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# A Critical Discourse Analysis of Middle-Class African American Parents' Racial Socialization Parenting Behavior with Their 3 and 4-year-old Sons

Stacey French-Lee

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This dissertation, A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE-CLASS AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS' RACIAL SOCIALIZATION PARENTING BEHAVIOR WITH THEIR 3 AND 4-YEAR-OLD SONS, by STACEY FRENCH-LEE was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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**French-Lee, S.**, Jarrett, O., Bulunuz, N., & Bulunuz, M. (2004, February). What do children do in the sand pit? A look at gender, age and materials. Paper presented at the annual conference of The Association for the Study of Play, Atlanta, GA.

#### PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

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**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MIDDLE-CLASS AFRICAN AMERICAN  
PARENTS' RACIAL SOCIALIZATION PARENTING BEHAVIOR WITH THEIR 3 AND  
4-YEAR-OLD SONS**

by

**STACEY FRENCH-LEE**

Under the Direction of Laura May

**ABSTRACT**

All parents, whether they are aware of it or not, engage in racial socialization. For African American parents in the United States (U.S.), however, a degree of urgency exists that exceeds what is typical for European American parents (Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn directly from middle-class African American families about how they engaged double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903/1994) as they racially socialized their 3 and 4-year-old sons. Specifically, I wanted to learn about the discourses influenced by intersections of class, race, and gender that they used to educate their sons about 1) how they may be viewed in a racist society, and 2) to ensure positive development. The study is framed by critical race theory (Bell, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), intersectionality (Cooper 1892/1988; Crenshaw, 1995), and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007). I collected multiple forms of data from five families over twelve weeks. The study was designed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In particular, an integrated design using Fairclough's (2013) explanatory

critique and thematic analysis in order to best identify how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their young sons. Two questions guided this research study: a) what factors (e.g., stereotypes, ideologies, values, beliefs, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) influence how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their sons; and b) what genres do middle-class African American parents use to racially socialize their 3 and 4-year-old sons? I found that factors that influenced how parents racially socialized their sons are discriminatory stereotypes grounded in United States history; institutional and structural racism; the age of their child; the gender of their child, and the parent gender; the social class status of the parent during their upbringing; the current family social class status; and cultural resources that the family could access. The language-based and non-language-based genres that the parents used to racially socialize their sons were books, toys, artwork, and conversations. Scholarly and practical implications and recommendations for future research are provided.

**INDEX WORDS:** Racial socialization, African American boys, Early childhood, Cultural resources, Critical discourse analysis



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in

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in

The Department of Early Childhood Education

in

the College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband Moses W. Lee III, and to my son Moses W. Lee IV. M III you are my selfless rock. Your constant support and encouragement made this work possible. M IV, the beautiful journey of raising you to the phenomenal Black man you are has given me an understanding of this topic beyond and above what I have read in any scholarly work.

I dedicate this work in memory of my father George T. French, Sr. and to my mother Dorothy Jewell French. My father's constant affirmation from as early as I can remember was that I am "young, gifted, and Black." I am grateful to my father for the centrality of higher education in his parenting. Thank you Mommy for raising me within the context of the church where I sang as a child, "Jesus loves the little children...red, and yellow, black and white, all are precious in his sight," and for introducing me to the Bible where I found in the book of Solomon that I am Black and beautiful. I am grateful to you for teaching me that nothing is too hard for God. Because of my parents, I have known since 1963 that I have Black girl magic.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my siblings, Alyce, Angela, Yolanda, and George, Jr. To me, they are everything. When we were children, Alyce often led us through our Black middle class neighborhood with her calling out, "Am I Black enough for you?" and us responding, "Hell yeah?" and "Say it Loud" and us responding, "I'm Black and I'm proud!" My siblings taught me to unapologetically tell the world that I am Black excellence.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903/1994, p. 2)

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois introduced double consciousness. Du Bois' concept of double consciousness provides a description of the experience of Americans of African descent; that is, Americans whose ancestors were forcibly brought to America from Africa during the transatlantic slave trade. According to Du Bois, African Americans experience double consciousness as a result of living in the United States at the intersections of race and citizenship. Du Bois contends that to survive and thrive in a society in which one experiences racism, is stigmatized, and viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes is a constant battle. According to Link & Phelan (2001) to be stigmatized is to be set apart and labeled as different and less than the dominant culture. The battle of double consciousness is waged both internally and externally.

Internally, African Americans know that the color of their skin and the fact that their ancestors were forced into slavery in the United States does not make them lesser citizens or less entitled than other Americans. Further, they realize that although since Emancipation laws have been amended and enacted that are intended to ensure their civil rights they continue to face discrimination and racism. Therefore, they strive not to internalize the racist treatment and messages that they are subjected to in this country.

Externally African Americans strive not to be viewed through labels that are applied based on their race, and work to counteract racism so that they may have full access to the promises of American citizenship. The labels applied negatively describe both behavioral and physical characteristics. Further, the person who is labeled faces inequality and inequity as a result. Some of the negative stereotypes applied to African Americans label them as violent, prone to criminal activity, intimidating, promiscuous, and unintelligent (Pickett, Welch, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2014; Welch, 2017). These stereotypes are also gender based. For instance, African American men are more often perceived as intimidating and violent, while African American women are viewed as promiscuous and perpetually angry. The external component of double consciousness for all African Americans is well documented and has led to tragic repercussions. For example, from the time of slavery, to Reconstruction, to Jim Crow, and continuing today there is a long history of African American boys and men being killed due to racism. Oftentimes, this loss of life has come about as a result of European American citizens taking justice into their own hands and beating, burning, castrating, and publically lynching boys and men who have been falsely accused of crimes (Gunning, 1996; Dray, 2007). There are almost 3,000 documented cases of lynchings of African Americans in the southern United States between 1882-1930 alone (Tolnay & Beck, 1995). Lynching continued beyond the 1930's as evidenced by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples' (NAACP) crusade against lynching that ran from 1909 through 1950 (Zangrando, 1984). Even after the NAACP's crusade ended, mobs continued to carry out vigilante justice through lynching. For instance, on August 24, 1955 fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, a resident of Chicago, Illinois was visiting his relatives in the Mississippi Delta when a white woman accused him of whistling at her. Later that night an angry mob kidnapped Emmett from his relative's home and brutally beat, burned, and lynched him (Harold & DeLuca,

2005). Emmett's killers J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant, the husband of Emmett's accuser were brought to trial, but were exonerated (Metress, 2003). Decades after his death, Emmett's accuser, Carolyn Bryant came forward and confessed that she falsely accused Emmett. The death of Trayvon Martin is recent example of how racism and accompanying stereotypes have caused the deaths of African American boys and was mentioned by the families in this study. On February 26, 2012, Trayvon, an African American adolescent was shot and killed in his Florida community by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watchman who described Trayvon as appearing "dangerous." Trayvon was walking alone, talking on the telephone to a friend when Zimmerman, who had been advised by police to stop pursuit, approached him. Trayvon, wearing a hoodie, was returning to his home from a trip to the grocery store when Zimmerman approached, shot, and killed him. Zimmerman was eventually found not guilty of murder (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). As indicated by one of this study's participants, Trayvon Martin's death is an important event in recent American history that caused parents of African American sons to fear for their children's physical safety and reinforces for them the importance of racial socialization in their parenting. For African American families, racial socialization is the way parents socialize their children by providing messages about their own race and to prepare them to successfully participate and navigate in a society where they will experience racism (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Peters, 1985).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn directly from middle-class African American families about how they engage double consciousness as they racially socialize their 3 and 4 year-old-sons. Specifically, I wanted to learn about the discourses influenced by intersections of class, race, and gender that they use to educate their sons about 1) how they may be

viewed in a racist society, and 2) to ensure positive development. Studying the discourse of African American parents is vital to this study because:

Missing from scholarly research is first-hand, detailed accounts from Black parents themselves, about the roles that they believe power, race, and racism plays in their experiences as parents...particularly their sons. It is the value of experiential knowledge that may offer important opportunities for new research paradigms; particularly those centered on the manifestations of race and racism. (Reynolds, 2010, p. 149)

This study contributes to scholarly research about the racial socialization behavior of middle-class African American parents whose sons have not started kindergarten, and provides important first-hand information from families about how stereotypes and racist ideologies grounded in American history may influence their parenting behavior.

The research literature shows that double consciousness and racism impacts not only African American men and adolescents, but also young boys who, as early as preschool have been placed in jeopardy and disenfranchised in schools (Howard, 2008). For instance, because of discriminatory racial stereotypes and deficit beliefs about their behavior and abilities, African American boys are over represented in discipline and special education, and underrepresented in gifted education (Wright & Floyd, 2016). African American preschool boys are suspended more often than their peers (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Commonly, rather than aiming to teach African American boys and ensuring their academic achievement, schools focus on managing their behavior and meting out discipline to them. Many schools view teaching African American boys as overwhelming and by the time they leave 2<sup>nd</sup> grade are treating them like adults rather than children (Ladson Billings, 2011). For example, rather than addressing their not being able to sit for long periods of time, hitting, pushing, inability to control their emotions as

developmentally appropriate and providing guidance, African American boys are often suspended and expelled. This focus on discipline has contributed to what is often referred to as an academic gap in which African American boys lag behind their peers academically (Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Rouse, & Chen, 2012; Noguera, 2009; Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, & Cortina, 2010; Prager, 2011; Wright, 2009). Research support also exists indicating that the academic gap and disproportionate discipline between African American boys and their peers can be attributed to racism (Howard & Flenbaugh, 2012; Skiba, Horner, Chung, Rausch, May, 2011). Disproportionate discipline places African American boys on a trajectory that can lead to incarceration. This trajectory is known as the school to prison pipeline (Barbarin 2010; Mora & Christianakis, 2013). The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) describes the school to prison pipeline as such:

... the punitive and overzealous tools and approaches of the modern criminal justice system have seeped into our schools, serving to remove children from mainstream educational environments and funnel them onto a one-way path toward prison.... The School-to-Prison Pipeline is one of the most urgent challenges in education today. (2005)

However, the literature also shows that parenting behaviors as well as family characteristics such as socioeconomic class status influence educational and other outcomes for African American boys (Brooks-Gunn & Markham, 2005; Joe & Davis, 2009).

The parenting behavior of racial socialization in African American families is important because although the concept of double consciousness was introduced over one hundred years ago, due to the fact that racism against African Americans at the time that Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folks* remains today, many African American parents continue to attend to it as they parent their children. Therefore, for African American parents, a process of socialization is

required, with this process being more complicated for some than others (Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, 2013; Isom 2012; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). According to Reynolds (2010), "...children of color, particularly Black males, find their experiences and opportunities being shaped largely by issues of race and gender" (p. 148). Because of the inequitable and unjust treatment that their sons face due racism in the United States, parents of African American boys are aware that their young sons will soon begin to experience double consciousness as they start to notice how they are perceived and treated in society. Therefore, these parents find it necessary to teach about racism and how to navigate in a racist society, while at the same time, instill positive self-esteem and self-worth (Reynolds, 2010). Also, as cited earlier in this section, parenting behavior influences academic success. For African American boys who fall behind other children due to culturally incompetent and/or biased teachers and culturally biased testing (Ford and Moore, 2013; Wasserberg, 2017), racial socialization is important to study because it may be one of the parenting behaviors that serves to help boys experience academic success. For instance, according to Brooks-Gunn and Markham (2005), "Even studies that adjust for family conditions and child characteristics may fail to measure other sources of variation in parenting and children's school readiness" (p. 146). The parenting behavior of racial socialization is common amongst African American parents, yet little research exists concerning the unique practices that African American parents employ in racially socializing their sons during the period of early childhood (Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, 2013; Hughes, Rodriquea, Smith, Johnson, Stevenson, & Spicer, 2006) that may lead to student success. Although we know that the way in which parents carry out parenting behavior varies across socioeconomic class status (Brooks-Mann & Markham, 2005) there is limited research on racial socialization available about African American families who are economically stable such as families participating in the middle class (Friend,

Hunter, & Fletcher, 2010; Lacy, 2004; Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter, & Dilihnut, 2005). Although the research is limited on economically stable African American families, it is important to note that it is documented that historically, African Americans have experienced economic stability, which has contributed to positive outcomes for their children. For instance, in 1870 Paul Laurence Dunbar High School was founded in a middle-class community in Washington D.C., and was the first public high school for African American students in the United States of America. Several administrators and faculty who served at Dunbar High, including Anna J. Cooper, whose ideas form the groundwork for intersectionality used in this study, went on to become well known scholars. The robust curriculum at Dunbar High prepared its students for college acceptance at prominent universities including Howard, Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth (Gibson, 1965). Dunbar High school provides only one example of the fact that there is a long history of middle-class African American families, communities, and schools even though the research community has not taken a significant interest in including them in the research (Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

### **Significance of the Study**

There are many studies that analyze African American boys based on their race, gender, and/or class (Battle, Alderman-Swain, & Tyner, 2005; Brittian, 2011; Cogburn, Chavous, & Griffin, 2011), which show that these social identities influence how children are perceived and educated in United States society (Battle, Alderman-Swain, & Tyner, 2005; Dowd 2013; Reynolds, 2010). Very few studies of African American boys use an intersectional approach even though using intersectional approaches in research has the potential to produce different findings and change the way in which research is carried out (Collins, 1993). For example, there are differences in access and resources that may influence differences in parenting behaviors between

middle-class and working-class families. Also, children's gender may influence how parents approach parenting.

Over two decades after Collins' (1993) recommendation, and based on the results of their review of the research on the topic of ethnic-racial socialization spanning 30 years of research, Priest et al., (2014) also recommend that future research should attend to how multiple intersecting socio-environmental factors influence how children are racially socialized. Howard & Flenbaugh (2011) recommend that researchers who conduct studies about African American boys consider how their multiple identities, particularly their race, class, and gender intersect in significant ways. This intersection of race, class, and gender for African American boys strongly influences how they view themselves, how others view them, and consequently the types of life experiences they will have. A primary goal of this study is to take up Howard & Flenbaugh's (2011) call for researchers to use new and different ways to explore the intersecting social identities of Black males, paying attention to how their identity develops over time. Studying how African American parents racially socialize their sons provides a way to analyze how their identities are constructed in early childhood in the face of racism and how the parenting behavior of racial socialization may help to ensure academic success. Also, though many studies focus on young European American children from middle-class families, studies are all but nonexistent that identify the parenting behaviors that parents of young boys from middle-class African American families engage in as they socialize their children. (Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, 2013). Due to considerable evidence of racism and racial profiling (Pérez Huber, & Solorzano, 2015; Allen, 2013; Monroe, 2005), a closer examination is needed.



## Research Questions

While a growing body of research (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2010; Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, 2013; Hughes, & Chen, 1999; Peters, 1985; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008) has informed us of a few of the genres, processes, and strategies African American parents use to racially socialize their children, the research has mainly focused on older children and families from working class communities (Lacy, 2004; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). Yet, young children also understand and apply racial constructs (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Still absent but needed is an understanding of how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their children at the intersections of race, class, and gender. For instance, there may be differences in ways that parents from different socioeconomic class status communities racially socialize their sons, leading to different outcomes. This study focuses in on this topic within an age-band in which children are soon to be enrolled in kindergarten yet far from old enough to be perceived as adolescents. Therefore, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What factors (e.g., stereotypes, ideologies, values, beliefs, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) influence how middle class African American parents racially socialize their sons?
2. What genres do middle class African American parents use to racially socialize their 3-4 year-old sons?

In this study, the term African American is used to describe United States Americans who are of African descent. The term European American is used to describe United States citizens of European descent. The term Black is used to describe participants who self-identify as Black, but who were of African descent. Also, the term Black is used when quoting study participants and scholarly works who use Black and African American interchangeably. The first and

final criteria draw on Howard, Rose, and Barbarin's (2013) description of the importance of considering national origins in participant selection in studies that focus on racial socialization due to the distinct nature of ideologies grounded in U.S.-based racial constructs.

The chapters that follow address these questions. In answering the questions, I apply an intersectional lens to gather first-hand information from middle-class parents of African American boys about how they engage with double consciousness and discriminatory stereotypes to ensure positive outcomes for their sons. In chapter 2, I provide a comprehensive literature review of parenting, race and racial socialization, gender, and social class. Subsequently in chapter 3, I describe the methods that I used to investigate the research questions just listed. In chapter 4 I present the findings of the study. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the study.

## **2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

All parents, whether they are aware of it or not, engage in racial socialization. For African American parents in the U.S., however, a degree of urgency exists that exceeds the typical (Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). Further, due to how African American boys and men are perceived in the U.S., this socialization is gender-based with parents of African American boys understanding the distinctive nature of their role in providing their sons with information about how they are perceived in society while at the same time ensuring that their sons maintain positive self-concepts. Evidence also exists indicating that the social class of families influences the ways in which parents racially socialize their sons. In this chapter, I explore extant literature on parenting including the sociocultural nature of parenting, African American parenting, and the intersectional nature of parenting, race and racial socialization, gender and African American boys, and social class.

## **Parenting**

Parenting is the process of attending to the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and financial needs of children from the time they are born until they are adults (Yadav, 2017). Brooks-Gunn and Mark (2005) state, “Parenting encompasses the literally hundreds of activities that parents engage in either with or for their child. Often, researchers divide parenting in categories of behavior...nurturance, discipline, teaching, language, monitoring, management and materials” (p. 140). In this study, I include racial socialization as a category of parenting behavior in which parents engage with their children. As will be described in the following sections, although parenting behavior may differ culturally, according to the American Psychological Association (2017), globally there are three major goals associated with parenting. These goals are: 1) ensuring children’s health and safety; 2) preparing children for life as productive adults; and 3) transmitting cultural values (<http://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/>).

**Sociocultural nature of parenting.** Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory places emphasis on learning as a social process influenced by culture. According to Vygotsky parenting behaviors work within sociocultural groups, varying across groups. These parenting behaviors draw upon psychological tools specific to that culture for their child’s cognitive development. Kozulin (2003) describes psychological tools as “symbolic artifacts—signs, symbols texts, formulae, graphic organizers—that when internalized help individuals master their own psychological functions of perception, memory, and so on” (p. 15-16). According to Kozulin, psychological tools mediate human experiences. In the section that follows, I describe how African American parents utilize psychological tools in racially socializing their sons.

**African American parenting.** Like parents of other races and ethnicities, African American parents engage in loving, appropriate, and meaningful parenting behaviors to prepare their

sons to successfully navigate in society (Cabrera, 2013). In racially socializing their sons, African American parents use specific psychological tools (Kozulin, 2003) including discourses that they consume, produce, and reproduce about what it means to be African American and to be viewed negatively in society. Further, at the same time that they are teaching their children about racism they will experience from European Americans, they are also transmitting the tenets and ways of behaving of European Americans to their children (Hill, 2001) with the hopes that they will be accepted into mainstream society. Examples of culturally psychological tools that African American parents use to mediate racial socialization are books, toys, and games. These psychological tools are specific to the culture because they may include images of African American children or that transmit messages about positive self-esteem directly geared toward African American children's looks and abilities. The goal of parents appropriating certain psychological tools in their parenting behavior is that their children receive and internalize positive messages about their racial identity leading to healthy social emotional development and long-term safety and success. As they appropriate psychological tools, parents also take into account the child's age. For instance, parents racially socialize young boys differently from adolescent boys due to the child's ability to understand racial concepts based on the child's cognitive development.

Despite the fact that African American parents are competent and nurturing, due to racism in the United States African American parenting is often viewed through a deficit lens in the research and in society (Adkison-Bradley, 2011).

**Intersectional nature of parenting.** As indicated in chapter 1, parenting, including the parenting behavior of racial socialization is influenced by the child's race, gender, the family's social class, and the child's development within the family's sociocultural and sociohistorical

contexts. Racial socialization behavior as related to race, class, and gender cannot be teased apart; rather, they work together to form intersecting identities. It is how these identities intersect that influence parenting decisions. For instance, being a member of the middle-class coupled with societal constructs related to gender and race make the experience of parenting an African American boy different from that of parenting a European American child, or a child of other genders, races, or socioeconomic status. (Bornstein, 2013; Ogbu, 1994).

### **Race and Racial Socialization**

Race influences perceptions of children and is used to categorize members of U.S. society. In this section, I discuss race as a social construct, its impact on U.S. schooling, and the importance of racial socialization.

**Race, racism, and U.S. schooling.** According to Tatum (2007),

...the concept of race is a faulty one. Those distinctions are socially meaningful but not biologically valid...the only meaningful racial categorization is that of 'human'...we still use the language of race, and need to, in order to describe what is taking place in the lives of particular groups of people... (p. xiv)

As indicated, categorizing people and assigning labels impacts how children are perceived and educated. In the U.S. the stereotypes and ideologies associated with being African American tend to be negative and frame African Americans as naturally inferior to European Americans. These perceptions impact African Americans in ways that limit educational and other opportunities and benefit European Americans (Murrell, 2008). For instance, because of the negative connotations associated with being African American, the expectations that some teachers have for African American children are lower than for others (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012). Further, preschool aged children and children in primary grades not only experience but also

understand and apply racial constructs (Park, 2011; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996, 2001). Van Ausdale & Feagin (1996) conducted a study in which they observed 3-6 year-old children for eleven months in a racially and ethnically diverse early learning center. The researchers wanted to learn what children understand about race, and how they apply these understandings during play. During the course of the study, “significant” occurrences of the children’s interactions that included racial or ethnic constructs. These significant occurrences excluded other children, included other children, defined themselves, and defined others. For example, a child removed her cot and told the teacher that she could not sleep by an African American child, referring to the child using a racial slur, and making other derogatory statements. In defining others, the children demonstrated the application of physical attributes such as skin color, and hair texture based on racial classification. In some instances, the children purposefully kept private from the teachers their interactions around race, indicating that they understood the sensitive nature of the topic. Park (2011) relied on sociocultural theory to learn about 3.5 to 5.5-year-old children’s understanding of racial and ethnic differences. Park observed six children’s social interaction and language in their classrooms, and interviewed the six children. She found that children notice physical differences related to race and ethnicity and that their peers act as more knowledgeable others to help the children construct meaning about their own and others’ racial and ethnic identities based on these differences. Similar to Van Ausdale & Feagin (1996), Park noted that the children excluded and included others, reproducing what she terms racialized patterns of social life. In this study the types of exclusion were more indirect; for example, when an African American girl tried to join a group of European American girls in play she was shooed away. In another instance two European American children would not have anything to do with the toy a non-European American child passed around during show and tell. Finally, children were observed actively working

together to co-construct meaning about racial and ethnic differences. Park reported an incident in which children talked together attempting to figure out why people have different skin colors.

The results of Van Ausdale's & Feagin's (1996) and Park's (2011) studies illustrate that even before the age of kindergarten, children notice racial and ethnic differences and demonstrate agency in their own identity development as well as constructing meaning about others. The teachers and parents in the study were surprised to learn that children were conscious of racial differences and incorporated their knowledge of racial and ethnic differences in their interactions with each other.

Although there is evidence to support the existence of racism against African Americans in the U.S., a "color-blind" philosophy insisting that race does not matter persists. People who embrace this ideology insist that they don't see color, only people. A color-blind ideology places African American students at a great disadvantage because, "Its assertion that race does not matter ...mask[s] the fact that race still functions as a source of power and privilege for White people" (Murrell, 2008, pp. 9-10). For example, a teacher asserting that she does not "see race" or that race does not matter in effect discounts the experiences and limitations that are institutionally and structurally placed on her African American students that European American students do not have to overcome. Rather than decreasing, negative and racially based schooling practices are increasing and continue to be harmful for the educational experiences and outcomes of African American children (Murrell, 2008). Inequitable school practices are one type of institutional racism that makes racial socialization a critical practice for African American parents.

**Racial socialization in the family.** Extant literature provides evidence indicating that unique methods, processes, and techniques are used by African American parents to racially socialize their children. While definitions, goals, and methods of racial socialization may differ,

scholars agree that racial socialization is an important area of identity development for African American children (Caughy, Nettles, & Lima, 2011; Murrell, 2008). According to Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry (2012), “identity is critical because it shapes the manner in which young people view themselves and the manner in which they perform in schools” (p. 92). Parents can transmit racial socialization messages to their children in ways that counter the negative impact of growing up in a racist society thus allowing children to view themselves positively regardless of how they are viewed by others (Hughes, & Chen, 1999; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). Racial socialization is an important part of identity development for African American children due to its ability to provide them with confidence and help them navigate competently in school and society. But race does not operate in isolation within practices of racial socialization; ideologies and stereotypes exist that are based on combinations of gender and race.

### **Gender**

At birth, newborns are identified as male or female based on their physical anatomy. Beginning in infancy and continuing through the lifespan humans are socialized to perform in ways that meet socially constructed ideas that align with the genders that were assigned at birth. However, this male/female, boy/girl binary is problematic because gender is fluid, thereby making gender identity a complicated issue (Jacobson, 2010; Hidalgo, et al., 2013). For instance, people do not often fit neatly into either the male or female identity category, or they may go back and forth between identifying as male or female. Further, in combination with other factors (in this case, race), perceived genders influence how people are treated. From birth children receive multiple varying messages about what it means to be a girl or a boy. Parents, other children, and adults often have expectations for how children should behave based on their gender (Jacobson, 2010). Children make decisions about how to interact with others, in part, through their



observations of how influential adults interact with others based on gender. Not only do children make decisions about behavior based on gender, they actively look for gender cues to help them determine which activities they should participate in and to identify how boys and girls differ (Martin & Ruble, 2004). Children look for and find these cues from family members and friends, often adjusting their behavior accordingly (Bryan, 2012).

There are also differences in how children are treated in schools based on gender. There is an increasing cognizance that boys and girls are often unintentionally perceived and treated differently in schools based on gender based stereotypes (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). For example, in early childhood settings teacher/child interactions are often based on stereotypical gender ideas. Girls are given more attention for their clothing and physical attributes, whereas boys are more likely to be recognized for their abilities (Strasser & Koeppel, 2011). Bryan (2012) states, “From the clothes they are dressed in, to the toys they are given, to the way they are lined up for P.E. children are constantly immersed in what I call gender identity instruction (GII)...Teachers consciously and unconsciously engage in GII with students every day” (p. 18). GII occurs in various ways including the explicit attribution of characteristics to a gender (e.g., telling boys they are crying like girls), providing stereotypical images and course materials in the classroom (e.g., Strasser & Koeppel, 2010), and having different expectations for academic and behavioral outcomes

Perceptions of children are not based on gender alone; people use the intersection of race and gender to form perceptions. In the following section, I review the literature on how African American boys in particular are perceived and treated in U.S. society.

**African American boys.** Although African American boys and girls experience racism, are racialized, and are often perceived negatively in schools and society, there are different

stereotypes and ideologies associated with the genders. Perceptions about African American boys have long labeled them as threatening, criminal, and lazy (Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2015; Tyler, 2014). These stereotypes and ideologies negatively and continuously influence the outcomes for African American boys (Howard, Flennaugh, & Terry, 2013).

There are various and complicated racially and ethnically based ways that beliefs about gender roles and gender constructs differ (Hiedmann & Joesch, 2004); therefore, gender-specific racist ideologies confront African American boys in the U.S. (Collins, 2004). “For African Americans the relationship between gender and race is intensified, producing a Black gender ideology...used to justify patterns of oppression and discrimination...in schools...and other American social institutions” (p. 8). In schools and other parts of society, African American boys’ lives are negatively impacted by Black gender ideology (Thomas & Stevens, 2009; Varner & Mandara, 2013). African American boys from working class families remain at the most jeopardy for educational inequity resulting in low academic performance and achievement gaps between them and their middle-class peers (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009).

Gender based disparities play out in different ways. Saunders, Davis, Williams, and Williams (2004) found that regardless of grade level, African American girls do better academically than African American boys. In their report of this study, they attribute two possible factors to the differences in positive school experiences between girls and their male counterparts. First, the majority of elementary school teachers are women who may be more skilled at providing positive support and behavior management for girls. Second, they found gender based societal perceptions of African American boys exist that can be attributed to their low achievement levels. Achievement gaps between African American boys and their European American counterparts appear as soon as boys begin formal schooling and the gaps grow larger as they progress through the grade

levels. African American boys are persistently underrepresented amongst high achieving students and are constantly over represented as low achievers (Barbarin, 2010). Notably, parents are aware of societal perceptions of African American boys and these perceptions impact how they engage in racial socialization of their sons.

**Racial socialization and gender.** Racial socialization messages differ based on the gender of the child, with boys receiving more messages that are intended to help them deal with bias and discrimination in society (Berkel et al., 2009; McHale, et al., 2006; Neblett, For, Philip, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2008). The messages that parents provide their sons about racism in the U.S. may help bolster their drive to achieve, help them navigate obstacles grounded in racism, successfully navigate inequities, and perform at higher levels in school (Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009). African American boys whose parents provide more methods of racial socialization that focus on preparing them for discrimination are better equipped to understand racism that they face and adapt their behaviors to deal with racism (Friend, Hunter, & Fletcher, 2011). For instance, in one study on the racial socialization practices of African American families with sons of an average age of 6.59, and from various socio-economic status communities, the researchers found

- A home rich in African American culture was associated with greater cognitive competence.
- Parental racial socialization messages were significantly associated with cognitive outcomes for girls but not for boys.
- Parental racial socialization messages were associated with receptive language skills as measured by the PPVT for children living in some types of neighborhoods. More research is needed to elucidate why parental racial socialization messages are important to language

development in high-risk neighborhoods but not in other neighborhoods. (Caughy, O'Campo, Nettles, & Lohrfink, 2006, p. 1232-1233)

Racial socialization messages can also build positive identity development. The centrality of identity construction for African American boys is evident in Murrell's (2008) situated-mediated identity theory. Situated-mediated identity theory provides an explanation for how African American and other children who are not European American develop positive self-identity and mentally and emotionally protect themselves from the pervasive racism they deal with in society and schools. This theory posits that in order for young African American children to perform well academically they must acquire critical sociocultural and sociohistorical awareness of who they are as well as knowledge of how they may be perceived in the school environment (Murrell, 2008). An important way that African American boys may develop this critical awareness is through the racial socialization methods and processes that their parents utilize. Burton, Bonilla-Siva, Ray, Buckelew and Freeman (2010) define racialization as the processes by which meaning is applied to differences amongst people based on the construct of race. The application of these meanings results in a tiered society between races where the top tiers have control and unearned privilege, while those on the lower tier face structural and institutional racism. For instance, stereotypes associated with African American boys that label them as naturally prone to criminal activity, slothful, having limited intellectual capacity, and resistant to authority (Rowley, et al., 2014) cause others to hold low expectations. Although the boys may not see themselves in this way, these stereotypes are often held by parents, teachers, and sometimes cause the boys to develop what Rowley, Ross, Lozado, Williams, Gale, and Kurtz-Costes (2014) refer to as "Black boy" narratives. For instance, the boys believe the stories that they are told about themselves and function as if they are inherently lazy, not able to learn, and bad. The adoption of these stereotypes in schools,

results in inequality and places African American boys in the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline is a term used to describe the trajectory that begins when African American boys experience racism in schools and ends with them being incarcerated (Barbarian 2010).

As these studies illustrate, both race and gender are vital to how African American boys are perceived and treated in the United States and how they are racially socialized in the context of their families. Alongside race and gender, social class status also plays an important role in how children are perceived and educated in the United States.

### **Social Class**

Middle-class status provides parents with access to available resources they can use to racially socialize their sons. In addition, it can provide barriers to some of the negative experiences faced by African Americans living in working-class communities. In this section, I define social class and related terms used within this study, provide an overview of the African American middle class, discuss extant literature on the influence of social class to the transmission of cultural wealth using theories from Bourdieu (2006) and Yosso (2005) as lenses, and specify the importance of social class to racial socialization.

**Defining social class.** A construct used to sort members of society based on income, level of education, and occupation, social class classifies people hierarchically (DiMaggio, 2012). In the U.S. an interesting juxtaposition exists with two inconsistent yet enduring ideological perspectives. On one side, meritocratic ideologies can be seen through societal images of people such as athletes, politicians, actors, and other high-profile individuals who have attained upper class status. These individual success stories help perpetuate the American myth that work ethic trumps social class (Milkie & Ray, 2014). As a result of this perspective, American citizens reject the notion that class status has an impact—negative or positive on child outcomes (Lareau & McCrory,

2012). Although there is a percentage of American citizens who are able to crossover from one socioeconomic status to a higher one, the percentage of those who are not able to access the resources and opportunities to do so remains large and cannot be attributed to their lack of ability or desire (Bowles, Gintis, & Groves, 2009). At the same time, class status is associated with access, opportunity, and esteem (Condrón, 2009; Nesbit, 2006). Because of the considerable evidence contradicting the first (Delgado, 2007; McNamee & Miller, 2009), I focus on the second here.

In this study, I use the terms middle-class and working-class. Following the Pew Research Center (2016), I define class status based on family income, level of education, and occupation. To be middle-class means that the family income is “two-thirds to double the national median...” (Pew Research Center, 2015, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/09/the-american-middle-class-is-losing-ground/>) having attended school past high school, and employed in a professional (white collar) occupation. Working-class is defined as having a family income “below the sixty-seven percent median household income, adjusted for family size” (Pew Research Center, 2015, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/12/09/the-american-middle-class-is-losing-ground/>), no education beyond high school, and being employed in a non-professional (blue collar) position. Families do not have to meet all class markers for a class status to be considered a member of that class. Social class does not exist in isolation. As described in the following sections, race plays a role in social class status.

**The African American Middle-Class.** The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s brought about a rise in the number of middle-class African Americans, yet this demographic is underrepresented in scholarly research with African Americans from working-class communities more often included in scholarly research (Pattillo, 2013). The available research shows that middle-class African Americans still overwhelmingly live in segregated communities,

have children who perform worse on high stakes tests than their European American counterparts due to cultural mismatches between the boys and their teachers and the curriculum, and continue to experience institutional and structural racism (Brewster, Stephenson, & Beard, 2013; Fashola, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Pattillo, 2013). Although research indicates that middle-class African American boys often face the same types of racism and discrimination, as working-class boys, middle-class parents remain optimistic that their status will provide protection from racism and discrimination. Indeed, the privileged status of middle-class has been found to not provide an advantage toward successful school experiences for Black boys in institutional school settings that are particularly racist (Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent, & Ball, 2012). Some consider this optimism outright denial (see, for example, Brewster, Stephenson, & Beard, 2013). The educational research literature must include all African American family demographics for, as Noguera (2003) states, "...there is considerable confusion regarding why being Black and male causes this segment of the population to stand out in the most negative and alarming ways, both in school and in the larger society" (p. 433).

**Social reproduction of cultural capital.** Social class status influences outcomes for children. According to Lareau & McCrory (2012), "Social scientists are much more likely to recognize the power of social class in shaping life chances...Class matters for social interaction in that it provides access to different cultural repertoires" (p. 61-62). Life experiences, available and accessible opportunities, and how one is viewed in society vary based on class status with those classified as higher socioeconomic status often having access, opportunities, and more positive outcomes than those from working class communities. Children born into families with higher levels of income and education have access to more exclusive educational settings, social clubs, and extracurricular activities not available to those born to working-class families. When parents

don't have the economic resources to pay for activities such as music lessons or dance classes to help their children develop their talents or levels of education that they can call upon to help support their children's studies, differences arise.

In contrast to middle-class parents, according to Lareau (2003),

For working-class and poor families, the cultural logic of child rearing at home is out of synch with the standards of institutions. As a result, while children whose parents adopt strategies of concerted cultivation appear to gain a sense of entitlement...[working-class] appear to gain an emerging sense of distance, distrust, and constraint in their institutional experiences (p. 3).

Lareau (2003) describes concerted cultivation as the way that parents intentionally expose their children to enrichment experiences and activities. According to Lareau (2003), rather than focusing on concerted cultivation, children from lower socio-economic status communities experience the "accomplishment of natural growth" (p. 3). Lareau (2003) describes natural growth as, "... long stretches of leisure time, child-initiated play, clear boundaries between adults and children, and daily interactions with kin ... more 'childlike' lives, with autonomy from adults and control over their extended leisure time" (p. 4). For children, class matters because family class status impacts ways of parenting, which has far reaching implications for children's experiences in the classroom and their overall academic trajectory. The difference between concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth are class-based parenting differences that influence how children are perceived in schools and academic outcomes (Lareau, 2003).

According to Markus and Fiske (2012), "Social class (like gender, race, and ethnicity) is an ongoing system of social distinction that is created and maintained through implicit and explicit patterns of social interaction" (p. 10). Patterns of social interaction are present systemically



and institutionally in the United States. Bourdieu's (2006) social class theories provide descriptions of the relationship between social class and formal schooling that are well-instantiated and widely referenced within the research literature on education. He illustrates how children's class-based experiences at home directly relate to the levels of success they experience in school in ways that allow the school to serve as a conduit for social reproduction of existing inequity. The experiences and exposure afforded to children from higher socioeconomic status families provide them with "cultural capital" they are able to leverage in the school setting. Possessing this cultural capital benefits children from middle-class communities. Children from working-class communities however are constrained by not having access to cultural capital. The result of these differences is unequal academic achievement for those from lower socioeconomic status communities and academic profit for those children with higher socioeconomic status.

Unlike economic capital, which is tangible and can be quantified, cultural capital is often invisible and difficult to be measured. Whether economic or cultural, capital "...exerts a symbolic violence as soon as it is recognized, that is, misrecognized in its truth as capital and imposes itself as an authority calling for recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013, p. 298-299). This symbolic violence is enacted when a) children who do not possess cultural capital are recognized as incapable and b) resources are withheld from them. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital is "embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus" (p. 83). Following, a habitus includes "habits of mind, dispositions to action, and evaluative orientations, operating largely outside consciousness, that both reflect one's life experience and incline one to reproduce the kinds of situations that generated those experiences" (DiMaggio, 2010, p. 25). Children's class-based habitus directly impacts their ability to access resources within the school setting.

According to DiMaggio (2012), schools take the cultural capital and habitus that middle-class students exhibit “...as a sign of native academic ability...[and] transform class privilege into individual merit” (p. 24). Though all do not explicitly use Bourdieusian theory to articulate their conceptualizations, some researchers have attributed failure for minority students to cultural mismatches within school settings due to how the child has been socialized to use language (Villegas, 1988) and the way teachers structure interactions, or participant structures, within the classroom (Au, 1980, 1981; Michaels, 1981; Philips, 1972, 2003). It is possible to use mismatch theory to apply a deficit lens onto children rather than a perspective of the considerable linguistic resources children bring to the classroom (Yosso, 2005). Through this deficit perspective children from working-class families are seen as not being ready for school, rather than the school not being ready for them. Heath’s (1983) ethnographic study in the Piedmont Carolinas included families from a working-class community and families from a middle-class community and illustrates how class based sociocultural differences leads to cultural mismatches in schools resulting in differences in educational achievement. Not only did the culture of the homes of the middle-class students more closely match the culture of the schools, but the middle-class families had the financial, community, educational, and other resources to help their children overcome obstacles to their academic achievement. Rather than viewing the children from the working-class community as deficient, Heath articulated the mismatches as well as ways that the families did possess capital.

Following, this study works from a more nuanced, inclusive understanding described by community cultural wealth theory (Yosso, 2005). The Bourdieusian concept of cultural capital can be used to privilege the psychological tools (Vygotsky, 2005) that parents from the dominant culture use to transmit knowledge to their children, thereby devaluing non-European cultures.

CCW is grounded in, and incorporates the tenets of CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) to conceptualize six forms of community cultural capital: aspirational capital, familial capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, social capital, and linguistic capital. Unlike economic capital, which is tangible and can be quantified, these types of capital are ingrained in the individual; they are invisible and cannot be measured. To possess aspirational capital means that one remains hopeful against all odds that their current circumstance will improve for the better. For example, their families may teach children born into poverty that if they remain focused and do well in school, they can achieve better lives. Linguistic capital attends to the multiple modalities used to communicate, such as visual art, music, and poetry but also includes linguistic diversity such as African American English used by speakers of standard English. Familial capital is a form of cultural wealth that extends beyond the immediate family of origin to include extended family such as real and informally adopted aunts, uncles, and cousins. These family members provide emotional and moral support and help teach and model life lessons, all while stressing the importance of staying connected to family. Social capital involves having access to people and resources outside of the family that provide support and guidance as one moves through society. In the African American community social capital is provided through organizations including Jack and Jill of America and Black Greek sororities and fraternities and religious organizations. Resistant capital, which is actively pushing back against or opposing inequality is a resource that is often drawn upon in settings where institutionalized racism is present. An example of resistance capital is the Black Lives Matter movement, which was created by Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, after the death of Trayon Martin and in response to racism that African Americans face in America (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>). Navigational capital is also included in Yosso's list. For many African Americans having access to navigational capital means having the ability to function skillfully

and successfully in social institutions where systemic racism exists. Finally, parents who racially socialize their African American sons might socialize them to effectively navigate schools when they face discipline harsher than that encountered by their European American peers.

Taken together, the six forms of capital that make up the CCW framework illustrates that, although African American families may face racism and unequal treatment, they still possess types of capital that helps them to function effectively in society.

**The importance of social class to racial socialization.** Socioeconomic status influences which processes, strategies, and messages are accessible to parents for use in racially socializing their children (Crouter, Baril, Davis, & McHale, 2008; White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010). For instance, parents who have more economic resources and higher levels of education are more likely to engage in activities such as Jack and Jill of America which require membership fees that make them restrictive to families from working class communities. According to the mission statement on their website, Jack and Jill (2017), “Is a membership organization of mothers with children ages 2 – 19, dedicated to nurturing future African American leaders by strengthening children through leadership development, volunteer service, philanthropic giving and civic duty” (<http://jackandjillinc.org>). Membership to Jack and Jill is by invitation or through legacy status. Also, parents who have not been able to access higher levels of education might not have the means of entry into school-compatible lessons useful for instilling pride in the African American race. Further, the literature shows that parents who have completed more schooling and parents who have higher income are more likely to transmit messages about racial pride and race-related barriers (Caughyn, O’Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997, White-Johnson, Ford, & Sellers, 2010).

## Conclusion

Little research exists concerning intersections of class, race, and gender in the unique racial socialization practices that middle-class African American parents employ in racially socializing their sons aged birth through eight years old (for an exception see Howard, Rose, & Barbarin, 2013). The majority of the racial socialization research that exists focuses on older children and families from low-socio-economic status communities (Friend, Hunter & Fletcher, 2010; Lacy, 2004; Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen & Sellers, 2009; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008; Tyler, Boykin, Boelter & Dilihunt, 2005). According to Pattillo (2005), in the research community “...an explicit focus on nonpoor African Americans has been missing” (p. 305). Further, it is important to understand the racialized experiences of younger children, because according to Van Ausdale & Feagin (2001), preschool aged children and children in primary grades also understand and apply racial constructs. In addition, negative attitudes in society towards males begin when they are very young (Howard, Flenbaugh & Terry 2012). As Friend, Hunter, and Fletcher (2011) state:

Qualitative...studies ... help us better understand the manner in which parents craft racial socialization messages to specifically target their children’s academic achievement, what specific coping mechanisms children who receive racial socialization messages are likely to employ to cope with racism in the school setting, and how these patterns and processes differ across gender and social class groups...[qualitative studies] would also help to explicate the intersections of race, gender, and class and how the distinctive effective environments that result from such intersections may influence associations between racial socialization and academic achievement. (p. 54)

Therefore, key insights into how middle-class parents racially socialize their sons at the intersections of race, class, and gender are needed and will be addressed in this study through examination of the following questions: 1) What factors (e.g., stereotypes, ideologies, values, beliefs, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) influence how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their sons? and 2) What genres do middle-class African American parents use to racially socialize their 3-4 year old sons?

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to examine how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their 3 and 4-year-old sons. In this chapter, I first describe my theoretical framework. Then I present decisions about methodological design. Next, I describe participants and include information about how I sampled and recruited. Following, I describe methods of data collection and analysis in detail. Finally, I address measures that I implemented to safeguard trustworthiness. Notably, I worked from an emic and etic perspective. As an African American woman raised in a middle-class family and who raised an African American son as a middle-class parent, I have experienced situations similar to the participants with regard to the need for racial socialization. Further, my world view is framed by the concept of double consciousness and the tenets of critical race theory. I also, however, work from an etic perspective because my experiences differ to some extent as my son was in the target age range over two decades ago.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical theory attends to the meaning making of power and hegemony along with the complexities of race in its ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Both theoretically and methodologically, critical theory informs this study with regard to how discourses and ideologies present in the United States impact the lives of African American boys at the intersections of

race, class, and gender (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical theory is especially appropriate for this study because of its focus on the permanence of race in the lived experiences of African Americans. For instance, the permanence of racism makes it necessary for African American parents to prepare their children to survive in a racist society. I also draw on intersectionality (Collins, 1993; Crenshaw, 1995; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008; Zinn, 2012) and community cultural wealth, a theory developed within the tradition of critical theory (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007).

In the sections that follow I will discuss critical race theory, intersectionality, and community cultural wealth. Howard and Flenbaugh (2011) refer to each of these theoretical frameworks as transformative in nature and call on researchers to use them to frame their studies in the context of a racist society. I here describe how I used a critical lens to examine how racial, class-based, and gendered identities are socially constructed and applied to African American people based on the needs of those in society who hold power.

**Critical Race Theory.** Because of the “complex nature of race” (Milner, 2007, p. 392), I used critical race theory (CRT) to examine how the construct of race as applied to African Americans influences how African American boys are socialized within the context of their families. CRT provided a framework for understanding what it means to be African American, while pushing back against deficit frameworks often used within research on African Americans. Scholars working from CRT understand that racism is a permanent part of American society; therefore, in African American families the permanence of racism may require that socialization of children include preparation for living with racism, inequity, stereotypes, and ideologies that oppress them. Critical race theory’s origin is in the field of critical legal studies (Bell, 1987). The theory emerged as a result of legal scholars and activists working together to make meaning

of and addressing power, race, and racism in the United States legal system. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) recognized that the field of education had also failed to address these same issues, and re-conceptualized CRT in such a way that it could be applied to educational issues. Critical race theorists believe that race is a social construct and apply the concept of a social construction thesis to explain the subjectivity and fluidity of how race is constructed based on what is convenient for the more powerful in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theorists also believe that racism toward African Americans is such a deeply ingrained societal practice that it often goes unacknowledged by European American people. The unwillingness of European Americans to acknowledge racism against African Americans results in racism remaining unchecked and static. CRT theorists examine how racism, stereotypes, and ideologies operate in society and influence the experiences of African Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

In this study, the tenets of CRT, particularly the permanence of racism, helped to understand and explain which techniques and strategies African American parents used to socialize their children in addition to why it was necessary for them to do so. For instance, African American parents understand that their children could need to confront racism in their daily lives in their interactions with teachers and other authority figures in schools, while interacting with their peers, and in society at large, and that they may experience double consciousness while doing so.

**Intersectionality.** I also used intersectionality as a theoretical framework in this study. Intersectionality calls for the examination of the interconnectedness of the multiple social identities of race, class, and gender. For instance, researchers who utilize intersectionality understand that one's social identities, together, and in overlapping ways influence their experiences. Therefore, these researchers do not attempt to examine the multiple identities of their participants in



isolation. This framework was appropriate because the connectedness of race, class, and gender influence how African American families racially socialize their sons. The idea of intersectionality is grounded in feminist theory and was first theorized by Cooper (1892/1988) (Cusick, 2009; Giles, 2006; Guy-Sheftall, 2009; May, 2004; Sule 2013). Cooper was an African American feminist, scholar, and writer who recognized that combinations of race, class, and gender result in different life experiences. For example, the life experiences of a middle-class African American boy are different from those of a middle-class European American boy. In the 1980's, legal theorist Crenshaw (1989) took up Cooper's ideas from the 1800's and coined the term intersectionality. Currently, researchers use intersectionality across multiple disciplines (Crenshaw, 1995; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008).

According to Gopaldas (2013),

At the macro-level the concept of intersectionality refers to the multiplicity and interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender. At a micro-level of analysis, the implication of intersectionality is that every person in society is positioned at the intersection of multiple social identity structures and is thus subject to multiple social advantages and disadvantages (p. 91).

Therefore, intersectional theorists understand that humans have multiple social identities that interconnect, creating different experiences and outcomes. For instance, a person who is a part of a minority group, but who is upper-class may enjoy advantages that a minority person from a lower-class status may not enjoy.

A common characteristic of intersectionality studies is that researchers privilege the lived experiences of people of color with oppressed intersecting identities as they collect and analyze data (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005; Winker & Degele, 2011). In order to

privilege these lived experiences, intersectional researchers collect data directly from their participants, including interviews, surveys, narratives, and documents provided by participants. Referred to within CRT as the voice of thesis tenet, the basic premise is that African Americans are better able to and should be called upon to communicate their own experiences with racism, rather than having someone speak for them. Because many intersectionality studies focus on oppressed intersecting identities, there is scarcity of African American middle-class boys in studies of intersectionality. However, there are some scholars such as Garry (2011) who expand the concept of intersectionality, making it more broad and inclusive to include privileged as well as oppressed social identities. In this study, in order to determine whether or not middle-class status provides challenges or opportunities when interconnected with raising African American (race) boys (gender), I included the privileged social identity of middle-class as well as the oppressed identity of African American to learn more about how African American families racially socialize their sons.

Gopaldas (2013) states,

Traditional diversity research tends to conceive of race, class, gender, and so on as independent demographic variables. In contrast, intersectional research tends to conceive of race, class, gender and so on as social identity structures that can be and often are interdependent. (p. 91)

For example, the experience of being African American differs according to gender because of the different stereotypes attributed to African Americans that are gender-based. Also, class differences impact how African American families racially socialize their children due to access they may or may not have based on differences in income and/or levels of education.

**Community Cultural Wealth.** The final theoretical framework used in this study is Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & García, 2007). CCW provides a lens for examining the strengths, knowledge, and skills that African American families draw on to counter the oppression and racism they face in the U.S. (Yosso & García, 2007), rather than through a deficit lens. Cultural wealth described in terms of Bourdieusian theory (2006), can work from deficit perspectives and assert that African American families do not possess the cultural capital that dominant groups possess. Studies that work from Bourdieusian have intimated that African Americans are not equipped to socialize their children in ways that will prepare them to be successful in American society and institutions (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Yosso (2005) and Yosso & García (2007), on the other hand, developed a “kaleidoscope model of community cultural wealth” that provides a way for scholars to avoid a deficit perspective when examining analyze African Americans. CCW treats African American communities as culturally wealthy, and rather than focusing on a single form of capital, identifies six. The six forms of CCW are: 1) aspirational (i.e. aspiring toward a future that is brighter than the present; 2) familial (e.g., extended family, and friends who are like family); 3) navigational (i.e., successfully moving within racist institutions); 4) social (e.g. social networks such as the Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - NAACP, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference - SCLC); 5) linguistic (i.e., speaking more than one language; and 7) resistant (e.g., being an activist).

### **Research Design**

My line of inquiry was framed by critical theory, and racial socialization takes place through discourse (defined broadly); therefore, I employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Fairclough’s explanatory critique method. CDA provided the opportunity for me to

critically examine language based and non-language-based genres that parents utilize to racially socialize their sons. This method aims to identify a social problem, explain how the discourse surrounding and making up the problem shapes and is shaped by ideologies, and critiques the problem following prescribed stages and steps. See Table 1 for a description of the initial CDA stages of this study that influenced data collection decisions. As described in the introduction of this study, providing the opportunity for participants to tell their own stories is central to studies framed in critical theory. Therefore, this study was designed as a qualitative exploration of African American parents' racial socialization behavior.

I collected and analyzed data that allowed me to examine member resources that African American parents draw on to racially socialize their sons. Fairclough (1989) describes member resources as ideologically shaped social resources individuals use to interpret, consume, and produce, texts. According to Fairclough, "The nature of member resources are dependent on the social relations and struggles out of which they were generated - as well as being socially transmitted..." (p. 24). The member resources that the families of African American children draw on to racially socialize their sons include their own experiences with racism in the context of American society.

The goals of the study were to: (a) identify genres, processes, methods, and tensions in African American socialization; and (b) critically evaluate and explain how the intersections of race, class, and gender have shaped the socialization of African American boys in the United States.

*Table 1 Initial design decisions influenced by Fairclough's (2013) explanatory critique*

Stage 1: Identify a social wrong within its semiotic aspect	Application to racial socialization of African American Boys
Step 1: Identify a topic related to inequity that would benefit from a	Systemic and institutional racism against African American boys in the United States.

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transdisciplinary approach that focuses in on discourse.

Step 2: Identify research participant's objects of research for initially identified research topics by theorizing them in a transdisciplinary way

Objects of research: racial socialization parenting practices

This transdisciplinary study is influenced by multiple disciplines including sociocultural theory (education), CDA (linguistics), CRT (legal studies, education), CCW (critical race theory), and intersectionality (legal studies, feminist theory).

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The explanatory critique model is one of multiple CDA versions Fairclough (2013) has described. These methods work from a critical paradigm as

CDA aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggle over power. (Fairclough, 2013, p. 93)

Fairclough has been instrumental in facilitating the ability of researchers to connect language studies with social critical theory; it is his belief that the failure to attend to discourse *and* social theory when conducting discourse analysis leads to less rigorous analyses. CDA was a suitable method for this study's research questions because the discourse that parents use to racially socialize their young sons shapes and is shaped by ideologies and stereotypes present in society.

This study was designed using Fairclough's methodological tools due to the ability of his staged-model framework to analyze the connection between language use and social practice in ways that a) foreground the social problem from the beginning, and b) identify existing approaches to overcome and resist the social problem.

As described earlier in this chapter, I used an intersectional approach in this study. Intersectionality research promotes social justice and social change (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008). There are studies that analyze African American boys based on their race, gender, and/or class (Battle, Alderman-Swain, & Tyner, 2005; Brittian, 2011; Cogburn, Chavous, & Griffin, 2011). However, very few studies use an intersectional approach. I believe, as Dowd (2013) argues, "...race and gender cannot be divided from an inquiry to end the subordination of black boys" (p. 36).

In the next section I describe the study participants and data collection determined to best address the research questions within this particular design.

### **Data Collection**

**Recruitment.** African American families who had sons between the ages of 3-5 were invited to participate in the study through use of an introductory letter, recruiting announcement, (Appendix B) and word of mouth. I sent the letter to local chapters of Jack and Jill of America, and the recruiting announcement was posted in African American businesses including malls, barber shops, and beauty salons as well as area churches, mosques, karate classes, child development programs, and gyms. An initial questionnaire was used to determine eligibility and, if participants met selection requirements, as a data source to for demographic information including their levels of education and family income. My goal was to include between five and eight families in the study. I recruited for four months and five families responded. All five families who responded met eligibility requirements to participate in the study. The five families that agreed to participate in the study had children who attended two University based child development centers.

**Participants.** Because of my interest in learning more about how middle-class African American families racially socialize their sons I purposively recruited and selected participants based on my research questions. Five families were selected for participation in the study (Patton, 1990). Criteria for participation were: a) at least one parent self-identified as African American, and the other parent identified as Black, but not of American descent (E.g., Afro Caribbean); b) parents identified son as African American c) the family self-identified as middle-class, confirmed by class markers (e.g., family income, level of education, occupation); c) family structure included at least one son within an age-band in which the child is soon to be enrolled in kindergarten at the time of selection, and; d) birth and upbringing of at least one parent in the United States. The focal unit is the participating parent(s), organized by son. Table 2 below provides pseudonyms and description of participants.

*Table 2* Description of Participants

Family	Description	Children
1. Miller	<p>Marilyn and Daniel</p> <p>Live in a townhome in a predominately African American suburb of a southeastern city.</p> <p>Marilyn only interviewed Marilyn is a corporate psychologist</p> <p>Daniel is an Elementary School physical education teacher</p>	<p>1 son Preschool</p>
2. Matthews	<p>Samantha and James interviewed</p> <p>Live in a house in a predominately African American suburb of a major southeastern city. The family describe their neighborhood as being solidly middle-class, and surrounded by neighborhoods that they describe as upper-class and working-class.</p> <p>Samantha is the director of an administrative office at a university</p> <p>James is the assistant director of business operations in a university department</p>	<p>2 sons 1<sup>st</sup> grade and Prekindergarten</p>

3. Moore	<p>Karen and William</p> <p>Live downtown in a condo in a major southeastern city. Family is searching for a home that is located in a diverse area of the city.</p> <p>Karen only interviewed</p> <p>Karen is a university professor</p> <p>William is a high school instructor</p>	<p>1 son Prekindergarten</p>
4. Taylor	<p>Evelyn and Peter</p> <p>Both parents participated in interviews</p> <p>Live temporarily in a downtown condo in a diverse city adjacent to a major southeastern city. Family moved from a home in a predominately African American area of the southeastern city. Family is searching for a home in a diverse area of the city.</p> <p>Evelyn is a clinical research associate at a national pharmaceutical company</p> <p>Peter is a director at the state child and family services agency.</p>	<p>1 son Preschool</p> <p>1 daughter Kindergarten</p>
5. Anderson	<p>Sonya and Dominic</p> <p>Sonya only interviewed</p> <p>Live in a predominately African American suburb</p> <p>Sonya is a marketing director at a national non-profit agency.</p> <p>Dominic is a banker.</p>	<p>2 sons Infant and Pre-kindergarten</p>

### Data sources

According to Gopaldas, (2013), "...intersectional research uses primary data (e.g., on-site interviews, participant observations) and secondary data (e.g., historical texts) to gather multiple perspectives on a context" (p. 91). I collected multiple forms of data from five families. Specifically, I collected three types of primary data sources: a) semi-structured interviews, b) participant observation field notes, and c) family demographic information. In addition, I collected secondary data sources in the form of participant-selected photos of the family's home environment.



Data collection took place within two distinct phases. In the following sections I will describe data collection topics.

**Interviews.** Interviews afford the gathering of detailed, in-depth information about the participants' experiences in part because they allow for the researcher to ask clarification questions or prompt additional information. There is a range in types of participation that researchers choose to engage in as they collect data (Spradley, 1980). Characteristics of a moderate participant are that they can be identified as researchers, but have limited participation with research subjects during data collection. Therefore, during data collection I refrained from giving personal opinions or sharing personal experiences of my own parenting behavior unless asked directly in order to not lead participant responses. I began my initial participant meetings with a brief disclosure of my own experiences raising an African American son.

I interviewed participants from December 14, 2016 through April 20, 2017 asking questions that allowed me to learn about the families' racialized child socialization practices (Bucklew & Freeman, 2010; Burton & Bonilla-Silva, Ray, 2010). I spent between 3-4 hours with each participant across three semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for protocols) and an additional member check meeting during the final stages of analysis. My original plan was to interview either parent, however during the first round of interviews parents often indicated that their spouse may have a different perspective or more insight into the questions asked. Therefore, I requested that if possible each family provide the opportunity for me to interview each parent at least one time. Out of five family units, I was able to interview both mother and father in two families. With the Matthews family, I conducted the first interview with the father alone, and in the second and third interviews I interviewed the parents together. With the Moore family, I interviewed the mother alone in the first interview, and the parents together in the second and third

interviews. Interviews took place at a local child development center and in participants' homes when possible due to my interest in elements of the home environment that may relate to how parents racially socialize their sons. I conducted one interview in the homes of 4 out of the 5 families that participated in the study. During the interviews, I audio-recorded and took notes in my field note journal. Within 24 hours following each interview I expanded field notes, as described in further detail in the sections that follow.

In the initial interview, I asked parents questions about what it means to be African American (e.g., ideologies, stereotypes, concerns/fears for their children), what it means to be an African American male in the United States, and about strategies or processes they use to racially socialize their sons. I asked parents to describe ways that their parenting behavior (e.g., discipline, teaching about others.) were influenced by their child's intersecting identities of race, gender, and/or access the family may have based on social class status. Topics included social issues represented in literature, the news, and popular media.

Contexts play an important role in how parents racially socialize their children. For children aged birth through five years old, the home is a significant context in which racial socialization takes place. Parents may state that because of the young age of their child and their perceived limited understanding, they do not engage in the practice of racial socialization. However, by including items in the home such as artwork depicting positive images of African Americans parents relay messages about racial pride to young children (Cauhby, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002). At the end of the first interview I asked parents to use their smart phones to take pictures and/or videos that provide examples of things present in their homes that provide racial socialization messages for their sons. Participants texted or emailed the photos to me. When asked and in order to better explain, I provided examples from my own upbringing and from my own

experiences of racially socializing a son. For example, Sonya Anderson asked during the second interview I knew when the time was right to start talking to my son about race. I responded that I played it by ear, and followed his lead. Also, Evelyn Taylor asked what it was like for me growing up African American in the 1960's, and I responded that my family was active in the Civil Rights Movement. In the second interview, I asked parents to describe how they purposefully use the things that they photographed to racially socialize their sons.

In the third interview I asked specific questions about pop culture (e.g., movies, songs, music, video games, social media); social organizations; religious organizations; choice of doctors or other professionals; and choice of friends, neighborhoods, and schools that they used to purposefully racially socialize their sons. Though some of these topics arose in the second interview, a return to the topics in this final interview was merited due to a) the need for follow-up questions to previous interview and other data sources, and b) the ability to follow inquiries arising from evolving findings. Because I interviewed participants over the course of three interviews they were able to have time between interviews to think about their parenting behavior around racial socialization. From the first to the third interviews, parents became more thoughtful about the topic and began to talk more explicitly and more in detail about how they racially socialize their sons.

**Participant observation field notes.** I hand-wrote field notes in a notebook in order to collect unstated data such as body language and other physical behavior (e.g. shaking or nodding head when speaking, looking at other parent to indicate they want them to answer the question), and other data I noticed that could not be captured in an audio-recording (Glesne, 2006).

**Expanded field notes.** I expanded and analyzed the field notes within 24 twenty-four hours of each interview using Corsaro's (1981) technique of "cooking" the notes. I typed the

original notes in order to make the data easier to work with then expanded with more detailed descriptions of the previously jotted quick notes. I applied Corsaro's codes: a) PN for personal notes, b) MN for methodological notes, and c) TN for theoretical notes. Expanding field notes in this way helped me to add more detail and note preliminary patterns that were occurring in the data and to plan for further collection and analysis.

**Photos.** Parents racially socialize their children by speaking directly to them but also by providing certain things in their home environment and exposing them to other contexts as a means of racial socialization. The photos that parents provided were an important data source because they supplemented what parents reported during the interviews and provided an additional way for me to analyze the parenting behavior of racial socialization. The photos also provided an opportunity for me to build understanding of how the home context influences African American children's development (Caughy, Randolph, & O'Campo, 2002).

### **Data Analysis**

Fairclough's CDA explanatory critique guided my analysis throughout the study supported by thematic analysis to identify strategies, processes, and techniques used by participants. In Table 1 in this chapter, I detailed the first stage of Fairclough's CDA in which I identified a social wrong within its semiotic aspect. Table 2, below details how stages 2 through 4 of Fairclough's (2001, 2013) explanatory critique framework applied to data analysis in this study.

Table 3 Fairclough's explanatory critique applied to data analysis

<i>Fairclough's Stages</i>	<i>Application to this study</i>
Stage 2. Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong (what is keeping this problem from being addressed?)	
Step 1: Analysis of the network of practices it is located in.	I analyzed and coded interviews and photos for places in society where the parents identified that their sons experienced racism. This data was used to conceptualize structural networks of practices where racism exists for African American boys (e.g., interactions with police officers).
Step 2: Analysis of the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practices concerned.	Using data identified in step 1, I analyzed the structural aspects of the discourse through direct parent reports of inequity, perceived inequity, and my identifications of inequitable practices (e.g., school discipline examined at the individual rather than group level).
Step 3: Analysis of the discourse by means of interdiscursive analysis.	I analyzed the data across data type (e.g., interview, photos, etc.) to identify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Genres that parents use to racially socialize their sons (e.g., everyday conversations, artwork, media, toys, books).</li> <li>b) Discourses used by parents to racially socialize their sons (e.g., parents might work to counteract perceptions that African Americans are lazy by highlighting successful African Americans in society).</li> </ul> <p>“Interdiscursivity occurs when different discourses and genres are articulated together in a communicative event” Jorgensen &amp; Phillips, 2002, p. 73)</p>
Stage 3. Consider whether the social order “needs” the social wrong	I analyzed the data to ascertain parent perceptions of who benefits from racism and from failing to create more equitable practices (e.g., parents might say things like, “they want to keep our children out of the gifted program so they don’t take the spaces for their kids”).
Stage 4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles	I examined the data using the community cultural wealth perspective to identify positive change through processes, strategies, and techniques that parents use to resist, oppose, and/or overcome racism that their sons do or will experience.

I conducted stages two through four of CDA explanatory critique with the use of thematic analysis. This method has been described as not dependent upon a single theory (Joffe, 2012; Clark & Braun, 2013); for instance, Clarke and Braun (2013) state,

We view TA as theoretically flexible because the search for, and examination of, patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for human beings, experiences or practices. This means TA can be applied within a range of theoretical frameworks... (p. 120)

Though I believe that all analysis is theoretically grounded, I do find thematic analysis compatible with the theories from which I work—CRT, CCW, and intersectionality. I used Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory techniques to code the data searching for themes, selected in part because of her recognition of the importance of researcher acknowledgement of the theories from which they work. Table 3 details how I carried out Clark's and Braun's (2013) six nonlinear phases for conducting thematic analysis, as well as how I used Charmaz's (2006) methods of grounded theory to code the data.

*Table 4* Six phases of Thematic Analysis incorporating grounded theory methods as applied to Stage 2 of Fairclough's explanatory critique

Thematic Analysis Phase	Incorporated Grounded Theory
<p>In order to <i>familiarize themselves with the data</i>, the researcher spends considerable time engaging directly with data (e.g., reading and re-reading, listening to, etc.). Analytic observations are documented.</p>	<p>I listened to each audio-recording and used as an aid to expanding field notes within 24 hours of recording. Due to this study's concentration on the content of participant talk, the audio-recordings were sent out to an IRB-approved external transcriber. During listening and readings, I kept a notebook for initial analytic observations.</p>
<p>During the <i>coding</i> phase the researcher applies labels to any data that broadly relates to the research question. The final part of this phase is for the researcher to classify data excerpts with the assigned codes.</p>	<p>Following each set of interviews, I used Dedoose computer assisted qualitative data analysis software to carry out grounded theory coding techniques for initial coding of the expanded field notes and interview transcripts.</p>
	<p>Following Charmaz (2006), I used gerunds to code in order to maintain my emphasis on parents' discourses. I read the interview transcripts line-by-line, coding as follows according to Fairclough's stages. Table 4 provides a list of initial codes.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Stage 2</b></p>
	<p>Step 1: I analyzed and coded interviews and photos for places in society where the parents identified that their sons experience racism.</p>
	<p>Step 2: Using the data identified in step 1, analyzed the structural aspects of the discourse through direct parent reports of inequity, perceived inequity, and my identifications of inequitable practices (e.g. school discipline examined at the individual rather than group level).</p>
	<p>Step 3:</p>
	<p>a) Genres parents use to racially socialize their sons (e.g., everyday conversations, artwork, media, toys, books).</p>

Thematic Analysis Phase	Incorporated Grounded Theory
	<p>b) Instances where the parents describe processes (i.e., discourses) they use to racially socialize their sons.</p> <p>c) Instances when the parents refer to descriptions applied to their sons.</p> <p>d) Instances when the parents refer to counteracting or validating descriptions applied to their sons.</p> <p>e)</p> <p>Stage 3: I analyzed the data to ascertain parent perceptions of who benefits from racism and from failing to create more equitable practices. (Parents might say things like, “they want to keep our children out of gifted programs so they don’t take up the spaces for their kids.”)</p> <p>Stage 4: I examined the data using the community cultural wealth perspective to identify processes, strategies, and techniques that parents use to resist, oppose, and/or overcome racism that their sons do or will experience.</p> <p>I wrote up a formal analytic memo summarizing initial analysis of each set. These memos informed future data collection.</p>
<p><i>Searching for themes:</i> Themes are derived from actively and carefully reviewing coded data and taking note of similarities. The researcher sorts the coded data into their respective categories/themes.</p>	<p>After initial coding was completed for the three sets of data, I used focused coding techniques (Charmaz, 2006) to sort each excerpt into its theme. I sorted excerpts based on similar themes and subthemes.</p>
<p><i>Reviewing themes:</i> During this phase the researcher determines if the themes make sense in relation to the coded excerpts and all of the collected data. Themes may be combined (collapsed) or taken apart to create more themes. Themes might also be abandoned during this phase. The researcher must consider if the themes convey an account of the data that persuasively responds to the research questions. This is the phase in which the researcher starts to define the characteristics of the themes and how they relate to each other.</p>	<p>I used theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2006) to review, refine, and identify relationships amongst the themes.</p>



Thematic Analysis Phase	Incorporated Grounded Theory
<p><i>Defining and naming themes:</i> The researcher writes a detailed definition/description of each theme and examines the suitability of the theme's name, modifying as necessary.</p>	<p>From the beginning of the <i>searching for themes</i> phase, I maintained descriptions of codes through the use of memos in Dedoose, in which I drafted and redrafted my definitions of each theme.</p>
<p>The <i>writing up</i> phase is a vital part of data analysis. Once the other phases of analysis have been completed the researcher creates a comprehensible story about the data composed of an analytic narrative and data excerpts. The write up should include how the analytical findings relate to the literature on the topic</p>	<p>Any changes made as I constructed the comprehensible story while writing findings will be described as a part of the analysis including the rationale for making the changes.</p>

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*Note.* My analysis and these procedures were cumulative allowing for ongoing development of analysis that is iterative and recursive.

Table 5 Samples of initial codes

Excerpt	Code
I wanted him to be normalized around Black doctors, Black teachers, Black attorneys, Black political leaders. I wanted that normalization for him.	Providing exposure to African American professionals.
Black men, boys are still being feared in some way, shape, form or fashion. So, while the presence of an African American woman can be unsettling, I don't think that the fear factor is there the way it is for Black boys and men. So, it does take a different toll, I think, from raising a boy from a girl. And again, being prepared for people who'd view him in fear.	Experiencing racism differently based on gender.  Being stereotyped as intimidating  Preparing child for bias.
We're very particular about where we live, school districts.	Intentionally choosing where to live
And he was like, what do, what are we going to tell our son if he comes out with my complexion? And I said, we're going to tell him that he's extra special. Extra special and the sun just kissed him a little longer. So, to know that that was a fear of my husband and I showed him in the Bible in the Psalm of Solomon where they said that your skin has been kissed by the sun and it's dark like the tints of Qatar. I was like, that was celebrated back in the day. And that's just what we teach him and so I call him by beautiful chocolate boy.	Building confidence
I think they're viewed differently because I think that if they made one little mistake, it's like the end of the world versus, you know, other children might have done the exact same thing and they're given, you know, chances and stuff like that.	Teaching that as African American boy he cannot behave as others.  Facing unequal treatment in school.
I was actually pregnant when Trayvon Martin was shot, and I had a moment, Like I almost couldn't even go to work that day for just feeling like I can't believe I'm going to have a child, and now my fear is that somebody's going to shoot him on his way home. So, you know, that's embedded.	Fearing for child's life
...He's around my husband's fraternity brothers, and they do community service, and he's around other African American males that are you know, doing outreach in the community.	Accessing social capital  Providing positive role models

Excerpt	Code
Again, I think they're just more reinforcement to have images that look like him in his home so that he's comfortable in his skin and can see a reflection of himself displayed in other ways, you know, outside of the few friends he may have or what he sees on television. He can see those reflections throughout his home.	Displaying African American images in the home.
Like my husband's name is ----- which is obviously an African American name, but he wanted to ensure that his child had a name more...	Choosing a name that is not typically associated with African American race.

As I have described in the above sections, I used thematic analysis to guide me in carrying out stages two through four of Fairclough's explanatory critique. As Table 3 above shows, thematic analysis required that I carry out phases of data analysis, but does not have prescribed methods; therefore, I applied grounded theory coding methods to thematic analysis.

### **Trustworthiness**

I used qualitative research criteria to safeguard trustworthiness of findings in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rhymes, 2009). In this dissertation, I used trustworthiness to ensure that my research is dependable, credible, transferable and confirmable. This criterion is described in the section that follows

**Member check.** According to Guba (1981) "the process of member checks is the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion" (p. 85). I used member checking throughout data collection to ensure that I had accurately captured the information the participants provided (Glesne, 2006; Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). I checked in with participants informally from time to time as I analyzed the data. In the second and third interviews, I clarified my understandings from previous data collection. To ensure that I captured the important information that participants provided I also made notes in my field note

journal during member checks. When I altered steps in my study based on responses from participants during member checking I documented the changes and their rationales in my methodological log. Following all data collection, I had a formal check-in with each set of participants (organized by shared son) during which I shared excerpts from the data along with developing themes to test my construction of the participants' racial socialization practices (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

**Debriefers.** I had one peer debriefer and one expert debriefer to provide additional perspectives including critical feedback on the data and my analysis of it. Both reviewed segments of the data along with my analysis followed by a discussion with me in which they asked clarifying questions and considered the degree to which my emerging findings were credible. I met two times during data analysis with each of the debriefers. The expert debriefer also pointed out weaknesses in my analysis as well as my planned next steps

**Negative case analysis.** I actively searched the data for negative cases that contradicted or failed to fit into my emerging insights. Each negative case was carefully considered and compared to the data that supported my emerging insights and led to either a re-analysis of the data or a description of my understandings of why it differs. The negative case is described in chapter 4 of this study.

**Reflexive note.** According to Rhymes (2009) it is important that researchers critically reflect as they are conducting research. Engaging in critical reflection ensures that, "Instead of seeing everything from our own perspective... we can see many sides of any discussion, conversation..." (p. 62). Because racial identity construction and racial socialization in my own upbringing and in raising my own child figured so prominently, it is likely that I have experienced many of the same things as the participants in regard to racial socialization experiences. Following, I

maintained a reflexive journal in which I reflected on my values, beliefs, and experiences. It was important that I critically reflected on and acknowledged my emotional attachment and personal interest in the topic. I included as many measures of trustworthiness as possible to ensure that I gathered the participants' experiences rather than interjecting my own into the data. Although I have an emic perspective on the topic, my goal was to look beyond my own perspective, values, and beliefs.

**Methodological log.** Throughout data collection and analysis, I kept a methodological log in which I kept a record of analytic decisions and how they informed how data collection and analysis proceeded, things that I wondered about the data, preliminary themes, potential codes and possible further questions.

#### 4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present findings from the critical discourse analysis just described in which I drew on critical race theory, intersectionality, and cultural wealth in my data collection and analysis of interviews with five middle class African American families who have at least one preschool aged son. Each set of parents participated in three interviews answering questions about their racial socialization parenting behavior which allowed me to learn: a) What factors (e.g., stereotypes, ideologies, values, beliefs, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) influence how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their sons and b) What genres middle class African American parents use to racially socialize their 3-4-year-old sons.

My analytic lens focused on genres and processes the parents used to racially socialize their sons, descriptions that parents referred to as applicable to their sons, and places in society where parents believed their son had or would be discriminated against. Through a critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013) incorporating thematic analysis (Clark & Braun, 2013), I

identified themes consistent across the data. I identified five major themes. This chapter will describe each theme in detail and provide specific examples from the interviews to illustrate each theme's development. In table 5, I provide a list of themes and subthemes, organized by the research questions they address.

*Table 6 Themes*

Influencing Factors	Genres
<p><b>THEME 1</b> Recognizing Institutional and Structural Racism</p> <p><b>THEME 2</b> Responding to Discriminatory Stereotypes <b>Subthemes</b> Criminality Aggressive and Threatening Unintelligent Single Parent Homes Misbehaving</p> <p><b>THEME 3</b> Accessing Developmentally Appropriate Cultural Resources <b>Subthemes</b> Purpose capital Relational capital Operational capital Associational capital Counteraction capital</p> <p><b>THEME 4</b> Demographic Profile Matters <b>Subthemes</b> Age of the child Gender of the child and parent Class status of the parent during their upbringing Current class status</p>	<p><b>THEME 5</b> Socially and Emotionally Developmentally Appropriate Genres <b>Subtheme</b> Books Artwork Toys Conversations</p>

In the sections that follow, direct quotes from participants are included that support theme development and give room for participants to tell their own stories.

### **Influencing Factors**

The first research question in this study was designed to learn from families about specific factors that drove their need to racially socialize their sons in particular ways. For the middle-class parents of African American children in this study, these factors consisted of the following: institutional and structural racism; stereotypes and ideologies grounded in United States history; cultural resources that the family could access; the age of their child; the gender of their child, and the parent gender; the social class status of the parent during their own upbringing; and the current family social class status. In the section that follows I describe and provide examples of the each of these factors just listed.

### **Recognizing Institutional and Structural Racism**

Institutional and structural racism influenced how parents racially socialized their sons. Study participants identified three primary contexts in which racism was institutionalized: school, police, and society in general. All of the parents referenced school and society in general, and three referenced police. Two of the parents gave specific examples of instances in which their sons experienced racism in preschool settings. One parent stated that teachers might not always be aware that they have biases and operate off of racism in their classroom practices. Karen Moore detailed a conversation she had with someone about which school system she would enroll her son for kindergarten. Institutional racism was at the forefront of her decision. Karen stated, "...he was like 'Trinity is a great school. It's a great school district.' I was like 'yeah, that's nice. How do they treat Black boys?' And he said 'actually...they treat them really good.' He said 'I can't say that for all the top schools.'" (Interview 3, February 22, 2017)

Although their children were only 3 and 4 years old, in terms of the structural and institutional racism their sons would face, parents were most anxious about encounters their sons would have with police officers in the future. This anxiety drove the parents to racially socialize their sons early to obey authority immediately and without question in hopes that police officers would not unlawfully hurt or kill them. They were worried their sons would be unlawfully arrested. They were worried that they would be killed:

If he encounters the wrong person that can't see past his Blackness, that doesn't look like him and know that my son comes from a two-parent home with parents who have five degrees, professionals, entrepreneurs, he [my son] got to listen the first time. And it's your [my son's] job to come home and let us get the lawyers and whatever to fight the fight for him, but you [my son] shut up and follow directions. (Interview 1, Karen Moore, December 15, 2016)

As indicated in my field notes, James Matthews became visibly upset, and expressed his fear and anxiety strongly, saying,

I mean he could be hurt, he could be arrested, he could be killed...If he's with a police officer and he's choosing to...to voice his...it could be well within his rights, but to voice his concern...but there's a police officer that's not having that from this little brown kid or this young Black male. That can go totally left. (Interview 2, February 7, 2017)

But school and law enforcement were not the only institutionalized contexts in which racism was encountered. African American boy encounter racism in public activities as simple as Trick or Treating, not being invited to, or the child and family being ignored at social events, and treated negatively in social spaces such as stores.



## **Responding to Discriminatory Stereotypes**

Five specific stereotypes applied to African American boys were prevalent across all five families' data. Parents were well aware that these stereotypes are or will be applied to their sons. For instance, parents indicated that their sons may not yet be of the age to be stereotyped as criminals, however they believed that the stereotype would be applied as their sons get older. In the interviews, the parents in most cases also described how they counteract the stereotypes for their sons as well as how they teach their children to behave in ways that to counteract the stereotypes. The five stereotypes that I identified in the data are: 1) criminality; 2) aggressive and threatening; 3) unintelligent; 4) from single parent homes; and 5) misbehaving. In this section I describe these discriminatory stereotypes and provide examples of parent references.

**Criminality.** In reference to criminality associated with African American men, the majority of parents did not express that their children are currently seen as criminals; however, they were cognizant of the fact that as they get older, this stereotype would be applied and influenced their racial socialization parenting behavior. For example, parents did not allow their sons to watch television shows that portray African Americans as criminals or news stories that highlight criminal behavior of African Americans at the exclusion of other races. According to the Matthews family, "Like when you talk about someone who robs, steals, kills they plaster the Black person on TV" (Interview 2, February 7, 2017).

For the age of the children in this study, the criminal stereotype manifests in disproportionate discipline in preschool. Three of the five families in the study described instances in which they believed that, due to his race, their sons' age appropriate behavior was perceived as misbehavior. Sonya Anderson expressed that even though he was 3 years old, she and her

husband Dominic prohibited their son from wearing hooded clothing in public. This family understood that for African American boys, hoodies are falsely associated with criminal behavior.

**Aggressive and threatening.** Parents also responded to labeling of African American boys as overwhelming aggressive or threatening when racially socializing their sons. For instance, in a few cases parents referenced that due to how their sons played, the volume and tone of their voices, and their physical size, they expected the boys to be negatively stereotyped. This assumption was present in spite of the fact that their sons played and spoke in ways that were appropriate for their age, and though were in some cases in the upper percentile in height and weight ranges for their age, they were still clearly children. According to Evelyn Taylor,

My husband's a tall, very quiet, mellow man, and he's a brown complexion. And I think just everyone when he steps in a room just might be intimidated...So I wouldn't want that to fall on my child. I wouldn't want anyone to think that his behavior or anything like that is aggressive or anything just because he is African American. (Interview 1, December 15, 2016)

Karen Moore expressed a similar concern in regard to her son being stereotyped as aggressive, stating, "And as little as he is, we're always on him about not coming across as too aggressive, not being threatening, and you know it's scary" (Interview 1, December 15, 2016). Parents also are aware from listening to media that their children are stereotyped as aggressive at very young ages, as indicated by Marilyn Miller, "...I'd heard about from NPR there was that study about how even preschool teachers consider African American boys as more aggressive" (Interview 3, March 28, 2017). As the excerpts from the interviews make evident, parents had concerns about their sons being perceived as threatening and took action to racially socialize their sons to counteract these perceptions.

**Unintelligent.** Four of the families indicated that the stereotype of being unintelligent would be applied to their sons resulting in future low expectations and thus preventing their sons' ability to achieve up to their full potential. Parents were concerned that a consequence of this stereotype would be that their sons could be misdiagnosed as having a learning disability. Sonya Anderson counteracted this stereotype in public settings, "If we're out in public and he's singing a song or a tune, and I'm like, nu-uh, I don't want anyone thinking that's what we listen to. We know our A-B-C's, we know our numbers. I don't want anyone thinking...that he's not going to be a well-educated Black little boy" (Interview 1, December 17, 2017).

Karen Moore counteracted the stereotype of unintelligent by encouraging her child to speak out and to speak well in class. When describing the stereotype of African American boys not being intelligent Karen stated, "That they're not smart...hey it's okay to show the teacher how smart you are. It's okay to talk up in class. And we get on him about articulating and, being clear with is diction..." (Interview 1, December 15, 2016). Parents used various strategies in order to counteract the stereotype that their sons were not intelligent.

One of these strategies was to spend time working with their sons at home to ensure that they were on target in meeting learning standards. Another strategy was to be present in the classroom and to communicate with the teachers regularly to make sure that teachers would not have lower expectations of their sons.

**Single parent homes.** Frequently, parents referenced the stereotype of African American children as coming from single parent homes. This stereotype of single, unwed African American mothers with absent co-parents is perpetuated in the news, politics, and other places in society (Punyuanunt-Carter, 2008; Tyree, 2011; Adams-Bass, 2014; McAdoo, 2009). Samantha Matthews provided an example of how the stereotype of single, unwed African American mothers

played out in her typical interactions with the mother of one of her son's classmates, stating, "She asked me a bunch of questions about...how long we've been married, is this my only kid...that's when she said we can do play dates" (Interview 2, February 7, 2017). Following, they also racially socialized their sons to view two parent homes as normal for African American families and set marriage before having children as an expectation for their sons' futures. For instance, Karen Moore pointed out that she was bothered by a commercial that featured an African American mother with three sons and no father present, stating that she feels that the commercial is an example of how the media negatively portrays African American children as coming from single parent families. Describing how her family counteracts the stereotype of absent African American fathers, she stated,

Your father has never abandoned you. He has been there...He was always present. I can say, go to your day...he sees Dad cooking. He sees Dad doing laundry. He sees his Grandpa doing the same thing...this is what a Black man does. He does everything for his family." (Interview 2, Karen Moore, January 18, 2017)

As with the Moore family for other families in this study, normalizing traditional family structure was an important way that they racially socialized their sons.

**Misbehaving.** Every single parent in this study referenced that their racial socialization behavior was influenced by the stereotype of African American boys not behaving appropriately or misbehaving in school and other social settings. James Matthews described a European American man that he and his son encountered as being surprised that his sons were well-behaved. According to James, "But by him observing what they said and not being rude and obnoxious and belligerent in the bathroom it made him feel like we were accepted, they were on the right track...Not so much if he had seen somebody of another ethnicity or race he wouldn't have

thought ...that's an anomaly" (Interview 2, February 7, 2017). As will be described later in the findings section of this study, parent's racial socialization behavior focused largely on teaching their sons to perform in social settings in ways that would counteract these stereotypes.

Throughout the data, parents indicated their awareness of discriminatory stereotypes that are applied to their sons. These stereotypes were a core factor in how they racially socialized their African American sons. The stereotypes described in this section led to the second factor that influenced how parents racially socialized their sons that emerged from the data. Due to discriminatory stereotypes, resulting institutional and structural racism influenced how parents racially socialized their African American sons

### **Accessing Developmentally Appropriate Cultural Resources**

Parents in the study drew on various types of cultural resources conceptualized as Community Cultural Wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005 and Yosso & García (2007). Parents reported available resources as influencing factors in how they racially socialized their sons. Drawing on Yosso's, (2005) and Yosso's and García's (2007) CCW in examining the data, I identified developmentally appropriate culturally based capital that participants accessed to racially socialize their son. In this section I describe the types of cultural capital that middle class parents of African American sons accessed, along with data excerpts.

Table 7 Cultural Resources

Type of capital	Example from Interview
Purpose – recognizing that your life has purpose based on what other members of your culture have achieved.	<p>“I want him to be normalized around Black doctors, Black teachers, Black attorneys, Black political leaders...” (Interview 1, Karen Moore, December 15, 2016).</p> <p>“Since [my husband] finished his Master’s program. He doesn’t want to walk, but he’s going to walk so that his children can see him walk...so they can see he has a family, he has a full-time job and he still was able to complete a degree. So it’s never too late...if it’s a goal, you can always try to reach to attain it” (Interview 3, Samantha Matthews, March 19, 2017).</p>
Relational – family, close friends, community.	<p>“Your dad or one of your uncles to be your role model” (Interview 3, Karen Moore, February 22, 2017)</p> <p>“I think his cousin is a good role model for him because he does well in school and is involved and is a good kid...I think different members of his family, as well...so just mostly family members, older cousins” (Interview 3, Marilyn Miller, March 28, 2017)</p>
Operational – successfully operating in a racist society	<p>“Just knowing when a situation is negative. Knowing how to navigate those types of situations...situational awareness, knowing where people are coming from, knowing if they have bad intentions and how to navigate that...be honest, tell the truth, equip them with the knowledge to be able to navigate situations...” (Interview 2, Peter Taylor, February 7, 2017).</p> <p>“When we decided [our son’s] name it wouldn’t have been a name like DeVante...just because specifically I was thinking about his resume and stuff like that. So I do think about what’s going to help him navigate more easily in the world...” (Interview 3, Marilyn Miller, March 28, 2017).</p>

Type of capital	Example from Interview
Associational- social networks, such as the Urban league, NAACP, SCLC, fraternities, HBCUs	<p>“And you’re willing to pull whatever alumni strings, whatever network strings...” (Interview 1, Karen Moore, December 15, 2016).</p> <p>“[Our son] knows that we went to HBCUs...that we went to Black schools...but part of being in a HBCU is being Greek...And they know that it is a Black organization for men and they know that it’s a brotherhood...to us that’s just another way to reinforce that Black men...Black men are not necessarily the stereotype of Black...the HBCUs and the Greek organization really influences how they feel about themselves and connections that they make with their Blackness and feeling good” (Interview 2, James Matthews, February 7, 2017).</p>
Counteraction – being an activist or advocate	<p>“...and I’m going to have to be an advocate for him” (Interview 1, Marilyn Miller, December 14, 2016).</p> <p>“Be involved, very involved. That’s one of the reasons that I stay in academia...gives me the most flexibility with my schedule so I can be present at school for him...If you’re going to tell me something is wrong with my son, you better have receipts” (Interview 1, Karen Moore, December 15, 2016).</p> <p>“To be involved. One of the biggest things...as a parent, I’m like there’s no excuse. I just feel like parent involvement says a lot because someone can judge your child or think different things or accuse them of stuff in school and stuff like that, but if you don’t have a voice, if you’re not present then that’s all it is really” (Interview 1, Peter Taylor, December 15, 2016.)</p>

**Purpose capital.** As further detailed below, all of the middle-class parents of African American sons in this study drew on purpose capital in ways that were often implicit. They did so by providing aspirational role models through exposure to African American doctors and other service providers and intentionally searching for homes in communities with middle and upper middle-class families and businesses, for example. In providing these models, the parents were sending the message to their children that their lives had purpose and they could achieve beyond what some may believe they were capable of.

**Relational capital.** Most of the families in the study drew on relational capital wherein family members and friends who are as close as family, were resources that they drew on to racially socialize their sons. Participants in this study had biological family members as well as friends who had become adopted or pretend aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins. Only the Taylor family did not have access to relational capital. Evelyn Taylor expressed disappointment in its absence and stated that this type of wealth was lacking in the African American community at large. Evelyn stated,

I guess compared to when I was growing up, I don't really feel like there's a community for African Americans anymore, where it was a village. I know that's been one of my struggles since I've been a parent. We don't really have any other family, and it just seems like it's not a strong community as it was when I was growing up. Someone didn't have to lean on blood relative to... my neighbor would say, no. So I don't really... I don't know... that... that kind of breaks my heart in the African American community because I feel like we just don't have much guidance from each other. I've talked to my husband about this just us maybe mentoring and stuff like... I remember growing up, and it just seems like we had people to look out for us. I don't know if it was in the church or neighbors or... I don't know if the other communities... I feel like are more tight knit, I hate to say it, but even just my daughter and stuff in school, and I just see how everyone has... a village and I... I don't know that I necessarily feel like as an African American we have that village anymore. (Interview 1, December 15, 2014)

Evelyn's perception of not having access to relational capital was influenced by two factors. She was raised in a town with her family and extended family close by and now lives in a city away from them. I believe that she wished for the same experience she had growing up where the



children were surrounded by real family, not friends who are adopted as family. The Taylor family had been in the current city for only a few years. In that time they had moved once, and were in a temporary apartment until the family decides which area of town that will purchase a house. Once they are settled, they may have more of an opportunity to build the community for the family that Evelyn is seeking, and have access to relational resources in racially socializing her son.

**Operational capital.** Racial socialization practices of all of the parents in this study were heavily centered on operational capital; teaching their sons how to operate effectively in a racist society. Parents did this by teaching their children how to socialize in ways that counter negative stereotypes about African American boys.

**Associational capital.** Historically Black Colleges and Universities are two sources of associational capital that families cited as influential factors in how they racially socialized their sons. Five of the ten parents who participated in this study were graduates of HBCUs, and throughout the three interviews, emphasized that HBCUs are an important social network for their families. They remained affiliated with the HBCUs they attended and promoted them to their sons as institutions that African American boys could take pride in attending in the future. Two of the fathers in the study were members of Greek organizations. These fathers indicated that their sons' ability to see them as members in these organizations, particularly with the emphasis on brotherhood and community service, provided important models to their sons. They believed that their sons' participation in doing community service projects alongside them and their fraternity brothers would instill a sense of pride and help counteract stereotypes associated with African American boys and men.

**Counteraction capital.** Accessing counteraction capital means that one performs as an activist or advocate. All of the families in this study talked about being advocates for their

children or being involved in their children's schools once the boys reach the age of kindergarten. The parents believed that their participation and involvement in their son's schools would minimize teachers from discriminating against their sons, prevent their sons from being mislabeled or misdiagnosed, ensure their child would perform well academically, and counteract the stereotype that parents of African American sons are complacent about their sons' education.

### **Demographic Profile Matters**

The next factor that influenced how parents racially socialized their sons was the demographic profile of the son and family. The age of the child, gender of the child and of the parent, class status of the parent during their own upbringing, and the family's current class status, were components of the demographic profile that factored into how the sons were racially socialized and will be described in the next sections.

**Age of the child.** Every single family also grappled with their sons' young age as a factor. The majority of the parents in the study expressed that because of their son's age they didn't speak directly to them about racism or race, but that they thought about how they would in the future. At the same time, however, they stated that they would have to teach their sons appropriate behavior much earlier than parents of other races. For example, in interview one when I asked if it were important for their son to understand what it means to be an African American boy in the United States before he reaches kindergarten, James Miller stated, "No, not before. I think that can happen later." Later in the interview however, he stated, that African American boys have to know right and wrong much earlier than everybody else, stating, "...earlier, yeah, than you do for...some things other cultures can get away with and African American boys cannot" (Interview 1, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016). In the second interview almost two months later, James stated, "...So I will say this has been a hard concept for me as far as how to introduce,

when to introduce without making them fearful and making sure it's age appropriate, and they can understand" (Interview 2, February 7, 2017). Other participants frequently expressed similar concerns about not wanting the child to be fearful, as well as uncertainty about the child's level of understanding about race and racism due to the child's age.

Parents indicated that they shielded their children from racism and gave implicit racial socialization messages until there was some indication from the child that he was ready for explicit messages or a situation arose that caused the parent to feel the need to give explicit messages. Indications from the child that he was ready for direct conversations or processes included the child noticing differences in physical characteristics or in treatment he received from others and behaving in ways that the parent felt validated negative stereotypes. For example, Peter Taylor stated, "...he's too young...so just in my parental day-to-day I think indirectly, I might try to steer him away from racism or...I will have a conversation with him because racism is coming in all types of forms, so eventually growing up, we will have more conversations about that...right now it's very, you know, short and brief...then once he gets older, we can start having more in-depth conversations, more detailed conversations" (Interview 2, February 7, 2017). Karen Moore provided an example of a situation arising that indicated the need to begin to provide explicit racial socialization messages:

What's so sad is we've, had to start teaching him that from three. To him it's, oh that's just my friend. He doesn't notice. Yeah, but when your friend's dad is around he doesn't play with you. He doesn't act like he knows you. And it, it's been a very painful lesson to teach him that just because your friend can do that doesn't mean that you can. And that's the most simple way...It's hard. And he looks like, why? And I'm like baby, sometimes it's just different. (Interview 1, December 15, 2016)

Due to the young age of their children parents most often racially socialized their sons in implicit ways through genres further described later in this chapter.

**Gender of the child and parent.** Every single family stated that gender impacts how they racially socialized their sons. The families further stated that they felt that raising an African American son was uniquely challenging. As noted in my field notes, two of the parents cried during the interview when they answered the question about what it means to be the parent of an African American boy. Sonya Anderson cried while stating that she found out that she was having a son around the time Trayvon Martin was killed. Sonya expressed that she realized that the same stereotypes that caused Trayvon to be killed would be applied to her unborn son. Across the data, it could be seen that parents experienced a mixture of joy and sadness about parenting African American sons. For example,

I will be honest, when I found out that we were pregnant and then when I found out his gender, I actually cried. I was very scared for him. I was excited, but there was a part of me that mourned because I knew what his future might look like...It's beautiful because I have my own chocolate boy, but it's also very scary for us. (Interview 1, Karen Moore, December 15, 2016)

They were excited about expanding their families while fearful for their son's safety in a way that they described unnecessary for parents of children of other genders and races. All of the parents expressed worry about the institutional and structural racism that specifically targeted African American boys. These parents aspired for their sons to be judged based on their individual character rather than stereotypes. Evelyn Taylor stated,

I worry I guess because he is an African American male. I don't want him to be just put in a group...I don't want him to be judged. I want his actions to be a reflection of him

and not really just group him into something that might not be who he actually represents.

(Interview 1, December 15, 2014)

Overwhelmingly, parents expressed that the raising an African American boy is challenging and emotionally charged due to the intersections of race and gender in the United States. Further, as I describe in the next section racial socialization parenting behavior was also influenced by the intersection of the parents' race and gender.

My original plan was to collect data by interviewing at least one of the child's parents, regardless of gender. However, in two of the initial interviews, mothers expressed that fathers would most likely have a different response to how they racially socialize their sons due to the father's own gender-based experiences with race, and that their sons would experience racism similar to their fathers. For instance,

But as a woman, the racism that I sort of experience isn't to the degree that my husband experiences...I think my experiences are more covert, more subtle. No one grabs their purse when I walk into an elevator. But if my husband is behind me they do. (Interview 1, Karen Moore, December 15, 2016)

In interviews where both parents were present, the mother most often relied on the father to provide responses about how they currently or will in the future racially socialize their sons. It was evident that mothers believed that fathers had a better understanding of the factors applied to their sons and were better suited based on their own gender-based experiences to provide leadership and make decisions in their sons' racial socialization.

**Class status of the parent during their upbringing.** Parent's class status during their own upbringing influenced how they racially socialized their sons. Three sets of parents expressed that differences between class statuses during each of their own childhoods and

adolescences produced differences in how they each approached racially socializing their child.

For instance,

My husband grew up in Miami and he grew up sort of in a lower socioeconomic status.

And he, when he was younger, because like he didn't know his father and I think he saw his father maybe twice his whole childhood, and his mother was not the best mother, got involved in let's say delinquent type activities...he can see something that [his son] is doing now and fast forward 15 years and reach the absolute wrong conclusion about what it means in a 3-year-old. (Interview 1, Marilyn Miller, December 14, 2016)

Evelyn Taylor (Interview 1, December 15, 2016) highlighted differences in socioeconomic status during her own and her husband's Peter's upbringing. Evelyn described how in her working-class community she did not experience racism because only other African American people surrounded her. However, Peter's family was the only middle-class African American family in his community and even with all of the opportunities that afforded him, he did experience racism. Therefore, Evelyn and Peter's different class-based experiences during childhood was a factor in how they approached and contributed to the racial socialization of their son.

**Current class status.** Frequently, parents indicated that their middle-class status was a factor that influenced how they racially socialized their sons. For instance, due to class markers including income and education these parents expressed that they were perceived more favorably by European Americans than African American parents from lower socioeconomic class status communities. The middle-class parents in this study were also better able to provide access to resources that would help their children succeed in spite of structural and institutional racism. Karen Moore (Interview 1, December 15, 2016) stated that European American people have told

her that she is “not like a Black person” which was, to her, an egregious statement. Karen went on to state,

We’ve already seen that [socioeconomic status] makes a difference where he lives, who his parents are, what we sound like, what we look like when we pick him up... We have an awareness that other parents may not have... I hate to say it because I don’t want to sound elitist, but there are some buffers. There is some awareness. (Interview 1, December 15, 2016)

At the intersections of race and class, parents were able to access certain types of resources, many financial, including the ability to purchase homes in particular communities and to enroll their children in schools that were deemed more academically rigorous, than possible for families from lower socioeconomic class status communities. However, having access provided opportunities and buffers but did not prevent their sons from experiencing racism. Financial resources were only one type of resource that the families in this study had access to.

As can be seen in this section, factors that the parents identified influencing how they racially socialized their sons indicates that they understand how race, class, and gender intersect in their child’s lives. In addition to identifying ideologically-based stereotypes and other factors described in this section, parents were agentive in addressing them using age-appropriate genres and processes.

### **Social and Emotional Developmentally Appropriate Genres**

Parents’ attention to their sons’ social and emotional development during racial socialization could also be seen throughout the data. All families overwhelmingly reported that nurturing their child’s social and emotional development was a critical part of their racial socialization parenting behavior. As will be described in the following sections, parents’ focus on social and

emotional development was intended to build self-esteem, counteract negative stereotypes that their sons would encounter, and keep their sons safe.

The home environment and diverse settings were contexts in which parents used social and emotional developmentally appropriate genres to racially socialize their sons. Every single family throughout the three interviews referenced being intentional in looking for opportunities to expose their sons to diverse settings that included African Americans who are doing well. Providing diverse settings was a way for families to provide exposure for their sons in ways that normalized diversity, particularly those settings in which African Americans were successful. For example, parents intentionally chose diverse cities to settle their families, neighborhoods in which to live, and schools to enroll their sons. James Matthews stated, “It’s very intentional...the type of area we live in, for them to see African-Americans all the time, running businesses” (Interview 1, December 14, 2017). Parents sought out specific settings to racially socialize their sons even to the point of making sacrifices in other areas of their lives. For instance, James went on to say later in the interview,

We have to drive across town to experience something as simple as Hippo Hop or one of those jumpy house places...Finding...forms of good food, healthy food...We have to go to the White communities...where the population of, of White people are bigger...Schools, school systems in African American communities are not as affluent as those in White areas. Public, private, charter, it doesn’t matter” (Interview 1, December 14, 2017).

It is important to note that James’s response indicated that middle-class African American communities don’t always have resources equal to those in middle-class European American communities, which is an example of how class status and race intersect in significant ways.



The Moore family intentionally moved to the same major southeastern city and state just described to provide the diversity they wanted their son to experience. Karen Moore stated, Us moving here...part of the reason we moved here from where we were living...I love coming to this city and seeing us being magical...We are doing it here and I wanted our son to see that as normal...We researched very heavily neighborhoods before we moved into them. So right now, we live in Centerville. And my husband loves the area called Park Central. And I'm like okay. I don't see Black people walking around Park Central. And so, we pay attention to diversity everywhere we go trying to protect [our son] in the hopes that he won't stick out like a sore thumb. (Interview 1, December 15, 2016)

As the excerpts illustrate, raising their sons in the context of diverse states, cities, and neighborhoods was important to parents' racial socialization parenting behavior.

Within the context of the home and diverse settings, the language based and non-language-based genres that parents utilized to racially socialize their sons were books, toys, artwork, and conversations. The messages that the parents transmitted through these genres were those that the parents perceived as being developmentally appropriate and evolved over time based on their child's development.

**Books.** Families used a variety of books, including books that were beyond the reading level of the child, but could be used to provide information to children on specific topics. These books were stored on bookshelves in the homes and displayed on coffee tables in family rooms and living rooms. The Matthews family displayed an African American encyclopedia that contains rich images and words. James said that the book was used to convey to his son "that [White people are] not the only scientists and...science that Black people have contributed to.

There's a lot of wealth and knowledge that has been attributed to Black people that a lot of times is never mentioned" (Interview 2, February 7, 2017).

Every single family relied heavily on children's literature to racially socialize their sons. They chose books for their sons that have African Americans as main characters and that teach African American history in age appropriate ways. The parents expressed that children's literature was a key way that they provided messages about race to their sons, particularly messages that served to develop the child's positive self-image. Parents also chose children's literature that provided African American history lessons. The photo below provides an example of children's books from the Matthews family home that include history and messages of self-esteem and pride.



*Figure 1 Children's Books*

**Artwork.** Several of the families displayed artwork in their homes that depict African American people, both well-known and less well known. In some cases, the families wanted the children to grow up seeing people who share physical characteristics as them shown in positive ways and did not feel the need to point out or tell a story about the artwork. In other cases, parents had photos or statues of historical figures including Martin Luther King, Jr. and told the children age appropriate historical details about the person. Not all of the art in the homes used to racially socialize African American boys depicted people. The picture below shows a photo of a cotton wreath that I observed in the Moore family home.



*Figure 2 Artwork in home*

Karen described how the family used the wreath to racially socialize their son stating,

Our history. Like this...the cotton in your shirt has a story. People used to pick these, you know. And so, we wanted that in our home so when he gets older...and he just sort of feels it now and touches it. (Interview 2, January 18, 2017)

In addition to the cotton wreath, the Millers also had cotton that had not been processed in a bowl in their home that their son could explore freely. For this family, the cotton is an important, historical way to engage in racial socialization because it represents the history and treatment of African people in America, the sacrifices they have made, and their resilience. Karen indicated that right now as her son is 3, he simply knows that cotton is a material used to make clothing and other items. However, as he gets older, the family would progressively and age appropriately teach their son about the history of the connection between the cotton that he has explored over the years and chattel slavery in the United States. They would also be able to teach him how pathological stereotypes about African American boys originated with chattel slavery.

As described, the racial socialization messages provided through artwork in the home environment were implicit and subtle, but were provided with the intentions of instilling confidence and pride, teaching history, and providing an introduction to more explicit lessons that would come as the child ages.

**Toys.** In addition to books and artwork, when purchasing toys that have human characteristics, all of the families sought out toys featuring African Americans (e.g., superhero figurines). A few parents stated that because of their child's exposure to pop culture, they purchased European American action figures and dolls that their sons requested, but were committed to ensuring that those were not the only toys their sons owned. Similarly to books, parents used toys as a genre for racial socialization to instill racial pride and high self-esteem.

**Conversations.** Because they were aware of stereotypes applied to their sons, parents used conversations as a genre to racially socialize their sons. These conversations focused on social development by teaching the boys to follow directions immediately, look people in the eye

when speaking with them, shake hands upon meeting someone, dress neatly at all times, and not speak loudly or be rambunctious in public settings.

The parents also used conversations as a genre to teach their sons to regulate their emotions in ways that they thought particularly important for African American boys in order to counteract negative stereotypes. For example, Marilyn Miller explained,

I've been working with him on how to manage his emotions, deep breathe or calm down...being able to manage his emotions is probably much more important for him as an African American boy than it might be for someone if they were a girl or even a little boy of a different race. (Interview 1, December 14, 2017)

As with books, toys, and artwork, parents used conversations to instill a sense of pride in their sons, their abilities, and their physical characteristics and to ensure that their sons would survive and thrive in the face of racism. One of the ways that the Miller family tended to their son's emotional development was to help him to take pride in his African American heritage and to be aware that he has agency. Marilyn stated, "One thing that I really want to make sure that he gets is the message, less of victimization and more of like, look, you come from really resilient people...look how well we're doing. Or look what sort of people we come from" (Interview 3, March 28, 2017). In this instance, the family was using both personal family references, as well as historical references that the child could take pride in and to let their son know that African Americans before him had been successful while coping with structural and institutional racism. Evelyn Taylor explained why instilling self-confidence was critical to their son's ability to thrive in the face of racism. Evelyn stated, "I feel like if they're self-confident, then it doesn't even matter what an ignorant person might say to them" (Interview 1, December 15, 2016). Although expressed differently, both of these family's responses demonstrate that parents felt that

attending to their emotional development is a part of racial socialization that serves to build resilience.

Some of the parents were aware that the physical characteristics of African American boys might be viewed negatively. Karen Moore described the first time she heard her son use what she considered to be a negative term to describe his hair texture.

And Sunday he described one of his friend's hair another Black boy... his friend's hair is tangled. And... that's not a word we use, so I said, 'why would you say his hair is tangled?' And he was like, 'it's tangled.' I'm like, 'no, it's curly just like your hair is curly and grandma's hair is curly and mommy's hair is curly and daddy's hair is curly.' I said, 'who did... who called his hair tangled?' And he named one of the White kids. And I thought, 'okay.' So, we went through this whole thing of like your hair isn't tangled, it's curly. (Interview 2, January 18, 2017)

Karen is aware that children as young as 3 are beginning to view physical characteristics as negative or positive and that in the United States, African American children's physical characteristics including hair texture are viewed negatively. She also knew that their son would learn that his skin color would also be viewed as less desirable. It was important for the Moore family that how others perceive his physical appearance, not lower their son's self-esteem. Karen stated that it was important to them that, "... no matter what the world says about his color, that he knows that he's beautiful" (Interview 1, December 15, 2016).

Parents often attend to their children's social and emotional development, but for parents of African American sons, my analysis revealed that these areas of development are significantly influenced by the intersections of gender and race.

To summarize, the findings in this study revealed that middle class parents' racial socialization parenting behavior with their 3 and 4-year old African American sons was influenced by discriminatory stereotypes present in the United States. Other factors, including the intersections of the child's and the parent's race, gender, and socioeconomic class status also influenced how the parents racially socialized their sons. Types of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, and Yosso & Garca, 2007) were factors that influenced racial socialization, in that resources at the parent's disposal contributed to how they socialized their sons. Further, their awareness of the discriminatory stereotypes associated with African American boys caused the parents to use particular genres and processes in the home and diverse settings to racially socialize their sons. This study demonstrates that due to the intersections of race, class, and gender, parents of middle class African American boys begin using various genres to racially socialize their sons as young as 3 years of age. In the next chapter, I will provide a thorough discussion of the findings of this study.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

Parents of very young children believe that their sons already have, or will experience racism. Findings support the idea that due to stereotypes associated with African American boys, parents of sons as young as 3 find it necessary to include racial socialization as a parenting behavior. In the following sections, I discuss the findings in relation to both research questions. I will discuss the importance of the findings, explain the scholarly and practical implications of the findings, and make suggestions for further research.

### **Discussion of findings related to the first research question**

This qualitative study answered two questions. The first question was: What factors (e.g., stereotypes, ideologies, values, beliefs, age, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) influence

how middle-class African American parents racially socialize their sons? The findings were that stereotypes grounded in United States history; the age of their child; the gender of their child, and the parent gender; the social class status of the parent during their own upbringing; the current family social class status; cultural resources available to the family; and institutional and structural racism influenced how parents racially socialized their 3 and 4-year-old sons.

As shown through the data, discriminatory stereotypes grounded in United States history from chattel slavery to the present (Ellis, Rowley, Nellum, & Smith, 2015; Tyler, 2014) influence the need for, and how parents racially socialize their 3 and 4-year-old sons. For instance, because parents are aware that since the period of chattel slavery until the present time, African American men and boys have been stereotyped as being aggressive and threatening. To counteract this stereotype parenting behavior focuses on social and emotional development with the goal of ensuring that their sons behave in ways that are socially acceptable, although not necessarily developmentally appropriate. Further, true to the critical race theory tenet of the permanence of racism, the families in the study did not express throughout the 3-interview cycle that they were hopeful that their sons would not experience racism in their lifetimes. Therefore, parents do not wonder if, but when each of the stereotypes and ideologies that emerged from the data would be applied to their sons, and how they would work to counter the stereotype while ensuring their son's positive development.

Throughout data collection, parents mentioned their sons' young ages as a factor in racial socialization. For the parents in this study, the selection of genres, message, and strategies and tailoring of these in age appropriate ways was a recurring consideration. A major concern for parents of young boys is that while they believe it is important for their sons to know how they are perceived in society, they grapple with when it might be appropriate to send explicit



messages that won't negatively impact their sons' emotional development. Ultimately, parent's messages evolve over time, as their sons grow older, and progress from implicit to explicit (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001). For the boys in this study, racial socialization messages were most often transmitted through toys, books, artwork, and conversations in the home and in diverse settings. Further, the focus of racial socialization is most often on their son's social and emotional development. Parents of African American sons have the task of teaching their very young sons to socially interact with others in early learning settings and society in ways that may be beyond what is appropriate to their sons' ages to both protect their children from immediate academic harm, to physical harm in the future. For instance, 3 and 4-year old children are yet learning how to control their emotions, so when they are upset it is age appropriate for them to hit, throw temper tantrums, and even throw things. However, when 3 and 4-year old African American boys exhibit these behaviors they are often labeled as out of control, aggressive, threatening, or violent and are faced with school discipline up to expulsion. Conversely, European American children who are still learning to regulate their emotions are viewed through the lens of age appropriateness, and are thus supported and guided in learning to regulate their own emotions (Collins, 2004; Hiedmann & Jospheh, 2004; Monroe, 2005).

Age is an important consideration in racial socialization (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001) because parents do not wish to instill fear in their 3 and 4 year-old-sons while they are too young to understand racism, stereotypes, and real and perceived threats to their safety and well-being. Ultimately parents strive to ensure that their African American sons have the freedom to be children and have joyful childhoods before the reality of racism impacts them in ways in which that their parents cannot shield them.

It is important to acknowledge that both African American boys and girls face racism grounded in United States history. This racism leads to outcomes such as disproportionate school discipline for boys and girls (Monroe, 2005; Allen, 2013; Barbarin, 2010). The difference is that stereotypes that are applied are based on gender. Following, African American parents are aware of the stereotypes and other factors related to gender and racially socialize their children accordingly. The gender of the parent is also a factor in racial socialization parenting behavior. For instance, men and women engage in double consciousness differently based on how the world views them. Therefore, their approaches to racial socialization are different with the same gendered parent identifying more with the child of their same gender. The racial stereotypes that are applied to fathers are based on gender and are, or will likewise be applied to their sons, therefore fathers have strong ideas and beliefs about how their sons should be socialized, and feel connected to their sons' experiences (Allen, 2013).

Class identity differences between parents during their upbringing results in differences in how they approach racial socialization and their viewpoints on what messages their children should receive, how they should receive the messages, and how soon they receive the messages. These differences are due to class-based experiences the parent had during their own upbringing. The data analysis in this study uncovered that some parents raised in lower socioeconomic class status communities had less exposure to people of other races, and came to adulthood with fewer experiences with racism which caused them not fully understand how racism may impact their young sons, and thereby caused uncertainty about their young sons' racial experiences in diverse settings. Some of the parents who were raised in middle to upper middle socioeconomic status class communities felt more equipped to teach their children how to interact with people from

other races and to help them cope with racism. Within family unit, differences in parents' class status during upbringing results in different approaches to racial socialization parenting behavior.

Families are easily able to identify, and society readily values the resources that money is able to provide for children. However, African American families have resources available that are not contingent upon affordability. Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), as defined by Yosso, (2005), and Yosso & Garcíá, (2007) are important resources that African American families access regardless of their socioeconomic class status. The types of wealth that are available culturally are as important as financial resources for racial socialization and aid children's healthy racial socialization and long-term survival within the context of a society in which they are certain to face institutional and structural racism.

The presence of institutional and structural racism in the United States cannot be separated from parenting behavior for parents of African American boys. For instance, tragically, as the families in this study expressed, from the moment they learn that a boy will join their families, their thoughts go to the history of race in the United States, specifically how negatively boys and men are perceived and treated in this country. Parents' hopes of institutions and structures changing positively in their sons' interests are shallow, therefore, their parenting behavior includes utilizing the genres described in study to racially socialize their children.

In their review of research on racial socialization Hughes, Smith, Stevenson, Rodriquez, Johnson & Spicer (2006) synthesized the research on racial socialization in families, and found that four major themes are present throughout the literature. These themes were cultural socialization, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust, and egalitarianism. In this dissertation study, the genres parents used to racially socialize their 3 and 4-year-old sons based on the factors that they identified in question one are congruent with the theme of cultural socialization in that the

parents explicitly and implicitly focused on instilling pride by having conversations; providing home environments that transmitted positive messages through Afrocentric artwork, books, and toys; choice of neighborhood and school; and choice of service providers including doctors.

Findings from question two will be discussed in the next section.

### **Discussion of findings related to the second research question**

In this section, I will discuss findings used to answer the second research question concerning language-based and non-language-based genres parents used to racially socialize their sons. While the first research question was concerned with factors that influence how parents racially socialize their African American sons, the second question related to the genres parents used to racially socialize their 3 and 4-year old sons. The second research question was: What genres do middle class African American parents use to racially socialize their 3 and 4-year-old sons? Parents utilize social and emotional developmentally appropriate genres to racially socialize their sons. While many parents attend to their children's emotional development and strive to instill self-confidence, confidence in their abilities, and their appearance, for parents of African American sons, that message is layered with teachings about race, racism, stereotypes, and ideologies that are cornerstones of the United States of America (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Suizzo, Robinson & Pahlke, 2008). Therefore, parents teach their sons to have confidence and pride *in spite of* the stereotypes and discrimination they will encounter *due to* their race. Socially, African American parents teach their children hard lessons including the danger in questioning authority that their,, peers may freely question, and not expressing their emotions in ways that they peers may have the freedom to express their own.

Aside from early learning settings, the home environment is where children spend the majority of their time, and where much of their learning takes place, and is a context in which

they are racially socialized. Similarly to how teachers intentionally select genres in the classroom environment to meet learning goals for children, African American parents select genres in their home environments for racial socialization (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph & Nickerson, 2002). In the home environment books are a genre for racial socialization. Books provide information about, and access to historical figures and events and transmit messages about pride and self-confidence. However, it is sometimes difficult for families to find developmentally appropriate children's literature and toys that depict African Americans in ways that transmit the positive messages the parents want to transmit to their children. It is paradoxical that while the home environment is often designed as a welcoming, safe, and comfortable environment, for African American families the home is filled with genres for racial socialization that have uncomfortable meanings and are meant to teach significant and hard lessons about race and discrimination.

Diverse settings are another context in which parents racially social their sons. Often, when people speak of diverse setting, they are indicating that the goal is for their children to have exposure to those different from them. African American families in this study intentionally sought out diverse settings with the goal of providing their children examples of racial and ethnic differences between themselves and others, but equally as important to these families was providing their children access to those whose race was the same and whose social class was the same or higher than theirs. This sameness was important for the normalization of traditional family structure and career and educational success.

In the previous sections I have discussed finding from the research questions. Various factors influence how parents racially socialize their 3 and 4-year old African American sons. Following, parents use language-based and non-language-based genres for racial socialization.

In the following sections, I will discuss the implications of this study and suggestions for further research.

### **Implications**

There are important implications of this study for scholars, teacher education programs, early learning teachers, and parents of African American boys. In the sections that follow, I will discuss these implications.

**Scholarly Implications.** It is important to interpret this study in the context of its methodological design. For instance, studies that use deficit frameworks and that are not intersectional in nature result in the pathologization and generalization of African American children and families. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that researchers who study African American children use critical theories and methodologies including critical discourse analysis, intersectionality, critical race theory, and community cultural wealth to learn about their experiences. Employing these critical lenses provides an opportunity for researchers to avoid focusing narrowly and consequently leaving important information uncovered.

To illustrate the importance of how including critical paradigms, such as intersectionality, can serve to yield information that may remain uncovered otherwise, I refer to the well-known and widely respected scholar Lareau (2002), and her important work with African American and European American families. Although the role of class status in providing opportunities for all children is well researched by Lareau (2002), the importance of using critical frameworks when studying African American children and families is also evident in the absence of these frameworks in her studies. Notably Lareau, argues that African American and European American middle-class parents engage in almost the exact same types of parenting behaviors. According to Lareau, there is little difference in the daily lives of African American and European

American middle-class children. Therefore, Lareau concludes that social class is more important than race in children's day-to-day lives. However, the parents in this dissertation study expressed that race plays more of a significant role than class in their children's daily lives, and particularly in their parenting behavior. If Lareau had used CRT to frame her study, she would have possibly asked different questions and likely would have come to a different conclusion. Lareau makes mention of intersecting identities, but does not actually examine the participants using an intersectional framework. Applying these lenses might have helped Lareau to learn that while the African American middle-class has experienced some level of success and are able to provide their children with certain opportunities, they have not been able to overcome structural and institutional racism, and therefore, their parenting and their children's daily lives are different from their European American counterparts, and that they were perhaps drawing on CCW as conceived by Yosso, (2005) and Yosso & García, (2007) to help their children achieve, and that their behavior is influenced by race, rather than class. For instance, a couple of the middle-class families in this study expressed that they stress immediate compliance with their children, providing no room for reasoning or negotiation in attempts to keep their children safe from disproportionate school discipline and in encounters with police.

Much of the research pathologizes African American children and families and does not attend to the agentive, productive strategies that families are engaging in and the resources they draw on. In research, this pathologizing takes the form of the application of deficit theoretical frameworks, rather than through lenses such as CCW that views them through a lens that looks at the cultural wealth that they have.

There are not as many studies that focus on racial socialization with 3 and 4-year-old children as compared to older children and the findings in the research that is available vary due

to study design (Suizzo, Robinson & Pahlke, 2008). According to Suizzo, Robinson and Pahlke, (2008) studies on racial socialization with preschool children, "...have not consistently measured and compared the same dimensions, or they have used different methods to measure the same dimension, yielding results that may not be equivalent across studies" (p. 290). It is important for scholars to build understanding on racial socialization with very young children, while also acknowledging that perceived inconsistencies in findings may be related to how the social identities of study participants interconnect.

In the next section I will discuss practical implications of the findings of this study.

**Practical Implications.** The findings in this study illustrate and amplify the concerns that parents of African American sons have in regard to the inequity their children experience in early learning and social settings. The findings also illustrate that parents grapple with how and when to appropriately teach their sons ways to successfully cope with racism in the United States. Therefore, it is important that professional development in programs like Head Start and universal prekindergarten programs and university teacher preparation programs utilize evidence based practices to meet the needs of African American boys. These practices must be those which do not pathologize African American boys, and thereby, seek to control their behavior and consequently their self-images. The day-to-day practices of early learning teachers should also center the parents' voices and experiences. Along these lines, professional development and teacher preparation programs should be designed so that preservice and in service teachers have opportunities to explore the history of race in the United States of America through the lens of CRT, and how learn about how African American boys continue to be placed at jeopardy due to their race. Finally, these courses and trainings should require in service and preservice teachers to examine



their known and unexplored racial biases and stereotypes and to reflect on how they may negatively impact children (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The parents in this study were active in parenting their sons, and thoughtful about how to best prepare them to live in a racist society. Even as they actively engaged with their sons, the findings highlight that parents are not always sure how to racially socialize their sons in ways appropriate for the ages of their children. However, parents do recognize that they are the best advocates for their children in early learning and other settings. Therefore, it is important that there are opportunities for teachers of young boys and their families to come together so that teachers may hear directly from families about the unique challenges they face in raising African American boys, and how the teachers may best meet the needs of the families. Creating these types of experiences could serve to allow teachers and families to develop symbiotic relationships that will serve the children.

### **Suggestions for future research**

Although the parenting behavior of racial socialization with African American children has been examined, few studies examine how parents racially socialize their very young children (Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008). This study addressed important gaps in the literature on racial socialization by examining 3 and 4-year olds African American boys. Further, much of the racial socialization research focuses on the relationship between racial socialization and academic success (Trask-Tate, Cunningham, & Francois, 2014 & Wang & Huguley, 2012). However, there is limited research on emotional well-being and racial socialization of 3 and 4-year olds. My results suggest that researchers interested in racial socialization of very young children should pay close attention to social and emotional development. For example, what effect does disproportionate discipline have on the social and emotional development of 3 and 4-year-old

African American boys? What happens to their self-esteem and self-confidence when they are repeatedly disciplined for behavior for which that their peers do not receive discipline? Socially, how do other children interact with African American boys and perceive them when they are aware that the teacher views them as a problem.

This study addresses the racial socialization practices of parents of middle-class African American boys. Perhaps parents who identify as working-class utilize racial socialization parenting behavior that is more explicit and does not center as heavily on social and emotional development. Left unexplored are 3 and 4-year-old girls, 3 and 4-year-old boys within working class families, and 3 and 4-year-old children in mixed race families. It would be worthwhile for researchers to explore the aforementioned populations. Without this knowledge, African American children continue to be viewed narrowly and will continue to be placed in jeopardy academically, socially, and physically.

As this study has demonstrated, parents engage in the parenting behavior of racial socialization with children as young as 3 years old. While there is more research about racial socialization for adolescent and older children there is relatively limited research about 3 and 4-year-olds. In this way, this study adds to a still growing literature base. However, there are still unexplored factors that influence how parents from different demographic profiles racially socialize their children, as well as the genres that they use. Therefore, longer, more in-depth studies on this topic that examine other intersecting social identities may yield further insight into racial socialization of African American children that will serve to ensure their healthy development.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn directly from middle class parents of African American 3 and 4-year-old children about how they engaged Du Bois' concept of double

consciousness as they racially socialized their sons. Specifically, my purpose was to learn about the discourses influenced by intersections of class, race, and gender that they used to educate their sons about 1) how they may be viewed in a racist society, and 2) to ensure positive development.

I gathered information from the parents over the course of three interviews, using semi-structured questions. The use of critical discourse analysis, critical race theory, intersectionality, and community cultural wealth provided an opportunity for me to learn that parents of 3 and 4-year-old African American boys use language based and non-language based genres to implicitly racially socialize their sons.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Interview 1

Describe what it means to be African American in America and what it means to be an African American male in America. (Ideologies, stereotypes, concerns/fears for their children).

Describe ways that their parenting practices (discipline, teaching about others including law enforcement, European Americans, etc.) are influenced by their child's intersecting identities of race, gender, age, or by access the family may have based on class status.

1. What aspirations do you have for your son?
2. What does it mean to be the parent of an African American boy?
3. Do you think being an African American boy currently influences or will influence the interactions and the way that other people react to and/or treat your son? Give examples.
4. Do you think African American parents face challenges that are specific to raising their sons?
5. Do you talk to or teach your son about being an African American boy? How do you do this? What kinds of things do you say? What kinds of things do you do?
6. Are there any ways that you attempt to protect your son from racism? Are there ways that you prepare your son to deal with racism?
7. Do you think African American boys and girls experience racism differently?
8. Do you think it is important for your son to understand before he reaches the age of formal schooling what it means to be an African American boy (man) in America? If so, why? If not, why not?
9. Do you think it is important for your son to understand before he reaches the age of formal schooling that there are racial or ethnic differences? Why or why not?

10. If you teach your son about racial issues, what type of messages do you tell him about being an African American boy?
11. What kind of advice would you give other African American parents about raising sons?

### **Interview 2**

(Go back to interview 1 and allow them to respond/explain/expand

Describe how they purposefully use the things that they photographed or video recorded to racially socialize their sons.

Questions: What made you select this? Can you tell me a little about it? How often does this sort of thing happen? How does this relate to race? How does this relate to young children? How do you use it?

### **Interview 3**

Questions about things in pop culture (movies, songs, music, video games, social media) social organizations, holidays, traditions, religious organizations, choice of doctors or other professionals, choice of dress, friends, neighborhoods, and schools that they used to purposefully racially socialize their sons.

1. What types of environments do you think are important for your son to be a part of for his development as an African American boy?
2. Are there particular rites of passage and/or holidays that you celebrate or family traditions that you have in which you celebrate your culture or heritage as African Americans?
3. Are there certain songs, movies, games, or types of social media that you intentionally provide for your son or restrict in an effort to shape his racial identity?

4. Does your child participate in any social organizations or activities that are specifically for African American children/families? What is the group? What is your goal in participating?
5. Does the topic of racism or discrimination get addressed or spoken about in your church?  
Social organizations?
6. Are there things that you (or your pastor, congregation, church leaders) do at church to teach your child about stereotypes about or how to behave as an African American boy?
7. Do you encourage certain African American role models for your son?
8. When you chose the school/daycare that you son attends did his racial/gender/class influence your choice?
9. Are there any types of dress or hair that are commonly worn often by African American boys or men that you really like for your son to wear? Why? Ones that you dislike?  
Why?



