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Seeing White In Black: Examining Racial Identity Among African American Adolescents In A Culturally Centered Book Club

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SEEING *WHITE* IN BLACK:
EXAMINING RACIAL IDENTITY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH IN A
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE BOOK CLUB

by
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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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December 15, 2008

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I Had a Dream

I had a dream
That programmed hate would suddenly
switch channels like an electric current
And flow into love that washes the world
clean.
I believed this in innocence;
“It is necessary,” I told myself.

I had a dream
that one day soldiers would march home
from foreign crimes
collective in their repentance and
steadfast in justice, mercy, and humility.
I believed this in naivete;
“It’s so clearly wrong,” I told myself.

And when I saw cities that are corpses
rotting in the sun
Suddenly rise like a phoenix from its
ashes
into splendid bronze and gold hexagons
hurling arcs in ripe air
I believed this wonder:
“It could be so beautiful,” I told myself.

Yes, I had a dream of black and white
Americans
joined in feasts where there had been
famine,
drinking of Wisdom’s cup from each
other’s table,
and washing in the waters of mutual
respect.
I trusted in this hopefully;
“It’s right,” I told myself.

But then dreams are made of fragile stuff.
And when real bullets burst like
nightmare screams in Memphis and my
lai,
I woke up knee deep in rivers of innocent
blood;
my naivete drowned in the hunger in my
child’s eyes,
my wonder gnawed off by huge yellow-
toothed rats.

So I put away my dreams,
and got a gun.

Dedicated to:

Kandi Baba Kumasi

(1942-1994)

Niambi Nneka Kumasi

(1973-1990)

Kayli Niambi Kumasi-Johnson

(1998-)

William Deon Johnson

(2003-)

The two poems featured on either side of this page were written by my father, Dr. Kandi Baba Kumasi. They were published in an award winning poetry pamphlet entitled “The Kandi Man” copyrighted in 1970. The poem, “I had a Dream” speaks to the mixed feelings of hope and cynicism many Black Americans felt during the racially turbulent Civil Rights Era. The poem on the right, “Riverside” is a tranquil reflection on the journey of life.

Riverside

When the wind and I get high
we move across the water
with fleeting rippled might
that shakes out the sun
into gold glittering bright
on the river of my mind.

And the birds that glide
on the everloving tide
etch a smile in my eyes
with their flight across the light
on the river of my mind.

And I ask the ever constant
question
where is everything going
and I answer without knowing
that the goings been long gone,
just like the ripples ever rippling
on the river of my mind.

What’s devotion what is time
but the motion of my mind?
What is joy what is sorrow
but a vision of tomorrow
that sails into the harbor
on the river of my mind.

So as I gaze out at the water
and listen to the wind,
I know that where they’re going
is where I’ve always been:
Just an ever constant journey
on a ship that’s traveling blind
through the ever shifting landscape
on the river of mind.

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Finally, I would like to pay tribute to God, the ultimate author of life, Whose grace and sustenance has brought me thus far.

ABSTRACT

Kafi D. Kumasi

Seeing *White* in Black: Examining Racial Identity Among African American Adolescents in a Culturally Centered Book Club

This qualitative, ethnographic study explores the various tensions and struggles around racial identity that thirteen African American youth encounter while participating in a culturally responsive, library-based book club called *Circle of Voices*. Data were collected twice a week over four months in an after school community literacy intervention program in a public library and a university Black cultural library setting. Thematic analysis of the corpus of data and a micro ethnographic discourse analysis were performed on the data.

Whiteness and double consciousness serve as complementary theoretical frameworks. Findings reveal that: a) tension is an integral component in helping African American youth to explicitly articulate their racial identity in book discussions where issues of race are made central; b) whiteness functions as an unarticulated, yet hegemonic “other” in racially sensitive book discussions that structures how African American youth act, interact, and react to the text and each other; and c) using African American literature in culturally responsive book clubs with African American youth can create opportunities for the youth participants to articulate their racialized experiences in generative ways. This research poses implications for secondary literacy scholars, particularly librarians, seeking to implement culturally responsive approaches to literacy instruction into their practices as a way to better facilitate learning among students of color. It also advances research on whiteness in education by providing an in-depth look at how whiteness informs the actions and interactions of non-white youth in a culturally-centered, literature-based curricular format.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My interest in literacy, racial identity, and African American youth stems from my professional experience as a secondary English teacher and School Library Media Specialist in a predominately African American school district located in the city of Detroit. As an urban educator, I witnessed firsthand the struggles that teachers face as they try to prepare students for increasingly high stakes standardized tests, while also trying to recognize and support their resilient and innovative “out-of-school literacies” (Hull & Schultz, 2001). Before embarking on this study, however, I began to critically examine my own conceptions and understanding of literacy upon reading the work of scholars such as Gee (1996), Lee (1992), Nieto (1996), and Ball (2000).

As I began to digest the different scholarly perspectives of literacy, my thoughts about literacy and libraries were becoming more complex. I realized that I went through several stages of growth in my understanding of literacy, which I describe in five stages (see Figure 5) including confinement, encounter, discontinuity, choice, and acculturation.

In the confinement stage, my understanding of literacy was limited primarily to one mode: information literacy. From this view, notions of literacy and reading are seen as a cognitive ability to decode and comprehend various kinds of texts. However, this conception of literacy seems to be diminished when it is situated alongside a larger scholarly discourse that defines literacy as a social practice (Irizzary, 2006; Langer, 1991; McCarty & Perez, 1999). It was not long before I began to question the implicit assumptions about learning embedded in the information literacy model and began to reflect on the meaning of literacy itself. As I entered into the encounter stage, I became

better acquainted with a large body of scholarship rooted in social and cultural literacy frameworks (see e.g., Cook-Gumperz, 2006; Street, 1985). In reading this body of work, I began to realize that there was a very different conversation about literacy taking place which spoke to my sensibilities and concerns as an urban educator and librarian.

Ultimately, as I progressed through the various stages of understanding literacy, I came to understand that literacy is much more than a cognitive ability to read and write, but a very social act that involves basic modes of participating in the world (Freire, 1970). This study represents the transition between and the fourth and fifth stages of the literacy model I created. During the fourth stage, which is *choice*, I decided to pursue a dissertation topic that was primarily informed by a social and cultural view of literacy rather than a strict cognitive view. As a result, I helped co-construct the fifth *transformative* stage with the research participants through the *Circle of Voices* Book Club. This transformative space helped expand our collective imagination about what literacy learning in the library might look like.

Background to the Study

“No, Not my Librarian!”

Toward the end of my first year as a doctoral student, I was afforded an opportunity to work as a graduate assistant in a research project known as CLIP, or *Closing the Gap: Community Literacy Intervention Program*. This pre-college program focuses on helping African American adolescents build literacy, critical thinking, and leadership skills while supporting and affirming their home and community literacies. It was during this opportunity that I really began to understand the importance of a more social view of literacy.

As graduate assistant, I was able to listen in on several conversations. During one conversation in the fall of 2006 as youth were preparing to work on their student literary magazine *Youth Voices* (pseudonym), the program's director began asking the youth about their reading, writing, and library usage. With regard to library usage, the youth were asked if they thought their school librarian implemented or would implement a culturally relevant program such as the African American Read-In. Many of the youth were already familiar with the African American Read-In though their participation in CLIP in prior years. The African American Read-In is a program that recognizes and celebrates African American literature. The event is often hosted in churches, libraries, and schools across the nation (see website at <http://www.ncte.org/prog/readin>). As a former school library media specialist, I found the youths' responses to be quite revealing. They made comments like, "No, not my librarian! She's not open-minded" and "The library's like her house," or "Librarian[s] see their role basically as to tell where the books are at, tell what it's used for—and that's it." However, one student did state optimistically that, "Maybe, if it [the library] had somebody to direct it [a culturally responsive program] who was good."

Hearing the CLIP youth talk about their perceptions of and experiences in libraries reminded me that there is still much work to do in terms of providing youth, particularly African American youth, with opportunities to engage in culturally responsive literacy learning activities in the library.

Overview of the Study

This study examines racial identity among a group of African American¹ youth who participate in a book club called *Circle of Voices*. Prompted by the remarks of the African American youth in the larger study, I secured a grant that enabled me to help facilitate a culturally responsive book club. In establishing this book club, I sought to create a library learning environment that would support the development of both traditional academic literacies (e.g. expository writing and information literacy) as well as out-of-school literacies as well as Rap, spoken word, and others (Kirkland, 2008; Fisher, 2007; Morrell, 2002).

Circle of Voices became the investigative site for this study, which explores how African American youth construct their racial identity while reading and discussing two young adult novels: *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson and *Born Blue* by Han Nolan. The two novels were provided by a book club grant and were chosen for their coverage of issues relevant to African American experiences and racial identity.

It is important to note that the book club investigated in this dissertation study exists as part of the larger after school community literacy intervention program (CLIP). Through their participation in CLIP, the participants in the current study were already engaged in a variety of culturally affirming reading and writing activities. However, this study focuses solely on the book club component of CLIP, which I named *Circle of Voices*.

¹ Throughout this paper, I use the terms African American and black. I use the former term mainly to refer to the youth in this study and the latter when speaking more generally about people of African descent.

Statement of the Problem

Despite an increased awareness that libraries play a vital role in facilitating the literacy development of adolescents (Davidson, 1988; Jones, 2002), there is a lack of literature that explores how libraries can better meet the literacy needs of youth of color—particularly African American youth. While scholars in the field of education have generated a strong foundational body of knowledge on how race and power intersect in the literacy learning process for students of color (see e.g., Haddix, 2008, Jimenez, 2000; Paris, 2008; Watkins et al, 2001), there is a dearth of similar research in the field of library and information science. Yet, as mentioned previously, library scholars are recognized as key stakeholders in the advancement of adolescent literacy.

To understand why issues of race and racism have been largely absent within library scholarship, one might look at Honma's (1995) article entitled, *Trippin' Over the Color Line: The Invisibility of Race in the LIS*. In this article, Honma lays out a cogent analysis of what he describes as the "perennial problem" in the study of race in the LIS field which is: "celebratory multiculturalism and unacknowledged whiteness" (p.14).

Honma raises several pertinent questions about race and the LIS field:

Why is it that scholars and students do not talk openly and honestly about issues of race and LIS? Why does the field have a tendency to tiptoe around discussing race and racism, and instead limit the discourse by using words such as "multiculturalism" and "diversity"? Why is the field so glaringly white yet no one wants to talk about whiteness and white privilege? (p. 1)

Perhaps one reason race is under-theorized in library scholarship is because of the emphasis that is placed on the cognitive rather than the social and cultural dimensions of literacy (Kucer, 2001). For example, the primary approach library scholars take in the study of literacy is information literacy. Information literacy is a framework for

understanding how library users locate, access, and evaluate library resources (Rader, 2000). Library researchers often use information literacy as a framework for analyzing students' information-seeking behaviors and abilities inside the library (Loertscher, 2002). LIS scholar Kapitzke (2003) points out that the epistemological foundation of the information literacy model is positivist and divorces information problems from their social and political context. Similarly, in an article I wrote entitled *Critical Inquiry: School Library Media Specialists as Change Agents* (see Kumasi-Johnson, 2007) I contend that traditional approaches to inquiry in the library such as information literacy can be problematic because the information problem itself does not necessarily come under scrutiny when librarians try to help students identify possible research topics. Furthermore, I point out that, "A student may identify a seemingly mundane, noncritical information problem such as 'how to build a garden' and never be challenged to investigate important social issues such as who can build a garden and who cannot" (Kumasi-Johnson, 2007).

Former librarian-turned-poet-and-activist Audre Lorde (1984) also challenged the way literacy is conceived in the library field. Initially, Lorde indicated that she pursued a career in librarianship believing that if only she could acquire the tools to organize and access information, she would be better equipped to transfer this knowledge into social action. However, after serving briefly as a librarian, Lorde decided that information devoid of social context fails to live up to its transformative potential. Lorde and the others noted above are just a few of the library scholars who have sought to expand literacy frameworks in the library in more holistic ways.

Focus of the Study

This study was initially guided by an open-ended research question that sought to explore the following question: *What happens when African American youth are provided an opportunity to explore black culture while reading young adult novels in a culturally responsive book club?* In the early phases of data collection and analysis, I began to see emergent themes around racial identity as central to the way the youth acted and interacted. Therefore, I began to recursively refine my guiding research question numerous times to reflect the emergent themes in the data. Ultimately, I decided to pursue the following research question: *How do African American youth articulate their racial identity as they engage in book discussions and inquiry activities in culturally a responsive book club?* Three sub-questions were also pursued, including:

1. What, if any, tensions or struggles around racial identity do African American youth experience while acting, interacting, and reacting in a culturally responsive book club?
2. How is whiteness—as a form of power—deployed, reproduced, and negotiated among a group of African American youth inside a culturally responsive book club?
3. What connections, if any, do African American youth make around issues of race and racism as they read and discuss young adult novels by and about blacks?

Significance of the Study

Hearing the voices of African American youth as they explore issues related to black culture and experiences in a library-based book club can help infuse much needed scholarship on the intersections of race, power, and literacy into library scholarship. Moreover, this study can assist librarians and other literacy scholars in understanding some of the tensions and struggles African American youth experience while learning in traditional literacy contexts that are constructed upon narrow notions of literacy. In a

broader sense, this research helps further the idea that libraries can become sites for critical participation among young people if they are allowed opportunities to discuss and explore issues that affect their daily lives through literature.

Theoretical Framework

To help explore the complexities of racial identity construction among the African American youth participating in this study, I employ two complementary theoretical frameworks: whiteness and double consciousness. These two theoretical frameworks are part of an ongoing, scholarly commitment to understand (and dismantle) racism and white supremacist ideologies (McLaren, 1998). The questions that whiteness scholars ask generally have to do with how whiteness—as a form of power—is deployed, reproduced, and negotiated among people in the dominant white group. However, this study reframes traditional questions and debates within whiteness scholarship by asking how non-white people (or people who contest whiteness) negotiate, deploy, and reproduce its hegemonic influence, particularly in learning contexts.

What differs between this study and the majority of educational scholarship on whiteness is the focus on the experiences of students of color. Traditionally, educational scholars focus on how white teachers and students are implicated in reproducing white privilege. For example, Thompson (2003) argues that whiteness theory is important for educators because

White cultural norms are systematically enforced in the schools (usually without any recognition that they are white norms). A teacher who can deconstruct his or her own whiteness is far better positioned to see why prevailing pedagogical and curricular patterns might not work for students. Even white teachers who are fully committed to multiculturalism often fail to see how their own investments in white culture as a universal culture get in the way of their good intentions vis-a-vis students of color. (p.1)

Although Thompson's assessment of the value in whiteness theory for educators is important, it does not fully address the value of whiteness theory for the current study. According to Thompson, whiteness theory is useful primarily to white educators because of its ability to help them deconstruct their own privileged positions and assumptions that reproduce whiteness at the expense of their students of color. While this line of research is certainly important, it does not necessarily help educators understand some of the struggles and challenges that non-white students face in negotiating whiteness in a Eurocentric curricular framework. The current study seeks to help fill this research/knowledge gap.

In the past, whiteness scholars in education have looked at a number of issues that affect teaching and learning. For example, some researchers have examined how white teachers impose colorblind ideologies in their classrooms and the deleterious effects this might have on students' ability to think critically about the subject matter (McIntyre, 1997). Other scholars have looked at how canonized works of literature in the American curriculum often privilege the knowledge and history of whites (Apple, 2004; Morrison, 1993). Still others have written about the challenges of teaching about race, power, and white privilege in predominately white classrooms (hooks, 1992). This study, however, builds on a small but growing body of research in education that examines how non-white students negotiate, deploy, perform, reproduce, and resist whiteness in educational settings (see e.g., Carter, 2006; 2007a).

It is important to point out that this study owes an intellectual debt to the work of early black scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson. Both DuBois and Woodson engaged in groundbreaking research on the meaning and consequences of

whiteness, particularly on the lives of black people (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). In fact, some scholars credit DuBois with laying the intellectual foundation for contemporary whiteness studies. For example, Twine and Gallagher (2007) point out that, “The ideological import, cultural meaning and how the relative invisibility of whiteness by whites maintains white supremacy was observed by DuBois over one hundred years ago”.

Although this study takes a slightly different approach to the study of whiteness in education, the theoretical assumptions about race upon which this study is based are consistent with the views of noted scholars who study race, such as Winant (2000). One of the basic assumptions that these scholars acknowledge is that race is socially constructed. What this means is that the concept of race has held its meaning over centuries because of the investment that human beings have placed in it, rather than on the scientific merits of the concept of race itself. However, while scholars of race in education often agree that race is not a scientifically merited concept (Delgado, 2001; Eldeman & Jones, 2004; Jones-Wilson, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), they also recognize that people of color have suffered very real material consequences because of their racial classification.

What is Whiteness?

Like the concept of race, *whiteness* is also somewhat of an elusive term that scholars have struggled to define. For the purposes of this study, however, whiteness will be defined as a set of unspoken culture practices—or ways of speaking, thinking, and viewing the world—that privilege white people while marginalizing or “othering” (Dominguez, 1994) the cultural practices of non-white people. The aforementioned

definition may appear limited insofar as it speaks to only one component of whiteness as it is defined by other prominent whiteness scholars such as Frankenburg (1997).

Frankenburg puts forth a much broader definition of whiteness which has the following components:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, or race privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint,” at a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, at society. Third, “whiteness” refers to a set of cultural practices, that are usually unmarked and unnamed (p.1).

Research on whiteness concentrates mainly on the formation of white identities, ideologies, and cultural practices, and explores how such identities, ideologies, and practices buttress white supremacy. Oftentimes, this has meant that whiteness research focuses on the experiences and identities of white people (see e.g. McIntyre, 1997). In contrast, research on double consciousness examines the hegemonic effects of whiteness on the lived experiences of non-white people, particularly on African Americans.

What is Double Consciousness?

The preeminent twentieth century black sociologist W.E.B. DuBois articulated the theory of *double consciousness* to help explain the social and psychological tensions that African Americans experience while negotiating their racial identity in a societal context structured mainly by and for white people. In his classic work, *Souls of black Folk* (1903) DuBois described this theory as

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. (p.3).

By using double consciousness and whiteness as complementary theoretical lenses, this study extends what is known about the social and psychological effects of racism on how African American youth construct their racial identity. Other scholars have also expounded upon DuBois' notion of double consciousness. For instance, Smitherman (1977) describes double consciousness as a "push-pull" social and psychological syndrome that causes African Americans to simultaneously seek acculturation into mainstream white America and also seek their own, distinct Black racial identity.

Author Toni Morrison helps make the link between whiteness and double consciousness visible. In an interview for National Public Radio (NPR), Morrison stated that she has felt the "gaze" of whiteness in her own experiences as an African American female writer. Morrison noted that she no longer censors her writing for the "gaze" of the presumed white reader. Moreover, Morrison points out that a double standard exists among some literary critics who have lambasted her work for focusing too "narrowly" on Black female experiences. In contrast, white authors are not often subjected to the same sort of criticism. Morrison points out that some of the most recognized works of fiction in the American literary canon are written by white authors who focus exclusively on white experiences and set their novels in European countries such as Scotland and Ireland. She ends by noting that her work is even *more* nuanced and complex than ever before, now that she focuses solely on African American female experiences.

In a similar vein, by focusing on how a group of African American youth construct their racial identity inside a culturally responsive book club, this study can help shed light on the range of complexities within African American youths' literate lives.

Furthermore, by using whiteness and double consciousness as theoretical frameworks, this study can be seen as part of what has been described as “third wave” (Twine & Gallagher, 2007) whiteness scholarship. According to Twine and Gallagher (2007), third wave whiteness scholarship is concerned primarily with “locating the nuanced and locally specific ways in which whiteness as a form of power is defined, deployed, performed, policed, and reinvented”. Like other third wave whiteness scholars in education (Carter, 2007a; Haviland, 2008; Lewis, 2004; Mars, 2004), this research seeks to understand how whiteness is internalized, privileged, and reproduced among a people of color—namely a group of African American youth.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Five interrelated areas of literature help contextualize this study: 1) whiteness in education, 2) racial identity and literacy development among African American adolescents, 3) culturally responsive pedagogy, 4) library service for blacks in the United States, and 5) using African American literature to engage black youth. In the following paragraph, I explain how each of these areas of literature relates to the current study.

It was important to consult the literature on whiteness in education, because the questions at the heart of this study are similar to those that whiteness scholars in education ask in terms of looking at how issues of race, power, and privilege function in mainstream classrooms and how these forces shape the way teachers teach and students learn (or do not learn). Next, I turned to the literature on racial identity and literacy among African American adolescents. This body of literature helps lay the intellectual foundation for understanding some of the tensions and struggles African American youth experience while learning in a U.S. societal context that has been constructed primarily by and for whites. The next area of literature that was explored is literature on culturally responsive pedagogy. This body of literature helps make visible the pedagogical principles and philosophical orientation that guide the development of a curriculum geared toward African American youth. Moreover, culturally responsive pedagogy can be seen as a pragmatic response to counteracting the prevailing influence of whiteness in the American curriculum (Apple, 2004; Maher & Tetrealt, 1997). Following that, I surveyed the literature on library service to blacks in the U.S. This literature is important because it provides a necessary historical context for understanding why today's African

American youth might feel disconnected from libraries and why librarians still need to be deliberative in their literacy outreach efforts to African American youth. Finally, I incorporated the literature that discusses the benefits of using African American literature to engage black youth. I incorporated this literature as a way to theoretically ground discussions about how African American youth respond to the text and to each other when reading young adult novels written by and about black people.

Whiteness in Education

In the past decade, there has been a steady increase in the number of studies in the field of education that use whiteness as an analytical framework. Prior to this influx of research, whiteness scholarship had been generated primarily by scholars in the disciplines of history (Roediger, 2005), sociology (DuBois, 1899), and literary studies (Morrison, 1993). As mentioned in the theoretical framework, much of contemporary scholarship on whiteness in education owes an intellectual debt to black scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson.

One of the primary lines of inquiry that contemporary whiteness scholars in education have pursued has to do with examining the ways in which white teachers are implicated in reproducing notions of white supremacy at the expense of students of color in the classroom. For example, in their article, *Learning in the Dark: How Assumptions of Whiteness Shape Classroom Knowledge*, Maher and Tetreault (1997), revisited the data they collected for a book they had previously authored in which they aligned themselves with women of color as resisters to a patriarchal academy. In looking back over their data for a new writing project, the authors explain that their intentions were slightly different in their second undertaking. In their new effort, the authors state that they sought to

“acknowledge and understand our own social position of privilege, which made us, vis-a-vis our subjects, oppressors as well as feminist allies” (p.322).

Although they might not classify their work under the heading “whiteness,” black educators have also written about whiteness in the context of teaching and learning. For example, in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*, Tatum (1992) includes a chapter on white identity development in which she describes her experiences teaching college courses and workshops to mostly white participants. When asked to reflect on their social class and ethnic backgrounds, Tatum describes how one white participant paused before stating, “I’m just normal”. Tatum goes on to explain that,

Like many White people, this young woman had never really considered her own racial and ethnic group membership. For her, Whiteness was simply the unexamined norm. Because they represent the societal norm, Whites can easily reach adulthood without thinking much about their racial group (p.93).

Another branch of whiteness scholarship in contemporary educational discourse focuses on issues of globalization and whiteness as key components of critical pedagogy. For example, in his critically acclaimed collection, *White Reign*, Kincheloe et. al (2000) advocates an assault on white privilege as a socially constructed signifier by rearticulating it through a “critical pedagogy of whiteness.” Taking on Kincheloe’s charge, Leonardo (2002) wrote an article entitled, *The Souls of White Folk: Critical Pedagogy, Whiteness Studies, and Globalization Discourse*, that links whiteness with globalization issues in the classroom.

Other areas whiteness scholars in education have investigated (?) are the colorblind ideologies that often hover over conversations about race in contemporary classrooms (see e.g., Lewis, 2004). These ideologies, it is often argued, hinder authentic

learning and critical thinking not only for non-white students, but white students as well. One example of this literature is Rodriguez's 1998 work entitled, *Emptying the Content of Whiteness: Toward an Understanding of the Relation between Whiteness and Pedagogy*. In this chapter, Rodriguez argues that whiteness does indeed have content "inasmuch as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and others , and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself"(p.32).

One understudied area of research on whiteness in education relates to the examination of how non-white students negotiate whiteness in various learning contexts. However, there are a few recent examples of this line of inquiry. For example, one might look at Carter's (2007b) research on African American female racial identity development in secondary English classrooms for its treatment of whiteness in the context of classroom interactions. In her article *Reading All That White Crazy Stuff*: *Black Young Women Unpacking Whiteness in a High School British Literature Classroom*, Carter (2007b) presents a telling case that explores "the gendered and racial complexities facing young Black female students in a British literature class, dominated by literature written from a Eurocentric perspective, primarily by White males" (p.42). According to Carter, this telling case was analyzed to "explore how whiteness functioned within the British literature curriculum and classroom interactions and how the two black young women were negatively positioned as a result of classroom interactions around the curriculum" (p.42). The current study seeks to expand on Carter's work, using it as a bridge for connecting research on adolescents and literacy in the library field.

Literacy and Racial Identity Among African American Youth

A Note on Race and Ethnicity

In an effort to avoid conflating the terms *racial identity* and *ethnic identity* in ways that are unhelpful to the reader, I offer a brief description of these two terms and a justification for which terminology will be used in this study. McMahon and Watts (2002) draw a useful comparison of the terms racial identity and ethnic identity. The authors explain that “racial identity focuses more on the social and political impact of visible group membership on psychological functioning” (p. 413). In contrast, the authors suggest that “ethnicity is often related to race, but need not be; ethnicity refers to a shared worldview, language and set of behaviors that is associated with a cultural heritage” (p.413). Because the focus of this study is on how a group of self-identified African American youth negotiate their identity against the larger social and historical backdrop of white supremacy, the term racial identity is the preferred terminology that will be used in this study.

Learning while black. For African American youth, attaining a level of academic success in an American educational system that is structured upon Eurocentric norms is a particularly complex endeavor (Gadsden, 1995). In fact, academic success among African American youth has been one of the most contentious and misunderstood areas of inquiry in educational research. Harpalani (2005) argues that part of this struggle has to do with the repeated errors that researchers have committed, such as, “deficit-oriented thinking, combined with a failure to properly consider the interaction of identity formation, culture, and history” (p.1). As a result, many African American youth have developed an oppositional cultural identity, or a sense of identity in opposition to white

America because of the social, economic, and political subordination they have encountered. Oftentimes, African American youth also develop “protective devices” (Harpalani, 2005) to reactively promote black identity by sustaining boundaries between themselves and the dominant white culture.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) claim that black children learn to enact these oppositional identities at an early age and that notions of identity become rooted in “fictive kinship.” Fictive kinship can be described as an intense sense of group loyalty and membership extending beyond conventional family relationships. Because of this notion of fictive kinship, some black Americans emphasize group loyalty in situations involving conflict and competition with white Americans.

In a similar line of research, Phinney (1989) developed an identity scale for African American youth and found that African American youth score higher than other group members in terms of their self-identification with their racial group. Phinney suggests this may be because the marginalization these youth experience encourages stronger in-group patterns of association or identity. Furthermore, Anglin and Wade (2007) found statistically significant relationships between racial socialization and ethnic identity and between ethnic identity and school engagement using a sample of 131 black youth. These findings speak to the current study in that they provide a background for understanding that many African American youth construct their racial identity in response to dominant white cultural frameworks.

Further, Cross’ work (1994) on African American identity development is also helpful in understanding the challenges that African American adolescents might face while learning in a library context that is constructed upon narrow notions of literacy,

which uphold Eurocentric epistemologies (Pawley, 1998). Cross notes five stages of “nigrescence” or of becoming black. These stages, linked to African American adolescent development, include pre-change, encounter, transition, internalization, and integrative awareness. In synthesizing Cross’ work, Bennett (2006) offers a summary of the five stages of black identity development, which is cited at length below:

In stage one, or pre-change, African Americans accept the dominant Anglo-European worldview and seek to become assimilated into White mainstream society. The second stage, encounter is triggered by a shattering experience that destroys the person’s previous ethnic self-image and changes his or her interpretations of the conditions of African Americans in the United States. Individuals in stage three, transition, want to live totally within the black world and tend to become preoccupied with all things black (e.g. literature, clothing, forms of expression, etc. and may develop a pseudo-black identity because it is based on hatred and negation of Whites rather than on affirmation of a pro-black perspective. In stage four, internalization, the individual achieves greater inner security, self-satisfaction, a healthy sense of black identity and pride, and feels less hostility towards Whites. Individuals who move into stage five, internalization-commitment, become actively involved in efforts to bring about social justice through structural changes in society. (p.11)

Tatum (1992) builds on Cross’ work by addressing particular challenges that African American adolescents face in learning contexts. She notes that some African American adolescents develop oppositional identities as coping mechanisms, as they are constantly aware of the societal messages that do not affirm their racial identity. Similarly, DeCuir-Gunby (2007) examines how African American adolescents negotiate their race and class identities at a predominately white school. Using counter-storytelling—a critical race theory construct—as an analytical framework, the authors found that African American youth told similar stories of the difficulties they faced in negotiating their racial identity in a “bubble” or in a predominantly white schooling environment.

Language and African American racial identity. Some of the difficulties African American youth experience in negotiating their racial identity in mainstream educational settings center around issues of language. Many African American youth speak what is known as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 2001; Rickford, 1999; Smitherman, 1977). However, the language of power in the U.S.—or the language that carries the most social and political capital—is White English Vernacular (WEV) commonly known as Standard American English (SAE). The way many African Americans and other linguistic minorities have responded to the colonization of their native tongue is to construct a bicultural linguistic identity that allows them to function in two social worlds: an official environment (e.g., school) where SAE is the norm; and an unofficial environment (e.g., home and community) where AAVE is the norm (Perry & Delpit, 1998).

One of the leading anti-colonial thinkers of the 20th century, Fanon (1967) wrote extensively about the consequences of white supremacy and the suppression of non-European language on the social consciousness of black people. Fanon believed that being colonized by a language has larger implications on one's political consciousness. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) wrote that, "To speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization (p.17-18)." For him, speaking French, for example, means that one accepts, or is coerced into accepting, the collective consciousness of the French.

Fanon's argument that linguistic colonization has negative consequences on the psychological well-being of black people is taken up by educational scholars as well. In his research on African American youths' racial identity development, Ogbu (as cited in

Gadsden, 1995) wrote that some African American youth view learning or speaking Standard English and practicing other aspects of white middle-class culture as threatening to their own minority culture, language, and identity. This phenomenon, also known as “acting white,” was originally introduced by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) in the mid 1980’s. The notion of acting white has since been adopted, critiqued, and expanded by other scholars (see e.g., Lee, 2006; Williams, 2007). In essence, acting white generally refers to as a set of social interactions in which high-achieving minority students enjoy less social popularity than high-achieving white students because of deeply entrenched white supremacist ideologies hinged upon notions of cultural deficiency and intellectual inferiority among black people.

Welch and Hodges (1997) describe how some black youth struggle to construct an academic identity under the “heavy overlay” of racial identity that positions them as outsiders or often relegates them to an “at risk” status. The authors examine the contextual factors that exist in the classroom (e.g. teacher and student behavior), which may contribute to the persistently poor academic performance of black youth. In the next section, I explore an area of literature that contemporary educational scholars have produced to help offset racist ideologies that drive teaching practices.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Today’s educational scholars have accumulated an impressive body of scholarship outlining the goals, principles, and strategies of a more culturally inclusive, anti-racist approach to teaching non-white students. This body of work offers philosophical alternatives to the mainstream Eurocentric curricula that still dominate the school curricula today (Sherwood, 2006). Some of the headings under which this body of

work has been classified include culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, critical race pedagogy, and the Afrocentric idea in education. The next paragraphs will focus on two areas within this body of literature: culturally responsive pedagogy and the Afrocentric idea. These two areas best align with the goals and curricular format of the culturally responsive book club investigated in this study.

At its core, culturally relevant pedagogy recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. Some of the characteristics of culturally relevant teaching include positive perspectives on parents and families, communication of high expectations, learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and recognizing the teacher as facilitator (Gay, 2000; Moje & Hinchman, 2004). Ladson Billings (1995) defines culturally relevant teaching as pedagogy of opposition. She likens culturally relevant teaching to critical pedagogy, but points out that culturally responsive pedagogy is specifically committed to collective empowerment rather than just individual empowerment.

Another body of literature that emerged to help bolster academic achievement among black youth is the literature on the Afrocentric idea in education (Asante, 1991). Originally credited to Carter G. Woodson and later rearticulated by Molefi Asante, the Afrocentric approach to education situates African American students as the subject rather than an object of the learning experience. An African centered curricular philosophy maintains that a curriculum that presents Africans in a true light will benefit *all* students, not just black students. Moreover, Afrocentric curricular theorists contend that the traditional Eurocentric school curriculum is potentially harmful for all students

because understanding the history of Africa is a key to being able to put larger world history events in their proper context. One school that has received acclaim for its success in implementing the Afrocentric idea in education is the Betty Shabazz International Charter School. The school was founded in 1998 in Chicago, Illinois by Dr. Carol D. Lee, Haki Madhubuti, Robert J. Dale, Soyini Walton and Anthony Daniels-Halisi (see school website at <http://www.bsics.net>). Betty Shabazz International Charter School has been lauded for its ability to balance culturally centered curricula while still helping students perform well on state standardized tests.

Afrocentric curriculum theorists have identified a set of principles and ideas that help clarify what constitutes the Afrocentric idea in education. According to Giddings (2001), an Afrocentric curriculum would strive toward the following five goals:

- 1) Assist students in developing the necessary intellectual, moral and emotional skills for accomplishing a productive, affirming life in society.
- 2) Provide such educational instruction as to deconstruct established hegemonic pillars and to safeguard against the construction of new ones.
- 3) Provide students of African descent with educational techniques that are in accord with their learning styles.
- 4) Assist students of African descent in maintaining a positive self-concept, with a goal of achieving a sense of collective accountability.
- 5) Serve as a model for Banks (1988) “Transformational” and “Social Action” approaches to education. (p.463)

These five principles illustrate the need to help students of color to bridge the ‘cultural dissonances’ (King, 1991) that they often experience between school and home, which hinder their academic success.

Library Service for Blacks in the U.S.

As anecdotal evidence provided in the introduction of this study suggests, some African American youth feel disconnected from their school and public libraries and do not necessarily view these spaces as culturally affirming. To help understand what might

cause these kinds of cultural dissonances, it is perhaps useful to explore the history of library service for blacks in the United States. The following section attempts to provide such a perspective.

The Early Period of Public Library Service in the United States

Contrary to what celebratory versions of library history might suggest, public libraries in the U.S. have not always lived up to their utopian and democratic ideals that they are most known for today (Weigand, 1999). As Honma (2005) points out, “the framing of the library within the terms of ‘democracy’ and ‘neutrality’ conceals the covert structural forms of racial exclusion that protect white racial interests, a system which Lipsitz labels the ‘possessive investment in whiteness’(p.8).”

The concept of the public library as the “people’s university” where access is free and open to anyone who wishes to use it, emerged in the early 19th century, following a series of forerunners such as the subscription, proprietary, parochial, and circulating libraries. The emergence of public libraries in America, like public schools, grew out of societal industrialization and urbanization. Paralleling education reform movements marked by the Progressive Era, public schools and public libraries fostered the democratic notions of social advancement and human betterment.

In a 1972 *Library Journal* article, Blasingame notes that it was hoped that through reading and access to books, newly urbanized and industrialized citizens would acquire knowledge to prepare them to participate in the new society. This idea of the public library as a place where the masses could be educated and learn how to become self-directed learners and consumers of information was a major shift from the former notion that libraries served mainly as academic workshops for elite white male scholars (Pawley,

1998). Early public library professionals took both pragmatic and altruistic philosophical approaches to their work. They responded to the influx of new kinds of patrons that European immigration and urbanization brought to the United States by adopting a mission to help new patrons become contributing members of the American society.

However, not all American citizens, particularly those who were not classified as white, experienced what Blasingame (1972) described as the utopian view of the role libraries might play in their social advancement. Several decades later, Rubin (2000), in his scholarship of Latino perceptions of the public library, points out that “libraries are often perceived as one of many Anglo institutions that are designed and controlled by Anglos to serve Anglos” (p. 241). This perception shows the tensions between how mainstream white perceptions of the library can be quite different from those of people of color.

Public library service for blacks. While benevolence became a sentiment characteristic in the era of public library development, the treatment of African Americans during this time period reflected less inclusion (DuMont, 1986; Peterson, 1996). The sentiment of benevolence that Blasingame (1972) described as the mission of early public libraries seems contradictory when it is viewed in relation to the African American user population at that time. MacCann (1989) suggests that institutionalized racism allowed two disparate systems of library service to exist between African Americans and European immigrants. She explains:

Contrasting library policies toward early twentieth century European immigrants and groups that even today are commonly referred to as “minorities” provide substantial evidence that inequities in library service were produced with conscious intent. We can see in immigrant and African American experience the results of professional action that worked toward unity and disunity, respectively, as librarians set policies to encourage basic educational opportunities for

immigrants and discourage the availability of such opportunities for blacks. (p. 97)

By 1925, the prevailing progressive democratic ideology had taken root in professional library journals. Yet, there was a double standard when it came to library service for blacks, which is best understood when it is put in the historical context of slavery in the United States (Josey, 1972; McPheeters, 1988; Phinazee, 1980; Richards, 1988). Slavery in the United States was able to be maintained in some ways because of the laws that prohibited blacks from learning to read. For example, in 1834, South Carolina established a law prohibiting the teaching of either slave or free black children. Spencer (1899) expounds on this idea stating that “reading-except for Bible reading, was seen as dangerous for blacks who might ‘get ideas’ unsuitable for their subordinated status (p.92).” Simply put, although libraries may not have explicitly endorsed racist practices towards blacks, in some ways they were complicit in the institutionalization of racism by not rejecting these discriminatory policies.

Period of racial reform. At the turn of the twentieth century, cities such as Houston, Louisville, and Nashville launched successful campaigns for funds to construct public libraries through grants made available by entrepreneur and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. According to Malone (1999), Carnegie gave building grants to more than 1,400 cities and towns in the U.S. between 1886 and 1919. But as Malone (1999) points out, “When African American residents of those locales attempted to enter new buildings—whose books, magazines, newspapers, and services were publicly funded—they were barred” (p.59). States and local institutions created ad hoc policies denying black people services based on their interpretation of the 1896 Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, which established a doctrine of “separate but equal.” Consequently,

many segregated public libraries were established for black communities, but they were forced to operate with fewer and unequal resources than their white counterparts.

In 1903, the Cossitt Library in Memphis began providing library service to blacks through an agreement with Lemoyne Institute, a private black secondary school (Josey & Shockley, 1977). The next significant event occurred in 1905, when the Louisville Free Public Library opened a branch for blacks, which was administered by Thomas Fountain Blue, the first black person to head such a facility. The success of this branch has been attributed in part to the support of the main library with the trustees and staff cooperating with each other to help the black assistants.

Toward an era of cultural diversity. By 1928, the West Virginia Supreme Court ruled that Charleston libraries could not exclude black patrons since, as taxpayers, they were equally entitled to library service (Richards, 1988; Smith, 1974). Several decades after the Supreme Court declared “separate but equal” facilities based solely on race as unconstitutional, the American Library Association (ALA) held its first integrated annual conference in Miami Beach in 1954. After years of avoiding the South as a meeting place due to racial segregation, E.J. Josey, an African American librarian and member of the ALA, facilitated a more expedient implementation of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as it related to libraries (Smith, 1974). The ALA had been slow in integrating all of its southern chapters until Josey offered a resolution at the 1964 Conference that would prevent ALA officers and staff members from attending segregated state chapter meetings (Wheeler, 2007). The resolution passed, and it was through the social activism of people like E.J. Josey coupled with the growing climate of intolerance for racial discrimination that helped open doors for blacks in libraries.

Cultural diversity is now an explicit goal within libraries. In 1961, the American Library Association amended its 1948 Bill of Rights to include a statement which says that “the rights of an individual to the use of a library should not be denied or abridged because of his race, religion, national origins, or political views” (American Library Association, 2007). Libraries have recently implemented several other programs geared towards achieving cultural diversity (Robertson, 2005). However, some scholars have suggested that the diversity trend in libraries facilitated more superficial rather than substantive changes (Balderrama, 2000). One of the more substantive changes libraries can make on both a theoretical and practical level in terms of becoming more culturally relevant is to develop library programs (i.e. book clubs) that can engage youth of color in critical conversations around race and other issues that affect their daily lives.

Using African American Literature to Engage Black Youth

Given that American libraries have a history of challenges with regard to supporting the African American community, the need for continual literacy outreach to African American users, particularly African American youth, is apparent. For many black youth, literacy success comes from having opportunities to read and discuss African American literature, or literature written by and about blacks (Mahiri & Sablo, 1996). In their investigation of the literacy practices of urban African American youth, Mahiri and Sablo suggest that many urban African American youth are unmotivated to engage in school-based literacy events because they do not see the relevance of the school curriculum to their daily lives. This leaves many youth of color who are already struggling with reading with an additional challenge of becoming proficient at reading in a context that has little or no cultural relevance or significance (Cortes & et al., 1986).

It is particularly important for African American youth to be introduced to literature by and about themselves because as Lee (1998) points out, “African American literature provides for African American students a necessary and rewarding “microscope” through which to view and understand the complexities of being black in America (p. 3).” Other scholars such as Harris (1993) have also promoted literature-based approaches to reading instruction that draw on African American literature as a way to engage black youth. By reading African American literature, it is believed that black youth are more likely to make connections with the text in ways that translate into increased reading comprehension.

DeVoogd (2006) suggests that literature-based reading programs such as book clubs offer librarians a unique opportunity to become critical educators. Critical educators, according to Darder (1991) are those who “perceive their primary purpose as commitment to creating the conditions for students to learn skills, knowledge and modes of inquiry that will allow them to critically examine the role that society has played in their self-formation” (p. xviii). They achieve this by providing individuals with opportunities to read and discuss books that incorporate multiple perspectives on a variety of topics or themes (e.g. immigration) and allow participants to openly grapple with the complexities of race and the human experience.

Each of the aforementioned areas of literature helps to situate the current study. The first area of literature on whiteness in education provides a context for understanding some of the struggles and tensions African American youth might experience as they negotiate their racial identity against the backdrop of Eurocentric cultural and linguistic norms while participating in racially centered book club discussions and activities. The

second area of literature on racial identity and literacy development among African American adolescents helps contextualize the cultural and linguistic practices that African American youth might enact in the book club as well as the ideological stances they might take in particular discussions and inquiry activities. The third area on culturally responsive pedagogy helps make visible the pedagogical principles that made the participants' actions and interactions around race visible. The fourth area of literature on library service for blacks in the U.S. is relevant because it provides a necessary historical backdrop for understanding the cultural disconnects African American youth might experience while learning in library settings that have been structured primarily by and for white patrons. The fifth and final area of literature on using African American literature to engage black youth is relevant because it helps theoretically ground the ways in which African American youth act, interact, and react around texts centered on Black culture and experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of this chapter is to describe the qualitative research tradition in which this study is situated and to outline the data sources and analysis procedures that were employed. Second, this chapter will provide a description of the larger focal site where the study is situated and explain how the researcher gained access to the focal site and the participants. This chapter will also include a brief description of the participants and a discussion of the social location of the researcher. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the book club structure and remarks about validity concerns.

Sociolinguistic Ethnography and the Critical Approach

This study is situated within the ethnographic tradition of qualitative inquiry. It is also heavily informed by the critical research tradition where issues of power, privilege, and praxis are central. The ethnographic tradition in qualitative research can be described as the systematic, qualitative study of culture, including the cultural bases of linguistic skills and communicative contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). The sociolinguistic tradition in qualitative research focuses on how language use is shaped by individual and societal forces (Centeno et al., 2007; Fairclough, 1992; Green & Wallat, 1981; Hudson, 1996). A sociolinguistic ethnographic approach is a useful conceptual framework examining how students construct their racial identity in a culturally responsive book club, because this approach acknowledges that people's actions and interactions around language reflect certain ideological stances that exist in society and that manifest in educational settings such as a classroom (Carter, 2007b). For these reasons, a critical sociolinguistic ethnographic approach has been identified as a suitable methodological

framework for addressing how racial identity is articulated by a group of African American youth inside a culturally responsive book club.

As mentioned above, critically-oriented researchers often foreground issues of power, privilege, and praxis—or the fusion of theory and practice. In terms of power and privilege, critical researchers ask questions to uncover whose interests, culture, and languages are being privileged and whose are being marginalized or left out altogether in the research site (Korth, 2002). Similarly, by asking how whiteness functions in the context of a culturally responsive book club, this study can help tease out some of the struggles and challenges the participants have in constructing their racial identity in a societal context that privileges Eurocentric cultural and linguistic norms.

In terms of praxis, critical researchers acknowledge that *all* research is an ethical and political act (Carspecken, 1996). Therefore, critical researchers seek not only to name the injustice(s) found in the research site, but also to help establish a framework for the empowerment and social action for and with the participants. Critical theorist Karl Marx observed that philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in different ways, but the point is to *change* it (Padover, 1978). In keeping with this view, this dissertation seeks not only to help advance theoretical knowledge on whiteness in education, but also to put forth a model of culturally responsive library programming that can benefit African American youth and other historically underserved youth.

Design and Methods

Description of the Focal Site

The *Circle of Voices* book club investigated in this study is situated inside of a larger research project called the *Community Literacy Intervention Program* (CLIP).

CLIP is a community-based research program involving African American high school students who want to improve their literacy abilities and gain the skills needed for college success. This two-year research project was designed by a faculty member in the School of Education where I pursued my doctoral studies, who is hereafter referred to as Dr. P.

Some of the questions that Dr. P.'s CLIP research project sought to explore include:

1. How might utilizing black students' home and school literacy practices as a resource facilitate improved academic literacy?
2. What are the various ways black students are able to transfer their cultural knowledge and resources from an after school community literacy program to the school context?
3. How can working with black youth in a community literacy program inform pre-service teachers' knowledge, current beliefs, and practices?

One of the main goals of CLIP is to help students build bridges and make connections between their home and school cultures to facilitate their academic success. The program has a strong emphasis on reading, writing, and critical thinking. It also provides university faculty and local teachers with an opportunity to model and mentor pre-service English teachers who have selected to participate in CLIP for their teacher education field placement requirement. CLIP exemplifies the importance of connecting teaching, research, and service.

Gaining Access

I met Dr. P. during a summer seminar I enrolled in which she co-taught in 2005. One of the things I learned about Dr. P. in that seminar was that we shared common interests in using our scholarship as a vehicle to help improve the educational experiences of African American youth. As part of her literacy outreach efforts, Dr. P. hosts an African American Read-In each year through the university's School of Education. At this annual event, approximately 250 high school students visit the university by bus and

take part in a day-long event featuring spoken word, poetry, “stepping,” and guest author speakers. The event pays tribute to the African American literary tradition.

At the time of this study, Dr. P. was one of only two African American female professors in the university where this study was conducted. I viewed Dr. P.’s presence as a rare and unique opportunity to possibly gain mentorship and support in my own goals as an aspiring college professor. Soon after I met Dr. P., I expressed an interest in getting involved in her research and community partnerships. At that time, Dr. P. was just about to begin a two-year research project (CLIP) described above.

Before CLIP officially became the focal site for the current study, I spent a semester familiarizing myself with the overall structure of the program and getting to know the participants. I attended the opening CLIP parent meeting as well as the initial sessions of the program. I began to attend the program regularly before my role became more formal and I was given the responsibilities of a research assistant. As a research assistant, my responsibilities were to help conduct interviews, organize data, and fill in where necessary in helping the program run smoothly. It was not long before I knew all of the CLIP participants by first name and had had an opportunity to converse with them one-on-one. Over time, I believe that I became a familiar and welcomed presence in their lives.

Description of the Participants

This study profiles the actions and interactions of thirteen young scholars, ranging between the ages of 13 and 18 years old. These young scholars are all self-identified African Americans who live and attend school in the community that surrounds a Midwest university. Hereafter, the participants in this study are referred to as “young

scholars” because of their commitment to attending the CLIP program on a voluntarily basis week-after-week and for their dedication to working on their academic success. Dr. P. often reminded the youth that, as young scholars, their purpose in CLIP was to become more critical thinkers. Moreover, using the term young scholars regularly was a subtle attempt to sway the youths’ consciousness by helping them reject the negative portrayals of black youth that proliferate in the mainstream media.

Young scholar profiles. Monique (all names are pseudonyms) is a freshman. She happens to be one of the youngest scholars in the group. Despite her youth, Monique is also one of the most vocal participants. Monique readily offers her opinion and has strong reactions to many-of the issues that are discussed. Monique enjoys shopping and socializing with her friends.

Anthony is somewhat like a big brother to Monique. He is a sophomore who recently moved from an urban city approximately three hours north of this Midwest university town. Anthony is involved in extra curricular activities such as the student chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and holds other leadership positions in the community.

Barack is a quiet, reserved ninth grader who enjoys running track. He attends church regularly and has a very respectful demeanor. Barack is very cooperative and often works independently during tutoring.

Ayanna is an eighth grade student whose favorite subjects are math and family and consumer sciences. Ayanna enjoys cheerleading, attending church, and running track. Ayanna’s mother is pursuing her teaching credentials at one of local colleges. Ayanna’s

grandmother plays a large role in her life and is an active member of one of the local Baptist churches.

Alicia is a sophomore who seems quiet upon first meeting her. However, her quiet demeanor is quickly shed once she participates in the larger group conversations. Alicia enjoys writing poetry and socializing with her friends.

Raven is a junior, originally from Louisiana, who was raised by her grandmother. Raven has a Southern disposition and answers “yes, ma’am” when speaking to adults. Raven is painfully shy and dreads public speaking. She enjoys reading novels by and about blacks and especially reading urban novels by authors like Omar Tyree and Sistah Souljah. Raven wants to attend college and pursue a career in Nursing.

Merriel is a very bubbly freshman who talks fast and is very creative. Whether it is writing poetry or essays on timely issues, Merriel keeps her finger on the pulse of what is happening in the world. Like Raven, Merriel also enjoys reading novels by and about black people. She frequents the library in her spare time.

Natasha is an eleventh grader who enjoys singing. Due to personal illness, Natasha missed several weeks of school her junior year and consequently suffered academically. Despite this setback, she remained committed to participating in the literacy program and improving her grades in school.

Erica is a sophomore who entered the program in its second year. Erica has a very strong personality. Beneath her tough exterior, Erica is warm and sensitive. Erica has aspirations to become a cosmetologist and to own her own beauty salon.

Melanie also entered the program in its second year. She is a bright and lively addition to the group. Melanie is most known as the youngest of a family full of talented

gospel singers and musicians. Melanie also enjoys singing and is a member of the church choir. She recently relocated to the live with an older sister and brother who are both college students.

Mike is a senior originally from Detroit who entered the program in its second year. Mike worked at one of the local television stations as an editing assistant. One of the major contributions Mike brought to the program was producing the video montage for one of the program's culminating community literacy events. Mike has aspirations to establish a career in the music video industry.

Tanika is also a senior and is good at math and working with her hands. During the program, Tanika often worked on needlepoint art projects from school. Tanika is quiet and unassuming during most of the discussions.

Derrell is a sophomore who enjoys hanging out with his friends and playing basketball. Derrell could often be seen carrying his prized ipod mp3 player, which contains hundreds of the latest Rap and R & B songs. Derrell has plan to become an entrepreneur in real estate.

Additional participants. There are a few other adults participants besides Dr. P. and me who are important to this study. The first is Jay, a graduate student who works as a research assistant for the CLIP program. Jay works closely with Dr. P. on all aspects of the program. I met Jay on my first visit to Dr. P.'s office, and we became close associates throughout the study. Jay is a black male and is also a youth minister at a local church who plays bass guitar during Sunday services. Through his role as a minister, Jay also mentors the young scholars both in and outside of school. Many of the young scholars looked to Jay for advice and counseling on personal matters, due to his caring disposition.

At the time of the study Jay was pursuing a master's degree in African American and African Diaspora Studies. With this educational background, Jay was often called on to conduct the "Black History Moment" segment of the program.

Ms. Book is another central figure in the book club. She is the youth services librarian whom I partnered with to apply for the book club grant that helped make *Circle of Voices* possible. Shortly after securing the grant in April of 2006, Ms. Book and I met face-to-face to sketch out a preliminary timeline and plan for the book club activities. Ms. Book's role in the book club was primarily to provide library resources and to schedule library rooms for related book club activities and events. Since the book club is student-led, Ms. Book's interactions with students were at a minimum, although she was present at all the sessions and asked questions about the books on occasion. Ms. Book is a white female in her early thirties who recently completed her master's degree in Library and Information Science at one of the local colleges. Ms. Book agreed to participate in the study as a volunteer and was interviewed before, during, and after the study about her thoughts on the program.

Social Location of Researcher

I am at once an insider and an outsider in this study. I am an insider because as an African American female who has been educated and raised in a predominately black community, I share a sense of fictive kinship, or an unspoken communal bond with the African American youth in this study. This communal bond is not based merely on a superficial physical likeness, but a shared political outlook and set of lived experiences that has been forged under the crucible of racism and dominant white ideologies. This sense of fictive kinship is strengthened in some ways by the exchange of the Afro-

cultural communicative styles between the researcher and the participants. At times, this cultural bond helped me to blur the boundaries of researcher/researched and allowed me an opportunity to observe the students use language in ways that they might not feel comfortable using in official spaces such as school. I am also an insider in this study because of my identification with and participation in “Hip-Hop” culture. This affiliation grants me a certain kind of access into the participants’ lives that might not be available otherwise.

In many regards, I am also an outsider to the study. Although the youth may have felt comfortable talking to me in certain ways about certain things, they were well aware that that I represented an authoritative, school-like presence in their lives as the book club co-facilitator and researcher. Moreover, it was difficult at times to assume a more authoritative role as a teacher/facilitator once the book club began. This can primarily be attributed to the fact that my role was more peripheral—rather than instructional—prior to the start of the book club. From an ethnographic standpoint, however, assuming a less authoritative role worked to my advantage because it forced me to talk less, listen more, and take notes. In doing so, I could truly hear these young scholars’ concerns and take notes on how they seemed to be constructing meaning around their racial identity.

Lastly, I am invested in this dissertation research both professionally and politically (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003). I have explicitly positioned myself both as a researcher and an advocate for African American youth in this study by helping to establish a space within the public library where African American youth were able to explore issues of race and cultural identity through young adult novels. The ideas of Paulo Freire help to contextualize my role in this study. For Freire (1971), the goal of

education is to begin to name the world and to recognize that we are all “subjects” of our own lives and narratives and not “objects of others” in the stories of others (p.116).

Freire’s remarks can be interpreted to mean that it is important for educational researchers to view themselves as not conducting research *on* students but *with* them. I felt that it was important for this book club intervention to take place in a library setting because I wanted the youth in this study to begin to see themselves as insiders in their library community.

Structure and Format of the Book Club

The format of the *Circle of Voices* required the participants to meet twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The book club met on Tuesdays at the local public library and on Thursdays at the local university’s Black cultural center library. The main goal for the book club was to engage discussions and critical inquiry around issues of black culture while reading two young adult novels. The first novel read was *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson. This coming-of-age story deals with the trials of Bobbi, an African American teenage male, who is expecting a child with his high school girlfriend Nia. Each chapter is written in alternating tenses of past and present. This format helps make a strong contrast between Bobbi’s thoughts and habits before and after his daughter Feather is born. As the story ends, the reader is kept wondering whether or not Bobbi will succumb to family and peer pressures and give Feather up for adoption or decide to keep her and raise her himself.

The second novel, *Born Blue*, is about a European American girl name Janie whose drug-addicted mother’s lifestyle leads her into a turbulent life. As a foster child, Janie endures physical abuse, develops a drug habit, and eventually is faced with an

unwanted pregnancy. Janie gives herself the name Leshaya in an apparent attempt to connect with her strong identification with Black culture. This connection is forged as Leshaya escapes her harsh life by listening to “the ladies,” or her favorite artists, including Billie Holiday, Etta James, and Aretha Franklin. The novel ends tragically with Janie caring for her mother who is dying of AIDS.

The goal of creating *Circle of Voices* Book Club was to provide a space where African American youth could grapple with complex issues related to black culture and identity while also gaining traditional academic skills in reading, information seeking, and critical thinking. Rather than placing the emphasis on youth who are *behind* in reading, this library program sees the literacy abilities and potential of African American youth.

The Tuesday book club meetings took place on the second floor of the local public library in a mid-size room. The room itself was equipped as with the usual classroom amenities, including tables, chairs, an easel, an overhead screen, and cabinets. The room comfortably seats about twenty-five people. A set of approximately fifteen laptop computers was available to the book club participants upon request through the library staff. The general format for the sessions included a community building exercise, a black history moment, one large or two small youth-led book discussion groups, independent library research, and whole-group guided inquiry. Thursday sessions were held in either a small computer lab or a small conference room inside the library at the Black cultural center.

Data Collection

Book club sessions (audio and video). I audio taped each of the 26 book club sessions that were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays over a four month period which totaled 42 hours: One hour for each book discussion and 1-1/2 hours for each post-debriefing session. I also videotaped the book club sessions that were held on Tuesdays and Thursdays over the four month period, which totaled approximately 39 hours, or about 1-1/2 hours per session. The audiotapes were generally more reliable than the videotapes because they could hold more minutes of data and were less intrusive. I carried an audio recorder throughout the study. I generally used one side of the audiotape to record the actual book club sessions and the other side for recording the debriefing sessions that took place between the principle investigator of the larger research project and myself. Figure 1 shows the sources of data that I used as a basis for my analysis.

Figure 1. *Chart featuring Data Collection, Volume, and Recording Method*

Data Source	Volume and Recording Method
Book Club Sessions over Four Months	Audio = 42 hours. 26 sessions @ approximately 2hrs each (1-1/2 hour per book discussion segment +1/2 hour per researcher post debriefing segment) Video= 39 hours 26 days @ approximately 1-1/2 hours each for book club session only
Culminating Inquiry Project Community Events	Audio and Video = 6 hours. 2 events @ approximately 3 hours each
Focus Group Conversations	Audio and Video = 6 hours. 6 conversations @ approximately 1 hour each
Field Notes	Handwritten and Typed =162 pages (mini-legal pad or laptop) = 54 hours of notes from the corpus of data @ approximately 3 pages per hour
Individual Interviews	Audio =1 hour. 6 participants selected via purposive sampling for 10 minute follow-up conversations over

	the course of the study
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Culminating inquiry projects (audio and video). I videotaped the two culminating inquiry projects held over the course of the study in which the participants shared their research with the community at the conclusion of each novel. The two community literacy events lasted approximately three hours each for a total of six hours.

Focus group conversations (audio and video). Six 1-hour focus group conversations were audio and videotaped over the course of the book club sessions. These semi-structured conversations were led by the book club facilitators and allowed the participants an opportunity to openly reflect on several topics, including their impressions of the novels, their experiences engaging in the inquiry process, their experiences during the two community literacy events, and their as overall impression of the book club.

Field notes (handwritten and typed). I took fields notes before, during, and after each book club session on Tuesdays at the public library. I also took extensive notes on Thursdays at the black cultural center library during the follow-up discussions and inquiry activities. My notes were more extensive on Thursdays because I was not responsible for leading the inquiry sessions and focus group discussions on these days. I used Emerson's (1981) approach to taking field notes which calls for recording any and all information about the setting and the actors in the setting that come to mind.

My field notes can be classified into three categories: personal, theoretical, and methodological (see appendix E). Personal notes were those notes where I had insights, epiphanies, or simply mundane commentary about the day's events such as a

participant's response to a question or a topic that was raised. Theoretical notes helped to capture theoretical assumptions I was making about how white privilege and other issues of race and power were functioning in the context of the book club and how it informed the participants' actions, interactions, and reactions. Methodological notes were those reflexive notes in which I comment on and evaluate issues relative to insider/outsider researcher dynamics and the structure and flow of the book club.

Individual interviews (audio). I conducted six individual interviews with key participants in the book club whose actions and interactions around racial identity were noteworthy in my theoretical field notes. These interviews were semi-structured and took place before the book club began as participants were engaged in tutorial activities as part of the larger research project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was ongoing and reflected the iterative nature of qualitative research in which theory-building and data collection work in concert (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). I moved recursively between the emergent themes found in the data and adjusted my questions accordingly to reflect these patterns. I then subjected the data to two levels of analysis: a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) and a microethnographic discourse analysis (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004). In the next section, I provide an overview of the two types of analysis that were conducted and a detailed description of how these techniques were carried out.

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis has been used frequently among qualitative researchers as a way to analyze themes and patterns that emerge across the data with respect to the participants' behavior, experiences, etc. Once identified, these

themes are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of the participants' collective experience. In conducting a thematic analysis, my first step was to transcribe the corpus of audio and videotaped data. Using Boyatzis' (1998) description of inductive coding, my second step was to look across the corpus of transcribed data to identify statements that could fall within the overarching code of *Black Experiences*. The code Black Experiences was generated by looking at the emergent themes and emergent research questions from the early phases of data collection and data analysis. In looking across the data, it was apparent that issues of racial identity were central to how the participants acted and interacted during the book club. The code Black Experiences was developed to capture instances where the participants talked about their experiences being African Americans or talked in general about the "ways of Black folk," including their speech patterns, worldviews, etc. I coded direct quotes or paraphrased statements that fell under the broad category of Black Experiences.

The third step was to identify any patterns or themes within the overarching code of Black Experiences. *Themes* are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor, Bogdan, & 1984, p.131). In looking more closely at the corpus of data within the overarching code, I began to notice that the participants were articulating their racial identity in complex ways. In order to better describe the patterns that were emerging, I devised a two-fold sub-coding scheme.

First, I coded the instances in which the participants were articulating black racial identity through what I refer to as *identity statements*. An identity statement, for the purposes of this study, refers to claims the participants made about what it means to be

black, based on their perceptions about the way black people view the world (or do not view the world); speak (or do not speak); and behave (or do not behave).

Second, I coded instances in which the participants articulated what it means to be black by linking black identity to the *consequences of whiteness*. As an example, these are statements in which the participants link black racial identity to experiences with racial oppression and marginalization in a dominant white societal context.

For example, at some point in the book club the participants articulated their conception of what it means to be black. Anthony, for instance, made an identity statement when he referred to black males as having a “swagger” (field notes 9/12/06). Erica also made an identity statement when she talked about how black people are “supposed to talk proper, even though we don’t”. In contrast, Merriel articulated black racial identity as a consequence of whiteness when she said that Janie, a white character in the novel, would “never have to go through what black people go through” in terms of having to experience racism (field notes, 11/2/06). This bi-level coding scheme helped me expound upon the various ways African American youth articulated their racial identity over the course of the book club sessions. With these themes in mind, I employed a second level of analysis aimed at looking at more closely at how these themes played out with respect to the research questions posed in this study.

Microethnographic discourse analysis. I conducted a microethnographic discourse analysis based on three key literacy events that took place during the book club. I centered my conceptual framework on Heath’s notion of a literacy event. Heath (1983) defines a *literacy event* as, “A communication act that represents any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their

interpretive processes.” Each of the three literacy events I selected reflects larger themes that emerged in the initial level of analysis. According to Bloome et al. (2004), the three basic elements of a microethnographic approach to discourse analysis in classroom events include 1) examining human actions and interactions around language, 2) theorizing the use of language in social context, and 3) foregrounding classrooms as sites for studying language and literacy. This analytic approach was chosen for its proven ability to portray what is happening in the classroom (or other formal learning) and to help reveal systems of power and control that are grounded in the reality of students’ everyday lives and macro-level societal realities. Because of its tendency to foreground issues of power, a microethnographic discourse analysis approach lends itself to addressing the questions central to this study which deal with the tensions and struggles around race that inform how African American youth act and interact in the book club.

Like other approaches to discourse analysis, a microethnographic approach is rooted in the theoretical precepts of sociolinguistic ethnography. Sociolinguistic ethnographers maintain that the process through which social identities are named and constituted are essentially language processes. Therefore, by looking closely at how the participants in this study use language during book discussions, a microethnographic analysis of discourse can make visible certain macro-and micro-level power dynamics. In particular, this approach can help illustrate the processes through which African American youth negotiate whiteness within selected events in the context of a culturally responsive book club. By illustrating this negotiation process up close, the reader can better see the complex layers of interactions that might otherwise be invisible (Carter, 2007). These hidden layers are important because they are significant to the meaning-

making processes of African American youth inside of typical classroom events. They also make visible the moments of contestation or resistance that are not often visible as African American youth negotiate whiteness in classroom contexts.

Transcripts from the three events were coded and placed in the format of a chart for the purposes of subjecting them to a micro ethnographic microethnographic discourse analysis. Each chart has a line number, a speaker, a message unit, youth voices, and a macro-level analysis. The column labeled “Youth Voices” contains quotes from the participants that were extracted from follow-up interviews, field notes, etc. which help contextualize my analysis of the three events. The column labeled “Macro” is an interpretive analysis of the line-by-line conversation. It also draws upon the youths’ voices as well as the extant research literature related to the three respective categories of analysis which include African American racial identity, whiteness, and double consciousness.

By citing research literature in the findings chapter, this study employs literature for the purposes of methodological triangulation. Denzin (1978) describes *methodological triangulation* as the convergence of data from multiple data collection sources. Infusing the literature is a way to further contextualize the youths’ challenges and struggles around racial identity and to connect the participants’ immediate actions and interactions to the larger structural impediments (e.g. racism) they face.

The analysis for the three events will include capturing the tensions that surfaced around racial identity for the African American participants, the ways the African American youth negotiated whiteness, and the connections the youth made between the texts and their own racialized experiences.

Validity Concerns

Several measures were taken to help enhance the validity of this study, while recognizing that issues of validity are conceived of differently in qualitative and quantitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Like most qualitative research, this study concerns itself with the meanings and experiences of the “whole” person, or localized culture, and does not attempt to generalize to wider populations—as is often the goal in quantitative research. Instead, this study sought to generalize to theory about how whiteness and double consciousness operate and function in the literate lives of a group of African American youth. Furthermore, the claims that are made in this study about how the participants construct their racial identity are based on co-constructed dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Moreover, findings or knowledge claims were created as the investigation proceeded. This is in keeping with the basic principles of the interpretive paradigm which posits that the researchers’ values are inherent in all phases of the research process (Angen, 2000). The interpretive perspective also recognizes that truth is negotiated through dialogue. That is, findings emerge through dialogue in which conflicting interpretations are negotiated among members of a community.

To that end, I employed some of the standard techniques for enhancing validity in qualitative research, including member checking; triangulating data sources; and checking for rival explanations, or alternative explanations that refute the researcher’s hypothesis of how meaning is being made in the social context among the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As for member checking, I checked back with study participants to confirm that my interpretation of their responses was in keeping with how they viewed them. Secondly, I used multiple sources of data (e.g. interviews and observations) to cross-check my findings and to provide greater confidence in the validity of my conclusions. Lastly, I searched for disconfirming or refutable evidence through regular debriefing conversations with the principle investigator of the larger study (Dr. P.).

In all, this chapter set out to describe the methodological framework and specific methods that were used to understand how African American youth articulate their racial identity while participating in a culturally relevant book club. The analysis techniques described in this chapter laid the foundation for the findings presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings and analysis relative to the overarching research question that drove this study, which was *How do African American youth articulate their racial identity as they explore black experiences through young adult novels in a culturally responsive book club?* As mentioned previously, this research question was generated as a result of a recursive process that involved analyzing the emergent themes and patterns found in the data and adjusting the research questions accordingly. This chapter will present findings pertaining to each of the following sub-research questions:

1. What, if any, tensions or struggles around racial identity do African American youth experience while acting, interacting, and reacting in a culturally responsive book club?
2. How is whiteness—as a form of power—deployed, reproduced, and negotiated among a group of African American youth inside a culturally responsive book club?
3. What connections, if any, do African American youth make around issues of race and racism as they read and discuss young adult novels by and about blacks?

Listed below are the three significant findings that emerged from the thematic analysis of the corpus of data. I will contextualize findings through three key literacy events from the book club. The three main findings that emerged are follows:

1. *Tension Is an Integral, Constructive Component to Book Discussions Around Race*

Tension and struggle around race was an integral aspect of Circle of Voices book club. Through tensions, African American youths articulated their racial identity in two distinct patterns: 1) through identity statements which link black identity to certain ways of knowing, speaking, and being and; 2) through statements linking black identity to a consequences of whiteness or being racially marginalized or oppressed.

2. ***Whiteness Functions As an Unarticulated, yet Hegemonic “Other” in Racially Centered Book Discussions.***

Whiteness structured the limits of the book conversations in ways that helped make double consciousness more visible in the African American youth’s actions and interactions.

3. ***African American Literature Serves As a Conduit for Helping African American Youth Articulate Their Racialized Experiences.***

Literature by and about African American experiences provides a medium for helping African American youth articulate their racialized experiences, or experiences with being marginalized in a dominant white society.

I have chosen three key literacy events from over the course of the book club sessions to contextualize the findings. The headings for each event listed below contains the title of the text that was being read or created in the book club session, followed by a defining quote from the young scholars that helps illuminate each finding. The three literacy events are as follows:

- *First Part Last*: “But They Are Different”
- Brotha to Brotha: “Ne’mind, Ain’t No Difference”
- *Born Blue*: “I’ve Experienced Racism”

Although the findings are interrelated, each event emphasizes a different finding. I chose the *First Part Last*: “But They are Different” event to discuss the first finding which explores how tension functioned as a necessary and constructive component in the book club session that helped the African American youth to articulate their racial identity in explicit ways. This event highlights a conversation based on the novel *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson, which was the first assigned reading in the book club. By presenting this event first, it is hoped that the reader will gain a rich description of the book club from its beginning.

I chose the Brotha to Brotha: “Ne’mind, Ain’t No Difference” event to contextualize the second finding which deals with the how whiteness functions in the book club sessions and structures the limits of the conversations in ways that cause the African American youth to enact a sense of double consciousness. The Brotha to Brotha poster session was put on by the young scholars in Circle of Voices as a culminating inquiry project on black males in society.

Lastly, I chose the *Born Blue*: “I’ve Experienced Racism” event to discuss the third finding relative to the connections African American youth made between the literature and their own racialized experiences in the world. *Born Blue* by Han Nolan was the second and final novel read during the book club.

Event 1
First Part Last
“But They Are Different”

The transcript segment highlighted for this event is used to contextualize the first finding about how tension drove the *Circle of Voices* book discussions and helped the African American youth articulate their racial identity in explicit ways. It is important to note that tension is being conceived as something that builds up, or escalates within a particular literacy event over time as the participants become steeped in their actions and interactions with one another. Therefore, each message unit within a particular line of the transcript should be viewed as part of a larger story that is being constructed among the participants and the researcher.

The transcript segment featured below documents the beginning of the first book discussion on the novel *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson. This discussion took place at

the local public library in room 2C. In the following paragraphs, I contextualize the events surrounding this transcript as they unfolded.

It is a Tuesday and the agenda (see Appendix A) for the session is full. There is one hour reserved between 4-5 p.m. to accomplish the tasks set forth including discussing the first thirty pages of *First Part Last*. The novel was distributed the previous Tuesday during the first formal meeting of *Circle of Voices*. Although this session is only the second meeting of *Circle of Voices*, it is the fourth meeting of CLIP – the larger community literacy intervention program in which the book club is situated.

The following individuals were present (all names are pseudonyms): Ms. KK and Dr. P. (two African American female researchers/book club facilitators); Jay (a black male graduate assistant); Ms. Book (a white female cooperating librarian); Kate and Nicole (two white female pre-service teachers); and twelve African American youth: Merriel, Erica, Anthony, Ayanna, Monique, Raven, Alicia, Barack, Mike, Tanika, and Derrell and Natasha.

The young scholars have been reminded that their purpose is not only to read and discuss books, but to educate their community on a variety of issues that emerge during the book club discussions and inquiry activities. Dr. P. has engaged the young scholars in a discussion of what it means to be a scholar. A definition was generated from this discussion which described a scholar as “someone who produces and distributes knowledge in their community” (Field notes, 9/12/06). As co-facilitators of the book club, Dr. P. and Ms. KK challenged the young scholars to internalize their newfound understanding of scholarship by thinking of their upcoming inquiry projects not as a typical academic assignment where receiving a grade is the primary incentive, but rather

as an opportunity to educate their community about a timely social issue that affects their daily life.

To help tie the book club activities into CLIP's curricular format, it was decided that a fitting inquiry focus to correlate with the reading of *First Part Last* would be to explore issues related to black males in society. This inquiry focus emerged organically the previous year through the young scholars' participation in CLIP. The topic of black males surfaced from several whole group discussions where the CLIP scholars brainstormed ideas to write about in their student literary magazine, *Youth Voices*.

Once this inquiry focus was settled upon, Dr. P. and Ms. KK began looking for audiovisual resources to share with the young scholars as an anticipatory set or scaffolding tool. Ultimately, two videos were shown on the first day of the book club. The first video was *Just the Two of Us* (1998), by Will Smith. This video is set against the musical backdrop of Bill Withers' original version of the song. In the video, Will Smith raps about the joys of becoming a father. In the introduction to the song Smith's lyrics state:

Crazy joy, when I see the eyes of my baby boy
I pledge to you, I will always do
Everything I can
Show you how to be a man
Dignity, integrity, honor
An I don't mind if you lose, long as you came with it
An you can cry, ain't no shame in it

The video contains a compilation of images of black fathers, including cameos by prominent men such as Keenan Ivory Wayans, Muhammad Ali, and Montell Jordan, who are pictured alongside their children.

For contrast, the video *Self Destruction* (1989) by the Stop the Violence All-Stars was shown. This popular Rap song was created in the 1990s by a group of well known Rap artists, including KRS-1 and Queen Latifah. The lyrics of the song call for an end to “black-on-black” crime caused by drug-related violence. Rapper KRS-One, sets the tone of the message with the following opening lyrics to the song:

Well, today's topic, self destruction
It really ain't the rap audience that's buggin
It's one or two suckas, ignorant brothers
Trying to rob and steal from one another
You get caught in the mid
So to crush the stereotype here's what we did
We got ourselves together so that you could unite
and fight for what's right
Not negative 'cause the way we live is positive
We don't kill our relatives

Another important aspect of today’s session was the introduction of an inquiry model (see Appendix B). This model was introduced as a way to help the young scholars understand the process that they are going to be involved in as they explore issues related to black males in society. There are six phases of inquiry outlined in this model, including planning, retrieving, processing, creating, sharing, and evaluating. This model served as a reference for the remainder of the book club inquiry activities.

To help make the inquiry model relevant to the young scholars’ lived experiences, Dr. P. used an analogy of “finding a mate” (Field Note, 9/12/06). To paraphrase her analogy, the first phase of inquiry might entail planning to see the person of interest, which would require some sort of *planning*. The next step might be to seek out information about what the person likes from a friend or family member by *retrieving* information. After that, you might create or buy something nice for this person to impress them which would require *processing* information you ascertained about that person’s

likes and dislikes. You might then tell a friend or family member about this person of interest and solicit their advice by *sharing* information. The final phase might be to *evaluate* how the previous strategies have worked (or not worked) and decide whether to try a different tactic to pursue the person of interest.

With the inquiry model posted prominently on the wall, the second meeting of the book club gets underway. The session begins as the young scholars share news and notes. Sharing news and notes is a routine that has been established in the larger research project as a way to build a sense of community among the young scholars.

Anthony starts by sharing information about an event that he is helping to plan as a member of the local student chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Next, Monique shouts out that she celebrated her fifteenth birthday over the past weekend. Raven chimes in and informs the group that she has obtained an internship at the local hospital and that she has decided to pursue a career in Nursing. Tanika notes that she got an A on her math quiz. As the group begins to settle down and there are no additional comments, Dr. P. directs the group's attention towards Ms. KK. to begin the book club discussion. (Note: the conventions of mechanics have been omitted and phonetic license has been employed where students are being quoted (in this and other transcriptions of the book club sessions).

Ms. KK poses the following question to the group to open up the book discussion:

What are your observations of the book so far? What kinds of things have you noticed? (Book Discussion Transcript, 9/19/06).

Merriel, a tenth grader, responds first by pointing out

The mom wasn't in the picture and usually you kind of read books at the beginning where it's always the mother taking care of the child and the baby daddy is like a dead beat father. (Book Discussion Transcript, 9/19/06)

Merriel's comment helps to introduce the transcript segment being analyzed in this event. A few comments later, Anthony responds to Merriel's observation about the way the novel portrays Bobbi's mother. He basically agrees with Merriel stating:

Yeah, I ain't feel it was realistic because, I'm saying like, the majority of the women I know they'll help they kids or whatever. But I guess they tryna like teach him how to be a man, just basically give him more responsibility. (Book Discussion Transcript, 9/14/06)

At this point, the conversation shifts to a discussion about what it means to be a man—more specifically what it means to be a black man. The transcript segment featured below captures this portion of the book discussion.

Transcript Segment 1
Segment of Book Discussion on *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson
September 19, 2006

MB: Merriel Broddick, African American female student

ES: Erica Smith, African American female student

Dr.C.: Dr. Carter, African American female researcher/co-facilitator

KK: Kafi Kumasi, African American female researcher/co-facilitator

AH: Anthony Houghes, African American male student

AS: Ayanna Scott, African American female student

MW: Monique Williams, African American female student

Transcription Key

/ = Conversational pauses within the message unit

[] = inaudible due to speech overlap in conversation or other interference

(*italics*) = additional information inserted for clarity

CAPITALS = emphasis or accentuation on syllables

! = increase in voice pitch or tone

☺ = Group Laughter

... = brief pause

36 Dr. P.: Okay/ So I mean man/ everybody has a concept or a notion about what it means to be a man/ a black man/ and I say black man/is that what y'all were saying?

37 ES: [Right I] Huh?... No!

38 Dr.C: No?

39 ES: What is/ What is that! / How you gon say/ what the?...Ne'mind

40 Dr. P.: No tell me Erica!

41 ES: You just don't say what's a black man/ like/ you actin like you have to be like/
you have to act a certain a way to be a black man or sumthin like that

42 Dr. P.: Okay/ So you don't?

43 ES: What are you talkin about?

44 ☺: Group laughter

45 Dr. P.: Somebody help me out!

46 ES: Anyway/well/like/I was just sayin

47 Dr. P.: Okay so I guess I was just sayin/Erica raises another point cause I said/ What
does it mean to be a man and then I said black man/ and she was like hold up,
hold up you know/ you know/ you know like you tryna single black men out like
their different/ that's what I get

48 ES: Right, yeah

49 Dr. P.: So

50 AH: But they are different! That's the thing.

51 Dr. P.: Are they?

52 AH: Yeah

53 AS: Some of them are different

54 ES: No/I don't know

55 Dr. P.: Some of them? Some of who?

56: KK: Elaborate

57 Dr. P.: Yeah elaborate

58 MB: But no, but I didn't say it Ayanna said it/ so elaborate over there

59 Dr. P.: Oh, Ayanna elaborate/ I mean like / okay cause I/ Erica was challenging me in terms of the fact when I said

60 ES: Yes, I shol was!

61 AS: Some black people act white/ some people

62 AH: What is acting white?

63 MW: What's actin white? It's just cause you talk like you suppose to?

64 ES: It's just talkin proper/ we supposed to talk proper/ even though we don't talk proper

Line-by-line Analysis

On line 36, Dr. P. tries to engage the young scholars in a discussion about their understanding of what it means to be a man—particularly of what it means to be a black man. This topic emerged from a comment Anthony made about the way Bobbi, the main character in novel *First Part Last*, was being portrayed in the novel. Anthony made the comment previously that, “They tryna like teach him [Bobbi] how to be a man, just basically give him more responsibility.” To follow up on Anthony’s comment, Dr. P. says in line 36, “Okay/ So I mean man/ everybody has a concept or a notion about what it means to be a man/ a black man/ and I say black man/is that what yall were saying?”

Figure 2. Chart featuring a line-by-line analysis of the transcript segment from Event 1- *First Part Last*: “But They Are Different”

Line	Speaker	Message Unit	Youth Voices	Analysis of Tensions and Struggles around Race (Macro)

36	Dr.C.	Okay/ So I mean man/ everybody has a concept or a notion about what it means to be a man/ a black man/ and I say black man/is that what yall were saying?		Dr. P. raises the issue of what it means to be a black man as a way of helping the youth to open up and address tensions and contradictions they might be experiencing as black youth.
37	ES	[Right I] Huh?... No!		Erica interjects in seeming disagreement with what was just said.
39	Dr.C.	No?		Dr.C. acknowledges that Erica is objecting to something.
40	ES	What is/ What is that!/ How you gon say/ what the?/ Ne'mind		Erica begins to contest what was said and then she stops abruptly. It appears that she is resisting Dr.C.'s remark.
41	Dr.C.	No tell me Erica!		Dr.C. prods Erica to continue with her comment.
42	ES	You just don't say what's a black man/ like/ you actin like you have to be like/ you have to act a certain a way to be a black man or sumthin like that	<i>ES: When I'm around my brothers, we are not thinking about the person that is next to us or people lock their doors when they see like a group of black folk (Focus Group Interview,9-21-06)</i>	Erica seems to be contesting a monolithic, homogenized view of black men. The mere introduction of the words <i>black man</i> created a source of tension for Erica that caused her to react in a defensive way.
43	Dr.C.	Okay/ So you don't?		Dr.C. challenges Erica to elaborate on her objections to the words <i>black man</i> being used.
44	ES	What are you talkin about?		Erica continues to resist Dr.C.'s attempt to get her to explain the oppositional stance she took when she heard the words <i>black man</i> .
45		☺		The group laughs at Erica's sarcastic tone.
45	Dr. P.	Somebody help me out!		Dr. P. elicits feedback from the rest of the group about

				whether they had any particular thoughts or reactions when the word black man <i>black man</i> was introduced in the conversation.
47	ES	Anyway/well/like/no/ I was just sayin		Erica begins to clarify her position.
48	Dr. P.	Okay so I guess I was just sayin/Erica raises another point cause I said/ What does it mean to be a man and then I said black man/ and she was like hold up, hold up you know/ you know/ you know like you tryna single black men out like their different/ that's what I get		Dr. P. interjects attempting to clarify how she was using the term and seeking to ascertain from Erica if in fact she interpreted her comment as singling black men out as different.
49	ES	Right, yeah		Erica confirms that she did perceive black men as being singled out or positioned as different.
50	Dr. P.	So		Dr. P. begins to articulate a thought, but she is interrupted by Anthony.
51	AH	But they are different! That's the thing.	<i>AH: It just gets more attention when a black person does it. I don't think they give us like equal rights as other people (Focus Group Interview,9-21-06)</i>	Anthony inserts another viewpoint in relation to difference and black males.
52	Dr. P.	Are they?		Dr. P. seeks further explication from Anthony.
53	AH	Yeah		Anthony confirms that he views black male as

				“different”. It is not clear who or what they are different from at this point.
54	AS	Some of them are different		Ayanna interjects qualifying that <i>some</i> of them are different. Still there is no clarification about what difference means yet.
55	ES	No/I don’t know		Erica seems to be struggling to articulate her thoughts on this racially sensitive issue.
56	Dr. P.	Some of them? Some of who?		Dr. P. attempts to get the youth to talk more specifically about how the term <i>difference</i> is being used in the conversation.
57	KK	Elaborate		Ms. KK encourages Ayanna to elaborate on her statement about difference as well.
58	Dr. P.	Yeah elaborate		Dr. P. echoes Ms. KK.’s request to elaborate.
59	MB	But no, but I didn’t say it Ayanna said it/ so elaborate over there	<i>MB: People may not want to say it, but there is a difference. If there’s no difference then how come some white girls say they only date black guys? Focus Group Interview,9-21-06)</i>	Merriel seems to think that Dr. P. was asking her to elaborate instead of Ayanna who made the original comment. Merriel directs the focus back to Ayanna. In doing so, she seems hesitant to speak.
60	Dr. P.	Oh, Ayanna elaborate/ I mean like / okay cause I/ Erica was challenging me in terms of the fact when I said/		Dr. P. brings the conversation back to the initial source of tension—the introduction of the term <i>black man</i> .
61	ES	Yes, I shol was!	<i>ES: First of all, I am an African American and I know that they are going to look</i>	Using AAVE, Erica admits that she did in fact take exception to when word <i>black man</i> was introduced.

			<i>at me as being a threat to their society because it's not many African Americans out here and they're stereotyped. (Focus Group Interview,9-26-06)</i>	
62	AS	Some black people act white/ some people	<i>AS: I know a lot of Black people who were raised in predominately white cities like Bloomington and they don't necessarily put on like whiteness (Focus Group Interview,9-21-06).</i>	When Ayanna speaks, the conversation suddenly shifts from talking about black men to talking about black people in general. Almost simultaneously Ayanna introduces the notion of "acting white" into the discussion.
63	AH	What is acting white?		None of the youth challenge Ayanna's statement about acting white. Instead, Anthony and others begin interrogating the <i>meaning of acting white</i> .
64	MW	What's actin white? It's just cause you talk like you suppose to?	<i>MW: They always makin fun of the way you talk and I'm lookin like just cause we don't talk the way...like it's not necessarily a different language but its just a different way we talk to each other. (Focus Group Interview,9-21-06)</i>	Once whiteness is articulated, there seems to be a covert value system assigned to the notion of acting white which is equated with talking "proper."
65	ES	It's just talkin proper/ we supposed to talk proper/ even		Erica points out the internal conflict that she and other African Americans experience while having to

		though we don't talk proper		negotiate dual sets of cultural and linguistic norms that are constructed upon whiteness.
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When Dr. P. juxtaposes the word *man* against the words *black man*, the dynamic of the conversation shifts and the tensions around race begin to become more visible. Erica immediately expresses disagreement with Dr.C.'s statement when she says "Huh? No!" in line 37. Struggling to articulate the reason for her objection, Erica mumbles in line 40, "What is, what is that! How you gon say... what the? Ne'mind." Dr. P. then prods Erica in line 41 to continue with her remarks saying, "No tell me Erica." As Erica begins to open up in line 42, it becomes clearer why she appeared to have taken an oppositional stance when the term *black man* was introduced. In the very next line of the transcript on line 42 Erica says, "You just don't say what's a black man/ like/ you actin like you have to be like/ you have to act a certain a way to be a black man or sumthin like that."

On the surface, Erica's statement "You just don't say what's a black man" appears to be a form of rejecting what she perceives to be a homogenized representation of black men. However, in looking at separate interview data taken from a follow-up focus group conversation, Erica's response, "You just don't say what's a black man" seems much more complicated. When Erica was asked to reflect on her thoughts about Black males, she began to share a story about an incident with her brothers whom she believed were perceived as potential threats to a white person that they came across while traveling to a party. She observes, "Like when I'm around my brothers, we are not

thinking about the person [white person] that is next to us, and people lock their doors when they see like a group of black folk” (Focus Group Interview, 9/21/06).

Erica’s reflection on this personal event helps illustrate her level of awareness as to how black people—black males in particular—are perceived and positioned by dominant white society. Therefore, when Dr. P. brought up the issue of black males, it is likely that Erica drew on her prior knowledge and experiences of witnessing black men like her brothers being seen as threatening in a dominant white societal context (Bernardi, 2008).

The positioning of non-white people as threatening and/or culturally deficient is a phenomenon deeply entrenched in white supremacist ideologies (Meddaugh, 1999; Ricky Lee, 2001). This positioning has been described by the concept of *othering*, or the grouping of non-white people together in ways that (sometimes inadvertently) reify white supremacy. The notion of othering has reinforced perceptions widely held in some segments of American society that to be human is to be white, or to be able to do and accomplish what white Americans have done and accomplished (Fordham, 1996). Therefore, the oppositional stance Erica seemed to take when the word *man* was juxtaposed with the words *black man* can perhaps be attributed to the heightened sensitivity many African American youth have to the ways blacks have been “othered” in mainstream society. Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986) contend that African American youth develop oppositional collective identity and cultural frames of reference in response to their growing awareness of the systematic exclusion of black people from full participation in U.S. society.

Dr. P. attempts to get at the source of Erica’s oppositional reaction, saying:

Okay so I guess I was just sayin/Erica raises another point cause I said/ What does it mean to be a man and then I said black man/ and she was like hold up, hold up you know/ you know/ you know like you tryna single black men out like they're different/ that's what I get. (Book Club transcript, 9/19/07, line 48)

By saying “Right, yeah” in line 49, Erica agrees that she *did* perceive that the word *difference* was being constructed in a negative way with regard to black males. In order to put Erica’s oppositional stance in context, it is necessary to expound on the notion of fictive kinship. Although there is a diversity of opinions that may exist within the African American community, as is the case with other racial minority groups, there tends to be, in many instances, a sense of wanting to protect other black people from undue effects of white racism or white supremacist ideologies. For instance, when a black person engages in an unsavory act (or is alleged to have done so), there is often a collective sense of pain felt by the majority of African Americans. This phenomenon played out in the racially polarized events surrounding the 1994 O.J. Simpson murder trial. The African American community expressed a collective sigh of relief that the justice system was finally working *for* and not against a black man such as Simpson, who was charged with the killings of his ex-wife Nicole Simpson and her associate Ronald Goldman. On the other hand, the larger white community responded in dismay and outrage at Simpson’s acquittal. Some argue that the reaction the black community expressed was not necessarily about O.J. Simpson’s guilt or innocence, but rather was about the miscarriage of justice that has historically been perpetuated against black men at the hands of the white judicial establishment. Erica’s reaction to hearing the words *man* (i.e. white man) and *black man* in the same sentence perhaps sparked similar feelings of defensiveness towards the way black men have been portrayed and positioned in the dominant white media.

In contrast, Anthony's remark, "But they are different!" in line 51 suggests that he may have constructed its meaning differently than Erica. However, while Erica and Anthony each attached distinct interpretations to how *different* was being constructed in the conversation, what remained static in both their reactions was the concept of whiteness. In other words, while the concept of *different* was being negotiated back and forth in the conversation by the participants, whiteness never moved away from its position at normative center of the conversation.

Later in the same book club conversation, Anthony was asked to expound on his thoughts about black males being different. He described Black males as having a certain "swagger" (Field Notes, 9/19/08). Also, during a follow-up focus group interview in which Anthony was asked to elaborate on his views about black males, he explained that white people also have criminal elements among them and men who abandon their fatherly responsibilities. Yet, as he notes, "It just catches more attention when a black guy does it" (Focus Group Interview Transcript, 9/21/06).

Once Anthony challenges Erica's response, the notion of *difference* becomes complex and loaded. Again, it is clear that whiteness remains the proverbial elephant in the room while the youth construct various understandings of the term *different*. On one hand, Erica challenged Dr. P.'s use of the term *difference* on the basis that it represented an invisible measuring system of white superiority. On the other hand, Anthony embraced the notion of difference as affirming a distinct black male identity, or a "swagger" as he described it. (Field Notes, 9/19/08). Anthony's remark helps to illustrate the tensions and contradictions that can surface when African American youth

attempt to articulate their racial identity as whiteness functions beneath the surface of the conversation.

In line 54 when Ayanna challenges Anthony and says, “Some of them are different” it is not clear yet who “them” are and what “different” is being contrasted against. By not articulating who “them” are, there is a level of tension being introduced into the conversation because Ayanna, the speaker, must rely on a level fictive kinship to negotiate this racially sensitive conversation. In other words, she must assume or hope that her African American peers understand what her intended meaning is about who “them” are in the context of this discussion.

A follow up interview with Ayanna clarifies that her use of the word *them* was indeed a comparison to white people. She contends that not all black people necessarily act white. When Ayanna was asked to explain her thoughts on the concept of difference, she stated, “ I know a lot of black people who were raised in predominately white cities... and they don’t necessarily put on like whiteness” (Focus Group Interview, 9/21/06). Ayanna appears to conflate the notion of acting white with whiteness even though whiteness also has to do with larger issues of power and privilege. Nonetheless, she clearly expresses that the term *difference*, for her, was intuitively linked to a category of whiteness.

In seeking to make race more visible, Dr. P. encourages Ayanna to clarify her remarks in line 56 asking, “Some of them? Some of who?” Once Ayanna regains the floor in line 62, she responds to Dr. P. saying, “Some black people act white/some people...”. When Ayanna introduces the term *acting white* into the discussion about difference, it becomes clear that whiteness is at play in the conversation. Again, perhaps

the reason whiteness has not been articulated up to this point is that it was implicitly understood. Whiteness enabled the young scholars to talk *around* the issue of race while still understanding the basic meaning of how it was being constructed in the discussion.

Furthermore, Ayanna only introduces the notion of acting white once Dr. P. requests that she elaborate on her response about difference. It would not have been uncommon for the conversation to continue without whiteness being made visible had not Dr. P. challenged Ayanna to clarify her statement. An example of how African American youth talk around race can be seen when Merriel directs the focus of attention away from herself when she thinks that Ms. KK and Dr. P. are asking her, instead of Ayanna, to elaborate on what is meant by the statement, “some of them are different”. Merriel responds quickly in line 59 saying, “But no, I didn’t say it, Ayanna said it, so elaborate over there.” In redirecting the focus, Merriel appears to be hesitant to initiate her thoughts on this racially charged discussion. This can be corroborated by the fact that Merriel responded similarly in previous conversations about what it means to act white (Field Notes, 9/12/06; Field Notes 11/2/06). Her general response when asked what it means to act white was to deflect the attention away from herself and say, “You already know what it means.” Merriel was adamant in her position that as an African American, Dr. P. or any other black person in the book club already knows (or at least should know) what it means to act white. It appears that fictive kinship informed Merriel’s reaction to the this topic, insofar as she believed that notions of acting white or acting black are already embedded in most people’s consciousness and therefore do not warrant direct verbalization.

Once Ayanna articulates whiteness, the young scholars begin to openly interrogate its meaning. For instance, in line 63 Monique asks, “What’s acting white? It’s just ‘cause you talk like you supposed to?” By equating acting white with “talk[ing] like you to supposed to,” Monique begins to reveal the complicated relationship between black identity and language. During an individual interview, Monique opened up with Dr. P. about her experiences as a black student in a predominately white school as she reflected on her inquiry project related to Black males in society. In the interview, Monique was asked to elaborate on how race plays out in her school because she talked a lot about being stereotyped and singled out in school by her teachers throughout the interview. She stated, “I honestly don’t think they [white teachers] understand black people” (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/ 26/06). As the conversation progressed, Monique stated that although she tries to stay out of trouble at school, she finds her self in trouble a lot. She explains,

They [white teachers] look at you differently like well being black in general they look at you like aw she bad don’t worry about her she always got an attitude and stuff or like she not smart or she probably out there doin drugs, but being a black a girl they always think aw yeah she be out there having sex all the time when that’s not true (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/ 26/06).

Immediately following Monique’s response, Dr. P. asks her, “Do you think they respond differently or do you think that has anything to do with being a black girl?” Monique responds by saying,

It’s the way we act in general, like the black kids... black people in general like when you talk or whatever they always making fun of the way you talk and I’m looking like just cause we don’t talk the way... like it’s not necessarily a different language but it’s the same language but it’s just a different way we talk to each other. (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/ 26/06)

Evidently, Monique is grappling with how African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is perceived and positioned in her predominately white school setting. Although she does not acknowledge AAVE as a distinct language with its own rule-governing system as some linguists have shown (Smitherman, 1977; Perry & Delpit, 1998), she seems aware of how AAVE is positioned as a substandard language in the dominant white social context.

Moreover, in line 65 when Erica says, “It’s just talkin’ proper/ we supposed to talk proper/ even though we don’t talk proper,” the value system that African American youth attach to Eurocentric language and speech patterns becomes apparent. Beneath the surface, both Erica and Monique are articulating the tension some African American youth experience in having to negotiate both dominant Eurocentric cultural and linguistic norms as well as those that are practiced in their homes and communities (Williams, 2007). Negotiating these dual sets of cultural and linguistic norms requires having a sense of double consciousness, or a heightened awareness of how dominant white society subordinates the language and speech patterns of black people.

When Erica makes the statement “it’s just talkin’ proper” in line 65, the placement of the word *just* in her remark suggests that she recognizes that there is a covert value system at play in the U.S. whereby Standard American English (SAE) is the language of power, or the language that carries the most “cultural capital” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Erica immediately qualifies her remark saying in that same line saying, “Even though we don’t talk proper.” Here, Erica seems to be expressing awareness that although African Americans *know how* to speak the language of power (SAE), they often *choose not* to. This resistance has been described as *code switching*, or selectively

choosing to use one's home language rather than the dominant language in particular social settings (Morgan, 2002; Van Keulen, Weddington, & DeBose, 1998).

Erica's own language choices throughout the book club sessions are indicative of the tension that African Americans experience while negotiating mainstream white cultural and linguistic norms alongside their own Afro-cultural communicative practices. For instance, in line 61 Erica responds to Dr. P. using an AAVE expression, "I shol was." She could have chosen to use the "proper" Standard American English translation of the phrase which would have been "I sure was"—but she chose not to do so.

Her choice *not* to use the "proper" language can be seen as an act of resistance to the linguistic colonization of AAVE in the United States. On several occasions, Erica would correct Dr. P. or other adults who attempted to correct her use of AAVE. Her contestation shows evidence that she is aware of how to speak the language of power (SAE) and yet she elects to use her native tongue (AAVE). Her decision to use AAVE could also stem from her comfort level in the predominately Black book club where she may feel more free to speak without restrictions or being perceived as less intelligent than her peers. Erica discussed how it feels to live in a predominately white community during a individual interview with Dr. P. She notes, " First of all, I am an African American and I know that they are going to look at me as being a threat to their society because it's not many African Americans out here and they're stereotyped" (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06).

Similarly, in a study on African American racial identity Williams (2007) found that African American youth in middle school classrooms used AAVE intentionally as a way to build community with the other African Americans in the classroom. Her finding

is supported in the way AAVE was used by the young scholars in the *Circle of Voices* book club as well.

Summary. This book discussion of the novel *First Part Last* helps illuminate the following finding: Tension is a necessary and constructive component of critical racial dialogue that African American youth use to help articulate their racial identity in overt ways. The finding addresses the following research questions:

1. What, if any, tensions or struggles do African American youth experience while articulating their racial identity in a culturally responsive book club?
2. How does whiteness function inside the book club and in what ways does it inform how the African American youth act, interact, and react?

The *First Part Last*: “But They Are Different” event highlights the fact that tension is a constructive and integral component to critical dialogue, particularly around issues of race in culturally responsive book club settings. As the transcript segment above shows, Anthony challenged Erica’s notion of difference as it related to black male experiences in ways that helped all of the youth begin to unmask the hidden ideologies that were informing the way they were articulating their racial identity. Were it not for the continual prodding from the book club facilitators—Dr. P. and Ms. KK—the young scholars would likely not have been swayed to articulate their thoughts as candidly as they did about the topic of black males. This gentle prodding helped create a positive tension that drove the discussions and made whiteness more visible. For example, when Ayanna was asked to elaborate on her conception of difference, she introduced the notion of acting white into the conversation. Had she not been asked to elaborate, the group would have likely continued to operate from an implicit assumption that whiteness was

the normative category against which difference was being defined. Once it became evident that whiteness was the normative “other” the youth began to problematize that notion in ways that were transformative and enlightening for the entire group.

Event 2
Brotha to Brotha:
“Ne’mind; Ain’t No Difference”:

Introduction

The transcript segment highlighted in this literacy event helps contextualize the second finding relative to how whiteness functioned in the book club and structured the limits of the book discussions in ways that made double consciousness more visible in the African American youth’s actions and interactions. The transcript segment featured below documents a follow-up book discussion/inquiry session that took place at the Black Cultural Center Library where the young scholars were beginning to generate inquiry topics for their culminating Brotha to Brotha inquiry project. Present at this session are Dr. P., Ms. KK., Alicia, Anthony, Barack, Derrell, Erica, Ayanna, Merriel, Mike, Monique, Raven, and Tanika. There were also three white female pre-service teachers present who were observing the discussion as part of their field placement in Secondary English education.

Transcript 2
Segment of an Inquiry Session on Black Males
Thursday, September 21, 2006

AH: Anthony Hughes, African American male student

AS: Ayanna Scott, African American female student

ES: Erica Smith, African American female student

KK: Kafi Kumasi, African American female researcher/ co- facilitator

MB: Merriel Broddick, African American female student

MW: Monique Williams, African American female student

MD: Mike Dixon, African American male student

SC: Stephanie Carter, African American female researcher/ co-facilitator

- 1 Dr. P.: Okay first/ let's kinda review for a minute. Are there other... What did we do Tuesday?
- 2 MW: Talked about the book
- 3 Dr. P.: We Talked about the book on Tuesday. And what else? So we talked about the book and what else did we talk about in relation to the book?
- 4 MW: Black men.
- 5 Dr. P.: Black men. Okay. And I just wanna clarify something. Um there were several different notions going on about black men. One was/ one, it was don't stereotype/that they're no different. I'm not sure different from who or different from what. I wanna believe/ was it Anthony that said, "Can't explain it, it's kinds like a swagger"? Was it you Barack that said that?
- 6 Barack: Actually it was Anthony.
- 7 Dr. P.: Okay. So what/ what is this/ I just wanna I understand you/ so/ black man/ when you hear *black man*/ do you think different from any other group? Or do you think similar or do you see it in terms of difference? Or how DO you think/ when you think black man?
- 8 MW: Difference.
- 9 Dr. P.: When you say "difference," tell me what you mean when you say "different?"
- 10 MW: We gotta explain ourselves?
- 11 Dr. P.: You always have to explain yourself.
- 12 MW: Well then ne'mind ain't no difference
- 13 ☺ Laughter
- 14 AH: A whole different perspective on life
- 15 Dr. P.: A whole different perspective on life
- 16 AH: A hustle [inaudible]
- 17 Dr. P.: Like for example?
- 18 AH: Like them white boys- different

- 19: Dr. P.: I mean like when you say “perspective” / what kind of different perspective?
- 20 AH: Like they have more of a struggle.
- 21: MW: You be makin the questions hard.
- 22: AH: What they just supposed to be easy?
- 23: KK: Remember you all are scholars.
- 24: Dr. P.: Yeah scholars elaborate, we talk. You said because, you said about struggle right? Okay so it’s about struggle. So you think black males, in terms of struggle, have it different?
- 25: MB: Yeah
- 26: Dr. P.: Is that what you were saying Monique or you were saying something different?
- 27 MW: No I was saying that.
- 28 Dr. P.: Would anyone disagree? I mean you can. We don’t all have to agree. Scholars don’t have to think alike. So let me say this. Let me ask you this, it was interesting, at the library what happened? Why, why was it, what happened that? And you know I need you all to be real-with me. I need you to always to be real-with me. What happened? You know cause you all couldn’t articulate/ you all seemed to not want to articulate/ that at the library. I just seemed that way. What happened?
- 29 MW: We ain’t want to offend nobody.
- 30 Dr. P.: Okay so you were concerned that you would offend someone.
- 31 MW: If I did I mean I would say sorry, but [inaudible]
- 32 Dr. P.: And what I need you all to understand is its okay—this, this is for you, about you, as African American youth. So you need to feel free to speak your mind, in a respectful way of course, but speak your mind. You should never feel like you can’t talk. So was that the reason you all didn’t elaborate?
- 33 ES: No I didn’t feel that way.
- 34 Dr. P.: Did other people feel that you couldn’t elaborate?...So you all didn’t get that impression at all?
- 35 MB: mm um.

36 Dr. P.: You, you smiling.

37 MB: What?

38 ☺

39 Dr. P.: Okay so speak your mind. Feel free to do that. All right so now the inquiry model. We, actually Ms. KK, did a great thing for you all and synthesized some of your ideas.

Line-by-Line Analysis

In line 1 of the chart below (see Figure 3), Dr. P. opens the session by asking the young scholars to review what was discussed during the previous Tuesday's book club session at the public library. Monique is the first to respond, stating that the discussion was about the book—referring to *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson. Monique later elaborates on her response in line 4, stating that the discussion was also about black men. Because Monique's initial response remained at the surface level, it may have been that she was uncomfortable being the first to enter the discussion about black men, particularly in the presence of the white pre-service teachers. Being hesitant to speak or to talk around issues of race until it is deemed safe to do so is symbolic of a level of double consciousness.

Figure 3. Chart featuring a line by line analysis of the transcript segment from the Brotha to Brotha : Ne'mind, Ain't No Difference" event

Line	Speaker	Message Unit	Youth Voices	Analysis of Whiteness and Double Consciousness (Macro)
1	Dr. P.	Okay first/ let's kinda review for a minute. Are there other? What did we do Tuesday?		Dr. P. helps students review what took place in the previous book discussion.

2	MW	Talked about the book.		Monique responds indicating that the conversation was about the novel <i>First Part Last</i> by Angela Johnson.
3	Dr. P.	We talked about the book on Tuesday? And what else? So we talked about the book and what else did we talk about in relation to the book?		Dr. P. restates Monique's answer and asks the students to elaborate on what else was discussed in the previous book discussion. She attempts to bring race explicitly to the fore of the conversation because the issue of black male hood took up such a large portion of the previous book discussion.
4	MW	Black men.	<i>MW: It makes you sound ignorant and it's already bad enough that the white people look at us as ignorant people" (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/3/06).</i>	Monique responds more specifically this time that the book discussion was also about black men. Her initial response is symbolic of a level double consciousness.
5	Dr. P.	Black men. Okay. And I just wanna clarify something. There were several different notions going on about black men. One was/ one, it was don't stereotype: that they're no different. I'm not sure different from whom or different from what. I wanna believe/ was it Anthony that said, "Can't explain it, it's kinds like a swagger"? Was it you Barack that said that?		Dr. P. begins to unpack the different ideological stances the youth took during Tuesday's book discussion in terms of how they constructed the term <i>difference</i> as it relates to black men.

6	Barack	Actually it was Anthony.	<i>B: I went through two classes and all we did was talk about like black people and like race and how they brought us down. I think they focused too much on how we were brought down instead of the good things that came out of it. (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06)</i>	Seemingly hesitant to take the lead in the discussion, Barack clarifies that it was Anthony, not him, that made the remark about difference. He appears reticent to enter the discussion about race.
7	Dr. P.	Okay. So what/ what is this/ I just wanna I understand you/ so/ black man/ when you hear <i>black man</i> / do you think different from any other group? Or do you think similar or do you see it terms of difference? Or how DO you think/ when you think <i>black man</i> ?		Dr. P. continues to try to get the African American youth to articulate their ideas about difference.
8	MW	Difference.		Monique states plainly that there is a difference. She stops short of providing a more detailed explanation.
9	Dr. P.	When you say <i>difference</i> , tell me what you mean when you say <i>different</i> .		Dr. P. continues to challenge Monique to articulate her ideas about difference.
10	MW	We gotta explain ourselves?	<i>MW: When we [black youth] with each other we actually have a lot on our mind that we be wanting to say to other people but we don't know how to say it because they</i>	Monique appears to take exception to the fact that she is being asked to explain what it means to be black.

			<i>[white people] think we coming at them the wrong way (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06)</i>	
11	Dr. P.	You always have to explain yourself.		Dr. P. reminds Monique, and the rest of the group, that it is important to be able to articulate your ideas clearly by giving supportive details.
12	MW	Well then ne'mind, ain't no difference.	<i>M: They look at you differently like well being black in general they look at you like aw she bad so don't worry about her she always got attitude and stuff or she not smart or she probably out there doing drugs, but being a black girl they always think aw she yeah she be out there having sex all the time, when that's not true.</i>	Once Monique has been urged by Dr. P. to describe how black men are different, she retreats from her initial viewpoint altogether; again symbolizing a level of double consciousness.
13	☺	Laughter	<i>ES: It's like when we say it, we actually get the jokes without having to explain it (Field Notes, 10/26/06)</i>	Some of the African American youth laugh at Monique's response. It seems they find humor at the length Monique is willing to go (completely changing her position) to not have to articulate her thoughts on this racially sensitive issue. Their laughter also seems to help mask the tension in the room and show a level of fictive kinship, or an unspoken bond among the African American youth.
14	AH	A whole different perspective on life.	<i>A: Personally, with me it's not that type</i>	Anthony interrupts and offers an opposing

			<i>of thing like if you do this n that you know, if you like put your “er’s” and all that on your words, you’re being black. I don’t know, it’s just a swagger to it truthfully. I don’t know it’s hard explain it. You can just tell by a person’s conversation and what they talkin about if they black or not.</i>	viewpoint to Monique. Unlike Monique, it appears that Anthony is willing to articulate a position that acknowledges how black males are different. In doing so, Anthony pushes back against whiteness—as colorblind ideology—and asserts a racially conscious view of black male experiences.
15	Dr. P.	A whole different perspective on life.		Dr. P. re-voices Anthony’s response.
16	AH	[A hustle]		Slightly inaudible, Anthony likens the black male experience to a hustle.
17	Dr. P.	Like for example?		Dr. P. continues to push the conversation forward by asking Anthony to further explain his position on difference as it relates to black males.
18	AH	Like them white boys	<i>AH: This white kid had on a shirt that said mighty whitey or something like that and they told him to take it off or whatever but that’s a direct word and if we was to wear like our hats in the hallway you know it’s a gym teacher that’s like as soon as it hits 8:55, well not 8:55,7:55, in the books it says take our hats off at 8:00. Soon as it hits that five minute bell</i>	Anthony begins to respond but does not complete his thought. However in saying ‘white boys’, Anthony introduces white experiences into the conversation. In doing so, whiteness becomes the normative category against which the notion of difference is being constructed.

			<i>teacher be like well you need to take off this and take off that and he followed my cousin to his locker trying o make him take it off, but on the other hand kids walking, three, four, five kids passed him that had their hats on but he was focused on this one kid. I think that's wrong. (Individual Interview Transcript, 5/30/06)</i>	
19	Dr. P.	I mean like when you say perspective/ what kind of different perspective?		Dr. P. continues to probe Anthony for a more detailed explanation of how he thinks about difference as it relates to black males.
20	AH	Like they [black males] have more of a struggle.	<i>A: Some things they kind of don't go by the rules they set themselves so I think that's kind of messed up. (Individual Interview Transcript, 5/30/06)</i>	Anthony defines the black experience in terms of struggle.
21	MW	You be makin the questions hard!		Monique seems to still be uncomfortable with this racially sensitive line of questioning. Her discomfort is another sign that she is not accustomed to talking about issues of race explicitly, particularly in the presence of whites.
22	AH	What they just supposed to be easy?	<i>AH: It [family and CLIP] makes me work harder you know because I know a lot of people depending on me. They want me to be</i>	Anthony challenges Monique in a way that perhaps shows that his level of comfort in talking through difficult racial conversations is higher than hers.

			<i>somebody and they see the potential in me. So Therefore I don't want to let them down.</i> (Individual Interview Transcript, 5/30/06)	
23	Ms. KK	Remember you all are scholars.		Ms. KK reiterates the point that, as scholars, the youth should be comfortable challenging one another and asking questions.
24	Dr. P.	Yeah scholars elaborate, we talk. You said because, you said about struggle right? Okay so it's about struggle. So you think black males, in terms of struggle, have it different?		Dr. P. affirms Ms. KK's comment. She then moves back to the crux of the conversation by rephrasing Anthony's comment about black males and struggle.
25	MB	Yeah		Merriel answers affirmatively, but does not elaborate.
26	Dr. P.	Is that what you were saying Monique or you were saying something different?		Dr. P. attempts to confirm whether Monique agreed with her interpretation that black experiences differ in terms of the struggle.
27	MW	No I was saying that.		Monique agrees that she conceived of difference the way Dr. P. restated it—in terms of struggle. By agreeing, Monique shifts back to her original viewpoint, [insert comma] which was that black male experiences <i>are</i> in fact different.
28	Dr. P.	Would anyone disagree? I mean you can. We don't all have to agree. Scholars don't have		Sensing Monique's hesitancy to speak freely, Dr. P. reminds the young scholars that they should feel comfortable

		to think alike. So let me say this. Let me ask you this, it was interesting, at the library what happened? Why, why was it, what happened that? And you know I need you all to be real-with me. I need you to always to be real-with me. What happened? You know cause you all couldn't articulate/ you all seemed to not want to articulate that at the library. I just seemed that way. What happened?		articulating their ideas. She then uses this opportunity to question the youth as to why they seemed hesitant to talk on Tuesday at the public library after Ms. Book, the white librarian, interjected a comment.
29	MW	We ain't want to offend nobody	<i>MW: They [white teachers] always think black people gon go up there and cuss them out or be like I'm going to fight you and stuff like that when that's not really how we act. I mean yeah we might seem like we act like that on movies and tv shows, but like, we not gon come up there disrespecting you if we don't know the real story.(Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/08)</i>	The "nobody" Monique does not want to offend is perhaps Ms. Book, the white librarian, or the white college tutors who were present at Tuesday's session. Her comment helps illustrate why she did not elaborate earlier in lines about her thoughts on difference. It also helps confirm the fact that Monique was enacting double consciousness by considering how her remarks might be perceived by a white audience.
30	Dr. P.	So you were concerned that you.		Dr. P. begins to seek clarity on what Monique is saying.

31	MW	I mean if I did I would say sorry.		Monique expresses an understanding of the “politically correct” way to handle offending someone, particularly in a racially charged situation, showing her awareness of the “rules” of racial talk that exist in a post-Civil Rights political context.
32	Dr. P.	And what I need you all to understand is its okay—this, this is for you, about you, as African American youth. So you need to feel free to speak your mind, in a respectful way of course, but speak your mind. You should never feel like you can’t talk. . So was that the reason you all didn’t elaborate?		Dr. P. reminds the young scholars that they should feel comfortable talking about racially sensitive issues, particularly in this learning context which has been designed to support their Afro-cultural learning styles and literacy needs.
33	ES	No I didn’t feel that way.		Erica, a more outspoken student, indicates that she did not feel uncomfortable speaking her mind in the presence of the white librarians and college tutors.
34	Dr. P.	Did other people feel that you couldn’t elaborate?...So you all didn’t get that impression at all?		Dr. P. queries the rest of the group about whether they felt uncomfortable talking about race in the presence of the white librarian and tutors.
35	MB	umm mm (meaning no)		Merriel’s response is that she did <i>not</i> feel constrained to talk freely about race in the presence of the white librarian or college tutor.

36	Dr. P.	You, you smiling.		Dr. P. recognizes that Merriel was smiling when she gave her response, masking her true thoughts. She attempts to get Merriel to articulate what she is thinking.
37	MB	Whaaaaat? (smiling)	<i>MB: Everybody knows what it [acting white or acting black] means... whether that want to say it or not.(Field Notes, 10/6/06)</i>	Merriel continues to mask her thoughts behind a coy smile.
38	☺	Group Laughter		The laughter that is evoked from Merriel's comment symbolizes the bond these African American youth share which allows them to negotiate racially sensitive discussions without having to explicitly articulate the underlying assumptions, meanings, etc. that are at play in the discussion.
39	Dr. P.	Okay so speak your mind. Feel free to do that. Alright so now the inquiry model. We, actually Ms. KK, did a great thing for you all and synthesized some of your ideas.		Before moving on to the next topic, Dr. P., with an awareness of the young scholars' heightened sensitivity toward talking freely in the presence of whites, encourages the young scholars to speak their minds.

In line 4 Monique gives a more specific answer, indicating that the book club discussion was about black men. Monique's initial response is indicative of her level of double consciousness. Interview data from a conversation with Monique suggests that the reason she may not have come right out and stated that the conversation was about black men may be attributed to her awareness of how the white college tutors might have

perceive her remarks. For instance, when Monique was asked about her thoughts on the *n* word during an interview pertaining to her inquiry project and the topic of black males, she stated that the word should not be used too much even by black people because in her opinion “it makes you sound ignorant and it’s already bad enough that the white people look at us as ignorant people” (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/3/06). This interview reflects the kind of awareness that Monique carries with her as it relates to how she and other black people are perceived by whites. Therefore, she may have been uncomfortable initiating the discussion about black males in the presence of the white college tutors for similar reasons having to do with double consciousness.

In line 5, Dr. P. takes the opportunity to unpack the different ideological stances that the youth seemed to take with regard their construction of the term *difference* in the previous book discussion. The way Erica constructed the term *different* illuminates the ways in which African American youth enact double consciousness as a response to whiteness. Like many African American youth, Erica enacted a heightened awareness to the ways black men are often portrayed in mainstream media as gangsters, criminals, etc. (Tatum, 1992). This sort of heightened sensitivity—also known as double consciousness—is a direct response to a mainstream media in the U.S. that is constructed primarily by and for whites (Giroux, 1997). Because Erica was aware of how black men have been marginalized in mainstream media and society at large, she immediately assumed a defensive stance when the notion of difference was introduced that compelled her to react strongly to defend their reputation.

In line 6, Barack deflects the attention away from himself and towards Anthony by stating “actually, it was Anthony” who made the comment about black males having a

swagger. It appears that Barack may have been reticent to take the lead in this racially sensitive discussion just as Monique was. Yet, interview data suggest that Barack's apprehension may have been rooted in a slightly different source. In a focus group conversation about black males, Barack voiced his displeasure for how issues of race and black history are dealt in his school curriculum. He stated,

I went through two classes and all we did was talk about like black people and like race and how they brought us down. I think they focused too much on how we were brought down instead of the good things that came out of it (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06)

Since Barack is quiet and reserved during most of the book club sessions, it is not surprising that he would deflect the attention away from himself. Yet, in light of his feelings about how issues of race and black experiences are dealt with in school, it seems likely that he is not totally comfortable with talking about issues of race in this space as well. In this sense, Barack is enacting a sort of double consciousness that is linked to his experience as an African American student in a predominately white school. Despite his school's efforts to address difficult issues such as slavery in the curricula, Barack seems uncomfortable with discussing these kinds of issues, particularly when black people are represented mainly as victims of oppression. Although the youth have opportunities to create counter narratives of black life inside the *Circle of Voices* book club and the larger CLIP program, Barack may not be fully ready to take on these kinds of intellectual challenges.

In line 7, Dr. P. attempts to get the youth to talk explicitly about how they think about the topic of black men. She says, "When you hear *black man*/ do you think different from any other group? Or do you think similar or do you see it terms of difference? Or how *do* you think when you think *black man*?" In line 8, Monique

confirms that there is a difference with regard to black males, but she stops short of giving a more detailed explanation. Again, there appears to be reluctance among some of the young scholars to take up the issue of race and difference in a forthright manner. This reluctance is perhaps another indication of the ways in which whiteness structures the limits of the conversation by imposing a colorblind ideology that minimizes racial differences (Lewis, 2001).

Dr. P. continues to urge Monique to articulate her ideas about difference in line 8. Monique then responds vociferously to this request in line 9 when she demands, “We gotta explain ourselves?” Monique seems to be struggling to negotiate whiteness as it often functions as a hidden ideology of colorblindness and/or neutrality. This negotiation process become visible in an interview conversation with Monique related to her inquiry project on black men in Hollywood films. When she was asked about the various kinds of experiences and influences that helped shape her inquiry topic, Monique began to express her feelings about being a black female student at her school. She noted that, “When we [black youth] with each other we actually have a lot on our mind that we be wantin’ to say to other people but we don’t know how to say it because they [white people] think we coming at them the wrong way” (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06).

Moreover, Monique’s annoyance with being asked to elaborate on her understanding about the concept of different in relation to black males is perhaps also linked to her sense of fictive kinship with the other African American people in the book club. As mentioned previously, fictive kinship, among African Americans, is a sense of “peoplehood” in opposition to dominant white society (Fordham, 1986). In the context of the book club, fictive kinship allowed the African American youth to often talk around

the issue of race by relying on their shared understandings how white supremacy functions. Dr. P. reminds Monique and the other young scholars that it is important to always be prepared to explain themselves. Nonetheless, this exchange with Monique reveals how difficult it is for some African American youth to articulate their racial identity while negotiating whiteness and double consciousness at the same time.

In line 12, after Dr. P. urges Monique to elaborate on her ideas about difference as it relates to black men, Monique abruptly changes her initial stance. She says sarcastically, “Well then ne’ mind ain’t no difference.” Rather than articulate a racially conscious position, Monique retracts her statement that black males are different. Monique’s shift in position can be attributed to her not wanting to offend the white college tutors in the room by delving deeper into her personal thoughts about her racialized experiences as a black student. Similarly, in a prior interview Monique articulated an explicit awareness of the ways in which black people are perceived by whites when she stated, “They [white people] look at you differently like well being black in general they look at you like aw she bad so don’t worry about her she always got attitude and stuff ” (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06).

In line 13, many of the young scholars responded with laughter to Monique’s statement. They seemed to find humor in the fact that she was willing to completely change her position so as not to have to articulate her thoughts on this racially sensitive issue in the presence of the white college tutors. The laughter also connotes a sense of fictive kinship, meaning that the youth collectively understood how Monique may have felt at that moment based on a shared sense of black identity.

Another example of how fictive kinship has manifested was during a book discussion on the novel *Born Blue*. Erica vocalized that she did not like the way the author used language in the novel to represent a speaker of African American Vernacular English through Leshaya's character. This led to a conversation about code switching. Dr. P. asked Erica to give an example of a statement using African American Vernacular English and then translate the same statement into Standard American English for a hypothetical job interview scenario. Erica chose the phrase "I'll be dere at fo" to represent AAVE. She then translated it into SAE with an elevated pitch in her voice and an emphasis on the letter r in the word *four*, saying, "I'll be there at four o'clock." The group laughed at Erica's mocking impression of what was implicitly understood to be someone who sounds white.

In a follow-up interview conversation with Erica, she elaborated on the communal bond she feels as a participant in the book club and the larger literacy program. One of the things she pointed out was that she appreciated the fact the other youth in the book club, actually get the jokes without having to explain them (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/4/06).

Anthony disrupts the laughter in line 14 and offers a response to Dr. P.'s question to say that black men have "a whole different perspective on life." In contrast to Erica's reaction, Anthony appears to have attached a more positive connotation to the notion of difference. However, his interpretation is still juxtaposed against an invisible category of whiteness. To explain what he meant by this statement, it is helpful to refer to his remarks from a focus group conversation where the topic of being 'ghetto' arose in the

context of discussing what it means to be black. When one student attempted to liken the concept of ghetto to using poor speech habits, Anthony challenged this idea stating,

Personally, with me it's not that type of thing like if you do this n' that you know, if you like put your *er*'s and all that on your words, your being black. I don't know, it's just a swagger to it truthfully. I don't know it's hard explain it. You can just tell by a person's conversation and what they talkin about if they black or not. (Focus Group Interview Transcript, 11/2/06)

It appears that Anthony, unlike Monique, is willing to articulate how black males are different. In doing so, Anthony pushes back against whiteness as a colorblind ideology and asserts a racially conscious view of black male experiences. In lines 16-19, Anthony attempts to provide a more concrete example of his point. Although he does not complete his thought, in line 18 he says "like them white boys." This comment is most likely a reference to an incident that occurred at school that Anthony shared during an individual interview. He explains,

This white kid had on a shirt that said "mighty whitey" or something like that and they told him to take it off or whatever but that's a direct word and if we was to wear like our hats in the hallway you know it's a gym teacher that's like as soon as it hits 8:55, well not 8:55, 7:55, in the books it says take our hats off at 8:00. Soon as it hits that five minute bell teacher be like well you need to take off this and take off that and he followed my cousin to his locker trying o make him take it off, but on the other hand kids walking, three, four, five kids [white kids] passed him that had their hats on but he was focused on this one kid. I think that's wrong. (Individual Interview Transcript, 5/30/06)

Here again, Anthony is making a contrast between white and black to help explicate the meaning of *difference*. In doing so, whiteness assumes its typical position as the unspoken, normative category against which all racial differences are constructed—or normative whiteness (Pierce, 1994).

In line 19, Dr. P. returns to Anthony's point about black males having a different perspective on life and asks him to elaborate on what he means by this statement. He

responds in line 20 by likening black male experiences to a struggle. This also goes back to when Anthony began to articulate the incident at school in which his cousin was subjected to harsher scrutiny than white students by the white teachers in their (the teachers') enforcement of the "no hat" policy. Eventually, Anthony gets to the crux of how he sees black males as different when he says, "Some things they kind of don't go by the rules they set themselves so I think that's kind of messed up" (Individual Interview Transcript, 5/30/06). In a broader sense, the struggles that Anthony begins to describe are connected to a larger struggle that black men face in disproportionately being the victims of racial profiling and police brutality.

Between lines 21-24, it becomes clearer how whiteness structured the limits of this racially sensitive conversation in ways that caused the African American youth like Monique to enact a sense of double consciousness. For example, in line 21, Monique challenges Dr. P.'s direct line of questioning by arguing that, "You makin' the questions hard." It seems that Monique finds it problematic that she, as a black person, is being asked by another black person (Dr. P.), what it means to be black in the presence of a group of black youth along with a few white college tutors. On one level, Monique's discomfort probably stems from the perception that the majority of people in the room already know what it means and how it feels to be black and thus should not be asked such a simplistic question. On another level, Monique's discomfort in engaging in the discussion about black males is also a sign that perhaps she is not accustomed to talking about issues of race explicitly in other teaching and learning settings.

Anthony challenges Monique in a way that shows that his level of comfort in taking on difficult racial conversations exceeds hers. In line 22 he asks, "What they

supposed to be easy?” Notably, Anthony is one of the only young scholars who plays an active role in the local student chapter of the NAACP. Therefore, his willingness to take up racial issues directly is not surprising. Moreover, when asked what are some of the factors behind his success in school, Anthony credits CLIP and his family for pushing him to work harder. He says, It [family and CLIP] makes me work harder you know because I know a lot of people depending on me. They want me to be somebody and they see the potential in me. So therefore I don’t want to let them down” (Individual Interview Transcript, 5/30/06). Ms. KK and Dr. P. in lines 23 and 24 remind the youth that, as young scholars, they should be willing and able to ask and answer difficult questions of each other.

In line 24, Dr. P. brings the discussion back to Anthony’s comment about struggle. She says, “Okay so it’s about struggle. So you think black males, in terms of struggle, have it different?” Merriel answers affirmatively saying “yeah” in line 25, but she does not elaborate. Dr. P. attempts to confirm whether in fact Monique agreed with Anthony’s comment that black male experiences differ in terms of the struggle. In line 26, she asks, “Is that what you were saying Monique or you were saying something different?” In line 27, Monique agrees with Dr. P. when she says, “No, I was saying that.” Monique’s shifting of positions in the midst of the conversation implies that she was indeed struggling with how to articulate her position about black men being different, given the racial dynamics in the room. Another factor could also be that Monique has not been socialized to openly discuss sensitive issues of race in traditional teaching and learning spaces such as school.

Sensing Monique's hesitancy to speak freely, Dr. P. reminds the young scholars that they should feel comfortable articulating their ideas. She takes an opportunity to question the youth as to why they seemed hesitant to talk on Tuesday at the public library at a certain point in the discussion. In line 28, Dr. P. poses the question to the group:

Let me ask you this, it was interesting, at the library what happened? Why, why was it, what happened that? And you know I need you all to be real—with me. I need you to always to be real, *with me*. What happened? You know cause you all couldn't articulate/ you all seemed to not want to articulate that at the library. I just seemed that way. What happened?

Monique responds promptly to Dr. P.'s question in line 29 saying, "We ain't want to offend nobody." In order to dissect Monique's response, it is important to understand the nature of what occurred in Tuesday's book discussion. During a routine debriefing session after Tuesday's book club session, Dr. P. and Ms. KK noted a difference (see Appendix E) in the students' willingness to talk openly after Ms. Book, the white librarian, interjected a comment that essentially asked the young scholars to compare the novel *First Part Last*, about a black teen father, with *Hanging on to Max*, a novel about a white teen father (Field Notes, 9/12/06). Dr. P. and Ms. KK surmised that Ms. Book's comment may have been perceived by the African American youth as an attempt to redirect the focus of the conversation away from black issues and experiences and toward white experiences. If so, the youth might have felt compelled to consider how black experiences converge rather than diverge with white experiences. In this way, whiteness (perhaps inadvertently) was placed back at the normative center of the conversation. Yet, the purpose of the book club is to foreground inquiry into black experiences.

In light of what occurred during Tuesday's book discussion, the "nobody" that Monique did not want to offend is most likely Ms. Book, the white librarian, or possibly

the white college tutors present in the room that day. Her comment helps to illustrate why she may not have felt comfortable elaborating on notions of difference and black men earlier in the conversation, as well. Previously, in an individual interview, Monique expressed the following sentiments which further illustrate her level of double consciousness:

They [white teachers] always think black people gon go up there and cuss them out or be like I'm going to fight you and stuff like that when that's not really how we act. I mean yeah we might seem like we act like that on movies and TV shows, but like, we not gon come up there disrespecting you if we don't know the real story.(Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06)

Dr. P. begins to seek clarity about what Monique is saying with regard to offending other people in line 30 when she asks, "So you were concerned that you—" In the following line Monique says apologetically, "If I did I mean I would say sorry." This statement reflects Monique's awareness of how to handle racially sensitive conversations in a colorblind political climate. It also reveals her heightened sensitivity towards how her comments might have been received by the white college tutors in the room.

In contrast, Erica, a more outspoken student, indicates in line 33 that she did *not* feel uncomfortable speaking her mind in the presence of the white librarian when she replied, "No I didn't feel that way." Interestingly, however, while Erica is outspoken in other instances, she does not speak up more throughout this conversation and express her opinion about the issue of race and difference. This suggests that perhaps Erica is more conscious of how her comments might be perceived by whites than she would like to admit.

The last portion of this transcript segment in lines 34-39 is loaded with subtle cues and references about how whiteness functions and how African American youth

negotiate its presence. Some of the statements in this segment require a consideration of conversations that took place outside this particular event. For example, in line 35, Merriel smiles and says “no” in response to Dr. P.’s question about whether she or the other youth felt they could not elaborate on their ideas for fear of offending someone. Dr. P. acknowledges the fact that Merriel is smiling in line 36 as a way of giving her an opportunity to explain her laughter. However, Merriel continues to mask her thoughts behind a smile and simply asking, “Whaaat?” in line 37. Merriel’s smile perhaps signals her hesitation to re-enter an ongoing dialogue that has surfaced in the book club regarding notions of acting white and “acting black. On one occasion, Merriel stated in a matter-of-fact tone that, “Everybody knows what it [acting white or acting black] means... whether they want to say it or not” (Field Notes, 10/6/06). Over the course of the book club sessions, Merriel has voiced a strong opinion that it is *not* necessary to have an intellectual debate about what it means to “act white” or to “act black” because she believes most people understand what these terms mean—whether they acknowledge it or not. Therefore, it seems likely that Merriel’s smile in line 37 might be a result of her hesitation, or even frustration, in re-articulating this point again in the larger group.

The laughter that is evoked from Merriel’s comment in line 38 harkens back to the bond, or fictive kinship, these African American youth share that allows them to share inside jokes and negotiate racially sensitive discussions without having to articulate their thoughts out loud. Before moving on to the next topic, Dr. P. encourages the youth to simply “speak your mind.”

Summary. This book discussion reveals the following finding: Whiteness functions as an unarticulated, yet hegemonic racial backdrop that structures the limits of

book discussions and conversations about race in ways that help make double consciousness visible in the African American youths' actions, interactions, and reactions. In turn, this finding addressed the following research question: How does whiteness function inside the book club and in what ways does it inform how the African American youth act, interact, and react?

This Brotha to Brotha: "Ne'mind, Ain't No Difference" event reveals how whiteness imposes an invisible barrier over racially explicit conversations and how African American youth respond to such barriers by enacting a sense of double consciousness. The primary barrier that whiteness imposes on racially explicit conversations is colorblindness. In other words, what the African American youth did or did not say about race in the book discussions had a lot to do with the way they have been socialized to talk around issues of race in other teaching and learning settings. Further, in this political climate where the playing field is thought to be leveled for previously disenfranchised racial groups (e.g. African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Latino peoples) it is unpalatable in many instances to highlight racial difference rather than discuss similarities in the human experience.

Moreover, whiteness is only articulated when African American youth are prodded to clearly express the underlying assumptions that are driving their remarks about race. Otherwise, African American youth may rely upon their sense of fictive kinship to navigate racial discussions, without having to worry about being politically correct or incorrect in crafting a response.

Event 3
Born Blue:
"I've Experienced Racism Too"

Introduction

The transcript segment that is highlighted in this literacy event helps reveal the third finding relative to the connections that young scholars make between their own racialized experiences and the themes found in the African American literature they read during the book club. The transcript documents a follow-up conversation based on the novel *Born Blue* by Han Nolan. Although the main character in *Born Blue* is white, she heavily identifies with black culture. In this sense, *Born Blue* can be classified as African American literature. The conversation segment that is captured in this transcript segment below takes place on a Thursday at the Black Cultural Center Library. As in previous events, there are approximately twelve African American youth present as well as three white pre-service teachers, Dr. P. and Mrs. K.K.

As the session opens, there is a flutter of noise and activity while the young scholars begin to settle down in preparation for the whole group discussion. As is customary, Dr. P. asks the young scholars to reflect on what took place during the previous book discussion at the public library. Monique observes that Tuesday's discussion was "one of the best" thus far because the book is more complex and deals with "stuff we can relate to" (book club transcript 11/2/06).

In comparison to the novel *Born Blue*, the youth observe that the novel *First Part Last* is relatively short and one-dimensional. Whereas *First Part Last* concentrates mostly on the actions and thoughts of the main character—Bobbi—*Born Blue* allows the reader to experience a range of other characters through their interactions with the protagonist Janie. Janie is a blonde-haired, blue-eyed teenager who heavily identifies with black culture, so much so that she gives herself the name Leshaya. As a foster child raised in a

black family, Leshaya frequents black churches where she gains an affinity for black music. Leshaya's favorite artists are Billie Holiday, Etta James, and Aretha Franklin, whom she affectionately refers to as "the ladies."

Many of the African American youth in the book club expressed strong opinions about how Leshaya's character was portrayed in the novel. For example, Erica found it problematic that although Leshaya's character wants to be considered black, she is a very troubled teen who engages in many unsavory acts, including sexual promiscuity and drug use. Erica also found Leshaya's use of language troubling because for her, it seemed inauthentic and stereotypical of how black people speak (Field Notes, 11/14/06). Erica's critique of the novel seemed to suggest that the author of *Born Blue* may have inadvertently reinforced negative stereotypes about black people by creating a character who wants to identify herself as black, yet she herself has a host of character flaws.

In light of the interest the youth showed in discussing Leshaya's conflicts around language and racial identity, Dr. P. decided to ask the youth to ponder the question, "How do you know you are black?" The transcript picks up about halfway through this discussion at a point where Monique begins to challenge this question.

Transcript 3
A segment of a book discussion of *Born Blue* by Han Nolan
Thursday, November 2, 2006

AH: Anthony Hughes, African American male student

AS: Ayanna Scott, African American female student

AT: Alicia Tate, African American female student

ES: Erica Smith, African American female student

KK: Kafi Kumasi, African American female researcher/ co- facilitator

MB: Merriel Broddick, African American female student

MW: Monique Williams, African American female student

MD: Mike Dixson, African American male student

Dr. P: African American female researcher/ co-facilitator

Transcription Key

/ = Conversational pauses within the message unit

[] = inaudible due to speech overlap in conversation or other interference

[*italics*] = information inserted for clarity

(*italics*) = additional information

CAPITALS = emphasis or accentuation on syllables

! = increase in voice pitch or tone

"#!=decrease in voice pitch or tone

☺=Group Laughter

...=brief pause

105 MW: This is. I'm sorry but I don't like this question

106 Dr. P.: Why? Monique why you don't like the question?

107 MW: Because it's like/ still how you gon ask a group of black kids how you know we black. Yeah we know we black.

108 AT: You know because of your birth parents

109 MW: That's not even it, it's just the fact that we know we black period/ everybody know what race they is.

110 MW: How, how do you know that? What if you blind? You can't look at your parents

111 KK: That's a good point

112 AT: But your parents could tell you what race they are

113 KK: Right

114 Dr. P.: But what if you/ what if you/ what if you/ what is they/ what if that's not an option?

115 MD: What if you was deaf too?

116 ☺ [laughter]

117 MB: Sign language

118 ☺ [laughter]

119 Dr. P.: Hold on. Hold on. And then Merriel has a point. I want/ I want you to make your point first Erica, go ahead.

120 ES: Blind people can/ you are gonna have that question no matter what because people up in the um/ the um/ like people that got they own business they/ they have to have people that are handicap in their um whatever/ they also have to have/ naw I'm not gon say every race, but other people of other races. And they gon um probably need a blind person for whatever/ leadin em in/ cause this lady up in Walmart/ she was blind but she was the greeter but nobody never knew that/ and she on TV one day and she and um/ when you/ on your applications you gon fill them little bubbles when why/ it asks you what race you are.

121 Dr. P.: So you saying its something you need to know. Okay, um Merriel what's your point?

122 MB: Well like um/ the girl in the book she/ when she said that she was black but/ really she/ even though she felt that she black within her soul/ she would never have to go through what black people have to go through. So I mean like there's so much that happened in the past they still have to go through something and even living in [city] I've lived through racism too you know. And people say it doesn't exist but it does.

123 ES: I ain't never been so discriminated against in my life

Line by line analysis

In the chart below (see Figure 4) on line 105, Monique vocalizes her opposition to the question, "How do you know you're black?" This question has been raised by the book club facilitators as a way to expand on the discussion about Leshaya, the main character in the novel *Born Blue*, who is struggling with her racial identity. It is not exactly clear why Monique is so bothered by this question, until Dr. P. asks her to explain her opposition in line 106. Monique's resistance to the question in line 107 is justified by a simple response: "We know we black." Though it is very bluntly stated, there seem to be several layers of complexity embedded in Monique's response.

Figure 4. Chart featuring a line-by-line analysis of the transcript segment from the *Born Blue*: "I've Experienced Racism" event

Line	Speaker	Message Unit	Youth Voices	Analysis of Race and Identity (Macro)
105	MW	This is. I'm sorry but I don't like this question.		Monique vocalizes her opposition to the question: "How do you know you're black?" At this point, it is not exactly clear why Monique is so bothered by the question.
106	Dr. P.	Why Monique? Why you don't like the question?		Dr. P. asks Monique why she doesn't like the question.
107	MW	Because it's like/ still how you gon ask a group of black kids how you know we black. Yeah we know we black.	<i>MW: It was different for like black kids to get away from the school and just spend time together. Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06)</i>	Monique's response begins to reveal the layers of complexity regarding how she self identifies as a black person and the level of permanency she attaches to black racial identity in general. It also suggests a level of fictive kinship among the youth that is based on covert assumptions about group solidarity.
108	AT	You know because of your birth parents.		Unlike Monique, Alicia is willing to entertain the conversation about the meaning of black racial identity. She comments that you can look at a person's birth parents to ascertain their racial identity. Her conception of racial identity seems to rely heavily on biology or phenotypic traits that one can observe.
109	MW	That's not even it, it's just the fact that we know we black period/ everybody know what race they is.	<i>MW: We learn more about the Holocaust than we do about slavery (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06)</i>	Monique continues to contest this racially explicit line of questioning. Again, she seems to attach a level of fixity to the concept of racial identity.
110	MD	How, how do you know that? What if		Mike begins to complicate the conversation by asking the

		you blind, you can't look at your parents.		group to think about how a blind person would be able determine their racial identity since they cannot physically see their birth parents—using Alicia's example. In doing so, Mike shows a level of openness to questioning and problematizing the concept of racial identity in ways that Monique seemed unwilling to do.
111	KK	That's a good point.		Ms. KK. commends Mike on his ability to think critically in trying to unpack the socially constructed nature of race.
112	AT	But your parents could tell you what race they are.		Alicia challenges Mike by arguing that even if a person is blind, his or her birth parents could tell then what their race is. Her remark reaffirms the notion that race is something that is partly learned rather than biological.
113	KK	Right.		Ms. KK. acknowledges that Alicia made a good observation.
114	Dr. P.	But what if you/ what if you/ what if you/ what if they/ what if that's not an option?		Dr. P. challenges the students to consider how they would know whether they are black if the options of seeing one's skin color or being told by one's birth parents were not available. In doing so, she is pressing for an explicit articulation of what black racial identity means for this group of African American youth.
115	MD	What if you was deaf too?		Mike adds another level of complexity to the issue. The young scholars are beginning to question each other. This reflects a level of comfort that has been established in the book club which the

				participants have move from being polite to being more direct.
116		☺ [laughter]		The group laughs, seeming to enjoy Mike's comedic timing. Laughter could be used to help diffuse the tension around difficult conversations about race.
117	MD	Sign language		Continuing to push the point, and possibly seeking more laughs from his peers, Mike adds on that sign language could be a way of communicating to someone what their race is. Although there is comedic overtone in the conversation at this point, the laughter helps underscore the fact that racial identity is something that a person would confront at some point in their life regardless of their physical abilities or disabilities.
118		☺ [laughter]		Students' laughter signals the difficulty and complexity of the conversation. Laughter can often mask tensions in racially sensitive conversations.
119	Dr. P.	Hold on. Hold on. And then Merriel has a point. I want/ I want you to make your point first Erica, go ahead.		Dr. P. attempts to settle the group down and continue the discussion. She recognizes that Merriel and Erica both want to speak and assigns them each a turn to talk.
120	ES	Blind people can/ you are gonna have that question no matter what because people up in the um/ the um/ like people that got they own business they/ they have to have people that are	<i>ES: This one girl [white girl] came up to me one time and she was like this girl told me that all niggas are going to hell and I was just sitting there like no are</i>	In a roundabout way, Erica reiterates the point that a person is going to have to deal with the race question "no matter what." She uses an example of a local Walmart greeter who is blind but who nonetheless had to likely disclose her racial

		handicap in their or whatever/ they also have to have—naw I’m not gon say every race but other people of other races. And they gon um probably need a blind person for whatever/ leadin em in/ cause this lady up in Walmart/ she was blind but she was the greeter but nobody never knew that and she was on tv one day and she / when you/ on your applications you gon fill them little bubbles when it asks you what race you are.	<i>you serious and she was like yeah and she pointed her out to me, but she did not say it to my face cause I...(Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06)</i>	classification on the job application.
121	Dr. P.	So you saying it’s [race] something you need to know. Okay, Merriel what’s your point?		Dr. P. re-voices Erica’s point that race is something everyone will confront at some point in their life due to the institutional structures and laws that have been put in place which reinforce racial categories and hierarchies. She then gives Merriel the floor.
122	MB	Well like the girl in the book, when she said that she was black/ but really even though she felt that she was black within her soul, she would never have to go through what black people have to go through. So I mean they make/ yeah like there’s so much that has happened in the past. They still have	<i>MB: Certain circumstances like you know no matter what a white person won’t be able to relate to you like if you’re black...I just feel that you know no matter what even if you guys are really close but those, there are those ones that you do make good friends</i>	Merriel brings the discussion back to the novel <i>Born Blue</i> by Han Nolan. In her comment, Merriel essentially implies that knowing one’s racial identity is much more than skin-deep. She uses an example of the main character in the novel, Janie (aka Leshaya), who believed she was black even though she was born with blue eyes, blonde hair, and a white birth mother. Merriel links black racial identity to a larger struggle against racism and

		to go through something. And even living here, I've lived through racism too you know and people say it doesn't exist but it does.	<i>with and you do bond with but they still won't ever understand...truly understand how it is to be black because they are not that color.(Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06)</i>	white supremacy. She relates her own experiences with racism to the plight of black people. She noted that she, unlike Leshaya, has lived through racism.
123	ES	I ain't never been so discriminated against in my life!	<i>ES: I feel like very uncomfortable out here because I feel like I'm being watched at every single thing I do. (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06)</i>	Erica chimes in with Merriel essentially affirming their similar experiences with racial discrimination.

On one level, Monique appears bothered by the question from a purely physical standpoint. In other words, since most of the youth possess physical traits (e.g. brown skin, coarse hair) that are characteristic of people of African descent, their blackness seems obvious, at least for Monique. On another level, Monique seems bothered by the fact that Dr. P. is disrupting the unspoken bond, or the sense of “peoplehood” that she shares with the other African American youth in the room based on a shared opposition to dominant white society. This unspoken bond is often reinforced because issues of race and racial identity are often glossed over in mainstream, predominately white educational spaces (Fordham, 1986). Furthermore, by calling her black racial identity into question, Monique may feel that Dr. P. breached the rules of public discourse that dictate race talk

in a post Civil Rights societal context that minimizes racial difference and promotes sameness (Lewis, 2001).

Monique elaborates on the bond that she shares with African American youth in her community in a separate interview as she reflects on the African American Read-In event held the previous year. She states, “It was different for like black kids to get away from the school and just spend time together” (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06). Embedded in Monique’s statement is a sense that there is a level of unspoken group solidarity that is located around being black. In this sense, racial identity seems to have a sense of permanence for Monique. Furthermore, Monique may not be accustomed to being asked to articulate how she self-identifies in terms of her racial identity. Therefore, her oppositional reaction is a complex amalgam of being “outed” in the ironic sense of having to articulate something that seems blatantly obvious, at least for her.

Monique’s opposition to being asked how she knows she is black seems to align with a fundamental, critical race theory tenet which maintains that race and racial identity are deeply enmeshed in the social fabric of the United States and abroad (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). From this perspective, every modern day citizen lays claim (or will be forced to lay claim) to a particular racial identity at some point in their lifetime. Perhaps Monique felt unnerved by the question because, as an African American, she is likely reminded of her blackness on a regular basis through her day-to-day interactions as well as by how larger society positions black people.

Unlike Monique, Alicia is willing to at least try to answer the question that Dr. P. has posed. In line 108, Alicia says that looking at one’s birth parents is one way to determine whether he or she is black. Alicia’s conception of racial identity—at least

based on her response—seems to rely heavily on a biological conception of race that emphasizes phenotypic characteristics (e.g. skin color, hair texture, etc.).

In line 109, Monique continues to take issue with the fundamental premise underlying Dr. P.'s question, despite the fact that Alicia has already somewhat validated the question by attempting to answer it. Monique says adamantly again, "That's not even it, it's just the fact that we know we black period/ everybody know what race they is."

Again, Monique's opposition to this question aligns with a fundamental critical race theory premise, which maintains that race and racial identity are fundamental aspects of how people make sense in the world. For example, in K-12 schools, students learn about the history of different racial/ethnic groups. In doing so, they begin to see the world as structured around racial lines. Monique speaks to this point in an interview when she observes, "We learn more about the Holocaust than we do about slavery" (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06). She goes on to talk pointedly about the ways in which black history is covered tangentially, whereas the history of Jewish people is given more depth of coverage by teachers.

Following that, Mike begins to complicate the conversation in line 110 by using Alicia's example about birth parents. He asks the group to think about how blind persons would be able to confirm or refute their racial identity, since they cannot physically see their birth parents. In line 111, Ms. KK commends Mike on his ability to think critically by trying to unpack the socially constructed nature of race.

Alicia then challenges Mike by contending that even if a person is blind, his or her birth parents would be able to tell them what race they are. Her remark reaffirms the notion that race is something that is partly learned rather than something that is purely

biological. Yet, like Monique's comment, Alicia's comment still upholds the CRT tenet, which emphasizes the permanence of race in the United States. In essence, all three of the youths' remarks help confirm that it would be very difficult for someone *not* to be confronted by the race questions at some point in his or her life.

In line 113, Ms. KK encourages the conversation to move forward by affirming Alicia's remark. Next, Dr. P. asks the youth to consider how they would know whether or not they were black if the options that have been presented (being able to see one's skin color or being told by a birth parent) were not available. Picking up on the direction Dr. P. was taking the conversation, Mike adds another level of complexity to the conversation in line 114. He presents the hypothetical scenario of a person who is both blind *and* deaf. There seems to be comedic intent behind Mike's remark, but it underscores how elusive and difficult the concept of race can be to define. The group laughs in line 116, seemingly enjoying Mike's comedic timing. Also, the youth could be using laughter as a way to diffuse or mask the tensions around race that have surfaced in the conversation.

In line 117, Mike continues to push the point, by adding that sign language could be a way of communicating to individuals what their race is. Although the comedic element of the conversation is apparent, the laughter helps underscore the fact that racial identity is something that individuals would confront at some point in their life regardless of their physical abilities or disabilities.

In line 119, Dr. P. attempts to settle the group down and continue the discussion. When Erica gains the floor in line 120, she reiterates the point that a person is going to have to deal with the race question "no matter what." She uses an example of a local

Walmart greeter who is blind but who probably had to fill out a job application that called on her to specify her race. Again, the common theme among all of the youths' remarks seems to be that race can neither be fully explained nor avoided in contemporary society.

In an individual interview, Erica shared an example which helps show how unavoidable it is for today's youth *not* to be confronted with their racial identity. When asked whether the *n* word is something that is said in school, Erica indicated that it does occur. She explains further:

This one girl [white girl] came up to one time and she was like this girl told me that all niggas are going to hell and I was just sitting there like no are you serious and she was like yeah and she pointed her out to me, but she did not say it to my face cause I... (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06).

Next, Dr. P. gives Merriel the floor in line 121 and she brings the conversation back to the novel, *Born Blue*. She says in line 122:

Well like the girl in the book, when she said that she was black/ but really even though she felt that she was black within her soul, she would never have to go through what black people have to go through. Like there's so much that has happened in the past. They still have to go through something. And even living in [city], I've lived through racism too you know and people say it doesn't exist, but it does.

It is significant that the rest of the youth have struggled to define what it means to be black, yet Merriel is able to articulate a very thoughtful explanation by drawing on an example from the novel *Born Blue*. The use of African American literature therefore seems to provide a generative forum for the African American youth to articulate their racial identity. For example, Merriel argues that knowing one's racial identity is much more than skin-deep. She uses Leshaya's character in *Born Blue* to illustrate her point. Leshaya is a white teen in foster care who thinks she is black, even though she has blue eyes, blonde hair, and a white birth mother. Merriel argues that Leshaya could not really

be black because she has no personal experience or connection to the larger struggle against racism and white supremacy. She relates her own experiences with racism as confirmation of her black identity. She says that, unlike Leshaya, “I’ve lived through racism.” Merriel elaborates on this topic in an individual interview where she explains,

Certain circumstances like you know no matter what a white person won’t be able to relate to you like if you’re black...I just feel that you know no matter what even if you guys are really close but those, there are those ones that you do make good friends with and you do bond with but they still won’t ever understand...truly understand how it is to be black because they are not that color. (Individual Interview Transcript, 10/12/06)

In the last line of the transcript, Erica seems to find resonance with Merriel’s comment about racism when she says candidly, “I ain’t never been so discriminated against in my life!” In a separate interview, Erica was forward in sharing her thoughts about the differences she feels between her former community which was predominately black to the community she lives in now which is predominately white. In a segment of the transcript in which Erica is asked to describe her community, she begins to make the distinction of race. One of the things she noted was that there seemed to be more scrutiny of her behaviors in the new community. She states, “I feel like very uncomfortable out here because I feel like I’m being watched at every single thing I do” (Individual Interview Transcript, 9/26/06)

Summary. This event, *Born Blue: “I’ve Lived Through Racism,”* illuminates the following finding: Literature by and about African American experiences serves as a conduit for helping African American youth articulate their racialized experiences in explicit ways. This finding addresses the following question: What connections, if any, do African American youth make between their racialized experiences and the literature they encounter in the book club?

In comparison to the last event, the young scholars have begun to establish a level of comfort with questioning and challenging each other. In many ways, politeness has been replaced for directness around racially charged issues. Furthermore, it has become clear that the use of African American literature, or literature by and about blacks, can serve as a bridge to help African American youth articulate the depth of their racialized experiences. As Merriel articulated so well during the book discussion, the character Leshaya might *think* she is black, but she would never have to go through what many black people go through in terms of racism. In this sense, Merriel is able to articulate that being black is much more than having a superficial connection to black music and speech patterns. Instead, Merriel argues that being black means having faced or continuing to face racism and discrimination as black people have experienced over centuries.

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CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I summarize the three key findings from this study, and based on these findings I offer implications for research (critical whiteness studies in education) and practice (culturally responsive library programs). In doing so, this chapter offers a bridge between scholarly discourses in the field of education and the field of library and information science. It is my hope that this study will help unite these disparate fields in ways that not only make theorizing about the race and adolescent literacy more interactive, but also help foster an exchange of ideas regarding anti-racist pedagogies that can cross classroom and library contexts.

Summary of Findings

Overall, each of the findings presented in this study helped illustrate how culturally responsive book clubs can serve as springboards for helping youth of color, particularly African American youth, to articulate their racial identity in constructive ways that might otherwise be repressed in traditional book club settings. *Circle of Voices* provided fertile ground and a safe space for engaging in “difficult dialogues” around race (Haviland, 2008). The following paragraphs recapture the key findings from this study.

Tension As an Integral Component of Critical Dialogue Around Race

The *First Part Last*: “But They Are Different” event helped illustrate that although racially sensitive conversations with youth may produce feelings of tension, that tension can be constructive rather than stifling if educators cultivate a climate of intellectual curiosity and respect prior to entering the discussion. The *Circle of Voices*

Book Club helped cultivate such a climate by facilitating community building activities in the group beforehand, which helped the youth become comfortable with challenging each other by asking difficult questions of one another. For instance, Erica first took a defensive, oppositional stance when Dr. P. asked the young scholars to describe their notion of what it means to be a man, particularly a black man, in the context of the book discussion of the novel *First Part Last*. Because Dr. P. challenged Erica to elaborate and defend her position, she was then able to articulate her racial identity in a more explicit way. Erica, like many African American youth, employed what some scholars describe as a “protective device” (Harpalani, 2005) in response to whiteness. For her, whiteness seemed to be functioning as a normative category by which the universal concept of manhood was being constructed. Erica’s perceptions of how difference was being constructed mirrors how white people’s experience and culture have been historically conflated with universal human experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that Erica read a racial code onto the conversation which translates to meaning that white male experiences were being hierarchically elevated above black male experiences. As a result, Erica took a defensive or corrective stance to support the reputation of black males.

As the conversation unfolded, Anthony began to challenge Erica’s perception that the notion of difference was being constructed as a cultural deficit when it came to discussing black male experiences. Anthony constructed a more enriched interpretation of how difference was being used in the conversation as it relates to black males. For example, he later described black males as having a swagger.

Once Dr. P. challenged the young scholars to explicitly articulate how they were using the term *different*, it became visible that whiteness was the unarticulated,

hegemonic other functioning in the backdrop of the discussion. This is evidenced when Ayanna introduced the notion of acting white into the conversation when asked to clarify whom or what she was referring to in her use of the term *different*. Overall, this event helped illustrate that tension can prove to be a productive component of racially sensitive discussions, provided that educators cultivate a climate of intellectual curiosity and respect.

*Whiteness As an Unarticulated, Hegemonic
Backdrop in Racial Discussions*

The second event, Brotha to Brotha: “Ne’ mind Ain’t No Difference,” helped illustrate how whiteness structures the limits of conversations about race in ways that make double consciousness more visible in the actions and interactions of African American youth. *Double consciousness* generally refers to the push/pull social and psychological syndrome among African Americans that causes them to *push* towards acculturation into mainstream white society and simultaneously *pull* away or resist dominant white cultural and linguistic imperialism. Double consciousness can also be described as a heightened awareness among African Americans about the way they are perceived and positioned in the dominant white society.

When Dr. P. urged Monique to describe how black men are different, she retracted her initial position that there was a difference and stated “Ne’ mind ain’t no difference.” Using AAVE, Monique articulated her resistance in ways that signal double consciousness. In other words, Monique’s reluctance to maintain a racially conscious stance on black male identity was mediated by two factors: a) the unspoken rules of colorblindness that structure the limits of racial discourse in the post Civil Rights political climate; and b) the sense of fictive kinship, or the unarticulated communal bond African

Americans share that help them talk around issues of race and racism while still sharing a collective understanding of its meaning. These factors help explain why Monique might have felt uncomfortable in having to put her thoughts about being black into words among a group of people who, at least for her, should already know what that experience is like. In essence, this event helped to show how whiteness can dictate the way racially sensitive book discussions take shape. It can serve as an unspoken mediator, guiding what African American youth feel is appropriate to say or not say as it relates to issues of race.

*African American Literature Helps Black Youth
Articulate Their Racialized Experiences*

The third event, *Born Blue*: “I’ve Experienced Racism Too” provides a compelling portrait of the ways in which African American literature can serve a useful medium for helping African American youth unleash their often-repressed thoughts and experiences concerning racism. In this event, the youth contemplated what it means to be black as part of a discussion of the novel *Born Blue* by Han Nolan. At the end of a lengthy exchange in which the young scholars struggled to define what it means to be black, Merriel offered a sophisticated response that connected her personal experiences with racism to the literature. Essentially, Merriel argued that being black is much more than having a superficial connection to black music and speech patterns as did the main character Janie. Instead, Merriel argued that being black means being linked to a larger struggle against racism and discrimination.

*Critical Whiteness Studies in Education:
A Direction for Future Adolescent Literacy Research in Libraries*

This study helps lay an empirical foundation for theorizing about how adolescents from racially stigmatized backgrounds negotiate the hegemonic influences of whiteness in literature-based learning situations. In doing so, this study begins to broaden our understanding of how whiteness functions on the micro level contexts of youths' interactions around culturally relevant literature. Future studies might look at how youth from other historically underrepresented backgrounds such as Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans negotiate whiteness in the context of culturally responsive literature-based discussions.

While there is a wealth of literature that expounds upon the consequences of whiteness in education for both teachers and students, this is situated mainly in education research journals rather than library research journals. To date, there are only a small number of studies (e.g., Carter, 2006) that explore the consequences of whiteness on students from a microethnographic perspective inside of real learning settings. Future studies on adolescent literacy might be well served by helping fill this research/knowledge gap.

Implications

I started this dissertation with a passion to better understanding how to support literacy development among African American youth in library settings. I believe the *Circle of Voices* Book Club model and this research have the potential to have a transformative impact on literacy instruction in the library field. The book club discussions and culminating activities (e.g. the Brotha to Brotha poster/panel session) not only helped the African American youth articulate their racialized experiences, but also helped them move toward social action through the process of critical inquiry. Moreover,

allowing the African American youth to engage in research about their own black culture helped them to see that they could indeed produce knowledge and create counter narratives of black life. In this respect, *Circle of Voices* connected theory and practice around culturally responsive teaching and critical race pedagogy in powerful ways (Lynn, 1999).

Yet, more needs still needs to be done to help librarians develop the knowledge base and pedagogical practices necessary to implement critical literacy and culturally responsive pedagogy in the school library. For this reason, I hope to share my own evolutionary growth in understanding literacy (See figure 5 below) with other library scholars as a form of professional development.

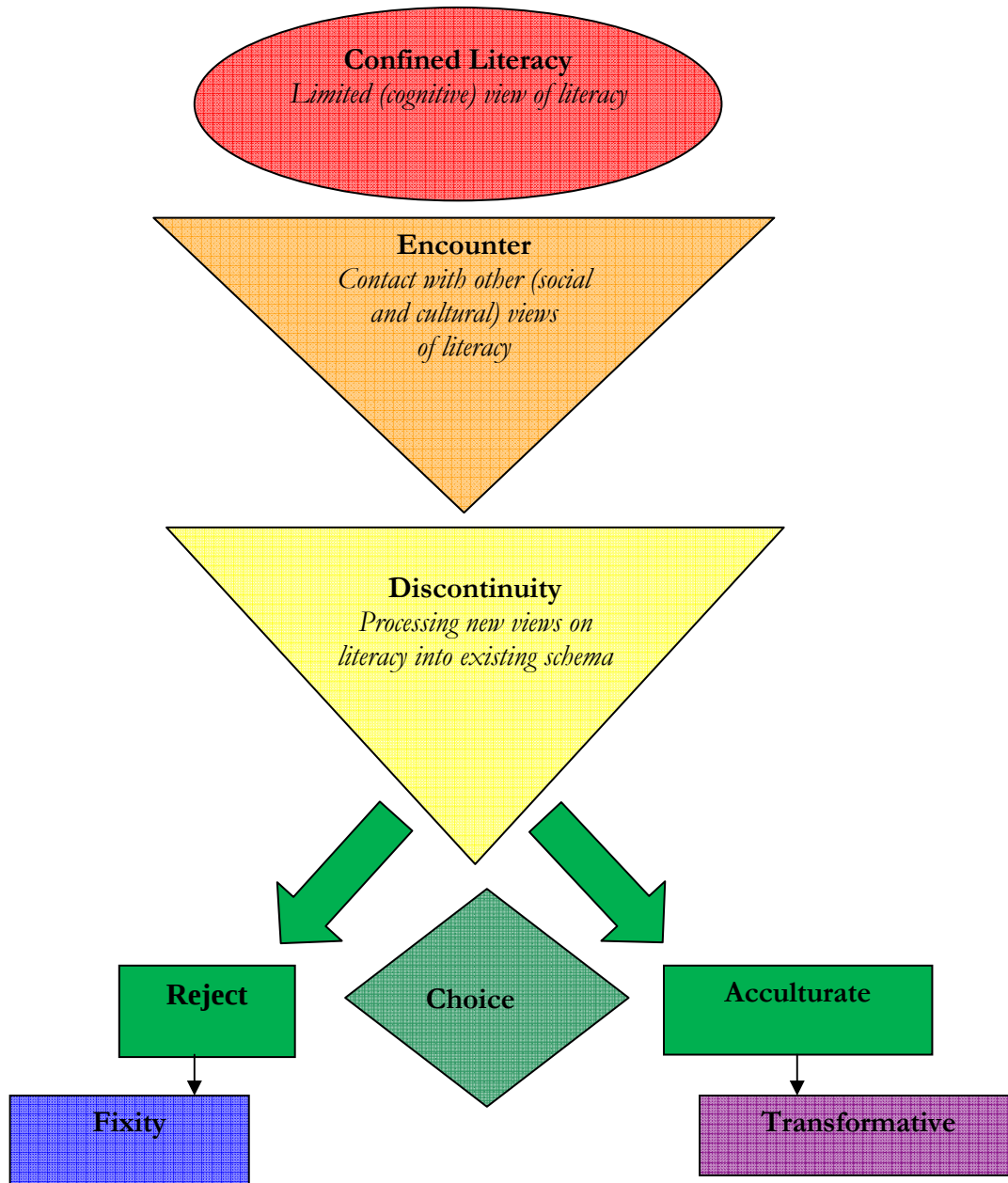
This model, I believe, can help jumpstart the infusion of a more critical approach to literacy instruction in libraries. A critical approach is not only about understanding literacy, but involves helping young people become active participants in the social and political transformation of their communities. Such an approach would foreground inquiry and social action around issues such as homelessness, poverty, crime, environmental waste, and inadequate schools, among other pressing social concerns.

Conclusion

Based on this study, library scholars need to do more to examine the intersections of literacy, race, and power, particularly as they work with youth of color. This study was only one small effort at understanding some of the impediments (e.g. whiteness) that restrict and inform the ways African American youth learn in the library. Although my journey in working with one group of African American youth has ended with the

completion of this work, I am motivated to continue and expand upon this line of inquiry in my future scholarly pursuits.

Figure 1. Kumasi, K. (2007) *A Library Scholar's Evolving Understanding of Literacy*



I hope to continue investigations prompted by my dissertation research, specifically on how whiteness informs the literate actions and interactions of African American youth. Ultimately, I want to expand on my doctoral research goals and objectives and spearhead a book club program working with underprivileged youth in the inner city of Detroit. In this way, my future research goals are to bridge innovative scholarship on adolescent literacy with multilevel engagement in urban communities.

APPENDIX A
SAMPLE BOOK CLUB AGENDA

Circle of Voices Day Book Club
Day Two
9/12/06 @MCPL rm2B
Agenda

3:00-4:00 Tutoring

4:00-4:15 Ms. Book- Teen Library Coordinator; library orientation

4:15-4:20 Dr. P. Debriefing Inquiry Model

1. Young Scholars- produce scholarship e.g. distributing knowledge(Derriona's mad cow disease)
2. 2 books, 2 Inquiry projects, 2 community events sharing research
3. Review Inquiry Model (You already do inquiry-now we will make critical thinking explicit- and we will reflect on the process.

4:20-4:30 Ms. KK- Getting Started-Reflecting on the Broad Topic-Black Males

1. Using novel as a springboard into research on Black males-distribute handout with directions and sample overarching questions.
2. First, we need to reflect on the topic before we plan.
3. Use graphic organizer to jot down anything that comes to mind when you think of Black men in society
4. Share your responses with the larger group *after* considering other ways of thinking about Black men

4:30-4:40 Show Videos (Just the Two of Us/ Self Destruction)

4:40-4:50 Ms. KK Whole Group Debriefing

1. Use easel to write down students responses
2. Stop. Remind students to be thinking about their topic at home and in school and to write down their thoughts as they come to them. Writing is a process! Scholars are always engaged in the pursuit of knowledge!

4:50-5:00 Dr. P. Wrapping up

1. Ms. KK- Distribute novel-*First Part Last*
2. Reading and book discussions will generally take place on Tuesdays between 4:00-4:30. Come prepared with quotes, commentary, insights, ideas, and general feedback about the book (distribute note cards)
3. You will work through your research ideas more in depth with a partner next week and develop more specific question- remember time constraints-3 weeks to present poster

Supplies Needed:

Inquiry Model Handout/Poster

Easel paper or dry erase pens

Graphic organizer

Note Cards

Assignment Handout

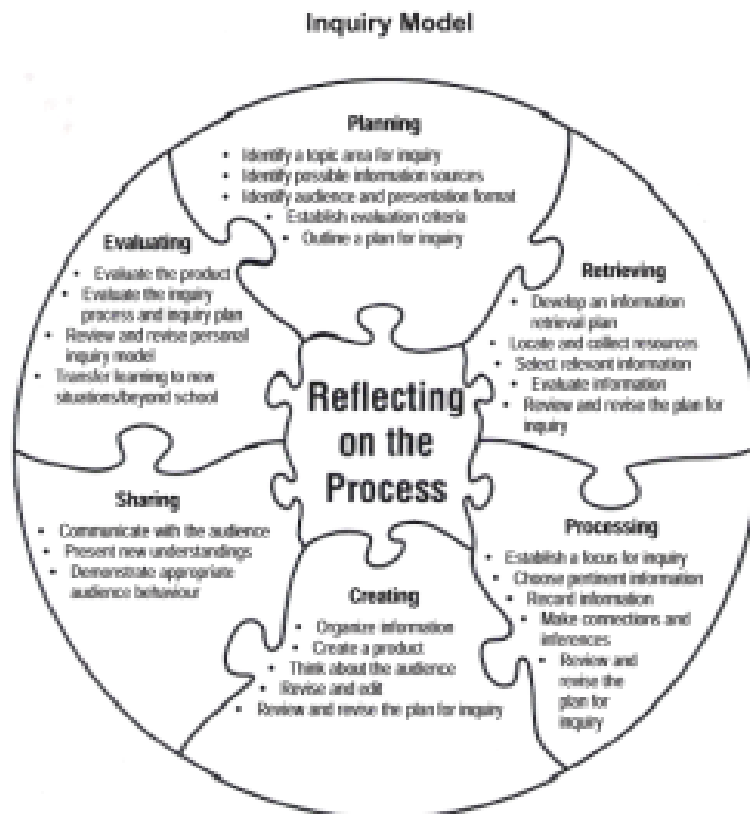
Novels

Videos

Laptop/LCD projector

APPENDIX B
INQUIRY MODEL

Inquiry Model
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APPENDIX C
SAMPLE BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discussion Questions for *Born Blue* by Han Nolan

Is Leshaya a likable character?

Do you know anyone like Leshaya whom you just can't seem to help?

What would you do with a friend like Leshaya?

Are there any similarities between Bobbi [from *First Part Last*] and Leshaya?

Which book from the book club are you more likely to refer to a friend? Why?

What are your thoughts about how language is used in the novel?

Leshaya thinks she is black; would you consider her to be black? How do you know you're Black?

What do you think Leshaya's problems with drugs and promiscuity stem from?

If you could ask the author a question about the novel, what would it be?

APPENDIX D
SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Focus Group Conversation #6

Topic: Reflecting on the Brotha to Brotha Poster/ Panel Session on Black Males

How would you describe that experience?

Is there anything different about the book club from your previous experiences?

Thinking back to the beginning of the inquiry process, what are your thoughts about going through the various stages of inquiry, having now completed the cycle?

How has the book club impacted you personally and in school?

How do you think your school teachers or community members view your participation in the Brotha to Brotha poster/ panel session?

What aspects of the book club relate to your experience as an African American student?

What do you like most about the book club so far? Least?

If you could envision your perfect school library, what would it be like?

APPENDIX E

NOTES

Circle of Voices Book Club
Field Notes
10/ 3/ 06
Public Library, Rm 2C
4:00-5:00pm

4:01

Dr. P. asks students to sit at their discussion tables.

Some students state that they are not discussion leaders.
Dr. P. directs students to just sit in the groups they sat in last week.

4:03

Dr. P. tells the group they two minutes to grab food

4:07

Dr. P. asks the group how many of them have a library card. She encourages them to get one.

Derrell says that his credit with the library is not good. He says that he owes for a movie because, “they tryna to say I didn’t turn it back in.”

4:11

Dr. P. asks students to check-in about news and events

Dr. P. reminds youth that CLIP is a support program but that support means you are helping people who are helping themselves. She says none of them should be in school suspension because they should have higher standards for themselves. She says, “if there’s nothing to support then there’s nothing to hold up. “

4:15

Dr. P. indicates that CLIP is about to do some wonderful things. She reminds them that their poster session is next Thurs. in the School of Education.

4:20

Dr. P. introduces a sample poster I created on the “the Cosmopolitan Black Man”

She asks the youth what do they think the word cosmopolitan means. She gives examples: a deep- thinker, well- rounded person, a traveler.

Afterwards, Dr. P. reminds the youth that the main thing to understand is the topic on the poster and to describe their topics clearly on the “What is” section of their research posters and be able to articulate clearly why they chose their topic and what they found.

Dr. P. states that due to time constraints, the book club will last only about 15 minutes for today.

4:25

Dr. P. recognizes that some of the youth have already written down their research topic and their related questions.

Dr. P. Asks Barack to tell the group what his research topic is and to state a few of research questions?

Barack responds that his research topic is “Music” and that his research questions are: “What is music?” He indicated that he found the definition of music on www.wikipedia.com. One of his research questions is “Why do they say Rap isn’t music?” He then declares that Rap Artists are storytellers.

4:45-5:00

I co-facilitate the book discussion of *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson for the remainder of the hour.

Methodological Notes

11/7/06

Raven does not like to be videotaped. As I set up the camera on her side of the room, she begins to turn her back on the camera and hold her hand over her head to hide her face. I need to find a way to better negotiate my presence as both a researcher and book club facilitator. I would probably feel the same way if I were her. I think my being a novice researcher is showing. I felt uncomfortable answering Raven’s question about why I was videotaping the book club. I know Dr. P. has already discussed with the youth that the research portion of CLIP is about helping teachers understand how to best support them as African American youth. Maybe because I am transitioning from being a research assistant to a lead researcher, I am hyper-sensitive about the “correct” way to handle questions from the participants. I think I’ll do better when I take on my next research project.

Theoretical Notes

9/12/06

Something interesting happened today in the book discussion on *First Part Last*. Ms. Book, the white cooperating librarian, asked the youth what was the difference between *First Part Last* by Angela Johnson [featuring a black male protagonist as teenage father] and a *Hanging on to Max* by Margaret Bechard [featuring a white male protagonist as teenage father]. I sensed a subtle tension in the room when Ms. Book made this comment. My hunch is that the youth do not want to state that the obvious difference between the books is the race of the main character. I'm sure Ms. Book did not mean any harm by asking the question, but in some ways her question reveals her white privilege. Perhaps Ms. Book thought that she was being colorblind and looking beyond race or the surface level differences of the two books by trying to get the youth to understand the similarities rather than the differences in the challenges black and white teen agers experience. Although her intentions may have been benign, Ms. Book does not seem to understand that Black youth are always forced to see themselves in relation to dominant white society's cultural and linguistic norms. It seems Ms. Book is resistant to the idea that the book club is about providing the youth an opportunity to explore their culturally specific norms and practices. I am anxious to follow-up with Dr. P. to see if she interpreted Ms. Book's comments as I did.

Personal notes

11-22-06

I had a one-on-one conversation with Erica today about the children's book she created called *Respect*. Erica seemed to open up to me today in a way that was gratifying. She told me that she felt it was important to write a book about the use of the 'N' word for black children because she knows that Black kids like her niece often use the word without fully knowing the history behind it. She also shared with me that her uncles' would teach her about Black history and the cruelties of racism they experienced in their youth and adulthood. She said that writing the children's book made her feel that she was being a positive role model for her younger nieces and nephews and that she felt she was carrying on in her uncle's footsteps by educating young Black children about their history.

APPENDIX F
STUDENT ARTIFACTS

My Proudest Moment

By: Erica Smith (Pseudonym)

In Youth Voices (Pseudonym) Student Literary Magazine, 11/06

My proudest moment was when I graduated from middle school. I thought that it would take a long time to get to high school but, when the day it came, it was my proudest moment. Maybe even the happiest day of my life! I feel that I took my education and ran it. The best part was that I never regretted any day of my actions during school.

The first week at my all new community and school, I knew little of what the other students had learned. This made me feel discouraged because I was ashamed of all my answers even when they were right. Also, being an African American from Chicago was a culture shock, but I knew that I was a fast learner. Still being in the playful mood that I had living in Chicago, the first semester, I had one “F”, three “Ds” and five “Cs”. At that time I felt that I had done well until my math class put together a workshop.

They gave everyone a piece of paper and asked the whole class to write down their G.P.A. When I wrote down my G.P.A., they asked me to pick a job that is worth my G.P.A. I realized that the job that I found offered the same amount of money that a person would make in fast food. Then my teacher gave the class an activity that made us consider our figures. For example, I might one day have a child, which would mean that I would have to pay for diapers and formula.

As I saw this, I could not keep on lying to myself about my grades. I knew that I had to work a little harder. The second semester came, and I came up in my math grade and nothing else. By the time the third semester came, I thought that I was not going to pass, so I stopped trying. So, I avoided doing my homework. I told myself that “you are not going to graduate this year.”

Around April, I went back to three “Ds”, one “F”, and the rest of my classes were “Cs”. My teachers came to me and asked me what was going on. I couldn’t even come up with a decent lie to get them off my back. The next day my mother asked me how was school. I wouldn’t answer even though I knew that I wasn’t getting along with anyone in school, not even my teachers. She told me that I could make good grades in school because I am intelligent. I said to myself that I could do it. I figured that if there was no hope far me then people would not have asked me what was going on with my school work.

The last report card was sent through the mail. My mother came into my room with a huge smile and said, “I told you—you can do it!” Those words still stick with me today. We got dressed and went to my graduation. As I walked across the stage, I remembered the words of my mother, as known as Cae Smith: “I TOLD YOU—YOU CAN DO IT!”

Imprisoned

By: Merriel Broderick (Psuedonym)

In Youth Voices (Psuedonym) Student Literary Magazine 11/06

*Small brown face, Almond shaped eyes hangin'
Imprisoned in a frame of hate.
He sees his reflection ashamed of his own race.*

*Confused if he had the color of another race.
If his lips weren't so full. If he didn't talk
So much, "what it do," "yo' girl you fine," slang
Or if he could just change his ghetto name.*

*If he could shatter his chocolate skin into a million pieces
Would he finally feel complete?
Would the hangin' imprisoned frame of hate become
Something he could love?*

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- Watkins, W. H., Lewis, J. H., & Chou, V. (Eds.). (2001). *Race and education: The roles of history and society in educating African American students*. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon.
- Weigand, W. (1999). Tunnel vision and blind spots: What the past tells us about the present: Reflections on the twentieth century history of American librarianship. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1(2), 1-32.
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- Wheeler, M. (2007). Timeline in library development for African Americans. Retrieved December 17, 2007, from <http://www.ala.org/ala/online/resources/selectedarticles/aframtimeline.cfm>
- Williams, C. (2007). The "Sound" of blackness: African American Language, Social and Cultural Identities, and Academic Success in a Middle School Language Arts Classroom. Unpublished Dissertation. Vanderbilt University.
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Curriculum Vitae

Kafi Damali Kumasi

Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, Indiana University, Bloomington

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Scholarly Interests

Social and Cultural Approaches to Adolescent Literacy Research and Teaching ▪ Issues and Trends in Children's and Young Adult Literature ▪ Critical and Participatory Action Research Methodologies ▪ School Library Media Studies ▪ Urban Education and Community Literacy Outreach ▪ Multicultural Education

Education

- 2008 Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, Indiana University
- 2003 M.L.I.S., Wayne State University
Credential, K-12 School Library Media Endorsement
- 1998 B.S., Education, University of Michigan
Credential, 7-12 Secondary English Certification
Credential, 7-12 Secondary History Certification

Research Experience

- 2006-2008 **Principle Investigator (Dissertation Research)**
Indiana University School of Education
Study Title: Seeing White in Black: Examining Racial Identity Among African American Adolescents through a Culturally Responsive Book Club.
Conducted a sociolinguistic ethnographic study that examined racial identity among thirteen African American middle and high school students inside a book club that centered on exploring Black culture and experiences through young adult novels. Findings revealed the tensions and contradictions the African American youth experience while negotiating their racial identity against the backdrop of normative whiteness, or dominant white cultural and linguistic standards.
- 2007 **Principal Investigator (Teaching Research)**
Indiana University School of Library and Information Science
Study Title: Stories We Tell: Culture, Race, and Youth Services in the LIS Curriculum. Conducted a qualitative pilot study exploring how a group of preservice librarians think about multicultural education as it relates to their role serving ethnically diverse youth in library settings. Conducted a thematic analysis on samples of student work looking for evidence of the different ways in which the students considered multiculturalism in their writings.

2006-2007 **Graduate Research Assistant**
 Indiana University School of Education
Study Title: Closing the Gap: Facilitating African American Adolescent School Success through a Community Literacy Intervention Research Project
 Helped conduct interviews, transcribed data, and took part in early phases of analysis for a two year qualitative ethnographic study which examines how adolescent Black youth use language as a means to negotiate and interpret the cultural, social, and political aspects of schooling.

Publications

Carter, S., Damico, J. and Kumasi-Johnson,(2008). The Time is Now!: Talking with Black Youth about College. Voices from the Middle, 16,2.

Kumasi-Johnson (under contract 2008). Critical Race Theory: Mapping the Eclectic Roots and Educational Applications. In Levinson. B.A. (Ed.), Critical Social Theories and Educational Scholarship: Questions and Possibilities. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Kumasi-Johnson (2007) Critical Inquiry: Library Media Specialists as Change Agents. School Library Media Activities Monthly, 24(7).

Unpublished Manuscripts and Manuscripts in Progress

Adolescents as Young Literary Critics: The Case for Culturally Relevant Book Clubs

Adolescent Literacy and the School Library: Developing Culturally Responsive Programs that Facilitate Academic Success.

Preservice Librarians' Conceptions of Multicultural Education: Implications for Library and Information Science Educators.

An Inside Look at Collaboration between a Pre-service Teacher and a School Library Media Specialist.

Activities, Honors, Grant Awards

Accepted (2008)	Newsletter Editor National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy (NCRL)
2008	Volunteer National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for Research (NCTEAR)
2008	Member of the Conference on English Education (CEE) Commission on Social Justice

National Council of Teachers of English

2008-Current Founding Member
American Association of School Librarians Diversity Task Force (AASL)

2007-Current Program Chair
SIG-Research in Education, Information and School Libraries (REISL)
American Educational Research Association

2007-Current Appointments Committee Member
American Library Association (ALA)

2007 Volunteer
African American Read-In
Indiana University

2005-Current Volunteer
Lifting As We Climb Foundation Inc. (LAWCF)
Detroit, MI

2006-Current Fellowship Recipient
Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color Grant Program (CNV)
National Council of Teachers of English, \$4,000.00

2006-Current Proposal Reviewer
Division G; Division K; SIG REISL
American Educational Research Association

2006 Grant Recipient
Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)
Book CLUB grant (Connecting Libraries, Underserved teens and Books)
Library Association, books and related resources provided

2005-2008 Doctoral Fellowship Recipient
Indiana University
Institute of Museum and Library Services Laura Bush 21st Century Librarians Program. A partnership between the School of Education and the School of Library and Information Science, \$72, 000.00

2003-2005 K-12 Book Selection Committee
Detroit Public Schools

2000-2002 Scholarship Recipient
Wayne State University
Institute of Museum and Library Services Library Education Grant. A partnership between Wayne State University and Detroit Public Schools, \$30,000.00

- 2002 Teacher-Mini Grant Award Recipient
Wayne County Regional Educational Services Association (RESA)
Teacher Mini-Grant, \$500.00
- 2001 Teacher Excellence Award
Wayne County Regional Educational Services Association (RESA)
- 2000-2001 Who's Who Among American Teachers

Teaching and Related Professional Experience

- 2009 Instructor
The School Library Media Specialists as Instructional Consultant
Library and Information Science Program
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan
- 2007 Instructor
Issues and Trends in Children's and Young Adult Literature
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Indiana University, Bloomington
- 2006 Co-Instructor
Issues and Trends in Children's and Young Adult Literature
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Indiana University, Bloomington
- 2006 Administrative Adjunct Faculty
English Education Program
Language Education, Literacy and Culture Department
Indiana University, Bloomington
- 2006 Teaching Assistant
The School Library Media Specialist
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
Indiana University, Bloomington
- 2003-2005 School Library Media Specialist
Finney High School
Detroit, Michigan
- 1999-2002 English Teacher
Southeastern High School of Technology
Detroit, Michigan
- 1998 Fourth Grade Summer School Teacher
Dickinson Elementary
Hamtramck, Michigan

Juried and Invited Conference Presentations and Workshops

Kumasi, K. (2008). Toward Critical Youth Participation in Libraries. Research Reflections from a School Library Scholar. Invited Presentation for SI 624 Media for Children and young Adults at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, School of Information.

Kumasi, K. (2009) Students of Color, Researchers of Color: Rigorous, Transformative Scholarship in and for Our Communities. An accepted paper session to be held at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, San Diego, California.

Kumasi, K. (2009) Voice Matters: Using Critical Race Theory (CRT) Constructs to Examine the Discursive Construction of Identity in the Lives of Students of Color (Session Organizer). An accepted paper session to be held at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, San Diego, California

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2008). Stepping Outside the Desk: Innovative Perspectives and Pedagogies on Literacy Learning in the School Library. (Session organizer). A paper session held at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, New York, New York.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2008). Helping Teachers Look at Literacy Through a Third Eye: Ethnolinguistic Minority Perspectives on Space, Identity, and Community. (Session organizer). A paper session held at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, New York, New York.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2007). Explorations of Research Methodologies in Language and Literacies. Invited panel presentation sponsored by the National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy and Research Foundation held at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, New York, New York.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2007). Seeing White in Black: A Critical Examination of Literacy, Racial Identity, and Whiteness in a Culturally Responsive Library Book Club for African American Youth. Poster session sponsored by the Cultivating New Voices among Scholars of Color Grant Program held at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, New York, New York.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2007). Truth Talkin: Exploring Issues of Language, Culture, and Identity with African American Youth through Young Adult Novels. Panel presentation given at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, New York, New York.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2007). Inside a Circle of Voices. A Critical Approach to Literature & Literacy for Librarians. Presentation given at Indiana Library Federation Annual Conference, Indianapolis Indiana.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2007). Critical Approaches to Literacy in the School Library Media Center. Invited workshop presentation sponsored by the School Library Media Program in the Department of Education & Special Education, College of Education & Human Services at Longwood University, Farmville, Virginia.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D., Banks, J., Gay, G. et. al. (2007). Building Multicultural Competence in the Library: The Promise of Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults. Interactive symposium held at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2007). Reflecting on My Roots: An Autoethnography of a Library Scholar's Evolving Conception of Literacy. Invited presentation given for the SIG-Research, Education, Information, and School Libraries at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association Chicago, Illinois.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. and Moeller, R. (2007). Stories We Tell: Culture, Race, and Youth Services in the LIS Curriculum. Paper session held at the annual conference of the Association of Library and Information Science Educators, Seattle, WA.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2006). Beyond Book Clubs: Building Culturally Relevant Library Programs for African American Youth. Poster session held at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention, Nashville, TN.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. & Moeller, R.A. (2006). Strategies for Teaching and Learning: Multicultural Children's and Young Adult Literature. Poster session held at the Annual Spring Poster session of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2006). Teaching Children's Literature through History: Assessing as New Course Using Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Practices. Work- in- progress poster session held at the annual conference of the Association of Library and Information Science Educators, Seattle, WA.

Kumasi-Johnson, K.D. (2005). Race, Reform and Libraries: The Closings at Hampton Institute and Clark Atlanta University Library Schools. Paper session conducted at the annual conference of the Midwest History of Education Society, Chicago, IL.

Professional Memberships and Affiliations

ALAN: The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents, 2008
American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2006-current
 SIG- Critical Examination of Race, Ethnicity, Class, Gender
 SIG- Critical Issues in Curriculum
 SIG- Research on Education, Information, and School Libraries, (Program
 Chair)
American Library Association (ALA), 2004-current
 Appointments Committee
 American Association of School Librarians (AASL) division
 Young Adult Library Association (YALSA) division
Association of Library and Information Science Educators (ALISE), 2006-current
 SIG Youth Services
International Reading Association (IRA), 2008
National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), 2006-current
 Conference on English Education (CEE)
 Commission on Social Justice
Michigan Association of Media Educators (MAME)