginalize Black boys in particular.

Figure 6.1 summarizes the insights I have gained from the mothers’ narratives about what needs to be done to protect the self-esteem of their children or grandchildren during our conversations. While Bev was the only one who discussed literary materials that portray Black people positively they all seem to concur with CRT scholars (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011) that a socially just classroom is one in which the multiple identities of students are affirmed, deficit perspectives of Black people are challenged, and disproportionate punishment of Black boys are addressed to help build self-esteem.

Figure 6.1 illustrates insights I gained from the women about how we can make classroom counterspaces for children who are racialized in the society. It asserts that educators should work to recognize and interrupt disproportionate and discriminatory/racist discipline practices that place Black boys in particular at a disadvantage in school (Howard, 2013; Townsend, 2000). Additionally, in alignment with the arguments of several researchers (Gay, 2010; Kirkwood, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Matthews & Mahoney, 2005) in the field of education, it suggests that in order for educators to create a classroom counterspace they should ensure that instructional materials and classroom discourse affirm students’ multiple identities, portray positive
images of them and challenge deficit perspectives all of which are consistent with culturally relevant teaching.

Figure 6.1 Building Positive Self-Esteem in the Classroom

Engage in Culturally Relevant Teaching: “They Need to Teach to Diversity.”

*Teachers need to be trained in the field of culture each child does not come to you blank so give him a chance to share children need to know that they are accepted for who they are don’t expect them all to fit in one box honor and respect whoever come into your classroom!*

The preceding multi-voiced ethno-poem, created from the Jamaican immigrant mothers’ words, reveals perspectives on social justice in schools that are aligned to a culturally relevant pedagogy approach. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), culturally relevant pedagogy is a “pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially,
emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.20). Three of the tenets of this pedagogical approach that are aligned to the insights that I have gained from my findings include: (1) draw from students’ cultural backgrounds, (2) build their critical awareness, and (3) set high expectations for their learning. These tenets are discussed in greater details in the discourse which follows. Taken together, they can be used by teacher education programs to assist in-service and pre-service teachers in creating a classroom that draws from their students’ outside counterspaces.

From interacting with the mothers and listening to their conversations, I learned that they all wanted their children or grandchildren to be valued as Black children and welcomed in an inclusive classroom atmosphere. Ms. May argued that teachers need to teach to diversity and thus be trained in “the field of culture.” She based her arguments on her own experience with triple racialization (racism, ethnocentrism, and linguicism) in her college English course and the unfair treatment of her grandson in school. She maintained the view that teachers are likely to have a diverse student population so they must be better equipped to support these students. In congruence, Ms. Dell argued that some teachers in the U.S. South need to be “re-trained and re-socialized” so they can learn to create classroom spaces where students feel comfortable to share their knowledge and experiences.

**Draw from African Diaspora heritage knowledge.** From my interactions with the Jamaican immigrant mothers and grandmothers in this research, I learned that social justice for their children should include creating a counterspace where alternate knowledge about their cultural background is welcomed. In congruence with this line of
argument, Ighodaro and Wiggan (2010) argued that “we cannot effectively teach African American students without the students having a proper understanding of African/African American history and cultural contributions” (p.132). The same seems true for the second generation immigrant children in this research who share an African ancestry with their African American peers. Given, the racialization of the children associated with this research in the wider society, Diaspora literacy (King, 1992) which means to foster a critical awareness of the knowledge, history, and experiences of people of African descent, as part of a culturally relevant pedagogical approach, could be incorporated in professional development training on culturally relevant teaching to help affirm their identities as children of African descent and prepare them for bias in the wider society by raising their critical consciousness.

Bev argued that Black parents must expose their children to cultural knowledge that is not currently taught in schools as a means of exposing them to counter knowledge that would build their self-esteem as Black children. She explained that she wanted her son to know about the achievement of his ancestors so he can learn that Black people did great things. Thus, in her home, she also has materials (books, art and craft, and music) that expose her son to knowledge drawn from the African Diaspora. She contended that knowing his Jamaican and African heritage is integral to understanding who he is in the world. The same seem true for the other women who exposed their children or grandchildren to knowledge from both heritages in their home. For example, Ms. Dell also brought books from Jamaica to teach her children about the Jamaican culture and African ancestry, and she continued the tradition of telling Anansi stories to her second generation Jamaican immigrant grandchildren.
I also observed materials and heard cultural socializing messages in Ms. May and Tanya’s home that exposed the children to their Jamaican and Nigerian ancestry. For example, in their living room, the family had a Social Studies book from Nigeria that provides them with cultural knowledge from the paternal side of their family. In their church setting the children are also exposed to more aspects of their Jamaican and Nigerian culture (e.g., language, knowledge, values and music) that seem to help affirm both identities. Hence, I concur with supporters of culturally relevant teaching (Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2010; King, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2009) that educators should connect with students’ home and community to construct lessons that draw from the rich resources in their students’ background.

Set high expectations for racialized students. All the mothers in this research shared that they would like schools to set high expectations for their Black children. Hence, addressing this issue seem to form part of Bev and Tanya’s advocacy work in their son’s school. Bev shared the belief that Black parents must hold teachers accountable for ensuring that their children are given equal opportunity to learn and excel in school. She argued that the “social chrysalis” at some schools often seems to be built on a racist mindset that does not maximize the full potential of Black students. Tanya also complained about the lack of rigor of her son’s advanced classes and contended that, from her teaching experience, she often observed that Black students are often not challenged or encouraged to excel academically.

Like CRT scholars (Howard, 2008, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2009) these mothers argued that lowered expectations in school might ultimately derail the performance of Black children. Tanya argued that educators must not hold deficit perspectives about their
ability to learn and Bev contended that these teachers must check any thinking or practice that seem to reproduce these kinds of perspectives. Discussing the disconnect between what she knows her son is capable of and what the school expects of him, like Ladson-Billings (2009), Tanya contended that educators must focus on the strengths of Black students. She maintained that her son is brilliant and good at mental math, but his teacher seemed to concentrate more on giving him referrals than recognizing and drawing from his strengths in the classroom.

**Build capacity for dialogue.** The findings of this study also reveal that part of learning to create a classroom space that affirms children’s identities like the counterspaces in their outside world; educators should focus on building a capacity for dialogue with families. Hence, teacher education program should provide teachers with practical skills for making this necessary connection with children’s homes. During our conversations, Bev asserted that schools should go into students’ communities to build capacity for dialogue. Arguing that the home is already the most powerful place in children’s life, she contended that to ensure the success of Black children schools must collaborate with parents. She also noted that school officials who want to make radical changes the schools must be “straight on what is going on in the world of racism out there” in their conversations with parents. In other word, she asserted that that the dialogue between school and parents must include an acknowledgment that race impacts their students’ daily life.

Bev’s suggestion that race should be placed at the forefront of dialogues with parents comes from her own experience with attending an education conference that exposed her to critical race discussions about supporting Black males in school. She
explained that she learned a lot from attending this conference and began looking into the critical information that the presenters shared. Her experience signals to me that parents would benefit from having discussions in their children’s school or community that are tailored to meeting the needs of Black children. Reflecting on an education session that I attended at a church in Toronto, Canada, I believe that dialoguing with parents could help build a home-school partnership in meeting the needs of these students. At this session, a social worker, also a member of the church, engaged parents in discussions about the challenges that their children are facing in schools and the society. Parents got the chance to share their experiences and discuss with the educators ways in which they could collaborate to transform their children’s lives.

Tanya also maintained that dialogue between schools and parents could be beneficial, but it must be built on a trusting relationship which is built on her own experience with her son’s school. She noted that after being assured that the unjust punishment her son received would be “expunged,” years later when she visited his school for a conference with her son’s teacher she recognized that it was not done. Such practice impacted the level of trust she feels she can place in the school. She also noted that building a capacity for dialogue means that she should not be perceived as a problem when she advocates for her son. She shared with me that when she asked her son’s school for statistics on the number of African American students receiving referrals within the current school year she did not receive a response. She explained that much later she received the answers to her questions from the legal counsel at the school district. She explained that once again, she felt that the school perceived her as a problem rather than a concerned mother.
For the grandmothers in this research, building capacity for dialogue means also acknowledging and welcoming their presence at their grandchildren’s school. For example, Ms. May explained that she was hesitant to go to her grandson’s school to advocate on his behalf because she felt unwelcomed. Hence, she asserted that educators must learn about students’ unique family structure and the role that other family members play in the children’s lives. For Afro-Caribbean families, in particular, she argued that grandparents hold great significance and are usually very involved in grandchildren’s lives.

**Implications for Research**

**Foster a Research Counterspace: Psychic Preservation for all Racialized Families**

People of color may internalize the stock stories that various groups of society promote to maintain their influence (Crenshaw, 1988). Historically, people of color have used storytelling to heal wounds caused by racial discrimination (Tate, 1997, p.221)

As a Jamaican doctoral female student facing racism in the U.S. South, I often looked to research to learn about the experiences of other Afro-Caribbean migrants as part of my attempt at “psychic preservation” (Tate, 1997, p. 221) as I navigated academia. I was searching for a deeper understanding of my own experiences and support from the field that would help me to cope with being raced on a daily basis. I came to the U.S. critically aware of the history of racism in this country. However, like the Jamaican immigrant women in this research, I did not have a repertoire of experiences that would help me to understand fully the different ways it might manifest itself in the society and affect people’s daily lives. Therefore, it was very frustrating to see very little critical
research on Afro-Caribbean immigrants that not only speak to how they perceive racism in the society but also how they attempt to cope with living in the U.S. racialized society.

My own experience and that of the Jamaican immigrant women in this research suggest that there is an urgent need for future research studies to foster an understanding of racialized Black immigrants and their families. As Pierre (2004) argued, I firmly believe that previous divide and conquer narratives about us does nothing but perpetuate racism in the society. Focusing only on our ethnicity and comparing us to African Americans ignores the fact that all Black people are being racialized on a daily basis. Research studies, therefore, should move towards an exploration of this issue by grounding their analyses about Black immigrants in critical perspectives (Pierre, 2004).

Table 6.2 provides my recommendations for future research:

Table 6.2.

*Implications for Future Research*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding Racialized Black Immigrant Families</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Foster nuanced understanding of Black immigrant families by contextualizing future research studies in the socio-political milieu of both the U.S. and their homeland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Broaden discourse on social justice for racialized families by including the stories of Black immigrant families.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Explore Black immigrants’ experiences with and responses to racialization in the U.S. society</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ground future research on Black immigrants using critical lenses that examine the role that race and racialization play in their lives (Pierre, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explore possible counterspaces in the lives of Black immigrant families to gain insights about their coping strategies in the face of racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Examine the complexities in Black immigrant women’s lives and how they might be attempting to negotiate or reshape their identities in ways that help to claim their right to humanity.</td>
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• Continue to fill the gap in research about Black immigrant women and how they are choosing to socialize their children in the U.S. in general and the southeast in particular.

• Explore how Black immigrant women are also ethnic-racially socializing their daughters in the U.S. society.

• Future research should continue to explore Black immigrants’ narratives, to provide teachers and teacher education programs with nuanced insights (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Pierre, 2004; Warner, 2010) to help educators learn how to co-construct classroom counterspaces.

• Researchers should consider conducting action research studies that explore teachers’ work with Black immigrant families to create these classroom counterspaces providing rich details on the challenges encountered and negotiated during this process.

• Future research should conduct similar research with other racialized immigrant groups and African American mothers in the U.S. society.

The implications in the Table 6.2 represent the kind of work that teachers and teacher education program should do in order to dismantle school practices that threaten the psychological and academic well-being of Black students. They indicate a need to begin with a nuanced understanding of students’ experiences and a willingness to work with parents to disrupt the status quo in schools.

**Foster Nuanced Understanding of Black Immigrant Families**

*Racism is an international phenomenon that appears differently nuanced according to historical and cultural locations* (Davies, 2013, p.173)

Critical researchers should consider exploring the stories of Black immigrant families to help provide a nuanced understanding of their perception of and experiences with racism. Differences in the social landscape of Jamaica and the U.S. (Davies, 2013; Vickerman, 1999; Waters, 1999) seem to impact how the women articulate their
experiences as Black immigrant women living in the South. Having experienced classism in Jamaica all the mothers, except Bev said that they do not believe that racism is a problem in their home country which accounted for their initial surprise when they experienced overt racism in the U.S. They all explained that in Jamaica the majority Black people were not restricted from moving upwards in the social ladder. Hence, in addition to individual racism, they had no prior experience with structural racism in the U.S. society.

All the women, except Bev in this research, described homeland experiences with classism rather than racism thus accounting for what they perceived as the absence of the latter in Jamaica. Although Bev maintained that both classism and racism exist in Jamaica, she also noted that racism might look and feel different in the country when compared to the U.S. because of its majority Black population. In congruence, Davies (2013) argued that Caribbean structural racism “is in place at invisible levels-economic and political” (p.175). Thus, my findings reveal that coming to the U.S. with a majority black lens seem to shape their discussions about racism in this country in ways that seem different, in some instances, from how African Americans might discuss this socially constructed problem. For example, although the Jamaican immigrant women all recognized that racism is a problem in this society and attempt to resist it in their homes, they still seem to hold meritocratic views influenced by her homeland experiences.

**Include Black Immigrant Stories in Social Justice Discourses**

I found some of the previous research studies about Afro-Caribbean immigrants problematic for two main reasons; first, they were often cast in a language that ignores the impact of racism on Black immigrants’ lives, and second they focused on comparing
these immigrants to African Americans in ways that blamed the latter for the problems they face on a daily basis. In both cases, such research narratives hurt these groups and perpetuate racialization in the U.S. society (Pierre, 2004). Identifying these kinds of practice in research as a form of cultural racism, Pierre (2004) argued the following:

A key aspect of these racialization processes is immigration scholars’ own construction of a racialist framework of analysis that, by its insistence on comparing the cultural value systems of native-born to foreign-born Blacks, impedes essential discussions about the complex nature of United States racism and the Black immigrant confrontation with the United States racial hierarchies (p.144).

I concur with Pierre (2004) that rather than comparing Black immigrants and African Americans in ways that contribute to a divide and conquer narrative, research scholars should focus on how the U.S. racial structure impact the lives of individuals from both groups. Casting Afro-Caribbean immigrants as model minorities and blaming African Americans for the challenges they face in a racialized society is unlikely to advance social justice work.

Future critical research studies should also broaden discourse on social justice for racialized people in the U.S. by including the stories of Black immigrant families. By this I mean that these studies should engage in critically exploring, for example, Black immigrant families racialized experiences in the U.S. society. Focusing on their ethnic background is important for arriving at a nuanced understanding of their general experiences. However, equally, important is understanding how racialization in this
context impacts their daily lives since this has implications for their children’s school experience, psychological well-being, and identity development.

Grounding future research about Afro-Caribbean immigrant families in critical lenses that put race at the center of analyses could help move research discourse from an uncritical multicultural emphasis to one that problematizes U.S racial structures (Pierre, 2004). Significantly, such research emphasis could help us to support and create a research counterspace for families like them, who do not have a long history of racism in the U.S. but are experiencing contemporary racism. In this vein, their stories could benefit not only other Afro-Caribbean immigrants but also other immigrant and native-born families who are also facing racialization in the society.

All the women’s narratives revealed a resistance to the labeling and dehumanization of their families in the society. Their stories add to the quilt of stories from other Black groups who name their reality and attempt to resist and cope with their racialization. In conducting research that centers their voices and experiences while acknowledging that race matters in their daily lives, I hope as researchers, we can help to interrupt oppressive systems that seem to lower their voices (Senior, 1985).

**Continue to Explore Black immigrants’ ethnic-racial socialization practices**

*Told us nothing about ourselves. There was nothing of our landscape there* (Senior, 1985)

The absence of Senior’s (1985) cultural background in the colonial girls’ school she attended as a child, also seems to ring true in current research on Black immigrant families in the society. There is a gap in research about Afro-Caribbean families in the U.S. South (areas outside Florida and Atlanta) and their experiences with racism and how
their nuanced cultural background factor into these experiences. As part of gaining this nuanced understanding of their experiences, I propose that future research should continue to fill the gap on how Afro-Caribbean families are ethnic-racially socializing their children in different locations in the U.S., especially those with low populations of this group which might signal a greater need for schools to learn more about their unique experiences. For instance, more research is needed on Afro-Caribbean experiences in the U.S. South, which might provide unique challenges than those faced by these immigrants in places like New York where there are established Caribbean communities and networks to support them as they adjust to living in a racialized context.

My findings indicate that learning about the Jamaican immigrant women’s perception of racism, how they choose to self-identify and ethnic-racially socialize their children might be more beneficial to the social justice causes in schools and society than merely comparing them to other ethnic-racial groups in the U.S. In order to avoid what might seem like a divide and conquer narrative in some research studies, surrounding different members of the Black community (e.g., Caribbean immigrants and African Americans), I suggest that research studies that focus on nuanced experiences might be better able to provide a deeper understanding of how schools could support Black children from diverse cultural backgrounds. Taking such an approach in research on the families of second generation Afro-Caribbean children might be illuminating since “by the second generation, the same problems that beset African Americans educational disparities, unequal policing, low or no employment, the criminal justice system also affect Afro-Caribbeans” (Davies, 2013, p.193).
Future research should continue to explore how Black immigrants are ethni-
crally socializing their children in response to their racialization. Coming from Jamaica
where racism is deemphasized to the racialized society of the U.S. posed unanticipated
challenges for them in this society. Given the Black-White binary of U.S. society, they
found themselves racialized and discriminated against because of their race much like
African Americans. (Butterfield, 2004; Rong & Brown, 2002; Vickerman, 1999; Waters,
1999). Though they all articulated pride in their racial identity and African heritage, they
expressed concern about the negative connotation associated with the word “black” in the
U.S., so they shared a preference for self-identifying first as Jamaican as a means of
resisting their stigmatization, but this should not be interpreted as a rejection of their
racial identity. In fact, their narratives reveal that they embrace both identities and teach
their children to do the same.

Researchers should continue to explore the racialization of second-generation
immigrant boys in schools through a critical race lens that acknowledges the role race
might play in their psychological well-being and academic performance in these
institutions. In this vein, given the increased racially charged incidents involving Black
males in the U.S., researchers should consider exploring how Afro-Caribbean
immigrants, who share a racial identity with African Americans, might also be preparing
their sons for bias in the society, providing them with coping strategies for the challenges
they will face as Black males and advocating for them in schools.

Since there is a gap in research studies on Black boys with intersected identities
such as ethnicity, nationality and gender, researchers should specifically consider
exploring the challenges associated with their identities to broaden discourse on the
racialized experiences of Black boys in the U.S. by including nuanced details (Howard, 2013). Focusing on these intersections is important because “each marker in its own way profoundly influences identity construction, self-concept, interactions with the world, and meaning making” (Howard, 2013, p.62).

The focus of this research was how the Jamaican immigrant mothers are ethnically socializing their sons to help them cope with racism. However, it would also be useful for broadening our understanding of these families if researchers also focus their attention on how Black immigrant mothers are also socializing their daughters in the U.S. society.

**Explore Counterspaces in the Lives of Black Immigrant Families**

*The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices—all may be spaces of racialization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope* (Smith, 1999, p.4).

Researchers seeking to learn more about Black immigrant families’ responses to their racialization should explore possible counterspaces in their lives. In order to help educators gain insights on how they could create a classroom counterspace, future research studies could include a focus on action research that examine collaboration between teachers and parents to co-construct such a space in their classroom. Such studies should consider providing rich details on the challenges involved and how they are negotiated.

Smith’s (1999) preceding statement support the view that oppressed individuals often create spaces to resist their racialization in the society. In keeping with this line of argument, hooks (2000) noted that “Black women use a variety of strategies to undermine
oppressive institutions” (p.209) in the society. In congruence, my findings reveal that exploring the sites of resistance for Black women like those in my research could help to enlighten critical researchers about the strategies racialized women like them often use to resist their racialization and help their children cope with racism. Although the Jamaican immigrant women in this research at times did not fully comprehend structural racism in the U.S., they nevertheless recognized that racism posed a threat to their family’s well-being and attempted to use strategies to address the impact of this problem in their home.

As a part of their resistance to deficit mainstream narratives about Black people, the Jamaican immigrant women’s narratives revealed that they are attempting to foster in their children pride in their racial and ethnic identities. Thus, they exposed their children to ethnic-racial messages in their home and church that help create counterspaces for coping with their racialization in the U.S. society. Counterspaces refer to settings, in which oppressed people participate, that promote their well-being by affirming their identities and challenging mainstream deficit perspectives about them (Case & Hunter, 2012). These counterspaces are particularly significant because several research studies indicate that Black people are at risk of experiencing psychological challenges and “race-related stress” because of the oppression they face in mainstream society (Case & Hunter, 2014; Hunter, Case, Joseph, Mekawi & Bokhari, 2016).

According to Collins (2000), Black families have always attempted to create a space that helps them to cope with their racialization. For instance, she noted that “all-Black neighborhoods simultaneously provided a separate space where African-American women and men could use African-derived ideas to craft distinctive oppositional knowledge designed to resist racial oppression” (p. 9 &10). Pointing to the idea that
Caribbean immigrant women might also create home spaces like these to help their children learn about their identity and deal with life challenges, Gadsby (2006) noted that, as a second-generation Barbadian immigrant child, her mother’s kitchen in New York was a space where she learned about her Barbadian heritage and found a language to resist oppression. She describes this experience:

Sunday afternoons in Tantie’s kitchen became a time and space in which she, my mother, and my female sisters and friends could (re)claim a language of resistance against an outside world of patriarchal dominance (within and across racial lines), economic exploitation, and racist oppression. (p.19)

As I interacted with the four Jamaican immigrant mothers in this research and listened to their stories, I learned that like Gadsby’s (2006) mother, they created spaces where narratives and counter-narratives are used to resist their racialization in the society. For example, when Ms. Dell told her children “don’t let your skin tone affect you” and “God made you special” she was using resistance narratives (Case & Hunter, 2012) to challenge the status quo that relegates them to the margins of the society. Her statements provide them with an alternate way of viewing themselves to counter deficit, racist perspectives in mainstream narratives.

“I choose the powerful home”: Homeplace as a Possible Site of Resistance

Through their use of ethnic-racial socializing messages of preparation for bias, cultural socialization, and faith socialization, the four Jamaican immigrant mothers or grandmothers help create a home counterspace for their children or grandchildren. The direct relational transactions (Case & Hunter, 2012) occurring in Ms. Dell and Tanya’s
churches expose their children or grandchildren to an additional counterspace to help buffer deficit perspectives about their identities.

The Jamaican women’s counternarratives and narratives of identity work (Case & Hunter, 2012) seem to indicate that their home might be operating as a site of resistance (hooks, 2014) to mainstream deficit narratives about Black people. In this space the women seem to do the following: (1) reposition their children as individuals who are smart, beautiful and talented; (2) acknowledge and celebrate multiple identities (racial, ethnic, and faith); (3) challenge deficit perspectives about their identities; and (4) expose the children to their racial and ethnic heritages. Thus, the women’s narratives reveal their attempt to resist their family’s oppression by affirming their multiple identities in their home, building self-esteem and helping their children to develop coping strategies to deal with their racialization.

In the face of racialization, hooks (2014) explained that “Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world” (p.42). My findings support the notion that the mothers or grandmothers in this research are transmitting ethnic-racial messages directly or indirectly that seem to reposition their family in ways that seem to restore the “dignity denied” (hooks, 2014) them in mainstream society.

**The Black Church and Afro-Caribbean immigrant families.**

*Lift every voice and sing/Till earth and heaven ring
ring with the harmonies of liberty;
let our rejoicing rise/ high as the list'ning skies,
let it resound loud as the rolling sea*
Future research studies should explore the Black church as a counterspace for Afro-Caribbean immigrants since learning about counterspaces in Black immigrants’ lives means also exploring their social networking outside the home. I based this argument on my findings which revealed that some of the women’s church operated as another site of resistance in their lives. For example, at the beginning of Black History Month, the congregants at Ms. Dell’s church sang passionately the preceding song written first as a poem by James Weldon Johnson. It represented one of the many examples, of how her family is exposed to narratives and counter-narratives about the experiences of Black people in mainstream society. Significantly, it reveals how Black churches in the U.S. might provide counterspaces for Black families. Additionally, consistent with my personal experience, these counterspaces often help Afro-Caribbean immigrants become more critically aware of the long history of oppression of Black people in this country and provide them with ways of coping with their own racialization in the society.

As mentioned earlier, Tanya and Ms. Dell attended predominantly Black churches that acted as counterspaces for their children. Tanya’s church as a predominantly Black immigrant church not only specifically offered support as an immigrant family but also as a Black family living in a racialized context. For example, her pastor drew references from the bible to validate his Black congregants as human beings made in the image of God. Ms. Dell’s church as a predominantly African American church exposed Ms. Dell’s grandchildren to the long history of discrimination in the country through, for example, Negro Spirituals, Black History Month services and weekly sermons that specifically speak to the Black experience in the country. Her church also connected her
grandchildren with other members who also share a Caribbean heritage making it also a site for African Diaspora heritage knowledge.

There is a long history of how the Black church operates as a site of resistance for African Americans (McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010; Nelsen & Nelsen, 1975) but there is a gap in how it might do the same for Black immigrant families. Hence future research should consider exploring the role that the Black church might play in also helping them to cope with racism and other forms of discrimination in the U.S. society as well as raise their critical consciousness.

Conclusion

Dear Sister,

I could not tell you how to raise a Black child here cause I lack the experience but I am sending you some stories from fellow sisters who are learning ways to cope with distancing called race-ism while raising their Black child

Remember the stories I use to tell you for entertainment while sitting on the verandah? Well now, I am sending you stories for healing for days when you need it most for days when you are still trying to figure out how to raise a black child here

One love
My preceding poetic letter to my sister speaks to my concern, expressed at the beginning of this research, about what life will be like for her as she raises her Black son in the U.S. given the stereotypical representation of Black males and the problem of racism in the society. It also speaks to the purpose of this research which is to share invisible stories about the experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrant women in the U.S. South and how they are ethnic-racially socializing their children in a racialized society to offer psychic preservation to all my sisters out there.

My Dear Sister poem is aligned to Black feminists emphasis on using the stories of Black women as a form of healing and survival. It also points to the notion that “living life as Black women requires wisdom” (hooks, 2000, p. 257) which I believe could be derived from pooling our knowledge, experiences and coping strategies to support each other in an oppressive world. Likewise, from this Black feminist perspective, my findings reveal that “the relationship between mothers and children can serve as a private sphere in which cultures of resistance are learned” (hooks, 2000, p.51).

As a Black woman living in this context, I understand and empathize with the struggles the Jamaican immigrant women in this research experienced in attempting to protect their children from the negative impact of racism. Though not a mother of a Black child, as an educator I learned how institutional racism negatively impacts the schooling experiences of Black students. For example, I have observed and seen the effect of lowered expectations for them, lack of resources in predominantly Black schools and school curricula that do not meet the unique needs of children from a diverse background.

Thus, in conducting this research I sought to broaden discourse about social justice in schools by sharing the stories of the Jamaican immigrant women who are
raising their children here to provide additional insights on what can be done by teacher
education programs to help teachers understand the need to interrupt these discriminatory
practices and to help them create classroom counterspaces.

I hope as CRT scholars and Black Feminists have argued that these stories can help researchers in the field to further unpack the complexities involved in living in a racialized world, especially for Black immigrant women whose voices are often missing from critical research discourses. In this research, I represented the women’s narratives as living poetry that documents their struggle to protect their children and build their psychological well-being by exposing them to counterspaces in their homes and or church. These kinds of living poetry or stories are also needed to create a research counterspace for all racialized people in the U.S. society. The Jamaican immigrant women’s invisible stories, as living poetry, add lines and stanzas to research discourse that could help us to arrive at a deeper understanding of how racism impacts the lives of racialized families from varied backgrounds. With more attention to the nuanced experiences of Black immigrant families, researchers and educators with a vested interest in creating socially just schools, could gain insights on the changes needed in schools to support all racialized children.
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APPENDIX A

Map of Jamaica

Figure A1: Map of Jamaica
APPENDIX B

Map of the Caribbean

Figure B1: Map of the Caribbean

Retrieved from
http://www.britannica.com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/EBchecked/topic/640195/West-Indies
May 1, 2015

Dear Parent:

My name is Michelle Grace-Williams and I am inviting you to participate in a study I am conducting to learn more about Jamaican immigrant mothers in the U.S. I am currently a student in the Language and Literacy program of the College of Education at the University of South Carolina and I am conducting a research to learn specifically about your racial/ethnic identity, experiences (in Jamaica and the U.S.), and your socialization practices as part of the requirements for my degree in education. I am particularly interested in working with you during this study because you meet my research criteria of being Jamaican immigrant women with children or grandchildren living in the U.S. South. I believe that listening to your stories will help me to learn more about you and your family and the knowledge that I gain from you, could then be used to help educators build relationships with you and provide better support for your children.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following things during the months of June to September:

1) Participate in at least three, 60-90-minute audio-taped interviews (face to face and via the telephone) which will include conversations about your identity,
history, your views on and or your experiences with challenges (e.g. racism) you
might have encountered in the U.S. as well as your child rearing practices.

2) Allow me to join you in some of your social spaces (e.g. home and church events)
so I can learn more about you through interaction.

3) Share and submit documents (e.g. church programs, brochures, poems, songs,
newspaper clippings, school work, images from social network websites,
advertisements or other materials) that would help me to learn about your identity
and experiences in the U.S. and Jamaica (e.g. history).

4) Allow me to take or view photographs of items (only those you are comfortable
sharing) in your home that tell a story about your identity and life experiences.

5) Provide feedback on the accuracy of interview transcriptions

During interviews or casual conversation you might feel uncomfortable answering
some questions. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to. You
might not directly benefit from participation in this research, but other immigrant
mothers, and their children might benefit from hearing your story. The knowledge that
you provide during this study might help educators to accommodate better all children
from different backgrounds.

Your participation is voluntary, and your information will be kept confidential.
You have the right to withdraw from this research and if wish to discontinue, and there
will be no negative consequences to you if you make that decision. The information I
gather from you will be kept in a secured location on my computer or filing cabinet. The
results of this research may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your
identity will not be revealed. I will use pseudonyms or fake names to identify you and I
will not give the name of your specific location. Please do not write your real names on any of the documents that I will collect from you except the consent form. If you forget to remove your name, I will blot it out with a black permanent marker. You may contact me at the telephone number or email address listed below if you have any questions about this research. I want to assure you of my flexibility in scheduling interviews and home visits because I know that families have busy lives.

Thank you in advance for sharing your story with me. Please sign below as an official indication of your consent. When you are done, please call, email or text me to let me know that you are willing to participate. I will come to collect this letter at your earliest convenience.

I_________________________________________ agree to participate in this study

_________________________________________ (date)

Yours truly,

Michelle

Michelle Grace-Williams
University of South Carolina
Graduate Student
College of Education
Instruction and Teacher Education
Email: GraceWil@email.sc.edu
APPENDIX D

Decolonizing Methodology Concept Map

- Privileging multiple voices, perspectives, experiences and epistemologies
- Claiming oppressed people's rights to "self-definition and self-expression" (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p.12)
- Centering and honoring participants' stories
- Deconstructing dehumanizing Western/colonizing research to empower and humanize participants (Smith, 1999)
- Reframing traditional research discourse to create a space for the use of participants' stories as sites of resistance (Lisa, 1999)

Figure D1: Decolonizing Methodology Concept Map
APPENDIX E

Critical Race Methodology Concept Map
(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)

Challenging majoritarian stories built on cultural deficit models

Unveiling racism and other forms of oppression against racialized groups

Empowering participants by projecting their voices

Centering participants' stories, settings and experiences

Drawing from the experiential knowledge of participants

Figure E1: Critical Race Methodology Concept Map