READING RACE IN A COMMUNITY SPACE: A NARRATIVE POST-INTENTIONAL

PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION

by

ROBERTA PRICE GARDNER

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary research examines the ways that identity categories, including race, class, gender and place, influence literacies within and outside of school contexts. It weaves together the author's girlhood memories in a working class African American community that experienced white flight, and the narratives of children and mothers of color in a low-income housing complex in the South. It includes participants' interpretations of race through multicultural children's literature; and theoretical stories afforded by phenomenology, human geography, critical race theory, and critical theories of literacy and literature.

INDEX WORDS: Anti-Black racism, phenomenology, critical racial literacy, bodies in education, Black mothering discourses, narrative, intersections of race, place, gender, and class

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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DEDICATION

For Morris, Morgan, Andrew, Price, and Nicholas Gardner. Be real Black for me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Booker Elementary is a Title I school. Claude Homes, River Eves, as well as several other public housing projects feed into it. Many classed and racially coded tropes and Moynihanisms about "project kids" like Da'veon, Zuri, Makeela, Katrina, Tray, and Caleb, as well as stigmatizing references to uninvolved or "lazy parents" accompany this Title I descriptor. However, what meanings do the facts and figures that are formulated into quantifiable statistics reveal? There are real stories and meanings behind the statistical data, and the individual stories can tell much more about the lived truths, than the figures. Therefore, similar to Clarke in his research into Dark Ghetto (1965/1989), my goal in this research was to not allow the "facts" and perceptions about blackness or poverty get in the way of my participants' narratives of lived experiences. Ignoring the facts was a way of allowing my participants to fully animate what it was like for them to read race.

The mothers and children in this research live within spaces/places of liminality; these are spaces and places between hope, promise, chance, and despair. They live, as Diaz (2012) asserted, "at the racially sharp end of the stick" (para.1) As such, issues such as poverty, violence, not having access to healthcare, affordable housing, and incarceration were realities connected to their lifeworld. Janesse, one of the mothers who you will soon come to know, typically kept a copy of the local crime blotter magazine in her purse, and it was a central point of conversation amongst the mothers during many of our focus group reading sessions. Each of the mothers in this research was raised in local public housing projects by single mothers; however they did each have a relationship with their fathers. All of the women were also in

committed relationships and Janesse was married to the father of her children whom she had dated since high school. They represented a second generation of poverty (each having lived in public housing with their own children). At the time of the study, all of the participants were receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), food stamps, or Medicaid. Two mothers (Janesse, and Angie) had not completed high school, although both were well read, and both expressed and demonstrated that they valued education for themselves and their children. All of the women had become mothers relatively early in their lives, and all had close male family members (brothers, boyfriends, husbands) who had been incarcerated at some point.

One of the mothers in this research also served time in jail for a traffic violation because she lacked the financial resources to pay the fines and court fees. These are not distinctly or inherently Black realities; but neither are they merely realities of Black people who happen to be poor. Race matters, as does place (in the state of Georgia, 32% of the children in poverty are Black). But again, merely relying on macro level or micro level statistics would create a caricature of the Black families in my study, and it would simplify the complexity and fullness of their raced, classed, and gendered lives. As Clarke argued, "facts reflect and suggest some truth…but they do not relate to the parents' [or a child's] emotions…his[her] pretense at indifference or defiance of his/her fate, his/her vulnerability to hurt, his/her sense of rejection, his/her fears, his/her angers, or his/her sense of aloneness" (xxiii). That is the purpose of this project, for you to look inside and come understand at least for now what it's like to read race in their community space.

TABLE 1 Participants

Focal Participants	Parents		Age	Community
Zuri	Mother: Father:	Janesse Latrel	10	River Eves
Katrina	Mother: Father:	Janesse Latrel	8	River Eves
Caleb	Mother:	Natasha	12	River Eves
Tray	Mother:	Natasha	6	River Eves
Makeela	Mother:	Lynette	7	River Eves
D'aveon	Mother: Father:	Tonda Zeke	10	Claude Homes/River Eves
Jamerion	Mother:	NA	12	Claude Homes
Children did not participate	Angie			Claude Homes
Note. These profiles are based on interviews conducted between May 2012 - September 2012.				

CHAPTER 1

BOOKER ELEMENTARY

When I first went to meet Natasha and Janesse, two of the mothers who had agreed to be a part of my study, it was near the end of the school year. The breath of summer was easing its way in, and as I walked along the path to enter Booker Elementary, several teachers and children were coming out to the playground area which was adjacent to the front of the school. A chain linked fence outlined a playscape that included a small wooden sandpit, a slide with a colorful climbing apparatus, swings, and a bench reserved for teachers. As the laughter and whoops of the children playing punctuated the air, a little African American girl broke away from a group of recess-ready kids that the teachers were unsuccessfully trying to order. She hurdled into the sandbox and raked the grains of fine sand with her fingers tossing the dust into the air leaving a trail of powdery residue all in her hair. The plastic colored balls that held her two pony tails in place were caked.

As I passed by the puff of dust, the corners of my mouth rolled into a smile. I allowed my mind to wander back to my own rough and tumble elementary school days. The kind of carefree play that this little girl exhibited typically came at a hefty price for young Black girls who didn't have wash and ready hair. I wondered what her mother would say. I recall the extra time and energy it took to get my hair pressed and brushed into pigtails or braided into neat plaits meant that I usually had to face the wrath of my mother, who came home from work with only enough energy to fix us something to eat for dinner. The last thing she wanted to do was wrestle through

my hair with a fine tooth comb to get some dirt or sand out. But I suspect that like me, and so many other little brown girls, she felt that the freedom to simply let go and shower herself with sand, was well worth any fuss about her hair that would likely come later.

As I walked along the path to the school, I shifted the weight of the picture books I was carrying and began to order my thinking. With each footfall on the concrete, I rehearsed what I would say to the two mothers who had agreed to provide me with intimate access to their lives. I figured that I would enter the study in the best way that I knew how, by opening books that contained what I perceived as powerful words and images of Black life past and present. I wanted the parents and children who read with me to lend their lives to the texts (Greene, 1995) and to tell me what meanings they had tethered to race.

When I reached the parent resource room, several adults were in the small homey space working and chatting. It had been several months since I'd visited the school. For the past two years, I'd worked in a variety of capacities within and outside of Booker, all in the interests of cultivating and sustaining literacy learning. I worked directly with administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The majority of the African American and Mexican families that attended Booker lived in public housing projects and low income apartment complexes. Most parents worked shift work in the retail or service industry making minimum wage. They were the working poor. The school provided wrap around services like visits from a mobile dental van and a food service drop off program that provided fresh fruits and vegetables on weekends. During the summer months a federally subsidized food program would deliver lunches to local sites. Natasha was in charge of coordinating the summer lunch program and one of the school administrators suggested that perhaps I could use the program to introduce parents and children to culturally relevant books, and to also discuss issues of racial meaning.

I was well acquainted with several of the parents at Booker because I helped facilitate some of the monthly parent coffees held in the school media center. Mave, who was a regular at most parent functions, was in the resource room helping to assemble parent information packets. We hugged and chatted about her two grandsons. She had already raised three children of her own, but after the violent murder of her oldest daughter, she took full custody of her twin grandsons who were in the fourth grade. She admitted quite often that she was short on energy but high in spirit, and that she knew that God had her back. She joked that she "just had to keep it movin." As she sat back down, I watched her ash colored hands, atrophied and twisted by arthritis. The papers appeared weighty as she wrestled them under the gun of the metal stapler. The thin cloth on her tennis shoes took the shape of her narrow feet, and she wore a wool pullover despite the elevated temperatures outside. At one point one of the women sitting on the couch called out to Mave: "Why you got on that big ol' sweater?" "Cause I'm always cold-always. You could send me back to Africa and I'm still gone be cold."

Natasha and Janesse were sitting at a table nearby waiting for me. Natasha wore a brightly patterned shirt and a pair of shorts. Her lips were fully glazed and her make-up was colorful and flawless. I could tell that she loved putting herself together. Her hair was styled in a twisted updo and she had on a pair of extra-large hoop earrings, the kind so big that you could put your wrist through and wear like a bracelet. They reminded me of something my niece or girls from the working class Black neighborhood where I grew up might wear. It was sometime between attending a predominately White high school and college that I adopted a conservative, less urban (read Black) fashion aesthetic, one that was more acceptable to the White middle-class Midwestern world that I was navigating. It was just one of the many ways that I assimilated and bought into the racial bribe (Guiner & Torres, 2002).

Janesse worked in the food service industry, and she was wearing her uniform. Both Janesse and Natasha were thick "big boned" women and they had an air about themselves like so many females from Black neighborhoods; it was a look in their eyes and a way of carrying themselves like they didn't need anything from the world. As I spread the books out on the table, I began to walk the tightrope of criss-crossing race and class lines within the black community, that precarious line between unity and difference. We were united by our history and blackness as an existential experience. However my access to middle and upper class spaces provided me with a level of privilege that in some ways placed me on "an otherside" of blackness. I sensed that they were reading me, as I was reading them, because I had walked this tightrope before. It was indeed what Collins (2000) referred to as the phenomenon of being an outsider-within. As Ford (2010) noted, "race, inscribed on the bodies and consciousness of people of African descent in the United States of America, is a powerful unifying principle" (p.53).

But the truth is it isn't enough. Notions of collective identity or common oppression only go so far. We were differently raced, gendered, and classed across place and time and these social locations were connected to the places and experiences for which we had lived through or had access to. Why should they bother allowing me within their community space and why did I really even want to enter it? Sure, I had been informed by theoretical knowledge that the "particularities of the African American experience and culture" are necessary to address so as to help students understand how race constructs their lives and those of their families" (Ladson-Billings 1994, p.129). But it was much deeper than that. I wanted to grasp some of those particularities for which Ladson-Billings referred, and in many ways my racial narrative compelled me to conduct research about race within that particular community space.

Reading My World

I grew up in an all-Black working class neighborhood full of latch key kids. Teenage boys drove around the neighborhood leaning to the side driving slow in old Cutlasses refurbished with cheap paint jobs from Earl Schibe. They would blast music from their cars as if they were sirens, alerting others of their presence. Girls would hang out on the sidewalks chewing gum, talkin' loud, and gossiping. I was not a goody two shoes; I had my fair share of neighborhood drama, but more than anything, I loved to read. Quite often as squeals of laughter and the drone of bass vibrated outside my window, I stayed inside using books to gain access into other worlds. However, my neighborhood wasn't always all Black. In fact when we first moved, we were the second Black family in the neighborhood. It was 1975, and I was in the first grade. Both the White art teacher and librarian from my elementary school lived around the corner. Legal victories contesting redlining which spatially concentrated Blacks within inner-city neighborhoods were struck down and this paved the way for many families like my own to move into residential neighborhoods that were previously all White. At any rate, by the time I was in fifth grade, only one White family remained. Over the course of four years, my neighborhood had become blighted due to White Flight, and soon property values plummeted and many houses in the neighborhood became HUD homes that sold for $1.

Attempts to counter de-facto segregated schools resulted in court-ordered busing that sent me and all of the Black kids from my neighborhood into White suburban schools. In order to get to the other side, our commutes were well over an hour. Participating in after school activities and organizations was difficult because we all had working parents. One of the few Black teachers who also coached basketball and track sometimes loaded us into his car often, six bodies deep, just so that we could engage in athletic programs or clubs. As neighborhood schools

became even more inadequate, when it was time for me to attend high school, my mother took a second job in order to send me to a private school. Even so, every month when tuition was overdue I had to line up outside the business office with all of the other Black faces to explain why my mother hadn't paid. The population of Black students there was minuscule and demarcated along class lines. There were three distinct categories; the Jack and Jill Blacks (a social organization for upper class Black families started in 1938 by Black women in Philadelphia) who could afford to attend the school, those who couldn't afford it but who went there to get away from low performing neighborhood schools, and those who were there to help the school win football and basketball championships (they were never in the line for overdue payments).

When I went away to college I accepted a work-study job off campus at the local Boys and Girls Club. The neighborhood where it was located was familiar to me even though it was hundreds of miles from my home. The banter, clothing styles, neighborhood talk and body language were the same, but the middle school kids there pegged me as an outsider. It didn't matter that I was Black, I was from the otherside; one of those "uppity Negroes" from the University. They didn't want me or anyone else to come down there to work with them. I wasn't completely surprised at their stand-offish attitude and their way of looking past me. Blacks on campus who came downstate to attend the University jokingly referred to local Blacks, as "townies." This signified that they were below the standard of blackness possessed by Blacks who attended the University. Essentially, the sentiment was that townies were Blacks who weren't "going anywhere." Their embodiment as Black people within that town was reduced to class-based readings.

Similar to Dap the primary character in the movie School Daze who espoused racial solidarity and an embrace of the Black Diaspora, challenges to black authenticity classism never sat right with my spirit, and it never will.

In many ways, I think that is why when I started to think about how I might come full circle in my formal educational endeavor – getting my PhD, I ended up sitting in the community center of an apartment in a small town reading race with Natasha, Janesse, Lynette, Angie and their children as well as anybody else from the community who was willing to read with us. Like most cities in the U.S., in Clinton, residential spaces are clearly demarcated by race and class lines (Massey & Denton, 1993). The university is the hub of the city, and it is also racially stratified, with the exception of a small percentage of Black undergraduate and graduate students (and even fewer Mexican students), Black and Brown people largely reside on the "otherside," of Clinton, within delineated pockets, and on the borders, outside of the university space. Living within and negotiating these racial spaces shapes social and psychic identities (Thomas, 2011). The reciprocity of our skin, and embodied geographies of blackness (see chapter 4) which we experienced separately and together created unique connections and ways of knowing. There were many times during our sessions when there was a discursive synergy, a comfort level and conversational flow that was relaxed, at ease and communal, but like Love (2009) "I began my role as a researcher situated between an insider and outsider, and I left just the same" (p.88).

Countering Post Racial Readings

This research represents a localized accounting of racialization; the phenomenon of being raced in a particular place. It includes critical discourse and literacy engagements of Black parents and their children along with some of my post-bridled (Vagle, personal conversation,

June, 2012) and unbridled thoughts about the abstract and embodied ways that race gets read, for example, how it is mapped onto geographic spaces, on/within bodies, social and institutional structures, and also hearts and minds. It's about racial fatigue, hope, desire, anger, pride, communal bonds, and a violence of despair. It includes the negation and exercise of freedom in relation to blackness (freedom from and freedom to), and how blackness is constructed and disciplined through spatiality. Space served as a powerful heuristic for exposing some of the binds of invisibility associated with racial meaning, revealing places where racial lines were erased, redrawn or blurred. There are temporal dimensions of reading race grounded in their experience and occasionally my own. Throughout this research, although you will hear the voices of many community members and societal discourses, I focused primarily on four low-income African American parents and their children and how they made meaning of race (blackness) based on their lived experiences in a small urban community in the South. Some of the racialized ideologies articulated by my young participants were so deeply embedded that visions for work, play, and what one might become were already arrested, undernourished, or aborted - for example, what Black girls and boys do and don't do (see chapter 6). Over the course of twenty weeks I listened to my participants' discourses of being, social histories, placed based narratives, and semiotic forms of meaning making (Gee, 1990). Through engaging in text and talk I became a witness to the complex ways they read race and were formulating and attempting to (re)negotiate identity positions against a prescribed background that was classed as well as racially and spatially configured in hegemonic ways (Amed, 2006).

The complexity of these negotiations was articulated in one of our reading sessions when Jamerion a sixth grade Black male expressed his desire to play pro football and see the inside of a jail within the same breath. His assertion is mired in complexity, and may have been tinged

with a bit of youthful braggadocio. Even so, I suspect that it was also influenced by the

ecological context within his school and community spaces where you are either a "baller" or

you go to jail, and school spaces like Booker Middle and elementary and so many other Title I

schools where the ubiquitous cloud of testing and readings of the "achievement gap" between

White and Black students hovers. This cloud contributes to an ethos in schools that is routinized

and managed with a carceral logic (Shabazz, 2012) which stifles possibilities. As a result, neither

Black schools nor Black communities exist as an ontological space for hope Freire (1970). And

this at a time when race isn't supposed mean anything at all.

Goals of the Study

Currently, given the dominant societal discourse we are in a raceless or colorblind era

(Bonilla Silva, 2010; Lewis, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994). King (1991) referred to colorblindness

as dysconscious racism, "an uncritical habit of the mind that justifies inequity and exploitation

by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). More recently, the discursive threads

of colorblindness have been stretched beyond the boundaries of reality. In such cases,

colorblindness has been extended into a tall tale of a post-racial society or what Alim and Reyes

(2011) called "postraciality." Post racial refers to a hyperbolic trope that race is irrelevant in

American society. Within the colorblind post-racial zeitgeist when race is addressed, it is

referenced genetically as a biological difference, data, or mere visual representation without any

recognition or exploration of the epistemic and ontological dynamics of being and living as

raced. The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding about living within and

navigating a highly segregated hyper-racial space, specifically the ways in which Black youths

and their parents absorbed the realities of being raced in their everyday lives and how these

readings connect to their literacies.

The questions guiding my research were

1.   What is it like to read race?

2.   How do the embodied experiences, and geographic location of the participants influence the manner in which they read race?

3.   What racialized meanings, dialogues, ideas, or symbols are generated as participants engage with texts?

Pulitzer prize winning author Junot Diaz asserted that "he writes about race and by extension White supremacy as a way of countering the rhetorical legerdemain and deformed silences surrounding race" (2012). In narrating the phenomenon of reading race, I am writing with a similar objective: to confront the benign neglect, suppression, and out-right disregard about the dysconscious and nuanced ways that race is ascribed and defined yet not discussed or recognized in our hyper-racial society. Pointing towards the perverse privilege that Whites posses to not talk about or recognize what race often means, I explored the phenomenon of reading race and wrote about it from inside of the Black community. However in recognizing the various dimensions of blackness and the intersection of class and cultural differences, I was not of that particular community and therefore quite often I researched from a space of liminality. Locating the ways in which race was read from the inside of this Black community, I strove to extract the subtle ways in which my participants and I climbed into and out of racial meaning, using a multitude of different texts.

I situated this research using socio-cultural conceptions of literacy which include cultural, linguistic, and social practices that are contextual, symbolic, and connected to power relations (Ives, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Larson, 2006). I recognize that all texts are racialized. This includes the participants in the study and myself (the facilitator). Throughout this research

class and gender are recognized as social constructions inextricably connected to the matrix of how we all read race. Racial experience serves as a significant variable in our literate lives, and yet the contextual layers that inform the ways in which it does so needs to be unfolded. I include my own reflexive ways of reading race and in embracing Greene's (1995) call for a process of search over silence; I invite you to do the same. I'd like for you to read race not only within this text but also existentially within the context of your own life.

How Do You Read Race?

I consider this a consciousness raising literacy project that reorients racialization pedagogically. In so doing, I embrace the use of dialogical relation. Dialogical relation provides the reader with more than a definition or interpretation of a phenomenon; it has the power to orient them to it (van Manen, 1990). In employing dialogical relation, I don't necessarily attempt to solve the manner in which race is being read, because to do so would assume that all racialized readings are inherently wrong , i.e. to read race is to be racist. Instead, I ask that you doggedly examine the various ways of how it is read and embodied in macro-level and micro-level contexts. For example, how might you read the fetishism of Black oriented linguistic terms in the mainstream and a willingness to commodify and create spaces for this language while simultaneously chastising Black English (Smitherman, 1977)? As you read race, consider how it is employed, curbed, or dismissed in various spaces at home, school, and in your daily living. When are White faces on the otherside; i.e. in predominately Black or nonwhite spaces and vice versa and what do these raced bodies mean in relation to the social and institutional structures or contexts? It had significant meaning within this particular community.

Overview of the Study

A key text in this research is a racially segregated low-income apartment community (River Eves). Here, I refer to text as a semiotic form (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Street, 1995) in which objects and places have social meanings and identity markers associated with them. In many instances throughout this research I will also refer to text in a traditional sense, as a representation of written language. Claude Homes is a public housing project that is adjacent to River Eves and where many of my participants had recently moved. Both of these communities are within the city of Clinton a small urban college town. Both neighborhoods are tucked away behind several hotels and fast food establishments. Within walking distance however is a commercial district with high end stores and restaurants. Geographically, Booker Elementary sits at the crossroads, a dividing point between mostly all-Black and Latino residential community and an all White community, however only 8% of the student population is White (see Table 2 below).

My participants and I met for twenty weeks beginning in late spring, and we continued throughout the summer. Our reading sessions were held two to three times per week for one to two hours and led to deep conversations about the empirical ways that race influenced the lives and literacies of my participants. Texts included children's literature, magazines, hip hop music, articles of clothing, and geographical spaces, as well as our bodies. Their readings of race were largely derived from the spatial and geographical ontologies, of living in a high poverty community populated by mostly Black and Brown bodies (Lipsitz, 2011; Massey & Denton, 1993; Moje, 2000). As such I have come to refer to their readings as "embodied geographies of blackness."

TABLE 2

RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF LOCAL SCHOOL

Booker Elementary Racial Demographics

	Black	Hispanic	White	Mixed Race	Asian
Series1	297	74	36	14	7
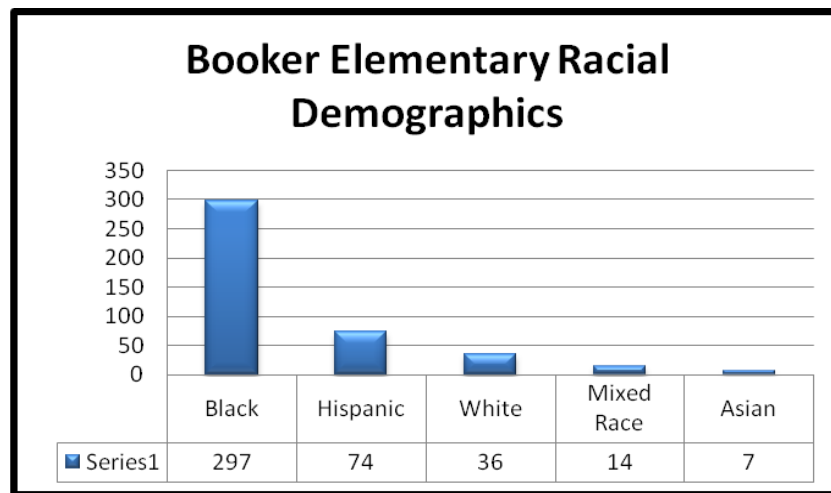
The discourse and interactions of parents and children revealed subtle and overt forms of everyday race-making that occurred within the community space. Popular culture references, particularly hip-hop, influenced their perceptions and ideas about race overall and their embodiment of blackness. Amed (2006) makes the point that "where the body dwells" provides perspective (p. 8). As such, the response of my participants about violence, police interrogation, notions of fictive kinship (the we), loyalty, acceptable forms of work, discipline, and language use were tied to dimensions of meaning related to being raced, gendered, and classed, in the South within a particular community space. I recognized my participants' readings as contingent and contextual, relative to the presence/absence of particular people at a particular place and time (Vagle, 2010; 2011). Participants referenced race primarily as a Black and White binary even though many Mexican people lived within the community. While there are limitations associated with these contexts, which I address in later chapters, I believe that educators, parents, and community stakeholders can learn much from these readings of race as I did and that this

research has critical implications for helping to cultivate, and maintain forms of communal wealth (Yosso, 2005) and literacy within and outside of school spaces.

Some of the uncensored and difficult conversations that took place within this community space will forever simultaneously haunt and inspire me in my work as a researcher and educator. Sometimes during our focus group sessions there were moments when we laughed uncontrollably about our ways of responding to and in the world. This included racial humor or stereotypical ideas about "why black people tend to shout." But there were some days when they were laughing, and I sat within that space weeping and screaming on the inside because I was certain that there was nothing funny about the kind of violence and rape of the spirit that they sometimes had to witness living in their community—the constant presence of the police, an underlying sentiment that Black boys who don't fight are sissies and Black women who had been sexually assaulted had placed themselves in harm's way. Even though I didn't agree with some of their readings, I respect my participants, and I think about them often; in fact, even as I write this, I miss them immensely. I used dialogical relation throughout the research text to address the ethical challenges and personal discontinuities of reading race that I experienced. In some respects this research text is both dialogical and rhetorical because I occasionally respond to the ethical or moral challenges that arose using excerpts from literature for children and young adults, excerpts from my bridling journal, and popular cultural references.

As noted previously, colorblindness or racelessness is a racial project that minimizes and misconstrues the reality and effects of race and racism, and it obscures the social and institutional structures that create and maintain them. My participants' readings of race, however, manifestly demonstrated that race still matters in deeply significant ways and moreover that "blackness matters in more detailed ways" (Smith, 1993, p. 74). In reading race within this space, socially,

institutionally, and emotionally, historically contested bodies continued to fight off the seduction and limitations surrounding the tropes of blackness that circulate within and outside of their communities.

During our meeting at Booker, Natasha, Janesse, and I had developed a schedule for all of the reading group sessions that we would hold throughout the summer. In addition to finding out how race was read in this all-Black community space, I also hoped that parents and children would genuinely enjoy and like reading the array of stories which featured African American. I wanted the stories to make a difference to them in fact looking back I had delusions of grandeur about what the stories would/could mean to them, and how I would be received as an outsider of the community (see chapter 7). I decided to go to the community several times a week prior to formally starting our sessions because I wanted to allow parents and children to get used to seeing and hearing me being within their communal space. Natasha thought it was a good idea, plus I could help her get the lunch program rolling.

On the first day I arrived at 10:30. Plops and sheets of rain beat down and formed a brown pool within a sunken tile at the entrance to the cabana. The meals for the lunch program were delivered soon after by Dale an older Black Jamaican man who later participated in two of our reading sessions. Natasha took the temperature of the sandwiches to make sure they weren't too cold or too hot, and Tray and I put Sun Chips, juice and milk beside each bag. We counted them over and over while Natasha sifted through a stack of paperwork related to the program. Lightning began flashing, and by 11:30, Natasha feared that the message about the lunch program hadn't gotten out even though she had plastered flyers throughout the community within the alcoves of the buildings. She ultimately decided it was likely due to the heavy rainfall and lightening; however, in the paperwork, it was explicit that if the driver returned to pick up

the food crates and there were any extra lunches, the agency would either reduce the number of

lunches they delivered or cancel the program all together. Basically, the rainy day could mean

the end of the summer lunch program before it began. Natasha grabbed her umbrella and decided

to pick up children in her car. Tray and I stayed behind in the center.

Reading the Texts of Their Lives

"That's what I'ma do I'ma play basketball in the NBA when I grow up…"

Tray and I were well over counting the bags, so I decided to open up a copy of Christopher

Myers' (2007) reimagined version of Lewis Carol's classic poem, the Jabberwocky (1871).

 I read:

> *'Twas brilling in the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe*
>
> *Did gyre and gimble in the wabe: All mimsy were the borogoves*
>
> *and the momeraths outgrabe. Beware the Jabberwock, my son!*

Tray interrupted me, "That's what I'ma do I'ma play basketball in the NBA when I grow

up"(Observation, 6/07). In Meyers' version of this metaphorical poem, instead of the woods, the

setting is an inner city basketball court. The jabberwocky is depicted as subhuman; a towering jet

black figure with elongated arms, seven fingers, and one menacing eye. Splashes of orange, red,

teal, black, and tawny brown graphics punctuate the pages. Tray expressed that he loved the

intensity of the colors and elements of magical realism featured in the book but more than

anything else "the basketball part" was his favorite. Tray specifically constructed the text within

the realm of professional basketball, and from his perspective as the mutant antagonist, and the

other nameless characters battled on the court, they were playing in the NBA.

Nearly all of the young Black males who participated in the study aspired to play

professional sports. I spoke with over twenty youths (16 males and 4 females) and fifteen

parents, and of the six focal youths I read with, four were males and two were females ranging in

age from 6-12 years old (see participant table in the introduction). Drawing from elements of

Max van Manen's (1999) hermeneutic phenomenology, I initially decided to use children's

literature with the parents and children as prompts for eliciting discourse about lived experience

and racial meaning. Over the last two years, the administrators at Booker had placed an emphasis

on building a collection of culturally relevant books for students and teachers as a way of

increasing interests in reading. I'd helped them in selecting these books and aligning them with

curricular goals and performance standards. With that in mind, I focused on introducing parents

and their children to many of the same books, with a focus on examining the threads of racial

meaning they might connect to the stories. Many of the books we read (see Appendix B) were

Coretta Scott King award winners and many other titles fell under the category of enabling texts

(Tatum, 2009). Tatum considers enabling texts as those books that demonstrate resiliency,

multiple identities, individual or collective struggle of Black people. In the book Reading for

their Lives (2009), Tatum reflected, "I constantly ask myself, out of all of the texts in the world,

why do I want to put this text in front of my students?" (p. 90). I also contemplated this question

as I considered what books I would share with the mothers and children. Many of the selections

that we read were iterative and derived from conversations with my participants during our

sessions. For example, we read *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (2010) after Janesse stated that her biggest

regret for moving from the projects was the fact that her kids missed out on the communal

atmosphere, and the initiation into Black boyhood that she felt that her son, Zuri, so desperately

needed. She expressed that she was certain that he wouldn't be getting bullied at school (see

chapter 7) if they still lived "behind the bricks," "because Black boys over there learn real quick

to fight back, or you won't make it".

Sometimes, larger societal discourses prompted me to introduce certain texts. I selected *A Father Like* (Zolotow, 2007) as a central text for our discussion the day after I heard a representative on the radio from the National Fatherhood Initiative stated that 2 in 3 (64%) of African American children live in "father absent homes." It is a devastating and disheartening figure, and I wanted to know how my participants felt about the absent Black father narrative. The conversation actually morphed into the mothers' beliefs that Black children need to be tougher than White children.

Many of the racialized discourses that took place happened organically, before we started our formal readings. Sometimes they occurred because the sun was beaming a little too much. It was those times that Tray, who had a darker complexion, wanted to stay out of the sun so that he didn't get "too Black" or as he said "crispy." Other times it was talk about hair; to perm or not to perm, texturize, braid, twist, or weave. Lynette and several other women in the neighborhood braided hair as a side hustle (extra job) and there were many times people stopped by to let her know they were ready for an appointment. However, seemingly surface level conversations about the Black aesthetic or comments made to the children by parents, such as "Boy pull your pants up," often turned into deeper conversations about Black males and prison or unemployment, all issues which are tied to deep social, psychological, and economic realities. There were many times when we were in the thick of conversations before I remembered that we were fully engaged in reading race. As I rushed to flip on my digital recorder, I was reminded that alienating our racial consciousness is not possible because we are always already creating chains of meaning that contribute to racialization in dysconscious and sometimes unintended ways.

Language use in the community space was also a prominent example of dysconscious race making. The life of language sometimes signified without always necessarily specifying race. For example, "talking Black" or having a "blaccent" was essentially the norm. Ogbu's (2003) assertions about oppositional identity arose as points of reference for both parents and children. For example, Janesse took pride in knowing how to "speak properly," and she often joked that she had Disney Babies who "talked White" because they watched *Zach and Cody*. But "talking Black" also apparently had linguistic characteristics that were rooted to a particular place. As several of the mothers chatted about a popular reality television star, they laughed that "she got a little "bougie" (slang reference for upper class tendencies) in her but she talk like she straight out of Claude Homes."

The use of similar language and clothing styles also served as signifying factors for being read as Black. One prime example was the assertion that Whites who hung around Blacks, talked like them, or who lived within River Eves were considered "wiggers " (Sartwell, 2005) or "wiggas." The ideology of Whites as a privileged race largely did not apply to these Whites although my participants felt they were immune from the interrogation of police who constantly patrolled the community. Racial meaning and allegiance was claimed on the basis of spatial proximity and the co-dwelling of Mexican and White people in the community even if it didn't actually exist. For example, early on, several Mexican mothers came to the center with their children to eat lunch, but they typically left immediately afterwards and didn't participate in the sessions even though I often went to greet them with bi-lingual books and offered to have a translator present for the sessions. These mothers essentially were not socially connected to the Black mothers in the community. Still, on many occasions, both parents and children described Mexican families and Whites who lived there as "just like Black people."

Summary of Chapters

In the community space, the standards of middle class whiteness were "an absent presence" (Prendergast, 1998) that influenced the way that race was ascribed by both parents and youths. Prendergast described this absent presence of race as a subdued, diminished, and "scenic unconscious practice" of race making. Race is therefore a present organizing force; however it is unacknowledged or evaded. The culture of race and poverty were bounded and tangled but often became unraveled by participants who disabused race, citing the popular hip-hop slogan "money over everything." There was not a unified consensus or singular way in which all community members read race. Hall's (1997) assertion that "race is a floating signifier" indeed rang true as readings of race were resisted, embraced, or curbed, through ideologies of good and bad faith (see Gordon, 1995).

To explore my research questions, I used a lived experience methodological approach (post-intentional phenomenology) to gather the threads of meaning or intentionalities that my participants connected to race. In chapter 2, I discuss reading race from my own perspective and I connect relevant threads of literature pertaining to reading race in embodied ways as well as those read concretely in school and community spaces. In chapter 3, I will address the relationship between post-intentional phenomenological inquiry (Vagle, 2010, 2011), space/place, and racial meaning. In chapter 4, *Racial spaces and Embodied Geographies of Blackness*, using narrative vignettes that feature the voices of Janesse, Natasha, Lynette, and Angie, the four focal mothers in this research, I put their readings of race in-dialogue with critical theories as they explain the inextricable connection between race and place. In chapter 5, *Unforgivable Blackness and the Racial Aesthetic*, derived from their lived experience as well as societal influences I address the ways parents and their children read blackness in relation to

history. Chapter 6, "*The Darker Brother*" explores the critical discourse of a group of young black males who used the cabana and various spaces in the community as sites for formulating racialized gender constructions. It also includes elements of parental influence that socialized these identity constructions in race, class, and gender specific ways. In "*Black and Blue, Anger, the Police, and Getting Violency*," I create a bridge between the racial aesthetic, the embodiment of blackness, and the phenomenon of constantly being under surveillance and in the shadow of the law. I address the carceral logic and "anti-homing" (Ahmed, 2006) strategies that govern my participants spaces at home and school. In the final chapter "*Othersideness*" I imagine how parents, educators, and community based organizations together and separately might reach into the folds of tension, and provide counter spaces for deconstructing racial meaning and anti-Black racism through enacting critical racial literacy.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL RESEARCH INTO BLACK RACIAL SPACES

The purpose of this chapter is to trace some of the relevant threads of literature pertaining to reading race as a socially constructed lived experience. The process of chronicling the literature that has informed my analysis into reading race has been a journey of "searching again." It has been a roundabout messy cycle of shifting and sorting, in order to analyze and deepen my understanding of the findings in this research. When I wrote my prospectus, I reviewed literature in critical theories into racial literacy within school (Allen & Moeller, 2002; Brooks, 2006; Copenhaver, 2000; Lazar & Offenberg, 2011; Rogers & Mosley, 2006), as well as many others. I had also read countless ethnographies, and philosophical explorations into racialization, among them Boylorn (2009), Fanon (2008), Gordon (1995), Ladner (1995), and Morris (2006). I basically followed the standard protocol for conducting research. The process included locating "relevant" a prior literature that fit my area of inquiry. I developed a solid knowledge of theories and research into reading race; however, when I actually entered into the field and began collecting data, many of the philosophies and theories that the mothers and children brought into being did not always coincide with what I had already read. As a result, I (re)searched again to locate literature that was more closely related to the philosophies and theories of my participants.

I didn't have the academic language for what I was doing, but as Jones noted (personal conversation, April 15, 2013), I was following the "discursive leads of my participants." For example, when Caleb argued that "Black boys don't play with action figures," I (re)searched

again and located the work of Nama (2009) and his theories helped me to analyze and understand

a bit more about super heroes and the politics of play, in relationship to some of the raced,

classed, and gendered (dis)connections that Black and nonWhite youth often experience in their

play and multimodal literacy interactions. Chin's (2009) ethnographic research into the

consumer culture of low income and working class Black youth was also informative as I

observed the children and they discussed issues of identity, play, commodification, and hip hop

culture. I turned to Love's (2009) research as well as Oware (2010) both of whom explored the

genre of rap and the intersection of gender, racial identity, and Black authenticity.

Although I suspected that hip hop would influence the youths' perception of themselves,

I didn't know how it would come into being, or who the children would connect with and why.

Once they shared some of these reasons I explored and read more. The references and language

they used also served as a guide. For example, Whites in the community who "acted Black" were

referred to as "wiggas." Morris' (2006) ethnographic research which examined the social,

psychological and academic landscape of White youth who attended a predominately Black

middle school was useful i.e., (one White student referred to *himself* as "White chocolate").

However, explicitly following my participants' reference led me to Sartwell's (2005) scholarly

essay about the role and image of the "wigga" in society. This philosophical article enriched my

understanding about the ways the children were willing to negotiate racial meaning and identity.

As my participants shared various meanings and readings of race, I responded by reading deeper

into the manifestations of the phenomenon that they were living out within the community space.

My review of literature was therefore a recursive process of drawing upon a prior literature and

the living texts that were generated by the mothers and children. In this chapter, I do not partake

in a long view or traditional review; instead, I merge the relevant threads of literature that shaped

my understanding and analysis of racialized embodiment, and reading race in school and community spaces.

Before I note some of the studies that informed my journey, I will explain my conception of reading race. I then draw upon theoretical and philosophical conversations to counter post racial and colorblind tropes. I address reading race within school spaces because I believe that my research has important implications for how and why we might want to rethink how race is read in school spaces. I note influences in critical spatial theories and I emphasize that race is a text and a dimension of new literacies that schools and social institutions attempt to neutralize while simultaneously employing it in a multitude of ways. I also highlight some of the research into Black and Brown community spaces, and I briefly review some "discursive leads" that I followed after observations, focus group, and open ended interviews with mothers and children. To understand reading race, it is important to step to the side and consider what it means to read at all (Edmundson, 2004). Reading is a recursive process of making meaning. From a technical standpoint, it includes deconstructing, reconstructing, and transacting (Iser, 1976; Rosenblatt, 1976) between various parts, and the whole text, to read race is to engage in a similar process.

When we read race, various parts of subjects and objects are read in relationship to whole social body which includes places/spaces, institutional structures, material objects, stylistic conventions, and embodied ways of being in the world. The multiplicity of ways that the participants in this research read race will be explored in subsequent chapters. However, a general understanding about the way that I conceptualized reading race, based on the confluence of critical social theories and research into race as a lived experience of meaning making, relative to place/space are explored in this chapter, but first I want to dispel a myth about race as an illusion.

Race is Real

How can what is lived and embodied be called an illusion? How can anyone ever say that the image that they see in the mirror everyday doesn't really matter to them, or to the outside world, or that the corporeality of our skin, does not flag certain sentiments such as joy, fear, depression, hope, hatred, curiosity, or regret? How can anyone claim that race is not real when you can hear, see, and feel racialness dancing across your computer or television screen, or what about when you roll past racialized billboards, or listen to explicit racialized lyrics piped through the airwaves on the radio? How can anyone say that race is an illusion, when we can look around our mostly segregated White, Black, Mexican, or Asian neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools, and see race being lived out in day to day moment to moment interactions. We speak it, sing it, argue about it, and witness it through listening- race is real and it's being funneled through every pore of our being.

Although there have been scholarly attempts to theorize race away (Darder & Torres, 2009), based on this research , my own raced, classed, and gendered life, and the research that I review below, race and the accompanying meanings are alive, and they are constantly shifting, and morphing in a process of (re) racing (Omi & Winant, 1993). Anthony Appiah (1993) has argued that race is an illusory notion that is not useful. He asserted that racial ascriptions limit freedom and opportunities for communality, and the goal of achieving a humanistic ethical universe. And, while I completely agree with Appiah's contention that racial ascriptions can sometimes limit freedom and opportunities for collective efficacy, like King (see final chapter), I believe that *explicitly* reading race as we understand it, and then being highly reflective of our racialized readings of both ourselves and others is how anti-Black racism might be diminished.

In his discussion which I cite at length, Appiah (1985) argued that

> … For where race works – in places where "gross differences" of morphology are correlated with "subtle differences" of temperament, belief, and intention – it works as an attempt at a metonym for culture; and it does so only at the price of biologizing what is culture, or ideology. To call it "biologizing" is not cosign our concept of race to biology. What is present there is not our concept but our word only. Even the biologists who believe in human races use the term "race" as they say "without any social implication." What exists "out there" in the world – communities of meaning, shading variously into each other in rich structures of social world - is the province not of biology but of hermeneutic understanding. (p. 36)

I found it interesting that scientists use the word race and subsequently make the claim that it is "without any social implication," because using the word always has social implications. Getting lost in the semantics of race as a philosophical question can cause readers to miss Appiah's early premise that "race works." The fact that it works at all, and has meaning in any realm acknowledges that it is real. I understand his assertion that socio-historical and cultural frames are discursive categorizations that make up a significant portion of what many call race. I also agree with his contention and that of Stuart Hall (1997) that "race is more like a language than it is in the way in which we are biologically constituted" (Media Education Foundation, para. 7). Hall also described race as a floating signifier. He pointed out that race is a meaning making practice whereby subjects and objects gain understandings and develop meanings on the basis of shifting relations of difference that come into being through a process of interaction that results in redefinition and appropriation. As such, he argued that "race floats in sea of relations," and it is never fixed. Again I don't disagree, in fact I watched race float in the course of this study.

However, in this research what mattered most was the evidence of experience, philosophical conversations, and the multiple meanings and understandings assigned to race by my participants, and what *they* tethered to this thing that we still understand, and call race. I also want to point out that even if we were to consider race as merely a perceptual field or an illusory concept as Gilroy (1991) has suggested, we must at least recognize that "every perception takes place within a certain horizon, and ultimately in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.436). As Merleau Ponty argued, all consciousness is perceptual, even the consciousness of ourselves [as racial beings]. With the exegesis of consciousness serving as a foundation, reading race is therefore premised on a *reality* of race, and the variability of racial meaning within our individual consciousness.

With this understanding, race is recognized as part of our literacies (New London Group, 1996), *and* because we live in a "hyperracial" society (Alim & Reyes, 2011), we must also acknowledge that we all read race. For example, children as young as three years old, read race (Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), as such what is key, is not *whether* we read race, but how we read it (Alcoff, 2006; Monahan 2010). I focus on two critical sites of embodied racial meaning (schools and neighborhoods) that have shaped my belief that the racial caste system and particularly anti-Black racism will continue to self- perpetuate through silence and post-racial tropes, if we continue to submerge and silence our racial literacies. Schools are central sites for suppressing racial meanings which are a part of their hidden literacies that get overlooked (Ives, 2011).

Neutralizing Reading Race in School Spaces

Within schools, race is a taboo topic (Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2008), that is often under read even in all of its presentness. Consider for example how in non-structured school interactions, children and adolescents self segregate racially in the cafeteria (Tatum, 2003) the

playground (Lewis, 2003) or by gender and race (Thomas, 2005), in doing so, they are enacting

their racial literacies (Guiner & Torres, 2003; Johnson, 2009) in both conscious and unconscious

ways. As Ives (2011) noted, within schools, racialization is a hidden literacy that is often

silenced and suppressed. Similarly, Apple (1982) and Noguera (2009) have each argued that

what children learn about race in school is largely part of the hidden curriculum. If race is

explicitly read, it usually receives minimal coverage underneath the parachute of

multiculturalism (Banks, 2007), which has largely become a tourist curriculum (Hade, 1997). As

Hade contended, the tourist curriculum centers explorations and conversations about culture

which result in simplistic and often superficial aspects of culture that include costumes, food, and

art. It might also include a cursory introduction to a few "key" socially acceptable racial figures

in history which are neatly folded into the social studies or literature curricula (Kohl & Zipes,

1996).

In the debate between culture and race, Irving (2003) pointed to the need for teachers to

understand the "significance of race in shaping the cultural eye." Irving drew from Branch

(1988), who stated "Almost as color defines vision itself, race shapes the cultural eye-what we

do and do not notice, the reach of empathy and the alignment of response" (xi). This assertion

helps to clarify the either or debate about race or culture. It situates race and culture as mutually

influential forces that shape the way we see and experience the world; not merely through

cultural contexts but also racial. As such, both race and culture serve as determinants that

construct our literacies. It is certainly recognized that within any particular race there are various

sub-cultures. And further that a hyper racialized stance that seeks to completely diminish culture

or the individual is as problematic as colorblind perspectives that make race incidental. In

addition, stereotype threat is also an important factor that shouldn't be overlooked. All of these

aspects are discursive elements that can be addressed within a critically racially literate pedagogy framework. The point I want to emphasize is that even as culture is as vital an aspect of our literacies, it should not serve as a proxy for race because it is less contentious, (Nieto, 1999). Teachers have largely been schooled to avoid race and often fear addressing it (Copenhaver, 2000; Stallworth, Gibbons, & Fauber, 2008), or teachers may engage in inadvertent complicity about race. Teachers have also denied the salience of race (Lewis, 2003; Sleeter & Delgado, 2004). The neutralization of race in reading began when nonWhite students started to populate majority White schools. After integration, the primary goal as it had been with regard to the integration of every "Othered" individual or collective was to "school" Black and Brown students into the mores of middle class European American language and literacy practices. For example, in *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946/1947), Mexican students were integrated into California schools seven years prior to Brown, and yet it would take decades to incorporate their specific language and literacy needs into the curriculum. As such, their ways of reading, languaging, knowing, and being in and with the world were marginalized and often misunderstood within these educational spaces (Nieto, 1999).

Basically racial and cultural differences were diminished as constitutive factors in literacy teaching and learning. Lamos (2009) argued that this indifference was not an oversight and that colorblindness was one of the primary strategies conceived by state structures to deal with the heterogeneity of schools. He asserted that the state institutionalized this norm and that colorblind literacy practices were ushered in shortly after Brown. He argued that conservative critics used Brown as a way to levy claims of a literacy crisis in America. He stated:
A number of mainstream journalists, scholars, and politicians would insist repeatedly during this time that U.S. students' language and literacy abilities had precipitously declined as a function of

late-1960s and early-1970s educational experimentation in general and race based educational experimentation in particular. They would further insist that the only cure for such crisis was a swift and decisive abandonment of all such experimentation in favor of a return to the linguistic and literate "basics" (p. 125). Lamos emphasized that any form of literacy that took race into account was misconstrued as ineffective and useless. Racelessness was conceptualized by state institutions as a way to ignore the literacies of minorities and to force them into a "White" system. Literacy therefore became a primary tool for assimilating nonwhite individuals. Those who resisted or couldn't adapt to or adopt these literacy standards and understandings typically didn't succeed in the educational system.

Ladson Billings (1994), Delpit (1996, 2012), and Larson (2003) have all emphasized race as a part of culture and a significant aspect of our literacies. As Ladson Billings (2003) noted, literacy is a useful rubric for making sense of race (p.viii). However, as Copenhaver (2000) argued, the "social stigma" and the emotional tensions associated with reading race in school spaces often causes teachers to be apprehensive. Moeller and Allen (2000) and Lewison, Leland, Flint, & Moeller (2002) have all noted the discomfort that students and teachers often encounter when they read race. Lewison et. al argued that although many aspects were unsettling, crossing the threshold and "unearthing deep silences" helped to move students and teachers into new spaces that felt refreshing. Such explorations demonstrate the liberating aspects of literacy and how new lenses and perspectives can be developed. Based on this research, discovering ways to interrogate present structures of race and the "debris of history" are needed because they are relevant and continue to influence our everyday readings of race.

Constructions of race and the ways that it was woven into the public transcript, date back to the 17th and 18th century. Early architects of scientific racism such as Carl Linnaeus,

Christoph Meiners, and Francis Galton (Galton was the cousin of Charles Darwin) produced research, and wrote literature that helped to construct a taxonomy of race that degradated blackness and glorified whiteness. In 1869, Francis Galton penned his theory of eugenics in the book Hereditary Genius, and asserted that African people were "two grades below Anglo Saxons" (p. x), as Valencia and Suzuki (2001) argued this was part of the foundational ideological structure about deficit thinking and intelligence. For his part, Carl Linnaeus also theorized a "chain of being" that placed African origins at the lowest levels of the chain. These understandings were crafted on the basis of skin representing inner character, intelligence, and beauty. For example, Christoph Meiners argued that "Caucasians had the whitest, most blooming and most delicate skin and features" (Herminghouse, 1998, p. 28), their social constructions of race live on and were sadly spoken from the lips of children in the River Eves Claude Homes Corridor, hereafter referred to as the RECHC.

Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006), noted that misunderstanding and non exposure to the historicity of race, and alienation from the lived realities occurring within students' communities contributes to teachers' omissions and side stepping of critical racial literacy practice. Within this research, I provide a window into the social semiotics of race, and the intersecting dimensions of class, and gender in relationship to place. Understanding race as a dimension of new literacies (New London Group, 1996) is critical for making sense of the influences of racial meaning, and social location.

Race as a Dimension of New Literacies

Reading race directly counters both color-blind etiquette (Bonilla Silva, 2010) and the trend of post-racial thinking. To read race acknowledges that our bodies and the texts that are associated with them are also racialized. For example names (see names as racial spaces in

chapter 4), clothing, hairstyles, language, and place of residence maybe read as symbolic, stylistic, and material racialized texts. In addition to embodied abstract readings of race, reading race also includes concrete multimodal texts such as books, magazines, music, movies, and also space/ places. I ground this research using race itself as a text and a dimension of New Literacies (New London Group, 1996) which includes cultural, linguistic, and social practices that are contextual, symbolic, and connected to power relations (Galda & Beach, 2001; Gee, 1996; Ives, 2011; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Larson, 2006). As Compton-Lilly (2009) noted, race is an aspect of New Literacies because it is essentially linked to people's lives, identities, and social affiliations (p. 88). From this standpoint, race is not merely a biological category (with respect to visible racial markers), rather "race is a relationship" (Guiner, 2004; Tabili, 2003) between individuals, and material, embodied social and ideological structures, and these relationships shape our literacies.

Exploring Racialized Bodies and Racialness

Merleau-Ponty (1995) asserted that we access and respond to the world as embodied [racial and gendered] beings. He stated, that the body is both the "vehicle" (p.82) and "the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought" (p.92). We are therefore constantly "perceived and are perceiving" ourselves and each other (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström, 2006, p. 41) as not only raced, but also as gendered, classed, and sexual beings in relationship to geographic and physical spaces (Crenshaw, 1995; Frankenberg, 1993; Harris, 1993; Jones, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Thomas, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

Unfortunately, as Hughes (2011), Jones and Hughes-Decatur (2012) and Hook (2008) have each argued, embodied social locations can create tension, and resolving these tensions, often means attempting to reconcile ourselves, with the ideologies and images that are grafted

upon us in the world. One of the key questions within this research was how my participants made sense of the mark of the racial brush on their lives and in their community space. The "inequitable modes of sociality" associated with race making (conscious or not), are always already at work, even when there are claims of *not seeing* or being aware of the way that race is working through one's life.

For example, as Lewis (2004) has noted, it is not uncommon for White people to not notice their Whiteness. This in turn has equated to the dismissal of racial meaning and sometimes even the assertion that race is a game that is *always only* being played by Others, (i.e., it is *Others* who are playing the race card, never Whites). However, the racial meanings that we make function on the basis of absences and presences in our literacies (Prendergast, 1998), and being unaware of race or racial meaning (Lewis, 2004) does not remove one from serving as a racial actor. In fact, the unawareness of race or racial meaning is more often a form of White racial privilege.

As Gordon (1995) pointed out, "the White body is expected to be seen by others without seeing itself being seen" (p103). As Ahmed (2006) noted, in actuality some racialized bodies are (dis) oriented and made to feel and be aware of themselves as racialized beings more than others. Phenotypically, materially, symbolically, or otherwise, the racialness and extra value for whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006) is a presence attempting to make itself an absence. The attempt to diminish the presence of race by making it an absence, masks White privilege.

As Alim and Reyes (2011) argued, "colorblindness (race as not seen) and postraciality (race is not relevant)" work in concert to uncomplicate the complex logic of race and racial meanings (p. 379). Playing on the absence of race simplifies racial meaning and maintains the status quo. Goldberg (2001), asserted that "race is the social or cultural significance assigned

to or assumed in physical or biological markers of human beings, including the presumed physical or physiognomic markers of cultural attributes, habits, or behavior" (p. 118). The social and phenotypic factors noted by Goldberg point to the textuality of the body and the significance of physical characteristics related to race, as well as the aesthetics of the "skin that we speak." He maintained that these characteristics are an integral part of the ways in which race is ascribed or assumed. Research into race as a lived experience and specifically research that forwards understandings into the linked dimensions of blackness including those noted by Goldberg, are needed in order to extend understanding about the varied ways that race, as a facet of our literacies, is absorbed and lived out in various spaces.

As Knowles (2005) asserted, 'The corporeality of the racialized body has remained something of an enigma. . .[and] comparatively little work has been done on either the embodied nature of racial discourse or on the embodied subjectivity of racialized individuals or groups' (p. 12). This assertion is a specific call to research racial meaning and the discursive processes of racialized embodiment within spaces. Looking into the ways that our racialness has meaning, and gaining an understanding of how those meanings shape our literacies within and outside of community spaces should be explored.

Knowles also (2003) argued that inadequate attention has been paid to the body as sensory and emotional entity encapsulating individual experiences and that the body as physical and material vehicle is an important focus of subjectivity, a means through which racialized individuals make sense of their being in the world (p. 141).Knowles pointed out that, our embodied racialized experiences within spaces are therefore tied to emotional experiences and relational connections and disconnections within various spaces and places. These emotional subjectivities are also reflected in our geographical landscapes which are racialized and classed

(see chapter 4). Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory includes three primary elements that were useful in my analysis.

These include spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space. Spatial practice includes everyday interactions in social spaces, representations of space are physical manifestations of space developed by architects and urban planners and they are connected to socio-historic power relations in society (p. 116). Representational space refers to bodily experiences and temporal elements in space; it includes subjective and intersubjective ideologies and perceptions about spaces. Within the cabana I observed and listened to the discursive forms of racialized embodied and spatialized practices of the mothers and children, and I noted the absent presence of race and the intersecting dimensions of class, and gender in relationship to space/place. Max van Manen's (1999) existential perspective of space and embodiment which considers lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation to each other also influenced my readings of race.

Intersectionality and Place

Throughout this research, I refer to space and place interchangeably noting the abstract and ubiquitous nature of the literacy space and Moje's (2004) assertion that "places are also spaces" (p.20). In some instances I refer to place similar to cultural geographers such as Lipsitz (2011) who describe place in terms of physical and social relations. In recognizing that both race and space (Soja, 2010) are active archives (Knowles, 2003) that are constantly (re)shaping each other, the references to place in this research also include spatial legacies (areas where Blacks traditionally reside in Clinton), as well as hierarchical readings of race that are connected to class and gender power structures. In analyzing my participants' readings of race, a critical spatial

lens helped to capture the interrelated embodied, material, and symbolic lived aspects that are connected to literacy and everyday meaning-making.

In the literature that informed my understanding and analysis of race, I crossed theoretical boundaries and lines of discipline in critical race theory, critical literacy education, phenomenological philosophies, sociology, and geography because traversing these boundaries and lines was necessary to trace racial lines and meanings. As critical race theorists (Crenshaw, 1991; Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995) suggested, I looked into the ways that gender and social class mattered in relationship to racial meanings and also how place was a significant factor. In describing intersectionality, Crenshaw (2004) explained "if you're standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion,[i.e. race, gender , class] you are likely to get hit by all of them" (Perspectives, n.p). In exploring these intersecting relationships (intentionalities, see chapter 3), I also explored place as a phenomenon (Relph, 1976) and as a force that appeared to shape racialized ways of knowing and being (Goldberg, 2002; Lipsitz, 2007; 2011). These relationships subsequently influence our literacies (Schaafsma, 1997; Kinloch, 2009; Moje, 2004). As such, race and space/place are regarded as contiguous interrelated phenomenon (Goldberg, 2001; Lewis, 2003; Moje, 2004) that also intersect with class and gender (Crenshaw, 1993; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In this research, the mothers and children and I only read in the cabana, in other words we stayed in one place, however as described previously, race is a mutating text that constantly shifted, across spaces/places/ and time and it was ever present. As you read this research you will likely experience this shifting and mutating because as we moved from reading books, to talking about bodies within spaces and places, aspects of the past and present, and hair, and rappers, and action figures, lived experiences of class, gender intersected and were mired in

complexity. Race was always in motion, being and becoming and taking on new meanings, through different subjects and objects situated in or on spaces/places, and at times it seemed as if it wasn't there, but always was an absent presence. This absent presence is not visible but it is still actively influencing interactions, discourses, etc. I address this manifestation of reading race in chapter 3, and throughout the research text. If you read race in the natural unreflective attitude, you might miss some of these absences/presences in the everydayness of the ways that race exists, because it isn't just our racialized bodies, it includes our bodies and everything in between and around them that constitutes racialness. As Greene (1995) explained

> When we "do" human sciences-phenomenology of childhood, hermeneutics, semiotics, literary criticism-we have to relate ourselves somehow to a social world that is polluted by something invisible and odorless, overhung by a sort of motionless cloud of giveness, of what is considered "natural" by those caught in the taken-for-granted, in the everydayness of things. (p.47)

In relating myself to the social world of my participants, it was important for me to be embedded within a space in the community in order to absorb some of the "giveness" of the "everydayness" within the space, because as a student at the nearby university, I was on the otherside of blackness in Clinton, therefore reading race with the mothers and children in their neighborhood allowed me to at least geographically, to be "close to the experience as lived" (van Manen, 1990, p.67). The cabana, was a repurposed space that used to serve as a clubhouse for the neighborhood pool which was now abandoned and considered beyond repair.

The cabana also served as a community meeting space for an after school tutoring program during the school year, and a federally subsidized lunch program in the summer which was managed by Natasha and Janesse. Occasionally the Clinton Housing Authority sponsored

computer training classes which were also held there. Within this Black and Brown community space, I observed the ways that Mexican and Black mothers and some of the teenage youths who occasionally came to the cabana, self segregated. The ways they negotiated the space caused me to read more about mixed raced Black and Brown community spaces.

<div align="center">**Black and Brown Community Spaces**</div>

In her study into the intersection of race and literacies within a communal context, Moje (2004) researched young adolescent Latino/youths' perceptions of their social, ethnic, and racial identity in relation to geographic spaces in their community, and along the "edges" of segregated European American, African American, and Arab-American communities. This longitudinal ethnographic study, included examinations of Latino youths' enactment of literacy processes in relation to national, city, community, neighborhood, home, suburban, and virtual spaces. Moje discovered that space and identity were critical contexts for the racio-ethnic identity and meaning making of the Latino youths. Moreover, she found that the youths in her study utilized physical and virtual spaces as sites for (re)imagining, (re)composing, and (re)affirming their Latino/a identity. Although there are no Latino/a voices in this study, they were present and their presence mattered relative to my own readings as well as the racialized readings of the Black mothers and children.

In the cabana, as I observed the ways that Blacks and Mexicans were situated in unspoken yet still defined/confined racial spaces (see chapter 4), I was reminded of Moje's findings. Whether self-imposed or inadvertent, there were distinct racial boundaries that situated Mexican youths and their families within or outside of particular discourse, ideological, and physical spaces. In fact, the relational and linguistic gaps that existed in the cabana did not allow

me to include the voices of Mexican mothers and their children in this research. The linguistic gap created a relational distance that was simply too difficult to bridge. There were likely other tensions.

Nicholas Vaca (2004), shined a light on the "black-brown racial divide," in his book, *The Presumed Alliance: The Unspoken Conflict Between Latinos and Blacks and What It Means for America*. Vaca argued that living side by side has created a conflict for Black and Mexican or Latino/a families. He noted that although they have similar structural and ideological obstacles to surmount they also have unique histories and tensions that complicate the struggle for limited resources such as affordable housing and jobs.

In (2001) researchers for the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) went into a Durham, North Carolina community to learn more about Black and Hispanic residents' perspectives about their newly shared mixed racial neighborhood. They cited tensions from all groups, particularly Black and Latino/residents who were sharing what had traditionally been an all Black area. The SOHP study revealed that the tension between Black and Latino/residents included competition for jobs, anti-immigration bias, and sentiments by Black residents that the neighborhood's racial purity had been lost (p. 27). The notion of maintaining racial purity in community and school spaces was also explored in the richly narrated text *There Goes My Everything* (Sokol, 2007).

In this book, Sokol interviewed White Southerners who described what it was like for them to experience newly integrated spaces as the Civil Rights and Brown versus the Board of Education policies were being enacted. Sokol's research highlighted the racial and class conflicts associated with racially mixed spaces and racist fears about miscegenation and interracial mixing. He also revealed the complex social-psychological and emotional

phenomenon of what living within "racially pure spaces" often means. Similar attitudes were noted in the SOHP study amongst Blacks, as Mexican immigrants moved into their communities. For example, one Black resident in the study argued:

> I remember Northeast Central Durham | at a time when I was a school boy, hanging out
>
> on Juniper Street and everybody over there was African American. I knew everybody
>
> over there. And Juniper Square, places that I would go and play. Well, when I started
>
> seeing the Hispanics moving in I felt that they were invading on my
>
> turf, on my playground. It was no longer our place.

The respondents' sentiment revealed the ways that race shifts, and how it can settle and unsettle neighborhood spaces. I wondered how much if any of these tensions created the racialized spatialization that existed in the community space. In his article, "Blacks vs. Browns," Jack Miles (1992) argued that "America's older Black poor and newer Brown poor are on a collision course." In the RECHC, as classmates and neighborhood friends, Black and Mexican elementary school aged children fell into and out of conversation and play easily. However, there were distinctly marked racial spaces in River Eves written on the bricks (Mexican gang symbols) and an unmarked but recognized physical divide in the cabana that existed between the Black and Mexican mothers. The spatialization of race was one of the tentative manifestations (Vagle, 2010; 2011) of the phenomenon of reading race. As I note in chapter 4, I do not believe that segregated racial spaces are inherently bad, in fact as Dillard argued (personal conversation, September 2012), significant attention should be given to the counter-hegemonic discourses and possibilities for growth, self-reflection, and healing that can occur in segregated Black school and community spaces.

Everyday Living and Reading Race in Black Community Spaces

Decades ago, Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines (1988) asserted that the "interrelationships" between the home and school, should be synergistic so as to support and enhance the literacies students are developing. Race is a "critical and connectional literacy" (Allen et al., 2012) and research into the holistic ways that racial meaning between home and schools influences literacies are needed. One of the earliest studies that continue to inform literacy pedagogy is Shirley Brice Heath's groundbreaking community based research captured in the book *Ways with Words* (1983/1996), and in *Lives in Work and Play: Three Decades of Ways with Words in Families and Communities* (2011). Using Hymes' "ethnography of communication," which connects language, community, and identity, Heath emphasized that these factors are "braided into our literacies." However as Prendergast (1998), argued in her challenge against colorblindness in composition studies, in Heath's research, race was largely treated as an absent presence. Prendergast argued,

> I have come to think of this extra effort I have to go through to locate race in the first part of *Ways With Words* as emblematic of my experience reading much of the scholarship in composition studies where race seems to function as an absent presence. (p. 36)

As Prendergast argued, in such instances, race is present, however the way that it is functioning and has meaning is hidden. Allen's work (2007; 2010) emphasizes the importance of connecting the literacies between home, communities, and schools. Building on this research and the work of others such as Brooks, 2006; Compton Lilly, 2009; Dyson, 1997; and Moje, 2004 requires gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity factors such as race, gender, and poverty, in relationship to place.

Below, I include a partial review of the literature of empirical studies that explore various aspects of Blacks being raced (ontology) within community spaces. I include research within sociology and education, as well as studies in critical language and literacy research. This is not meant to be a comprehensive review of literature into reading race. The studies that I include help to contextualize some of the tentative manifestations (Vagle, 2010; 2011) of my participants' readings of race (see Appendix A). The studies that I highlight explore race (Blackness) as a lived experience within community spaces across place and time. They include the lived experiences of adults and youth within both urban and rural contexts. In exploring various studies of Black life, I foregrounded studies that gave prominence to the voice of the people, as I considered Kelly's (1997) assertion that far too many researchers "do not let the natives speak" (p.16). In my brief review of the literature, with the exception of Fanon's account, none of the research that I highlighted used post-intentional phenomenology.

In *Black Skin White Masks* (1952/2008), Franz Fanon revealed the existential fabric of what it was like to live as raced. His narration included a "historio-racial schema" inclusive of somatic knowledge (knowledge of the body), and the accompanying emotive elements, as well as the political, place, and language related contexts of the Black Antillean racialized experience. He characterized race in it's being, and how the lived moments of being raced were experienced in place and time. A large majority of the studies that explore race as a lived experience are ethnographies, and this inherently points to the need for methodological explorations into race using a lens that "goes to the thing itself" (Husserl, 1913/1982) to disrupt and interrogate the everydayness of race as lived.

With this in mind, in many ways my inquiry into reading race as a phenomenon was as much about understanding what it was like to read race in the RECHC, as it was about exploring

how post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2010; 2011) might open up spaces for critical

language and literacy educators and researchers to understand and develop new lines of inquiry

to challenge racial inequality within a post racial color-blind zeitgeist. Unlike traditional

phenomenology (Husserl, 1913) which emphasizes epistemology over ontology, bracketing

one's pre-understandings, and locating the essence of a phenomenon, post-intentional

phenomenology locates tentative manifestations of a phenomenon. These are multiple elements

of meaning that come into being in relationship to the phenomenon throughout the context of the

research.

Looking into the lived experience of race, as well as the intersecting dimensions of place,

class, and gender (Harris, 1993) and how these particular social locations intersect with the

literacies of the mothers and children in the RECHC are key elements of this research. Although

I do not partake in a long view of racial explorations, I note a few of the earliest explorations of

living as raced, because as I noted earlier, reading race is always a historical process. The early

accounts also paved the way for subsequent explorations into race as a lived experience

phenomenon.

Theoretical knowledge derived from studies of Black community life within urban and

rural geographical contexts were useful in addressing my research questions and informing my

analysis. I provide a brief tracing of the studies that were tangential to this research. As I noted

previously, reader response studies of racialized texts within and in out of school contexts have

also shaped my overall inquiry and research questions, and they appear within subsequent

chapters as they relate to the mothers' and children's responses to reading children's literature

and other racialized texts.

Early writings and research about the everyday experiences of Black life and some of

varied meanings about race derived from racialized lived experiences; date back to individual

slave narratives such as the autobiographical account of Olaudah Equiano (1789/2003), Fredrick

Douglass (1845/2008) or the prose and poetic accounts of Phillis Wheatley (1773/2001). These

were some of the first books I read that explored the Black experience. Such accounts about

racialized lives were sparse because of the enslavement of Black people which denied them

access and opportunities to read and write, however these early writings allow us to see how race

was experienced, what it meant, and how the racial structure differs or remains the same.

In 1884, Nathaniel Shaler a White Harvard educated scientist was the first to write about

the "Negro" as a "problem." The article appeared in the Atlantic Monthly magazine, and the

writings were in response to the newly free Negro in America. As Muhammad (2010) described,

"in a moment equivalent to a historical blink of the eye, four million people were transformed

from property to human beings to would-be citizens of the nation" (p. 16). The perception and

reading of the Negro as a problem, how to make sense of the Negro and determining his/her

place in society continues to have resonance and was a site of struggle in this research (see

chapter 4).

In 1899, Dubois published the *Philadelphia Negro*, which provided an expansive look

into the experiences of Black life in the North. Although the voices of the people were not

present, Dubois' extensive sociological exploration provided a significant window into the "rise

of the freedman." He chronicled the education, literacy, family, religious life, occupations,

residential patterns, and crime in this urban context. He followed up that research into Black life,

with a journey into the rural south, in his seminal work The *Souls of Black Folks* (1903/1994). In

Souls, Dubois explored race and place through a narration of his own "travel stories" which

included working in the rural south. Dubois' rich literary account provided an emotional and philosophical perspective on living as Black.

These early accounts and lived experiences of racialization in spaces and places across time problematized racist structures. They helped to inform, unsettle, and call attention to the *everydayness* of the racial caste system. Post-racial colorblind tropes silence and mask the ways racial structures are reified. Exploring race in Black community spaces extracts the voices that post-racial rhetoric aims to silence, and it opens the dialogue about forms of racial logic that shape beliefs and practices. Below I cite a few studies that draw attention to identity and the socio-psychological aspects of racial meaning.

The ghetto is synonymous with blackness, poverty, and neglect. It is characterized by particular behavior, language, and style of dress. In *Dark Ghetto* (1965/1989) Kenneth Clarke, who is widely known for his infamous doll test, which paved the pathway for school integration in the *Brown versus Board of Education Topeka Kansas* (1954) ruling, allowed his emotions and those of his participants to "cry out." Clarke's ethnographic study illuminated the voices and experiences of Black people living within an urban ghetto. Clarke was committed to letting his participants' truths take precedent over any "hard factual" data, and he spoke directly to the people *within* their community in order to "draw forth deep feelings and ambivalences" (xix).

Following Daniel Patrick Moynihan's research (1965), entitled The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, (soon changed to the Moynihan Report), Joyce Lander published her four year longitudinal research into the lived experiences, and perceptions of Black adolescent girls who lived in the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri. In her book *Tomorrow's Tomorrow* (1995), Ladner chronicled the lives of hundreds of "average" young Black females who lived in the public housing community. The girls discussed race, policing,

poverty, males, and future hopes in relationship to the realities of living in the ghetto. Ladner found that despite some of the negative realities and less than stellar race relations that existed at that time (the study was conducted in the 1970's), the young girls had positive beliefs about their blackness and their identity as young women. Ladner argued that the young women did not use White societal frames of reference to make sense of who they were. In her analysis, of the girls' beliefs Ladner (1995) stated, "I have endeavored to analyze their present lives as they emerge out of these historical forces, for they have been involved in a strong reciprocal relationship in that they have been shaped by the forces of oppression but have also exerted their influence so as to alter certain of these patterns" (p. 270). Ladner's research provided one of the earliest counter-narratives to the ethnocentric perspective in the Moynihan Report, which largely pathologized and simplified the complexities of Black families and particularly Black women. Ladner also argued that many of the negative elements within the housing project were a product of American social policy rather than inherent Black qualities.

Her study highlighted the importance of having a strong and positive Black identity to combat anti-Black, as well as gender and class discrimination. Explorations into Black lives within low income community spaces is necessary to better understand the literacies of racial socialization and how the structure of race is absorbed in various societal contexts and racial eras. Decades after Ladner's research, John Langston Gwaltney, an anthropologist, chronicled the oral histories of individuals that he considered ordinary or "core black people." In *Drylongso* (1980), which translates to mean "ordinary," Gwaltney centered the voices of the people, by allowing his participants to define the Black experience. They shared "what it was like" for them to live as marginally raced people and how they "made a way out of no way" while maintaining

dignity and pride. Gwaltney's research included the "day-to-day" experiences of Black life in

both urban and rural contexts, and he included the voices of men and women across generations.

His research ushered in the racialized, gendered, and generational aspects of the Black

experience. Salient themes included harassment by the police (a reality that was still prevalent

for the participants in this study), beliefs about the placement of Blacks in particular geographic

places, limited opportunities for economic advancement, and the significant value of family.

Gwaltney included over forty different voices and he considered them all co-authors of the book.

These voices whispered in my ear at times throughout the course of this research. For example,

respondent Gilbert Lanarck's assertion that "You can't just take anything this man hands out,

because he has a hundred different kinds of chains," (p. xii) was particular salient as I

considered the ways that the boys coveted certain material possessions and embraced

commodified images and ideologies in popular hip hop culture. As I note in subsequent

chapters, these images appeared to limit and "chain" the Black youths' perceptions of themselves

and their ideas about their future.

Anderson's research in urban and rural cites (2002) also captured the voices of Blacks

across generations and different class groups. He analyzed how they negotiated the "codes of the

street." Participants in Anderson's research shared stories about how they "survived" and made

sense of racialized symbolic codes along a continuum that spanned "acting white" and "thug

life." In the focus group sessions mothers shared their beliefs about the need for Black children

to have thick skin and be tougher than White children. Although class was mentioned as a

qualifier, issues of neighborhood violence, negative police relations, and unfavorable perceptions

and expectations about inevitable societal realities for Black children were cited by the mothers.

These particular threads generated from our focus group sessions and the boys' stories of being constantly followed by the police led me to Brunson's (2007) in depth research which included the accounts of 40 Black males who shared personal experiences with aggressive police oversight in their neighborhoods. As the boys shared their encounters, I thought about the ways that reading and writing and new literacies might be employed as methods for enriching positive Black consciousness, agency, and communality in the face of the oppression they endured. For example, Mahari (2005) chronicled the "street scripts" of five Black youths and used a New Literacies perspective. He defined street scripts as texts that encompassed the lived experiences of the Black urban youths. He used writing as a method for helping the youth to create new spaces to (re)write possibilities to counter the realities of living in a violent community in which they were being targeted for the penal system. The youth revealed that they were aware of the fine line that they traversed as they negotiated becoming a victim of the justice system, or the evils of community violence. Writing served as a tool and allowed the youths to develop an agentive response to their environment. Literacy explorations provide multiple possibilities for deep relational understanding, conscious raising efforts, and insight into dispositions surrounding racial meaning (Friere & Macedo, 1987; hooks, 2003; Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). They can also inform new perspectives for implementing content area and critical literacy practices (Jones, Clarke & Enriquez, 2009).

In this post-intentional phenomenological exploration into reading race, I explore the embodied ways that racial meaning were absorbed in the lifeworld of the mothers and children in the RECHC. In phenomenology, the lifeworld encompasses "the world of objects around us as we perceive them and our experience of our self, body and relationships" (Findlay, 2008). It includes "that which appears meaningfully to consciousness in its qualitative, flowing given-

ness; not an objective world 'out there', but a humanly relational world" (Todres et al, 2006, in Findlay). Although race is the primary focus in this research, class and gender are mutually constructing dimensions, and there are many times when class or gender are more salient issues.

Within a post-racial context, racial meaning is being shaped as a neutral unmarked heuristic, and as Lewis (2003) asserted, locating racial meaning is a nebulous but essential task. She argued that race is mapped onto each of us, through various social processes, and that it shapes "who we are, what we do, how we interact…where we live, whom we interact with, and how we understand ourselves and others" (p.7). As Mills (1998) succinctly offered, "race exists, and it moves people" (p. xiv). I wondered how it was mapped onto the children within the RECHC and in what ways it shaped who they perceived themselves and others, and was constructing their literacies within a particular place in time. Through explicitly reading race, I strove to gather the linked dimensions of blackness and racial meaning to understand the ways that race *moved* the mothers and children, and me, in abstract, concrete, and physical ways. Post-intentional phenomenology was a critical methodological tool for researching the everyday racialized lives and literacies within the RECHC, and in the next chapter I explain the philosophical and methodological commitments that I used to gather and analyze the various readings of race in this community space.

CHAPTER 3

POST-INTENTIONAL PHENOMENOLOGY AS A METHODOLOGY

FOR READING RACE

In this chapter I highlight post intentional phenomenology, and the ways in which I employed this methodology to read race in the River Eves Claude Homes Corridor. Post-Intentional phenomenologists enter into the research process with an assumption and understanding of the twisted, tangled and highly contextual nature of researching lived experience. In fact, Vagle (2010) described post-intentional phenomenological research as a methodology that is in pursuit of the "multiple, partial, and endlessly deferred" (p. 36) ways in which phenomena are lived. It is a methodological orientation that responds to the shifting inchoate nature of living and being-in-the-world. Rather than foregrounding theory, in post-intentional phenomenology, fidelity is given to the phenomenon and what participants dictate (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

As such, post-intentional phenomenology expands the limits of classical phenomenology (Heidegger, 1962/2002; Husserl, 1981/2002) in that there is an active theorizing that occurs within the research. It is a methodology that is responsive to what is given; therefore, I gathered data on the basis of racial meaning as it came into being both for me and my participants. In post-intentional phenomenology the methods for data collection and also the theories that inform the research findings of lifeworld research are varied. Post-intentional methodologists locate and then "grasp" (van Manen, 1990) tentative manifestations or particular aspects of a phenomenon (Vagle, 2010). Tentative manifestations are not fixed essences; instead, they are circulating

meanings that are constantly shifting, intersecting, and being reformed. As elements of a phenomenon are given either through stories, written prose, interviews, imagery, or observation; the researcher records, bridles, and analyzes them. There is a constant navigation between the various parts of the research text, and it is fused together through the process of post-bridling (personal communication), a methodological commitment that I explain later in the chapter.

Overall, phenomenological studies that address the lived experience of race remain scant. Insofar as education is concerned, the studies that examine the influence of being raced and racial understanding, using post-intentional phenomenology as a methodology is even more miniscule (for exceptions see Benson, 2012; Hughes, 2011; Pate, 2012). While critical socio-cultural theories guided my analysis and the formation of my inquiry into reading race in the RECHC, I put the philosophical and methodological commitments within post-intentional phenomenology (Vagle, 2010) and hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1990) in-dialogue with one another. Drawing from CRT's notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1995), and Merleau Ponty's (1987) assertion that being encompasses body and language (p.19); in considering the racialized lifeworld and interactions of my participants, I used narratives as a method for ushering in the voices, "inner landscapes" and the "visions of experience" (Edmundson, 2004) of my participants. I therefore included the racialized classed and gendered meanings related to their lived experience.

Post-Intentional Phenomenology and Critical Oriented Thinking

Stepping back a bit in order to trace the earlier origins of phenomenology (from which Vagle's post-intentional is both based and departs), it is often said that phenomenology is the research into lived experience and meaning that encompasses ways of knowing (Husserl, 2002) and being (Heidegger, 2002). It includes those aspects of the lifeworld that become normalized,

or "just the way it is." The primary objective of phenomenological research is to allow "that which shows itself" (p. 288) to be seen. As Heidegger asserted, it is that which reveals "itself as being and as a structure of being" (Heidegger, p. 288). However, in developing a phenomenology of knowing and being, phenomenological researchers have not sufficiently addressed the phenomenon of racial knowing and being within hegemonic power structures. For example, even as Merleau Ponty emphasized the bodily presences, and notions of the flesh, he failed to "phenomenologically" address being relative to the skin memories (Ahmed & Posser, 2004) tethered to being raced and/or gendered. This is the objective of critical oriented researchers such as me. Similar to Hughes (2011), I believe that critical race research theories in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and critical literacy education (Apol et al., 2002; Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Lazar & Offenberg, 2011) need to form a dialectical relationship with phenomenology because this methodology emphasizes locating "an awareness that is unaware of itself" (Dahlberg et al., 2008), and a look into the everydayness of race. It is particularly useful to disrupt the comfortable and well-meaning etiquette that maintains color-neutral ways-of-seeing and being-in-the world as it exist presently.

Within schools, White middle class bodies and their ways of knowing and being, remain the horizon from which all other bodies and ways of knowing are measured. As Fanon (2008) asserted in relation to Blackness, "not only must the man [or woman] be [B]lack; he must be Black in relation to the [W]hite man or [White woman]" (p. 90). The social transactions and cumulative effects of living-in a racialized society are a significant part of our literacies (New London Group, 1996). They shape and structure our embodied ways of knowing and being, much of which is inherited (Yancy, 2009). That is to say, that our racialness and our understanding of it precede us. It is in one sense how we become Black /White/Other. Critical

race theorist, Zeus Leonardo (2009), asserted that racial consciousness and "racialness is something into which children grow" (p. 139). In other words, being Black or White is not just *being*. For example, in sharing their lived experiences of what it was like to read race, Jamerion, Caleb, and Da'veon (participants in my study) revealed that the deeds of their young Black male bodies were irrelevant to police who cased the RECHC. They could simply be hanging out in the neighborhood, but they were perceived and treated as suspects and "tokens of danger" (Brunson, 2007; Yancy, 2008), by the Clinton police. In addition, two of the youngest participants in this research, Katrina and Tray both perceived blackness or *being Black* as undesirable and flawed. The vignettes that I share in subsequent chapters reveal that Blackness was not an unmarked heuristic, it was a loaded reality.

Illuminating Racial Readings

Despite the racial fluidity that exists in society more recently, my participants and perhaps you dear readers reside in a segregated (hyper-racial) space. The spaces and places that we call home and the landscape of what we consider our community fundamentally shape what it is like to read, to know, to live, and to understand race. Further, the discourses that circulate about the ubiquitous gaps in education rarely interrogate the socio-psychological gaps, cleavages, and differences that exist perceptively on the basis of our embodied racialized understandings and epistemologies. Perhaps more research that looks deeply into the spaces that graft, signify, and shape the complexities and raciality of our literacies is necessary. Throughout this research, many of the a priori racialized unconscious positive or negative values of my participants surfaced as I introduced certain texts, and they were also embedded within casual discourses. Throughout, my participants disclosed the absent presence of racial being and

meaning including places and spaces that were part of their literacies that have been folded into their daily living. I address the absent presence of race bit below.

Critical race scholars have argued that "race matters from womb to tomb" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 139) and that Black and Brown faces will remain the "faces at the bottom of the well" right below poor Whites (Bell, 1993, p.181). They have asserted that aspects of racial meaning are constantly "invented, lived, analyzed, modified, and disgarded" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 8). Zeus Leonardo added further that moving through life using the lens of colorblindness is an act of deviance that is unnatural. He argued that we inherently read race and therefore we must interrogate the ways in which we do so. Explicitly reading race can cause us to experience racial fatigue, and it can also elucidate aspects of racial beingness that we would rather not see. Perhaps it reflects back or reveals something within us that is judgmental, or it illuminates unearned racialized, gendered, and/or classed privileges. It may even reiterate something that we inherently already know because of our own lived experience, and thus it deepens our understanding. Like Leonardo, I am emphasizing the usefulness of reading race rather than the impulse to resist it, or to think that we already know what there is to know about it as a lived experience.

As a racial insider, and critically oriented educator and researcher, one of the primary reasons that I embraced phenomenology and post-intentional phenomenology in particular, was because it challenged me to resist methodological solipsism (Agassi, 1969) and the tendency to always already know what it meant to read race. This methodological orientation both deepened and expanded my own ideas of what it means to read race. I suggest that this methodological lens may also be useful for other researchers who have social justice oriented objectives aimed

towards revealing and ending the violence of silence related to race, class, and gender

inequalities, and that it can also challenge the researchers own beliefs and perceptions.

Critical Departures into Post-Structural Thinking

The *post* element within this realm of phenomenology is derived from St. Pierre's (1997)

concept of nomadic inquiry. Adopting a stance of nomadic inquiry embraces the mutable and

temporal nature of researching various phenomena. Rather than a fixed methodological

perspective, nomadic inquiry is variable and open to the shifts of living that occur within the

research process. Co-opting this element of post-structuralist thinking is important because it

allows phenomenology "to be in dialogue with" theoretical frameworks that were previously

thought to be incongruent with classic interpretations of phenomenology (Vagle, 2010a).

Another critical departure that opened up phenomenology was the move from bracketing to

bridling, which is a fundamental commitment that I address in the methods section of this

chapter. Intentionality (see *understanding intentionality*), bridling, and the nomadic inquiry

aspect of Post-Structural thinking allowed critical language and literacy researchers to enter into

the discursive fray of phenomenological research. Within nomadic inquiry the openness and

unwillingness to remain hinged to a charted path or "smooth spaces" of thought and inquiry

opened possibilities for dialogue with other theoretical ideologies.

One of the central commitments of critical pedagogy scholars Freire and Macedo (2000)

was to be open and responsiveness to the epistemologies of the people. It was the world or words

and the participants' ways of knowing and being-in-the world that served as the foundation for

pedagogy. In my own research I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of

reading race so that as I enacted critical literacy practices, I might better understand how to

address the racialized connections and disconnections of readers. As van Manen (2000) argued, "a phenomenology of practice aims to open up possibilities for creating formative relations between being and acting, between who we are and how we act, between thoughtfulness and tact" (p. 13). Because race is an absent presence, in order for critical racial literacy pedagogy to be beneficial, or for racial understanding to occur, I argue that gaining a deeper understanding of racial meaning and being, can enrich possibilities for enacting care and tact in racial literacy pedagogy. I would therefore like to share the findings from my research data with teachers and other literacy researchers as a way informing their critical racial literacy inquiry and pedagogical practices.

Absent Presence of Race

Heidegger (2002) noted that "a science of phenomena means to grasp its objects *in such a way* that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly" (p. 284). He added further that a phenomenon can be undiscovered, buried over, or partially revealed), and that phenomenology offers possibilities for exposing them (p.285). In this way phenomenology recognizes ways of knowing and being that are existential and not always seen. It is heard, felt, experienced completely in a corporeal sense, and therefore real and present. It encompasses what Merleau Ponty (1968) noted is beyond the "visible is" towards the "every is," he described, " total visible is always behind, or after, or between the aspects we see of it, there is access to it only through an experience which, like it, is wholly outside of itself (p. 136). In order to extract that which is present but absent, it is necessary to shift from a natural attitude to one that his phenomenological.

A natural attitude is a way of unreflectively moving through the world. Take for example, space and the way that we often navigate space as if it isn't anything at all, as if it is neutral and

unmarked. As Foucault (1986) asserted "we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things…we live inside a set of relations… (p.23). If we adapt a more phenomenological attitude about space, we then recognize that the geography of our lifeworld (Seamon, 2000) is racialized (Lewis, 2003; Neely & Samura, 2011), classed (Jones, 2006; Jones & Vagle, 2012), gendered (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Frankenberg, 1993), queered (Ahmed, 2006), and heterosexualized (Thomas, 2004). The racialness of a space may include "bodily dialogue" (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2006, p.270) gestures, language use, implicitly understood but unspoken ways of disciplining the body relative to the people in and purpose of a space. Have you ever noticed that sometimes there are no distinct words or gestures, and that often spaces are racialized simply because of the presence or absence of particular bodies?

Visual perception alone however doesn't signify racial, gendered, or classed meanings, and I embraced this methodology and philosophical lens, because these social locations and the ways in which we read them are not always tangible or visible. Like space, race is an absent presence, and it is a significant, and dysconscious facet of our literacies (Prendergast, 1998). Racialized literacies are embedded within structures and are part of socialization processes that become normalized (and part of our natural attitude). Dysconscious un-reflective forms of (re)racing (the ways in which we redraw the color line in daily living) constantly occur when we are within our natural attitude. (Re) racing occurs in segregated all-Black/all-White racial spaces, as well as in serialized racial spaces (see chapter 4), and it is always occurring. Racial formation theorists recognize that race is always already becoming, and morphing into new horizons of meaning (Omi & Winant, 1994), and within my research, the central task was to capture the units (Giorgi, 1997) or what I refer to as racialized fragments of meaning

Understanding Intentionality

In using a post-intentional phenomenology to locate what it was like for my participants to read race, I discovered that the racialized readings of mothers and children who lived in the RECHC were tethered to their embodied experiences of living within particular places over space and time. Their readings of and about race were tied to conscious and unconscious meanings also referred to as intentionalities. Intentionalities are the central ideological construct in post-intentional phenomenology. Etymologically, intentionality might easily be confused with the word "intention" which refers to purpose. However, in phenomenology, intentionality does not translate to mean having an intention or motivation to do something, instead, intentionality is about that which is connected to our lived experience, and they are "brought into being by embodied subjects" (Vagle, 2011, p. 22). Intentionalities are thus "intrinsically relational" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238). Intentionalities are the circulation of meanings, they are the in-between spaces that fuse together meanings and understandings and how things come to *be* one thing or another, and as Vagle noted, it is through embodied subjects that intentionalities come into being.

Drawing from Husserl (2002), Giorgi (1997) described intentionality as a matrix comprised of the "embodied self-world-other" (p. 238). He offered further that our intentionality with/to an object always transcends the object as it appears. Therefore to intend racially is to relate meaning structures within our consciousness onto ideas about race. As Merleau-Ponty (1995) argued, "The body is the vehicle of being in the world" (p.82), and it is "the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever present and anterior to every determining thought" (p.92). As such, our literacies are indeed embodied. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, van Manen (2000) added that "such pathic knowledge does not only inhere in the body but also in the

things of our world, in the situation(s) in which we find ourselves, and in the very relations that we maintain with others and the things around us (p. 13). Within the segregated racial space in the RECHC my interests centered on locating this "pathic knowledge" related to these meanings, and the racialness of these relations.

Post-Intentional Phenomenology as a New Methodological Orientation

Methodologically, post-intentional phenomenology is largely unfamiliar within the field of qualitative research. In fact, as has been said of narrative research (Montero & Washington, 2011), post-intentional phenomenology is in its "embryonic stages" (p. 333). Antiracist scholars such as Fanon (1986), Gordon, (1995), Alcoff, (2006), and Ahmed (2006) have embraced the philosophical aspects of phenomenology stemming from Heidegger and Husserlian traditions. However, Hughes (2011) whose research examined race as an aspect of "bodily not-enoughness," (p. 1) and Pate (2012) have each used post-intentional phenomenology experientially as a methodological approach. I embraced this inquiry stance because the philosophical and methodological commitments place emphasis on locating an awareness that is unaware of itself (van Manen, 1990). A primary goal in enacting this inquiry is to arouse consciousness about a particular phenomenon within the realm of everyday living. This awareness can allow for a deeper understanding of what it is like to read race. Linda Alcoff asserted that "[a] phenomenological approach can render our tacit knowledge about racial embodiment explicit" (p. 272). Such an approach serves to demonstrate how race matters and has meaning in people's lives as we hope for and work towards otherwise (Greene, 1999). Otherwise is the openness for a new social order. It challenges what is in the interests of fairness, access, and equity.

In exploring racial meaning, within the River Eves community, I found it useful to embrace Pilcher's (2001) argument that "living through our own and one another's critical consciousness in our everyday lives affords us opportunities for revolutionizing change" (p. 299). Pilcher's assertion caused me to think about how my participants' readings of race might also stir the critical consciousness of teachers, administrators, parents, and individuals in community based organizations who are interested in *holistically* enriching the literate lives of children, from the inside out. I believe that to do so, means gaining a deeper understanding of how they make sense of their raced, classed, and gendered lives. For example, as we read, I found that some of the racialized constructions of self as it related to blackness, were literally wounding the souls and self-esteem of the children. Black features and Black skin were sites of ridicule and shame. I cannot say with any certainty that any particular child had low self-esteem. The data does however indicate an understanding by the children in this study of a negative perception and low societal values associated with *being* Black.

In her book *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self Esteem* (2003), bell hooks argued that "If we are to see a change in the collective self-esteem of black people, reading and writing will need to be once again a central focus of racial uplift" (p.105). The self-abnegating ways of reading the word and the world, that I witnessed by some of the young children during our readings, should be disrupted, and it is the focus of my final chapter, *Otherwise and the Otherside*. Through reading, and conversation, and simply dwelling within their community space, I was able to capture the tentative manifestations of reading race in the RECHC.

Post-Intentional Phenomenological Process

Although presented as such, the five-part process of conducting post-intentional phenomenology is not linear. It is a recursive process, and therefore the five components

presented below are reviewed and enacted throughout the research. Vagle (2011) noted that post-intentional phenomenological research findings indicate tentative manifestations of a phenomenon, meaning they are partial, fluid, and constantly being disrupted. The components are as follows:

(1) Identify a phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts.

(2) Devise a process for collecting data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation.

(3) Make a bridling plan.

(4) Read and write your way through your data in a systematic manner.

(5) Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon.

Identifying the phenomenon of reading race in this research included locating abstract, embodied, concrete, and semiotic ways that my participants and I experienced racial meaning. In addition because of the macro-level influences and historicity of race, broader global contexts were also included. My process for collecting data began on the basis of a long-term relationship working within and outside of the school community. As noted in chapter one, I worked with parents, children, and administrators at Booker Elementary for two and half years in both in and out of school contexts. Through a mutual school acquaintance, I developed an alliance with two mothers (Natasha and Janesse) who connected me with other parents in the RECHC. Reciprocity based on being Black alone is never enough (see "deluded we" in chapter 8); however, the relationships that I had built up working within and outside of the school for several years supporting literacy efforts helped me to build trust and respect from the mothers. As a result, they allowed me to map myself into the community space, and together, we formed a community within the community. We read books and discussed race over the course of twenty weeks in the During our focus group sessions sometimes I read with the children, while the mothers were in

another room. At other times both mothers, and family members that included cousins, boyfriends, "play cousins," uncles, grandmothers, and even the two drivers for the lunch program joined our reading focus groups. In order to maintain my composure of reflexivity, throughout the research I bridled after each session, and occasionally before our meetings.

(Post)Bridling

According to Dahlberg et al. (2008), bridling

1. Allows the researcher to bring forth theories, ideas, and beliefs

2. Reveals pre-understandings and understandings as a whole,

3. Projects a forward thinking approach that anticipates what research into the phenomenon will present.

My bridling journal included thoughts, emotions, and presumptions of individuals and discursive encounters that occurred both in the study and in my daily living. However, as Vagle (2010) noted, a post-intentional approach to bridling which is derived from Dahlberg's notion of bridling acknowledges and welcomes the autobiographical nature of inquiry, and the researcher's interests and commitments to the phenomenon. Therefore, my life notes (Dillard, 2006), and encounters related to the skin memories (Ahmed, 2006) of my past were also brought to bear. I therefore bridled beyond the ways in which Dahlberg et al. (2008) theorized. As Vagle argued, post-bridling (personal communication, May, 24, 2012) should serve as a space for wonder, joy, anger, and refuge.

Post bridling differs from bridling in that rather than bridling one's intentional relationship with the phenomenon as a method of remaining open, post-bridling further interrogates what is framing the researcher's relationship with the phenomenon while also

remaining open and actively tracing one's intentionalities with the moment to moment

encounters with the phenomenon as it comes into being.   It is a methodological commitment that

allowed me to understand the ways that my racialized perspectives and experiences influenced

how I was seeing the phenomenon. Post-bridling did not mean that I bracketed or set aside my

presuppositions or lived experiences as Husserl (2002) or Giorgi (1997) necessitated in their

phenomenological research. Instead, post-bridling helped me to maintain an attitude of

availability and openness as the phenomenon was revealed (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström,

2006; Vagle et al., 2009, p. 350). It also allowed me to see "what was influencing my seeing"

(Lather, 1993) and a way to fully acknowledge, affirm, question, and sift through the various

sentiments and emotions and that are a part of my embodied Black female, mother, educator,

daughter, middle-class, heterosexual, married, lifeworld.

Early on in the study, I often arrived earlier than Natasha, and I parked my car, and sat

and wrote in my bridling journal. I often watched the stray dogs jaunt through the complex

unleashed, and free to roam. Some days, I sat there and wrote ritualistic mantras such as, *stay*

bright, stay strong, stay positive stay bright, stay strong, stay positive. I repetitively wrote these

simple words just so that I could conjure up an upbeat disposition, because there were some days

that I didn't like what I was learning about the realities of my people (they were not just my

participants). The readings, and conversations were not uplifting, they were sometimes

depressing and sad. Below I provide an excerpt from one such conversation between several

mothers and a post bridled excerpt of my sentiments. The mothers were discussing the gang rape

of a twenty year old woman in the community. I didn't include this particular incident within the

research context; however, the emotional weight of these kinds of spatial readings, and the ills of

neighborhood violence that were discussed influenced my disposition as a researcher, and my own raced, classed, and gendered readings.

Lynette: It's sad and all, but this ain't no place to play around.

Angie: Look, she should've known better.

Roberta: So what happened to the guys that did it?

Lynette: They still around here, I mean you just have to take care of yourself. You can't be loose.

As I listened to the mothers talk, I learned that the rape went unreported, which was likely due to broader hegemonic forms of patriarchy that cause women to remain silent when they have been sexually assaulted, as well as the negative police community relations in the RECHC. "Snitches get stitches" was a neighborhood code, and it was talked about amongst the adults and the kids talked about quite often (see chapter 7). I attempted to ask other justice oriented outsider type questions, but they were drowned out as the mothers continued talking over me and to each other about the *stupid girl* who should've known better. I sat thinking… loose… stupid, who cares? She was *still* raped by *men, who "should've known better*." I was sitting in the midst of the story, but I had to "remain silent while I scream[ed]" (Ploeg, 2012, n.p). I couldn't let the horror and despair that I felt on the inside show on the outside. I disliked their stance, but I couldn't judge. The structural violence of gendered, classed, and racial inequities was really to blame. As an outsider, I had to remain silent in order to maintain rapport with my participants. If I said more, I feared that they would think that I was judging them.

Bridling provided somewhat of a space to release or settle some of the inner tension that resulted as I witnessed harsh realities through listening. Sometimes when I sat outside of the cabana and wrote as I waited for Natasha, I allowed my stirring wheel to serve as a desktop but a

few times when she pulled up and I was writing, I felt uncomfortable because even though they signed all of the paper work, I never wanted my participants to feel like they were subjects--and I don't think that I ever saw them that way. At any rate, I stopped writing in the field, and the recorder was the only methodological device present and over time it melded into the background. I maintained an inner dialogue and when I left, I bridled through the conflict of being an unambivalent participant researcher (Collins, 2000), and the struggle that I felt in telling some of the difficult stories about racial meaning that I knew needed to be told, while simultaneously *not* knowing how to tell them.

The Trauma of Witnessing Through Listening

Post- bridling was particularly useful as emotional and transgressive data (St. Pierre, 1997) accumulated. One day, in a casual conversation Lynette, one of the mothers, shared that her son's father said that he would kill her if she ever tried to leave him. She repeated it not once but twice. On another day, Da'veon, Caleb and Jamerion kept joking about running from the police. Janesse kept trying to convince them that there was nothing funny about their escapade, and that it was dangerous to run from the police—particularly if you are a *Black male*. They ignored her and continued laughing uncontrollably about successfully ditching the police. They described how he rolled slowly in his car pacing them like a predator as they walked from the drug store to the neighborhood. The boys kept laughing, and Janesse *kept* trying to talk over them. Finally, she hit a metal spoon against the table stilling the room, and she bellowed "Ya'll need to shut the hell up and quit trippin' (fooling around) 'cause ain't nothin' funny about a nigga runnin' from no police."

She was so right. These threads of stories from the cabana demonstrate why I needed a space to write out some of the worrisome, weighty, frightening, painful, and angry thoughts and

sentiments that I felt that will likely never see the light of day. My bridling journal was not just a space full of dirges and sad songs. I also wrote sentiments and ideas that spilled over with joy and excitement about reading race (e.g. listening to Katrina hit high and low notes as she sang gospel songs throughout the cabana as if she was in church on a Sunday morning). Towards the end of the research, I started codifying a list of "what if's" in my journal to counter some of the negative realities that I felt I couldn't do anything about in the field as a researcher. Through post-bridling, ritualistic mantra writing, and prayer, I came to understand the emotive openings, blockages, and turmoil that I experienced as I witnessed through listening were productive spaces. The encounters that were joyous *and* the days that caused me anguish were both disruptive spaces that enlivened my consciousness (Greene, 1999) about what it meant to read race.

Post-bridling was in many ways a salve; a space for reflexivity that helped to move me through parts of the data, that were "un-ready-to-hand" and not yet usable. There were nagging sentiments to "do no harm" and haunting feelings about "airing dirty laundry" about Black lives, particularly Black lives that have already been shaped within the gaze of others using negative deficit oriented perspectives about low-income families (Gorski, 2010; Jones, 2006; Sleeter, 2004; Yosso, 2005). According to Gorski (2010) deficit ideologies, "justify existing social conditions by identifying the problem of inequality as located within, rather than as pressing upon, disenfranchised [individuals and] communities…therefore efforts to redress inequalities focus on 'fixing' disenfranchised people rather than the conditions which disenfranchise them"(p, 3). As Gorski noted, the deficit paradigm means that researchers who are working with low-income minority families bear a tremendous responsibility. Narrating what it was like to read race, from the perspective of my participants was steeped with ethical and personal

challenges which I address in the final chapter. Although post-bridling was a useful tool, I must admit that, I am still trying to make sense of how to "properly" write through the weight of this kind data because much of it is still dwelling within me – and it likely always will.

Methods and Data Sources

I employed a variety of methods to gather the data, and similar to Clark (1989), I hoped the "social phenomena would determine the methods instead of the methods distorting or determining the phenomena. It was necessary, therefore to run risks…" (p. xix). Building from Vagle's (2010) notion that phenomenological researchers allow the phenomenon to dictate the methods that will be used, and Lather's (2007) methodological challenge of allowing oneself to get lost in the research, I allowed my participants to create the trajectory of the discourse and the selections of texts. Merleau Ponty (1964) argued that a route reveals itself through discourse and interaction. He asserted further that "an experience which gradually clarifies itself, gradually rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and others" (p. 21). As I allowed the path to be created as we moved through the research, I also recognized that given the spatial and temporal contexts, I did not have much of a choice. For example, much of the study took place during the summer months, and the cabana was a space for eating and free play, therefore the rules that applied to discourse and behavior in school were not applicable in the cabana. To use the proverbial phrase, the freedom in the cabana coupled with the kids being in the spirit of summer, was both "a blessing and a curse." Quite often it was difficult to hold the children's attention; however, in this out of school space both the children and parents were likely more candid in their responses when we did come to together in semi-structured reading sessions.

The sessions occurred two to three times per week and I was in the field for 2-3 hours each visit. I helped to assemble the lunches, clean up, and then I facilitated focus group and

reading sessions, played and entertained the children, or sat in conversation with mothers. Vagle (2010) argued that post intentional phenomenology, "resists traditional boundaries for what data might be appropriate, [and that] researchers should feel free to use data sources that appear to belong to other research approaches" (p. 402), as such I used a variety of methods for collecting data.

Reading African American Centered Texts

My methods included reading African American children's literature that represented various genres such as history, graphic novels, and fiction. Black centric magazines such as *Ebony*, and *Jet*, and the local police blotter, were also included. Mothers injected these texts which they brought to the cabana as leisure reading. I should note that although all racial groups were represented in the police blotter, the mothers primarily read it to identify Black people they knew who lived in Clinton. It served as both a source of information and entertainment for the women. The mothers and I read these texts as well as picture books written for children. All aspects of the texts including photographs, drawings, and advertisements served as critical sites for reading race. And, although I framed this research using books and there are instances in which I include content analysis of the books, they primarily served as hermeneutic prompts.

Conversational Interviews and Focus Groups

I never knew who would attend the sessions, what texts they would select to read, or the nature of the discourse that would ensue. During or after our readings, I conducted informal conversational interviews that sometimes occurred one on one, in dyads or triads, or within the focus group sessions that sometimes included up to ten parents and/or children. Through dialogic relations within the focus groups there was constantly a (de)settling of race. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted, in their analysis of data collection methods that "focus groups are

contingent, synergistic articulations that are constantly in motion" (p. 556). In many ways, the discursive turns in the focus groups mimicked the elusive nature of racial meaning, and also the shifting nature of phenomenological research. As Ihde (2003), who writes of a *post-phenomenology*, offered, "discordant multiple voices of evidence" are instrumental for illuminating phenomena in all of its variant meanings and being (p. 24-25). As illustrated in the conversational vignette that I highlight in the next section, as one individual shared a particular notion, it was often refuted or expanded, by another.

Both the "ruptures of fieldwork" (Lather, 2007) and the inchoate nature of the phenomenon, illustrate the dynamic and complicated nature of racialization. Lather (1991) emphasized that "group interviews provide tremendous potential for deeper probing and reciprocally educative encounters" (p. 77). As participants agreed, disagreed, and shared narratives of experience they also revealed that race is many things, and that it is also always in the process of becoming something else and that it is never, not present or without meaning. It was not only through reading, but also through close observation, that I was able to gather the "shards of meaning" (Pate, 2011) relative to reading race.

Participant Observation and Narratives

I employed elements of participant observation as I played cars with Tray, ate pizza and looked at graphic novels with Da'veon, Jamerion, Caleb, and Zuri, and also when I sang the blues with Katrina. On our *Blues Journey* (Myers, 2009) Katrina and I sang the words to the entire book instead of reading them. Katrina tilted her head, curled her lips, and stepped into the notes, letting her voice dip into a shallow grovel and then a moan. She improvised the blues with each turn of the page, drawing from a repertoire of Black churchified cadences and body

motions. She sang, and I trace and captured the moment as we read together and I later wrote it out as a narrative poem.

Max van Manen (1990) suggested that "the researcher who is involved in closely observing situations for their lived meaning is a gatherer of anecdotes" (p. 69), and as Merleau Ponty (1945/2002) asserted, language places "imprints on our unconscious/[conscious] psychic life" (p.203). Therefore, as I observed and interacted with my participants, I absorbed, the living phrases and "verbal images" in my heart and mind, as well as the stories from the focus group sessions and interviews, and these became anecdotal narratives (van Manen, 1990). The narratives were based on my participants' conversations and aspects of their lived experiences (Dahlberg, Dahlberg &Nyström, 2006), in addition to their responses to literature. As Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström (2006) described, narratives can serve as descriptions of day-to-day events, or a particular encounter that illuminates the phenomena (p.178). Whether they were in print or shared orally, narratives are part of our social being, and they were always already ebbing, flowing, and alive within the community space.

Dwelling in the Community Space

As I mentioned previously, I allowed the discourse and impulses of my participants to lead me, and I simply followed. I trusted that coming to know and understand the phenomenon from the perspective of my participants, was verily embedded within the living. As van Manen (year) asserted, "One has to recognize what parts of the "text" of daily living are significant while it is happening" (p. 69). Thus, as the children and I painted the walls and inadvertently the carpet in the "man cave" (see chapter 7), I took mental notes and bridled about our gestures, language choices, and cultural and racialized points of reference that were made in our discourse. There were many days when I came to the cabana and I didn't have any books, bubbles, toys, or

paint, I simply came to listen. As I assembled and passed out lunches with Natasha, or drew

pictures, played games, went on walks, or sat amongst parents and children as *they* talked or

read; I simply dwelled within their lifeworld. This process of dwelling within, served to balance

some of the giving and finding meaning dualism that is inherently a part phenomenological

research (Vagle, 2009).

Analysis

In my analysis, I read through the data in a whole part, whole process. As I interacted

with the data I started to shape the narratives based on reoccurring themes and patterns that

appeared in conversations, interview, and focus group sessions. Although race is the

phenomenon of interest, it is not regarded as a sole determinate or perspectival site--poverty was

also a critical contextual aspect, as was gender. The themes that reoccurred in discourse included

slavery/collective identity/ the we/neighborhood loyalty/getting an education/ food/public

assistance averting police oversight/Blackness as a burden/bullying/being Black and poor/being

Black and rich/fighting back/violence/anger/police/being tough/ jail/ getting locked up/the

bricks/fractured village/money over everything/ graduating/ summer school/talking

White/talking Black/ Black hair maintenance /looking White /looking Black/looking right/acting

too Black/flagging of the skin/propertied belonging/ black/talking/Mexicans and Whites as

Blacks /North South neighborhood conflicts/project/apartment conflicts/feeling stuck/ snitches

get stitches/ going pro/ blackness as a mark of shame/moving to a better place/Black boy

stuff/White boy stuff/Black girl stuff/White girl stuff.

I placed chunks of texts into categories, and then collapsed them into smaller themes that

became the basis of my chapters. The narration of this research also includes experiential

descriptions from the literature that we read, and biographical narratives of my participants (van

Manen, 1990) which I used to develop vignettes and conversational threads within the chapters. I used this approach because I believe that it was the best way to privilege the participant's voices and provide my readers with "a sense of being there in the scene" (Erickson, 1986, p.163). I also provided the brief biographical portraits throughout the chapters as a method of elucidating a particular manifestation of reading race (e.g. Lynette's sketch represents the hybridity) or in-betweeness and blurring lines of racial meaning. The biographical portraits also served to point out some of the more nuanced or latent aspects of reading race that were gendered and classed.

Reader, Writer, Speaker, Hearer and the Voice of the People

Throughout this text, I attempt to maintain a writerly tone (narrative), one that I believe allows the research to be accessible to the parents with whom I read as well as educators and researchers. I also embrace Ricoeur's (1991) notion that narratives are jointly told between writer, reader, speaker and hearer" (Squire, 2008, p. 48). This included the understanding that reading and telling stories are phenomena; a merger between text and audience. It is a transaction (Rosenblatt, 19955; Iser, 1972) that is "intrinsically relational" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238). I also employed a narrative voice to counter the language of phenomenology, which can sometimes create confusion. As Seamon (1996) asserted, even phenomenological researchers get mired in the complexity of lifeworld descriptions and phenomenological terminology. Maintaining a voice that was accessible, and gave fidelity to what my participants shared was of critical importance and a difficult balancing act. I use the individual narratives of children or mothers to point out some of the ways that racialized embodied conceptual systems in everyday meaning making were being lived out, judged, negotiated, and oriented toward the world (Alcoff, 2007)

Max van Manen made a central assertion, that "we gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (p. 62).   Throughout this research

I cite many academic theorists. As Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2006) suggested, these were theories that effectively served the inquiry (p. 283). However, I held my participants' ways of knowing and being and the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2004) they possessed in high esteem (Collins, 2000). I attempted to follow the lead of Gwaltney (1980) who gave weight to the "chorus of voices" and lived experiences of his participants. Their racialized ways of knowing included the "codes of the streets" (Anderson, 1994), book knowledge, and folkloric wisdom which they employed and injected into their readings of various texts and contexts. Many of my participants' ideologies echoed the assertions of scholars, and in other ways they developed their own theories of race. Ultimately, through listening to their voices and allowing them "to hear themselves being heard" the phenomenon of reading race was illuminated in its variant and constantly changing dimensions.

In the next chapter I move into the community space and the mothers and I explore the social construction of race and place. They prove Soja (1989) and Massey and Denton's (1993) assertion that spaces are not objective, or neutral. Rather they are shaped by historical contexts that are temporal, political and ideological (p.80). Soja also argued that space serves as a significant referent for our social being. Neely and Samura (2011) specifically align space and race and they maintain that the "spatialization of race and a racialization of space," (p. 1941) are mutually constructing forces. As such, the narrative threads in chapter 4 demonstrate the embodiment of blackness for families who live behind the bricks or within the liminal space, just outside of the walls of Claude homes. These spaces served as primary axes of identity, and they were distinctively tied to the way in which they read race, and as Jones (2006) argued, where we are from and "our locations in this world color the lenses through which we read it" (p.2).

CHAPTER 4

RACIAL SPACES AND THE

EMBODIED GEOGRAPHIES OF BLACKNESS

Race is mapped onto street signs in cities and towns, community centers, and government buildings such as schools. For example, in many places King Boulevard serves as a marker for the Black side of town. These signs render race onto spaces, and they represent people or events in history; they are sites of struggle, triumph, pride, and also commitments (Schaafsma, 1993). Racial spaces may also include visual phenomenon, such as the people who populate or those who are moving through a space. In many inner city urban areas, spaces may include billboards, retail establishments, murals or other symbols that serve as signifying markers of a distinctly Black, White, Mexican, or Asian space (i.e. Chinatown). However, racial spaces are not just paved throughout urban cityscapes, and they aren't always explicitly named. They meander along cul-de-sac suburban streets lined with Crepe Myrtle and Bradford Pear trees. They wind down dead end streets called Freedom Way where Mexican people live in trailer homes with tarp roofs suspended like circus tents. They include rural row houses, and trailer park enclaves where Confederate flags are sometimes strung up on poles or plastered in the window. They also exist along the cotton belt in middle Georgia where someone can pass on to the otherside, get buried six feet under, and the indelible lines of racism still mark where a Black or White body will rest and tombstones will be erected.

The White Shadow

Look around, ain't no White People around here.

-Angie

Spaces are dynamic and defined by the bodies within them. As Ahmed (2006) argued, "the alignment of race and space materialize as givens, as if each extends the other" (p. 121). Angie's call to "look around" and take note of who was not there was an important critical reading of the community space. Looking to see who or what aspects of racialness are absent is one of the fundamental ways that we read race. Angie added, they only see White people at school, and on t.v., but "you don't see 'em around here, and they ain't comin'." Drawing from Husserl, Ahmed (2006) argued, "thereness" includes what is not seen and what is not within view (p.25). This is ironic since White people were largely not physically present in the community space, and as Angie suspected, "they ain't comin'."

I noticed that whiteness wasn't completely absent. In fact, the racialness of White people was always there, hovering like a white shadow. It was as bell hooks (1992) asserted, like a ghostly presence, which she described as "living in the bush of ghost" (p.166).   For example, although "looking around" meant not actually seeing many White people in the community space, sometimes, whiteness appeared discursively in disembodied ways (i.e. "you know if White people *did* live here, they (the management) would take care of it better.") It also was present within Black bodies. For example, one afternoon while we were having one of those casual conversations about school, kids, and life in general--which didn't seem to be some neutral or general anymore once I started to listen phenomenologically to the way that race moves into and out of conversations--and Zuri ran into the room to ask Janesse for his inhaler. After he left Janesse stated:

See, did you hear my son talk? You know, if you just listened, and you couldn't see him, you would think he was a White boy. For real, that's why they consider him a little White boy around here, 'cause of how he talks.

Zuri had a "proper sounding" voice and it was rare for him to use Black vernacular. As such, whiteness appeared in the form of Zuri's Black body, *through his voice*. His voice created the aural presence of whiteness in the "all Black space." Talking White while Black within an all Black space demonstrated one of the many ways that race was marked socially, and how the absent presence of race making works. As Omi and Winant argued, "Race is a dimension of human representation" (p.55) and therefore it is socially constructed.

Social Construction of Racial Spaces

Racial spaces are socially constructed, and spatially contingent (Lewis, 2003; Lipsitz, 2011; Omi & Winant, 1994; Soja, 1989; Neely & Samura, 2011), and although the racial lines that persists are less precise than the hard lines that existed during the Jim Crow era South, they remain. There are countless racial spaces for which "the inhabitants of spaces *seem* to belong to them" alone (Razack, 2002 p. 8). These exist in embodied ways and within residential, school, work, and leisure spaces. For example, Angie expressed that the only White people that the children knew were in school spaces, and she asserted that they would like stay in those spaces, and not cross over into their community. Although, Black, White, Asian, Indigenous, or Latino/bodies do sometimes cross over and create heterogeneous multi-racial spaces, these are typically situational and contingent. For the most part, the segregated spaces that we make, and dwell within, and those that are unrecognized and are created for us by state structures (Goldberg, 2002; Massey & Denton, 1993) often go unquestioned. It is as they say "just the way it is" and like the rising and setting of the sun, these spaces *appear* to "just happen." And, within

a colorblind, desegregated society racial fluidity (the movement of different racial bodies moving in and out of spaces without visible boundaries) creates the illusion that racial lines have been erased and undone. However, this appearance is primarily the result of racialized seriality.

Racialized Seriality

Seriality is a phenomenon that places mixed raced, classed, and gendered individuals together into passive social collectives (Sartre, 1960; Lewis, 2006; Young, 1964) that are tied to a particular societal function or task such as work, school, or being in a public facility. When heterogeneous racial populations are within such spaces, they become serialized racial spaces. For example, as I write this passage, I am sitting in a serialized racial space: a large government building in downtown Atlanta. I am waiting to fulfill my civic duty as a potential juror. Black, brown, tan, pink, and peachy hued bodies are folded into rows of turquoise and cinnamon colored chairs. A Black male with braided hair and diamond studs in both ears is sitting next to a middle aged White female holding a Beth Moore book and a magazine about kitchen remodeling. Whenever we are dismissed from our service, we will each disperse into mostly segregated residential spaces.

In Tanner Colby's humorous but thought provoking narrative, *Some of My Best Friends are Black* (2012), he examined the irony of growing up in a desegregated society, and celebrating the victory of the nation's first Black president while looking within his own personal sphere and noticing for the first time that he did not *actually* know any Black people. Tanner wrote:

> I didn't actually know any black people. I mean, I've met them, have been
> acquainted with a few in passing, here and there. I know of black people, you

could say. But none of my friends were black. I'd never had a black teacher,

college professor or workplace mentor. I'd never even been inside a black person's

house.

Here, Tanner essentially narrated the phenomenon of experiencing racialized seriality. He

unreflectively moved through spaces seeing and "knowing of Black people" without actually

knowing them, or without noticing how (re) racing was transpiring in his daily living. Seriality is

a macro-level tentative manifestation of reading race that influences the ways in which we

understand race. As Tanner alluded, serialized racial spaces can be deceptive, and they are more

often an illusion of inclusion, racial solidarity, and communality than what actually exist.

Although racialized seriality may sometimes be a site of promise or a bridge towards racial

plurality, it is a passive form of raciality that masks the socio-psychological, social and economic

racial-spatial divide (Goldberg, 2002; Lipsitz, 2011) that exists and persists.

An "All Black" Space

In the town of Clinton, both River Eves and Claude Homes were considered to be Black

neighborhoods and because the majority of the students who attended Booker Elementary were

Black children, by extension it was referred to as a Black school. In her book, *Black, Brown,*

Yellow, and Left, Laura Pulido (2006), argued that racial identities are place bound and that

residential spaces construct lives. Neely and Samura (2011), Razack (2002), and Keenan (2010),

have each argued that property is a dialectical relationship between subjects and objects that are

constructed and maintained by hegemonic power structures. As such, these spaces *don't* just

happen; and because of the significant economic, structural, ideological, emotional, and socio-

psychological elements that are related to living in many all Black neighborhoods, this is not a

banal descriptor.

I want to make an important point, so that I am not misunderstood: I don't believe that all Black or any other segregated racial space is inherently bad. I do however, believe that being aware and willing to interrogate how and sometimes why the spaces and places that we embody are, or become Jim Crowed, (i.e. racialized, gendered, classed, and heterosexualized) is worth reading into. Without questioning these spatialized racial constructions, it is far too easy to misread places as if they are neutral, because they never are (Lipsitiz, 2009; 2011; Massey & Denton, 1993; Moje, 2004; Soja, 1990; Thomas, 2004). Even the names of the children are read as racial spaces. Have you ever noticed that?

"Those Crazy Sounding Black Names"

DeQuin	KaRon
Nakeya	Mykeema
Deshane	Nakeya
KaRon	Chanquesia
Jacquizz	Latrivis
Shalondra	Quashaa
Ketia	Jimarcus
JaVale	Jantel
Julyan	Nneka
Kerron	Shaday
Nickesha	Natavious

At Booker and within the RECHC, many of the children's names would be distinctly categorized as Black sounding names: stereotypically these are considered names that are "made

up," "crazy sounding," "hard to spell" and "ghetto" (Brown & Lively, 2012). But perhaps we should think more about what these names might mean as part of the interpretive horizon and instantiation of the body from the perspective of those who are being oppressed by middle class White-centric and narrow Americanized social constructions. In their quantitative longitudinal research, Fryer and Levitt (2004) noted that prior to the Black power movement of the 1960's and 1970's; Black and White naming conventions were similar. However after years of embracing counter-hegemonic stances such as Black is Beautiful and Afro-centric social and political agendas, they found that names such as Connor, Cody, Jake, Molly, Emily, Abigail, and Caitlin were names that were primarily given to White children.

 For example, they discovered that of the 2,248 little girls that were named Molly, only 9 were Black. Conversely, names such as DeShawn, Tyrone, Shanice, Precious, Kiara, and Deja were popular choices for Black children, but not for White children. Their research also noted residential patterns connected to class were also associated with naming conventions. As Brown and Lively (2012) noted, these were not names that you might find on a key chain or a bicycle tag at Walmart, and many of the names did seem to be made up. But does that make them wrong, and what makes them Black names? The absence of Molly's in the RECHC, and the presence of Black sounding names all around me caused me to explicitly ask the mothers the question, "Would you name your daughter Molly? Why or why not?" This prompted the following conversation, in which the mothers clearly situate names within Black or White, domains.

Angie: I can't see no little Black girl named Molly,

Janesse: Not, no Jane, or Kate.

Angie: Nope, I don't see no Katie, Sally, or Megan either. No, see, Black people are creative. Your baby shouldn't have the same name as everybody else. It should be unique.

Roberta: Well, what do you think about people who say that Black women name their children in ways that hold them back. And you know, that the kids can't spell their names and stuff…

Janesse: Look, they (White people) don't like Black people no way. Ain't no sense in foolin' yo self to please White folks. That ain't it. If I want to name my baby Latavious or some crazy ass African name, that's *my* child. 'Cause for real, it's gone always be something else. If it ain't your name it's something else. You know it's really just you period. They probably just don't like you.

Angie: And I mean if you a teacher, it's yo job to help my child spell, not judge my child.

Lynette: Look, I'm with Janesse, naming yo baby something White ain't gone change nothin'. You like what *you* like. I might not like Mary Jane or Beth, that's just not me, but ain't nobody judging those names, like they judge the names Black people got. Whatever… It's supposed to mean something to you.

Whose Name has Capital?

Naming conventions serve as a common marker for reading race. The pseudonyms for the children in this study (Zuri, Caleb, Katrina, Makeela, Tray, Da'veon, and Jamerion) represent the counter hegemonic naming conventions that were similar to the actual children's names who participated in this study. The use of diacritic marks to separate vowels or consonants is representative of the ways that linguistic and institutional boundaries that narrowly shape naming conventions are also challenged. As demonstrated by Angie's comment, the mothers could not

see their own children with names that they felt did not represent them. Moreover, they believed that choosing a White name was a mirage that would not sufficiently mask any disdain or animosity that Whites had for Black people.

Janesse and Lynette agreed with the position argued by Brown and Lively who asserted that Blacks will "sell the farm to buy the cow" or relinquish their identity and right to name their children in order "to buy a smaller piece of capital in American society." This was a wager the mothers believed was not only a "risk" but also a futile attempt, since it would as Janesse asserted, "always be something else." In their opinion it wasn't necessarily better to co-op a White name, because as Angie asserted, Black names were a mark of creativity and representative of the uniqueness of each life. Similarly, Janesse and Lynette expressed that creating or adopting unique or Afro-centric names as a racialized and ethnicized aesthetic was their prerogative, and that it was important to choose a name that "mean[s] something to you." Brown & Lively (2012) explored Black perspectives on racialized naming of individuals and institutions using CRT and a form of ethnomethodology called netography which uses the responses of individuals from online communities (Kozinets, 2002). The respondents who were presumed to be Black, argued against "Black sounding" names largely on the basis of employability. However, their study also highlighted class-based "intracultural racism" amongst Blacks who expressed a belief that as far as naming conventions went; Black children were "handicapped because they were "already Black." As such, they believed that distinctly Black names, placed Black children in an even further "deficit social position" because they were given "crazy" or "ghetto sounding names," that are too difficult to pronounce or spell (p. 680). Their sentiment was that selecting names that were easier to pronounce, and less racial or ethnic

provided a form of social capital, that wouldn't render any other negative consequences on the Black body in any other way.

Naming as Resistant Capital

Give your daughters difficult names. Give your daughters names that command the full use of tongue. My name makes you want to tell me the truth. My name doesn't allow me to trust anyone that cannot pronounce it right. – (Warsan Shire, 2011, "The birth name").

Racial and ethnicized naming conventions are a form of resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). This resistance demonstrates a critical consciousness that is in opposition to assimilated naming standards, and it also counters the conventions that suit a purely American, Black or White middle-class sensibility. Unfortunately, as I have navigated the discourse spaces with Black and White teachers, parents, and administrators across the K-20 spectrum, I have heard many negative judgments and comments about the "nonsensical" or "made up" stylistic conventions of Black children's names. These conventions are often trivialized and serve as fodder for racialized humor. Similar to the respondents in Brown and Lively's (2012) research, many teachers point to the economic consequences associated with individuals who have Black sounding names. They often cite the findings written about in *Freakonomics* (2005), or the Bertrand and Mullianathan (2004) research both of which were highly publicized in the mainstream and revealed that "distinctly Black names" were cited as factors by human resource professionals for getting by passed for employment opportunities.

However, teachers must be reflective about their own biases rather than mimicking and reifying the privilege and preference for White or Eurocentric names, as one of the respondents in Brown and Lively's study suggested:

…I think we have to look at the attitude of those teaching the Laquesiala's as

well…many have a problem right off the bat when they hear a name like that. Do we

make the same sigh of grief when Lucas James Whiteman is in your class? Do you treat

them both the same? If Lucas had a problem with a 2+2, most wouldn't have a problem

helping him, but let poor little Bonequeeshala have the same problem and we'd be like…

"Damn, you stupid, why did yo' mama name you that?" (p.681)

Laham, Koval, and Alter (2012) noted that orthographic irregularity and names that are

difficult to pronounce can have negative social and economic implications for all racial and

ethnic groups. For many decades, immigrants have changed their names in order to become

White in print. Asian and Indian immigrants who come to America continue to adopt American

names that have a wider and whiter appeal, and they often relinquish their birth name or only

allow for it to be used at home so that they can assimilate easier into American culture. The

adoption of new names serves to mitigate any negative bias, aversion, or discomfort associated

with others' who must learn how to read or pronounce an unfamiliar ethic name.

Assimilated naming conventions are supposed to serve as conduits for racio-ethnic

minorities to gain easier social acceptance and to maximize economic potential. However, as

racio-ethnic minorities assume names that are more palatable, names that don't "command the

full use of tongue," they participate in an unintended form of complicity that contributes to

White privilege. It also increases negative sentiments and "Cosby"-esque (see Dyson, 2005)

assertions that the inventive spellings or expansion of phonemic dimensions that are common

characteristics of unique Black naming conventions serve as sites of evidence or proof of a

particular ineptness, or racialized ignorance on the part of Black parents who *resist* assimilated

naming conventions. I suggest that an "unreflective parenthetical norm of whiteness" (Gordon,

1995) masks the reality that all names were made up at some point. In addition, if we are to read race on a much deeper level we might consider the ways in which the racial and class based degradation of unique Black names ignores the depths of Black diasporic displacement and the desire for some Black people to make their own meanings and distinctively name and write their own world.

Race, Place, and Class

In the next section, of this chapter, I foreground the voices of the mothers (Angie, Lynette, Janesse, and Natasha) as they discuss their conceptions of race and place. In the conversational thread below, the mothers share their theories of race, class, gender, propertied belonging (Ahmed, 2006; Keenan, 2010), and the flagging of the skin (Grabham, 2009). Drawing from Billig (1995) Grabham described flagging of the skin as "a set of rhetorical techniques and practices that reiterate nationalism within communities." She argued further that just as the nation is imagined and produced through everyday rhetoric and maps and flags, it is also constructed on the skin, and through bodies, by different types of corporeal 'flagging.' (p. 64). Grabham discusses flagging and corporeal change in relationship to surgical procedures that White people in the UK have performed to demonstrate that they belong to their nation. I take up her concept of flagging and corporeal change to connect the ways that the mothers recognized that their skin served as a site that indicated that they belonged or didn't belong within River Eves or Claude Homes. I put their readings in dialogue with Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, 1995; Harris, 1993) as well as feminist (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2006; hooks, 2008) and critical geography theories (Lipsitz, 2006; 2011; Soja, 1989; Tuan, 1976).

I then narrate the phenomenon of racialized felt space. In this particular narration, I share what it was like to dwell within the hyper racial "all Black" space in the cabana, and how the space shifted (or not) in the presence of White or Mexican people. I also thread some of Relph's (1976) phenomenological theories of place throughout the chapter, and I briefly touch upon macro level factors such as gentrification and racial segmentation, which were all actively occurring at the time of the study. Gentrification is a process in which the composition of a community that is typically Black or Brown and low income, shifts because new construction increases rent and property values in the surrounding area. Families are typically dispersed into other geographic areas, and sometimes become homeless, or encounter heavy economic burdens because of higher rents elsewhere (Wilson, 2007). This section reveals some aspects of what the pre-gentrified aspects of participant's lives were like in the RECHC. Although Relph (1976) did not address issues such as race, class, or gender in relation to place, he did, develop a phenomenological arc of place that I found useful for pointing out and capturing some of the ways in which my participants, read and made sense of race and place.

These larger racialized phenomena have deep roots in socio-historical capitalistic structures (Lipsitz, 2011; Soja, 1989) that are well beyond the scope of my particular research questions (see Massey & Denton, 1993). However, I include some of these elements within the chapter, because many of these are aspects of political race (Guiner & Torres, 2003), that deeply undergird the (dis)placement and movement of the Black families in and out of the RECHC, and it demonstrates the way that race is a mutating text. These also heavily influenced how the mothers were reading race, class, and gender, and also why police surveillance and oversight in the community was so prevalent.

In constructing this section, I extracted storied elements of the mothers' lived experiences and the meaningful embodiment of race, in relationship to both macro and micro-level social and economic place related contexts. Through the mothers' conversations I reveal the intersecting dimensions of their raced, classed, and gendered lifeworld as Black mothers (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1995). In subsequent chapters, reading race largely occurs in response to children's literature and other texts that the mothers and I and or the children and I read. However, in this chapter, the broader social context of place serves as the primary textual reference. I should emphasize that although I entered into the research with an understanding that race and place mattered, I didn't know *how* it mattered to my participants or the ways that it was woven into their lives and literacies. As such, I used a place-based lens as a unit of analysis as it was given to me.

Phenomenology of Place

On one particular afternoon, the mothers and I hadn't read any books; they did, however, read race broadly and also in relation to the community space. As Relph, asserted in his theory into the phenomenology of place, "Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world" (p. 141). The mothers had served lunches to the children, and as they sat around talking and waiting for them to finish eating, I asked them to tell me what race meant to them.

> Natasha: Race, at least when you Black is something that marks you in like a bad way. I
> mean you can be rich and don't nobody care, you still Black and you still gone get put in
> your place. You might be rich but you just in a different big house, look at Obama.

Lynette: But yeah I don't know… cause you still got money and you know what they say M.O.E.

Janesse: We might not be behind the bricks no more, but come on, when you broke and Black… look around this place, it's junky. I mean this is better than being in Claude Homes but these are still some rusty ass bricks.

Lynette: I believe they are eventually gone fix it up around here though, but we just ain't gone be here. Cause you know they tryin' to move the Black folks out so they can get Whites to move back in here.

Just like the various shades and tones of our skin, there were a multitude of ways that race was read within River Eves. In the conversational vignette above, Natasha, Lynette, and Janesse echoed Lipsitiz' (2011) assertion that " the lived experience of race takes place in actual spaces, while the lived experience of place draws its determinate logic from overt and covert understandings of race" (p.6). Both the mothers and children in the RECHC conceptualized their ideas about race in terms of a Black and White binary. In this particular instance, the mothers' readings of race included caveats about blackness in relation to money and the extent to which they perceived that money could alleviate the adversity of being Black in America, and ways in which they believed their presence devalued the space and shuttered opportunities to appeal to Whites.

In the vignette thread, although Lynette employed the popular hip hop catch phrase M.O. E. (money over everything) to emphasize her belief that money transcended any negative effects of being Black, Natasha didn't subscribe to the notion that money had the ability to "lighten" (DeVos & DeVos, 2004). This particular term was derived in Brazil, where a Black individual with high socioeconomic status is considered *to be* White. They are perceived lighter

and less Black because they are economically successful. Natasha's assertion that money didn't always lighten was similar to bell hooks' (2009) argument that "black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness" (p.102). M.O.E. taps into the notion that green is the only color matters, and it does allow movement into places that were previously inaccessible to Black bodies, but it doesn't change perceptions of racialness. As Alcoff (2010) noted, perceptions are positional and are part of a structure of consciousness that is intersubjective (p. 110), and based on my own lived experience of moving in and through various classed spaces I was somewhere in between it all, because like Lynette, I believe that money can lighten *all* of us in many ways. Perhaps perceptually it can even make White people appear Whiter to some Blacks and other racial minorities. However, I also know that having money can also *remind* you just how Black you actually are, both to yourself and to others.

From Natasha's perspective, monetary resources didn't preclude Blacks from being "put their place." When I asked her to explain what she meant by place, she described it as "not on the same level as White people who had money." Natasha's assertion also mirrored Fanon's (1952) racialized consciousness that in the midst of others, "the epidermal schema of a Black individual is an ontology that is unattainable in the presence of Whites who have similar material means" (n.p). In stating that rich Blacks were simply serving a different master in a "different big house," Natasha was pointing out all of the ways that Barack Obama has been denigrated by both racially coded and flagrant racialized readings of him as "an Other." "Please…how you gone live in the White House and still be called a monkey?" Natasha's reference to the "big house" also infused an aspect of Fanon's (1952/2008) "historico-racial schema," (p.135) which in short, relates to the negation and contingent nature of blackness on the basis of the various historical

myths that were imposed onto Blacks (e.g., lazy, unintelligent, unworthy of respect) aspects which continue to be applied despite how elevated the places are where Black bodies might dwell.

From Janesse's perspective, the double bind of being "broke *and* Black" equated to a particular material condition of living in a junky place. As Relph (1976) argued, "places are intentional structures of human consciousness…and all consciousness is consciousness of something *in its place*"(p. 42) (my emphasis). Janesse was conscious of all of the Black bodies living within the rusty bricks in River Eves, and behind the bricks in Claude Homes. She reiterated Richardson's (2009) argument that the "semiotic domains" of neighborhood landscapes shape meanings about what it means to be "po and Black." Semiotic domains are a "set of practices that recruit one or more modalities to communicate distinctive types of meanings" (Gee 2003, 18). They include symbols and place based associations, and they also include bodies within spaces. Bricks became a racialized context and symbol of place because the mothers equated bricks with where Black bodies lived, and living behind the bricks was considered a "Black thing."

Living Inside and Outside of the Bricks

Although Angie still lived "behind the bricks" in Claude Homes, Lynette, Janesse, and Natasha were on the otherside, outside of the bricks. Each of the mothers considered moving out of public housing as a "lightening factor," (so did Black people who still lived in Claude). This was somewhat similar to the Brazilian lightening thesis, but these women weren't actually better off (lighter or whiter) in an economic sense; they and their children were just perceived to be *less Black* because they were no longer living inside of public housing. Although the two communities were in close proximity (e.g. Caleb and many of the other boys usually cut through

the over brush and scaled a damaged portion of a chain linked fence in River Eves in order to go

hang out with friends who still lived in Claude Homes) when the women moved outside of the

bricks, they were considered *less Black* in the eyes of some of the Blacks who still lived in

Claude Homes. In sharing this reading of race, Janesse argued,

> You know I don't think its right, and it makes me mad, because it's really ignorant.
>
> And I think this has caused so many problems for Zuri, but in some ways I do understand
>
> why they say it. I mean I can count the number of White people that have lived there on
>
> one hand. I grew up there, and I'm 32 years old. If you don't see no White people around
>
> then you know, living there just feels like a Black thing.

The mothers didn't actually consider themselves any less Black, and as I mentioned,

financially they weren't lighter. In fact moving out of public housing was a heavy financial

burden, and the mothers expressed that they had to "make do." The women considered moving

out of Claude necessary for the emotional and psychological preservation of them and their

families because of the constant oversight and surveillance. Janesse shared, "We had to scrape

everything to move, but I just couldn't be livin' in public housing and stay married because you

know they harass the hell out of Black men over there." Even though being married was not

prohibited, Janesse felt that she needed to move away from public housing to protect her husband

from the constant surveillance and interrogation of Black men who the police had outwardly

expressed "didn't belong there and should be doing better than living in the projects." From the

mothers' perspective, "making do" was worth being out from under the auspice of the police and

the public housing authority.

Natasha moved out of Claude Homes 5 months prior to her participation in the study, and she shared her sentiments about leaving and hopefully staying out of the public housing projects. She clicked her tongue in disgust,

> I will do whatever I have to do to stay out of there. It's like you in jail. Ain't nothin but us in there, just scrambling all the time. And they won't let you just live. See I can't stand nobody coming in my place whenever they want … they tell you when to clean and who can come over and how many people can be around the place. You know I was at work one day, but they have a key to where you stay, and will use it. They monitor your Black ass 24/7 (around the clock). You come in from work, or whatever, and they might be in your unit. I hope I never have to go back there.

Public housing was teeming with oversight of Black bodies, and the mothers were each doing everything they could to maximize resources to stay "outside of the bricks." They were resourceful and creative in maximizing opportunities to earn enough income. They each worked in the service industry at hourly positions, and they also held side jobs to make ends meet. For example, Natasha sold earrings and jewelry and Lynette and Angie both braided hair. Still, they didn't make enough. When Natasha's grandmother was admitted into the hospital and her family members needed her to drive them across town, she had to pool together gas money to make the drive 20 miles outside of Clinton. If the women had their hours cut at work, an unexpected issue with car maintenance arose, or if the summer lunch program were cancelled (and it was), these dilemmas greatly impacted the families' ability to "make do." Despite these common hardships in daily living, moving out of public housing was important to the mothers because it represented freedom from the infantilism of Black women and men that occurred when they lived behind the bricks. In addition, although it was a financial challenge, and some may not consider living in an

apartment movin' up, it was important to these women and it represented breaking the cycle of poverty within their families.

Living in Dead-end Spaces

In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (2007) noted the "compartmentalized world" of colonialized people and how they were fixed within social and spatial geographic regions (p.3). He described,

> the colonized world is divided in two…The "native sector" is not complimentary to the European sector"…The colonist sector is built to last, all stone and steel. Its sector of lights and paved roads…without a pothole without a stone…The colonist's sector is a white folks' sector. The "native quarters," …you are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere from anything. It's a world with no space…a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate (p.5).

All of the women grew up in public housing in Northern or Southern cities, and to them Claude Homes and public housing in general was constantly described as a trap and a dead end for Black people. When I asked the women to explain, they spoke in unison, "*There ain't but one way in and one way out.*"   The women's assertion was not merely a metaphor. In the 1930's and 40's, the majority of public housing complexes were constructed on dead-end streets with only one entrance and exit point (Massey & Denton, 1993). This is how it unfolded: as local public housing authorities were provided with federal subsidies for public housing, they purchased superblocks. Superblocks are large land parcels in which road networks are fused together without outlets. They are typically designed for institutional spaces such as schools, prisons, and hospital facilities. Superblocks essentially served to concentrate poor Blacks within defined spaces on city grids (Massey & Douglas, 1993), to "compartmentalize" and contain them. In the

North, public housing projects for Whites were also placed within superblocks but in areas that were also far from where Blacks resided.

Racial spaces were created by local governments in both Northern and Southern cities. These racial spaces were marked in other ways too. For example, other than not having any through streets, elevations and building conventions were designed with an aesthetic that was institutional and distinctly different from private residential spaces (Frank & Mostoller, 1995). These clearly defined and confined spaces splintered cities and created Black neighborhood enclaves and ghettos which in turn placed "tainted and civic-damaging black outcast bodies into spaces that needed to be assiduously regulated and managed" (Wilson, 2007, p.6). This spatialized logic isolated Blacks and helped to create segregated Black belts and residential areas which all had lower property values.

Like Natasha's comparison of public housing to jail, scholar Rashad Shabazz (2010) likened the ecology of the public housing communities to low security prison facilities. He argued, "Some prisons you inhabit simply by being poor or working class and black" (n.p). As Fanon noted about the colonized sector, they were "kept under close scrutiny, and contained by the rifle butts" (p.4). Although not as blatant, as being under watch with guns drawn; the manner in which the families who lived in Claude Homes were cordoned off behind the bricks, with architectural landscapes of control such as a single entry and exit point, and constant oversight by the police, caused the mothers to *feel* like the projects were a" trap" or "jail" for the Black people. Driving through Claude Homes I didn't feel it, but then I was just driving through, and I could leave. As Angie stated to them, it felt like "there was no way out." However, some of the mothers were on the otherside so to speak, but there was a growing sense within River Eves that the large Black presence in the apartment complex was unwanted, and moreover, that any

improvements that would take place in the community would begin with clearing as many Black

bodies out of the apartment complex as possible in order to make way for White tenants who

were, as Lynette asserted, more valuable and desirable. Lynette's assertion essentially echoed the

central tenet of Critical Race Theory (Harris, 1993), that middle class whiteness is considered the

ultimate property, and moreover, that Black skin flags a property, diminishes its value, and

cautions Whites to stay away.

Lynette's assertion also mirrored Lipsitz's (1998, 2011) notion about "the extra value for

whiteness." According to Lipsitz, this extra value for whiteness is symbolic, and it valorizes and

romanticizes particular forms of whiteness (Harris, 1993). This value determines what is

considered American, hard-working, wholesome, attractive, and law abiding. It is also a value

that is visible, because we are marked by a racial brush (Yancy, 2005), and therefore our skin

serves as a flag. Without words, the flagging of the skin can cause us to feel more or less at home

or (dis) oriented within various spaces (Ahmed, 2007), and it signifies propertied belonging

(Keenan, 2010; Lewis, 2003; Harris; 1993; Lipsitz, 2011). As Ahmed argued, the skin is always

open to being read--and being read differently (p.1). Black, White, Brown, Yellow, or Red skin

are symbolic representations similar to the ways that flags mark geographic regions such as

states or nations, in other words it can also "embed nation on our bodies" (Grabham, 2009, p.

63), and thus as Lynette recognized, skin signals claims or ownership to a space and socially and

otherwise determines who falls into or outside of racial spaces.

Hybrid Racial Spaces

As previously mentioned, Lynette was biracial and she embraced her hybridity. Her mother

was a White (blanco) Puerto Rican and her father was biracial (Black and White Puerto Rican);

however she was ascribed and considered herself Black. Phenotypically Lynette looked like a Black

woman. She was what Rodriguez (1995) described as moreno: a darker skinned Puerto Rican with a mix of European and African features. Lynette only dated Black men, and she had two children, Knight, who was a month old when the study began, and an eight-year-old daughter named Makeela. In our conversation, Lynette not only ushered in the realities related to the "flagging of the skin" and its relationship to "propertied belonging" within River Eves, but one day, she also narrated a story from her youth which she suggested caused her to position herself outside of White spaces and firmly within Black ones:

> White people don't even know they got it in um, they will only go so far wit you and then you become a nigga to them in a heartbeat. I was friends with this White girl all through high school. And I thought I was cool with her parents and stuff too but then we decided that we was gone get an apartment together when we graduated. We needed a co-signer, and my momma couldn't do it so we went to her parents. When she was in the other room with her father he said he didn't want his daughter to live with no monkey. You know she tried to take up for me and stuff, and she told him that I was mixed White, Puerto Rican and stuff, and he told her no, because to him I was still a half monkey.

A Little Bit of This and a Little Bit of That

In theorizing the multiplicity of the body in all of its presences and absence, Merleau Ponty (1968) offered that there are, "several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox lies in every visible" (p. 136). Lynette in many ways was the corporeal embodiment of every visible, and this often caused discrimination from both sides racially. In sharing her storied experience of hybridity (Tate, 2005) and the ways in which it placed her on the margins of Black, White, and Puerto

Rican spaces, Lynette demonstrated how proximity to blackness (phenotypically or culturally) often ends up falling on the side of blackness. For example, she mentioned that when she turned fifteen, she had a quinceanera (also known as a fiesta de quince años). This is a Puerto Rican/Latina tradition which celebrates the transition from girlhood into womanhood. Lynette shared that despite this event, her Puerto Ricaness was not a rich part of her cultural frame of reference. She described the event in the following way, "It was cool and stuff, but I don't get too deep into it though because I ain't really done nothin' Puerto Rican since then." In Clinton, Lynette mostly negotiated her identity through the binaries of blackness and whiteness. There didn't appear to be a space for" being in between." She recalled that growing up, she learned how to be tough in response to Black girls who tested her allegiance to her Black roots. She shared that she had "gotten into plenty of fights" with Black girls from middle school onward who "messed with her" and accused her of "thinking that she was cute" because she had lighter skin and wavy - read "good" - hair. In response to the taunts and challenges, Lynette argued,

> They was always tryin' to punk me, all through middle school and high school but they just didn't know, that stuff (the light skin and wavy hair) don't mean nothin' to me, I just wanted to chill, that's your problem not mine. I didn't fit in with most of the White girls cause I didn't look nothin like them at all.

Although she called herself "a little of this and a little of that" Lynette aligned herself spatially, relationally, and communally (van Manen, 1990) in Black spaces. The other mothers also recognized and ascribed her as Black, and in chapter 5, Makeela clearly defines herself as "Brown" then Black, and her grandmother as "a White person who thinks she's Black." Amongst the Black mothers there was no debate about Lynette's race. One mother explained her racialized reading of Lynette this way:

Look Lynette is Black, more than anything else.

(She curled her lips and cackled and looked directly at Lynette)

You can claim whatever you want to, but you know you Black, plus you got Black

babies.

The room erupted in laughter and hand slaps. Lynette could hardly contain her own amusement, and as the uproar died down she responded, "You right though, that's all I know. It's what I'm comfortable with. And other than my momma, White people don't claim me."

Lynette's Black, White, and Puerto Ricaness represented the embodied geographies and spectrum of blackness. Angie's assertion and Lynette's lived experience exemplified who is included and ascribed as Black and why some mixed race people claim one particular racial identity over another. Although it wasn't necessarily the same situation as Lynette, prolific Dominican poet Chiqui Vicioso noted, "I didn't know that I was black until I came to America." Being ascribed and treated as a Black person can effectually make one Black.

"The Hood be Tellin' You Stuff"

Over the summer, as we read books about the Black experience, Lynette said that she wanted to locate and read similar books to Makeela and her son Knight. She attended every session that I conducted in the cabana, and one day she even picked Makeela up early from a play date when she found out that I was doing a session for the kids instead of the adults. Like Lynette, each of the women expressed that the books that we were reading made them more vigilant about exposing their children to stories that broadly explored the Black experience. Identity and place were a significant reason why they thought the books were important. The women chatted:

Janesse: I don't like *all* of these books (Janesse hated to read books about slavery

because they made her too mad), but some of these, are really are good for our kids

because the hood be tellin' you stuff, and the kids feel like the only thing that's *Black*, is

ghetto, loud, over the top, and full of drama. They need to see something else and that's

what I like about these.

Natasha: The kids don't get to learn enough about the good stuff about us. Like, they

know what the sheriff coming means, and they can smell a fight in the wind, because

around here, it just always feels like some trouble coming. And you know, even though

they always play on being ghetto and stuff, they know it ain't good.

Natasha's comment caused me to remember the day that Katrina kept talking about

seeing "two big chef cops" in the neighborhood and how "they was looking to put somebody in

jail." "Who are the chef cops?" I asked. Katrina ignored my question and continued talking,

"My momma said, 'Don't be scared of 'em though 'cause they can't do nothin but give you some

papers.'" Janesse later clarified that Katrina was talking about two sheriffs in the neighborhood,

and that she explained to her that she shouldn't be afraid of sheriffs because they can only serve

warrants.

According to the mothers, having sheriffs in the neighborhood "looking to put somebody

in jail" was not uncommon in the community. As Natasha mentioned, most of the kids were

aware that they should fear the police more than the sheriff because the sheriff didn't have the

power to arrest you and take you to jail. Fearing, hating, and having anxiety about the presence

of the police was part of living as Black in the RECHC, particularly for Black males (see chapter

6 and 7). As an 8 year old female who was still very much under her mother's wing, Katrina was

just beginning to understanding the communal literacies about law enforcement, and how to

navigate the " landscape of fear" and anxiety created by their presence. Yi-fu Tuan (1979) described landscapes of fear as "infinite manifestations of the forces for chaos, natural, and human" (n.p.). In describing landscapes, Tuan also noted that they are not merely outside physical geographical places, but that places are epiphenomenal and also to shape the landscapes in our minds.

The mothers recognized that living within a community where it "feels like there is always trouble coming" meant that their children were shaping negative and limited understandings of who they were as Black beings. As Janesse argued, "the hood be tellin' you stuff," and the mothers didn't think " the stuff" that "the hood" was telling them was necessarily affirming. They believed that Black-centric books were spaces to (re)discover and (re)think blackness. They envisioned them as shelters for countering some of the chaos experienced with in their neighborhood landscape. Their ideas were much like Tuan's assertion that narratives are necessary, "…shelters built by the mind to rest, to escape the siege of inchoate experience and doubt" (n.p). I don't mean to imply that the mothers felt that the books and stories about Black life were a panacea; however reading race did matter to them significantly.

They felt that reading race was important because their "lived geographies" were heavily marked by negative raced, classed, and gendered dimensions. Unfortunately, the police and the management staff were increasing complicating the lives of the families in River Eves by placing them under the same surveillance that existed within Claude Homes. As the mothers speculated, there did appear to be a desire to re race the space, because the presence of the police and the new policies were increasingly disorienting and disrupting the lives of the families (Ahmed, 2006) and it appeared to be part of the "maintenance and improvement plan" in the community.

Race as an Active Archive

Neely and Samura (2011) argued that "the making and remaking of space is also about the making and remaking of race" (p. 1934). As I researched the spatial history of the River Eves/Claude Homes Corridor, I noticed that just as Lynette mentioned, River Eves used to attract mostly young White young families and college students from the local university. Based on the promotional materials, it appeared that the community was newer and more aesthetically pleasing during that time. They featured a landscaped property with swollen bushes, picnic tables, workout room, and a powder blue pool flanked with red umbrellas. However, these accoutrements were now absent or completely beyond repair. For example, the pool was drained and had been inoperable for several years and it sat rusted without a covering. The women in the front office said that that it was too costly to repair, gut, or cover. Natasha explained that they fought with them to at least cover it because the children already used the parking lot for a play area, and the empty pool was a tempting space for bored or curious kids.

The ways in which bodies move into and out of spaces, or are placed or displaced and the "architecture of the social world" in relationship to places of residence or building structures, demonstrates the inextricable nature of race and space (Neely & Samura, 2011, p.1940-1941). In describing the process of race as an active archive, Knowles (2003) argued

> Space is an active archive of the social processes and social relationships composing
> racial orders. Active because it is not just a monument, accumulated through a racial past
> and present although it is also that it is active in the sense that it interacts
> with people and their activities as an ongoing set of possibilities in
> which race is fabricated. (p. 80)

The ways in which the space was no longer being properly managed was something that the women attributed to the presence of so many Black people in the community. After several months of complaining and the threat to the staff that they would get sued if "somebody broke their damn neck," a protective tarp was finally placed over the cavernous hole shortly after the implementation of the fall afterschool program began in the cabana. Janesse and Lynette added that they believed that the failure to repair broken fixtures and appliances in the apartments, as well as the incremental increases in rent, served as additional examples of the anti-homing (Ahmed, 2006) strategies that the management staff was using to get Blacks to move out of the community.

Gentrified

The mothers' suspicions were not completely unfounded. Geopolitical forces were actively occurring in the RECHC. Claude Homes had long been targeted for gentrification, and the city council had recently voted to demolish the projects in order to build a new mixed-income residential neighborhood. A high-end specialty grocery store which the mothers complained they couldn't afford to buy a gallon of milk from recently opened in the nearby shopping complex. Such signs signified the need to maintain and attract a higher-income customer base. The space appeared to be reorienting to accommodate middle and high-income people, and in Clinton this happened to be mostly White people. As Ahmed (2007) noted, it appeared that White bodies were being provided more space, and Black bodies were in turn afforded less. Wilson (2005) noted that "frontier gentrification" which is the idea that spaces are ran by those that are those who are more responsible and the fragmenting and balkanizing of spaces by class and race has long been promulgated as essential for the viability of cities (p.36). Historically, racial groups have been managed and contained in particular spaces, and public housing was a primary

mechanism for doing so (Massey & Denton; 1993). Policy served as a prescription and tool for placing and displacing Black people in particular residential spaces.

As the demolition of Claude Homes neared, talk inside and outside of Booker Elementary revolved around the displacement of families and the impact that it would have on the school personnel structure, as well as the emotional and social psyche of the children and families. As school population sizes shift and dwindle during gentrification many times teachers are let go. There were mixed emotions on all side. Some the double-edge factors related to gentrification have been chronicled (Baslo, 2000; Freeman, 2008, and Grotidiner, 1994). However, it didn't really matter how anyone *felt* about it, because the policies and the shifting and sorting of the Black residents was already in motion.

The mothers noted that River Eves was quickly becoming a de facto public housing community. For example, they noted the implementation of new rules that were similar to the regulations that governed the residential public housing space in Claude Homes (i.e. new codes much like the housekeeping checks in public housing) were implemented. The women were being written up for having a bucket and mop or too many chairs on the stoop, or for standing outside of their apartment building with "too many people." Similar to the police sweeps in public housing that patrolled looking for Black men in the neighborhood "who didn't belong there" or those who had prior arrests or felonies, there were nightly visits by the police in River Eves. The mothers also noted an increase in the frequency of drop-in visits and community walk-through inspections by members of the front office staff during the day. Therefore, in the evening, there was the ubiquity of the police, and by day there was the close monitoring by the management staff. Janesse had already been written up twice for various infractions such as having a mop or bucket or too many chairs on her balcony. While I was never in the community

in the evening, one afternoon during one of our sessions I did witness a check-in visit by two women from the management office. What was particularly salient during this visit was the shift in the *felt space*, which I describe in the next section, that occurred when these two women entered the all Black space.

Racialized Felt Space

Spaces have a particular feltness. This includes sights, sounds, relational references, and an array of sensorial elements that make spaces *feel* a certain way (van Manen, 1990). Racialized spaces have a particular resonance to them that include gestures, symbols, language, or conversations that might be considered unacceptable in a racially mixed space. The way that these spaces feel is what I refer to here as a *racialized felt space*, and I have come to understand it as one of the most fundamental ways that race is read. Racialized felt spaces might be celebratory, somber, silent, or awkward. A racialized space can be felt while reading a book, looking at images in print or film, listening to music, an interview, or actually being in a physical space.

In the cabana the presence and concentration of Black bodies included a way of talking and gesturing that was at times (dis)comforting, soulful, loud, sensitive, colorful, and even spiritual. The ethos of the space depended upon the composition or number of Black bodies that were absent or present within the space. Sometimes, the content and character of the space and the conversation within it felt more or less male or female. There were also generational aspects that shifted the feel of the space. It depended on whether elementary, adolescent, younger or older adults were present within the space. However, because of the quick pace of southern tongues and the flourish of colored English that ebbed and flowed loudly throughout the cabana, it always felt Black to me, even when Mexican mothers and their children were present

(see the absent presence of Mexican People in the next section).

The day when two dark tan White women with southern drawls from the management office stopped by the cabana to "check on things," the space changed from one that was populated by the warmth of loud laughter, a bit of derision between neighbors, and an overall communal atmosphere, to one that felt taut and unsettling. There were eleven of us in the common area, *grown folks* as participants described us: Eight Black women ranging in age from twenty-five to forty-nine, three males who were 21, 35, and 59, and Lynette's son Knight who was sleeping in his stroller. We were sitting in a circle in metal chairs and it was the only structure that existed. Angie and another mother were arguing back and forth about the relevance of the neighborhood watch program, and the kids were running in and out of the front door which was ajar. There were side conversations about one of the reality television shows, and *Words with Wings* (Rochelle, 2000) sat in the middle of the table along with my chart paper, a set of markers, and a few lunch bags that had gone unclaimed.

The two women appeared at the back door and silence immediately swept into the room, as one of the women closed the open door behind her with a thud. There was only the tick and whirl of the ceiling fan and the muffled laughter of the kids who were circling around the building as if they were on carousel ride. One of the women spoke up in a soft tone that defied the power of her presence. "I wanted to check on things," she purred. "How are things?" Natasha spoke up as the rest of us shifted in our seats and became spectators. "Things are fine." There was a clip in Natasha's tone; it was a mark of distrust that I too felt. The other woman with the clipboard spoke next, "And the lunch program?" Janesse spoke up next, but her response was equally short, "It's good." I watched the glance of the tan woman's eyes sweep towards the three white lunch bags sitting in the middle of the table. Her eyes appeared to ask questions that her

mouth didn't speak. Natasha obviously read them too because she responded without the direct question, explaining, "Those extra bags right there are because some kids weren't ready to eat, and they wanted to play first."

The two women nodded, and exited the cabana without words. Their time there was brief, but intense. Slowly the fullness of our being and the rhythm of conversation flowed back into the room. Eventually, even the mild contention and disagreement between Angie and the other mother resumed. Natasha and Janesse started to curse back and forth about the two women and the increased frequency of their pop-up visits to their apartment units and now in the cabana. I later discovered that the Public Housing Authority and the River Eves management office partnered to help pay for the children's lunch program, which explained the ladies interests in the extra lunch bags.

Janesse lamented: They don't send nobody to *fix* nothin'. You see that toilet back there? It's been broke for almost a year, and all's they ever do is come to check on things. Angie: Yep, but you know for real, all they really doing is tryin' to check up on your Black ass.

Cool Whites and Wiggers

I don't believe that it was merely the presence of whiteness that tempered the communal feel in the space that afternoon; it was whiteness accompanied with power. As Angie bluntly asserted above, there was a sense of having an overseer. bell hooks (2009) noted that within all Black spaces, the way that whiteness makes its presence *felt* in Black life can sometimes feel too authoritative or serve as a "terrorizing imposition" (p. 94). This was not the case with the few Whites who were *of* the community. On another day, when an older White man with sunken jowls, an unshaven chin, and clothes that were too big came into the cabana to inquire about the free computer classes that were

being offered twice a month, the Black racialized felt space didn't shift as much. I was actually the

only one who was somewhat surprised by his presence. I had gotten used to the sameness of the

racial space. The older gentleman entered the cabana with a slow, shuffling gait. Janesse noticed my

puzzled look and explained, "That's old man Ned, he live in one of the buildings right up front." As

Janesse spoke to him, the banter amongst the mothers who were present continued as if he hadn't

entered the space. I tuned the mothers out, and turned my attention to the exchange between Janesse

and Ned.

Janesse: What's up Ned?

Ned, smiling broadly: You remember me from the last class don't you?

Janesse, also smiling: Yeah, I remember you. You ran circles around all the young folks who

were tryin' to do the computer.

Ned: I'm learnin' so much so I wanted to find out when's the next class, so I can keep up my

skills.

Janesse walked toward the door and removed the lone flyer that was tacked onto a bulletin

board that was plastered with a multitude of old smiley face stickers. She handed Ned the paper, and

patted his shoulder, "Go head Ned, do yo thang, you gone be better than all of us on the computer."

Ned thanked her and shuffled out of the cabana. After he left, Janesse explained that Ned was one of

the "handful of White people" who still lived in the community, and she described him as "cool."

Whites who were *of* the community were usually described as cool. Coolness translated to mean

non-threatening unlike the women in the front office. Cool Whites also included "wiggers" who

acted Black, and the Mexican kids who the kids described as "just like us." These assertions

demonstrated the instances in which class transcended racial binaries and differences. Poverty or an

affinity for Black culture created a "shaded form of whiteness" (Morris, 2006) that didn't essentially

alter the racialized felt space in the community; in fact, it appeared to expand the definition of blackness. As I mentioned briefly in the first chapter when Jamerion and Caleb asserted, "They just like us," the spatialized blackening of Whites also included some Mexican residents in the community.

Presence of Mexicaness

According the mothers and children who participated in this study, there were "a lot of Mexican families" who lived in River Eves. I never saw "a lot of Mexican families"; however, my time in the RECHC was limited. Sometimes I saw Mexican people coming and going to and from their cars or walking back and forth from work in their uniforms. There were six Mexican mothers who routinely brought their children to the cabana to eat lunch, and on several occasions a few Mexican teen-age girls came to eat in the cabana. As the younger children sat at the long banquet hall tables using their teeth to cleave the flesh from the skin of an apple, occasionally, Spanish words were peppered into English conversations. The upper elementary English and Spanish-speaking boys sometimes jokingly referred to some of the Black mothers as "my ese," which is slang for friend or and on the back of two of the buildings, there were Spanish words tagged on the bricks. Janesse said that these were signs of Mexican gang activity in the community. In the cabana, Spanish was spoken in hushed tones amongst the Mexican mothers. But overall, the presence of Mexicaness in the community felt faint and subtle the Black and Brown lines that existed between the Black and Mexican mothers.

Black and Brown Lines

Within the cabana, there were power differentials and diverse and divergent racial spatialities and literacies that were being enacted within the small physical space (Hirst, 2004). Although the interactions between the Black mothers and Mexican youths, and the Black and

Mexican children seemed fluid, at ease, and playful, this was not the case with Black and Mexican mothers and teenagers. There were common courtesies but nothing more. Their interaction within the space was incidental. The Mexican mothers came to attend to their children, and then they left. Mexican mothers and Black mothers sat in different quadrants of the cabana. Although there were separate rooms, watching how the mothers dispersed after they helped their children get their food was much like watching the racial segmentation in the high school cafeteria unfold (Tatum, 2003). The Mexican mothers sat within their space (usually in the small man cave), and the Black mothers sat in another room (larger common room). If the boys commandeered the man cave, the Mexican mothers would move to the corner of the playroom/eating area where the children were. Black mothers never went to sit in the man cave while the Mexican mothers were in there. I also noticed that whenever the Mexican teens (always females) came down to eat, they also typically sat in the "man cave," even if there were only one or two Black mothers in the common area.

Blackness as Propertied Belonging

The "spatial logic" was never stated and certainly the spaces were not officially claimed in the manner in which the boys named and claimed the man cave. It was an understood and informal form of racialized spatialization, which appeared to be based upon a sense of propertied belonging. As I mentioned previously, the cabana largely *felt* like a Black space. It was a space that I was able to "sink into" (Ahmed, 2007) because of the likeness and reciprocity of my skin, and also because I was familiar and mostly comfortable with the cultural ethos within the cabana. Ahmed described it best, she stated, "What is repeated is a very style of embodiment a way of inhabiting space, which claims space by the accumulation of gestures of "sinking into that space. (p.136)

Keenan (2010) argued that property can be defined as a relationship of belonging held up by the surrounding space (p.426). Keenan noted that our identities shift relative to the space in which we exist. She argued that a subject's identity *becomes* relative to the space which is around it (p.431).   Ahmed (2007) noted that a groups' sense of "ownership" or belonging within a particular space is relative to the state of feeling oriented, and having a sense that one belongs. She also contended that feeling as if one has power within a space is also a determining factor in whether one has a sense of belonging within a space. Our embodied consciousness is sensitive and situated within certain spaces (Merleau Ponty, 1962/2002). This consciousness stands tall, rises, or sinks amongst certain people, and within certain racial spaces (Ahmed, 2006). Within the Black space, it appeared that the Mexican mothers and young adult girls didn't feel as if they "belonged" within the space. As Keenan (2010) noted, belonging is a transaction of social relations and networks of which an individual or collective is embedded. She argued further that subjects or objects exceed the actual space. She stated, "Belonging is considered the relationship whereby an object, space, or rights over it belong to a subject, and secondly the constitutive relationship of part to whole whereby attributes, qualities or characteristics belong to a thing or a subject -'part-whole'" (p. 426).

As I observed the Mexican mothers and the teens interacting in the cabana, their conversations were subdued and unlike the loud cackles or the rising and falling of words and layered conversations that fill the Dominican salon where I get my hair straightened. Within that racio-ethnic Dominican space, I sit in the swivel chair with the puff of smoke from the blow dryer orbiting around me, as my kinky hair is blow dried into submission. Spanish words roll and trill from the mouths of the Brown, Yellow, White, and Dark Chocolate women almost as loudly as the melodic Spanish words that simultaneously bounce and blare from the speakers in the

boom box that plays. Within this space, although some of us shared the same skin tone, our common language has always been hair and money. We communicate with each other in a new and broken language. It has worked for many years, but it remains their space, and I'm within it. My experience is what Relph (1976) describes as an incidental insider/outsider. Being within a space only for a particular purpose. The incidental insider is in a space for a purpose but feels a connection rather than a contingency (p.51). Although Relph doesn't cross borders in his theorizing of places, within the Dominican salon, I move between being an incidental insider/outsider. Although we share some racio-ethnic borders, our language and cultural differences matter, because other than a few choice words of Spanish, I do not know what they are saying. I just know what it feels like.

In the cabana, the ratio of Black people to Mexican people, created a particular comfort level for Black community members that did not appear to exist for Mexican families. And, because Blacks made up the majority of the population, in the absence of the White management staff, they possessed an inverted form of social capital in the community (Morris, 2006). Relph (1976) described this place-based phenomenon as existential insideness. In this sense, place is experienced as comfortable, at home, and within such a space, one has a sense of belonging (p. 55). As I mentioned previously, this balance of power and sense of freedom and ease was evident in the way that physical space was enacted. The language barrier was certainly an issue, for example, when the Mexican mothers had questions about the food or if there weren't enough lunches to go around. Lucas, a fifth grade Mexican boy who usually ran around shirtless with Da'veon and Caleb, served as a translator. Lucas was like a bridge between the Black and Mexican mothers. He was a linguistic and cultural mediator (Reynolds & Orellana, 2009) and

when he wasn't there, and a message needed to be conveyed, it felt like attempting to converse through the thick panels of two-way glass.

In this chapter I introduced the mothers' perceptions of race and place and the larger societal and local political contexts influencing their readings. As Relph (1976) argued, through discourse, they revealed that "place is a profound and complex aspect of man's experience of the world" (p.3), and the racialized spatialization of reading race was explicated in varying dimensions. I put the mothers' perceptions of race in conversation with Critical Race Theory, critical feminist theory, and critical geography theories on race, and explored such as propertied belonging and the flagging of the skin. I also narrated examples of racialized felt space. Through Lynette's lived experience narrative, I demonstrated the social meanings of skin and phenotypic traits that flag differently and what it was like to negotiate racialized hybrid spaces. The racialization of space appears in subsequent chapters in a multitude of ways and varies in complexity and intensity.

What remained salient throughout this research was an acknowledgement that I would honor the multiplicity of voices with the spiritual and sacred dimensions which Denzin and Lincoln (2000) espoused. These dimensions included sensitivity, trust, love, humility, and respect (p, 559). I strove to maintain and apply these attributes throughout my analysis and writing, and each time that I crossed the threshold of the door at the cabana.

CHAPTER 5

UNFORGIVABLE BLACKNESS

The road leading to the cabana was an obstacle of massive concrete speed bumps that

made my body jostle even as I rolled my car over them slowly. They were thick, like gauges on a

train rail. However, I discovered that going over the train gauges was better than going around

them because the impact of hitting the deep depressions and divots on each side of them was far

worse. The cabana was located in the back of the complex tucked within several buildings. By

bicycle and by foot, kids laughed and zig-zagged through a maze of parked cars on the concrete

slabs of pavement that doubled as a playground. Patchy tufts of grass, dandelion weeds, and

white starred flowers for the bees bordered the walkway to the cabana. The red dust that caked

the feet of the young girls in their flip flops was more plentiful than the grass.

I parked my car and grabbed my stack of books. As I approached the cabana, Da'veon and

Jamerion, Lamar, and Marcus ran towards the door pushing and shoving each other. They were

shirtless and moist with sweat. The smell of summer was wafting from their skin. As they pushed

through the doorway, they simultaneously held it open for me. Natasha yelled out to them, "Um,

Um, y'all look like some runaway slaves, go on and sit down." The boys danced around laughing,

coughing, and gasping trying to catch their breath. She handed each one of them a white bag

containing their lunch. It included a chicken breast on a bun, an apple, and chips. They grabbed the

sacks and entered the large room in the front of the cabana that doubled as a lunch and playroom.

Several other children were already sitting at a long banquet table dissassembling the sandwich;

Tray's bun was on its side and he pulled pieces of chicken breast off in strings and ate the strands of the meat like they were gummy worms.

Natasha came into the room and announced, "Ms. Roberta's here. Ya'll can help her today with her books, plus she gone have y'all help her pick out a paint color for that room in there." I stood in the doorway peeking inward. Several younger boys protested, "But we want to paint *this* room, 'cause that room is our man cave." Katrina poked her lips out, "I can still go in there if I want to. Y'all ain't gone stop me from going. In. There. If. I. Want. To." Katrina twisted and swayed her body back and forth, and curled her lips. She paused to punctuate each word for added emphasis. The banter back and forth from the boys began. "I bet you won't unless you want to get your butt kicked." "Come kick it," begged Katrina who was up from her seat fully willing to accept his challenge. The boy who was clearly amused and more than willing to keep getting under her skin laughed and gulped his juice, "Just shut up, and sit down. You ain't gone do nothin." Katrina didn't bow down. "No, you shut up with yo Black big head self."

Aesthetics of Everyday Race Making

In the cabana, everyday race making and reading race occurred through discursive interactions within casual conversations like the vignette above. It included references, arguments, and rhetorical tendencies by adults and children. Janesses' reference to the boys looking like runaway slaves and Katrina's exchange are examples of the ways in which the racial aesthetic was embedded in the everyday discourse and relations amongst community members. Janesses' comment to the boys was a form of racialized humor that working class Blacks have used to describe a state of being disheveled or untidy. It was one of the many ways that the past was brought forward in casual discourse.

In this chapter, I highlight several conversational threads related to the aesthetics of blackness that were considered unforgivable. I include some of the ways these were embedded discursively within everyday interactions and conversations, and thus part of a natural attitude of reading race, and I also include explicit interpretations from participants. For example, some of the narrative threads that I inserted were based on my observations and interactions with mothers or children. Others were in response to reading books, engaging in book talks, or picture walks with parents and/or children. I highlight my participants' perspectives on the Black aesthetic, and I present a few questions to think about along the way. Throughout the chapter, I weave some of my post-bridled thoughts, personal struggles, and memories related to the racialized aesthetic of blackness and the absent presence of whiteness. The elements of the Black aesthetic that are included are ideologies about slavery, Black phenotypic traits, the Black hair trope, and colorism (Burke, 2008; Parrish, 1946).

The aesthetic of slavery was a manifestation of the phenomena that continually presented itself in a multitude of ways, both in response to reading books that didn't directly name or address slavery, such as *Happy to Be Nappy* (hooks & Raschka, 1999); texts that implied slavery, such as uncombed hair, or having the look of uncleanliness; as well as books that explicitly addressed slavery i.e. *Only Passing Through* (Rockwell & Christie, 2002). Ironically, before I entered into the community space, carrying my stack of fictional and nonfiction books about African American life of the past and present, slavery served as a referential aesthetic within the community.

Roots Kids and the Ideologies of Slavery

In River Eves, the moniker "the Root kids" had been given to five siblings who were known for being frail, "dusty," and unkept. "Black people got some nicknames don't they," chirped Janesse. "We got Ray Ray, Poochie, June Bug, Candyman, and the *Roots* kids." My girlfriends and I used to

joke that every Black neighborhood had a little boy named June Bug or Man Man, but I have to admit, that the *Roots* kids was new to me. During my time in the community, I never met any of "the *Roots* kids" or their mother because they never came down to the cabana to eat or play like most of the other children in the complex. Both parents and children referred to the children as the *Roots* kids. One day as we assembled lunches, Janesse and Angie chatted

> Janesse wondered, "I don't know why the little *Roots* kids ain't been down here. I gave one of the boys a flyer to give to his momma."
>
> Angie chimed in, "Them kids are way too skinny, I don't think she feed 'um. In fact, I know she don't. See 'cause whatever little piece of change she get, she be drinkin' it up."
>
> Janesse explained that the oldest of the *Roots* kids was a fifth grader at Booker, and he was inarticulate. "That little boy even *talk* like a slave. I'm serious; he can't string a coherent sentence together." She slapped her hand against her thigh. "For real, he got like a first grade reading level." "It sounds like she needs some help," I added.
>
> Natasha interjected. "You can't help nobody that don't want no help. I mean I know it's hard

out here, but you can only do so much, 'cause you got your own problems. But she *need* to take care of them raggedy kids though."

The women reveal their standpoint on Black mothering here and on several other occasions as one that must embody the "strong Black mother" (Collins, 2000; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). Tendencies to evoke analogous relationships to slavery, like Janesse's comment that "that little boy even *talk* like a slave," were primarily tied to aesthetic dimensions that were considered unattractive, unkept, servile, or, in this case, ignorant. I can recall similar negative references to slavery within my working class Black neighborhood. Slave references were in the repertoire of who we were, but not necessarily at our best. Quite often the analogies

that we made in relationship to our slave ancestry were repugnant. We were ashamed, and we tried to distance ourselves from it as much as possible. Sometimes as we hung out in the neighborhood playing dodge ball or as we sat around doing nothing, joaning sessions would ensue. Joaning is a form of Black verbal play that includes making fun of someone's behavior, physical characteristics or material circumstances. It was much like the playing the dozens (see Smitherman, 1995). Similar to the dozens or momma jokes, joaning sessions usually include a captive audience of spectators that interact by "keeping score" using laughter or jeers. Joaning may include jokes about someone being without money, or racialized humor that includes qualifiers about the way that someone looks. Calling someone an ol' slave or saying that somebody looked like Kunta Kinte, or Kizzy was considered an ultimate insult. In our minds, certainly nobody wanted to look like or be a slave.

Embodied Geographies of Blackness

I had buried the memories of those neighborhood discourses about slave talk within me, but the stories about the *Roots* kids made me remember the negative and careless ways that we conjured up the spirit and image of our ancestors (Dillard, 2006). As Judah (2012) noted, the body remembers and brings back to the surface that which you do not wish to remember. I began to remember how we used to crowd around on the sidewalk the day after watching the miniseries *Roots* (Haley, 1976). With skinned knees, ankle socks, and our "white girl" tennis shoes, we sat around talking about our Black selves – the *we*. We employed our collective consciousness which included our past and our present selves. Across space and time, we saw ourselves in them: in Kunta Kinte, Kizzy, Chicken George, and Fiddler. But we imagined that *we* were somehow wiser and tougher. I remember how *we* used to say that *we* would have fought back,

and how *we*, "wouldn't take that mess." *We* could've, would've, *never* been slaves. However, *we* still saw ourselves in them.

The embodied geographies of blackness have temporal and spatial dimensions that are inclusive of a blackness that precedes itself. Blackness in this sense is essentially already there. It encompasses the past and an embodied way of knowing and living as racial beings that we each inherit. It is in one sense how we become black or white. The embodied geographies of blackness is therefore connected to a legacy of collective struggle and triumph, and also what Gilroy (1993) referred to as the shared experience of terror and shame that is rooted in slavery. To embody blackness is to somehow encompass blackness that is outside of one self. To be Black is to be "one limb" of the collective body of blackness, even as one might desire to be outside of it or distanced from it. In addition, bounded by the politics of the skin the embodied geographies of blackness are diasporic and inclusive of Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic (Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean). Then and now as I remember and reflect, I believe that *we* were/are trying to reconcile our present selves with our past selves (Dubois, 1903). Dubois' often cited notion of double consciousness, that "One ever feels his[her] two-ness--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" (p. 5), is alive and real. Through mean spirited, insensitive, and sometimes humorous ways, the yearning and the desire to reconcile the two-ness was/is there, haunting the present.

Evoking the slave aesthetic appeared to be an underlying need and desire to situate our Black selves in relationship to slavery; it was a way of helping us to make sense of who we are in our present state of being Black. In addressing the identity of Black people's conflicted identity relative to reconciling the present with the past, Gilroy (1995) offered that as Black people, "we

are not what we were, but neither are we what we are supposed to be" (p. 26). In her assertion about what to do with the trauma of the past, Alcoff (2010) noted that "Individuals have agency over interpretations of their history but they cannot "choose" to live outside history any more than they can "overcome" their horizon (p.115). How do we make sense of *the ways* in which both the parents and children in this small urban city in the South, and the Black children in my Midwestern working class neighborhood, each drew upon, yet simultaneously attempted to distance ourselves from, our enslaved past. Moreover, why there is/was so much shame, and in terms of this complex phenomenon of acknowledging, remembering, and desiring to forget what are some ways of rethinking the praxis of a slave past within literacy spaces?

Shame

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise **...**
(Angelou, 1978)

Although the mothers and children seemed to consider the social rituals that evoked the aesthetic of slavery within each of the neighborhood spaces humorous, they were cloaked in fear, anger, pain, and shame. Gilroy (1993) argued that Black consciousness includes a shared experience of "terror" and shame that is rooted in slavery. As I considered our readings I wondered if perhaps the narrow orbit of reading race in school spaces should be expanded so that when we discuss slavery, there is also deep and purposeful conversation to counter internalized shame and forms of internalized racism that might manifest. Perhaps it should include rich narratives about the will and determination that Black slaves demonstrated as they constantly (re)created, strengthened and renewed Black family units in the face of degradation and oppression. After all, this is how the *we* and the collective identity of blackness came into being, because within the bowels of the slave ship, Black men and women who were from different

villages across the Diaspora of Central and West Africa and who did not speak the same language, or have the same culture *became* the one limb of blackness.

There was a handsome spirit of intellectualism, innovation, and creativity that Black people employed to resist the inhumanity of slavery. After slavery, segregated spaces were counter spaces for creating, sustaining, and strengthening the psychic-emotional stress within the hearts and minds of Blacks as a result of physical and psychological societal warfare waged against the presence of blackness. Within and outside of school the work of developing and sustaining a rich and positive Black identity was recognized (hooks, 1989; Walker, 1996). Although physically fighting back was indeed warranted and necessary, there was significant resistance through other empowering and viable means such as writing and art that countered anti-Black disempowering sentiments. Most Black children are aware of the negative identity constructs associated with blackness (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Lewis, 2003; Love, 2012; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995; Wang and Huguley, 2012). Adolescent youths have made sense of their racialized Black bodies as sites of coolness (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009), hypersexual objects (Love, 2012), and also through hyper-emphasis on athletic prowess (Morris & Adeyemo, 2012). What do they make of Angelou's assertion of being the hope and dream of a slave? What does it mean if anything, outside of shame? Reading race in the RECHC caused me to realize that it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which youths absorb anti-Black racism and sentiments and how these contribute to some of the nuanced inimical ideologies, contempt, and shame ascribed to being Black.

Looking Black: The Black Aesthetic

Shut up with yo Black big head self

- Katrina

Katrina's response to Lamar to "Shut up with yo Black big head self" exemplified the significance of blackness itself as a negative ontological aesthetic and a derogatory reference. It's not that Lamar did shut up because he didn't, but Katrina believed that she could shame, slay, and shut him up just by using the b-word. It was just one of the ways that being Black or the aesthetic of blackness was considered unforgivable. Spencer (1984) described this as racial dissonance. Racial dissonance is the articulation of "white-bias attitudes" by minority children. It is the "voice of the other within" (Tate, p. 104). One of the earliest studies of Black identity constructions was conducted by Horowitz (1939) whose research revealed that Black children identified themselves as White in line drawings. This indicated that Black children had a strong proclivity to identify themselves in relationship to whiteness. In 1952, psychologist Mamie and Kenneth Clarke built upon Horowitz' research; however, they used Black and White dolls to decipher racial attitudes that Black children possessed about the Black aesthetic. The results of the study were so powerful that it paved the way for social policy and the mandate for school desegregation—a milestone that is largely being reversed (Boger & Orfield, 2005).

According to hooks (2003), despite the heterotopian potential of integration that exists in a pluralistic free American society, negative ideologies about blackness are engrained in the Black psyche, and they are apparently breed within new generations in conscious and dysconscious ways. hooks quoted Lerone Bennet Jr., who argued that "The last bastion of white supremacy is in the Black man's mind" (p. 162). In our reading sessions, anti-Black sentiments about Black bodies that included colorism and phenotypic traits were not uncommon. Darker

skin, coarse hair, and facial features such as broad lips or flat noses were considered unattractive and undesirable. This form of self abnegation is a seed that bell hooks argued was planted and sowed during slavery. Rape and miscegenation created an internal color divide within the Black community because lighter skinned Blacks were given less strenuous jobs in the "big house" and they were considered more attractive because of their "high yellow" brighter, whiter looking skin tone.

These Black skin privileges and positive attributes created an abiding legacy and a source of conflict within the Black community well after slavery. The social privileges conferred to higher income and class status. Blue vein Blacks (those light enough to show blue veins) inter married and created social clubs to keep the gene pool and social economic status intact. More recently, lyrics in popular rap and R & B music by Lil' Wayne and Eric Benet have perpetuated preference for "red bone" and lighter skin women as a superior form of Black beauty. Red bone Blacks have lighter skin and hair. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) argued that when children indicate a preference for lighter skin, they are displaying an awareness about society's negative value of Black skin. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2002) asserted that "…all children in this society learn at an early age that, generally speaking, whiteness is privileged and darkness is not" (p. 57) In their ethnographic research into the racial socialization of young children, Van Ausdale and Feagin noted that children as young as 3 years old absorb and act out racialized thinking.

Unlike other instances of anti-Black rhetoric in the cabana, Katrina's assertion was interesting because her skin tone was not much lighter than Lamar's. In other words she was "as Black" as Lamar. Both were on the darker side of lightness, a deep shade of butterscotch. At the age of eight, Katrina had a clear understanding that blackness itself qualified as a flaw, and that it

could serve as a verbal weapon. In that sense, Lamar having a "big head" was not enough of an insult. Katrina knew that his Black skin would make the insult more potent.

As the kids continued with their riff, and moved on to other things, I taped paint chips to the wall in hues of blue and yellow. Earlier in the week I conducted an informal survey asking the kids what color they wanted to paint the walls in the room that I began referring to as the reading room as a way of neutralizing the gendered space that they called the man cave. It always created verbal spats of some kind, but I actually deluded myself by trying to rename the space because in casual references, the boys and everyone else (parents and the littler girls) continued to call it the "man cave." The walls in the man cave were a mottled gun-metal gray. The room was a small rectangle shape with two long walls and two short ones. There were two shelves stuffed with yellowed books and caste off games and toys with missing pieces rescued from the hallways of Booker by some of the mothers. There was a large hole in the long wall facing the entry. Natasha said that it was already there when they started using the space for the after school program, but that the management office refused to fix it (they also wouldn't repair the toilet). The hole was about the size of a basketball. Sometimes the children threw objects into the hole, and other times they extracted pieces of drywall and tossed pieces at each other like rocks. I asked Janesse if management would allow us to patch and paint the room as part of a summer project. They agreed.

Although the kids were excited about painting the room together at the end of the week, I wanted to focus on reading more books so I announced, "We'll talk about picking a color after we talk about some of these books." After several weeks, I had learned that reading during lunch or right before it was delivered was the best time to hold the children's attention. A few times when I waited until after lunch was over and I assembled the kids into a circle, many children

left or complained that "this was too much like school." I can't totally blame them – after all it was summer. The books that I brought with me on that particular day included narrative nonfiction, biographies, and melting pot books (Sims, 1982) that featured African American children without references to race. All of the titles that I included in the study were titles that had recently been added to the collection at Booker.

Too Black, Too Strong

As I continued to take books out of my bag and stand them up, Katrina blurted out: "I don't want to read that one 'cause she got some big bubble gum soup cooler lips." I was holding the book, *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth* (Rockwell & Christie, 2002). Da'veon chimed in and several of the kids began an assault of the book and Sojourner Truth. The kids bantered back and forth:

Da'veon: I don't like how she look either.

Tray: Look at her big ol' nose.

Ka'trina: And look at them arms and stuff.

Da'veon: She look like a deformed alien or something. (all of the kids laugh)

Da'veon: I can draw better than that. We don't all be so Black like that with big ol' noses and stuff.

Roberta: It's a unique way of creating the people. It's abstract art.

Tray: Ms. Roberta, I know why he said she an alien cause look at her head and her arms.

Da'veon: Yea, see her face and her arms, everything look like a monster.

Roberta: She was a real person, and woman that you should all know about. I have two books about her.

Katrina: No, Ms. Roberta, cause I don't want to *read* that one.

Roberta: What if we just read a little bit of each of these and you can take home either one that you want.
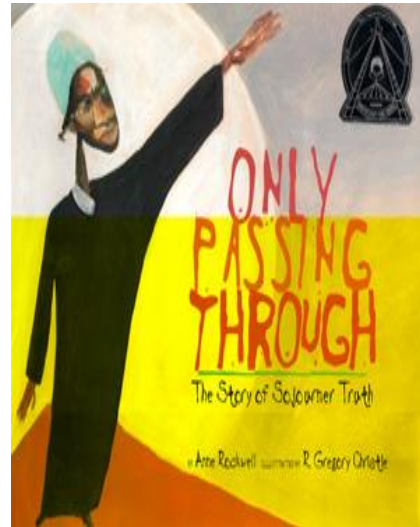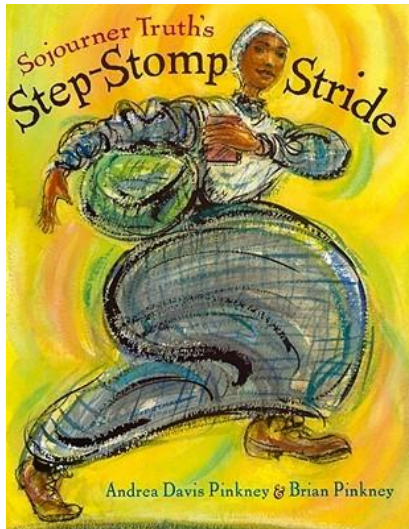
I suspected that the children would have a strong reaction to Gregory Christie's images. He purposefully plays with form in his paintings. Like Picasso, Christie abstracts the proportion and traits of human figures. Christie won a Coretta Scott King Honor award, and the book was also on *The New York Times* Best Illustrated and American Library Association's Notable Books lists. Christie uses striking colors, illustrative techniques, and metaphoric imagery such as elongated or truncated body parts, which serve as textual tools that can be used for rich discussion and critical racial literacy analysis. He often weathers the faces of his subjects which enlivens them and creates emotional layers that can serve as textual features for reading *into* the complexities of racial meaning and being (Beach & Philippot, 1999). Iser (1978), in his phenomenological perspective into reader response, argued that books were not simply books, rather they were *effects* that "initiate performance of meaning" (p.27). Similarly, Rosenblatt (1978) pointed out that an aesthetic reading of a text includes what is "lived through during a

reading." The performance of meaning as one reads any text can illicit strong resistance, and just like the response of Da'veon, Katrina, and Tray, it is not uncommon for children to reject the implicit or explicit messages in culturally conscious books (Sims, 1982, p. 49) about race (Brooks, 2006; Moeller & Allen, 2000; Lewison, et al, 2002). Each of the above studies indicated the need for deeper understanding of the ways that children make sense of race and cultural phenomenon in books.

Brooks and Brown's (2012) cultural standpoint theory of reader response is grounded on the premise that identity and personhood contexts are connected to students' community and cultural frames of reference. This standpoint also includes cultural positions relative to family, peer, and ethnic effects. Da'veon's argument that "we don't all be Black with big 'ol noses" was a way of resisting what he considered an attempt to universally portray blackness. It also demonstrates the importance of not allowing race and racial meaning to be neatly folded into culture. Katrina's initial comment about Sojourner's "big bubble gum soup cooler lips" was a racialized reference to having lips that are *so big* that they serve to cool soup. Sojourner's features were not considered pleasing because they were essentially too Black and too strong. Katrina was verbalizing her awareness of the macro-level ideologies and socially constructed views that prefer narrow White female beauty aesthetics. Like all of the children, they did not express Black beauty separate from a White frame of reference.

As I continued the book talk and picture walk (much to Katrina's dismay), the children persisted to resist both the artistic style of the book and the phenotypic traits of Sojourner who, despite the abstracted imagery, *did* have a broad nose and lips. As I read excerpts, pointed out textual features, and asked questions, Da'veon demonstrated an understanding of the metaphorical components, but he still disliked Christie's aesthetic perspective. He commented,

"I know why they used the little hands and stuff, see because she's about to get beat and she can't do nothin'. But she just look so jacked up and Black."

Lighter and Brighter

I wanted the children to be aware that there were other choices for reading about Sojourner Truth, so I also book talked *Step-Stomp Stride* (Pinkney & Pinkney, 2009). When I held up the copy of the book and explained that this was the same person, Katrina rolled her eyes and slapped her hand on the floor and shook her head as if she was truly grateful. "Gooood," she added drawing out her word, "Cause she look way more better in this one." All of the children agreed with Katrina, but they did get plenty of digs in about Sojourner's "big old shoes." Da'veon yelped, "Look at them big ol' roach stompers." In *Step-Stomp Stride*, the overall aesthetic and feel of the book is lighter and less ominous than *Only Passing Through*. The focus is less on slavery and more on the speeches that she made about freedom and women's suffrage. Sojourner looks less "alien like" in *Stomp*; however, in this text, Sojourner's features are also abstracted. Her dark skin is a lighter pecan color. Her nose and lips are keener, more European looking, and unlike her actual physical traits. There is a sense of vibrancy, positivity, and sometimes a humorous tone. The water colors and brush strokes in *Stomp* are soft, and brisk. Sojourner is rendered "large and in charge," but she is more stylized in her clothing than the version rendered by Rockwell and Christie. It has more kid appeal. For example, although she appears as somewhat of a messianic figure in both books, in *Stomp*, the rings of the sun form a variable halo around Sojourner's head as she "strides" "steps" and "stomps" toward justice. There is no sun in Rockwell and Christie's book which is recommended for children ages 6 and up. In fact, when Rockwell does describe the sun, it is symbolic of her fateful entry into slavery when Sojourner is nine years old and is being auctioned off. Rockwell narrates:

> Young tall, and strong as she was, no one bid for the slave girl called Isabella …The sun settled low in the sky and still she wasn't sold. Finally the auctioneer offered to throw in a flock of sheep if someone would just buy the girl so he could call it a day and go home for supper (paragraph 3).

Coupled with Christie's deep saturated palette and Rockwell's narration, from the onset the book feels bleak, and the cruel and the ugly ways of slavery are visible, palpable, and undeniable. Notice that the sun is low and nightfall is coming. Nobody wanted Sojourner. Throughout the book, the mouths of the people are askew and the eyes are piercing and brimming with emotion. There is a sense of fear, pain, despair, hostility, and discomfort. The red, orange, brown, and black tones and the shapes of the bodies feel heavy. Colors communicate and create psychological and emotive sentiments, and they can cause the reader to vicariously experience the lived tension, turmoil, and sentiments of the subjects (citation?). The positioning of the bodies and the objects in this image allow us to read issues of power and positioning without the words. I wanted to ask the children questions, such as these: Look at the men, look at Sojourner. Who is sitting? Who is standing and working? What about the object that she is holding, and how is that particular object tied to the larger structures of race and class?

I wanted to get to these kinds of readings but we couldn't get past her unforgivable blackness. Conversely, in *Stomp*, readers feel a sense of warmth, energy, affirmation, beauty, and hope. Andrea Pinkney uses a poetic form to draw the reader into the text. It opens:

> She was big. She was black. She was *so* beautiful. Born into slavery, Belle had to endure the cruelty of several masters before she escaped to freedom. And oh, was freedom sweet!"

The Pinkneys also demonstrate Sojourner's strength and determination through an effective pairing and synergy of the images and text (Sipe, 1998), but it's quite different from *Only passing Through*. The book exudes power, but it also *feels good*. The lyrical flow of language and umber tones in swathes of buttery gold, sienna, and misty blue create a textual ecology (Lewis, 2001) that is captivating, inviting. An aurora—the uplift and dawning of a new day, can you feel it when you look at these pictures?

The kids genuinely liked the lyrical flow of this book, "That one is good." "I think I did this report on her with my partner in reading," "This one is nicer." This one is just better, cause I like the pictures. The kids generally absorbed the feel good message in *Stomp,* and they made connections back to school. In this section, I folded in a brief literary analysis and juxtaposed some of the textual features of my participants' responses because they were representative of what reading race is often like in particular moments: Moving from spaces of despair, to places of hope, always in the midst of the White gaze, full of anger and resolve. Reading race is both a shadow and a substance (Sims, 1982). It includes shades of what is terrifying, repugnant, shameful and beautiful. It may be discomforting, gritty, shocking, or ugly. It is about speaking up and out, particularly when it is not necessarily what people are ready to hear or see.

Reading race can be discomforting and unexpected. I shared these books with the children because I believe that both the morose and jubilant realities of Sojourner's narrative must be known by all of us, particularly Black children. She embodied what it means to embrace and fight for who she was in every inch of her *Black being*. In Sojourner's case, that meant being a proud, intelligent, bi-lingual, outspoken, broad nose, think lipped, dark skinned Black woman. She crossed a multitude of boundaries, both freeing herself and others from the mental,

physical, intellectual, and psychological bondage of slavery. It's a battle that *we* must all recognize, and continually fight against.

"Ain't Nobody Happy Bein' Nappy"

On the afternoon that we read the book *Happy to Be Nappy* (hooks, 1999), with the exception of Natsaha and Zuri, all of the mothers as well as Katrina and Makeela resisted the whimsical image of the nameless little brown girl in the book, who flipped and twirled exuding sheer happiness in her nappy state. Lynette liked the message in the book too, but each of the women discredited her for not being able to relate because of her "good hair."

> I usually invited the parents to read the books aloud. Angie began reading, "…is soft like cotton, flower petal billowy soft, full of fizz and fuzz, …it can be smooth or patted down, …these short tight naps." Natasha interrupted, and the Black hair debate between the women ensued:
>
> Natasha: I like it. I *like* this book, it's true. We can rock our hair short, braided, whatever, and you need to be proud in whatever way you wear it too. I really like that little book right there.
>
> Angie, crowing with laughter: Nope, I don't think so. You have to *straighten* their hair for it to look decent.
>
> Another mother interjected: Your child will get teased,. Ain't nobody happy bein' nappy. And Tasha, you don't *have* no little girls so you don't know what you talkin' about.
>
> Natasha snapped: Well I like the book for me, plus I got nieces and stuff.
>
> Angie quipped: Yeah, whatever, but they don't run around with no *nappy* hair. You don't see no little girls around here with nappy hair except the little *Root's* kids. It might be more little girls in Claude Homes running around with nappy uncombed hair and stuff.

But you can forget that, I'm not letting my little girl have no afro or no nappy hair.

Janesse added: I ain't doin' that to my baby girl either. I will bead her hair up (reference to putting it in braids with colored beads), or I will get some *Dark and Lovely* to straighten up them coils and rolls in the kitchen (the back of the hair and nap of the neck).

Angie: It's a cute book, but you better not let your little girl be nappy.

Our reading of *Happy to be Nappy* was followed by *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*. Once again the mothers liked the book, but they remained skeptical of how the message of natural Black beauty actually played out in real life.

"I do like the book and everything," Angie offered, "but those girls with the Celie plaits (she is referring to the character Ms. Celie played in the Color Purple) just would not be considered cute. We need to stick with Tiana" (she was referring to Disney's first Black princess). The debate about Black features and Black beauty in relation to hair continued. It became contentious at times as mothers discussed personal choices about their own hair—

"Okay Ms. Spanish weave, you can't talk."

There were accusations about the White gaze and how "without White people, we wouldn't be straightening our hair."

"See, I like it thick and wavy, or straight," another mother added.

"Besides wiggers," said Natasha, "They (White women) ain't tryin' to get no hair like us. We tryin' to be like *them*."

Some mothers implicated Madame C. J. Walker and her pressing comb. There were also conversations about whether to braid or not to braid a girls' hair or little boys' hair, to dred or not to dred, and who had "good hair" and "bad hair." Angie emphasized the importance of Black women having the aesthetic of straightened hair in order to work at a "decent" place. "*Look* if

you *don't* straightening your hair you will not get a J. O. B, I mean you might get one but it

won't be a decent job."

Hair discrimination for Black men and women is common. However, the pressure to

perform whiteness through hair is particularly pervasive for Black women (Collins, 2000).

Wearing the White mask and deracination (Yancy, 2008) takes on many forms, and it is

profitable. The Black hair care industry is a multi-million dollar industry, and many of the

companies that manufacture, distribute, and sell Black hair products are not Black. Angie's

argument was not off track. In her comprehensive scholarly research into the history of Black

hair, Rooks (1996) located advertisements around the turn of the century that explicitly equated

economic advancement and the beauty of Black women to straightening their locks. The

advertisement for the product, Curl-I-Cure stated,

> You owe it to yourself, as well as to others who are interested in you, to make yourself as
>
> attractive as possible. Attractiveness will contribute much to your success—both socially
>
> and economically. Positively nothing, detracts so much from your appearance as short,
>
> matted un-attractive curly hair (p. 40).

Having Black hair that curls and coils seems to be an intractable problem for some

women. In fact the other aesthetic taboo, "being a dark –skinned girl" is considered forgivable if

a female has straight, wavy hair, or "good hair" as opposed to kinky or coarse hair. Conversely

having light skin with a curly kinky grade of hair can blacken, i.e. negate, the "positive"

attributes of beauty typically conferred to lighter skinned and biracial women. In her memoir

Secret Daughter (2007), noted scholar June Cross, who had a White mother and a Black father

described how hair, more so than skin tone, became a critical part of understanding her racialized

identity. She stated, "As I grew older, it seemed to be my hair, more than my skin color, that

defined me as a black woman; the crinkled curls spoke in the loudest terms possible: you are different, you are not pretty" (p. 73). Cross asserted that her obsession with curing her crinkled curls began before she could read. She desired long White hair. So did I.

I was six years old when I first put a towel on my head, pretending and dreaming that I had White hair. I danced in the mirror. I twirled around, letting my hair fly free in the wind. I would pause, finger, fling, and flip my hair like my White teacher did when she clicked down the hall. In my mirror, I would preen and smooth it around, and then turn ever so slightly so that my White hair would "cas-sca-sca-dade" down my back the way that Whoopi Goldberg's "hair" (a white shirt on head) did in her "My Luxurious Long Hair" routine (HBO, 1985). I wanted to be rid of my coils too; the towel hair was my cure. Later it was a perm in a box, and after giving up on that, more recently my cure has been a hot blow out by my Dominican stylist who has a skin tone as dark as mine and hair just as wooly. In the salon we communicate with each other in broken Spanish and English, but there is a fluidity in our understanding and a common language relative to our hair and skin.

Black hair in its natural/nappy/matted/curly/kitchen state continues to be characterized as a menace. It is an aesthetic that somehow needs to be rehabilitated and cured. It has been equated to wealth and economic success, positive social identity, and self love. Although countless Black people have embraced the term as a symbol of racial pride, and as a positive identity trait, "nappy" remains a racially inflammatory term that conjures up a negative unattractive aesthetic. Some Black people prefer the terms natural, kinky, or curly. As Lester (1999) argued, the word nappy highlights the "fundamental connections between language and perception and between language and identity, and demonstrates how certain words consciously or unconsciously carry with them loaded emotional and psychological responses" (p. 173). From the mother's

perspectives, nappy hair equaled unkept hair. Nappy hair was synonymous with a particular kind of poverty, *project poverty*.

In addition, being "dark and lovely" meant not simply having well groomed hair, but straight non-nappy hair. As Natasha noted, the book's explicit message was to simply be proud of one's hair in whatever style or way of wearing it-including and especially when wearing it nappy. However being nappy was a negative referent that perhaps polarized the women's attitudes about their daughter's and their own hair preferences. The politics of hair in the Black community is an on-going debate. Rooks (1996) noted that the "crux of the Black hair issue centers on three oppositional binaries—the natural/unnatural Black, good/bad hair Black, and the authentic/inauthentic Black. Black hair is monitored and regulated by both the White and Black gaze. As Rooks argued in her scholarly research into the Black hair aesthetic debate, the dominant image of beauty continues to be an aesthetic that mimics and is acceptable to White standards of beauty. Therefore, Black hair in its natural or ethnicized state can be problematic. Deciding to braid, dred, or twist Black hair is not merely a personal or professional choice, but a political one, and so is reading about it. The back and forth between the women continued—our hair-*Black hair*-remained a point of contention.

As the pulse of the room became elevated, I noticed that Zuri was underneath one of the banquet tables on his stomach reading a book from my stack. Zuri's hair was parted down the middle into long thin braids that reached the arc of his chin. I interrupted the women, "Let's ask Zuri what he thinks." Angie called out, "Come here Zuri. What do you think?" Do you think it's a good idea for Black people to be happy and nappy?" "Yeah, I do because I think it gives us our own world." Everyone laughed, but clearly I thought he was right.

Zuri

Zuri was a rising fifth grader at Booker, and Janesse described him as an "old soul." He often responded to seemingly simple questions in ways that I found deeply profound. When I first met him, I asked his name, to which he responded, "My name is Zuri Jovan Carter, son of Janesse and Latrel Carter." Zuri's introduction was filled with a sense of authority and pride. His introduction provided a linage and a full proclamation of who he was. I responded with a spontaneous and uncomfortable laugh; however, my laughter did not disarm him. It was a sense of discomfort on my part because I frankly didn't expect him to take my question so seriously. My response, however, did not match the respect that I instantaneously garnered for Zuri, Janesse and Latrel. Janesse said that she never taught Zuri to introduce himself in that manner. "I don't know where he got that from," she responded after I shared our first meeting. "Zuri is an old soul."

Although Janesse may not have taught Zuri those exact words, she did teach him to value his family and his place in it through her actions. For example, Janesse was very close with her brother who came to the cabana and read with us on two occasions. She and Latrel also drove up North to see family members during the summer, and you may recall that moving away from Claude (chapter 4) was a way of maintaining peace in her family because of the way that Black men were perceived and treated in public housing. I also watched Janesse with Zuri and Katrina; she was firm but loving. She wanted them to respect others and themselves, and she believed that sometimes it meant that you had to fight for that respect.

Zuri's tone and demeanor were usually pensive. He was a serious kid, and as heavy as the air on that particular June day, he appeared to be carrying a lot within him. I soon came to understand it as his normal demeanor. There were only a few days over the summer when he

appeared to be happy or carefree. Janesse mentioned several times that she felt that he needed some kind of intervention. "He needs somebody to talk to other than me, friends, a counselor. I don't know; somebody other than me. He get's depressed a lot. That ain't right for no fifth grade boy."

Zuri's eyes were somewhat sullen but full of knowing. He spoke in a low sotto voce that was somewhat under his breath. Throughout the summer, he wore his hair in cornrows or chin length braids, but on the first day that I met him, it was in a loose afro, errant and free. His pants were sagging and although he was a "big kid" for his age the shirt that he wore was also much larger than his frame. The screen print t-shirt featured Barack Obama, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela. I complimented him on his shirt, and I asked him who the people were. He looked at me and rose his voice in a matter of fact tone, and replied "Ms. Roberta, these are all the important people in the world who have made a difference." Janesse joked that she often had to stop and remember that Zuri was only ten years old, because "he was always so deep." She would shake her head and laugh, "I don't know what to do with him." In her jest she added, "I hope he don't end up becoming a street prophet." A street prophet uses the streets, barber shops, or other community spaces as a pulpit. They pontificate about injustice, the ailments in society, and possible cures. These public spheres are usually the street prophet's only outlet for speaking truth to power, and for sharing the depths of their knowledge. Sometimes they are mentally ill, but sometimes they aren't. They are often poetic, deeply conscious, and spiritually channeled as they challenge the unreflective masses, but I don't think anybody really pays attention to them, because they consider them lost.

"I wonder what's my something?"

The more that I was around Zuri, I also worried and wondered about how he might be able to successfully speak his unique truth while simultaneously navigating his world in and out of school. In the fictional narrative *Bird* (Elliot & Strickland, 2008), a young Black boy named Mehkai is dealing with the loss of his grandfather (his bones got tired) and his older brother (he overdosed on drugs). Art becomes Bird's salvation, it is the way that he makes sense of his world and copes with the violence of despair. One day, Zuri, and four other kids and I read this book in the man cave. At one point early in the story, Bird's Uncle Sam shares sage advice. He tells Bird, "You just remember, everybody got their somethin'. And that includes you." Before I could even turn the page, Zuri responded by asking out loud, "I wonder what's my something?" His words haunt me *still*, because I know that it is one of the most powerful questions that we can ever ask ourselves or have the courage to ask anyone else. It is a question that we have all uttered at some point even if it was only from within. Zuri's question also haunts me because I know that it is a much more difficult one for Black boys and Black girls who are growing up in low-income neighborhoods with narrow opportunity structures. In the short span of time that I was in the RECHC, I understood the depths of his question in relationship to some of the contradictions and ironies that he endured within and outside of his community space.

I didn't know *where* to begin or really what to say, so I responded to Zuri's question with another question. "Can you tell me what you like and what you love?" "Well, I like my mother's famous garlic pizza. I love math, and video games. I love to read books about history and war. I don't know." Zuri paused, "I used to love school, but I don't now. I got too many people messing with me." Zuri shared that he was bullied daily, and although he was a big kid, much to Janesse, Latrel, and Katrina's chagrin, Zuri wouldn't fight back. He told me that "three hundred million

people" bullied him, but when I pressed he admitted that it was actually just three people, but that it "*felt* like three hundred million people."

When I asked Janesse to give me the back story, she shared. "It's three little knuckle head boys from Claude that have picked with Zuri since second grade. And he gone eventually have to beat the hell out of 'um for it to stop" The bullying began when they still lived in Claude Homes, but it spilled over into school and for two years he suffered the wrath of several boys who Janesse asserted "wanted to test him." Janesse explained, "They still want to see if he's a punk. See he's big, plus he talk like a little White boy."

Talking White While Black

"You must not be from the United States." "Why?" "Because you don't talk like those southern Negroes." -Robin S. Kelly

I used to be called a White talker, but always by Black people. My family members teased me and so did the kids in my neighborhood, but never Whites. I often suspected that Whites probably thought that I needed to sharpen my "sloppy Black tongue," (Yancy, 2008). "Talking White" while Black or "not talking Black" is part of aesthetic of racialization that continues to mark perceptions of race (Ogbu, 2003). The critical gaze of Black authenticity and the borders and boundaries of blackness are tethered to the way that *we* speak. The way that *we* talk is a central site for authoring Blackness or Whiteness. Zuri's "White talk" was considered a "mimicry of whiteness." His linguistic character e.g., word choices, language patterns and inflections were unlike the southern Black vernacular of most of the other children who came to the cabana. Janesse sometimes joked, "I need to put some more Black back into this boy." As a Black boy who had once lived in the projects and who now lived in a low-income community, Zuri defied the stereotypical norm and expectations that he would "talk Black." Ironically,

despite where he lived and went to school, he was subjected to ridicule on the basis of not being considered Black enough. This aspect of Zuri's predicament caused me to question how the nuances of linguistic character across all racial and ethnic groups and the various ways of "talking Black" are addressed or not when we talk about linguistic plurality.

Janesse attributed Zuri's "White talk" to his television viewing habits because he enjoyed watching Zack and Cody and popular shows on the Disney channel. I watched the shows, and I noticed that although Black characters were featured on these shows, unless they were cracking a joke, they did not use the vernacular, syntax, or speech patterns that would be considered Black. Janesse believed that Zuri's White talk coupled with being a big Black boy who wouldn't fight complicated his social status amongst many of the kids at Booker and in the RECHC. He had made a few new friends in River Eves (mostly middle school boys) who were teaching him how to box so that he could defend himself at school (see Chapter 5). Katrina, Zuri's sister, also "talked White," but she was known for being feisty and willing to go toe to toe and fight. I watched her plenty of times mean mug the boys in the cabana, and give the fearless gaze to someone like, "I wish you would." One day when the mothers were discussing the imperative that Black kids need to be tough (see chapter 5), Lynette announced, "Katrina is rough for sure. I done seen her get in plenty of fights at the bus stop." Katrina, didn't mind fighting. In fact, it was during one of our reading sessions that she matter of factly advised her brother that he needed to fight back "because sometimes you just got to get violency" (see chapter 5).

The challenge to Zuri's aesthetic of Black boyhood (big, White-talking, readerly) was under attack in school and in the RECHC. A White middle-class normative informs and constructs identities across all racial and ethnic groups, hence the terms "white trash" (low-income or poor white), Oreo" (black person who is Black on the outside and White on the inside,

Apple (Native American who is red on the outside and white on the inside), and Banana (Asian who is yellow on the outside and white on the inside). Transgressing an "authentic" way of being Black essentially made Zuri "an-other Black" (Tate, 2005, p. 2) who in various ways existed in opposition to the discursive forms of blackness in his neighborhood. In the RECHC talking White, being big without fighting, and "doing White boy stuff" (see Chapter 6) were considered a betrayal of both blackness and masculinity. Such betrayal was unforgivable.

Tate argued that the Black gaze censors and monitors the aesthetic formation of race and helps to maintain hegemonic ideologies of Black authenticity. Thus, although ontological Blackness (the blackness that whiteness created) and maleness were created by broader hegemonic formations, they were policed from within the RECHC. All of the mothers agreed that there was a common perception that moving from Claude "lightened them" in the eyes of some of the Black residents who remained in the projects (see chapter 4). They were somehow less Black and no longer "down" (supportive) or "one of *them*." In *Dark Ghetto* Clarke asserted that the notion that no one can leave the ghetto without impunity (p.62) is a negative social and psychological phenomenon. Essentially crossing over into so-called non Black or presumably less Black spaces was also unforgivable.

Skin Memories: From the Outside In

As mentioned previously, every time the children and I read a book, we started with the peritext. Peritextual features include the cover, back of a book, title page, authors note etc.; essentially these are aspects of a book other than the narrative (Youngs, 2012). It is "a set of conventions which represent a sort of threshold which the entire text is either constrained by, or seeks to overcome" (p.380). It supports the content of a text, and although it is relevant, it is partial. After reading the paratext of *We Are the Ship* (Nelson, 2009), Da'veon decided that he

wanted to take the book home. "This is about knockin' somethin' out the park," he bellowed. "That's what homeboy look like he's about to do. But see I don't even like baseball though. I like football, but I want to take home the Negro book." Several kids who had been spectators finished eating and left the room. Tray, Jamerion, and several other children remained, as did Natasha and her aunt. Makeela came in and plopped into one of the metal chairs, and Da'veon continued dancing and parading around with his long chocolate arms extended over his head holding the book. Makeela swung her feet with her arms folded. Beads of sweat were on her forehead and the hair around her temples was flat and damp with sweat. "I want to take home a book too," she asserted, "but I don't want no Negro book, cause I ain't no Negro."

Da'veon continued his dance and he began to taunt Makeela "Yes you is, cause you Black." "If you Black," said Da'veon, "then you a Negro." "I *ain't* Black," retorted Makeela. "I'm *brown*. I'm brown, and you brown (me), you Black (Jamerion), you real Black (Tray), you yellow (Jamerion's cousin), you real Black too (Natasha's aunt), my momma is orange 'specially in the summer, and my grandmomma is white but she thinks she's Black." Makeela's round robin reading of the skin tones in the room signified not only her consciousness about the visual variances in our shades of blackness, but also an acknowledgement of the values associated with the spectrum of blackness, as indicated by her distinction of " Black , and real Black." Makeela's spectral racial aesthetic included brown, Black, real Black, White, yellow, and orange. I asked Makeela to explain what she meant when she said that her grandmother was White but that she thought that she was Black.

Roberta: So why did you say that your grandmother thinks that she is Black?

Makeela: 'Cause she do's Black stuff?

Roberta: Like what stuff?

Meekela: Like she be, my grandmomma be talking Black and she be outside on the porch

smoking cigarettes.

Makeela: *And* cause we play this game, and I tell my grandmomma you're White. Then

she says, no I'm Black. I say no you're White and *I'm Black*. And then we go back and

forth and then I trick her, 'cause I say I'm White, and she says no you're not. *I'm White.*

You're Black, and when she says that, I always win.

Makeela laughed out loud as she narrated the playful tiff between her and her

grandmother. She clearly enjoyed the Black/White game. In her seven year old mind, Makeela

understood the Black aesthetic not merely through color, but also through language, social

interactions, and proximity to other Black people. When I shared Makeela's comment with

Lynette, she said that she believed that Makeela probably considered her mother sitting outside

socializing with other Black women smoking as a "Black thing." Roelofs (2005) argued that we

are each aesthetically trained and our racial aesthetic is constructed on the basis of meaningful

perceivable qualities. Bergo (2005) described that such meanings and ways of seeing the world

are racially derived on the basis of "habitual appearing." Habitual appearing encompasses those

occurrences with what we see or experience frequently. Makeela, therefore, made sense of her

grandmother's "racewalking" (moving between Black and White spaces fluidly) or " thinking

that she was Black" on the basis of the way that her grandmother spoke, how she engaged

socially with other Black women, and through verbal play.

Like peritext, the skin is read and constructed on the basis of an outside assessment

(flagging). Reception or resistance included depictions of real people and fictitious characters in

the books that we read. Skin was a site of either being too much or not enough (Hughes, 2011) in

their racialness. These readings began with skin color, but they also included Black hair,

cleanliness, mannerisms, and speech. Amed and Prosser (2001) asserted that the phenomenological function of skin is to record, and that bodies take shape in relation to the memories derived from our skin; this phenomenon is referred to as skin memory. Prosser described skin itself as a narrative of accumulated textures that include class, race, labor, and leisure encounters that may be traumatic or joyous. Essentially Ahmed and Prosser declared that we feel, think, and respond on the basis of skin memory. Prosser asserted that "skin is the body's memory of our lives" and moreover "that the skin is burdened with unconscious" (p. 52). I would agree that it is equally fettered with consciousness.

Tray was particularly self conscious about his dark skin. Although his nature was somewhat rambunctious, anytime skin color came up he tended to cower. That's what Tray did when Makeela described him as "real Black," as she read the skin tones in the room. I watched him, as he folded into himself. As she went around the room pointing, under his breath, he responded, "Ain't nobody Black." I witnessed his lips mouth the words, although they barely escaped his lips. Perhaps he didn't want to say it too loud, or call too much more attention to his "real Black" skin tone? I'm not sure. I watched him as he exhibited "shrinking away" (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 120). Blackness as a bad and undesirable aesthetic trait always lingered. It was always an available easily accessible verbal weapon-- a quieting, diminishing force. The scars of being Black or real Black are not always visible, they are often invisible skin memories. After I witnessed Tray discreetly utter the words, "Ain't nobody black," I could envision his scarred and embattled skin, stinging from the welts of the verbal lashings. They hurt, so much so that he denied his black skin.

When I think about Tray not holding his head up, not seeking the rays of the sun as we blew bubbles or as he rolled his matchbox cars over the terrain in the red dirt outside of the

cabana, I am reminded of Gordon's assertion that "the strongest bad faith signifies an individual hiding from his own freedom" (p.45). Drawing from a Sartrean perspective, Gordon (1995) described bad faith as "an effort to deny the blackness within [and outside] by asserting the supremacy of whiteness, it can be regarded as an effort to purge blackness from the self and the world, symbolically and literally" (p.6). Bad faith is the phenomenon in which a human being under pressure from societal forces, adopts false values and disowns his/her innate freedom to act" (Childers, 1995, p.103). "*Ain't nobody Black*"— in uttering those few words, Tray attempted to flee from the anguish of his very being.

CHAPTER 6

THE DARKER BROTHER

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I'll be at the table

When company comes.

Nobody'll dare

Say to me,

"Eat in the kitchen,"

Then.

Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

-Hughes (2012)

Outside the cabana a pop up shower, left behind air filled with moisture and triple digit temperatures. Inside, as the children polished off peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, I led them in a call and response reading of *I Too Am America* (Hughes & Collier, 2012). Similar to all of the other books, we read from the outside in. I will take you on a journey so that you can picture what our reading experience was like. On the cover, Collier features a young Black male who appears to be about nine or ten years old. He is peering through translucent layers of the red and white stripes of the American flag. The gaze of the boy and the reader's meet. *He* is "the darker brother."

On the verso page of the book, stars float amidst stripes and remnants of the flag cascade across a soft pale blue sky. The pieces of the flag flow forward and lure the reader to the first page, a speckled field of cotton, followed by a train in motion which is featured prominently on the page. The text reads: I too sing America. I read each stanza of the poem, and I encouraged the children to repeat the words after me in a call and response style. They imitate my cadence, and their voices emit a chorus of raucous and out of sync shouts. As Ihde (2007) suggested, voices can become like instruments, and the "community of sound and the multiplicity of their voices" (p.34) was a gift of expression. All of the kids were reading; kids who typically came to the cabana for lunch but who usually did not stay to read joined in this choral reading.

The moment and possibilities for reading race felt boundless. Ihde described it well, in stating, "For, whatever else the voices of language may be, at the center where we are; they are rich, multidimensional and filled with as yet unexplored possibilities" (p. 194). As I paused at certain moments to turn the page, the children hurled questions at me and conversed amongst themselves:

What was he looking at? Is that flag torn up? Did he do it? Why would somebody tear up the American flag? Nope, that picture right there, is like he's thinking or like he's sad, like he's lookin' for somebody. To me, he look like he scared or somethin.'

The kids were enjoying our collective reading so much that several mothers who were in the larger common area got up and peeked into the room to witness our chat session and interactive reading. Each time I turned a page, it was as if we were riders on the train *with* the darker brother. The darker brother looks at the reader, and begins to narrate. He reminds the reader who he is: the text reads, *I am the darker brother*. Youngs (2012) noted that when characters in books look directly at the reader, it serves as challenge, or a dare. He wants us (the readers) to come along. We peer through the porthole and into the back kitchen where he was relegated to eat his meal. We glance over his shoulder as he leafs through the newspaper and a copy of *Life* magazine. Collier collages a copy of the Crisis Magazine, a confederate flag, and an image of himself on the cover of a newspaper as "an illustrator of history" as texts within the text. Each page is its own story, layered with meaning in relation to the darker brother's journey in and through America. As readers, we are there too, as part of the journey, one limb (see chapter 4).

Within this visual narrative, the reader vicariously moves through space and time on the train from the past into the present. As Max van Manen (1990) asserted, artists create products of "lived experiences transformed into transcended configurations" (p.74). The transition page features a young caramel colored girl with a wide-tooth smile and she is pointing upwards; upon turning the page, readers find that they are in a contemporary subway car full of multiracial people. A Black mother with an endearing gaze is sitting beside her young son, a darker brother. He is looking out of the window of the train, and through a veiled image of the American flag.

Collier cleverly embeds the nation on his body (Grabham, 2009). The darker brother is woven within the tapestry of the flag, red, white, blue, and black, and readers soon discover that the young boy is the same boy on the cover of the book, and he-the darker brother- is looking out from the window of the train at you and me.

Collier created a "visual storyline" of Langston Hughes' poem *I Too Am America*, using the narrative of the Pullman porter "to live out" the message in the poem. In asking the kids to read in a call in response style, I wanted all of us to live it out as readers. On the train, the darker brother is on a journey, moving from places and spaces in time, encountering racialized peril and oppression, and also hope and promise. Collier's brief yet powerful story demonstrates how Pullman Porters extended *new literacies* throughout Black communities as they continued to labor and journey in their new servile status after the emancipation proclamation and reconstruction. Pullman porters served as conduits for literacy, both within their home communities, and in the Black communities they traveled through. They shared opportunities about jobs and stories about places where Blacks could seek "the warmth of other suns" (Wilkerson, 2011).

Collier depicted the porters tossing books, magazines, and records from the train as an agentive act of *heterotopias*: a space charged with possibilities for changing the status quo (Foucault, 1984). Heterotopia is a space that can both contest and expand access. In depicting the literacies being spread about, Collier employs magical realism to represent the literacies being spread *across* space and time. This caused me to think about the journey of the darker brother in America today.

The Darker Brother Today

Today, the realities of the darker brother are at once poetic and paradoxical. As the first U.S. Black president, Barack Obama, begins a second term, the graduation rate for Black males in the nation's capitol is an abysmal 38% (Schott Foundation). The figures for Latino and White males are 46% and 88% respectively. The Schott Foundation for Public Education has embraced the philosophical premise of Martin Luther King's (1963) call to act upon "*the fierce urgency of now,*" by titling their 2012, 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males as *The Urgency of Now*. The report indicated that for the second consecutive time since the publication of the report which was first released in 2005, in 38 out of 50 states, Black males have the lowest graduation rates of all other racio-ethnic groups. In addition, the NAACP reported that one in six Black men had been incarcerated as of 2001. According to the report, if the current trend continues, one in three black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime" (NAACP Criminal Justice Fact Sheet).

Such statistics point to the reality that the "challenging oppositional bod[ies]" of Black males (Ferguson, 2001) continue to be disenfranchised because they also receive selective discipline within schools (Ferguson, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2011; Lewis, 2003; Noguera, 2005), and are catching proverbial hell trying to negotiate the police in low income community spaces (Brunson, 2007; Miller, 2008).The statistics and findings in the aforementioned research and the readings of race in the RECHC clearly indicate that race matters (West, 1994), that "blackness is another thing altogether" (Asante, 2007, p. 159), and it also matters in gender specific ways.

Andrew Billingsley (1994) cautioned, becoming too consumed and disheartened by the dire statistics of Black males because it could mean losing sight of all of the young Black males *who are sitting in schools* and playing within community centers, but who are *not* as Hughes and

Collier suggested being "shown how beautiful they are." The gaze depicted in the image of the

darker brother on the cover of the book is a symbolic declaration that asserts, "Not only will I

stare. I want my look to change reality" (hooks, 1992, p.116). Below, you can look into the

world of several elementary and preadolescent Black males in the RECHC and see the ways that

they were reading and making meaning of themselves as raced, gendered, classed, and

heterosexualized beings. As Vagle (2011) argued, within the space as the boys interacted and I

read and we talked, everything I intended and they brought into being was part of this inquiry

(p.35). The boys crossed a few discursive lines about girls' bodies that I would've rather not

crossed, but these notions were already there (Heidegger, 1998). As they talked, played, ate, and

wondered, the web of racialness in all of its varied intersections *came into being*. I include

descriptions of two boys, Caleb and Jamerion because they discoursed and were living out

embodied binary positions that have been constructed for many young Black males. The

readings of race in this section include the racialized politics of play, music, commodification,

athleticism, jail, and education.

I will begin with a narrative that I refer to as: Becoming Birdman and Black Barbie. The

day before this particular session was held, the lunch program was unceremoniously cancelled so

Lynette, Natasha, Janesse and I stood outside the entrance to the cabana pooling our money

together to purchase pizzas for the boys who were there, and any other children who came to the

cabana that day looking for lunch. Although, Natasha didn't have the full story about why the

program was cancelled, she mentioned something about a report from the women in the

management office that had been faxed to the housing authority representatives expressing

concern that the food resources were not being allocated properly. According to the rules,

lunches could only be distributed to those under the age of eighteen. If adults were seen carrying the white lunch bags without children, the program could be cancelled.

It was on the laundry list of rules that Natasha signed off on every day, and we knew about it. However, on several occasions, if parents walked down to get lunch bags without their children, we still allowed them to take a lunch sack home. There was also a rule that kids could only eat in the cabana and nobody was supposed to leave the building with a white lunch bags. Natasha speculated that the women in the management office witnessed adults or children walking around the complex with the white sacks, and therefore the program was cancelled.

After Natasha and Lynette left to go purchase the pizzas I walked back into the common area where the boys were talking loudly and making a trilling noise with their tongues. The noise bounced throughout the room and was interspersed with laughs and the screech of chairs being moved around. Katrina stayed behind and sat coloring unfazed. I interrupted the boys hoping to stall the trill:

Roberta: Let me make sure that I know everybody here today.

The kids start going around the room calling out and pointing.

Jamerion: That's my cousin, Lamar, but we call him Man Man, and you know 'Trina (Katrina) aka, Nikki Minaj.

Roberta: Wait, why are you calling Katrina Nikki Minaj?

They all yell: Because of her pink hair!

Katrina is shading in the tree that she was coloring.

Katrina: Yep, I had pink hair on my birthday just like Nikki Minaj. She my favorite.

Roberta: So you like Nikki Minaj?

(Caleb interrupts loudly as if I was implying that Katrina was attracted to Nikki Minaj.)

Caleb: Noooo ! *She* don't like her, *we* like her.

Da'veon: It's just cause of the hair stuff that she like her.

Roberta: I pretty much figured that.

Caleb: She like Little Wayne, Birdman, Machine Gun Kelly.

Jamerion corrects Caleb

Jamerion: Well, she don't like Machine Gun Kelly, 'cause he White.

Lamar: Yeah, but he act Black.

Jamerion notices my confusion, and the grimace that I made which was partly because of the way they were making up who Katrina "liked" and also because I wondered who Machine Gun Kelly was. Before I was able to ask the question Jamerion added,

Machine Gun Kelly is a rapper, and he's a wigger you know, like Eminem.

Roberta: Oh…that helped knowing he was like Eminem, but you know, stop saying that, I doubt that Katrina likes Little Wayne, Machine Gun Kelly, or Birdman.

Katrina shook her head no and continued coloring. After a few minutes a little girl who was also looking for lunch came down and they went in the man cave and lunchroom and played as we all waited for pizza.

Caleb: We just sayin' that's who most of the girls like though, that's who they like. Birdman and them.

Roberta: Well who is Birdman?

As soon as I asked the question, all of the boys started making the trilling sound again with their tongues. As the boys continued the trill, I finally decided to ask, "Well, what's up with the sound effect? " Jamerion brought me up to speed again, "That's what Birdman do. He like all

our favorite, him Lil Wayne…" As Jamerion explained, all of the boys chimed in simulating the

trill *again* as if I required any further demonstration. They projected their own individual bird

calls including high and low pitches, and versions that stopped and started again. The trills were

interspersed with laughter, and there were also screeches from the metal chairs as some of them

added movements to accompany their uniquely stylized Birdman impressions.

Nobody ever fully explained who Birdman was, so later on before I began transcribing, I

did a Wikipedia search and discovered that Birdman is both a rapper and owner of Cash Money

Records, (Young Money) which also happens to be the same record label that Nikki Minaj and

Lil' Wayne are on. Birdman's net worth is estimated at $110 million dollars, and he was on the

Forbes list of Top Hip Hop Artist in 2012. Another reason so many of the boys likely looked up

to Birdman was because he was born and raised in the Magnolia housing projects in New

Orleans (a subject that he raps about in many of his songs), and along with his group of friends,

it is where he began building his identity and image.

Homosocial Spaces

According to Max van Manen (1990), all phenomenological human science research

efforts are really explorations into the structure of the human lifeworld, the lived world as

experienced in everyday situations and relations" (p. 101). Within this homosocial discursive

space (Bird, 1996; Sedgwick, 1985), these Black elementary and preadolescent boys narrated

their perceptions of racial meaning in relation to gender and place, which they also connected to

leisure activities, sexuality, school related tasks, and future aspirations. Homosocial spaces are

same sex social spaces that are defined by the gender socialization that transpires within them

(Bird, 1996). These spaces serve to construct and measure maleness or femaleness (Kimmel,

2006), and they may or may not include conversations about sexual preferences or members of

the opposite sex. For example the "Birdman trill" that the boys imitated was representative of a form of non-sexual Black male homosocial bonding derived from hip hop culture (Oawre, 2010). Throughout our time together, I draw out fragments of their racialized lived experience and call attention to the ways in which they are bringing them into being. As homosocial spaces are raced, they are also classed, languaged, and they can also be queered. Language choices as well as direct and indirect conversations about material, cultural, and social capital serve as signs for acceptance within or outside of particular homosocial boundaries.

In schools, homosocial spaces inherently exist in bathrooms or locker rooms but they are also constructed and disbanded throughout the school day as males and females congregate and segregate the playground, lunchrooms, and classroom spaces. Quite often teachers also create homosocial spaces for children as they establish routines and protocols for lining up or when they create reading or writing groups (Henkin, 1998). In out of school spaces, homosociality may be officially designated through organizations such as athletic leagues or girl scouts, or unofficially through play or formations of spaces such as the man cave in the cabana. During this reading session, although we were not actually in the man cave, I imagine that it was much like the conversation and behavior that unfolded within it.

Sedgwick noted that male bonding and gender constructions within homosocial spaces might be accompanied by a fear or animosity of homosexuality and therefore hetero-normative ideologies are often constructed in these spaces. During our session, the boys did not express any explicit hatred of homosexuality, however they did exhibit fear, and at one point it gets played upon Janesse (see section on Going Pro and Going to Jail). Amongst the boys as they interacted there were occasional discussions and references to being "happy" or "gay" which provoked aggressive stances of distancing oneself from the possibility that either they, or apparently

Katrina (as demonstrated in the previous conversation), would mistakenly be considered "that kind of gay." In the midst of one conversation, Caleb asserted, "I ain't talkin' about being *that* kind of happy, 'cause *I like* Nikki Minaj's big butt."

Quite a few times the mother/educator/Black feminist within me started to rise up when they began snickering about girls from their neighborhood or in their school who had butts as big as or bigger than Nikki Minaj's. At certain points, the boys were trying to be discrete in a 10-12 year old boy kind of way, and although I was aware of Sartre's (1966) assertion that "a being which desires is [simply] making itself body" (p.505), I still felt the need to shut them down well after Katrina left to go play with another little girl who ran into the cabana looking for lunch. The majority of contextual references within this homosocial space were hyper racialized, gendered, and classed and they were constructing and defining themselves and others along racial and gendered boundaries which they occasionally blurred. In the earlier conversational exchange, as the boys imagined who they thought "all of the girls liked," they drew racial lines, but then erased them and blurred them to include Machine Gun Kelly (MGK), based on the assertion that "he act Black." Caleb further solidified it by adding, "Yeah, he's a wigga." The word and its parallel nigga signify a particular way of being recognized as racial in the world. Sartwell (2005) contended that the "wigger" signals a conflict because even as race is supposedly being transgressed, it remains essential. He presents a question that I find equally intriguing, "Is he performing in blackface or critiquing whiteness?" (p.37). Perhaps, in this sense as Merleau Ponty (1968) argued, "the body is an opening a stage where something takes place and that it is revealed in and through our bodily performances, (p. 263). Rather than the term wigger or wigga, I use the term racewalker, because I don't like the word wigger/wigga, because it is derived from the derogatory reference nigger/nigga. I use wigger/wigga only as my participants employ it.

Racewalkers employ Merleau Ponty's (1964) notion that [we] borrow ourselves from others (p. 159). Richard Baker (MGK) is named after the notorious prohibition era gangster George Celino Barnes, who was better known as "Machine Gun Kelly," because the machine gun was his weapon of choice. Richard Baker co-opted the moniker because of the rapid pace of his rapping style. In pictures and videos, Baker grimaces, and embraces a White form of cool posing that includes stylistic gestures, clothing, linguistic cadences, and word choices that mirror Black hyper-masculine hip hop culture (Morris, 2006). In his song *Chip off the Block*, which is a narrative based on "where he is from," MGK boasts that he "speaks in Ebonics" and "doesn't give a fuck about what Noah Webster says" (Porter, 2010). In employing these styles and echoing the sentiments of many Black kids who also "speak Ebonics" MGK gains entry and acceptance into Black spaces, and therefore racewalks or walks across and within Black spaces, because he affirms something that the kids hope is true, which is that whiteness is not *necessarily* such an invaluable asset.

In discussing racewalkers in their neighborhood, the mothers shared, that "the few White kids in their neighborhood almost have to be wiggas to survive." As Natasha shared, "Really, the Whites that have lived in Claude have never lasted long." As the mothers noted, and Sartwell (2005), who is a racial philosopher forwarded, in order to be accepted and to be able to dwell within Black spaces, "the wigger must remove the inscription of White culture from their bodies" (p. 43). Being or becoming a racewalker occurs by virtue of the absence of whiteness/blackness *around* or *on them* it becomes a disembodied form of whiteness whereby the only discernible form of whiteness is the skin. In their description of MGK, the boys explained, "Machine Gun Kelly is cool because he rap with everybody." They spoke over each other as they chronicled the list of names, sometimes correcting each other in the process. "Yep,

Machine Gun Kelly rap with Woka Flocka, 2-Chainz, Young Jeezy, Birdman, Little Wayne" (all

Black rappers). With the exception of MGK's skin tone, whiteness was largely absent. Perhaps,

as Sartwell has suggested, MGK *is* critiquing whiteness in some way, shape, or form, but the

tangled nature of a racewalker lies in the ways in which he/she extends what are considered

useable forms of blackness; this is what the kids seemed to be "bursting forth toward" and

drawing their racialized intentionalities from (Sartre, 2002, in Vagle, 2011).

Similar to MGK, Nicki Minaj also race walks as Black Barbie by manipulating and

fetishizing racialized imagery and identity constructs that specifically appeal to the both genders

across racial lines. In further describing race walkers, I draw from Smith and Beal's (2004)

assertion that "identities become a performance and race becomes a style" (p. 123). Take for

example, Minaj's chocolate skin and blonde, pink, orange, or rainbow colored bone-straight hair,

as well as her spontaneous use of a British accent, Ebonics, or "White girl accents" all of which

demonstrate her transcendence of race even as she exploits it. Minaj's naming conventions e.g.

"Black Barbie"/ Minaj (short for Ménage a Trois, meaning to have a sexual threesome), lyrical

references to her Black female identity, and exotic visual play which emphasizes the overly

rapped about full Black female back-side, is a performance that is constructed to appeal to girls

and boys as young as Katrina and Caleb, as well as young adult males and females. She

perpetuates both the fantasy of the promiscuous Black neighborhood "hoochie" (Collins, 2002),

and the "world of Barbie" which appeals to little girls of all races and creeds.

I understand why Katrina likes Nicki Minaj, her pink hair, and her songs, some of which

were in heavy rotation on my iPod at the time of the study. But, I *really didn't* like that they

share the same nickname, primarily because girls within the RECHC neighborhood have to live

through the realities of the racialized gender constructions that Minaj plays around with and

walks so fluidly into and out of. Not to mention, the problematic roots and deeply entrenched racial and gender stereotypes about Black women's bodies (mainly the butt) which she and the men who run Cash Money records *literally* used to prop her up (Collins, 2000; Richardson, 2006). In racewalking Minaj bends and twists racial imagery and walks into and out of blackness without ever having to actually *live through* the harshest realities of a racist structure.

During our afternoon session, in addition the conversation about hip hop, the boys also revealed their perspectives about "race acting" (Burrell, Winston, & Freeman, 2012) in relationship to the racial politics of play. Some of their conversations included "oblique forms" of racial meaning which proved to be as instructive as those that were explicitly recognized (Thomas, 2011, p. 4). The boys' assertions included essentialist critiques and gender characterizations about what Black boys and White boys do or don't do.

Black Boys Don't Play with Action Figures

"I looked in the mirror / and what did I see?

In Myers and Myers (2009) post-modern picture book *Looking like Me*, a silhouetted purple figure named Jeremy fist bumps his way throughout the tale, narrating the multiplicity of his identity. I selected this particular book to read with the boys because it served as an invitation for everyone to tell me about themselves. I hoped that it might spur conversations about some of the intentional relationships within their lifeworld (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; van Manen, 1990). After I read the book our exchange went like this:

Roberta: So tell me something about you and what you do for fun besides listening to rap

music, because I already know y'all like Birdman and Lil' Wayne and all of them.

Caleb: I don't know? We just be hanging out and stuff.

Jamerion: Yeah we just chill out. We be listening to rap, playing video games. Sometimes I be drawin' pictures like of Machine Gun Kelly graffiti stuff.

Marcus: Yeah sometimes he might draw Sponge Bob and Machine Kelly together with like a bunch of guns and stuff.

They all howl at this

Caleb: And, then during the school year and stuff. When we get off the bus, we watch the girls and laugh at how stupid they be acting. *He raises his voice to imitate how he believes that the girls talk.* They be like, "Honey chile, don't be doing this and that."

Zuri: I like to play with my action figures.

Caleb: Action figures? (Caleb contorts his lips and rears his head back) Don't no Black boys play with action figures. Zuri take that back man, tell her, tell her that you don't play with no action figures, man. Black boys don't play with no action figures."

Jamerion and Da'veon began agreeing with Caleb; however both the younger boys raised their eyebrows in a manner that indicated that they were either surprised or did not agree with Caleb's assertion. Despite their body language, neither of them admitted nor denied Caleb's seemingly over arching claim. I pressed a bit further,

Roberta: So how come *Black* boys don't play with action figures? What do you mean by that?

Caleb: It's just White boy stuff. And I bet when Zuri play, he don't be makin' the noises and stuff.

Zuri already declared at the onset of our conversation that he *did* play with action figures, therefore as Caleb continued to convince him to recant his proclamation; he was reluctant to take it back. He did however oblige Caleb by shaking his head to indicate that he *didn't* make the

noises or sound effects when he played with his action figures. As the oldest within this homosocial space, Caleb and Jamerion served as the primary authority figures on Black male masculinity, and because they were in sixth grade, it might not be surprising that they would distance themselves from a childlike activity such as playing with action figures. However, the notion that *Black* boys didn't play with action figures was an unusual distinction.

In her research into what it was like to be young poor and Black in American consumer culture, Elizabeth Chin (2001) identified the many ways that young Black girls altered their White dolls through physically manipulating the doll's hair to mimic their own, i.e. braiding their hair and putting colored beads in it. She argued that although companies began manufacturing Black dolls and toys, these companies didn't actually change the mold that they were using, thus they merely created racialized commodities that reified racial boundaries. In addition, she noted that toy manufacturers "assiduously avoided the problem of class," she argued further,

> These children did not appear to view race as a range of solid, immutable categories.
> Likewise, children's commentaries reveal their understanding that racialized
> commodities can only incompletely embody the experiences of kids who are racial
> beings, but also poor, working class, young, ghettoized, and gendered. (p.146)

As Dyson (1997) discovered, younger Black children in her research were using action figures and super hero characters as artifacts for imaginative play and exploration of social control and agency, so perhaps Zuri was engaged in similar transcendence performance as he played with his action figure ? At any rate, from Caleb and Jamerion's perspective, action figures were an "ideological artifact" that pushed up against their identity constructs, as *Black* boys (Kirkland, 2011). Action figures were not considered part of their subjective conceptions of Black

maleness. As Ahmed (2006) would assert, it was an object they perceived as outside of their horizon for making meaning within their world.

Morris (2006), Ferguson (2000), and Waters (1999) have each highlighted that gender lines often intersect with tropes of "acting White," and Caleb and Jamerion appeared to be schooling Zuri and the younger boys about the acceptable forms of Black male masculinity. From their perspectives, action figures should not be within Black boys' "cosmologies of identity." Cosmologies of identity are what Kirkland (2011) described as "a belief about one's self and one's place in the world, and possibilities for acting" (p. 199). These cosmologies also connect to their conceptions of literacy (see Kirkland & Jackson, 2009; Kirkland, 2011).

As I asked more questions like, what about batman or X-Men? Jamerion and Da'veon continued to agree with Caleb, that action figures were not in the repertoire of play for Black boys. Marcus admitted that he *used* to play with action figures *sometimes*. As Hook (2008) asserted in "*The 'Real of Racializing Embodiment*," "race as ideology, as regime of truth or order of signification, may come to encode the body, and hence over-determine its impulses and its affectivity" (p.149). At the time, I felt like this was exactly what the boys were doing. They were allowing limited notions of race and gender constructions, to *over-determine* their perspectives on whom they were, how they might spend their time, and as you will see as you continue reading, also who they might become.

Caleb

I was tempted to dismiss Caleb's notions about what Black boys do or don't do as part of his usual bravado. "I got that swag," (a line from a popular rap song) was one of his favorite phrases. However, remaining open, interrogating my presumptions and trying to understand *his* meaningful sense of reading race (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström, 2008) meant taking

seriously his narrow and essentialist assertion that belittled Zuri's interests, and served as yet another way that he was "not enough" in his Black male body (Hughes, 2011). As I mentioned, upon first reflection, Caleb's response that Zuri spent his time within an imaginative space, soaring, fighting, and "saving the world" as he played with action figures (of course that is my take on how he played), appeared to be an extension of his role as the alpha male.

Caleb was typically full of verve and braggadocio. He was known for being a good athlete, and he often embodied what would be characterized as a cool pose athletic persona (Conner, 1993; Smith & Beal, 2007). His deposition was mixed with the brashness and confidence of Black male "athletic masculinities" (Smith & Beal, 2007), and a stance of laid back, "Guys like me don't care about that kind of stuff coolness" (Conner, 1993). Smith and Beal described Black male athletic masculinities as "an embodied toughness, one that exudes emotional control and detachment and incorporates a flamboyant style (p.108). When Caleb came to the cabana he typically had extra friends in tow, and he loved to "crack" on people (tell jokes and talk about them in playful ways). He had a quick wit, and he often teased his mother, Natasha, and made her chuckle. Caleb had rich dark skin, just like Tray, but he wore it proudly. In fact, Natasha said, Caleb didn't care if he was "so Black that he was blue," because on most days throughout the summer, when he came to the cabana, he didn't bother wearing a shirt. He typically wore only basketball shorts and high top tennis shoes as he and his friends cavorted through the RECHC.

On this particular day, Caleb had on a polo style shirt with a collar and denim shorts. He was wearing a belt, but much like the popular hip hop figures whose music the boys enjoyed listening to, his shorts were sagging just enough so that his boxer shorts were exposed. Caleb appeared to care a lot about conveying a particular image of Black maleness. For example, his

attempt to get Zuri to disavow playing with action figures demonstrated that he believed that

they were somehow an affront to who they were, and what they should be doing as Black boys.

He didn't think it was okay, and clearly, it wasn't cool. As Pedro Noguera (2002) asserted,

"Racial identities become more rigid as adolescents become clearer about the nature of their

racial and gender identities and they begin to play a more active role in maintaining and policing

these identities" ("Identity and Academic Performance," para. 3). Caleb configured action

figures as White racialized texts, and he also infused the context of coolness, relative to Black

male literacies (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). Although he never actually said that it wasn't cool to

play with action figures, the implication was clearly there in his statement gestures and

disappointed facial expressions: "Man tell, tell her, that you don't play with no action figures."

Drawing from dialogic theories in literacy Dyson (1997) noted that "the meaning of any

symbol is not the form itself but emergent in the social field in which the symbol is incorporated

and within which it resonates" (p.16). Other than the actual visible characteristics i.e., the

painted skin tone of the toy action figure, or the clothing or costume, I wondered what additional

characteristics or symbolic ideologies (Turner, 1970) relative to action figures or to playing with

them, somehow rendered them "whitish" or "White boy only" texts. In what ways did action

figures, not fit the "socially situated [gender] identities" (West, 2008) of these particular Black

boys?

Ain't no such thing as Superman

In 1975, Black consciousness activist, musician, and spoken word poet, Gil Scot Heron

recorded a song called, (Ain't no such thing as Superman). In the song, Heron croons:

There ain't no such thing as a superman/ You alone consider mercy/ and seem to me like

you alone have found the courage that others could not find/You alone have the wisdom

to make this world what it what it want to be/ need to be/ can be.. There ain't no such thing as a superman / There ain't no--I can fly/ like no bird up in the sky/There ain't no you gone get yours/ like I'm gone get mine…So tell me why, can't you understand/That there ain't no such thing as a superman?

In his research into the depictions of Black comic book and science fiction characters, Nama (2009) argued that Black superheroes and science fiction figures can serve as critical counter hegemonic symbologies that can positively expand Black racial identity constructions, *if* they provide spaces for "imagining race and black racial identity in new and provocative ways" (p. 133). Nama was basically arguing that neither Caleb nor Heron's assertions about Black people abandoning notions about heroes or action figures should be considered simplistic essentialism or "racial paranoia." As Heron was explaining in his song, Nama also argued that the White imaginary realm is incongruent with the realities of many Black lived experiences, and moreover, that "reading and identifying with Black heroic figures in mainstream comic books [and presumably the figures] typically *victimized*, rather than saved Blacks from oppression" (p.134). He emphasized that even the folkloric image of John Henry (dubbed the original man of steel) served to instill an image of Black male strength that was only used to further the interests of the larger economic structure in America, rather than his own uplift. Superhero figures do not appear to have any powers that counteract the violence and trauma of racism and poverty. In his autobiographical account of growing up in Harlem with a single mother, Black educational activist Jeffrey Canada (2010) recounted,

When I first found out that Superman wasn't real, I was about eight. I was talking to my mother who declared, "No, no, no. There's no Superman." I started crying because I

really thought Superman was coming to rescue us from the chaos, the violence, the

danger. No hero was coming. (p.124)

In this case rather than peers it was Canada's mother who was reshaping his understandings

of his social location in relationship to the imaginative realm. As the mothers in the RECHC

expressed (see chapter 7), Canada's mother was teaching him that he had to develop his own

sense of agency. In the RECHC, the most powerful uniformed images were the police, and they

were as Jones (2006) noted more like enemies than allies, because they disrupted their lives and

took away people they loved (see next chapter). I started to recollect some of the stories that the

mothers shared about doors getting kicked in, or cautions to their children to "stay away from

neighborhood crackheads," and there were also local gangs. I suspect that negotiating these

realities would likely contribute to a bit of cynicism or a negation and resistance to pretending

that an outside larger than life superhero/ action figure like persona could transform such

circumstances. Certainly, pretending to be Birdman felt like a more relevant and worthy

endeavor.

White Boy Stuff

Roberta: So, what else is White boy stuff?

Caleb: Doin' homework.

Jamerion's two little brothers were sitting side by side, and they acted as cosigners

nodding, laughing, and agreeing with whatever Caleb and Jamerion said. I shot a glance

at the boys, and announced:

Roberta: You know that's not true, right? Black boys do homework. I don't understand

why you think that doing homework is White boy stuff?

Caleb: 'Cause, White boys do their homework *every day*.

Roberta: You don't *ever* do your homework?

Caleb shook his head: *Barely*.

 I looked at Daveon

Roberta: And what about you?

My eyes shifted and I turned my head towards each of the boys, allowing my gestures to

spur their response.

Marcus: Sometimes.

Zuri: Most of the time.

Da'veon: No, I never do it.

I rolled my eyes back in my head, "Why not?" I barked, getting up on my momma

soapbox. "Black boys do, do their homework."

Caleb retracted: Well, you know how I said that we don't do homework? There *is* this

one Black boy in our class, and he do his homework every day just like the White boys.

 Jamerion: Are you talking about Terrell?

Jamerion laughed and covered his mouth with his fist and reared back in the metal chair.

Jamerion: Yeah you right, he do, do his homework all the time."

It was ironic that Caleb was so nonchalant and willing to admit not doing homework,

because Natasha mentioned that *not* doing homework was the primary reason that Caleb had to

attend summer school. She also added that although she often watched him do it, he never

actually turned it in. She also mentioned that a lot of his teachers didn't like him because he

loved to be the "center of attention" and therefore he stayed in trouble. Caleb's assertion was in

line with Ogbu's (2003) notion of "oppositional identity" theory which concludes that the Black

students in his research were unsuccessful in school because of conceptions about "acting

White." Other scholars have repudiated Ogbu's claim (Morris & Monroe, 2009; Tyson et al, 2005), on the basis that Ogbu failed to examine the interrelated macro (larger community), meso (school), and micro (student) level contexts (Morris & Monroe, p. 26) of the youths readings of "acting White." As Tyson et al. documented in their research, most of the Black students in their research didn't subscribe to notions that academic achievement placed them outside of the sphere of blackness or that being attentive in school was a "White thing." Students who did align achievement with "acting White" pointed specifically to school structures and designations such as special education, AP or gifted courses, disciplinary measures, and socioeconomic status as reasons for making their assertions. In other words, their racialized intentionalities were derived from their lived experience connections and disconnections. The used the evidence of the eyes. As Caleb and Jamerion described summer school to me, they said "It's mostly just us (Black people) in there."

Jamerion

Both Jamerion and Caleb had to attend summer school in order for them to advance to seventh grade. When I asked Jamerion how he felt about school, he responded, "I like school and stuff, but certain stuff just be hard. I couldn't pass my math class or the test stuff." Jamerion constantly compared what I was doing in the cabana to school. On several occasions, he joked, "You be asking so many *questions* (his emphasis), just like they do in school." Even as he complained about my incessant questioning, he was always happy to explain things, because Jamerion loved to talk, and he also admitted that he genuinely loved people, *all* people. When I initially asked the boys to talk to me about race, he stated

> Jamerion: Race don't matter to me. I mean, maybe a little bit, but not that much. See,
> even though Caleb was sayin' that White people be hatin' on us. Most of 'um don't.

Except for the White cops, 'cause they *do really* be hatin' on us. (They all start to look at

each other for affirmation about this). But see, most of the other White people don't. I

mean, we all get along, and really I love everybody in the world. I mean I don't love

them like *that* but I love everybody, you know like as friends.

I don't really hang around too many White boys and stuff but they pretty cool.

I talk to everybody and stuff you know.

Jamerion had a deep caramel color-skin tone, and a warm spirit. Whenever anyone

looked at him, it was as if he found it difficult *not* to smile. He seemed like a happy kid. He also

appeared to relish his role as a caretaker for his brothers, and he wasn't afraid to get them in

check. I read the book *Looking Like Me* (2009) to the boys (looking back I wonder why I chose

to read to them because it did feel too much like school the way that I was doing it). At any rate,

at one point, his younger brother Lamar yawned loud enough for me and everyone else to know

that I was *completely* boring him. He flung his arms towards the ceiling and patted his mouth in

an exaggerated form, letting the yawn trail and echo through the room. It caused the other boys

to break out laughing, which provided exactly the comic relief that he apparently needed.

Jamerion, however, was quick to reprimand him, snapping at him, "Man sit on down, and stop

acting stupid. You always tryin' to get some attention."

When Janesse and Lynette returned with the pizzas and peeled back the paper, the steam

and smell of sausage, cheese, and tomatoes wafted through the air, and I watched as Jamerion

handed slices to his two brothers and cousin *before* he took a slice for himself. He also gladly

stepped in and served as an informal chief explicator and translator because he clarified the

questions and answers between the boys and me. As Caleb rattled off different answers or

opinions e.g. "Black girls be fightin' all the time, and it be over stupid stuff." Jamerion would

follow up with an explicit story. "Yep, see one day they even got in a fight on Halloween." Sometimes when I asked Jamerion to elaborate, or "tell me more" he would look away pensively and explain, "I'ma get back with you on that" to which he would respond with a laugh. I initially thought that he was feigning this "deep thought" but he usually did follow up at some point with an answer long after we finished a particular subject. Like all of the children in the RECHC, I perceived Jamerion as conscientious, and intelligent.

I emphasized these particular characteristics in reference to Jamerion because I soon learned that this is *not* how he was read in the world by the police who cased the RECHC. Like so many of the Black males in the community, Jamerion was "external" to the police, whereby he "live[d] in a *structuring* space in which he was *seen* and judged guilty a priori as guilty" (Yancy, 2005, p. 3) of *something*. But, what is he guilty of? According to the mothers and the boys, the police interrogated all of the boys, but they targeted *some* boys more than others, and Jamerion was one of them, and it was apparently related the reputation of his family members who had served time in jail for various reasons. As we were eating, Da'veon and Zuri were having a discussion about a particular video game when Jamerion interrupted,

I was thinking about what you asked me earlier about the police and stuff, and why they always really ridin' me.

Caleb: Yep, they do be riding Jamerion. They don't like you.

Lynette: Jamerion, you know good and well why the police don't like you—'cause of yo family. The cops around here don't like *nobody* in Jamerion's family."

Brothers in the Hood

Jamerion lived in Claude Homes with four other siblings. Two of which were older males who had been to jail. He also had several cousins that lived in Claude, and the boys were

inseparable. In fact Da'veon who hung around them as well said that they referred to themselves as "The Brothers in the Hood." Marcus asked, "Ms. Roberta, do you know the movie, *Boyz in the Hood?* Well see, that's like what we call ourselves, but we the "Brothers in the Hood." *Boyz in the Hood* was a 1991 movie by John Singleton that was based on his life experience growing up in the midst of gang violence, in a working class Black section of South Central Los Angeles. It featured the day in the life experiences of several young Black males, which included friendships, familial and communal relations, love interests, teenage sexuality, violence, education, hope, desire. The movie captured the joy and turmoil of "normal teenage life," mixed with the complexities of living in the constant shadow of structural violence, and primarily how Black males were coping or not as they navigated within the community.

As demonstrated in their earlier conversations about rappers such as Birdman and MGK, the boys were drawing parallels between their lives and multimodal texts such as music and movies (Kirkland & Jackson, 2009). The two central characters in the movie, Tre (Cuba Gooding Jr.) and Rickey (Morris Chestnut) believe that getting out of the "hood is the best strategy. Tre is a serious student, but Ricky's "way out" is through football. Like Ricky, who carries a football around in various scenes throughout the movie, the boys in the RECHC also were heavily into athletics, and envisioned themselves going pro.

Going Pro

 Hook (2008) argued that a differential order of embodiment that is tied to Black hyper-masculine racialized structures are connected to athleticism rather than intellect (p.144-145). On different occasions, each of the boys expressed a desire and belief that sports and "going pro" was part of their future and it was how they hoped that they would achieve economic success and as Caleb asserted, "make some racks." Smith and Beal (2007) argued that "sports provide a

compelling arena from which to examine the production and consumption of masculinity, race, and meritocracy" (p.123). They analyzed constructions of whiteness and blackness through readings of race on the MTV show *Cribs*. Within this popular cultural medium, they discovered that race in relationship to sports was simplified into consumptive styles. They argued that

> MTV has adeptly framed athletes to exemplify blackness and whiteness, essentializing each as a style. The choice is about which style to inhabit, not how the selection has implications related to structural racism. In turn, the audience can view race as a style and not have to consider the structural inequalities of racism, sexism, and classism. MTV reinforces these neoliberal ideas through its coded racial messages.

They boys in the RECHC were well versed in these styles and imagery of Black male athletic masculinities and they wanted to emulate them. They all aspired to succeed in athletics and play professional sports, including Zuri who expressed in front of the boys, "I might be a baseball player." Yet, it actually appeared to be another way that Zuri was trying to be like the other boys because in a one on one session he admitted that he has never played baseball. Tray, the youngest (6 years old), also envisioned that he would "go pro" and play in the NBA. On a separate occasion I asked Caleb if he knew that he had to go to college to play pro football, *and* that going to college probably meant that he needed to think about doing homework sometimes, to which he stated,

> Oh yeah, see, before I go pro, I'm going to Oregon, to play for the Ducks.

> See, I'm just like "Black Mamba" on the field, I do my thang.

Caleb was known for being an excellent athlete so it is not surprising that he imagined himself playing for the Ducks, which was his dream team. He expressed, "I know I'm going pro, and that I'm eventually gone have to do some work in school and stuff." It wasn't until after the study

was over and I began analyzing the data that I learned more about Black Mamba (De'Anthony Thomas). He was Caleb's favorite player for the Ducks, and I probably would have slipped him the online article that I read in which De'Anthony talks about how he considers himself a student who plays football, not simply a football player. Sports and "going pro" is appealing to males of all races, because, as Smith and Beal (2007) noted, young males see images of professional athletes living out a "Peter Pan lifestyle" and hetero-normative fantasy masculinities (Smith & Beal, 2007, p. 115). However, Anderson (2000) argued that because many Black males have limited access to futures with prestige and status, "going pro" becomes a key context for considering their future. It becomes that which they believe is within their grasp.

Unfortunately, a dichotomy between the desire to achieve in sports and in school exists. Morris and Adeyemo (2012) described this phenomenon as the "athletic/academic paradox." They argued that this paradox doesn't begin "in high school or college; [but that] it is woven into U.S. culture and imagery of black people, permeates schools, and other institutions, and is reinforced and perpetuated by families and communities" (p.29). Discursively, this appeared to be occurring in the RECHC; however this wasn't the only paradox that was limiting Black male identity constructs and possibilities for the future in the RECHC.

Going Pro and Going To Jail

As we finished off our pizza the following conversation about future endeavors ensued:

> Lamar: I'ma go pro, probably basketball or football.
>
> Jamerion: Me too, I know I am, I'm gone play pro football, but then I'm going to a jail just for like a week, or maybe just for like two or three days. You know just to see the inside and stuff. You know, to see what it's like.
>
> Collectively the mothers pounced on Jamerion's conflicted vision for the future.

Jamerion's lived experience of being under the surveillance of the police in his neighborhood was fueling his curiosity. As Alexander (2010) noted, in the poorest communities in the nation's capital, 3 out of 4 Black males will spend time in jail (p.6). She argued further that advocates in education and civil rights have not adequately addressed the racial injustice surrounding the mass incarceration of Blacks or Black males who are being funneled into the prison system. The failure of these institutions therefore leaves families in low income Black communities with few options for countering the ubiquitous forces that continue to shape them as future criminals. In order to help Jamerion to see the error of his twisted fantasy, Lynette burrowed in on Jamerion:

Lynette: What did you say? You really want to see what jail is like? I will tell you what it's like. First off, you gone be wearing some flip flops, not them one shoes, that y'all liked. You remember the one's that we seen the other day. You ain't gone be wearin' them. And see, that's why I didn't like those shoes.

Lynette is referring to the JS Roundhouse Mid athletic shoes

Because, see back in the day, Black folks *had* to wear shackles.

And now, they are bringing the chains back? See, they just tellin 'um (Black boys) you might as well get locked up or stay in chains for the rest of your life.

Lynette is looking directly at Jamerion as she is speaking and slapping her hand into the palm of her other hand.

That's what Black people were in…chains.

You don't want to play around with going to see the inside of a jail, Jamerion. Not only will you be wearing flip flops, they tell you when to go to bed, and you have to make your bed military style, they got super cold air blowing, *all day—every day*. You cannot

get under no covers and you can't go outside. You can't eat when you hungry. You eat when *they* say you hungry.

Lynette raised her voice quizzically

You really think you want to be in there?

Jamerion paused and thought a bit, and his twelve year old brain responded, "See, it's just for like a couple of days you know, just to see it but when I get tired of it, I can just call my agent, to bail me out." The boys laughed as if he had it all figured out. Janesse, who was always willing to add color to any story added, "Does the fact that you might have to become somebody's boyfriend change your mind? You probably would not like that part either, so maybe that will keep you from wanting to go to jail." The boys screamed in unison, "Noooo!" Later, in the context of another conversation, Jamerion who was *always* thinking and trying to make sense of things, folded in another possibility; "Well, see I guess I could probably go to the military."

Janesse played on stereotypical notions and the boys' fear of homosexuality to quell Jamerion's curiosity and voyeuristic desire to see the inside of a jail. Lynette tried to explain the discomforting realities of being locked up. She emphasized, that it was a cold place, without freedom to feed oneself or wear appealing shoes, and she also wanted him to remind him that there was a history of shackling Black people and it included consumer material aspects of culture. In arguing "they just tellin' em they might as well be locked up," Lynette implicates corporations for shaping and feeding his curiosity. From the mother's perspective the shackle shoes fit the cosmologies of prison culture and a consumer desire that *extended forth* and out to specifically reach Black male bodies and then directly position them so that these particular cosmologies are present and close to their frame of reference (Watkins, 2012). This extension

and reaching out to join prison culture and Black male bodies intoxicates racialized

intentionalities so that they are unbalanced and unaware of the fusion. In responding to the shoes

the boys stated,

> Caleb: I don't care what y'all say, that shoe "on fire."

> Jamerion: For real that is tight though.

> Caleb: Hey momma if you bought me these, I do you a favor and lock Tray down like

> to a chair or somethin' and I bet he would mind you and do whatever you say.

> Natasha: You know I ain't gone let you do my baby like that, and ain't nobdy buyin' you

> no shackle shoes.

As Caleb explained, the shackles were cool and whimsical, and from the boys'

perspective, they symbolized neither the past nor a connection to jail, they were "tight" and

supremely desired. According to Dr. Boyce Watkins (2012), a social scholar and economist, the

role of corporations in shaping Black male sensibilities with the prison industrial complex looms

large. He argued that manufacturing and marketing of the shoe trumped Red Bull's Street Ball

basketball Tournament that was held in the prison yard at Alcatraz in 2010 and 2011. They

actually held a tournament there, and in the promotional material, one of the notorious criminals

who was housed in Alcatraz was none other than Machine Gun Kelly. I was actually taken aback

when I saw the ad for the tournament. Everything was shaped to appeal directly to young Black

males in communities like the RECHC. Do you see how the images of what and who the boys

like are being constructed to like, and also who they are *supposed* to be is being knitted together

into a knotty convoluted vortex? Stepping back, it's not really so surprising that Jamerion would

juxtapose going pro and going to jail. The sad reality is that they are really too close to the edge

of a cliff. And while I don't agree completely with Patterson's (2006) argument about the

"Dionysian trap" (paragraph 22), whereby all aspects of coolness and popular culture are inherently negative and perilous for Black males, I do agree with his assertion that that the Black males and many Black children like those in the RECHC, don't have enough "filtering structures" to allow them the space to shift through the vortex or even resist the reach of racialized social and structural forces.

Through discourse and play within homosocial spaces, in their personal spheres, and in the larger world, the boys were trying to make sense of who they were in relationship to their identities as Black "Brothers in the Hood." Implicitly and explicitly they were deriving ideals of maleness, femaleness, race, class, and sexuality on the basis of living, interacting, and absorbing the symbol systems and texts that were targeted to and for their consumption in relationship to, and because of, their raced, classed, and gendered, identities. Whether imitating Birdman, Nikki Minaj, or playing with action figures, the boys were simultaneously, composing and trying to reconcile the various racial constructions and spaces within their own individual, peer, and communal spheres in relationship to those within larger structures outside of their community space.

CHAPTER 7

ANGER, THE POLICE, AND GETTING VIOLENCY

The rollers dripped thin wisps of blue paint on the carpeted floor, and in some places there were circles as round and as thick as nickels. At first, there were seven of us in the man cave, which were far too many bodies to paint one room. Everyone had a task but no one wanted to stick to it. We collectively patched the hole in the wall. First Zuri cut the metal grid and placed it over the hole. Next, Da'veon put the first few coats of spackle over it, and then several kids took turns smoothing it over like icing. While it dried, we focused on painting the other three walls. The kids selected a vibrant cobalt blue. I handed out foam paint brushes and then there were small tiffs over who would get the *real* rollers and paint brushes. Da'veon started to argue with another kid, and then he pushed him and then left the cabana. Zuri painted in a zig- zag pattern rather than the up and down motions that I had demonstrated. "Ms. Roberta I have paint all on my shirt and shorts," yelled Katrina. "So do I," another little boy added. I hoped that it would wash off.

The entire project was a mess and an exercise in my ability to keep my cool. The day before, as the children ate lunch, I left to go get the paint and the supplies so that we would be ready to get started painting the next day. However, when I returned, the kids had written their names, and words like "Westside," "swag," "holla," and "man cave" onto the wall as if it were a tablet. I didn't express the anger, disappointment, and confusion that I felt. I just had a shocked and simple look on my face and then I asked all of the kids, "Why did y'all do this?" One of the boys who came to cabana infrequently explained, "It don't really matter since you gone paint over it anyway, right?" In my head I thought:

Wrong. It did matter. There was a part of me thinking, here I am trying to patch, paint, and fix up this room, and *these kids* are defacing it, by writing on the walls? What is wrong with "these kids"? These kids-I didn't mean it like that, but it felt like I *could've* been thinking it. You know, it was like I was stereotyping or "framing them" (Vagle & Jones, 2012). What *did* I mean? Did I mean, *these kids*, as in kids will drive you crazy… or did I mean, these low income Black kids? Was I judging them, taking a missionary approach, or using the gaze of the researcher? It felt like some classist feelings could have been coming into being and that they wanted to spill out. When he talked about bodily tension of race making, Hooks (2008) didn't say anything about the inner tension and turmoil of class conflicts or how to reflect and reconcile those fleeting and negative thoughts that sometimes enter our psyche. These kids… this is what I was thinking, it was in my head, but I didn't say it out loud, not even to myself, because at the time I didn't know how I meant it.

In addition to thinking about what I might've been thinking, I was *also* thinking about the women in the front office, and how they would have a field day writing up all of the mothers if they happened to come into the cabana that afternoon and see the writing all over the walls. But honestly, *at that moment*, I didn't really care about that part, as much as I did about my own feelings. I was hurt, and I took the writing on the wall personally. I felt and feared that the kids were telling me that my little project to paint the room, and probably my bigger project, really didn't matter to them either.

Later on that night, after I cooled off, and bridled through what I was feeling, I realized that "these kids" probably wrote on the wall to remind me and anyone else that this was their space, and that they had already named and claimed it. I thought about how before I suggested that we paint the room, I had also moved a table into it and set up books on it for mothers and the

kids. It was much like the browsing tables they have at the bookstore. I had also "weeded" which is a process that librarians enact in which they sort, toss, or reorganize and straighten books. We can't help it, and we do it anytime we see bookshelves. I had thrown some of the books out because they were worthless-they really were-at least to me.

During my first week in the cabana, a feisty little girl who tussled with the boys over trucks, and anything else they wanted to go toe to toe with her on, had taken several of these books outside of the cabana. She organized them on the concrete steps and created a tower out of them and then she subsequently attempted to scale over them. Unfortunately, she didn't succeed and she skinned the tight tender flesh around her ankle bone. She trailed blood into the cabana and limped along. After I helped clean and bandage her ankle, I went outside and she narrated how it all went down. I looked through the books, all scattered about, and some of the pages were ripped or dirty from the mishap. Most of them were old with yellowed pages. For example, her apparatus had included a 1971 edition of the oxford dictionary, several Harlequin Romance novels, a travel book, several frayed Golden books with the signature gold foil and decorative black swirly spine, and a few rumpled paperback books that were stapled down the middle. They were definitely suitable for a prop, but not much else. Natasha said that the books were donations from what didn't sell at a Goodwill book sale, and cast offs from the hallways of Booker. At any rate the books I brought books that I felt the children and the mothers might actually enjoy and connect with on some level. However, in mapping myself into the community, I had also inadvertently taken over their space.

The next day, even though we were able to paint over their writing, the faint outline and grooves of the letters were still visible in several spots. Our entire afternoon of painting was actually a disaster. I toggled back and forth between breaking up small fights between the

children, and trying to avert a complete mess. The man cave was looking far worse than it did

before my painting project. At one point, I paused in defeat, and I stood there in the middle of it

all. I was tired of saying "Don't be doin' that," or "Did you just trip her? Please stop." I decided

that *I* would just stop, and then I watched as Tray dipped his brush into one of the buckets. As he

walked to the opposite side of the room, the cobalt blue paint drizzled over his dark arms and

onto the carpet like syrup. He was "black and blue." When he was bored, he left, and so did the

others. Soon, there was just me, and my throbbing headache.

Black and Blue

There were many days when I left the cabana feeling black and blue. It wasn't just the

depletion of energy and exhaustion that is inherently a part of working with young kids full of

energy. There was also a mental and spiritual weight that orbited around me as I attempted to

codify the temporal nuances *and* the heavy realities of what it was like to read race in the

RECHC. Some of the weightiness that I felt was the result of being an unambivalent researcher,

that is to say I was an othersider, a Black woman with access to the ivory tower, who is imbued

with a genuine love for "my people." There was a pathic sense (van Manen, 1990) of reading as

an outsider researcher with-in-their-world. In addition, because my inquiry into *what it was like*

to read race was with and on behalf of my own people, a significant part of my spiritual and

emotional being as a Black mother/ sister/ friend/daughter/wife/educator/researcher was always

very present (Dillard, 2006).

I constantly wondered and worried if I was getting it right. Was this or that okay to tell?

How was this or that, raced, classed, gendered, all of the above and more, or none of the above

(if that is possible). Some days, I was black and blue because it was simply hard to witness

through listening to some of the narratives of trauma that were shared (Dutro, 2009; Dutro et al,

2008; Jones, 2013). Stories about a neighborhood gang rape, doors getting kicked in, a shooting that took place on Makeela's birthday and in her building, which meant that because her building was considered a crime scene nobody could be in the building until the next day. In assuming my responsibility as a listener of the racialized readings of mothers and children, there were many instances in which I learned much more than I wanted to know or am willing to share, at least for now.

The Culture of Violence

In this chapter, I walk a fine line as I discuss the raced, classed, and gendered violence within the community space, because violence, anger, and dissonance is so often connected to Black people and the spaces they embody. For example, certain words such as *low income apartments* or *projects* inherently conjure up ideas of Black or Brown people, criminality, and violence (Mohammad, 2010). As Chin (2001) argued,

> Dense, evocative terms like inner city now operate as quick descriptors behind which lurk
> a host of meaning and assumptions that are loaded like a semiautomatic: poor, black,
> drugs, gangs, violence, Latino, welfare, joblessness. (p.60)

In addition, as Heidegger (1971) asserted, considering associations and meanings of language without necessarily submitting to them can be a difficult task, because as I mentioned previously, violence *was* a part of the spatial experience and lived realities of the Black families living in the RECHC. In considering the intentionalities of racialized violence, I also thought about those that I have witnessed in images, photographs, movies, and what I have read in books about the blood of violence that swung from southern trees, the salvia that was hurled on Black faces, the menacing lurching "race dogs," and water hoses that cut through the flesh of Black people. I thought about the number of Black youth who are victims of gun violence in their neighborhoods,

and the all too common death as the result of a policeman's bullet. I felt like Angie when she expressed, "I don't know, but it just feels like this mess is always happening to *us*." These were some of the things lurking in the shadow of my mind and that came forward when I began this particular portion of the phenomenological analysis.

Denzin (1984) noted that the experience of violence is a "situated, interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive activity," (p.484). I witnessed the racialized stories of trauma and violence through listening, and sometimes as these stories were being told, I slipped into moments of uneasiness. As Chawla (1994) articulated, I "[longed] for familiarity and comfort; and imaginative horizons of reach beyond where I was" (n.p), I never felt unsafe, and I don't believe that it was inherently a "bad community." It's simply how I felt in certain moments. What is salient is that as their stories were shared, their world became my world, and this research awakened me to this reality in a multitude of ways. The injustice and turmoil of their world became my own. Dutro (2009), and Dutro and Kantor (2011) have each emphasized that educators need to develop a critical witnessing stance to counter the me/them or us/them stance that can occur when the life-focused narratives of students and their families are shared or revealed.

In sharing the phenomenological moments in this chapter, I hope to complicate simplistic notions of violence in relationship to race and social location. In some of the stories that I share, Lyng's (2004) notion about the "body's contingent power to create havoc" and fight within or outside of oneself, with or against others, is taken up. I attempt to show how the racialized, classed, and gendered violence of the hegemonic structure was part of the connective tissue of life, which the mothers and children were constantly navigating in their day to day lives in the RECHC. I include the role of police in contributing to this violence, and the community member's code to combat it. Da'veon's narrative represents how "the grip of violence" within these racial, class, and

gendered structures weaves its way deeply within personal lives and can result in the kind of violence that is most recognized and punished. I conclude the chapter with the mothers' perspective that because of the ecological contexts of their lives, Black children need to be tough.

Violence is a part of life, and it is ubiquitous, even in nature. Consider for example, the cosmic violence (Cauchy, 1992) that occurs in the universe and organically in nature as we unconsciously move through our daily living. It's happening all around us and we often do not notice. Drawing from a Sartrean perspective, Fleming (2011) declared that the world is "saturated in violence" but that far too much of it is focused on what he dubbed "subjective violence" which has "easily identifiable authors" who we can easily blame and punish (p. 21). He noted that violent capitalistic, racist, and patriarchal structures need to be interrogated, disrupted, and read much more than they are. In other words, much like the unacknowledged everyday violence occurring in the natural world, Fleming points out that there is quite a bit of violence concealed in the status quo. In this chapter I share the intersection of violence, race, class, and gender structures that Fleming attempts to get us to see.

They Like Fireflies

Similar to Muhammad's assertion in the *Condemnation of Blackness* (2011), Michelle Alexander noted that the criminal justice system presently, serves the same function as it did after the Emancipation proclamation, and in the Jim Crow era, which was to maintain separation between undesirable Others (low income and Black and Brown individuals) and privileged society members. Each of the authors noted that racial and class profiling serves as a prominent method of social control. Hence, one of the primary forms of violence perpetrated in the RECHC included constantly being under the surveillance of the police, being uprooted and displaced, the necessity for the kids to be mentally and physically tough, as well as the tension

and violence that tugs and won't allow you to fight even when certain circumstances might implore "you to get violency" (Katrina, personal conversation, July 19). I will begin with Lynette describing what it was like to be accosted by the police, and read as a criminal as she walked home at night from the fast food restaurant where she worked. In the previous chapter, I wrote about how the police interrogated the younger and older Black males in the RECHC. However, as Lynette demonstrates the women in the community also had unfavorable encounters with the police. One day as some of the mothers were talking about [do something to contextualize this], Lynette described:

> They like fireflies or something, they come out in droves at nighttime, and they come
>
> from out of nowhere too. It's like they be hidin' tryin' to catch somebody. They be
>
> parking their cars in crazy places. One time, when I was walking home from work, they
>
> came up on me from nowhere and scared the shit out of me. They come asking me what
>
> I'm doin', and here, I got on my damn uniform. So really, what kind of question is that?
>
> Please… They scout the neighborhood constantly. And you know, just like how they
>
> mess with the boys. They started in on me with the twenty questions game. Where was I
>
> going ? What was I doing? Like really? Who walks around in that bullshit get up?
>
> (Lynette was referring to her uniform). I was headed to pick up Knight from my
>
> momma's house. And, honestly they just want to lock somebody up. And if you want to
>
> lock somebody up, then you go where the Black people live and you got an easy target.

In chronicling the intense oversight of the police, Natasha also shared,

> They knocked on my door all belligerent the other night, trying to track down somebody.
>
> I mean, we do have crime around here but we don't need them out here every night. And

see what's really messed up, is the way they go about it. So, at the end of the day, don't nobody around here trust the police.

The limitless and aggressive pursuits and questions of the police were not perceived by the mothers as being in their best interests or in that of the community; instead they felt that the police were against them (Jones, 2006; Miller, 2006). As Lynette noted, the mothers and the boys felt like their Black bodies were marked and criminalized, and *they* felt assaulted and violated by the stringent monitoring force because the police were often "popping up like fireflies." The mothers read these aggressive practices as racist, and they also spoke of witnessing Whites who were outsiders of the community being given a pass, and the benefit of doubt that they weren't necessarily afforded.

For example, it was well known that drugs were sold within the community, and typically the main reason that Whites were in the community after hours, was to purchase them. Natasha said that on one occasion, she witnessed as a police officer averted a White male from getting arrested, when it was clear that he was about buy illicit drugs. According to Natasha, a young White male was walking through the community when he was approached by a policeman who exchanged words with him, shook his hand, and walked him to his vehicle. She said that shortly thereafter, as two Black men walked through the complex (apparently looking for the White male) they were swiftly apprehended by the police who placed them up against a patrol car, frisked, and subsequently arrested them once they found the drugs.

Snitches Get Stitches

The police communal relations in the RECHC were negative as a result of the racist tendencies of the police and therefore "snitching" to outside authorities was considered

unacceptable. "Snitches get stitches" was a common mantra, inside joke, and a code of solidarity in the RECHC. It was one of the primary ways that families countered the disrespect of the police, and the structural violence and practices of targeting Blacks. Snitches get stitches was one of six year old Tray's favorite catch phrases. When Natasha's boyfriend Tyrone, was injured at work after several metal rods fell from a high shelf, he received deep lacerations that required stitches. Natasha said that while they were in the emergency room, Tray chanted "snitches get stitches," so often that the nurse eventually asked if there was something *else* about Tyrone's accident that she needed to know about. We laughed mightily about how embarrassing that must have been for Natasha to hush Tray as he chanted and revealed the neighborhood code. The day after Tyrone's accident, although no one wanted to see them, Natasha passed pictures of the injury around the cabana which made us all squeamish. At the end of the summer a large keloid scar that extended from Tyrone's neck to this chest had formed. It was a scar that he would bare for the rest of his life.

The scars and skin memories (Ahmed & Stacey, 2004) of violent incidents in our lives are *not* always visible, particularly those that are marked by structural race and class violence. An actual snitching incident that has undoubtedly left deep social and psychological scars for Da'veon and his family members occurred prior to the end of the school year. It *literally* tore his family apart, and caused his father to be incarcerated again. As Ahmed (2006) argued, it was a disorientation of the body that "in losing its support [his body and those of his family were] lost, undone, thrown" (p.157). This particular incident involved two families in Claude Homes that were entangled in an East side /West side intra-racial boundary transgression. Their conflict was part of a larger web of unequal raced, classed, and gendered policies, practices, and spatial

legacies constructed within macro-level institutional structures, most of which created and help to maintain the color of violence.

I began this chapter by narrating the day that the children and I attempted to paint the man cave. The painting debacle had taken place on Friday so I returned to River Eves on a Saturday in order to properly attend to painting the room (kid free) as well as to clean up some of the paint spills on the carpet which were fairly extensive. After I had gotten over my ego and the writing on the wall incident, I tossed and turned, thinking about how the women in the management office might penalize the mothers and hold them accountable for damaging the communal property. I could see it now-the mothers would each receive a mark on their record and then they would be asked to leave the community *all* because of my flawed painting project. I had to clean it up, and coming in over the weekend would allow plenty of time for the room to dry and air out without the kids running about. Natasha and I met mid morning and she provided me with the key to the cabana so that I could come and go as I needed.

Just as Natasha was about to leave, Tonda, Da'veon's mother, was passing by the cabana and she stopped to talk to Natasha. The door was still open, and I was excited to meet her because I wanted to invite her to attend our sessions, and obtain her signed permission for Da'veon to formally participate in the research. However, before I could get around the barrage of paint, furniture, and the plastic that I had put down (a day too late), Tonda launched into a profanity laden rant that rippled throughout the empty cabana. Her words were a "double spatial presence of sound," (Ihde, 2007, p.187), it was loud and brash, and she was undoubtedly pissed off. Cliché or not, it literally did cause me stop in my tracks, and I stayed put in the man cave. There was nothing else to do but listen, and to be honest, although I was eavesdropping, I didn't really feel that bad because Tonda *meant* for her story to be heard by any and everyone, whether

they wanted to hear what she was saying or not. Perhaps this might be read as a stereotype about Da'veon's mother being a loud Black and angry Black female. But, at that moment *she was* a loud and angry Black female. I have been pegged that a few times, just for being a Black woman who was angry.

Below, I wrote Tonda's conversation with Natasha out in this way because that's how I heard it. It was in streams and chunks, and there were omissions and things I didn't really understand because I didn't know the whole story. I was just getting parts of it.

I know you heard about what the hell happened

They did

all our shit

it was

some of it

yeah

some of it

Out in front

On that little raggedy ass

Patch of grass they call a yard

Nope

We ran out

I tied some of

The shit up

In the sheets

You know they

Cause I couldn't even

Get everything

Hell yeah

I did

I did

I just got as you know

Much as I could

I had Da'veon holding stuff

Yeah, you know they did

They did

Zeke is locked up

Yep

He locked up

And we then we all got barred too

Can't *nobody* go over there

He locked up

I don't know

But I can't even worry about him

Cause first

I gotta find somewhere for us to stay.

Tonda paused and exhaled a puff of cigarette smoke that wafted back into the cabana and into the man cave. It was pungent and heavy like the reality of her words. They had been put out, and Da'veon's father had been locked up. I wondered what he did to get locked up, as if that

really mattered, but I must admit I did wonder, and what about Da'veon? I immediately felt *sorry* for him. I did, that was my first emotion, and although I probably should've been thinking other things, I wasn't. I began busying myself with the task of properly painting the man cave, because Natasha knew that I was in the man cave and although I was clearly eavesdropping, and I said it wasn't a big deal, I didn't necessarily want to be recognized for doing it.

The mothers often talked about men also being barred from River Eves, and it took me awhile to understand what that really meant. In his analysis of racializing embodiment, Hook (2008) described barring as a "fundamental division-which means that human subjects are never complete or unified unto themselves," (p.140). In this sense those men who were barred couldn't go into certain neighborhoods and they were in effect being regulated and monitored. The unfortunate incident with Da'veon's father Zeke is a reality for many individuals who attempt re-entry into society after being incarcerated. As Alexander (2010) reiterated, "Once you are labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination, employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, educational opportunity, food stamps, public housing, and jury service are all legal" (p.4). A significant number of those who are incarcerated are low income Black males, therefore the criminal justice system functions as a significant tool for racial and social control.

I pulled a thick wedge of tape from the spool so that I could paint around the edges of the door; it made a loud ripping noise, which caused Tonda to stop again before she continued. "What was that?" I still didn't peak my head out, but I listened to Natasha talk about me, and my literary endeavor. "That's Roberta. She just be readin' books and stuff with the kids. Da'veon came over yesterday he didn't tell you?" In the midst of all of this, I couldn't imagine that what

we were doing would make the list of things that mattered in his world. What difference *would* reading some books make? Tonda responded,

> He probably did
>
> But see
>
> He's tired
>
> He's hungry
>
> He hate it here
>
> He stayin' with them, but he hate it
>
> And he don't really have none of his stuff
>
> And you *know* he miss Zeke
>
> That's all he's been talkin' about
>
> And you know he had gotten suspended
>
> Yeah
>
> Cause he got in a fight with them
>
> Yeah
>
> Them little nappy head snitching #mf**ers
>
> He beat their little asses
>
> So he had got put out
>
> How you gone get put out the last
>
> Week

Tonda was now aware of my presence but an introduction would have been awkward at this point. I crossed over into the common room to get more of my supplies off of the table in the common room. As I left the man cave, I glanced over and watched as Tonda blew more smoke

and stamped the cigarette butt out with her sandaled foot. The last puff billowed up. I decided that I would just wave. As I pushed the big gray trash barrel back into the man cave, I listened as Tonda sucked her teeth, and she asserted, "They gone get theirs though, you don't even have to worry about that."

The following week, Natasha filled in the blanks and told me the whole story about Da'veon and his family. How he was suspended from school after getting into an altercation with two of the children who lived in Claude Homes, because their parents were responsible for snitching on *his* family for breaking the anti-felony law in public housing. Zeke, Da'veon's father, had been in jail for possession, but he was clean, and he had served his time, *and* he was *trying* to turn his life around. As I mentioned previously, convicted felons cannot live in public housing. When Zeke got out of jail and moved in with his family, their neighbors who didn't like them because of long standing turf rifts between Blacks on the East and West side of Clinton decided to report them to the Clinton Housing Authority. As a result, the police bombarded their unit, put them out, and arrested Da'veon's father for trespassing and violating his probation. Natasha said that Da'veon's father had only been out of jail for two months before the snitching incident but while he was around, she said that he volunteered at Booker several days a week in the parent room and he was working with the Da'veon's teacher and administrators to figure out how to help Da'veon because he had a maelstrom of academic and disciplinary problems.

The snitching incident ended in a web of traumatic consequences that individually would create long lasting scars and turmoil. Becoming homeless, being suspended from school the last week, and watching his father being sent back to jail were unfathomable hardships for Da'veon and his family. I thought about Merleau-Ponty's (1979) notion about the ways that one embodies

the experiences of the other, and for me this was a heavy story to bear witness to. Can you imagine what it was like to live?

Da'veon

In school, Da'veon was considered one of the Troublemakers (Ferguson, 2001), he was a regular in the principal's office and according to administrators at Booker, he was known for instigating fights. The fight that caused him to be suspended was one of many infractions and indiscretions in his file folder at Booker, and despite the back-story, and the dire circumstances of his family, Da'veon was suspended the last week of school. Earlier, I noted Lyng's (2004) assertion about the body's "contingent power to create havoc," (p.370). Lyng argued further that sometimes allowing the body to move into the psychological, mental, and emotional state that it needs to be in, means that the body becomes "consumed by its own capacity for chaos," (p.370). And while fighting in school is disruptive and dangerous, quite frankly it is hard to imagine *not* allowing your body to fight out at least some of the inner turmoil that was brewing within him?

Over the summer, I noticed that Da'veon was aggressive at times, but like all of the kids he mostly just engaged in "tough talk" and empty threats. I only witnessed him become physical the day that we painted the man cave, and everybody was fighting and shoving. I realize that my time within the community and around Da'veon was very limited; however, in the four months that I came to know him outside of school his behavior was largely driven by a desire to be seen as "hard," and to gain the respect of his peers (Ferguson, 2001). Many times he defended himself against the verbal jabs from the middle school boys by responding, "Ain't nobody soft." He was living with Tonda's cousin in River Eves, and he always came for lunch and he also stayed for many of the sessions. Da'veon's interests in "being hard" was also apparent in the book that he took home one day after I conducted a book talk. For example, although baseball didn't appeal to

him, he liked the Negro League book *We are the Ship* (Nelson, 2009), because "the players looked hard like wouldn't nobody mess with them" (see chapter 5).   Being messed with and watching his back appeared to be a concern for Da'veon, and it was particularly an issue as it related to the police. Based on his personal experience, it is not surprising that Da'veon would hate the police.

Hide and Seek

In the conversation that the mothers and I had with the boys over pizza, Da'veon had the harshest criticism about the police, and like the mothers and other boys, he also believed that the police targeted Black people. After all, they had literally surrounded his home in order to escort his family out of Claude *and* they arrested his father, whom he was just becoming reacquainted with. In our group discussion with the mothers, Da'veon described his feelings about the police as follows:

> I do hate the police. Everybody know they want to lock you up and throw away the key. Like they came to my house and they was everywhere at the back door and the front door. And see too, I think *all* cops hate Black people, not just White polices. It's like I was talking about the movie (Boyz in the Hood). The Black ones do too, because we have Black cops, like the Black polices in that movie. They hate on us, and they racist too, just like the White police be. They always be following us, chasing us and stuff.

Janesse was present and she interrupted Da'veon's explanation:

> It's like I keep saying, y'all always running, and then they suspect that you did something wrong. You shouldn't run. It ain't never good for no nigga to run from the police.
>
> *Jamerion interjects*

But they don't care though. Like I can be standing doing nothing, and they still act like

we did something.

Da'veon: And you don't know what you gone do or what you gone say, when they

lookin' like they gone come up on you. See, one time I was running after I saw 'um,

'cause they was following me and my cousins from the store, so we started to run. They

caught up with us, and they started asking us all kinds of questions. Where y'all been?

Where y'all going? I said we wasn't going nowhere and we wasn't doing nothin' 'cause

we wasn't. And then, he said, well why you running then? And so I just said, 'cause we

was playing hide and go seek.

The room erupted in laughter; Da'veon's wit was clever and uncanny. I can't imagine

what he could have said that would have put the matter into prospective any better. It was funny

at the time but looking back, it really wasn't a laughing matter. It was, as Gordon (1995) noted,

an emotional response to racial tension that evaded the seriousness of the matter, and frankly it

was one without any easy response or answer. Janesse was right, but so was Jamerion. A young

Black male "can be standing [or walking] and doing nothing" and he will be considered

suspicious (Brunson, 2007; Weitzer, 2002). Brunson's study included the racialized experiences

of 40 Black adolescent males in low income communities and he discovered egregious acts of

over aggressiveness from police. Vagrancy laws against poor people and Blacks have long been

used to arrest "undesirable" Others (Muhammad, 2010), and as the boys were trying to convey,

simply "walking while Black" can cause suspicion. As the Trayvon Martin case demonstrated,

having on certain clothing can exacerbate the suspicion of walking while Black. His experience

also proved Jamerion's point that it didn't matter if they walked or ran, because based on

reported accounts, prior to being shot and killed, Trayvon walked and he ran as he was persued

by a volunteer security guard. Hopefully justice will be served in his case, but as the boys

wondered what *is* the right response, particularly when what they appear to be pursuing is your

"oppositional Black male body" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 72)? Shouldn't there be broader support to

address the violence of this structure and the police practices?

In the cabana as we laughed at Da'veon's hide and seek response, I suspect that making

light of the matter was a temporary salve for all of us, particularly for Da'veon and the boys. In

the RECHC, and in many other parts of the country, simply *being* a Black male is a cause for

suspicion. As a fourth grade boy, Da'veon responded in a manner that was present within him

without distance (Sartre, 1966, p. 509), because as a child, he *could've* been playing hide and

seek. And, in that moment of interrogation and internal peril and confusion when he didn't know

what to do or say, he was able to rely on the repertoire of childhood. This particular way out

would not be available to him in a few short years when his Black body matured into a young

adult male. As Fleming noted, there is far too much violence within institutional structures, and

"adultifying" these young Black males (Ferguson, 2000, p.83) is one of those forms of racialized,

classed, and gendered violence that these young boys and their family members were constantly

navigating.

Our Kids Have to Be Tough

If you recall, Da'veon's mother condoned the violence that resulted in Da'veon being put

out of school, and fighting back was an important lesson that the mothers felt that they needed to

impart to their children. These notions counter middle class ideas of turning the other cheek. In

fact, Janesse argued that she knows that fighting is not the first solution, but she acknowledged

that her mother taught her that "if you turn the other check, you just gone get smacked on the

otherside." From the outside in, such ideas conjure up notions about "bad parenting," not being

a good-enough mother, rough unruly Black kids, and narrow insensitive class readings.

However, negotiating the "codes of the street" (Anderson, 2005) is often necessary to instill self-sufficient, agency, and respect. The code as the mothers were imparting it to their children was a defensive one. Anderson described the code of the street as "a set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, including violence" (p. 24). He argued further that

> The code is thus largely defensive; it is literally necessary for operating in public.
> Therefore, even though families with a decency orientation are usually opposed to the values of the code, they often reluctantly encourage their children's familiarity with it to enable them to negotiate the inner-city environment.

Each of the mothers expressed the importance of their children being "street smart and book smart." They believed that the classed, raced, and gendered violence in the community required a disposition of fighting back, it was unfortunately sometimes a necessary response. This conversation arose one day as the mothers and I were reading the book *A Father Like that* (Zolotow, 2007). I selected the book as a central point of discussion after I'd listened to a radio interview where a representative from the National Fatherhood Initiative stated that 2 in 3 (64%) of African American children live in homes without their fathers. Earlier the women had complexified the father-absent narrative because father-absent homes did not necessarily equate to a father not being present in their children's lives. In selecting the book, I hoped to extend that particular discussion; however, the conversation went in a completely different direction than what I imagined. One interesting aspect of this book is that when it was originally published in 1971, it featured a young White male and a single mother. When the book was reissued in 2007, it depicted a young Black male, and a single Black mother. I was not able to obtain a copy of the

original book, but the race of the characters did alter the reading of the mothers in race, gender, and class specific ways.

In the book, a nameless little Black boy imagines what it would be like to have a father active, and in the home. The book never explains why his father is not present in his life. The boy envisions bonding with his father as they play games together, walk to school, etc. Based on the text and the illustrations, they share inside secrets that his mother apparently would never understand. I wondered what racial, class, or gender related connections and disconnections the mothers had with this particular book so we went back through portions of the story. Do you think this represents a Black perspective on fatherhood or motherhood?, I asked. Then I suggested for them to point out anything that stood out, and as I flipped back through the pages, Janesse asked me to stop at one point. She zeroed in on one line in which the little boy states, "He'd never call me sissy if I cried. He'd say never mind kiddo, you'll feel better later on."

Janesse shook her head and uttered:

Um hmm. Yep, that's the page right there. See I totally disagree with that. That's a White thing, right there because honestly, White people don't care if their kids sit there and cry till they're 14 years old. But see by the time you seven, as a Black child, if you still cryin' you gone have to man up. He can't be no sissy and survive.

Natasha : Yeah you better get some bass in your voice.

Janesse : Yeah, see I don't want Zuri to become known as the neighborhood punk because we are dealing with this issue with him at school and we tell him all the time, don't you be no sissy. Don't you be no wuss. His father tells him too. He can't be no sissy around here.

Roberta: Why, is it just a Black thing?

Janesse: He's going to have to learn how to fight and stand up for himself. His problem is complicated, but overall when you a Black child, I don't care if you rich or not, you have to be tough and you have to have some thick skin, because too many people still don't like us. I mean, it is tougher if you broke, you learn it quicker, but being Black is hard work period. So you have to prepare your kids for that. In Zuri's case he don't want to fight but he has started to hang around some boys that are teaching him how to box, so I'm glad.

Janesse interspersed issues of place, poverty, gender, and also simply *being Black* as reasons for the necessity for Black kids to be tough. She also injected Zuri's bullying issue into her belief about the trope of Black kids needing to be tougher. Natasha added a gendered caveat by stating, "You better get some bass in your voice," which indicated that *not being tough* carries a harsher penalty for boys. As Janesse responded "Yeah, see I don't want Zuri to become known as the neighborhood punk." Janesse added a racial and gender dimension that she experienced in her own youth, which also influenced her belief that both Black boys and girls, specifically from their community needed to be tough. She asserted,

It is a shame, but that's just how it is. You have to learn it. When we were growing up, I had a cousin who wouldn't fight. She was a bubbly Black girl, and you can't be no bubbly Black girl in the 'hood. Plenty of girls wanted to fight her, *just* for that. I mean, they will beat you up for that. I ended up fighting most of her fights for her because that ain't right, and that was my cousin, and the bottom line is, you better be tough and learn how to fight.

Janesse drew from lived experience to point out that from her perspective, for Black kids in their community there was no room for blind innocence or "being bubbly," even for girls. In

another conversation, Angie shared the importance of children in the RECHC also learning how to be mentally tough. She stated,

> You know when we got our door kicked in a few months back, and our stuff was stolen. It was messed up, but I told the kids, what we gone cry for? I told 'em look, sometimes stuff ain't fair, and when people are broke, they do messed up stuff to each other.

Being mentally tough and willing to physically fight was also a place related context, because as Janesse pointed out, she felt that Zuri *would be* tougher and that he would not being dealing with the bullies in school, if they still lived behind the bricks. She stated:

> I know for sure that if we still lived in Claude Homes, Zuri would not be getting bullied. I mean they still might be sayin' that he talk White and stuff, I don't know, cause he might not be doin' that either, but I know that he would've learned to fight back by now. It's just like the book that we read together - and you know he hated it. But see, he might get stretched out or whatever, but you still learn that you have to fight back.

> Janesse was referring to the book *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun* (Canada, 2010). I gave her the

book to read and share with Zuri after she mentioned that Zuri was getting bullied in school for being big and talking White while Black (see chapter 5). In the book Jeffery Canada discusses the rite of passage in his neighborhood which required that Black boys fight in order to gain respect in the neighborhood. Although Janesse read the whole book and felt that it resonated with her own and many of the children's' experiences in the RECHC, Zuri whole-heartedly resisted it. He didn't like to discuss the bullying that he encountered in school. He perceived it to be an insurmountable, if not an impossible situation for him to overcome.

One day after we read books and sat coloring, Zuri was unusually talkative and willing to discuss the bullying, which he had discussed one other time.

Zuri: I got like three hundred million people that don't like me, and want to fight me.

(He begins to name them)

Roberta: Three *hundred* million? (I asked skeptically). That doesn't sound like three hundred million people.

Zuri: Well it's three kids. They all want to fight me. And sometimes when they do it, it's a secret; you know where people can't see that they're doing it.

Roberta: Like what do they do?

Zuri: They poke me with pencils. They whisper stuff. They punch my stomach too. They hate me.

Roberta: I don't think they really hate you. Sometimes people just try to test you, to see how far they can push you.

Zuri: Well, I don't want to fight 'em, but I have tried every other solution there is.

Roberta: Like what have you done?

Zuri: I went to the teacher.

Roberta: What else?

Zuri: That's all I've ever tried.

I laughed at this a bit

Roberta: Well, sometimes you can use reverse psychology you know, kill 'em with kindness. Try to be friends with 'em.

Zuri: That would take a miracle. It's been three years of straight hatred from these guys. And you think that we could be friends? I don't even think magic could do that.

My heart sunk- and the way that he injected magic into it and how he didn't believe that it would work made it even sadder. I wondered if he had already tried it. I suddenly felt

extremely foolish for my simplistic idea. Zuri was right, it wasn't so easy. They didn't like his

White talking ways, or the fact that he was big and unwilling to fight. And, as Janesse had

pointed out, he also lived on the otherside, so he wasn't one of "them." Zuri and Katrina and I sat

in silence for a bit. Zuri colored and Katrina was flipping through a copy of the slavery books

that she had taken from a stack. She turned one of the pages, and blurted out, "Was it Barack

Obama or somebody else that freed the slaves?" Barrack Obama was not featured in the book at

all and I reminded Katrina that slavery was 400 years ago, *and* that Barack Obama wasn't around

400 years ago, just like we weren't around. I started explaining that Abraham Lincoln signed a

document called the emancipation proclamation, and then Zuri interrupted my history lesson, and

stated, "I probably do need to start defending myself, but I think that it *might* just make

everything worse." Zuri continues the battle within him and appears to act out being a resisting

body as he appears to retract. I imagine that he was probably having the fight in his head, as if

he were playing out the flesh on flesh battle between the boys. As he appeared to waver, Katrina

was clearly tired of his unwillingness to get on with the fight that appeared inevitable once the

school year began. She huffed,

> Well you *do* need to do something about it. (She was shaking her head in disgust). When
>
> *they* get violency wit you, then you just have to get violency back at them. Like these
>
> girls that mess with me. Ms.Roberta can you wait a minute? (Katrina went into the man
>
> cave to retrieve one of the tattered Golden Books that survived my weeding frenzy. It was
>
> a version of Cinderella. See that? She flipped through the pages in the book and pointed
>
> to the step-sisters. See, just like those step-sisters, right there. I have these girls in my
>
> class, and I'm Cinderella and when they say something about my dress and get smart
>
> with me, at first, I just ignore them for payback, but after that, I *do* say something back,

and if it gets worse, well, that's when I have to get violency. So Zuri, that's just like what you gone have to do…

I have often wondered what happened when the school year began. I wondered if Zuri was still encountering the bullying his final year at Booker, or whether the three boys had moved on and decided to leave Zuri alone, or if he did have to "go ham" on them (as Janesse often suggested), or if he was still acting out the fight in his mind. The three hundred million boys might even be gone since there was so much shifting and moving in Claude due to the impending excavation. Black families were being distributed throughout Clinton as vouchers were given to some families, and transfers into other local public housing communities that had openings were given to others. I learned that Da'veon and his mother moved back to the other side of Clinton with family members, and that Tonda was permanently barred from public housing in the city of Clinton. Nobody knew if Da'veon's father, Zeke, was out of jail yet, and I'm not sure if the police and community relations have improved or if they have gotten worse.

In this chapter, I explored the phenomenon of reading race through lived experiences of direct and structural violence (Galtung, 1969). According to Galtung, structural violence is the result of social structures that impede opportunities for the basic needs of human beings to be met. These include safety, emotional stability, and basic needs like food and shelter. I discussed my own sentiments of feeling Black and blue, as well the participants' experiences of anger, the necessity for agency against the police, toughness, and the belief that *sometimes* gettin' violency is necessary as a response to violence. As Lynette pointed out, the police were "like fireflies" and their presence within the community was its own form of violence. The families developed their own code in response to protect themselves against the constant presumption of being criminals that occurred in the RECHC. All of the instantiations in this chapter and also many

aspects in previous chapters call into question what it means to have bodily integrity in relationship to social location. Da'veon's narrative represented the labyrinth of racialized, classed, and gendered violence that is embedded within institutional policies and structures within housing complexes and schools. Some forms of violence such as the territorial divisiveness between the Black families and the bullying that Zuri encountered were epiphenomenonal, that is, they were tethered to a stream of social structures and racialized intentionalities that pulsate within the larger social body. Because their children had to navigate the confluence of social and structural violence within and outside of the Black community, the mothers in this research believed that their children needed to be tough.

In the concluding chapter I summarize this research and challenge how these racial meanings can perhaps help literacy educators to get to the otherside, although not the otherside of race in a post-racial way, because race will always be remade in new ways. I wonder how we might get to the otherside of reading it.

CHAPTER 8

OTHERSIDENESS

On my last day in the cabana, Katrina wrote her phone number on a sheet of paper and every number was a different color. Zuri drew me a picture (Appendix C), and explained:

This is me inside my house, and outside right there flying around, that's my mother's famous garlic pizza. I'm inside testing video games and that's the sound effects that I wrote. I did this because, I'm thinking that I might be a video game tester and creator, and me and Katrina might also open up our own pizza restaurant. The dollar signs, right there are how much money we're going to make.

There was a sense of othersideness that pervaded everything about this research. Othersideness encompassed my journey into the RECHC from my neighborhood in the Midwest, and onto university campuses where Black bodies were few, and Black people in small urban communities and those on the otherside at the universities largely sat in isolation from each other (in Kinloch, 2005, p.101), this made me an othersider. It included my desire to push through and finish this research project so that *I* could get to the otherside and receive my PhD, in order "to do something good in the world," hopefully by connecting communities through literacies. It included my attempt to see as many sides of race and racial meaning within this particular community space as possible: those sides that were in my face, orbiting in all of their racialness, and those that were less apparent, and seemingly absent, and lurking in the shadows like "the bush of White ghost" (hooks, 2009, p. 90). Othersideness also represented being and living as Othered. For example, in River Eves the majority of the people who lived within it were Black

and Brown people from the otherside, Black families who had recently moved from behind the bricks, and first and second generation Mexican families who had (legally or otherwise) crossed the false borders and boundaries placed around this "land of the free." They were each on the otherside, but it many ways they were not.

Zuri's drawing also featured othersideness. It included what he hoped to do when he grew up; he would become a video game creator and tester, as well as a proprietor of Janesse' famous garlic bread pizza along with his little sister Katrina. On the otherside, he would also have plenty of money. In the upper right hand corner of the page he wrote, "I love my world." I like knowing that Zuri loved his world even if it appeared to be in some other realm. I'm not sure why he appeared to be so heavy most of the time, even during the "carefree" days of summer. Certainly being bullied mattered, and the elements of his raced, classed, and gendered life were all wrapped up in it. Each of the phenomenological narratives that I included in this research demonstrates the web of intentionalities connected to race and racial meaning. From race, social locations such as class, gender, and place were constructing their perceptions and lived experiences. To reiterate Jones' assertion, place produces how bodies are perceived, and what people believe that bodies can do or become in spaces (personal conversation, April, 15, 2013). As such, through socialization within families they were also shaping and reshaping their embodied worlds intersubjectively on the basis of place. At times these were too limiting but structural forces helped to bolster these readings. My hope for each of the children in this research is that their lives and experiences will be without such boundaries and that perhaps a critical racial literacy can open up spaces for rethinking how we read race in school and community spaces.

Race Still Matters

Drawing from Dubois (1903/2002), Outlaw (1996) argued that "race is best read as a cluster idea in which elements are connected in an infinity disjunctive definition" (p.154-55). In thinking about the meaning of blackness, Asante (2007) noted that the "fluidity, mobility, and fleeting" characteristics of race mean that it should be read along a continuum of human reality" (p.159). In the RECHC, there were multiple dimensions of the racial cluster extending *through* the lives and realities of these mothers and children. Much of it was part of a larger racialized structural force, a force that exists within our natural attitude and is part of our unreflective everyday living. Within this unreflective attitude, we know race exists, but perhaps act as if it doesn't. Racial lines that are not marked continue to be lived out. However in crossing the line and going into this all Black space the participants allowed me to provide a window into what race means *as lived*. I found that the mothers and children in this research were too often "thrown into the awareness of their [Black] bodies" (Yancy, 2008, p.15) as oppositional, unattractive, criminal, and unworthy of respect. Race mattered and both gender and class intersected with place, which complicated and enriched my understanding of the symbols, dialogues, and ideas that came into being.

I can only speculate about the racio-ethnic (Alcoff, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994) complexities that Mexican families encountered on the basis of macro-level readings about immigration in this country and in the state. One of the significant limitations in this research was the inability to include the perspectives and experiences of Mexican mothers and children who also lived in the community and came to the cabana. Throughout the study, on a few occasions, Caleb and Jamerion spoke for the Mexican people in the community, asserting "*Mexican people talk like us, they dress like…they just like us.*" However, these were *their*

readings, and having the actual voices of Mexican mothers and children would have expanded understandings about the overall lived experience of race as a phenomenon in the RECHC. In significant ways "they just like us" also spoke to the ways that class was a more important cultural connection, which diminished racial differences. As I mentioned in chapter 4, the silences and spaces that existed between the Black and Mexican mothers and teens in the cabana demonstrate a need for research into mixed race Black and Mexican low income and working class neighborhood spaces with an emphasis on the raced, classed, and gendered lives of Mexican families because culture, ethnicity, and immigration are not colorless, in fact, they are color coded.

Another limitation of this study was the inability to see how the children were reading race within school spaces during free-play, or in their classroom interactions and discourse. Research into race and racial meaning, using a post-intentional phenomenological methodology within school spaces, would contribute significantly to the field of critical literacy studies, it's a methodology that can be employed to inform critical racial literacy, particularly children's literature .

As demonstrated in this research, and theorized in Brooks and Brown's (2012) cultural standpoint theory of reader response, race in relationship to communal and societal contexts are highly significant aspects of meaning making during reading transactions. Although Brooks, Brown and Hampton (2007) have explored colorism with adolescent girls, as the participants in this research noted, "the hood be tellin' you stuff," and many community realities often negate positive affirmations of blackness. Further, as revealed in chapter 6, and discovered by Love (2009) there are significant elements within popular forms of hip hop culture, that fuel self abnegation, internal racism, and misogyny. The social, political, and geographic realities that

participants referenced also contribute to these factors, however conscious raising pedagogy that explores the effects of racial structures are rarely included as part of a racial literacy paradigm within schools. Multicultural literature and critical literacy research must do more to adequately address internal racism and to broaden limited opportunity structures.

Within children's literature, many of the findings in this research such as the racial politics of play, "talking White" while Black, or issues such as propertied belonging (Keenan, 2010), and the ways that the Black families in the RECHC were being (dis)placed, disoriented, and gentrified, are not written about. The families lived under constant surveillance and policing of their bodies, and this policing occurred from outside institutional forces and also from inside the Black community. The children also resisted images and illustrations that represented features that were too Black or aesthetically displeasing. Aesthetically, issues of colorism, nappy hair, also created an unforgivable form of blackness, and revealed the practice of bad faith (Gordon, 1995).

The fetishism of blackness as a stylistic performance created a phenomenon that I referred to as racewalking, and the accompanying commodification of blackness rendered useable forms of blackness that appeared to cause the children to see blackness in narrow and superficial ways. Similar to Love's (2009) findings I discovered that (in this case, Black males) believed that the depictions of blackness in hip hop were the "real or authentic way" of being Black and male. In addition, the commodification of prison culture, constantly being harassed by the police, and seeing Black males in uniforms (jail or athletic) caused Jamerion (who enjoyed drawing and art), to envision a limited future based on a binary of going to jail or going pro. Communal references and reading race within books indicated shame, anger, resistance, and humor about slavery. As Watts-Jones (2002) argued, this appeared to indicate a form of

internalized racism. This phenomenon is a turning inward of the outward form of racism and racial meanings that are absorbed from negative racialized lived experiences.

The findings in my research have caused me to develop new questions and contemplate how new literacies and counter geographic spaces within and outside of schools may help to open up, uncover, and combat forms of self-abnegation and narrow opportunity structures. In what ways can racially segregated and homosocial spaces be used as productive sites for critical literacy work to addresses issues such as misogyny or limited constructions of Black boyhood and girlhood? More research into teachers' understandings about racial meaning and reasons for enacting critical racial literacy pedagogy, as well as ways to draw connections to current racial realities and the structural aspects of race and racial meaning are needed (Rogers and Christian, 2007; Rogers and Mosley, 2006; Lazar and Offenberg, 2011). In explaining this critical aspect of culturally relevant teaching, Ladson Billings (1995) argued that "culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that [continues to] exist in society" (p. 128). However, as Stallworth, Gibbons, and Fauber (2006) as well as the aforementioned research has indicated, teachers remain reluctant and unprepared to include those aspects of race and racial meaning that "cut at the very joints of reality" (Yancy, 2008, p. 12), in part because they are inundated with state mandated requirements that don't consider the ways that students' lives and identity constructions are fused to their literacies.

Although teachers know that many difficult realities occur within communities that feed into Title I schools like Booker, the reigns around race in a post racial society are often pulled so tight that what it really means *to see* and *to understand,* and then *what to do* about racial meaning gets lost and buried over in "the knowing" or a simplistic trope of "that's the way of the world."

As Black bodies within and outside of school spaces continue to be thrown back to themselves as "a something" that is problematic or "anything but" valuable, intelligent, beautiful, and worthy of respect, how do we respond?

In the previous chapter I discussed feeling "black and blue" and the ways that racialized violence was a strong presence in the community. I want to also point out that there were many days that I genuinely enjoyed being in the community space with the mothers and children, because it felt good to get the stories out, and to have a space to tell a story, to make sense of another story. Every conversation wasn't pleasant, but the mothers expressed that they truly enjoyed thinking through the ways that they and their children were shaped and also how they were also shaping the racial literacies of their children (see chapter 4). As Friere (1970) asserted, it was an ontological space for hope. Although I primarily focused on the readings of mothers who regularly attended, at one session, there were sixteen mothers in attendance. At one point, Natasha even suggested that we should host an open mic session in the cabana for anybody to come down, and discuss whatever issues or concerns that they faced and wanted to address as Black parents.

The open discussions and Natasha's suggestion seem to indicate that the mothers felt the sessions were useful to them, and in some instances it caused them to read race differently. For example, Janesse did not like reading books about slavery. However at one point she told me, "I started thinking about reading some of the books about slavery, but to look at them in the way that we talked about. You know, "following the flame and not the ashes." On several occasions there were fathers who came to the cabana and also made comments. Janesse's brother sat in on several sessions, as did a few older women residents and the Jamaican driver of the lunch program, who told everyone to quit using the n-word because it was a "White form of bondage."

Although the children and sometimes the mothers resisted some of the books that we read on the basis of Black people looking unattractive or they disagreed with the ideologies (being happy and nappy) overall, there was an enthusiastic interests in reading Black-centric books written for children, and the new media specialist at Booker was working to add more titles to the collection at the school. In this research, I believe that *all* of the readings that we engaged in across and within spaces/places, in books, on bodies, and within structures served as great beginnings for reading race, particularly those readings that were not positive affirmations because they opened up the deep wounds of racial meaning that were already there but had been left to fester and flourish without any care or attention. Additional research with parents that explores the ways that children's literature can be used as a method for sustaining and cultivating communal wealth (Yosso, 2005) and explorations of self image would be useful.

Coming to Understand and Becoming Undone

Post-Intentional phenomenology is an "assaulting and disrupting" methodological force. For example, Vagle (2011) argued that "phenomenology can be harnessed and then used to challenge boundaries because: a) it served a radical philosophy over a century ago and b) this radicalness can be amplified and then put into closer dialogue (Ahmed, 2006) with theories specifically designed for disruptive work" (p. 24). That's why I wanted to employ it to read race within a supposedly post-racial societal context, so that I could "see what radical work might transpire" Vagle, 2011, pg. 24. Going to the very thing in an all Black community space revealed the ways that fragments of racial meaning were being shaped and reshaped, amongst mothers and with children. I used their readings to expand my phenomenological thinking in many ways. For example, I read Da'veon's notion of "playing hide and seek" which he used as a cynical ploy to avert the police as a post-intentional phenomenological challenge for all of us in

dealing with the ubiquitous and discomforting presence of *race*, because rather than continuing to hide and help bury over the ways that race is moving in all our lives through silence and "inadvertent complicity" (Gordon, 2004), we must seek out the manifold of ways that it does, and how those ways have meanings personally and structurally.

In using a post-intentional phenomenology, (Vagle, 2010; 2011) I recognize that these findings and other forms of (re) racing were always coming into being and shifting during the course of the study, and they are likely shifting again, as I move to the otherside of this research, because race and racial meaning are phenomena of time and place, and they are *always* changing. Understanding the phenomenon of how race is read must occur continuously; Pate (2012) asserted that "ongoing and continual honing of the experienced phenomenon and one's intentional relationship with it resides within a perpetual process of *coming to understanding" (p.24)*. As Greene (1995) argued, "My interpretations are provisional" (p.16) and therefore as I live and breathe this phenomenon, renewing my understanding about the multiplicity of ways that race shapes my own literacies is perpetual. Within the research, in some instances my own readings and those of the mothers and children were classed, raced, and gender biased or they evoked fears of homosexuality. Revealing and noting these narrow "frames" also served as a way to challenge and change them. As Vagle and Jones (2012) noted, none of us "live framelessly" (p.334). Greene (1995) and Lorde (1984) have each forwarded the notion that as things exist in their present state, sometimes the best that we can do is to create new ways of seeing and further multiple dialogues with the recognition that things are constantly changing. The findings of our collective readings of race in the River Eves Clause Homes Corridor are considered "partial, fleeting, and endlessly deferred" (Vagle, 2010a), while also generative,

informative, and necessary for considering what it might mean to enact critically racially literate pedagogy, because there must be a bridge to the otherside.

Me in the Middle: Ethical Thoughts

Like Lucas, the young Mexican boy who often served as a translator for us in the cabana, (see chapter 4), I too serve as a bridge. I am a bridge between my participants and the readers who will gain some sense of the phenomenon of reading race in River Eves on the basis of the text that I compose. The words and relations within the cabana are being sifted and sorted through my lens and thus I posses a significant level of power and bear a tremendous ethical responsibility in narrating the readings of the mothers and children. Throughout my analysis, I worried quite often that some of my findings would negatively contribute to discourses of deficit on race and class in unintended ways. As Dillard (2012) noted in a personal conversation, the ethical responsibility that I bear as a Black woman writing about the lived experiences of Black mothers and children is significant because they were *not* just my participants. I was also talking about myself and my own children (see the embodied geographies of blackness, Chapter 4). I was Zuri, Jamerion, Katrina, Janesse, Da'veon, Tray and Makeela. I *was* a Black child in a low income neighborhood, and I am a Black mother/sister/daughter/wife/friend/educator. As Giddings (1985) asserted, when I enter the room the Black race enters with me, therefore this text also has important consequences about who I am perceived to be as a scholar, educator, and person. Garrett (2011) rightfully argued that theorizing about race is a great responsibility, and moreover, that the language used and how it is viewed matters significantly because it will create lasting perceptions.

Throughout the research, the adults and children used linguistic references such as "sista," "brotha," "cuz," "homeboy/homegirl," "nigga," and "wigga." "Nigga" and "wigga"

create negative sentiments and discomfort, and they can, as Croom (2011) has contended, "leave one feeling as if they have been made complicit in a morally atrocious act" (p. 343). Therefore like Croom, throughout this research I *referenced* these words but I did not actually employ them for my own use descriptively or as expressions. In addition, although they may be discomforting (like so many aspects of reading race can be), I employed them because I believe that removing these words from the mouths of the mothers and children would diminish understanding about the ways they were reading race. Each of these references represented a Black communal frame of reference and an acknowledgement of the racialness of being- othered-in-the-world. Despite the controversy about the word "nigga" as an in group reference, and the use of "wigga," these were part of the life of language within the community space. Communal language references serve as critical sites of situated consciousness (Merleau, Ponty, 1964), racial socialization, and collective identity.

Personally, I continue to question the modes of justification for using it within the Black community. Where I sit on this issue that continues to divide Blacks is not a judgment of my participants because I have family members that use the word with dexterity to punctuate in a multitude of ways. However, I believe that a critical racial literacy exploration that examines the historicity of the nigga/wigga trope and the equally offensive slur "white trash" would be a worthy critical racial literacy endeavor to explore for youths in this post-racial generation, because they continue to employ it without reflection. Other controversial and ethical lines of race, class, and gender that require critical racial literacy explorations include media depictions of sexuality, desire, and understandings about the ways that women's bodies continue to be read, and moreover how dehistorizing or being race-blind about those readings can cause educators or community-based practitioners to miss the cultural connections or disconnections.

In addition, mothers' assertions that Black kids need to be tough is a belief should be explored further. According to research conducted by the Children's Defense Fund (Hart Research, 2011), 7 out 10 Black parents agree with the dire assessment of the mothers in the RECHC that there are literally "tough realities" that Black children must endure. The study cited devastating statistics that show higher rates of unemployment, exposure to drugs, violence, poorly performing schools, and the increased exposure to gun violence in schools and neighborhoods. They also cited the high prevalence of negative images in hip hop culture that disrespect and mistreat Black women, as an increasing normative frame of reference for Black youths. They argued that this equates to a form of psychological trauma for both males and females. Marian Wright Edelman added that the staggering rates of "illiteracy, poverty, and massive incarceration within the Black community are like a "toxic cocktail" for Black youths" (Hart, 2010). Such realities implore a critical racial literacy and class-centered pedagogy (Vagle & Jones, 2012).

Power and Position as a Privileged Other

Throughout the research text, I often noted that these were "our readings" of race, primarily because many times, I introduced texts that triggered the racialized readings. The books that I presented were powerful heuristics which revealed and connected to racialized readings of the participants. In addition, through the method of post-bridling, which was a pouring out and expansion of my readings and emotions of being in the field, I brought my racialized consciousness and subjectivities to bear. In addition, this methodological commitment helped me to maintain an "outsider's curiosity as well as an insider's understanding" (Boylorn, 2009, p.42) throughout the data collection and analysis. Throughout the research, this was a

delicate dance because I am Black and racially conscious, perhaps some might say a *hyper* racially conscious, Black woman.

I love and believe in *the we*. The we is one of the tentative manifestations of reading race and it is a collective Black consciousness. I want to also note that although I didn't explore it, I believe that a collective consciousness exists within *every* racial group, and in many ways it is a form of psychological preservation. I suspect that the collective we allowed me access into the space, but that in some ways my class frames of reference and access to education opened up other spaces, and therefore recognizing that my racialized "truths" and experiences were not necessarily those of my participants was an important ethical factor. I embraced Sartre's caution, that we can sometimes be seduced by our own beliefs, so much so that they become knowledge and eventually a deluded truth. In other words, reciprocity of the skin (a deluded we) was not enough to know how these mothers and children read and experience race as a phenomenon.

Like many of the Black educators at Booker, my blackness was not their blackness. My Black Southern experience as a transplant, is different than the Black Southern experience of my participants. It's not just that my words don't roll off of my tongue in a lilt or southern cadence; I simply have not lived and experienced the South or the town of Clinton in the way that my participants have experienced it. Our embodied experiences of blackness diverge on the bases of the spaces for which we must navigate. For example, my access to the university space equates to a Black-skin privilege and racial mobility that the mothers and children who live in River Eves or Claude Homes did not necessarily possess, as Natasha pointed out at one point: "We don't really have nothin' to do with nothin' over there." Although this didn't surprise me, I was a bit struck to discover that for the most part the boys didn't at least consider themselves fans of the university athletic teams.

Across space and time, we possessed a common frame of reference that was rooted in raced, classed, and gendered realities because I was born and raised in a Midwest working class neighborhood that was plagued by Black on Black violence and the structural forms of racism that were present in the River Eves Claude Homes Corridor. However, over the years, as I have been pushing towards the otherside, like many of the Black educators at Booker, I embody a blackness with its own particularities, comforts and discomforts that results in a form of diasporic displacement, and othersideness that exists for many Blacks with access to middle classness. In one of our sessions as we discussed collective identity, Janesse effectively articulated the complexity of this particular manifestation of the phenomenon much better than I can explain it.

> And when I think about the school and stuff, how it works with the school teachers, like the Black teachers, they are in a class all their own. 'Cause you know they don't totally identify with mothers from the projects or a lot of the White teachers but they will throw that us in there in a heartbeat. I sit back listening to them but I don't want them tryin' to figure me out cause they can't really identify with either side.

> Her comment caused me wonder if *I* were also creating a "deluded we" in the cabana.

There were a few occasions when I would ask Janesse "probing question" in order to elicit clarification or to get at a deeper meaning; she would tease me and say, "Alright now, you know I ain't gone just share my business with anybody." She would subsequently lend her life to the text in a multitude of ways. Sometimes, she would sit and talk to me well after the actual large group sessions were finished. However, in many ways I felt implicated in Janesse's description of the Black middle class teachers at Booker who "threw that us in there," particularly because I was in their community space with a tape recorder asking questions.

Which side was I on? As I transcribed data from our sessions there were countless times that I listened to myself using *us* and *we* as I posed questions or made comments about particular books or lived experiences. Was I one of *them*, or one of *them*? I don't know to what extent, if any, that the mothers felt like I was trying to "figure them out," however they were complicit and even eager to share their racialized perspectives and experiences during our reading sessions. As such, I don't believe that Janesse or any of the other mothers thought that I was "trying to figure them out." As it related to some of the Black teachers in the school however, Janesse and the mothers expressed that some teachers had patronizing attitudes and maybe even unwittingly exuded pity when they expressed that they worked at a particular place or that they could not support their children because of a particular hardship. This caused me to wonder in what ways such literacy exchanges might also serve as a bridge for teachers and parents.

Rethinking How We Read Race in School Spaces

The voices and realities of the mothers and children in this research are real, and like the voices of the students in classrooms, they serve as critical tools for opening up spaces for critical racial dialogue and literacy exchanges. As Greene (1995) argued, educators must help erase some of the artificial lines that have been created between home and school lives, and she also pointed out that "connections and continuities cannot always be neatly defined" (p. 12.). She stated,

> That means attending to the impact of street life in all its multiplicity, danger, and mystery. It also means being somewhat aware of students' family life in its ease and unease. It means becoming conscious of the dramas played out on the playgrounds and front stoops, in the hospital emergency rooms and clinics, and in the welfare offices and

shelters and social agencies…police stations, libraries and blinking light of television screens…(p.12)

Within school spaces a "banal form of multiculturalism" (Thomas, 2011, p. 4) is prevalent, and the "multiplicity of family life in its ease, and unease" and how race, class, and gender meanings intersect are often absent or are diminished within this paradigm. As demonstrated in this research, these social locations have significant meanings for children's literacies and the intentionalities that are always already there, and are sometimes being discoursed and acted out in ways that are not affirming. As hooks (1992) so eloquently argued in response to the self-abnegation of blackness, "We must love blackness," and as a result, "we must dare to create spaces of reconciliation and forgiveness in our daily lives, spaces where we let go of past hurt, fear, shame"(forward, n.p).

Within schools where are these spaces of affirmation for youth like Da'veon, Zuri, Katrina, Makeela, Jamerion, and Tray? Greene asserted that teachers must arouse consciousness to *release* aspects of their pedagogy that are complicit and cause them inadvertently to serve as agents for structural forces that constrain rather than emancipate children. In his critique of banal forms of multiculturalism in schools, Hade (1997) argued,

Multiculturalism isn't something we study or learn about. It isn't a bibliography of good books about underrepresented groups. It isn't a month or week of focused study on a particular group. Multiculturalism is a perspective we take on and struggle to understand, a stance we take to our reading that race, class, and gender matter in the way that we interpret stories….[R]ace, class, and gender are social semiotics signs that are interpreted and have values assigned to them. (p. 241)

Hade recognized that this work includes struggle because struggling *is* often a part of reading race. His notion of struggling in reading race and addressing multiculturalism also acknowledges that there are perhaps multiple levels of crisis to move through, for students and teachers. Reading race implores us to learn to "see what frames our seeing" (Lather, 1993) about race and some of the accompanying meanings. My hope in forwarding this research is that it will help to plant a seed for (re)thinking ways to leverage critical racial literacy so that it opens up spaces for loosening the grip of the limited and damaging racialized, constructions connected to social and structural forces. For example, I wonder how within and outside of schools critical racial literacy pedagogical practices can serve to cultivate, reaffirm, rebuild, and help to sustain forms of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to support families that live in communities similar to the RECHC. Perhaps it could serve to strengthen children's understandings about the how the "debris of history" can serve as a flame, and represent of the strength, beauty, and respect that blackness deserves. In his vision for building a beloved inclusive community, Dr. Martin Luther King (in Birt, 2002) explicitly called for reading race, and outlined the steps needed to engender critical racial consciousness as a response to counter hegemonic societal forces. He stated:

> One positive response to our dilemma is to develop a rugged sense of somebodyness. This sense of somebodyness means the refusal to be ashamed of being black…A second important step that the Negro must take is to work passionately for group identity. This does not mean group isolation or group exclusivity…third[ly] the Negro must grapple …and make full constructive use of the freedom we already possess…[and] the fourth challenge that we face is to unite around powerful action plans to eradicate the last vestiges of racial injustice. (p.259)

We need to read *within* King's dream and move beyond the surface that it too unfortunately has become. Here, he provides a map for strengthening Black communities by first developing "a rugged sense of somebodyness," and "the refusal to be ashamed of being Black." Perhaps, critically reading race can help to build the toughness and sense of somebodyness that is needed to challenge and dismantle the forms of structural, social, psychological, and emotional violence that limits freedom and opportunities for children and families in communities like the RECHC. This is a holistic effort, but first we must acknowledge its presence. As Fullilove (2013) discusses, "social and spatial fractures" and segmented neighborhoods within societies are significantly related to emotional well-being and reconnections are needed. Creating powerful action plans using critical racial literacy may serve to unite the dichotomized racial spaces that continue to exist. Perhaps it will disquiet the silence and whispers of race making that contributes to a form of internalized racism and essentialism.

In closing, I must admit that I do believe that there has never been a better time to be Black in America. But I am far from settled, because there are too many Black children who don't love their blackness. In addition, far too many social and structural factors continue to maintain a grip on lives of low income families and Black youth. In my future work with parents, schools, and community stakeholders, I am challenged to weaken the voice of the other that is within the hearts and minds of Black children like Tray, Katrina, Da'veon, Makeela, Jamerion, Zuri, and Caleb and I will continue to contemplate ways that critical literacy might help serve as a counter-hegemonic force to combat the various forms of vi inequality within their lives. Perhaps it's something that we must all consider.

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APPENDIX A

TENTATIVE MANIFESTATIONS

*Interrelated Overlapping Phenomenon
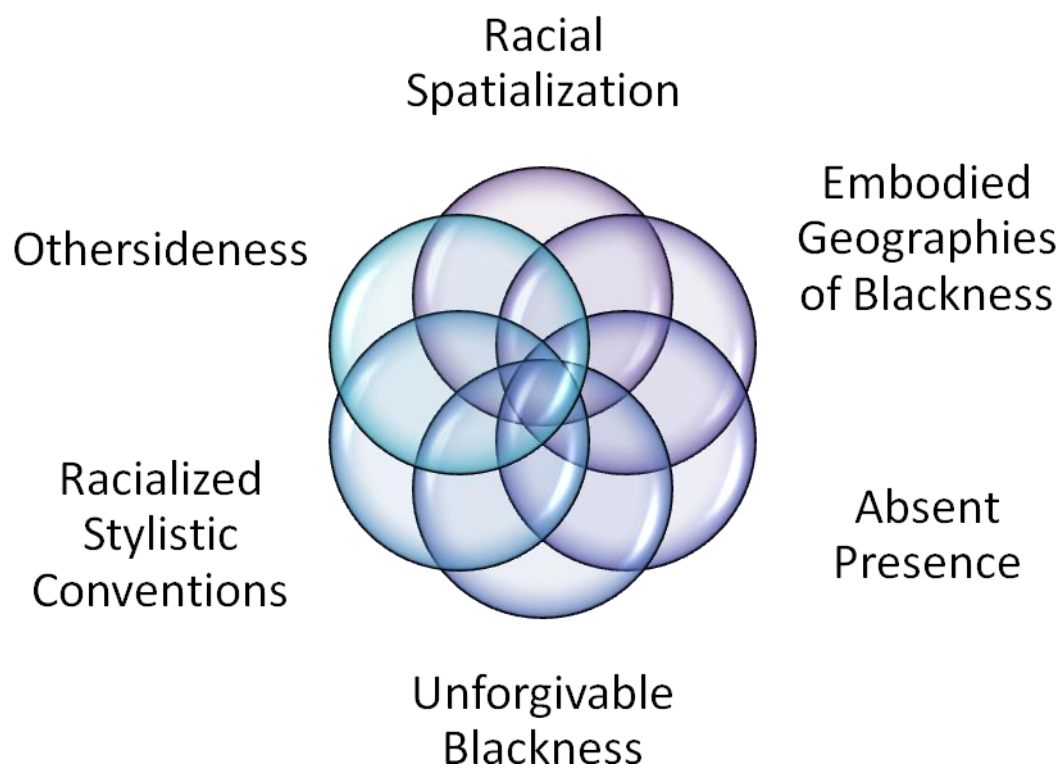
APPENDIX B

AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE READ

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APPENDIX C

ZURI'S WORLD