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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: UNDERSTANDING INNER CITY AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT EXPOSURES TO LITERACY

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: UNDERSTANDING INNER CITY AFRICAN

AMERICAN ADOLESCENT EXPOSURES TO LITERACY

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by

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ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: UNDERSTANDING INNER CITY AFRICAN

AMERICAN ADOLESCENT EXPOSURES TO LITERACY

Lupita-Maria Matadi

Underrepresented children of color living in poverty have become over-represented as unsuccessful literacy students. Within the last 20 years, new instructional practices have been developed to help practitioners better meet the needs of children often unintentionally neglected by traditional instruction. The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship inner city African American adolescents have with literacy. This topic explored home-based literacy exposure, the role engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon has on English class performance, and the relationship students have with literacy in and out of school. Areas considered were the influence of family, home-based literacy exposure, and culturally relevant pedagogy. In tandem with the literature, a transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach was applied. By interviewing high school students, a firsthand account was gauged regarding their experience and exposure to literacy. From the verbatim transcripts, codes were established and categorized to inform the three emergent themes of this study.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to two phenomenal women: Theresa M. Garza, M.Ed. and the late Sister Clarice Proctor, O.S.P. These women have shaped and changed my view of literacy as well as helped me recognize my capabilities as a learner. Not only have they demonstrated immense belief in my potential but also motivated me to surpass what my community or even I dreamt possible. Without the innumerable hours of dedication from Sr. Clarice, I would not have the necessary tools to manage and work through my dyslexia to ascertain the highest level of academic achievement without accommodation. However, of the two, I am eternally indebted to Mrs. Garza or "mummie" as I know her.

There are not enough words of gratitude formed to express how instrumental you have been to me and this literacy journey. Many people have lovely mothers but few can wholeheartedly declare that they were blessed to be born to a world-changing, talented, brilliant, incomparable, and oh so extraordinary woman. The world had never seen a woman like you, and I am grateful to have you as my model of tenacity and grace. From the moment you recognized my inability to read, you found every resource, person (Sr. Clarice), and tool at your disposal to ensure that I was not crippled by my learning difference; rather, you encouraged me to work harder and shine brighter so the world could not dim my light. Your ever so high expectations were my motivation to be the best and improve my community through more than just "lip service." You are the reason I became a teacher and the inspiration behind this study. You have shaped my world and prayerfully this work will influence countless others.

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Thank you to the research site, parents, and seven co-researchers who agreed to voice their experiences in this study. The time and vulnerability you all expressed are gifts I will forever cherish. Thank you for allowing me to convey your experiences. A special thank you to some of my closest friends whose names were the pseudonyms for the participants of this study.

Thank you to my parent, Bruno and Theresa, for the various ways you have invested in me. You two are the dream team. Having your love and support my whole life has been an invaluable blessing. You saw the environment surrounding me and worked multiple jobs to provide better educational opportunities. Furthermore, your support has had no limits towards me. Thank you for always encouraging my dreams, especially the farfetched ones.

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prayer. Thank you for being my rock and protector. Thank you for giving me Zemira-Maria. Thank you for being everything I never knew I needed. There are infinite thank you's I could write that would not satisfy all of what you have been to me throughout this journey. You are one of a kind, and I will always love you to infinity…

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a term, within education, that has adopted many definitions over the years. Although its residence is primarily associated with English coursework and content, Gee (1989) suggested that literacy transcends language and is interwoven into one's social practices. Literacy is often confused with language; however, the two are distinctly different. The nuances of language do not overlap with culture but rather syntax. Since literacy extends into culture, understanding discourse informs one's understanding of literacy. Gee (1989) further delineated between capital *D* and lowercase *d* of Discourse. The nature of Discourses is the identity kit that influences the words, beliefs, and behaviors associated with a cultural group. Primary (expressive) and secondary (controlled) usages of language are informed by Discourses and impact literacy altogether.

Since literacy is influenced by many elements, a simple definition is impossible to determine. Scribner (1984) identified that "definitions of literacy shape our perceptions of individuals who fall on either side of the standard (what a 'literate' or 'nonliterate' is like) and thus in a deep way affect both the substance and style of educational programs" (p. 6). The best way to define literacy is to avoid limiting its meaning to just reading and writing. Gee (1998) inferred that literacy is "the control of secondary uses of language" (p. 6). Perceptions of literacy can influence how instruction is provided if reading or writing are overly prioritized. Knoblauch (1990) presented the necessity of literacy beyond the basic values of reading, writing, and mathematics in school; literacy ought to incorporate "an awareness of cultural heritage, a capacity of higher order thinking, even some aesthetic discernment" (Knoblauch, 1990, p. 77). Through this sociocultural lens,

Keefe and Copeland (2011) asserted that skills, assumptions, ideological dispositions, and politics all influence literacy. Therefore, literacy is more than language but the culture associated; it is the fusion of written and verbal communication through the scope of one's experience. In order for students to learn in today's educational system, literacy is the agency of cultural and social capital one must traverse (Chomsky, 2007; Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987). The literacy experiences explored throughout this study were those of inner city private school African American adolescents.

There is a significant gap when comparing the literacy achievements of African American and European American learners. McFarland and Hussar (2018) identified "the White-Black achievement gap for 12th-grade students was wider in 2015 (30 points)" (p. 104). However, this academic lag is nothing new to the literacy community. Since the 1970s, the White-Black achievement gap has persisted. In the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Bohrnstedt et al. (2015) identified the academic lag in African American achievements from 1971 through 2011 between these learners and European American students outside of any inequality in the students' socioeconomic status (SES), gender, or geographic location. Within the last three decades, adolescent African American literacy scores have been 36-points lower than European American literacy scores (Carter et al., 2008). Through all the research conducted, there is little trending evidence related to this literacy gap beyond slavery and the negative family and schooling background (Cohen et al., 2012; Ferguson, 2000; Polite & Davis, 1999).

Within many of today's classrooms, there is a transcending challenge that exists among students by race, ethnicity, and language differences (Gary & Witherspoon, 2011). African American learners altogether demonstrate lower performances in reading

(Matthews et al., (2010). When comparing the reading and writing skills of African American students to their White peers, African American student assessments lag from before school through high school (Carter & Wilson, 1997; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Fryer & Levitt, 2005; Irvine, 1990; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Reardon, 2006). However, their performance is not due to any cognitive challenge; rather, it is literacy exposure. Carter et al. (2008) suggested "in an effort to improve the education of African American students, mounting evidence suggests that cultural aspects of students' learning styles can impact achievement levels in classrooms" (p. 30). Davis (2003) identified that individual schools are not meeting the social and developmental needs of African Americans and therefore inadequately teaching those students due to the lack of resources. Unquestionably, African American students are not homogenous, and therefore are not all subpar to that of their European American counterparts. However, the job of a teacher is more than presenting information to the students but doing so in a manner that cements the content and engages the mind.

Student engagement is a critical component of literacy. The most common pedagogical approach to literacy through the lens of student engagement is the usage of culturally relevant texts. Generally, cultural literature increases the literacy level of low-achieving students since it invokes cultural pride, participation, commitment, and success (Ebe, 2010; Herrero 2006). According to Husband (2012), "there is a strong correlation between students' attitudes toward reading and the ways in which they engage in reading activities in and out of school" (p. 2). African American students are just as likely to perform behind their European and Latino American counterparts (Palmer, 2010).

Therefore, acknowledging this gap and the associated implications is the first step towards remedying the literacy problem.

The relevance of literature to the reader is equally important to the development of literacy in adolescents. Ladson-Billings (1992) targeted the "focus on cultural and ethnic conditions of children and the relationship between these conditions and the structure of appropriate contexts for literacy learning" (p. 312) as a means to connect the need for culturally relevant instruction. Beyond culturally relevant texts, there is the Eurocentric educational canon which has been a literacy standard for decades. Said standard was modeled around learners that do not look like, nor have the background of, the inner city African American (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Consequently, the African American literacy decline contributes to the dropout rate of this demographic and the cycle of inevitable poverty. Matthews et al. (2010) identified that

> Early difficulties in emergent literacy also negatively affect children's future success, placing them at risk for reading and writing problems, low performance in other academic domains, placement in special education services, social deviance, school dropout, and a number of other academic and social problems (Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, & Furstenberg, 1993; Lonigan et al., 2000; Morrison & Cooney, 2002; Senechal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998) (p. 758).

Statement of the Problem

African American high school graduation rates have improved since the 1970s; however, it is still significantly lower than European American students. By the 12th grade, more than twice as many African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students have dropped out of school than European American, widening the achievement

gap (NCES, 2012). African Americans earn lower grades and tend to drop out especially if they are enrolled in an inner city school; thus, making this group twice as likely to become unemployed (Davis et al., 2002). The concern of these rates turns one's attention to the educational system as a whole.

Within the US, an ongoing debate has remained constant specific to teaching both ethnic and cultural diversity within schools (Banks, 1999). One school of thought considers the dominance of Western traditionalism over multiculturalism within school curriculums today, diminishing the experiences of the marginalized person of color (Banks, 1999; Milner, 2010). The Western traditionalist approach not only conditions African Americans to adopt White ideals but also to blame themselves for their educational, economic, and sociopolitical failures (Cross, 1991). Whereas, the multiculturalist curriculum approach not only values but also uses the lived experiences of students to direct the trajectory of a unit and materials incorporated to increase understanding and clarify the current social and academic lags within the current system (Bonilla Silva, 2003). However, the system and curriculum as a whole are two sides of this triangle.

Literacy does not begin and end in the classroom; it begins at home by the learner's first teacher: their family (Diffily, 2004). Much of a student's foundational knowledge takes place at home (Compton-Lilly, 2003) through the influence of their families. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1975) asserted that the family shapes and defines the assimilation of a child into the world socially and culturally. In conjunction with their overall influence, African American underachievement has a few proximal influences: "the role of SES, externalizing behaviors, interpersonal skills, home literacy environment,

and learning-related skills" (Matthews et al., 2010). The effect of one's SES (parent education, family income, and occupational prestige) directly impacts the academic performances and outcomes of students (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005). The literacy gap plus common interventions for this demographic are the baselines for identifying next steps towards literacy. By interviewing a sample of this population to identify their literacy acquisition and exposure, the student's voice is heard and one can elucidate how literacy was and is perceived by private school African American inner city adolescents.

Purpose of the Study

This study addressed the connection between adolescent literacy performance and exposure qualitatively. Phenomenology, as defined by Creswell (2016) "describes how one orients to lived experience" (p. 59). It uncovers the essence of meaning through studying a particular instance of lived experience (Van Manen, 1990). Since the study looked at the phenomenon of a racial group through society and culture, Sociocultural Theory (SCT), Critical Theory (CT), and Critical Race Theory (CRT) were selected as the frameworks.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to help literacy practitioners and researchers alike understand the home-based literacy experiences and exposure of inner city private school African American adolescents in an effort to understand the role it played in and out of the classroom. The phenomenological design was selected for this study to identify the common exposures for African American inner city adolescents (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The population was inner city private school African American adolescents in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Theoretical Framework

Phenomenology, according to Merleau-Ponty and Fisher (1963), is "an inventory of consciousness as of that wherein a universe resides" (p. 215). Within this study, the researcher used three theoretical frameworks to guide this research. Sociocultural Theory was selected as one of the frameworks because of Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that a child's consciousness is informed by their relationship to the world. Mcphail (1995) connected SCT to the phenomenology research designer by clarifying that Vygotsky (1978) recognized experience as a unit of analysis and argued that this design "represents the link between the whole personality and the social situation in the same sense that word meaning represents the link between cognition and speech in social interaction" (Minick, 1989, p. 187). This study looked at the home-based literacy experiences of African American adolescents.

Figure 1 *Sociocultural Theory* (Vygotsky, 1978)

Individual Development
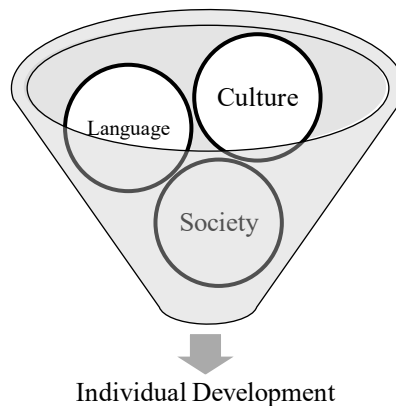
Likewise, Critical Theory was selected as another framework due to its reductionist nature to phenomenology (Schmitt, 1959). In phenomenological studies, researchers attempt to "relocate the origins of meaning in our lived experiences…[as] Critical Theory develops the insights of Hegel and Marx into a radical interrogation of ideologies at work in advanced society" (Kearney, 1995, p. 1). Critical Theory critiques

society with the intention of not only revealing but challenging the power structure (Geuss, 1981). This study looked at the role engagement with the Eurocentric literacy canon has on African American adolescents' English class performance.

Figure 2 *Critical Theory* (Bronner, 2009)
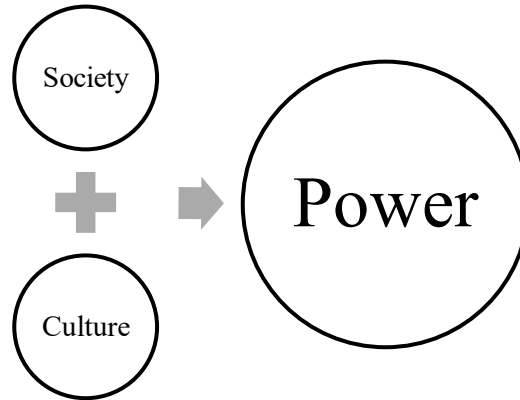
Finally, this study was guided by the Critical Race Theoretical framework. Within the social constructivist phenomenological approach, the researcher identified themes that emerged from the lived experiences of a particular group of people (Kline, 2008). Through the lens of CRT, the researcher studied the "paradigm shift in discourse about race and racism in education… to identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom" (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002, p. 219). This research study examined the role of the Eurocentric literacy canon on inner city private school African American adolescents in and out of the classroom.

Figure 3 *Critical Race Theory* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)
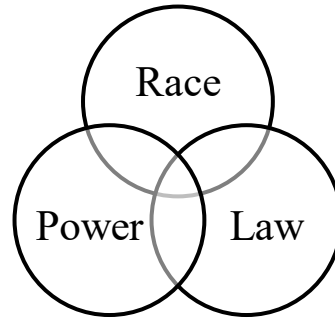
Significance of the Study

Student readiness for learning and literacy is positively linked to exposure and familial attitudes towards education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Reynolds et al., 1992; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). The experiences students have with literacy begins through the nature and function of language observed at home (Van Steensel, 2006). Home literacy experiences (HLE), as defined by Schmitt, Simpson, and Friend (2011), are the combination of literacy and joint attention activities such as shared reading, object naming, parent-child conversations, etc. Teale (1986) asserted that "literacy and literacy learning are fundamentally social processes" (p. 174) as a result "children's progress in reading and writing [are] the product[s] of adult-child (or sibling-child) interactions, the child's independent explorations of written language, and observations of others using written language" (p. 174). Connecting cultural and ethnic conditions to literacy instruction is beneficial for student literacy learning; "however, comparatively less research has discussed how teachers frame culturally relevant approaches to literacy teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 312). Parents reading and teaching their children is the major literacy activity researched today as an attributor to a child's verbal and written skills (Se´ne´chal et al.,

1998); however, those effects are proven but modest as the only attributor (Bus et al., 1995).

> […] Previous studies have provided us with a fairly good understanding of how home literacy practices contribute to children's language skills and literacy acquisition. However, little is understood about how home literacy practices are related to developmental trajectories of children's language and emergent literacy skills as well as conventional literacy skills (Kim, 2009, p. 58).

Of the research conducted on inner city African American literacy, Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that the major contributor to the achievement gap is the educational inequalities towards this group in the United States. This study related the impact of culturally relevant texts to African American adolescents and their literacy achievement lag. Research regarding the need for inner city curriculum improvement identifies compensatory education as the best approach to instruction. Wilson Riles (1969) proffered compensatory education as the rejection that equal educational opportunity can actually exist among unlike socio-economic groups. Rather he:

> [...] recognizes that equal educational opportunity means an educational program geared to the needs of each individual child. This means that more money, more books, more individual attention through smaller class size, more curriculum experimentation and better teachers must be poured into the schools where economically and environmentally disadvantaged children are concentrated (Riles, 1969).

The focus of this study rested within the paradigm of inner city literary exposures in African American high school students. This study was designed to explore the

relationship between the inner city African American adolescent learner and their home-based exposure to literacy.

Research Questions

The study explored the literacy experience of urban African American adolescent learners. The research questions were designed to identify the common phenomenon and role home-based literacy had on the participants. The researcher gained perspectives from the participants based on their encounter with culturally relevant texts, the Eurocentric literary canon, and literacy at home. In order to clearly understand the goal of the researcher, one must understand the difference between culturally relevant texts and the Eurocentric literary canon.

Gibbons (2009) suggested that a reader's comprehension is based on information culturally acquired; therefore, culturally relevant texts connect to the learner's lived experiences. Conversely, the Eurocentric literary Canon is a collection of "totally coherent" works based on "the entire written corpus, together with all surviving oral literature" (Fowler, 1979, p. 98) yet limited. It is based on the premise that the "Eurocentric perspective operates as an ideological censor that privileges Americans of European descent while systematically denying the legitimacy of all other views" (Ware & Ware, 1995, p. 1151) in the educational system. In many of today's English classrooms, instructors interpret and use the Eurocentric literary canon as the only source for text selection. The research questions explored were the following:

- What are the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents?

o What role do their literacy experiences and engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon have on their performance in English class?

o How do these learners describe their current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom?

Assumptions

This transcendental phenomenological study to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents includes one assumption. It assumed that the inner city private school African American students were truthful and forthcoming regarding the events and experiences related to home-based literacy and their academic journey. The findings and validity/trustworthiness of this study depended upon the truthfulness of the participants' interview responses since they were the source and foundation that addressed the research questions.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this research study, key terms were used. To understand the operational meaning versus the general usage outside of this work, definitions have been provided.

1. *African American:* In this study, the terms African American and Black were used interchangeably. They were both "capitalized throughout this work to emphasize the humanity of the individuals it represents, whether referenced as a noun or adjective" and represent people of the African diaspora (McGhie, 2015) who do not speak a second language.

2. ***European American:*** In this study, the terms European American and White were used interchangeably. Capitalized for the emphasis of humanity, European Americans reference individuals who also use the labels White or Americans of European ancestry (Price et al., 2008).

3. ***Adolescent***: The term adolescent references males and females between the ages of 14 and 18 (Hauser & Allen, 2007). This study only used this term to reference high school aged students.

4. ***Lived experience:*** Within this study, the term lived experience referenced "what personally and immediately 'one experiences for oneself' apart from all hearsay, conjecture, or imaginative and ratiocinatory constructions" (Burch, 1990, p. 132).

5. ***Home-based Literacy***: Within this work, the term home-based literacy referenced "exposure to print (through book reading) and letter names to provide children with an opportunity to connect spoken language to printed words, promoting children's sensitivity to individual sounds" (Kim, 2009, p. 59).

6. ***Eurocentric Literary Canon:*** The canon referenced in this study is a collection of literary works based on "the entire written corpus, together with all surviving oral literature" (Fowler, 1979, p. 98). The surviving literature within it "privileges Americans of European descent while systematically denying the legitimacy of all other views" (Ware & Ware, 1995, p. 1151).

7. ***Inner city:*** For this study, the term inner city referenced the area near the center of a city, specifically associated with social and economic problems. These urban areas have large amounts of poverty, social problems, drugs, and crime (Porter, 1995).

8. ***Private School:*** Within this study, the term private school was defined as "a

   school that is established, conducted, and primarily supported by a

   nongovernmental agency" (Merriam-Webster, 2020b).

Chapter Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 introduced and identified why this study was addressed. African American adolescents categorically achieve lower than European American students (McFarland & Hussar, 2018). With the consistency of African American dropouts, understanding this demographics' literacy exposure, and its relationship to class performance can influence future curricular changes. By interviewing, coding, and identifying themes for this phenomenological study, trends were highlighted within the shared experiences of the African American participants.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant research of similar studies and laid the foundation for this study. Chapter 3 explains the steps for collecting and analyzing the data (interviews), its limitations, and the ethical concerns that may arise. Chapter 4 presents the finding of the participants for the study. Finally, chapter 5 discusses and analyzes the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. This research was designed to contribute to the knowledge base needed to help practitioners and researchers identify the best approach for literacy education for inner city private school African American adolescents. Within this chapter, the empirical and theoretical research related to this topic is reviewed. By reviewing (a) African American students in the school system, (b) familial implication on learning, (c) home-based literacy exposure and its impact on reading, and (d) culturally relevant pedagogy and African American students, researchers can gain understanding of the relationship between home-based literacy and in-school literacy performance. The areas listed above are discussed in detail to demonstrate how this topic has been approached qualitatively, identify the research gaps that currently exist, and relate the research questions, methodology, and framework.

Historical Overview

Over the past 70 years, classrooms have drastically shifted as a result of many court cases that mandated education as an opportunity for all: notably Brown v. Board of Education. During the litigation of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)*,* the defense argued: "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education." Success, according to Dewey (1938) and Freire (1970), is most reliably built off one's education. On June 28, 1964, Malcolm X identified freedom as an associated outcome of education when he concluded that "education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the

people who prepare for it today" (as cited in Edelberg, 1986, p. 217); however, for centuries this demographic could not prepare for today since "slavery provided the circumstances necessary to produce large-scale illiteracy among a subpopulation (Cohen et al., 2012, p. 124).

During slavery, Slave Codes were created to juxtapose the rights of the free to the enslaved of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Although Slave Codes varied throughout the North American colonies, "one of the unifying tenets of slave codes was that Blacks should not read-must not read" (Capers, 2006, p.19). Cornelius (1983) identified that death or amputation of free men for "spoiling the good niggers" (as cited in Capers, 2006, p.19) with literacy or the hanging of the best slaves for learning and teaching others enslaved to read and write were the common punishments of choice. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* Douglass (1845) recounted his master saying "if you teach [a] nigger ... how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave" (as cited in Gates & McKay, 1997, p. 409). Douglass's recollection confirms the knowledge that literacy unlocks the mind and frees it from bondage; however, African Americans have only been afforded modicums of this up until 65 years ago (Warren, 1954).

African American Students in the School System

Since the racial desegregation of students in schools by the Supreme Court in 1954, African Americans have had to combat negative stereotypes, White exodus, school inequity, poor teacher preparation, and biased standardized tests (Davis et al., 2006; Saddler, 2005; Steele, 2003; Suzuki & Aronson, 2005). The systemic educational limitations within the African American school systems made it difficult for students to

"ask difficult epistemological and ontological questions about life, political systems, social and economic inequities" (Strong-Leek, 2008, p. 2) which Woodson (2006) identified as the miseducation of the race. Since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), African Americans have transformed "from beggars pleading for decent treatment to citizens demanding equal treatment under the law as their constitutionally recognized right" (Bell, 1980, p. 518). Throughout the years, this right has been accepted but meagerly incorporated since classrooms for people of color, according to Smedley (1970), are ill-equipped.

> Minority and low-income students in urban settings are most likely to find themselves in classrooms staffed by inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill-qualified teachers because funding inequities, distributions of local power, labor market conditions, and dysfunctional hiring practices conspire to produce teacher shortages of which they bear the brunt (Smedley, 1970, para. 1).

Within the United States (U.S.), public schools perpetuated segregation and inequality in the education provided (Bell, 1980; Zirkel, 2005). From special education labels to ill-qualified teachers (Lomotey, 2010), African American students have been systemically filtered into classrooms that deprive them of rigorous academic and social curriculum, crippling their assimilation into society (Harry & Anderson, 1994). This deprivation and inequity of education has contributed to the negative academic outcomes of African American students (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

> [...]the education finance systems of most states do not take into account the actual costs of providing a high-quality education with academic standards that

deliver high achievement[s] of all students, noting that 'their schools have less,

yet their students need more' (Narasaki et al, 2018, p. 25).

These negative academic outcomes of African American students have been linked back

to "the influence of socioeconomic status (SES), stereotype threat, oppositional identity,

and cultural discontinuity" (Matthews et al., 2010, p. 757) and made worse when victim

blaming is infused. Ogbu (1978) argued that people of color often maintain the society

they are systemically victims of which is evident with people of color living in urban

communities.

Inner city African American students matriculate through school with a unique

cultural set of standards and barriers (Roderick, 2005). Flennaugh (2017) explored the

educational transition of Black males from middle school to high school and found that

within the African American community, there is a distinct challenge faced by males

during their transition from boyhood to manhood. Flennaugh (2017) identified how

racism and institutional inequality plays a role in the Black high school experience

leaving these students targeted without safe spaces to bridge the developmental gap of

childhood to adulthood. Duncan-Andrade (2009) identified *critical hope* (great teaching

plus love for students demonstrated with actions) for educators working with

marginalized groups in order to help facilitate a clear transition and represent the type of

caring concern people of color need in a world that scrutinizes them. For marginalized

student groups, identity safe spaces improve educational outcomes and developmental

transitions (Davies et al., 2005).

Families within the inner city combat unemployment, poverty, incarceration,

expulsion, and school drop-out (Jiminez, 2009). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995)

identified that race, whether "real" or not, impacts social order and societal roles. Wilson (2009) argued that culture is an explanatory variable in race and urban poverty. Racism is perpetuated in society by the denial of its existence and the White cultural normative. Rightness of Whiteness (RW) considers what White people do as the standard behaviors, characteristics, and values for "non-Whites" (Omi & Winant, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). With race as the identifier, African Americans face an additionally complicated determinant for social interaction and classification that inevitably impacts how they are taught and receive instruction (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995).

Racial Identity in School

The extent to which African American learners' racially perceive themselves impacts their academic performance and opinion of education. Racial identity, as defined by McGhie (2015), is "the thoughts and feelings an individual has about their specific group membership" (p. 24). During adolescence, a primary contributor to one's development are the racial stereotypes and identity associated with them (Rice & Dolgin, 2005). Between kindergarten and 12th grade, adolescents' individual and group identities shift, whether positively or negatively, from what was once formed prior to entering school (Rice & Dolgin, 2005; Scottham et al., 2008). By illustrating how students racially and socially identify themselves, an accurate cultural lens can be used when interpreting the students' exposure to literacy.

McGhie (2015) asserted that "many minority children define themselves in relation to race (even before they define themselves as individuals), often comparing themselves to Whites" (p. 24). Within the African Diaspora, there are many names associated with Black people. Graves (2014) noted that African American students often

identify themselves differently using "ethnic terms representative of various constituencies in the African Diaspora" (p. 13). Within the American context of the African Diaspora, race and ethnicity are not mutually exclusive. A Black student's self-identification within the diaspora not only identifies their skin tone but also their connection to their broader racial group (Waters, 1999).

The colorblindness era, captured in Bonilla-Silva (2003), which is pervasive in society "forms a crucial context that informs the identity formation process and its impact on academic outcomes and dispositions" (Graves, 2014, p. 5) for African American students. The colorblind racial context presents African American students with media and academic messages that racism and overall oppression are non-existent in the school system (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). However, race recognition is not a bad thing; "to avoid talking about race is a way to willfully ignore the experiences of people of color, and makes the goal of erasure more fully discernible" (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 156).

When students see connections between their school and home identity via artwork or visual aids, they not only relate to the curriculum but also feel at home with the familiarity (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Identity safe schools provide students with the freedom to be their authentic selves without fear of racial judgement (Davies et al., 2005). Rather than focusing on mirroring the dominant group (Nieto & Bode, 2012), marginalized students demonstrate curriculum interest in environments that celebrate cultural differences rather than those that emphasize cultural similarities (Jackson, 2006). African American learning experiences benefit exponentially from realism and connections to their home-environment.

This study was built from this body of research seeking to examine culturally relevant instruction and African American literacy. This body of research provided a platform for the examination of the influence of home-based literacy on the inner city African American adolescent. Using participant's racial identity awareness, the study explored the role literacy experiences have on student English performances.

Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky, psychologist, is the founder of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Newman & Holzman, 2013). Vygotsky's research is directed towards the psychological differences between learned and personal concepts (Kozulin et al., 2003). These overlapping ideas work in tandem but are developed differently in the individual learner. Halliday (1973) suggested that culture is individually understood through language. Sociocultural Theory establishes that language cannot be independent of society since "it always occurs within and is shaped by a cultural context" (Perry, 2012, p. 52). This theory rejects speaking and thinking as one entity. Lantolf (2000) articulated that speaking is the transmission of established thoughts. Sociocultural Theory, through the lens of Lantolf (2000), explained that "Vygotsky conceived the human mind as a functional system in which the properties of the natural, or biologically specified, brain are organized into a higher, or culturally shaped, mind through integration of symbolic artifacts into thinking" (p. 2). It relates society's influence on an individual's development, marrying one's ideas with their words. Since literacy through the scope of SCT places special attention on society, it is important to understand society and its implications on the individual.

Critical Theory (CT), which emerged in the 1920s by members of the Frankfurt

School of social research, is a framework that places society under the microscope and

seeks to diagnose and cure it (Bronner, 2009). Of those members, Max Horkheimer

(1982) addressed the poverty of mass culture through the lens of history. By looking at

how culturally relevant texts impact the African American, the learner can be "liberated

from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244) while shedding

light on literature that can connect to their experiences. Concerned with social

experiences, CT manifests social-formative and historical power of one race over another

and how it can be applied to social sciences (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Within

society, CT analyzes power interests regarding who gains and loses among competing

groups (Kincheloe & McLaren 2011).

Likewise, Critical Race Theory (CRT), developed in the mid-1970s by Derrick

Bell, examines culture and society through how power and race impact individuals

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Capturing this connection, CRT "questions the very

foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, enlightenment

rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017,

p.3). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) identified the inequality in education through

CRT. Since the early 1990s, CRT has become the popular framework for both analysis

and criticisms when looking at racial disparities (Ladson-Billings, 2005). Among these

disparities are the literacy performance gaps of African American students (Cohen et al.,

2012). Critical Race Theory recognizes "racism as an enduring and pervasive part of life

in the United States and works toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader

goal of ending all forms of oppression" (Rogers, & Mosley, 2006, p. 465).

Table 1 *Principles of Critical Race Theory* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)

Principle 1	Racism appears normal to members of the dominant group in American society.
Principle 2	Storytelling is a way to confront racial oppression.
Principle 3	"Interest Convergence" suggests that the dominant race must benefit while racial oppression is emancipated.
Principle 4	"Social Construction" suggests that society invented race.
Principle 5	Due to the history of racial oppression, racial issues are better communicated by people of color through "voices of color and storytelling."

This study combined Sociocultural, Critical, and Critical Race Theories since culture and societal contexts of literacy are the foundations. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) encouraged the use of CRT in education. All three theories recognize that race is not fixed but shaped by lived experiences; CRT challenges status quo findings as the rationale for the experiences of people of color (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Since Sociocultural and Critical Race Theories are evolved forms of critical theory, this study used the three as a cultural lens to identify the literacy phenomenon within inner city private school African American adolescents as it relates to home-based exposure.

Familial Implications on Learning

The Ecology Defined

Family plays a part in the role literacy and academia have on the student. Beyond one's family income, education level, and culture, student success through high school is based upon their home environment (Cairney, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Language is a fundamental element within the African American family. Beckman (1995) argued that:

Language is the way we think and feel about the world we live in. It allows us to

remember and to pass on to our children the values and beliefs of the group. This

is the cultural system of human beings and it helps us to make sense of what is

happening in our daily lives. (p. 89)

Davis (2013) explained that family rules, traditions, relationships, and the meaning of life

are all established through language. Meaning, according to Halliday (1990), "is a social

and cultural phenomenon and all construction of meaning is a social process" (p. 133).

The practices of one's parents in conjunction with language form cultural habits;

however, today's households have shifted due to the change in family structure. The

ecology of the African American family provides clarity for its ever evolving structure

(Mui & Anderson, 2008).

Within U.S. homes, the structure is both diverse and ever changing from single

parent, married couple, or custodial guardian homes. According to the U.S. Census

Bureau (2016), "Married couples make up 68 percent of all families with children under

age 18, compared to 93 percent in 1950" leaving the remaining 32 percent among single

parent and custodial guardians. "Of the 11 million families with children under age 18,

and no spouse present, the majority are single mothers (8.5 million). Single fathers

comprise the remaining 2.5 million single parent families" (US Census Bureau, 2016).

Within the family structure, it is common for parents to never have been married.

In the case of disadvantaged African American families, the likelihood is greater

that a marriage to a stepparent will be a first marriage rather than a remarriage

because non-marital birth rates tend to be higher for low-income individuals and

Blacks when compared with rates for the general population (Moore & Chase, 2001, p 1148).

The shift in the family dynamic has changed the type of home-based interaction between the family and child.

With the new family dynamic, child-rearing has changed (Smith, 2008). Davis (2013) asserted that "interactions in the homes of these children are fluctuating, which plays a role on the multiplicity of language and literacy development" (p. 28). Purcell-Gates (1996) confirmed Vygotsky's belief that literacy acquisition takes place both at home and in school through social interaction. Epstein (2002) provided a six-type model regarding the potential scope of parental involvement in school.

Table 2 *Epstein's (2002) Six-type Model* (as cited in Bokhorst-Heng, 2008, p. 40-1)

Model 1	Basic obligations of parents as care-providers
Model 2	Schools communicating with parents about school programs
Model 3	Parent volunteering at school
Model 4	Parent involvement in home learning
Model 5	Parent as decision maker
Model 6	Collaborating with the community

This model in conjunction with schools supporting parents and parents supporting schools bring about the common goal needed for student learning. However, the current family dynamic and structure presents gaps in the language and literacy development of children (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Johnson, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 1996). Both Mui and Anderson (2008) and Johnson (2010) supported that literacy practices of the home are directly impacted by multiple roles of family members. Children learn to produce language when they reenact what they hear at home (Purcell-Gates, 1988); however

literacy development is just as important in the years past emergent development through interactions with multiple contexts of literacy (Tatum, 2009).

In order for literacy educators to effectively reach African American adolescents, Tatum (2009) suggested conveying information through an appreciation of sociocultural understanding. African American in-home literacy practices are perceived as insufficient and are often excluded from the discourse of language and literacy development (Edwards et al., 2010). Davis (2013) connected "the experiences, attitudes, and material[s] pertaining to literacy that a child naturally encounters and interacts with at home composed more of an impact on language and literacy development" (p. 33). Research indicates the necessity of looking beyond the scope of the school for literacy practice, but to spotlight the experiences and resources to engage prior knowledge (Dyson, 2003). The ability to focus on print material is a result of maternal book reading (Davis, 2013).

Sociocultural alternative debates regarding literacy development can be rooted in other circumstances of the learner (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Dyson, 2003; Heath, 1983; Howard, 2010; Milner, 2010; Purcell-Gates, 2004). Of these circumstances, the socioeconomic level of children is an environmental factor directly related to reading acquisition (Heath, 1983). Diffily (2004) confirmed that children's learning emerges within the home; "literacy history begins in an individual's home, and the construction of their knowledge is formed in their own cultures, families, and communities" (Davis, 2013, p. 34).

Bokhorst-Heng (2008) recognized "the importance of parental involvement in children's education, even through the last year of high school" as an established

necessity. Six benefits have been directly aligned to parental involvement in education and literacy:

Table 3 *Benefits of Parental Involvement* (Bokhorst-Heng, 2008, p. 40)

Benefit 1	Doing better in school with higher test scores and grades
Benefit 2	Being more likely to complete their homework
Benefit 3	Exhibiting better behavior
Benefit 4	Having more positive attitudes toward their learning
Benefit 5	Graduating
Benefit 6	Being more likely to enroll in higher education

The Ecology in Practice

Positive academic perceptions and outcomes are attributed to positive family relationships, involvement, monitoring, as well as support (Fuligni, 2001; Kao & Tienda, 1995; White & Glick, 2000). González et al. (2006), Gutman and McLoyd (2000), Ixa Plata-Potter and de Guzman (2012) all explored the home and challenges people of color face regarding education. In these studies, the researchers examined educational challenges from the perspective of the family dynamic and parental capacity to support their children. Home exposures as well as academic involvement are the primary focuses of the studies presented.

In González, Moll, and Amanti, (2006), a qualitative study was developed ethnographically to understand the households of working-class Mexicans in order to increase teacher's understanding of the out-of-school knowledge of students. Seeking to connect a student's home-based knowledge to classroom instruction, the researchers analyzed the social and labor histories of the participating families. The labor knowledge compared participants' understanding of physically laborious occupations to that of

mentally taxing office professions. The researchers studied the social environment of the participants to gauge the interaction levels of the family with other members of society and how those interactions fueled relationships. It was found that "teacher[s]... [are] ultimately the bridge between the students' world, theirs and their family's funds of knowledge, and the classroom experience" (González et al., 2006, p. 137) and that instruction is a collaborative effort of children's environment. These funds of knowledge, according to González et al. (2006), fuel how students perceive their teachers and the content presented.

Similarly, Gutman and McLoyd (2000) examined the difference in high-achieving and low-achieving early adolescents and the extent of their parental involvement. The participants for this mixed methods longitudinal study were from 22 elementary schools and 10 middle schools of which 42% were African American students economically disadvantaged receiving free or reduced lunch. Gutman and McLoyd (2000) interviewed married, single parent, and custodial guardian families using open-ended questions. Parents of high-achievers, reported by Gutman and McLoyd (2000), used "specific strategies to assist their children…[,] had more supportive conversations with their children…[,] initiated contact with their children's school in order to check on their children's progress[,] and maintain[ed] positive relationships with the school officials" (p. 10); however, parents of low achievers "rarely visited their children's school except in response to the school's request precipitated by their children's poor work or misbehavior" (p. 10). Both groups of parents acknowledge the importance of the home and family in their child's education but recognize that their child's "academic success might be hindered by their financial problems" (p. 17).

Finally, Ixa Plata-Potter and de Guzman (2012) investigated the parents of students of color to uncover why some demographics experience limited parental support. The study explored the experiences of eight Mexican parents phenomenologically regarding home-based educational support for their children in school. Using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method modified by Moustakas (1994), the investigators interviewed six mothers and one mother–father pair (six married, one single parent, and one separated). From the interviews, "77 significant statements were extracted... [and] six themes were derived" (Ixa Plata-Potter & de Guzman, 2012, p. 97). It was found that the parents' limitations were specific to academic and program support. The participants were unable to support their children with their school assignments given the disparity in their understanding of the material.

The three studies provide three different perspectives of familial support and implications. "As sets of social practices, specific literacies are evident in the ways people talk, read, write about, and otherwise use a variety of printed text" (Lee, 1991, p. 292). González et al. (2006) presented the relevance of understanding the home-based experiences of the learner. However, the research limited the funds of knowledge to societal norms within Mexican families; there is more to be learnt about the funds of knowledge specifically in African American homes in the inner city. Gutman and McLoyd (2000), furthered the exploration of home experiences on class performance. Their research studied the need for parental support on student success and the role poverty plays on that involvement within African American populations. While the investigators linked academic performance to the influence of one's family, Gutman and McLoyd (2000) did not identify how parental involvement influences literacy directly in

inner city schools with solely African Americans. Finally, Ixa Plata-Potter and de Guzman (2012) studied the experiences of immigrant parents supporting their children through school. The investigators focused on the challenges of the parents and highlighted that culture played an important role as a response to those difficulties. Ixa Plata-Potter and de Guzman (2012) isolated the phenomenon within immigrant families but did not address how the home-based challenges impact the relationship students have with literacy or their school work as a whole. The literature reviewed presented the family dynamic as an instrumental factor in student performance; however, how content is presented foundationally is just as impactful to student literacy perceptions (Gee, 2011).

Home-based Literacy Exposure and Its Impact on Reading

Exposure and Impact Defined

Multiple studies have established three foundational skills in the literacy acquisition of children: language (vocabulary), metalinguistics (phonological awareness), and emergent literacy skills (letter-name recognition, writing what is seen, and phonemic awareness) (Adams, 1990; Snow et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The development of these skills happen in the home since it exposes children to vocabulary (Hart & Risley, 1995) and print materials first (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Combinations of these exposures such as book reading at home can account for literacy achievement. Se´ne´chal et al. (1998) identified that foundational understanding for how language and literacy acquisition skills are developed in the home. Kim (2009) asserted that "children who have a rich language environment (through oral input or book reading) in preschool and at home are expected to develop vocabulary, which in turn stimulates

growth in phonological representations" (p. 59). These rich language environments

develop habits and establish a child in the "literate society" (Heath, 1982).

Children with large vocabularies tend to have better phonological awareness

(Lonigan et al., 2000; Metsala, 1999). In order for this skill to be developed, children

must learn the structure of language through rhyming, letter, and reading games (Tunmer

& Hoover, 1992). When children are exposed to print literacy, they are able to make

connections between the letters they see and the sounds they have heard spoken, which

promotes individual sound sensitivity (Kim, 2009). Home literacy influences what

adolescents value and read; it also contributes to one's anytime activities and the rules

associated with reading and writing (Heath, 1982). Lenski (2002) proposed that

> [...] social interactions influence the development of children's thinking abilities
>
> and ways of knowing. As children develop language, they are able to learn only
>
> those skills, ideas, and meanings that are in their zone of proximal development
>
> (ZPD) (p. 129).

Adolescent literacy interests combine Street's (2000) "literacy events (the physical,

observable text based activity of reading) and literacy practices (the socially situated

beliefs, values, and purposes that shape people's reading events)" (as cited in Bokhorst-

Heng, 2008, p. 42). "When students experience multiple situational interests in reading,

accompanied by perceived competence, autonomy, or relatedness in reading activities,

then students increase their intrinsic reading motivation" (Guthrie et al., 2006, p. 244).

The relationship between literacy skills and motivation are relevant to good

readers whether they are beginning or matriculating through school (Baker & Wigfield

1999; Gottfried 1990; Taboada et al., 2009; Wang & Guthrie 2004). Reading

performance and comprehension are a byproduct of both access and motivation (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2009). Children who read and are engaged in literacy activities often have better literacy skills (Anderson et al., 1988; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1991; Leppanen et al., 2005; Mol & Bus, 2011). Reading motivation, according to Wigfield and Guthrie (2000), is "the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading" (p. 405).

Over the past 10 years, adolescent literacy activities have changed; rather than measuring print exposures, digital text activities have become the dominant platform of their interests (McGeown et al., 2015). Given the rise of technology as the available platform for literacy, students need texts that will gauge their attention. Tatum (2013) identified that student motivations and perceptions of reading are linked to the texts selected and the intended audiences. Gee's (2011) Situated Meaning intertextuality isolates student interest and applies it to literacy through text selection and vocabulary contributing to literacy engagement.

On the secondary level, Wolf, Bokhorst-Heng, and Pereira (2007) found that recreational reading was limited. "What Johnny Likes to Read Is Hard to Find in School" connected why recreational reading is limited for secondary students (Worthy et al., 1999). Wolf et al. (2007) identified that when it comes to adolescent readers, there is little interest in understanding the diversity of the learner's home and school practices.

Exposure and Impact in Practice

In order to optimize the independent literacy abilities of a student, acknowledging their culture and history will cultivate the current and emergent skills in their ZPD (Leong, 1998). Dickinson and Tabors (2001), Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018), and

Dunston, Patterson, and Daniels (2010) studied home-based literacy and its impact on students. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) investigated the home-school relationship in a longitudinal mixed methods study following 83 low income children from three years old through elementary age. It was found that the kindergarten literacy skills of the participants were heavily influenced by the language and literacy exposure in the home prior to school entry. The home literacy exposures to rare words influence a student's vocabulary, emergent literacy skills, and narrative abilities (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018) examined a different angle to home-based literacy. Through the study of duality, Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018) identified an eight year old African American middle-class female student navigating the racial contexts of literacy in school and at home/church. Using sociocultural and post-structural theories, the researchers used a case-study design to examine the literacy difference and involvement in school and home. It was found through coding and triangulation that "communal and individual practices encourage diverse ways of engaging; teacher perceptions influence how the participant navigated each space; and church literacies allowed for the development of leadership skills" (Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018, p. 380). The participant of the study negotiated literacy in school that seldom presented her cultural experience versus the current events that related to her community at home; the expectation of silence and stillness in school versus opportunities for movement through dance and communication; and education focused on isolated literacy versus education grounded in African American history.

Conversely, Dunston, Patterson, and Daniels (2010) approached home base literacy through the lens of parental support rather than culture. The home literacy

experiences of 60 (32 females and 28 males) African American first graders and their guardians from southeastern cities were investigated. Using the mixed methods longitudinal approach, the researchers were able to examine the maternal feedback of African American mothers/guardians from various educational and socioeconomic backgrounds while listening to their child read aloud by incorporating ZPD. It was found that "children whose mothers provide premature assistance (i.e. responding before the child has a chance to make a word identification attempt) have lower reading scores... whereas children whose mothers provide no feedback (i.e., waiting or pausing to allow the child to work through reading attempts) show significantly higher first-grade reading scores" (Dunston et al., 2010, p. 16). The study's findings suggested that parents are able to support young readers during developmental literacy stages just as effectively as teachers.

These studies explored what African American students read and strive to understand why. Dickinson and Tabors (2001) identified how children's literacy outcomes were related to home language and literacy environments. The skills captured in the study explain the priority of home-based literacy in preschoolers but fails to identify the role it plays on adolescents in the inner city. Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018) investigated an African American third grader's ability to balance being Black in and out of school. By investigating how literacy is experienced in both realms, the researchers identified the need for "educators to patronize the local communities where the families live, shop, worship, and work" (p. 387) but did not address how the African American literacy experience translates into class performance for inner city students. Dunston, Patterson, and Daniels (2010), however, studied how African American

mothers/guardians support the reading development of their children reading aloud. Although the study focused on a specific literacy skill, it was limited to emergent readers and did not look at how parents can support literacy development for adolescents. The aforementioned studies have laid the foundation for literacy exposure in the home; however, there is more to be explored and understood regarding home-based literacy and culturally relevant instruction.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and African American Students

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Defined

In an effort to bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps of African American students, Street (2003) suggested the need for culturally relevant texts in literacy instruction. An anthropological awareness of African American experiences impacts the relationship students have with literacy since it recognizes that different ethnic groups have various values and interests (Gay, 2002). This recognition includes but is not limited to the "music, art, poetry, and dance" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 80) to the cultural group being taught. Many African American students connect to content and teachers who they relate to and often are of the same race and gender due to the similar-to-me effect (Wheeler et al., 1992). These commonalities and teachers who build relationships based on high support and low conflict through the similar-to-me effect produces higher academic scores (Williams, 2012).

The Eurocentric educational canon standardizes the White experience as dominant and is often taught by White female teachers in the U.S (McGhie, 2015). These *standards* consistently taught in many of today's classrooms have improved in the representation of ethnic groups but are "issued by national commission, state departments

of education, and local school districts" (Gay, 2002, p. 108) and are not as effective in culturally diverse classrooms (Wade, 1993). Tatum (2013) suggested that the inner city African American educational experience differs exponentially from those of their European American counterparts. Recognizing this difference, Gay (2002) suggested culturally responsive teaching since it analyzes literacy selection based on its "quantity, accuracy, complexity, placement, purpose, variety, significance, and authenticity of the narrative texts, visual illustrations, learning activities, role models, and authorial sources" (p. 108). Likewise, upon incorporating these relatable texts, culturally relevant teaching requires building a culturally responsive learning community.

Culturally responsive teaching requires high academic standards and the mandate of high success from students (Foster, 1997; Kleinfeld, 1974, 1975) rather than the common "gentle nurturing and altruistic concern" (Gay, 2002, p. 109). Maintaining rigor and cultural caring in these learning communities place "teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence" (Gay, 2000, p. 52). Culturally relevant instruction is needed especially when working with people of color (Darling-Hammond, 2001) since autonomous literacy instruction is difficult for them to relate; it "impos[es] western conceptions of literacy on to other cultures" (Street, 2003, p. 77). Rather than teaching the status quo to a diverse population, Ehri and McCormick (2013) emphasized student centered instruction.

Culturally responsive teaching that is student-centered engages cross-cultural communication (Gay, 2002). This acknowledgment of "what we talk about; how we talk about it; what we see, attend to, or ignore; how we think; and what we think about"

(Porter & Samovar, 1991, p. 21) recognizes the culture of the demographic and establishes value in their norm. Through this value, teachers can unlock the mind of their students, which is *culturally encoded* –language, symbols, or styles of a culture converted (Meghji, 2019)–*,* and decipher the influences and meanings of their prior knowledge (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1985). This type of communication not only changes how students speak in class but also the format of instruction and class rules. Rather than teacher-dominant speaking in class, culturally responsive communication allows for fluid interchanges. Teacher-solicited response patterns of "right answer*s"* from students (Goodlad, 1984; Philips, 1983) can no longer be the norm. The communication of the classroom must mirror that of the culture;

> [...] the communicative styles of most ethnic groups of color in the United States are more active, participatory, dialectic, and multimodal. Speakers expect listeners to engage with them as they speak by providing prompts, feedback, and commentary (Gay, 2002, p. 111).

Beyond the communication of the classroom, the overall practice of literacy instruction shapes student expectations and interactions with culturally relevant text (Galda, & Beach, 2001). When reading culturally relevant works, students have a great understanding of the work since readers use personal experiences to interpret the social practices and character development of the text world (Athanases, 1998; Kamberelis & Scott, 1992). Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) presents instruction and literacy in a manner with which diverse populations can connect.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in Practice

Culturally Relevant instruction prioritizes the culture of the students over that of the dominant. Howard (2001), Underwood (2015), and Byrd (2016) investigated culturally relevant pedagogy from the perspective of the students and teachers. Howard (2001) told the stories of 17 (10 girls; 7 boys) African American students from four inner city elementary schools qualitatively in a case study. It examined how the students interpreted and perceived the culturally responsive instruction from their teachers. To ensure the accuracy of the student responses, the researchers selected students from low, medium, and high achievement groups. Based upon the participant interviews, three themes emerged "(1) the importance of caring teachers, (2) the establishment of a community/family-type classroom environment, and (3) education as entertainment" (Howard, 2001, p. 136). The findings of this study emphasized how culturally relevant instruction excites and shifts student perspectives regarding school and the overall academic day.

> I like it [morning circle] because it's the only time you get to sit and talk with your friends besides lunch and recess. . . It's the beginning of the day and we're all really excited and we want to start a whole new day and explore things. It's just a good way to begin a new day with people you care and like a lot (Howard, 2001, p. 141).

Using a specific content as the guide, Underwood (2015) conducted a phenomenological case study to examine how preservice science teacher educators prepared instructors to engage K-12th grade African American students with culturally relevant pedagogical strategies. 11 preservice educators completed the survey and four

exemplar teachers were interviewed to identify their understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. Those semi-structured interviews revealed that science teacher educators do not differentiate between culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy. Beyond multiculturalism and race conversations, the participants confused race related conversation with culturally relevant science instruction and indicated needing clarity. One participating teacher identified that the professional development "did not foster training for her students in how to use this teaching practice to later facilitate cultural competence or critical consciousness with K-12 students" (p. 233).

Narrowing the research to specific outcomes, Byrd (2016) investigated the impact culturally relevant teaching has on student achievement quantitatively. The study involved the perceptions of 315 sixth to 12th grade students of various underrepresented groups. It explored how students perceived racial attitudes, academic outcomes, school racial socialization, and culturally relevant teaching. Based upon the survey responses, Byrd (2016) found significance with culturally relevant teaching and student outcomes. "These findings do lend support to the idea that culturally relevant teaching is "good teaching"..., but the findings also indicate that a direct focus on race and culture in the classroom is beneficial" (Byrd, 2016, p. 6).

This research study examined the relationship between culturally relevant literacy and instruction and the role exposure to the Eurocentric literary canon has on African American readers. Lee (1991) identified that literacy in and of itself is not a "single, amorphous set of skills that are evenly applicable across any circumstances" (p. 292) but as a set of integrated social practice (Resnick, 1990). Howard (2001) examined the impact of CRP from the vantage point of the students. The themes identified from it

support the assertions of Ladson-Billings (2014) and Tatum (2013) but limited the scope of its effectiveness to elementary instruction and texts. Underwood (2015) investigated how teachers receive culturally relevant instruction. Its findings identified a gap in the application stage of the training, identifying the need for more culturally relevant instruction, and reading for African Americans success regarding literacy. Byrd (2016) studied the relationship between culturally relevant teachings and student perception qualitatively but did not include the personal experiences and exposures of the students' culture on their academic outcome. Furthermore, the quantitative surveys responses ranged from students sixth to 12th grade students rather than a small age range with special attention to one content area and did not incorporate the "why" behind these surveys with qualitative inquiry.

Chapter Summary and Transition

Literacy instruction for African Americans in the inner city is lagging exponentially when reviewing and comparing the test scores and reading achievements to that of their European American counterparts (Cohen et al., 2012; Matthews et al., 2010; McFarland & Hussar, 2018). Through Critical Race Theory, one can "reject modernist notions of single-truth claims of objective discipline-based knowledge and policy answers" (Lynn et al., 2002, p.5). In order to provide equality in literacy for African American students, changing instruction and the overall narrative is the importance of counter storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counter-storytelling is "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege"

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p 32). Since literacy instruction is not equal for all, providing insight to the experiences of African American learners as they relate to literacy clarifies their narrative.

Lawson (2005) broached this topic from the angle of poverty and other inner city characteristics and their impact on the ways students meet challenges. This study identified how home-based and culturally related literacy influences the reader. In Chapter 1, an introduction of the significance of this study and the research questions explored were provided. Chapter 2 reviewed the empirical and theoretical research related to (a) African American students in the school system, (b) familial implication on learning, (c) home-based literacy exposure and its impact on reading, and (d) culturally relevant pedagogy and African American students as well as present the theoretical framework that directed this study. Chapter 3 explains the methodology, data collection, and ethical concerns of the study; Chapter 4 provides the finding of the research; and Chapter 5 discusses the findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Methods are defined as "the way of doing literacy research" (Duke & Mallette, 2011, p. 1) and can be conducted qualitatively, quantitatively, or by merging the two approaches into one single methodology referred to as mixed methods research (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Quantitative research presents new findings to the world of academia through dualism. Dualism is the belief that researchers "must be objective and separate themselves from the problem they are investigating" (Terrell, 2016, p. 68). With deduction as the means to determine findings, researchers use quantitative methods to clarify or disprove a hypothesis with measurable outcomes. Conversely, qualitative research methods are inductive (Terrell, 2016). Quantitative methods use theories to form predictions and inform the selected experiment; however, qualitative methods make observations that formulate generalizations to be used as a paradigm for the community with which the research relates. Within the last 30 years, a hybrid of the two research designs was embraced and emerged as mixed methods. Mixed methods research combines both the closed-ended and open-ended to find understanding. This approach "investigates combined statistical trends with stories and personal experiences, this collective strength provides a better understanding of the research problems" (Creswell, 2014, p. 2).

Qualitative methods explore the *why* behind the behaviors of a subject. Rather than prescribe specific procedures and pre-structures, qualitative methods "require spontaneous decisions to be made in the field, thus requiring researchers to have a high level of aptitude" (Collins & Cooper, 2014 p. 13) when working with their subjects. Using one's eyes and ears as a filter, qualitative methods organize and interpret the

researcher's gatherings (Lichtman, 2012, p. 299). This qualitative study explored the connection between the home literacy environment (HLE) and adolescent literacy performance to help literacy practitioners and researchers alike understand the influence of home-based literacy experiences of inner city private school African American adolescents. The qualitative transcendental phenomenology methodology is discussed in this chapter.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Research Design & Research Question</h2>

The qualitative research method utilized throughout this study was phenomenology. The phenomenological methodology allowed the researcher to draw connections based on descriptions of a shared phenomenon by a group of participants (Moustakas, 1994). This methodology was selected in order to investigate the lived experience rather than testing it. Phenomenology, as defined by Van Manen (2016), "is a project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence– sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications" (p. 12). Employing this approach aided in answering the research question and sub-questions:

- What are the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents?
    - What role do their literacy experiences and engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon have on their performance in English class?
    - How do these learners describe their current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom?

The phenomenological method was informed from the constructive, interpretive and critical race paradigms. Critical Race Theory narrows cultural and societal implications as they relate to one particular race confronting the social, historical, and ideological structures that both perpetuate and restrict it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Sociocultural and Critical Race Theories' primary focus is on reflective assessments. Criticism of society and culture is the stress of the paradigm and how it can be applied to social sciences. The marriage of these two paradigms "accepts that reality is virtual and shaped by various forces" (Lichtman, 2012, p. 24).

The intent of this research was to "develop an understanding, extension of experience, and increase in conviction" (Stake, 1978, p. 6) the literacy experiences of inner city African American adolescents at an inner city private high school for low income families in the Mid-Atlantic Region of the U.S. in an effort to better understand how the students perceive literacy. Therefore, the researcher employed a phenomenological design which involves interviewing, coding, analyzing, and concluding the meaning of the phenomenon for seven participants over six weeks. Data analysis procedures for this study were epoche and bracketing, horizonalization of data, textual and structural analysis, and common meaning and essence (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research as explained by Connelly (2010) explored the lived experience, "not just the person's reaction to the experience" (p. 127). The modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method was selected for this research study due to the personal passion and experiences of the researcher regarding literacy.

Epistemology Statement

This research study prioritized the voices of African American students to elucidate the English course grade discrepancies pervasive in inner city classrooms

regarding literacy (Cohen et al, 2012). The researcher sought to better understand how African American students in inner cities developed literacy to explain any current deficiencies. By exploring their home-literacy experiences, this study investigated the written literacy experiences that were made available to the participants and how English was spoken and interpreted in their homes. This study sought to align transcendentals to this phenomenon.

Transcendental phenomenology, as defined by Neubauer et al. (2019), requires the researcher to bracket and not allow subjectivity to inform participant descriptions and assume the lived experience as the best research approach. Distinctly, it involves "ideal, descriptive, existential, analytical, reflexive, and pragmatic" (Lichtman, 2012, p. 88) concepts in addition to a clear phenomenological account. Incorporating this approach identified that individuals make sense of new knowledge through the context of their prevailing understanding (Davis, 2013). Transcendental phenomenology, founded in the 20th century by Edmund Husserl, emphasized that "reality is internal to the knower… [and] appears in their consciousness" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92).

This study was guided by social constructivism as the research paradigm. Creswell and Poth (2016) asserted that social constructivism is the worldview where "individuals see understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 20). This view aligns with the transcendental phenomenological approach of the study since it did more than categorize themes; this study explored the complexity of the essence to identify the phenomenon. Social constructivism negotiates meaning through interactions with others as well as the lived context "in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 21).

Trustworthiness

Rather than seeking the validity and reliability of the data collected, as related to quantitative research, qualitative research seeks to demonstrate trustworthiness. This term is defined by Lichtman (2012) as the "transparency of the process, data gathered for a purpose, search for multiple perspectives, change in the researcher and in practice, and results that matter" (p. 292). Trustworthiness is a function of what Cohen and Crabtree (2006) as well as Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified as the four factors: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility is the parallel of internal validity since it states whether the results are believable from the participant's perspective (Terrell, 2016). Likewise, transferability can align with external validity since it desires to connect the research results to other contents. Dependability has a similar function to reliability since it "emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs" (Lichtman, 2012). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) fourth element of trustworthiness is confirmability which is the researcher's commitment to impartiality making the data both valuable and objective (as cited in Creswell, 2016). Remaining neutral ensures that the participants' experience is noted qualitatively without any influence or bias from the researcher.

Confirmability is critical since "the role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must be emphasized... to reduce the effect of investigator bias" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Triangulation is a strategy that "aid[s] in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a truthful proposition about some social phenomenon can be made" (Mathison, 1988). For years, researchers have worked to streamline the ethical implications of qualitative research. Taylor et al. (2001)

identified that peer reviewers' assessment for qualitative research followed the similar criteria to experimental research. During the 1990s, this function was placed under the microscope because of its potential threat to validity since researcher bias can shift the results of the research. As a result, confirmability audits, audit trails (field notes), and reflexivity were incorporated into the trustworthiness process to promote impartiality when gathering data. The researcher used thick descriptions as the data collection and analysis process.

Since the use of multiple data sources aids in the understanding of a phenomenon (Johnson & Tiedje, 1997), the researcher chronicled the process by connecting the study to three relevant theories (Sociocultural, Critical, and Critical Race Theory), using a field journal (reflexivity), and incorporating data triangulation to increase trustworthiness. The seven in-depth participant interviews were transcribed and coded within 24 hours after the interview process to preserve memory of the interview and ensure accuracy of the participants' descriptions. Likewise, code-recode procedures (taking random excerpts of the interview data for each participant and recode two weeks later to verify coding decisions), member checking (after completing transcriptions), and peer examination of coding decisions were incorporated, as shown in *Table 4*.

Table 4 *Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) *Strategies for This Study*

Qualitative (Trustworthiness) Lincoln & Guba (1985)	Strategies to Improve Trustworthiness for this Study
Credibility: truthful data and findings are presented; is the data believable and accurate?	Triangulation: incorporating Sociocultural Theory, Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory as the framework; 7 interviews over six weeks for 20 to 45 minutes; member checking to confirm interview accuracy; disinterested peer review to verify code-recode Pilot testing of interview questions by two disinterested peers
Transferability: can the findings extend to other situations; the responsibility shifts from the researcher to the reader as to whether it is deemed useful?	Thick descriptions: verbatim transcriptions that convey the participant's voice, feelings, and actions as they relate to the interview questions; common themes of all the interviews; the identified essence of meaning extracted from all the interviews
Dependability: consistency; is the research design logical?	Four recording devices (Zoom audio, Zoom video, Dolby On audio, and Dolby On video); the link of the interview questions to the research question
Confirmability: can the data collected be traced back to original sources?	Audit trails: the researcher's field journal of coding ideas, hunches, and interview probes; use of an interview guide to record issues that arise with questions or protocol; reflexivity and bracketing.

The phenomenological data analysis approach for this study used bracketing and epoche, horizonalization of data, textual and structural analysis, and common meaning and essence for each participant interview, which is based on the Stevick Colaizzi-Keen method discussed by Moustakas (1994).

Reductionist Process

Qualitative research requires a specific data collection process. The voices of the participants are the instrument to explain the phenomenon. Bednall (2006) elucidated that "the challenge for a researcher is to allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge authentically in coming to an understanding of what essentially the research respondents

mean in their personal accounts expressed through the data collection devices" (p. 124). To accomplish this, one must strategically design and apply procedures that will facilitate epoche and bracketing (Crotty, 1996; Schulz, 1994). Although many researchers use bracketing and epoche interchangeably, the two are very distinct.

Epoche, as defined by Mates (1996), is "the suspension of judgment… withholding of assent" (p. 225). The clearest distinction between epoche and bracketing is described by Patton (1990) as "an-ongoing analytic process" (p. 408). Epoche does not manifest during the analysis but takes place from the beginning of the process. It synthesizes participant observations as conclusions. Epoche, according to Bednall (2006), "allows for empathy and connection, not elimination, replacement or substitution of perceived researcher bias" (p. 127).

Although impartiality is a vital component of qualitative data collection and analysis, it is impossible to remain completely objective. "As a dynamic force, the researcher constantly adapts and modifies a position with regard to the research topic, the manner in which questions are formulated, and the interpretations given to the data" (Lichtman, 2012, p. 164). This component is incorporated through bracketing. Bracketing is a phenomenological device for inquiry that intentionally removes the researcher's beliefs and prior knowledge of the investigated phenomenon from the investigation process (Carpenter, 2007). It demonstrates research validity. Bracketing one's own experiences reduces the influence the researcher has on the participant's understanding of the phenomenon. It holds "in abeyance those elements that define the limits of an experience" (Chan, et al., 2013, p. 2). Epoche and bracketing were evidenced in this research study through the researcher's field notes.

Horizonalization of Data

Qualitative research has a layered data analysis process. Creswell (2016) described horizonalization of data as a step in phenomenological analysis. This step identifies what the participants say and the relevancy of their expressed topics. Padilla-Diaz (2015) suggested that "researchers list each of the relevant quotes of the studied topic and give them equal value with regard to the expressions of the group" (p. 106). Throughout the data analysis phase of this study, the researcher gathered the essence to inform the unit of meaning and common elements repeated by participants.

Textual and Structural Analysis

During the data collection process, the information given by the participants was reviewed through two different lenses: textual and structural. Textual analysis pays close attention to the content said by the participants; conversely, structural analysis interprets how this information is delivered. Padilla-Diaz (2015) clarified that "phenomenological analysis requires: describing and analyzing the 'text' to interpret the 'context'" (p. 105). In a phenomenological study such as this research study, participants used sensory experiences which must be "described, explicated, and interpreted" (Patton, 1990, p. 69). Together, these two forms of analysis informed the codes and themes extracted from the interviews.

Essence of the Experience

In phenomenology, essence is the goal for describing the phenomena (Dahlberg, 2006). It considers the experience to gain a deeper understanding (Bottorff, 2003). The purpose of essence in a phenomenology study is to relate to the philosophical underpinning (Lichtman, 2012, p. 88) which searches the human consciousness for

implicit structures that cannot be revealed by ordinary observation (Lin, 2017).

Moustakas (1994) identified essence as the medium for understanding the experiences of

the world. Essence is recommended for studies that are aimed at such (Creswell, 2016).

Research Site

Student participants from this study were identified within a small private high

school in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. To maintain institutional

anonymity, the researcher used the pseudonym, De Sales High School (DSHS), when

referencing the research setting of this study. DSHS was selected due to the nature and

mission of the school, which is to provide college preparatory education to low income

families, as well as its location. DSHS educates over 400 urban students with equal male

and female students in class sizes of 15 to 25. Demographically, DSHS educates African

American and Hispanic American students with most students qualifying for free or

reduced price lunch programs. DSHS students come from urban counties in the Mid-

Atlantic Region; "over 50 zip codes are represented" (URL withheld to maintain

institutional anonymity).

Table 5 *DSHS Current Demographics by Class Year* (source withheld to maintain

institutional anonymity).
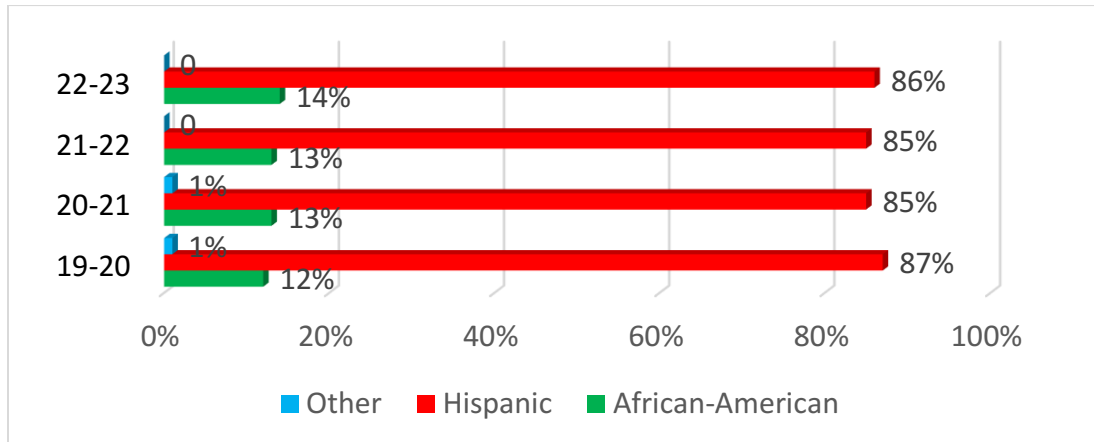
Before admission, students of DSHS must financially qualify in order to enroll. This rigorous process requires all parents to submit tax forms and additional financial records to verify the economic status of the family. The admissions and business departments of the school review these documents to identify the income to household ratio in order for the student to qualify. This private school is corporately sponsored in order for low-income students to access college preparatory curriculum. DSHS was an ideal research site since its admission process ensures that all participants are motivated to learn but financially qualify for this study. After receiving the approval of St. John's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix G), the researcher solicited consent from the principal and president of DSHS (see Appendix A and B).

Participant Pool

For this study, all participants were designated a pseudonym. Creswell (2016) advocated that researchers use pseudonyms to protect the privacy, rights, and confidentiality of participants involved. The target participants for this study were African American students who attended a private high school for underprivileged people of color (DSHS). The study's participants were students of African descent where English is the only language of their home. Olsen (2010) identified cultural and linguistic experiences, exposure to hearing and using English, and limited English role models as clear delineating factors between students with language differences and their peers. This was essential to this study to ensure that language learning barriers do not confuse or alter the findings of the work.

A common misconception is that private school students are well-endowed from middle and upper class sectors of society; however, there are overlooked private schools

that "charge just a few dollars a month and cater to the poor" (Tulloch et al., 2014, p. 7). DSHS is a college preparatory school for young men and women who have the financial need and motivation to attend college. This study came from a personal place for the researcher. As a product of inner city schools and an inner city high school English teacher, the researcher selected a study that impacts learners like her. However, during the course of her academic career, the researcher has observed many peers –and now students– fall through the cracks of the educational system because they did not fit a mold. Haenfler (2004) encouraged researchers to rethink how they approach research, and consider how one's personal experience influences their research interest (Moustakas, 1994). Although there was personal influence, the researcher maintained validity and trustworthiness based on the aforementioned.

Participant Recruitment

After obtaining IRB approval (Appendix G), the researcher solicited participants through an invitation letter (see Appendix C). In order to select said participants, the researcher used DSHS's online student database: PlusPortals. This program provided student images, address, and grade-level information. This letter was emailed to the parents of sophomores, juniors, and seniors who met the demographic requirements (lower SES African American) needed for this study. This letter explained the rationale for the study and why they were invited. Since this letter was dispersed to multiple grades, the pool of interested students was great; however only seven qualified. Participants in the study were informed that their involvement did not affect their English course grade. The names of the participants were labeled using a pseudonym and were informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were informed

of the anonymity of their involvement as well as their ability to leave during the informed consent stage of the research study.

Participant Selection

The participants for this study were inner city African American high school students since there is a common gap in their literacy performance (Haddix, 2009). Because this study was specific to inner city lower income students, the students who responded to the invitation letter were filtered based on their location, SES, and home language. This filtering process was based on the data collected from PlusPortals and parent email responses to the home language question in the invitation letter. Once the pool of students had been narrowed, the parental consent forms (see Appendix D) were emailed to qualifying participants. After receiving parental consent, qualifying participants received the participant assent form (see Appendix E) individually. From that pool of interested students, seven students were selected according to grade and gender to ensure an equal representation of high school aged male to female participants.

Research Procedures

Similar research studies align reading performance and motivation; however, a concentrated look at this demographic uncovered the common phenomenon of these learners. Identifying a phenomenon is best expressed when seeking "to know the truth of things through intuition and perceptions, learning from direct experiences and from awareness and reflections that bring meaning to light" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). The intent of this study was to describe the role that home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) have on African American adolescent English class performance. This study took place over the course of six weeks with seven

participants. A qualitative approach was selected in order to express the phenomenon amongst these students.

Before conducting the research, the investigator defended the research proposal and applied for Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix G) approval from St. John's University (SJU). Additionally, the researcher requested approval from the principal and president (see Appendix A and B) of DSHS to conduct research and gather data using PlusPortals as well as obtained permission to invite their students to participate in the study. After this approval, invitation letters (see Appendix C) were emailed to the parents of qualifying participants and parental consent forms (see Appendix D) and participant assent forms (see Appendix E) were collected from participants and stored in a password protected folder and online drive on the researchers computer prior to the data collection process.

The selected data collection process for this study was a semi-structured interview via Zoom, an online video conferencing platform, with each participant. Once collected, the researcher transcribed the data and used the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method structured by Moustakas (1994) to analyze data. This data formed the descriptions and isolated the phenomenon of the participants' literacy experience in the coding and themes identified.

Role of Researcher

In 2017, I began my PhD in Literacy at the commencement of my seventh year of teaching inner city students of color in Washington, DC. In December 2018, I got married while continuing my full-time course load as a student and teacher. As a middle and high school English teacher, I worked with predominantly African American students

and saw their struggle to connect with Eurocentric classic texts. As a half African American and Mexican American teacher, I believed it was my duty to provide rigorous instruction to marginalized students in order to push them past society's limitations; however, I grew to question the method I chose when doing so. The frustration of my students struck a personal nerve since I struggled to see the relevance and pertinence of these texts in my classroom. As a student, I rallied behind the classics despite the challenge they brought me as a dyslexic learner; however, my daily interaction with my students quickly drove me to question why such beautiful writing could not penetrate their interests.

Instruments

After IRB approval from both SJU and DSHS, the researcher began obtaining data from participants virtually. Virtual data collection was the selected instrument rather than face-to-face data collection due to the COVID19 pandemic and national social distancing and stay-at-home order. For the safety of both the researcher and participants, this study was 100% virtual. The source of this data was verbal responses to in-depth participant interviews through Zoom because of the email privacy protections enabled. The interviews were video and audio recorded by Zoom and Dolby On, which administrators, parents, and participants consented to (see Appendices A, B, D, and E). The researcher interviewed each participant, listen to the entirety of each recording twice, transcribed each individual transcript through Temi (a text to transcription service), reread the transcripts multiple times for accuracy assurance, and reviewed for accuracy of intent through participant feedback.

Data Collection

This research study employed triangulation. Miles and Huberman (1984) defined triangulation as the support of findings "by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, don't contradict it" (p. 235). Essentially, triangulation is "a strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow the dismissal of plausible rival explanations such that a truthful proposition about some social phenomenon can be made (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Denzin, 1978; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, & Sechrest, 1966)" (Mathison, 1988, p.13). All qualitative research, according to Creswell (2016), should include triangulation of data to increase trustworthiness. Since learners have in-school and in-home factors that influence their literacy, there are rival explanations regarding the role it plays making triangulation ideal. Although interviews were the data source for this study, each interview was of a lengthy nature to ensure trustworthiness and triangulation. The data collection methods chosen for this study aligned with Sociocultural, Critical, and Critical Race Theories given the fact that truth, according to Kincheloe and McLaren (2011), is subjective when interpreted. Since one's truth can be shaped by their personal experiences, the participants chosen for this study thoroughly elaborated on their home literacy exposure by answering targeted interview questions.

In preparation for the study, the researcher piloted the semi-structured validated interview questions on two disinterested peers to ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the questions. This interview validation was done to evaluate the questions for consistency and connection to the study's research questions. The pilot testing informed the necessary revisions to the interview questions before submitting them through the IRB committee for approval (Arain et al., 2010).

Interview

In qualitative research, investigators use interviews as the source of their data collection to uncover what cannot be observed. Semi-structured interviews were used for this study to investigate the research question through the Sociocultural, Critical, and Critical Race Theory framework (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This interview structure allowed the interviewer the flexibility to alter questions when needed for the participant's understanding or use probes based on participant responses (Patton, 1990). These interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom. The purpose of the interview, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), is to elucidate the connections and themes of one's individual experience on a given subject. For this study, the interview questions targeted the forms of home literacy (written and verbal) the participants have or have not experienced. The interviews for this study began in October 2020 following IRB approval (Appendix G). Before conducting interviews, the researcher explored her own personal literacy experiences to make connections to possible trends (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher contacted the participants via email and allowed one to two weeks for their responses and signed consent letters. A reminder email was sent a week thereafter, until the target number of participants had been recruited. After receiving signed parental consent forms (see Appendix D), participant assent forms (see Appendix E) were emailed and retrieved before scheduling began. All informed consent and assent forms were stored in a password protected folder in the researcher's personal home computer. All participants were sent open meeting times in an email, which ranged so the times align to their school schedule availability. The times selected were logged into a private Excel spreadsheet that was password protected for the researcher's use only and

labeled using the participants' pseudonym, which was assigned from a random list of names. The interview schedule took place in a span of six weeks. Once confirmed, Zoom invitation were emailed individually to participants and CC'd to their parents.

All interview blocks were scheduled for 60 minutes increments. One interview was conducted with each participant individually. The interview began by the researcher reviewing the signed consent form and confirming that the interviewees were comfortable being recorded and reminding the participant that they may discontinue the interview at any time if they chose to. Interviews were recorded via (a) Zoom video, (b) Zoom audio, (c) Dolby On video, and (d) Dolby On audio and labeled with pseudonyms which were backed up to a password protected Google Drive. The researcher used four recordings to ensure against loss of interview data. The semi-structured questions were open-ended, grand tour, and structured questions that focused on the details of each research question; in addition, probes were prepared in an interview guide and used to help participants elaborate on their home literacy experiences.

Tables 6 and 7 are examples of some of the specific, concrete, grand tour questions for this research study. These questions were modified to fit this study and compiled with researcher created questions to form the interview protocol (questions) (see Appendix F). *Table 6* consists of questions found in McGhie's (2015) previously published generative case study regarding the school-to-prison pipeline of Black male youth. *Table 7* consists of questions found in Davis' (2013) previously published phenomenological study regarding literacy practices in African American homes.

Table 6 *Interview Questions for Participants* (McGhie, 2015)

> **Participant Interview:**
> *Exposure to Literacy Prior to School*
>   1. Were you read to as a child prior to attending school for the first time
>   2. How frequently were you read to?
>   3. Was reading encouraged in your home? How?
>   4. What type of language was used at home? (Slang, Standard American English, etc.)
>   5. Do you feel being able to read and speak (literacy) was considered important in your home?
>   6. How was this importance (or lack thereof) expressed by your parent(s)/guardian(s)?
>   7. What type of education did your parents have?
> *Literacy Development*
>   8. By what age did you know the alphabet by heart?
>   9. Were you able to spell your own name prior to attending school?
>   10. Were you able to write your name and address before attending school?
>   11. Were you able to read before you attended school?
> *Home and School Literacy Exposure*
>   12. What type of books, if any, did you read as a child?
>   13. What, if any, was your favorite book and why was it your favorite?
>   14. Was "environmental print" a focus of learning to read at home?
>   15. What, if any, types of books were you exposed to at home? At school?
>   16. Did you have a library at home?
>   17. How often did you visit the public library prior to attending school?
>   18. How often did you visit the public library while attending school?
>   19. Was school more important in elementary, middle, or high school?
> *Literacy Socialization*
>   20. How did your skill, or lack of skill, in literacy influence your relationship with teachers and other students?
>   21. Do you remember having any conflicts with your parents related to the way you spoke (used language) at home?
>   22. Have your teachers ever told you that your use of language was not appropriate or incorrect in school?
>   23. If they did, how did this make you feel about them?
>   24. Do you remember having and conflicts with your teachers related to the way you spoke (used language) at school?
>   25. How did your close relatives influence your academics and socialization?

Table 7 *Interview Questions for Participants* (Davis, 2013)

> **Participant Interview:**
> *Exposure to Literacy Prior to School*
>   1. What types of printed material was read?
>   2. Were there other things your parents did to develop your language and reading skills?

After each interview was completed, participant recordings were transcribed through Temi followed by the transcription review process by the researcher. This review included corrections of errors by the transcription software and additions necessary to any missing dialogue. During the review of each interview transcript, the researcher watched the video recording while listening to the full interview as she rereading the transcripts word for word to ensure the accuracy of each response and correct any word errors made by the software. The completed transcripts and one recording were emailed to each participant individually for review and edited to ensure that their responses were accurately represented. All participants verified and approved their transcript via email before beginning the coding process.

Interview Guide

Individual interviews were selected for this study since they are purposeful conversations about shared meaning (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Following the semi-structured format allowed the interviewed to feel comfortable since there were no stringent guidelines to follow (Lichtman, 2012). Given the format, the participants were asked multiple types of questions: specific, concrete, and grand tour. The researcher incorporated specific and concrete questions to engage direct responses versus answers the participant thinks the researcher wants to hear (Lichtman, 2012).. Likewise, Spradley's (1979) grand tour questions were selected to encourage lengthy responses. This interview design organized the interview protocol (see Appendix F) to relate the research questions and facilitate a natural dialogue with clear responses between the interviewer and interviewee (Lichtman, 2012).

Each participant interview was conducted individually and span from 20 to 45 minutes. The questions were used as guiding questions depending on how each participant elaborated in their responses. When participants answered multiple questions in one response, the interviewer was flexible and not redundant. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, probes were used to explore in-depth responses to broad grand tour questions. Some probes materialized during the interview; however, some predetermined probes are listed below (Lichtman, 2012, p. 201):

- "Let's talk about that in more detail..."

- "What else can you say about..."

- "It's not clear to me. Can you give an example of..."

- "Can you tell me some more about..."

Field Journal

Before, during, and after the data collection process, the researcher journaled extensively. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encouraged researchers to "collect field texts through a wide array of sources—autobiographies, journals, researcher field notes, letters, conversations, interviews, stories of families, documents, photographs, and personal-family-social artifacts" (as cited in Creswell, 2016, p. 161). These notations included but were not limited to hunches, coding ideas, reflexive memos, and any other pertinent information related to the overall interview process. These notes were privately written and kept by the researcher as a means to keep all phases of the subject fresh. This journal was logged on the researcher's personal computer and kept in a password protected folder (Guraya et al., 2014) and backed up in a password protected online drive. This journal was password protected to increase the trustworthiness of this study.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research studies use data instruments and analysis to validate interpretations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The interviews for this study were analyzed using a modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. Creswell (2016) stated that:

The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method is a highly reductive method of data analysis frequently used by researchers working within the phenomenological tradition of qualitative inquiry to systematically distill essential concepts, issues, and themes from text (p. 159).

The researcher synthesized the data to understand what Derakhshan and Singh (2011) noted as the "describing key points and themes contained within the given topic" (p. 219). The modified approach followed the structure advanced by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' approach brackets, lists significant statements (horizonalization), tells the "what" and "how" (textual and structural analysis), and describes the overall phenomenon (essence).

Using the field notes specific to the researcher's personal experiences, the investigator bracketed personal bias out to "obtain a full description of [my] own experience of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Likewise, the researcher bracketed the "non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements" (Creswell, 2016, p. 193) into the analysis by color-coding these concepts into the transcript in Microsoft Word.

Using the approved participant transcripts, the researcher began the coding process. In order to bracket, produce a list of significant statements, tell the "what" and "how" (textual and structural analysis), and describe the overall phenomenon (essence), the researcher recorded all relevant statements. This process required the researcher to organize all the interviews and look for meaningful clusters (Patton, 1990) by reading and

rereading to list non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements (invariant horizons).

Synthesizing the invariant horizons verbatim provided "descriptions of the textures of the

experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122).

After the extensive coding process for each of the interviews, the researcher

began to describe the structures of the experience. Using "what" and "how" the

participants responded, the researcher constructed the meaning by merging them "into a

universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas,

1994, p. 122). According to Creswell (2016), "themes in qualitative research (also called

categories) are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form

a common idea" (p. 186). The common ideas of this study produced the essence of the

shared phenomenon.

Brod et al. (2009) identified that qualitative data analysis is simply the method of

determining the common factors obtained during an interview; however, to increase the

trustworthiness of the findings, it was imperative to confirm them (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). After the researcher completed the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method as it is

structured by Moustakas (1994), a colleague conducted a peer evaluation to double check

the coding decisions of the transcripts. Once the code recode procedures were complete,

the researcher compiled and produced the findings. See *Figure 4* for the data analysis

process.

Figure 4 *Data Analysis Process* (Moustakas, 1994)

Step 1: Using a phenomenological approach, obtain a full description of your own experience of the phenomenon.	**Step 2:** From the verbatim transcript of my own experience, carry out the seven steps by Moustakas (1994) in order.	**Step 2a:** Consider each statement with respect to significance for describing the experience
Step 2b: Record or highlight all relevant statements	**Step 2c:** Make a list of each nonrepetitive nonoverlapping statement; these are the invariant (unchanging/constant) horizons (horizonalization) or meaning units of the experience	**Step 2d:** Relate and cluster the invariant meaning units into themes
Step 2e: Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the textures of the experience; include verbatim examples	**Step 2f:** Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of your experience	**Step 2g:** Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experience
Step 3: From the verbatim transcript of the experience of each of the other co-researchers, complete steps Step 2a-2g	**Step 4:** From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all co-researchers' experiences, construct a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole.	

Ethical Considerations

To address ethical issues, a series of steps were taken to increase the validity/trustworthiness of the research. This research study was conducted on minors solely. For their protection and the integrity of the study, pseudonyms were used to identify participants. Since interviewing minors was the basis of the study, no participant was addressed or made part of this study without their assent and consent by parents. Before all Zoom interviews, additional recording permissions were revisited to maintain

clear and constant communication with the volunteer participants. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw their participation at any time. Since this study was solely conducted virtually, the researcher had limited access and time with the participants. All data collected and research related materials were kept in a password protected file in the researcher's home computer to ensure the anonymity and trustworthiness of the findings. Otherwise, this study involved minimal risk to participants.

Chapter Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 introduced and identified why this study should be addressed. Chapter 2 reviewed the relevant research of similar studies and laid the foundation for the subject matter. This chapter explains how the study transpired. From the Critical Race Theory framework to the research methodology of the study, this chapter explained the steps for collecting and analyzing the data (interviews), and the ethical concerns surrounding it as well as the design appropriateness. Chapter 4 provides the finding of the research by detailing the emergent themes. Finally, Chapter 5 provides extensive discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of inner city private school African American adolescents as they relate to the research question. The questions studied were (a) *What are the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents?* (b) *What role do their literacy experiences and engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon have on their performance in English class?* and (c) *How do these learners describe their current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom?*

This transcendental study was conducted to help literacy practitioners and researchers understand the role lived experiences play in and out of the classroom. Since a reader's ability to comprehend is often based on culturally acquired information and exposure to relatable texts (Gibbons, 2009), transcendental phenomenology was used to voice the exposures and lived experiences of a demographic group that is otherwise misunderstood (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). Utilizing individual interviews from private school inner city African American adolescents, data was collected, coded, analyzed, and a phenomenon concluded using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method. In accordance with the SCK method, all participants have been referenced as co-researchers within the findings.

Seven co-researchers were selected based on their common home-based language (English) as provided in their recruitment invitation letter response. Several instruments were used to collect the qualitative information from the co-researchers. Using Zoom, a

virtual communications platform for video and audio conferences, a semi-structured interview protocol was followed. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the researcher listened and watched the recorded video twice and transcribed the co-researcher's responses verbatim using Temi, a text to transcription service, to gauge relevant home-based literacy statements. Using Moustakas' (1994) modified SCK Method, the researcher answered the interview protocol (Appendix F) and bracketed all personal responses, analyzed the data for significant statements regarding home-based literacy exposures, grouped the invariant statements into themes, streamlined themes into descriptions of the experience, and created textural-structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of these experiences.

The researcher completed all the data analysis manually without the aid of qualitative software. An examination of these high school students' statements provided insights that include a rationale for how literacy was presented at home and key factors that influenced the co-researchers' current literacy relationship. Chapter 4 includes (a) an overview of the qualitative procedures, (b) researcher bracketing, (c) demographic information of the co-researchers, (d) co-researcher descriptions, (e) the structure of data collection, (f) the emergent themes for this study, and (f) conclusion.

Bracketing

This study included a semi-structured interview protocol which was conducted iteratively; however, before engaging the co-researchers, the researcher thoroughly answered the interview protocol using her own literacy experiences. These responses were logged into the researcher's field journal as an aide-mémoire. Following the personal interview, the researcher made notes of anticipated responses based on her own

statements in the field journal in accordance with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) instruction for qualitative researchers.

As a former inner city private school African American adolescent, the researcher noted a few recurring themes from her own interview responses. The first recurring theme noted was the involvement of her parents in her literacy development. From daily bedtime stories to homework assistance, the researcher's parents were instrumental in her literacy development as well as in identifying her dyslexia which was strengthened with the usage of environmental texts. During the four years of her private tutoring for dyslexia, the researcher's parents required her to read cereal boxes, street signs, cooking instructions, museum exhibit details, etc. aloud in order to monitor her progress in literacy. Likewise, the researcher noted a disconnection from her home literacy experiences and in-school experiences.

Within all of her English classes from fifth grade through undergraduate, the commonality amongst those courses were the race of the instructors (White) and the usage of the Eurocentric literacy canon as the curriculum. The teacher-selected texts for each English class from elementary through undergraduate did not include any culturally relevant works. The researcher never read anything about being bi-racial, poor, or a person of color altogether in English class. Reading lengthy texts and writing academic papers were a means to achieving a high course grade. Within her field journal, she identified a literary shift. When she was 24 years-old, she began to read academic works about ethnocentrism in education and could connect to concepts as well as the research surrounding the subject matter. The researcher identified experiencing stories by artists who looked like her in graduate school but not during her overall matriculation.

In addition, the researcher continued to journal throughout each co-researcher's interview. The researcher recorded her thoughts, observations, and even specific notes regarding where the co-researchers altered the protocol or misinterpreted questions. This data triangulation process, known as bracketing (Evers, 2013), was essential to setting aside the researcher's personal experiences or opinions during data collection. The SCK method modified by Moustakas (1994) was selected to give voice to the personal passion of the researcher regarding literacy and included this step to increase the trustworthiness of any data collected thereafter.

Demographics

This transcendental phenomenological study bracketed the researcher's lived experience and incorporated the co-researchers' (Neubauer et al., 2019). Using the social constructivism research paradigm, the co-researchers presented their understanding of the world in which they live (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Since African American students were the target demographic, only students of African descent were sought after. To ensure that the phenomenon identified had minimal limitations, the researcher selected co-researchers with similar cultural and linguistic experiences (Olsen, 2010).

A total of 47 students self-identified as African American within the sophomore, junior, and senior classes' PlusPortals, De Sales High School's administrative database. The parents of these students were sent the recruitment invitation for this study, which had a language response requirement. Before beginning the interview protocol, all co-researchers were selected based on their response to the sole language spoken at home: English. From the recruitment invitation responses, 12 of the 47 students identified

English as a language spoken at home. From the 12 students, seven students were identified who solely spoke English.

This study involved seven co-researchers from De Sales High School: two sophomores, two juniors and three seniors. *Table 8* provides demographic background for each of the co-researchers. *Table 9* identifies the highest level of education for the co-researchers' parents or guardian. Pseudonyms were designated to each co-researcher to protect their privacy, rights, and confidentiality (Creswell, 2016).

Table 8 *Co-Researcher Demographic Information*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Grade at De Sales High School
1. Nedgie	Female	15	Sophomore
2. Wendell	Male	15	Sophomore
3. Louri	Female	16	Junior
4. Juan	Male	16	Junior
5. Chebria	Female	17	Senior
6. Dwight	Male	18	Senior
7. Kevin	Male	18	Senior

Table 9 *Co-Researcher Parental Education Background*

Co-researcher	Parent 1	Parent 2	Guardian
1. Nedgie	High School Diploma	College Diploma	
2. Wendell	Some College		College Graduate (current)
3. Louri	GED	High School Diploma	
4. Juan			College Graduate
5. Chebria	Some College		
6. Dwight	Some College	College Graduate	
7. Kevin	College Graduate	College Graduate	

Co-Researcher Descriptions

Co-Researcher #1: Nedgie

Nedgie is a 15-year-old African American female enrolled in the 10th grade at De Sales High School. She is the daughter of one high school graduate and one college graduate. She identified herself as an early speaker and avid reader. When reflecting on life before school, she recalls having fiction books accessible on the bookshelf found in her home rather than non-fiction. Prior to secondary school, Nedgie did not frequent the public library but thoroughly enjoys visiting now, pre-COVID.

Co-Researcher #2: Wendell

Wendell is a 15-year-old African American male enrolled in the 10th grade at De Sales High School. He grew up in two different households. During his primary years, he was raised by his mother, a high school graduate, who did not place a high priority on speaking Standard American English. Ten years ago, he transitioned to his grandmother's

home who is a college graduate. When reflecting on the books he was exposed to, Wendell primarily recalls seeing picture books. Since living with his grandmother, Wendell frequents the library but for the primary purposes of playing games on the computers.

Co-Researcher #3: Louri

Louri is a 16-year-old African American female enrolled in the 11th grade at De Sales High School. She is the daughter of one high school dropout, who later obtained a GED, and one high school graduate. Louri identified herself as an early speaker and fast reader since she attended an accredited daycare from three months until pre-kindergarten. She recalled having various learning games and books downloaded to her iPad when she was younger. Prior to middle school, Louri identified how visiting the library was her favorite pastime.

Co-Researcher #4: Juan

Juan is a 16-year-old African American male enrolled in the 11th grade at De Sales High School. His primary guardian is his college graduate grandmother. He identified himself as an avid reader and journals often. Given his grandmother's academic background, Juan identified Standard American English as the required speaking standard in his home. Although there were many books available in his home library, Juan is a lover of non-fiction texts, specifically autobiographies about African American people.

Co-Researcher #5: Chebria

Chebria is a 17-year-old African American female enrolled in the 12th grade at De Sales High School. She is the daughter of a single mother who completed a few

college courses. Chebria identified herself as a speaker of various English dialects. Since most of her family is from the South, Chebria recalled learning to code switch depending on her audience. She explained that proximity dictated her access to the library. Chebria explained that her exposure to books increased during the fifth and sixth grades since she lived near a library.

Co-Researcher #6: Dwight

Dwight is an 18 year old African American male enrolled in the 12th grade at De Sales High School. He is the son of a college graduate and high school graduate with some college credits. Dwight recalled having access to books through his two older siblings. He often picked up advanced novels in an attempt to read his brothers' hand-me-downs. He identified himself as a young writer, drawing and writing his name on the walls of his home. Before attending school, he spent many of his days with his babysitter who exposed him to the library for the children's story time.

Co-Researcher #7: Kevin

Kevin is an 18 year old African American male enrolled in the 12th grade at De Sales High School. He is the son of two college graduates. When reflecting on his initial encounters with reading, Kevin identified it as an activity associated with his punishments. Whenever he got into trouble, he would have to read from one of the books he had in his library while in time-out. Since his family had a home library in the basement, Kevin recounted how easy reading was for him and how highly he tested on school standardized assessments. As a mature reader, he found adventure texts to be his preferred reading genre. For as long as he could remember, Kevin has frequented the library weekly.

Data Collection

Each co-researcher was interviewed through Zoom for the duration of 20 to 45 minutes. Since the second step of the SCK method is cyclical, each interview followed the same process. After each interview, the video and audio recordings were listened to twice and uploaded to Temi where the transcripts were produced within three minutes. Upon receipt of each transcript via email, the researcher opened the written transcript and reviewed each word along with the playback to ensure accuracy. After several reviews and edits of the documents, each verbatim transcript was downloaded to the researcher's personal computer and uploaded to a password protected online folder.

With each completed transcript, the corresponding co-researcher was emailed a digital copy and audio recording of the completed interview for approval (member checking). Within one week of the initial email, each co-researcher emailed the researcher verifying the content of both the audio recording and written transcript. Upon the receipt of each verified transcript, the researcher began the coding process. To increase the confirmability of this study, a disinterested colleague double checked the coding decisions of the transcripts (Seidman, 2006). After receiving the verified transcripts, a copy of each co-researcher's interview was emailed to a disinterested colleague labeled with the selected pseudonym.

Using the research questions as the coding foundation, the disinterested colleague and researcher simultaneously coded all seven interviews. Through several rereads, both the researcher and disinterested colleague listed significant statements for each interview individually. After several rereads, the list of significant statements were grouped into lists of non-repetitive and non-overlapping statements (invariant horizons) for each interview (Moustakas, 1994). These invariant horizons became one code. At the

completion of this process, all the coding decisions were shared digitally through email. The researcher used all the common codes to ensure confirmability.

From the 34 interview questions, each transcript averaged 12 codes. Although each co-researcher was asked the same questions, specific questions resonated with each differently elevating their passion for the topics. Using the research questions as the foundation, the researcher coded specifically to responses that were aligned.

Following the recode procedures, the researcher began the textual and structural analysis of the significant statement. By reviewing the video recordings with the coded transcripts, the researcher looked at the textual descriptions (what) and structural descriptions (how) of the co-researchers responses. Each transcript was given a color and each significant statement and inaudible response (gestures) was categorized into a table. From the significant statement, 42 codes emerged. In *Table 10*, the 42 codes were categorized into the three emergent themes from the seven transcripts: *the parental/guardian influence theme, classroom reading disconnect theme, and spoken language perception theme.*

Table 10 *Codes Categorized into Emergent Themes*

Parental/Guardian Influence Theme	Classroom Reading Disconnect Theme	Spoken Language Perception Theme
• Academic success to surpassing the family • Hand-me-down books (what was available) • Parent do not understand the school work • No organized place to read • Home library • Access to books • Family helped with school work • School priority because of college • Positive school encouragement • Pressure to succeed • Literacy encouraged but not modeled • Dad encouraged reading • Inconsistent messaging regarding reading by family • Read to before bed • Read to as a kid • Books in the bedroom • Parents modeled speaking and reading • Writing exercises at a young age • Journaling • Parents keep up with school • Not reading before school started • Library for games not reading	• Eurocentric classic • Classic text recognized • Not relating to texts • Culturally relevant texts • Teacher book suggestion • Seeing culture represented in school • Relating to texts • Created connections to unrelatable reading	• Parents assuming disrespect when using proper grammar • Speaking correctly associated with etiquette • Parents teaching mannerisms and how to act and speak in society • Code switching • Standard English is White • Confusion with language • Language/slang questioned by teachers • Teaching how to speak and code switch • Trouble for talking • Home language (taught slang at home) • Parents modeled proper speech • Feeling about being corrected

Emergent Themes

The emergent themes were determined by the most prolific statements made by the co-researchers in relation to the research questions of this study. This study sought to identify

- What are the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents?

- What role do their literacy experiences and engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon have on their performance in English class?
- How do these learners describe their current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom?

The parental/guardian influence theme connected to the main research question since it details the home-based literacy experiences and influences of the co-researchers. Furthermore, *the classroom reading disconnect theme* related to the first subtheme since the co-researchers express their opinions of the current teacher-selected texts and the impact on their desire to read in the classroom context. Finally, *the spoken language perception theme* described the second subtheme through the expressions of the co-researchers as they relate to how their languages of the home are perceived in school. In *Figure 5,* the three emergent themes are identified with the subthemes that were revealed.

Figure 5 *Emergent Themes and Subthemes*

Theme 1: **Parental/Guardian Influence**
- Reading Availability in the Home
- Academic Support
- Pressure to Succeed

Theme 2: **Classroom Reading Disconnect**
- Unrelatable Selections
- Utilizing the Voices of People of Color
- Culture Represented in Curriculum

Theme 3: **Spoken Language Perception**
- Confusion with Language
- Code Switching
- Feelings of Being Corrected

The parental/guardian influence theme described the impact parents/guardians have on the development of their child's perception of literacy. This impact includes model-reading as well as the availability of books within the home. Within *the parental/guardian influence theme*, foundational practices such as reading bedtime stories and utilizing flash cards were described as well as current behaviors towards literacy and overall academic success. This theme identified the observations of the co-researchers related to the literacy principles instilled and the behaviors modeled such as parents modeling reading or requiring the co-researchers to journal. Finally, *the parental/guardian influence theme* elucidated the African American success pressure imposed by parents/guardians.

The classroom reading disconnect theme related to the lack of identity found within the texts presented in the co-researchers' English classrooms. Within this theme, the co-researchers shared the lack of expectation for culturally relevant texts. This theme identified the desire for culturally relevant works and suggestions for what the co-researchers would like to experience in their English classes. Finally, *the classroom reading disconnect theme* elevated the frustration with the normalizing of White experiences over the inner city African American reality as suggested by McGhie (2015) through the assertion that the Eurocentric educational canon standardizes the White experience. These inner city African American students have a vastly different educational experience than their White counterparts (Tatum, 2013).

Finally, *the spoken language perception theme* shared the confusion and frustration the co-researchers felt regarding speaking. Included within this theme were code switching and degradation for innate speech. The co-researchers identified instances

where their spoken language was deemed inappropriate leading to consistent code switching to appease their audience. Furthermore, *the spoken language perception theme* presented the suppression of the co-researchers' home dialect. The association of language with race is explained within this theme. *The spoken language perception theme* connected the co-researchers' feeling regarding future success and mastering acceptable dialects of English.

The parental/guardian influence theme, classroom reading disconnect theme, and *spoken language perception theme* are the structure with which the results for this study are presented and discussed. Data from the seven interviews were used to support the themes and illustrate the co-researchers' experiences.

Parental/Guardian Influence Theme

For the co-researchers of De Sales High School, the development of their relationship with literacy –whether good or bad– was deeply rooted in the influence of their parents/guardians. Regardless of the individual parent's educational background, each co-researcher was influenced by their parents/guardian to read, write, and succeed which has shaped their expressed experiences. Although all the co-researchers –at some point– were told by their parents/guardians that they needed to read, write, or speak, their introductions to literacy and the expectations for literacy from their parents/guardians varied widely for all the co-researchers.

Reading Availability in the Home

Unlike many other co-researchers, Nedgie and Kevin cannot remember a time when reading was not a part of their daily lives. When asked about their first encounter with literacy and reading specifically, they immediately recollected childhood stories.

> *Nedgie:* I would say, like mostly at night. Like... before I went to sleep... or sometimes during the day. When I just was there was nothing else to do.

> *Kevin:* I had a series of like many little books in my room all the time... My mom would like read them to me or my grandmother too.

Nedgie, conversely, remembered reading as an activity practiced as well versus story alone. When asked about her earliest experiences with books and words, she explained that her parents did word drills with her:

> *Nedgie:* They had their little flashcards.

However, some co-researchers began their reading journey independently. Rather than hearing stories from their parent's lips, Dwight recounts observing his siblings read and Louri identified having books purchased for her by her father.

> *Dwight:* Normally just picked up books myself really. Cause my moms use to make my brothers read. So she used to have all the Harry Pott- Potter series and she used to just give them to us…

> *Louri:* He tried to find books that I like would read cause I don't really, I don't, I'm not big on reading. But, like, if it was funny, I can read it.

Dwight identified that his brothers' books were all he had access to until he was older.

> *Dwight:* I think it was just Harry Potter. That's the only thing I had my hands closest to; but once I got closer to middle school and stuff, that's when I got like more books and stuff like that because of the book fairs and everything… I mean, it was mainly with like that like sometimes like cause it's, it's three of us. So like my oldest brother, he, his books would go to the middle child, and then those books would go to me. So that's when that's how it all just– you know– plays out

and that's... but my mom encouraged us to read and stuff like that. Even if we didn't want to, cause reading can –you know– help us out.

Although not every co-researcher had reading modelled for them by their parents, Nedgie, Louri, Juan, and Wendell all had spaces in their homes dedicated to books. When asked if there was a designated library or location in their home where books were stored, they said:

> *Nedgie:* So it's this in a living room. It's like a shelf and they had a whole bunch of books on it.
>
> *Louri:* I had a desk and it had books in it.
>
> *Wendell:* Um, at my grandmother's house, I had a bookshelf with books on it.
>
> *Juan:* So the books that are in my home. There are a bunch of books on my bookshelf, but I won't say like they're outdated, but they're just too easy.

Beyond access to print texts in their home, the co-researchers indicated additional resources provided to them by their parents/guardians to insure literacy strength.

Academic Support

When asked about parental involvement in academic success, Wendell, Kevin, Nedgie, Juan, and Louri identified the contributions of their family or resources allotted to ensure their academic success.

> *Wendell:* My grandmother, like, she, she forced us a lot to like, read, write, and like, like having a journal. I remember we had like a tutor at church. Where we go to church on like Tuesday and she would, she would teach us about like grammar and stuff like that to help us get better with our writing.

Kevin: If I needed help, they [parents] would help me and then outside of the school, like even when I didn't have homework. They would, you know, make sure I read a book or something or did some extra practice problems.

Nedgie: Oh like they [parents] always pushed me to like do good in school. And they try to help me as much as they can. Like my older cousin, she like tries to help me with a lot of my homework, or I would ask like one of my older siblings to help me.

Juan: The most supportive I'll say probably middle school. Definitely. Uh, cause that's when our grandmother still like checked over your homework, made sure you got everything correct, and stuff. If you didn't, uh, like basically she would just like, look over mentioned you had everything correct. And if you have something wrong she would make sure you get it done correctly.

Louri: Elementary maybe, but I had help on my homework from my mentors, but from my parents probably like a long time ago, like elementary.

Like Louri, other co-researchers identified confusion between the academic expectations of their parents and the personal support received at home. For Dwight and Chebria, one of their greatest challenges with their parents was the inability to receive academic support. When asked what kind of homework help they receive and the last time their parents could guide their work, they said:

Dwight: Honestly, I probably say the last time was kindergarten. That's the last time after kindergarten. Like everything else was by myself. Like no assistance whatsoever when it came to writing papers maybe kind of, but you don't really get papers in elementary school like that. You normally have written it in school.

Even since, uh, middle school, I would be the ones actually teaching them about it. Because it got to a point where middle school, when my dad thought he knew everything about school and that's why my teacher confirmed that I was right and he was wrong and that's been the day since. Therefore, like, I never asked him to help me with studying or anything like that. All my writing assignments just come from me naturally.

Chebria: My written homework. So here's the thing. I always been a good student. I've been a strong student so that that... so them helping with my homework. It was like, "y'all can't help me ok. Cuz I don't know if y'all know what I'm doing." I know like kindergarten... this is the only way y'all can help me. Like kindergarten. I think I had it down pat or like, like my teachers. Like, I don't know. Like, I was a good student.

A part of the reading success of many co-researchers were the external resources made available. Although all the co-researchers had been to a public library, Chebria, Louri, Kevin, and Juan identified that the public library were regular occurrences for them regarding reading.

Chebria: So like, as we got older... they gave you like more chapter books, no pictures, like the whole nine at home. I knew we had like some books, and my mom likes to take us to the library and what not. We used to do that. Like projects and what not. But like I'll, my mom will take me to the library sometimes or I would go if I needed to go.

Louri: Especially in elementary school and like sixth grade. I used to stay at the library.

> *Kevin:* I think I had to go to the library like every week. I think it was for school too.

> *Juan:* So I know recently my cousin came over. He's like 21, and he recommended some books for me and I ordered those. So I'll say that's probably going to be how most of my exposure is. Now I'm ordering them [from the library], which is going to the library to get them.

However, the ideology that the library as a resource would encourage reading interest was not consistent among all the co-researchers. Nedgie, Wendell, and Juan utilized the library as a social space.

> *Nedgie:* I was at it [library] a lot actually, because why not just like going to the library and like playing games and reading. Because my sister and my cousin, they would go to like the little events at the library.

> *Wendell:* Um, before, like early on I would go like probably like twice a year. And then like, after that, after that as I got older, I started going there, like to go around the computer and play the games.

> *Juan:* So it just be like a bunch of neighborhood kids going over playing a game and then uh going over to the one in South East that's where I got my library card, but. I never checked out books in there.

The academic support and resources provided by parents and guardians eventually translated to educational expectations for higher education.

Pressure to Succeed

In the homes of the seven co-researchers, many messages had been communicated by the parents/guardians and family regarding the need to succeed. The consistent message communicated was to be "better than their parents" or "make it out" of their current home environment. Clark (2015) expressed this pressure when he identified "Black low-income families have high educational aspirations for their children… teacher expectations, and the culture of the school, often conflict with home experiences" (pp. x-xi). The "how to" element of success was missing from the delivery. Rather, these were the messages communicated to Dwight, Chebria, and Louri regarding success:

Dwight: So, um, since I have two younger siblings, um, and the rest of them are older than me and not all of them were able to go to college and uh, finished school. And by me seeing that, and my dad finished at school late, it just like inspired me to actually like go, you know, to college when I get the chance to. I actually like, you know, be better than all like everyone in my family, not just sound like cocky or anything, but to like, you know, like set an example that you know, that even though they didn't go to college and finished right away or get these amount of certain type of grades in school, that they can produce a child that's capable enough to like, you know, you know, making them proud and being able to do those things.

Chebria: I think it's always been important. I feel like, um, like kindergarten. Cause it's more, it was more lax, it wasn't a lot of like work demands. I think as I got older, school has been more important like make sure you graduate high school. I feel like that's always the goal. Like "graduate high school. Do this.

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Don't be like me" that same thing. But I feel like as I got older, it got more

important, but it was still like the foundation.

> *Louri*: My family had social influenced me be a better person because in my
>
> community you don't see a lot of people make it. So they just showed me how to
>
> be perfect and how to make it out.

On the contrary, Juan's pressure to succeed is sheerly university based. He identified:

> *Juan*: Uh, because we all know junior year is a big year for colleges and you
>
> gotta be on your "A game," basically. I had to think about that, uh, especially end
>
> of sophomore year, like terribly, uh, with Corona. So I definitely had the
>
> mentality over the summer that I needed to come back, start doing what I need to
>
> do because I need to get into school. I mean, I already know I'mma get into
>
> schools for sure; but I need to make sure I get into FAMU.

However, Chebria toggled with the demand to be better than her family while navigating

that space alone. Without having someone to model the steps of success, it was all up to

her.

> *Chebria:* But it was like, uh, "do, go to school." "Do get your education" and like
>
> do me. If we had like an assignment, if I was like kindergarten and I had an
>
> assignment of reading, like I had to read myself. It wasn't no one read to me.
>
> The *parental/guardian influence theme* described how the co-researchers have

been impacted by their parents/guardians regarding literacy. From reading to writing

development, the modeling of reading at home has had a lasting impression on the co-

researchers. This theme made Davis (2013) connection apparent which is mentioned

thoroughly in Chapter 2. Simply having access to material through the library is

insufficient to ensure literacy mastery but "the experiences, attitudes, and material[s] pertaining to literacy that a child naturally encounters and interacts with at home compose[s] more of an impact on language and literacy development" (Davis, 2013 p. 33). Whether personal or outsourced, this theme defines the value of academic support from parent to child. The desire of the seven co-researchers to succeed in life is clearly defined within this theme as evidenced through their desire to graduate from college and own their education. Although at this juncture in their lives, it appears unclear how to attain that goal; the pressure to succeed is equally parental influence and self-imposed.

Classroom Reading Disconnect Theme

A key to literacy success is the incorporation of cultural heritage (Knoblauch, 1990). The *classroom reading disconnect theme* surfaced throughout each interview. The seven co-researchers struggled to explain texts read in school due to the difficulty in seeing themselves in the characters, setting, or overall plot. A constant within this theme was cultural relevance in the texts described during the interviews. The co-researchers passionately described their disdain for the texts selected in their classrooms, confusion regarding their pertinence, or suggested artists they would prefer to read or learn about.

Unrelatable Selections

During the interviews, the co-researchers were asked about Eurocentric classics and their ability to relate and find themselves in the text. Dwight and Juan, like many of the other five, struggled to identify a plethora of classics that resonated with their life experiences.

Dwight: *House of Mirth* was assigned by a teacher. Um, culturally with *Fences* kind of. I mean it's two different time periods. So times really changed, but I

guess the principles that the dad was teaching his son was kind of similar, um, with House of Mirth. Um, I related to it because it teaches, well, the main character was trying to learn how like her place in our world, which is something a lot of teens like, um, deal with now. Like what they want to do when they get older. So that's something I really, um, could relate to a lot. But other than that, um, it's like small, like little key details that like stand out in the book that kind of relate to me almost all the time.

Juan: Oh, uh, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Um, I mean, I know for me, I don't have nothing that's culturally related. Uh, I mean, cause I don't know like much about like what it is like where my descendants are from. Something like that. I mean, we all can say Africa, but trace back to the exact country. No, I can't speak on that, but I mean, this is basic like a typical Black person.

Kevin presented an interesting perspective of trying to forge connections even when there were not any in order to successfully complete a text.

Kevin: It was called *Night*. Well, that was about Jewish people. You know, about the Holocaust and everything. Then, there's this other book called *Call of the Wild*. It's about this dog and everything. I mean, I wouldn't say personally; but like when I wrote essays, I was always able to make a connection into like, the real world to make some type of connection. But I wouldn't say personally no. Maybe the *Call of the Wild*. Yes, a little bit but *Night*, no. Um, but like any essay that I ever did about a book and the author, I was always able to make some type of connection.

Wendell's life experiences presented an additional hurdle for him when isolating or describing classic texts. The idea of an ordinary life was identified as fantasy to him.

> *Wendell:* Um, I remember, uh, we're reading a book right now called *Antigone*. It was basically like princess, kings, and stuff like that. And as I'm reading this, it's like confusing at some points. The book that we read at school was like more like fantasy or like somebody's like dream life. It's like an ordinary life. Like somebody going to high school growing up and then like going to college and stuff like that. But it wasn't, it was like, they live in a nice community. They don't have to worry about anything. It's like, once you read the books in school, it was like confusing, not confusing, but it was like hard to relate to. My experience growing up was like moving around a lot. Going from house to house. Stuff like that. Living with my mom and then my grandmother and stuff like that. So it was like, when I was reading the books, it was like, like dreaming. Like it seemed like a dream.

Nedgie identified the leisure books she read on her own; but when it came to teacher-selected texts, she could not really recollect a personal connection. When asked why her English class readings did not resonate, she said:

> *Nedgie:* Cause a lot of the books that we read wasn't really made by people of color. Most of them made by White people. And if it was a book of color, I would personally like pick it up or it'd be in the library.

Chebria and Louri communicated their frustration with the repetition of the same classics in her classroom. She recounted constantly reading the same book in various grade levels as well as the lack of diversity in authorship.

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Chebria: Um, I forgot, but there were like a lot of White books. I'd say there was a lot of White books I could tell you. I could really tell you that much. It was a lot of White books. Like you wasn't getting a Black character. I wasn't expecting that. You wasn't getting any minority stories. I feel like the most books you got that were kind of relatable is either like, Oh *the Odyssey*. I think that was, I think that's one of the books that we believe that stayed with me. I'm like "Why we keep reading the same book over?" That's like my second time hearing about it.

Louri: Well, yeah last year yeah and I read it twice, *Things Fall Apart*. Read that my eighth grade year. And I read it again tenth grade year.

When asked specifically how she relates to classroom texts, Louri said:

Louri: If they were about like slavery and how we were brought up. I mean, it's different now. I have grown up now. It's way different than how people have grown up back then. So I can't really relate to it, unless my grandma or somebody older than her tell me.

Through their frustration of reading or rereading Eurocentric texts, the co-researchers identified the need for authors of color within their English classes.

Utilizing the Voices of People of Color

Following the identification of teacher-selected texts and their relatability, the co-researchers often expounded on what would be more intriguing in their English classes. Instead of dwelling on his inability to connect with the current literary works, Juan reflected on genres of his past and suggested works that might interest other students of color.

Juan: I'll say growing up kind of like the middle school era. I know that would be

a lot of fiction where they wanted you to pick up on like the fantasy, the themes,

and all that stuff. You may read more poems. Like things about people's lives.

"Oh, read this about so-and-so." I would definitely be like "this unit will be really

about, um, Malcolm X, his life" and just stuff like that. So I know in the

classroom you can obviously get what you want, but I know that'd be more like a

more joyful English year or unit.

Juan's intentionality with taking control of his education opened the dialog to genre

preference. As an avid reader, he identified the need for more non-fiction works by

people of color in his English classes.

Juan: I mean, and it still speaks til this day now, uh, for me, I can only read

nonfiction: biographies and autobiographies. I don't really like fiction. Too much

like fantasy kind of. I like more things that are speaking about like real life things;

and I'll just touch on something. So I just recently got done with a book called *We

Were Here* by Matt Dela Pena, basically it was a real life story, journalism and all

that, and how he escaped a group home and just his life.

As Juan relayed the importance of reading real life experiences over fantasy, Wendell

identified how vastly different a person of color's experience is specifically for African

Americans in the United States. As descendants of enslaved people, much of their

heritage is an adaptation and evolution of their heritage overly removed. Juan's reflection

voiced Ogbu's (1978) argument regarding people of color maintaining the systemic

oppression which is evident in their living and learning communities. When asked if the

books read at school connected with him culturally, he responded:

Wendell: Not really culturally. They will have like culturally the books would talk about like how, they will have like family outings and stuff like that. Um, they were talking about how like they celebrate holidays and stuff like that. Then they have like religion. When I relate back to my life, I think about how we had a religion but it was forced upon us.

As a 12th grade student, Chebria reflected on her educational experience and identified her literary exposure as something she wished she could change. The voice of multiple people of color of various regions was something she wrestled with as a learner.

Chebria: I would change what I was exposed to at an early age. Instead of having like this one form of story you always received... instead of having that one history book with the same thing and the same year, I'll probably like, the holistic view of my own history or minority history. Cause it just puts a lot of things in perspective. I think that would probably been better also having to relate to somebody. "I can do that too because this person looks like me" or "they from the same place I'm coming from." "They're also a girl and they're Black or dark skin." It's always easier to relate to someone who actually like you. I would actually read like more books about like different ethnicities or from different places

Beyond reading stories about and by people of color, the co-researchers expressed the need for a multicultural curriculum in all subjects.

Culture Represented in Curriculum

Within this theme, there was an overwhelming desire to see revision in the high school curriculum of the co-researchers. Beyond race, co-researchers like Nedgie want to see a curriculum that reflects her cultural experiences and those of other underrepresented

groups. She mentioned *A Long Way Gone,* a text about the genocide in Sierra Leone and identified:

> *Nedgie:* It kind of connected to me because in the book he [the author] talked about having to go through all those trials and not being able. He was already separated from family members and a lot of destruction happened. I personally connected to the book cause it shows that even though you can go through stuff you can still come out of it. Once he did finish, like being a boy soldier, he get out of it. It showed that you could still get out of stuff. And not forget it, but like put it aside.

Juan brought up both the positive and negative racial occurrences of 2020 and identified that a culturally inclusive environment would increase the diversity of leadership as well as reduce ignorance. He concluded his interview with:

> *Juan:* The US getting more diverse. More people of color, more minorities are stepping up changing businesses, industry, the country. I think it starts with the classroom because if students are being raised with this one side of you, they can't really learn. I mean, I'm sure it's going to happen sooner than later. Learn to adapt to the diverse world, the different cultures, and stuff from an early start. When it comes to putting more of African American culture with the school, I'm sure there are enough smart people out here to figure out how to get the African American culture taught to the students.

Chebria illustrated the links that various groups can make if they expand their reading repertoire and encourage teachers to present texts with non-stereotypical characters.

Chebria: A lot of the books that we get in school versus what you personally read. A lot of the books were about either White kids. You wasn't getting Black characters like that. You wasn't getting a lot of stories you could relate to. I like reading so much different types of books that are not about me, but more minority stories. It was a totally different world besides these like White genres, but there's like just one type of history being pushed. Like authors like Elizabeth Acevedo. She's an Afro-Latina. It's not monolithic, like the Black assistant monolithic and this got me interested. It's like other minorities. I'm reading a book on Manzanar right now. "So this is going on?" "This is also going on!?" I feel like it's just shared like a whole bunch of history that I never knew.

She furthers this need for variety in the reading curriculum by identifying the limited history she had been presented with in school. For people of color, Chebria illustrated the basic elements of history covered and the need for texts to enlighten.

Chebria: History books connect depths. It was just slavery, MLK, Rosa Parks. Next? Like "is this all it is?" "Slavery?" Then you got the tributaries? Like it's the same thing every year. This made me think "all the history that people do not know and how a lot of these stories we don't get in history books actually exist." I think it's just important for teachers to recognize that students don't want the history book. We're tired of them. We're tired of reading the same thing. The whole Odyssey thing got to go. Get a different book off the Canon. The Color Purple, by Alice Walker is a really good read. It's also on the Canon. Just find other books.

The classroom reading disconnect theme illuminated the desire of the co-researchers regarding literary works but the overall frustration with the same selections or limited view of the world presented. The passion of the co-researchers was evident and confirmed the assertion of Gay (2002) mentioned in Chapter 2 with the recognition that teacher-selected texts need to relate to student experiences and realities. This theme allowed the co-researchers to express what their ideal English class should look like in order to inform various cultures simultaneously without a clear indication of a dominant culture. The *classroom reading disconnect theme* expressed the need for cultural diversity in the written material presented.

Spoken Language Perception Theme

Of the three themes, the *spoken language perception theme* was the most surprising. The co-researchers made multiple significant statements regarding their use of the English language and how it had been interpreted by both parents and teachers alike. Although the interviews only had four questions related to spoken language interpretation, all seven co-researchers had impactful experiences.

Confusion with Language

Many of the co-researchers identified confusion when defining and speaking Standard American English. When asked how reading and speaking were considered important in your home and expressed by your parents, Dwight struggled to define what the expected standard was; however, he easily could identify what words to avoid.

> **Dwight:** I would say something such as like "um." He [his father] did this [gesture of disapproval]. Like it's not improper, but it's like kinda like you messed up. He like kind of teach you like etiquette. Almost like how to talk to someone in

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a way. So they would correct me and say something. I know, my grandmother does a lot. And um, I forgo, it's kind of hard to give an example, but it's almost like they just correct, like teach you how to, you know, say the right thing.

However, he further conveyed the confusion he often experienced at home when he would use Standard American English. The expectation of what to say and actual application of speaking properly sometimes got him into trouble.

> *Dwight:* Cause like when I was to say something, they was like, "Oh, so you want to be smart?" And I'm like, no, I'm not being smart. I'm just talking. Um, so it can come off almost come off as like rude or disrespectful, but that's not my intentions.

When describing speaking at home, Kevin emphasized learning how to avoid trouble in public places and business-type situations. Dwight and Kevin both connected speech to etiquette and manners.

> *Kevin:* They would just like tell me about really events, you know. As I was growing up, um, like going to the stores and like looking at the news and stuff about like how when I grow up how important it is. I always make eye contact with people, shake hands, you know, use, you know, just don't uhh how do I say it... The way I talk with my friends. Like, don't let that interfere with like business and everything.

Juan, on the other hand, struggled to define the standard his grandmother required for his home.

Juan: Uh, for me, I'll say, I'll say like, just regular English. I don't want to put it in like perspective of, uh, well, not like perspective, but like, I don't want to be opinionated when I say it.

When asked to freely express what he means about perspective and opinionated, Juan linked speech to race.

Juan: So it's not like, uh, you saying, "Oh, this language belongs to one person." But it was more of like, oh, not like formal, but it was still White people. It was just plain old English. You know, us Black folks like to change things up.

Growing up, that wasn't used, but definitely as you get older, you pick up on it. Wendell described the layers of confusion that surrounded language for him. His parentage did not maintain a consistent standard. He expressed how the expectation often changed depending on whose home he was in.

Wendell: With my grandmother, it's Standard English; but when I used to live with my mom, it was slang. With my mom, she was just like, it was like, she didn't really care. She would like encourage you but like she would just like, she wouldn't force it.

Some of the confusion regarding language consisted of the inconsistency in the dialects spoken by the co-researchers' parents. Chebria, Nedgie, and Louri all referenced the hybrid form of English spoken in their homes.

Chebria: I think it was a mixture because my family is from the South. So we do have that Southern, but, uh, that vernacular that we speak. Plus the slang and plus proper English cause my aunt was a teacher. So she was like "don't say ain't" it's

like "you don't have." I still have like the Southern-like language. So if I was

saying "pillow," I say "pilla" like that. So I just have that Southern.

Nedgie: It was a mixture of like the proper English and slang.

Louri: What you mean by that? I mean, they speak slang. There's a lot of slang

there.

All seven co-researchers expressed confusion with language and explained that

navigating their language identity included alternating between multiple dialects.

Code Switching

Beyond the confusion of what the co-researchers speak and the standard they

were to adhere to, six of the seven recounted being taught to code switch. Code switching

is the alternating between two or more languages or varieties in a single conversation

(Gardner-Chloros, 2009). Kevin, Dwight and Chebria expressed how their use of

alternating dialects stemmed from a particular exposure. When Kevin was asked what

type of English was spoken or used in his home he responded that his parents reminded

him how to address others.

Kevin: Standard. It was always standard. They made me like aware of like how to

speak to people correctly and like not to use slang words all the time. Yeah. They

were always like, you know, making sure I know how to speak.

Dwight identified learning how to improve his code switching abilities through reading.

Dwight: Reading, it like expands your vocabulary; and it allows you to like hold

conversations with people, which is a lot of times. Sometimes –when my brothers

struggled– they haven't got the same education that I received. So sometimes

those conversations can seem like very different. It also teaches me how to like,

you know, try to switch the way like I could talk or things like that and how to change the conversation around.

Chebria's rich southern heritage was a major dialect in her home. She explained the dialects she navigates when code switching.

> *Chebria:* We kept that Southern language a little bit. So it always, for me, like I go in and out, basically I code switch a lot. So when I'm talking to my friends, I'm talking in Ebonics a little bit or, I'm saying things like "um." I'm abbreviating a lot of things; but if I'm talking to like a teacher or I'm gonna email it, I try to like do proper and I'd probably say over again to make sure it's correct.

Juan and Chebria continued to explain how they and their friends make code switching determination daily.

> *Juan:* I don't know if it was like common sense, but I know when to say what. When to do this. So I know when to do it. Basically, there's a time and place for everything. So you can't expect to use the same language that you use with your friends and expect to use it in the classroom.

> *Chebria:* So when you're in a group full of White people or like you had to be very um, not like a group full of White people but like if you had to be more, um, going to be more professional. They wasn't gonna act like the way they act at home. Like that hoop the hoop, hollering the hoop hollering yelling, it wasn't gonna happen.

However, code switching wasn't something she learnt independently. This was something modeled by her mother as well as the instances when it was appropriate.

Chebria: When it came to being professional or like we had to take care of business. So that's how I knew my mom was trying to take care of business cause she was on the phone and her voice, her voice it sounded completely different how she talk regularly at home. So I knew, "oh mom, mom having a phone call right now. Leave her alone." So I just knew that that was like, that's very important. Let me leave her alone. Or when her voice like sounded different you could tell.

Although many of the co-researchers were taught to code switch, those skills did not prevent them from in-school hurt when their home languages were corrected in school.

Feelings of Being Corrected

Many of the co-researchers recounted navigating the languages of their homes as well as what was acceptable at school. Wendell expressed the first time he was corrected by a teacher at school for the way he spoke.

Wendell: The first time it happened was like, it was like, "what is this dude talking about?" How, how does he not understand me? Cause I was young at the time, and I was like, trying to like, say, tell him something. I don't remember what, but like, he was like, "what are you saying?" He was like, "what does that mean?" And stuff like that. Like questioning my language. In the moment, it was confusing and it was kind of angering well not angering. I don't think that's the word, but it kind of made me mad how, how he didn't understand me.

Nedgie described the frustration of preemptive teacher correction. She identified the frustration of not being able to express herself freely or have the opportunity to self-correct.

Nedgie: Um, I think it was in middle school; and I was in English class. I had said something, and she was still quick to correct me! I was about to correct myself. I think I said a word wrong when we was reading a book or something. I said something wrong, and before I could even fix it, she was already trying to fix it for me. It made me feel like upset, but also like resentful towards her because I was like "I know the word. I just said it wrong by accident." I kind of stumbled. And then for you to just already correct me and not give me a chance, made me feel some type of way.

Louri reflected on the constant correction she received from her parents and teachers regarding her speech. Of the two, her teachers' feedback was identified as the most confusing for her.

Louri: Like just how I talk. They be like "stop talking like that", but it's just, that's just how I grew up. So it's just going to be hard for me to just stop talking like that. My teachers say that too when I write my essays. They say you talk how you write. I don't see it cause that's how I talk. But other people comment from it. My teachers reading it, they be like, you talk how you speak. I don't understand it, but I feel like when I write my essays, I feel like I do good. But then, when they read it, I don't come, don't come back with a good grade.

The poor essay scores and connection to her speech was a topic that changed Louri's physical demeanor. After shifting in her seat and fidgeting with her fingers, she expressed her frustration with her best not being enough. When asked how it all made her feel, she simply said:

Louri: So I be like "dang." It's like I'm tryna change my words to fit theirs.

The *spoken language perception theme* described the impact correction and language identity had on the co-researchers. This theme directly connected to the argument of Beckman (1995) when he conveyed that language is a cultural system that aids in making sense of daily life experiences. This theme presented the damage and frustration imposed on the students when their way of understanding the world was questioned or corrected.

Conclusion

This chapter presented and discussed the findings of this study. There were 42 codes that emerged from the transcribed interviews which formed the three themes for this study: *the parental/guardian influence theme, classroom reading disconnect theme,* and *spoken language perception theme.* The *parental/guardian influence* theme described the impact of reading availability in the home, academic support measures, and pressure to succeed. Within this theme, past and current influences were described. The co-researchers' attitude towards literacy and reading-based activities were defined. The theme concluded with the co-researchers' disconnect between the parental/guardian influence to succeed and the steps and materials needed to do so.

The *classroom reading disconnect* theme discussed the frustration and lack of identity the co-researchers found in their English classrooms. This theme related unrelatable Eurocentric texts, the need for utilizing the voices of people of color, and overall desire to have multiple cultures represented in the English class curriculum. Within this theme, the co-researchers illustrated the reading disconnect by providing examples of Eurocentric texts and how different those realities are from theirs. They also shared how the desperation to read works written by people of color and not just White

authors. This theme concluded with examples of other cultures that could bring diversity into an English class curricula.

The *spoken language perception* theme shared how the co-researchers have no language identity. Included within this theme were confusion with language, code switching, and feelings associated with being corrected. The co-researchers define the inconsistency of their overall spoken language experiences and even associate what is professionally acceptable as speaking "White." Beyond the dissociation of "proper" language with what they naturally produce, the co-researchers described how and when they alternate between what is acceptable and natural. This theme concluded with the resonating sentiments of language correction and how they are often left feeling mad and frustrated.

Chapter Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 introduced and identified why this study should be addressed. Chapter 2 reviewed the relevant research of similar studies and laid the foundation for the study. Chapter 3 explained the research design, participant selection process, steps for collecting and analyzing the data (interviews), and the ethical concerns associated with the design appropriateness. This chapter revealed findings from the study identified in relationship to the research questions. Of these findings, the three emergent themes (*the parental/guardian influence theme, classroom reading disconnect theme,* and *spoken language perception theme*) were presented with verbatim quotes to provide clear context. Finally, the three emergent themes from this study are discussed in-depth within Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the data collected and analyzed was presented. This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted to understand and describe the lived experiences of African American inner city adolescents regarding their home-based exposures to literacy. The research questions addressed were: (a) *What are the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents?* (b) *What role do their literacy experiences and engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon have on their performance in English class?* and (c) *How do these learners describe their current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom?* Within this chapter, the researcher discussed the findings yielded from the data collected.

In the final chapter of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher reviewed the purpose, significance, and methodology of the research in connection with the research questions. By reviewing these connections, the researcher provided a structural-textural description, based upon Moustakas (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen (SCK) method of analysis. The synthesized descriptions presented the experiences of the co-researchers into meaningful emergent themes that answer the research questions and determine the essence of meaning which informed the study's overall conclusion, discussion, recommendations, and future research considerations.

Giorgi (1997) asserted that transcendental phenomenology provides a voice to the exposures and lived experiences of misunderstood demographic groups. Although the research regarding African American students in the school system is extensive (Bell,

1980; Davis et al., 2006; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Flennaugh, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lomotey, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994; Roderick, 2005; Saddler, 2005; Steele, 2003; Strong-Leek, 2008; Suzuki & Aronson, 2005; Wilson, 2009; Zirkel, 2005), there is paucity in the literature specific to the literacy exposures of inner city African American adolescents. Of the studies conducted, the perspective of the inner city private school adolescent has been overlooked. Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) identified that African Americans face the additional complication of social interaction as an inevitable contributor that impacts their instruction. Since there are various implications regarding this demographic and their relationship with literacy, this study provided data directly from inner city private school African American adolescents. Furthermore, the essence of meaning from the lived experiences of the co-researchers may provide literacy practitioners and researchers with an in-depth understanding of the literacy experiences and exposures of inner city private school African American adolescents in an effort to make curriculum changes. This demographic needs to be heard.

To answer the research questions for this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted on seven inner city private school African American adolescents in accordance with the "interview guide" established in Chapter 3. Using the interview protocol (Appendix F), data on the lived experiences of the co-researchers was collected. After the transcription and member checking processes, the interview data was organized and analyzed manually without the aid of qualitative software. The emergent themes and essence of the home-based literacy exposures of inner city private school African American adolescents was reported using the Moustakas' (1994) modified SCK method.

The analysis of the seven co-researcher's verbatim transcripts presented 42 significant statements which were synthesized into textual and structural descriptions. The byproduct of this synthesis was the emergence of three themes: *the parental/guardian influence theme, classroom reading disconnect theme, and spoken language perception theme*. These themes were the basis for the discussion of the qualitative data collected.

This chapter discusses connections, alignment or misalignment, made from the findings to the theoretical framework and research literature regarding home-based literacy exposure and how that might influence one's relationship with reading. The research questions along with the three emergent themes of inner city private school African American adolescents are discussed in this chapter to help readers understand the home-based literacy experience and its impact in and out of the classroom for this demographic. Chapter 5 consists of (a) a summary of findings, (b) discussion of findings, (c) implications from the study, (d) limitations, (e) recommendations for future research, (f) and conclusion.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher's lived experiences with literacy as well as those observed in her classrooms served as the influence for this study. With limited research on her own demographic background as well as a plethora of unanswered questions surrounding the students she taught, the researcher's desire for exploration and expansion on the topic of this study was born. In accordance with the SCK method modified by Moustakas (1994), the first step of data analysis for this study was to obtain a full description of the researcher's personal experience of the phenomenon and bracket those findings to ensure the study's trustworthiness. The researcher's goal was to fill a gap in the literature from

the perspective of the student and not merely the observations or speculations of the researcher since there have been many published works by researchers and practitioners on this subject matter (Davidson & Koppenhaver, 2017; Labov, 1972; McKay, et., 2003). By obtaining firsthand accounts from inner city private school African American adolescents, three themes emerged from the data in response to the research questions.

Main Research Question

For this transcendental phenomenological study, there was one main research question and two sub-questions explored. The first emergent theme within this study's findings was a clear response to the main research question: *What are the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents?* The *parental/guardian influence theme* captured the essence of the home-based literacy experiences of the inner city private school African American adolescents. Within these findings, three distinct connections were made: motivation to read and its alignment to reading access, English coursework surpassing parent/guardian's ability to support, and educational aspirations misaligning with practical application.

All seven co-researchers expressed vivid influences of their parents related to reading availability in the home, academic support, and pressure to succeed. From these recollections, there were distinct similarities in the influence of their parents/guardian. Six of the seven co-researchers, Nedgie, Kevin, Dwight, Louri, Wendell, and Juan, had access to various books and novels either on a central bookshelf, personal desk, or box within the house. This finding was consistent with the research literature since Diffily (2004) and Se´ne´chal et. al (1998) asserted that learning begins at home through

Bokhorst-Heng's (2008) recognition of the importance of parental involvement. Likewise, Louri's access to reading materials was consistent with the findings of McGeown et al., (2015) since digital text activities have become the dominant platform, and Louri's father purchased books on her tablet. However, overall access to books did not motivate the readers and was not influential for some of the co-researchers. Wendell, Juan, and Dwight clarified that even though there were books available, the genres were not aligned with their interests; furthermore, they only had access to simple self-help/lifestyle genres, which were of no interest to them which was consistent with Anmarkrud and Bråten's (2009) correlation that reading performance is a byproduct of both access and motivation. Within this study, the *parental/guardian influence theme* uncovered that although reading materials were available, the motivation to read was not aligned to the access provided.

In addition, the role of parental/guardian influence as related to academic success was consistent for all seven co-researchers. They identified homework support from parents and/or mentors. However, Dwight and Chebria explained that their current homework surpassed the knowledge-base of their parents' academic support. The material presented or research required in their high school English classes are too complicated for their parents which does not provide them the opportunity for continued academic support. Dwight specifically referenced kindergarten as the last time he felt adequate support from his parents regarding his homework assignments and overall curriculum support (Chapter 4, p. 84). Like many of the co-researchers, Dwight and Chebria identified that overall school encouragement was present through their primary and high school matriculation; however, practical assistance with tasks such as research

and essay writing was outside of the scope of their parents' knowledge-base. Furthermore, Dwight articulated an instance in middle school as the moment he realized he knew more than his father (Chapter 4, p. 85). Although the co-researchers have pride in their ability to perform English tasks independently, the researcher wondered whether this lack of tangible academic support in any way stifled their growth as writers and researchers. Literacy encouragement varied among the co-researchers.

Unlike the other six co-researchers, Kevin identified reading as an element of punishment when referencing the parental influence he experienced towards reading which is consistent with the findings of Heath (1982) that home literacy influences an individual's leisure activities and impacts the perception of reading and writing. Although Kevin's initial association with reading was connected with getting into trouble, throughout the interview he mentioned many leisure books and adventure series. His parents' approach may have been unorthodox to the norm of his peers, but the approach helped to produced reading as a leisure activity for Kevin in accordance with Heath (1982). For other co-researchers, the library was a resource presented by their parents/guardian.

Visiting the library was yet another commonality among the co-researchers' parental influence regarding academic success. Nedgie, Wendell, and Juan, however, did not recount utilizing the library as a research hub; rather, the library was utilized as a social space which is consistent with the need for behavioral modeling versus presenting resources. According to Gee (2011), it is just as impactful to student literacy perceptions to not only make reading available but be intentional about how it is done. The library was presented as a location to visit and not thought of as a literary resource. The

parental/guardian influence theme additionally uncovered that the presentation of resources (books, journaling, and the library) as insufficient for overall reading appreciation and/or a success resource for literacy.

Finally, the main research question was answered with the recognition that the pressure to succeed was a common home-based exposure among all seven co-researchers. The co-researchers articulated their need to succeed versus desire to pursue a particular passion or career path. Consistent with Clark (2015), Chebria, Dwight, and Louri expressed the pressure of success as an avenue to escape their low-income neighborhoods or simply surpass their parentage. This realization was made clear to Louri when multiple family members articulated that "mak[ing] it out" is their [the family's] priority for her (Chapter 4, p. 88). Furthermore, Chebria and Dwight recounted reflections of their parents related to their inadequate educational background. The parental influence and motivation to go to college and succeed was rooted in the desire to "be better than" their parents in order not to suffer from poverty or the lack of opportunity (Dwight, Chapter 4, p. 87). This social construct has influenced the present day reality as well as future expectations of the co-researchers consistent with the findings of Merleau-Ponty and Fisher (1963) regarding the social constructivism paradigm since the co-researchers' community or "world" impacts their priorities and consciousness which informs their personal goals. With the pressures to succeed at the forefront of the co-researchers' mind throughout high school, they all have the goal of college in mind; however, their parents/guardians never communicated how to make that vision a reality. They all communicated college as a mystical solution to their plight of being poor rather than associating it with a career path or passion to pursue. The *parental/guardian influence*

theme uncovered the conflict of high educational aspirations and practical applications of the resources available. While all the students were presented with reading and reading resources, the approaches of home and school were not congruent adding to the frustration and distress associated with teacher-selected texts.

Research Sub-question One

Although there was one main research question for this study, the researcher wanted to understand specific nuances and defined two sub-questions related to the main question to help unpack the lived experiences of the co-researchers. The second emergent theme of this study directly responded to the first sub-research question: *What role do their [inner city private school African American adolescents] literacy experiences and engagement with the Eurocentric literary canon have on their performance in English class?* The *classroom reading disconnect theme* captured the essence of the role and impact the Eurocentric literacy canon has on inner city private school African American adolescents. Within these findings, four distinct connections were made: text-to-world connections are how students related to teacher-selected texts, the dominance of White experiences through text repetition, student desire to have input in teacher selected texts, and the exclusion or limited representation of people of color in teacher-selected texts.

Just as all co-researchers identified vivid influences of their parents, they also expressed deeply rooted frustration in the "unrelatable" selections, need to read authors of color, and desire to see various cultures represented in their English class curriculum. The co-researchers defined a few examples of Eurocentric texts and how they found connections related to them. Dwight, Kevin, Wendell, and Juan all attempted to express parallels between the texts and their lived experiences. Two of the four co-researchers identified generic connections to the four texts mentioned in response to the questions

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"What Eurocentric books have you read for school? Did the books you read at school connect to you personally/ culturally?" (Appendix F). Statements like "little key details… stories with teens" (Dwight, Chapter 4, p. 90) and "real world connection" (Kevin, Chapter, p. 90) were the best cultural connections the two co-researchers were able to provide. These links showed no substantial relationship between the reading and the individual reader. Their responses were clearly superficial, lacking the depth of analysis or relatability, and rooted in trying to satisfy the assigned reading. Within their interview responses, the male co-researchers indicated trying to "make some type of connection" (Kevin, Chapter 4, p. 90) in order to write their essays and complete the teacher-selected reading. These explanations demonstrated student disconnect from the course and its assignments. The co-researchers furthered the priority of this theme when explaining the needs for character and narrative representation that reflects their lived experiences.

Nedgie articulated a desire to see people of color at the forefront of the texts she read. She specifically explained that the teacher-selected texts included White people most of the time. She continued to explain that neither the plot nor characters, projected in her coursework, represented anything she would select for herself (Nedgie, Chapter 4, p. 91). Nedgie's indication of reading disconnect, identified her readiness to "checkout" when presented with teacher-selected texts, meaning she began assigned texts disinterested. This disconnect from the Eurocentric texts was consistent with the research literature presented in Chapter 2 since Wheeler et al. (1992) identified that students connect to content they relate to and often are of the same race and gender as aligned with the similar-to-me effect. Wendell further confirmed the research literature when he expressed confusion and the inability to relate to the characters of Eurocentric texts like

Antigone. Since his lived experience involved "moving a lot" or "going from house to house," reading texts about wealthy aristocrats not only seemed fanciful but also unrealistic to his worldview (Wendell, Chapter 4, p. 91). The embracement of the Eurocentric literacy canon as the tool for teacher-selected texts supports the findings of McGhie (2015) since many English teachers standardize the White experience as dominant. Whether intentional or unconscious, the lack of people of color-centered teacher-selected texts in English classrooms standardizes that the White experience is the norm that should be explored within the English classroom. This standard has to change. Within this study, the dominant White experience was not only recognized but highlighted as something inner city private school African American students have to accept through the repetition of teacher-selected texts.

Chebria's frustration in relation to reading disconnect was made abundantly clear when she emphatically repeated the statement "a lot of White books" three times successively (Chapter 4, p. 92). Her repetition indicated her passion as well as frustration. Following those statements with "you wasn't getting a Black character" clarified her disappointment with the lack of representation she recognized in her teacher-selected books. This ideology is a clear example of why the co-researcher and students like her might feel alienated or disconnected from their English readings. "Why we keep reading the same book" (Chebria, Chapter 4, p. 92) are not only her sentiments but those of this researcher. Nieto (1998) indicated the need for teachers to create interpersonal relationships with their students which consists of, but is not limited to, a curriculum (multicultural teaching) that includes their experiences, voices, and cultures. This demographic desires high academic expectations along with teacher recognition of their

ethnicity and socioeconomic status as a basis for altering their reading experiences (Ladson Billings, 1994). The *classroom reading disconnect theme* confirmed the current research regarding the Eurocentric literacy canon as it relates to the need for culturally relevant and responsive instruction in classrooms with people of color. Inner city private school African American adolescents should not have to utilize text-to-world connections, without the opportunity to make any text-to-self connections, for all of their teacher-selected texts.

While the co-researchers described difficulty relating to Eurocentric texts, three of the seven co-researchers, Juan, Wendell, and Chebria, were adamant regarding ways to improve the disconnect and discomfort associated with novel reading in English class. Chebria specifically referenced the notion that the White experience and White history is all that has been presented in her classes. As a means to improve the cultural course competency, Chebria asserted that there is more than "one history book" (Chapter 4, p. 96). Since people have various backgrounds and stories, the co-researchers begged the question: Why not have various voices and experiences presented in English class? The co-researchers identified this need to include diverse cultural backgrounds in all classes, not just English class. Juan asserted that the incorporation of non-fiction texts over fiction could be a better usage of the English reading curriculum (Chapter 4, p. 93). The assertions of both co-researchers indicated that if asked, students will answer and provide guidance regarding their needs and academic desires. The presentation of voices of color and desire to read stories that reflect their lived experience was consistent with the research literature (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Ehri & McCormick, 2013; Gay, 2000; Gay, 2002; Guthrie et al., 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Street, 2000; Street, 2003; Tatum,

2013; Wade, 1993; Wheeler et al., 1992; Wolf et al., 2007). English class curricula and reading should not be standardized since national or district standards-based instruction are not as effective as culturally relevant instruction in diverse classrooms (Wade, 1993). The *classroom reading disconnect theme* uncovered the passion and desire of students to advocate for their literacy instruction and novel selection.

Finally, this sub-research question was answered through the expression of culturally diverse representation in the curriculum of all courses. The expressed frustration and disconnect conveyed by Nedgie, Juan, and Chebria confirmed the research literature (Darling-Hammond, 2001) by conveying the difficulty for students of color to relate to autonomous literacy (Eurocentric texts) since their culture is not represented. According to Street (2003), the imposition of western conceptions on other cultures further disconnects students of color. Chebria and Louri specifically articulated the frustration and disappointment with English educators for presenting such a limited and often repetitive list of teacher-selected texts to classes with underrepresented populations. In one of her responses, Chebria identified "the whole *Odyssey* thing got to go" since this particular text had been taught more than once by two different teachers (Chapter 4, p. 92). Likewise, Louri read *Things Fall Apart* multiple times and wondered why this depiction –slaves or ancient Africans– of Black people seemed to be the only representation (Chapter 4, p. 92). From the co-researchers' responses, in the instance where teacher-selected texts were culturally related, they tended to be about "slavery, MLK, [and] Rosa Parks" (Chebria, Chapter 4, p. 96). The emphatic nature of the co-researchers questions the exclusion of various people of color as well as the presentation of the limited view of Blackness in the classroom. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995)

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identified the inequality of education without culturally relevant teaching which is evident in the in-school experience of the co-researchers. The power and race dominance within the texts selected were clear illustrations of what Delgado and Stefancic (2000) examined in the cultural and societal implications of Critical Race Theory which emphasizes the intersections of race and culture with the law and racial justice. The frustration of the co-researchers placed the curriculum and society as a whole under the microscope since the teacher-selected texts placed the White experience as the norm in these inner city classrooms. The *classroom reading disconnect theme* confirmed the need for culturally relevant and responsive instruction since the current practices expressed by the co-researchers are insufficient. Likewise, cultural competency is necessary for teachers of inner city private school African American adolescents, specifically regarding spoken language.

Research Sub-question Two

Within the research question, understanding the co-researchers' present day relationship with literacy was an additional nuance considered. The third emergent theme of this study addressed research sub-question two: *How do these learners [inner city private school African American adolescents] describe their current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom?* Of all the emergent themes, this one was the most surprising since there were only four questions dedicated to language from the interview protocol (Appendix F). When asked to explain their current relationship with literacy, the co-researchers identified language as the dominant literacy component. The *spoken language perception theme* captured the essence of the learners' described literacy encounters with teachers in the classroom. Within these findings, three distinct

connections were made: spoken language as a behavior, code switching as a norm, and linguistic rejection as an undercurrent within student to teacher communication and relation.

During the co-researchers reflection of their classroom experiences, the *spoken language perception theme* emerged. All seven co-researchers expressed confusion with home-based language expectations, learning to code switch, and the feelings associated with being corrected when speaking in school. While illustrating instances of language confusion, Dwight and Kevin identified that language was associated with manners which created an additional alert for them regarding how the outside world perceives them. As Black men, Dwight and Kevin were taught that they would be perceived differently if they did not speak well or make "eye contact with people [and] shake [people's] hands" when meeting (Kevin, Chapter 4, p. 98). This uncomfortable reality was consistent with Davis' (2013) explanation that family rules, traditions, relationships, and the meaning of life are all established through language. The *spoken language perception theme* confirmed that spoken language is established through the overall behavior expectations taught to the co-researcher regarding how and when to speak as a family rule as well as the tradition of code switching.

Throughout this theme, six of the seven co-researchers indicated code switching as a primary means of communication. When identifying the time and place in which a switch needed to occur, Chebria indicated when conversing with White people and handling business as the primary instances. This response aligned speech or comfort when conveying messages to race. In order for her mother to accomplish business goals or if you are in a "group full of White people" (Chebria, Chapter 4, p. 101), one should

change the tone of their voice. Chebria identified this norm and acknowledged that the tone changes often made her "sound completely different [from] how she [spoke] regularly" (Chebria, Chapter 4, p. 102). Dwight identified the struggle of navigating language from the professional (at school) to the social (at home). Since the tendency to code switch was a learned behavior within the home, the alternating speech was consistent with the research literature since knowledge is formed in cultures and communities by family (Diffily, 2004; Davis, 2013). The *spoken language perception theme* uncovered that in addition to language acquisition, code switching is a skill developed from childhood within the inner city private school African American home and highlighted the situations in which alternating speech should be applied. However, this norm did not transcend nor was perfected by all the co-researchers presenting discomfort and hurt as in school feeling associated with language.

The *spoken language perception theme* elevated the feelings and experiences of the co-researchers as it relates to communication discomfort within their English classes. Three of the seven co-researchers communicated the feelings of frustration and anger when being corrected as well as confusion as to why their home-based languages were unacceptable. Louri conveyed this frustration with statements like "dang" or the feeling of needing to "change [her] words to fit" into the academic environment established by her teachers (Chapter 4, p. 103). As expressed by the co-researchers, these feelings created distance between them and their teachers which was consistent with the research literature since "communal and individual practices encourage diverse ways of engaging; teacher perceptions influence how the [individuals] navigate space" (Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018, p. 380). This theme not only confirmed the literature as it relates to teacher

perceptions influencing classroom comfort, but also challenged the need for culturally relevant instruction in isolation. The co-researchers' responses indicated the need to merge culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching. The *spoken language perception theme* uncovered rejection as an undercurrent for student to teacher communication which aligns to Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory since language is not independent of society but "occurs within and is shaped by a cultural context" (Perry, 2012, p. 52). Since language is cyclical, according to Vygotsky (1978), to remove the cultural experience of the individual will impact how thoughts are expressed and the overall message that is conveyed. The experiences of the co-researchers revealed that how one speaks is not indicative of how they think.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher noted the lack of literacy awareness of the co-researchers during the interviews. The discussion of language during the interviewers was extensive in length and passionately conveyed by the co-researchers even though there were only four questions dedicated to this specific topic. While four of the seven co-researchers identified Standard American English as the required dialect of their home, throughout the interviews there were a plethora of colloquialisms, fillers, and syntax errors presented. The co-researchers' usage of words such as "cuz, y'all, gotta, I'mma, do me" or "uh, um, like" were a few examples throughout the verbatim transcripts of colloquialisms and fillers. While isolating significant statements, reading and rereading the transcripts was not only essential to ensure the researcher's understanding of the essence conveyed but also used to decode some of the statements of the co-researchers since many of the messages were wordy and often layered. Juan's statement "I had to think about that, uh, especially end of sophomore year, like terribly,

uh, with Corona" was a response to the desire for academic success as an example of syntax errors. Although the disclaimer at the beginning of the interview was "this is a safe space," the co-researchers struggled to accurately formulate clear and concise responses to the interview questions. They often rambled before addressing the specific question or scenario asked.

It is possible that the co-researchers code switched during the interview based on the researcher's background similarity since they clearly communicated the time and place appropriateness when using Standard American English. Holmes (2000) identified code switching as a signal for shared ethnicity and group affiliation. Through Sociocultural Theory, Vygotsky (1978) identified that culture shapes and integrates symbolic artifacts into language and thoughts (Lantolf, 2000). Therefore, code switching relates society's influence on an individual's development, marrying one's ideas with their words. However, the syntax of the co-researchers' responses was filtered through textual and structural analysis to ensure their significant statements were appropriately categorized into emergent themes and an essence could be derived.

Essence of Meaning

Overall, the essence of this study's outcomes rests within the three emergent themes. First, inner city private school African American adolescents lack modeling in their home-based exposures. The co-researchers conveyed having to complete complicated coursework on their own since their parents/guardians " can't help" since they do not "know what I'm doing" but were given the pressure to go to college and succeed to avoid "be[ing] like me [mom]" while not having tangible home tools to do so (Chebria, Chapter 4, p. 88). They are provided resources to engage literacy and are

pressured to surpass and succeed their parents/guardians without the necessary instruction and guidance to complete the next steps.

Second, inner city private school African American adolescents do not connect to the experiences associated with the Eurocentric literacy canon. Through the repeated statements of the co-researchers, the teacher-selected texts are both confusing and different from their home experiences. Fictional texts present fantasy narratives unlike "moving around a lot" or "going from house to house" that aligned with the lived experiences of the co-researchers (Wendell, Chapter 4, p. 91). Inner city private school African American adolescents need culturally relevant and responsive instruction to understand and engage literary works and are willing to advocate as well as make reading suggest.

Finally, inner city private school African American adolescents have a complicated linguistic relationship in and out of their classroom. This complication is specific to knowing when, as well as with whom, to use a specific dialect. Whether conversing with a friend or "in a group full of White people," the co-researchers explained the need to consider what type of English to speak (Chebria, Chapter 4, p. 101). Furthermore, when code switching is not a household norm, negotiating one's feelings when corrected or instructed to "stop talking like that" was a prevailing emotion experienced by the co-researchers (Louri, Chapter 4, p. 103). This study presented the need for teacher affirmation and normalization regarding the home-based languages of students when verbally communicating. Essence, as identified by Moustakas (1994), is a means to understand the lived experiences of the world the co-researchers have been

exposed to. Based on the essence of the experiences conveyed, multiple implications have been drawn as a result.

Implications

Although many of the findings from this study were consistent with previous research, there was consensus, to varying degrees, among how the co-researchers felt and experienced literacy. The uniqueness of this study is the fact that the data collected was presented from the perspective of the inner city private school African American adolescents. The implications within this section are described through two different lenses: theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

Transcendental phenomenology was an appropriate methodology to investigate the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. Phenomenology, as a qualitative method, seeks to understand the lived experiences which was the goal of this study and exemplified within the co-researchers' responses regarding their exposure to literacy. The best way to understand the experiences of private school inner city African American adolescents is to ask them. For English teachers to be effective, they need to look closely at the home-based exposures of their students and provide culturally relevant as well as culturally responsive instruction to engage the students holistically. The findings from this research study can provide researchers and practitioners with a deeper understanding of the needs of inner city high school students' when developing an English curriculum.

Neubauer et al. (2019) explained that transcendental phenomenology utilizes intentional bracketing on the part of the researcher in order to see the data for what it is. Furthermore, it was considered the best approach for this study since "reality is internal

to the knower… [and] appears in their consciousness" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). The social constructivism research paradigm guided this study since it is the worldview rooted in understanding the lived experience of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The alignment of this qualitative approach and worldview allowed the researcher to categorize themes and identify the common essence represented in the home-based literacy exposures of inner city private school African American adolescents. This study explored the lived experiences of seven inner city private school African American adolescents. The discussion of parental/guardian influence, classroom reading disconnect, and spoken language perfection exposed the co-researchers' history to provide the reader with context for understanding the experiences of inner city private African American adolescents as related to literacy. By listing the co-researchers' demographic information in Chapter 4, practitioners and researchers have additional historical contexts to connect the co-researchers' interview responses regarding their home-based literacy exposures and current relationship with literacy.

The co-researchers' present day relationship with literacy can best be explained and understood by considering their historical context and exposures which align with transcendental phenomenology. The social construct of an individual's lived experiences impacts their present day reality (Merleau-Ponty & Fisher, 1963). Along with this research paradigm, the researcher used three theoretical frameworks to guide this research.

By combining Sociocultural, Critical, and Critical Race Theories, culture and societal contexts of literacy provided the foundation for this study. Using Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory as a guide the co-researchers' social experiences informed

their responses regarding their home-based literacy exposures and current relationship with literacy in and out of the classroom since experience is a unit of analysis. Sociocultural Theory connects the impact of society and culture to an individual's development, exploring the learned behaviors and personal concepts (Kozulin et al., 2003).

Furthermore, Critical Theory was applied during data analysis due to its reductionist nature to phenomenology (Schmitt, 1959). By critiquing society through Critical Theory, the findings challenged the current curriculum power (Geuss, 1981) and necessity of the Eurocentric literacy canon for inner city African American communities. Since the current curriculum power explained through Critical Theory unearths the disconnect between the co-researchers and the teacher-selected works, incorporating culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Street, 2003) may help bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps that seem to exist.

Finally, Critical Race Theory allowed the researcher to analyze the emergent themes, specifically as they relate to race and racism in education. It also challenged the status quo (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002) since the spoken language perceptions of the co-researchers identified the need for code switching and feelings of frustration and anger related to their use of English. These overlapping theories, methods, and worldview worked in tandem to reveal the lived experiences of the co-researchers and isolated the essence of meaning.

Practical Implications

The emergent themes and essence of this study has implications for individuals interested in understanding the home-based literacy exposures of inner city private school

African American adolescents as well as the curriculum needs and language identity of this demographic. The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) highlight implications for researchers and practitioners working with inner city private school African American adolescents. Many of the co-researchers in this study felt comfortable with their literacy experiences and exposures of their home before school but expressed frustration towards school and even teachers; the books on their tablets, flash card exercises, and game-time at the library were not transferable to their classroom experiences. Rather, teacher-selected texts about a "dream life" (Wendell, Chapter 4, p. 91) and spoken language correction were the classroom realities that cultivated the anger and frustration towards English class.

Although the co-researchers expressed comfort, it is evident that their home-based exposures lacked resource modeling to encourage a higher level of literacy engagement and desire. Since only three of the seven co-researchers could recount being read to, it may be important to encourage parents to demonstrate reading at home beyond primary school but through high school since Tatum (2009) specified that literacy development is important in the years past emergent development. Presenting adolescents with books may be a wonderful start for developing literacy skills; however, it's not the resolve. Visiting the library is insufficient if the space is not recognized as more than a social location. In order for adolescents to read, they must develop the skill. This group may need to be motivated to read which often stems from texts selected (Tatum, 2013). Since it was identified that books are often available but inherited, a change in approach may help alter the long-term motivation of inner city African American adolescent readers. Incorporating Gee's (2011) situated meaning approach may influence the motivation of

readers in order to move them from exposure to engagement before teacher-selected texts are a factor. This approach allows readers to identify specific areas of interest. Using the interest topic, practitioners can provide various materials (props, posters, books, etc.) opportunities, and activities to encourage the idea. With this interest, positive memories are associated which can function as a bridge to present texts related to the positive experience or area of interest.

Additionally, culturally relevant and responsive instruction (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) may be beneficial to inner city private school African American adolescents in order to see equity in the cultures represented at school and understand the English curriculum set before them. A strong, consistent experience found within this study was the reading disconnect to the literature presented in school. Culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching recognizes the necessity of acknowledging cultural controversy (race, class, ethnicity, and gender) "to do instructional justice to the complexity, vitality, and potentiality of ethnic and cultural diversity" (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Although the Eurocentric literacy canon has established classics, the ability to understand the themes, motifs, and symbols may be difficult for individuals who live a different norm. An example of this was described by Louri when explaining reading texts about enslaved people as a representation of culturally relevant works. Although she could make connections to her ancestry, she explained that the experiences of the enslaved was different from how she has been "brought up" (Louri, Chapter 4, p. 92).

The co-researchers' experiences are not specific to them because of their race but are shaped by their overall lived experiences. The need for culturally responsive instruction best services students with limited modeling and exposure to literacy, whose

socioeconomic status does not afford them financial privileges, and who are fundamentally underrepresented (Flennaugh, 2017; Jiminez, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Mui & Anderson, 2008; Smedley, 1970). Beyond understanding English content, practitioners need to understand their student population since you cannot teach what you do not understand (Howard, 1999). Practitioners should examine their students' patterns of interest and utilize this information to develop their curriculum versus requiring students to adapt to a fixed plan. Furthermore, to understanding the historical and current relationship inner city private school African American adolescents have with literacy can only transpire once practitioners recognize the impact of student values and interests (Gay, 2002) which influence the level of comfort and connection one may have with the teacher as well as selected texts.

Furthermore, how spoken language is approached within classrooms by practitioners may need to be reevaluated. Rather than requiring the usage of Standard American English as the sole spoken dialect, collaboratively establishing classroom norms with the students and accepting their home-based dialects may facilitate academic success. The incorporation of culturally responsive teaching surpasses the curriculum but also includes how to interact with students. Rigor can be provided (Foster, 1997; Kleinfeld, 1974, 1975) without gently engaging the students or using an altruistic approach (Gay, 2002). Incorporating cross-cultural communication (Gay, 2002) may remove the feelings of anger and frustration associated with in-class correction since this approach acknowledges "what we talk about; how we talk about it; what we see, attend to, or ignore; how we think; and what we think about" (Porter & Samovar, 1991, p. 21). Not only could this communication approach help relax the anxiety of being corrected in

class but also may improve student speech with the blending and translation of their dialect to Standard American English. The foundation of how language might be addressed is from a place of "respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence" (Gay, 2000, p. 52). Practitioners should encourage inner city private school African American adolescents to speak the dialect of their home in order to form a class norm established by the collective (Gay, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of inner city private school African American adolescents regarding their home-based exposure and current relationship with literacy. Overall, the data collected from this study is meant to assist researchers and practitioners in understanding more about this demographic. There are numerous explanations for the relationship this demographic has with literacy in and out of the classroom. A deeper understanding of culturally responsive teaching and home-based exposures may assist practitioners on how to engage their students in order to increase their literacy skills and appreciation. It is vital for practitioners and researchers to remove personal biases and experiences regarding literacy when engaging inner city private school African American adolescents. The practitioner must view literacy instruction through the lens of the student's experiences and needs. Rather than developing the annual reading curriculum based on texts that interest the instructor, practitioners should research texts that are specific to the classroom demographic. Educators should incorporate and embrace uncomfortable texts "such as racism, historical atrocities, powerlessness, and hegemony" of various cultural groups and not just the high-profile narratives (Gay, 2002, p. 108). Culturally responsive teaching

surpasses selecting books written by or about the race represented in one's classroom; it is about the relatability of its content to the reader.

Limitations

This study focused primarily on the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening, and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. Since this research study identified a wide range of experiences over the course of the co-researchers' life, one of the limitations of this transcendental phenomenological study was the reliance on the co-researchers' recollection of their experiences. Ormrod (2008) identified the limitations time has over human memory; however, since the co-researchers of this study primarily discussed current literacy exposures, their personal recollections did not have to rely on distant memories. Because the participants for this study were enrolled in a private school for low-income families, another limitation might have been the motivation of the parents regarding home-based literacy exposure since they may have been highly motivated since they enrolled their child in an alternative educational institution. Additionally, since the co-researchers were private school students, the transferability of this study toward other inner city African American adolescent communities is limited.

Furthermore, the number of students accessible at De Sales High School was a limitation of the study. Within many of today's homes, multiple languages are commonly spoken. With such a high population of language learners, the researcher only selected single language co-researchers. Moreover, with the 2020 pandemic and the national stay-at-home orders enacted, the researcher had limited options when recruiting and engaging participants consistently. Since the study was solely conducted virtually, the number of

recruited participants were fewer than anticipated due to the nature of the interviews and reliance on virtual forms of communication. By conducting this entire study virtually, retaining interest and timely turnaround for communication was more difficult than an ordinary face-to-face study. The researcher anticipated recruiting up to 15 qualified co-researchers; however, this study presented the rich experiences of seven co-researchers.

As a result of this study's virtual nature, all interviews were conducted through video conference. This interview forum restricted the researcher's access to both the co-researcher's environment as well as her ability to observe full body language and nonverbal communication since interviewees were only visible from the waist up and could mute and unmute themselves throughout the interview (Irani, 2019). During virtual interviews, the researcher could hear responses but was unable to note interpersonal and communication skills, maturity, or even interest which can easily be accessed through the traditional interview means (in-person) (Chung, et al., 2019).

Finally, within qualitative research, a common limitation is the hand of the researcher "in the design of a study—from the inception to the writing and publication" (Tierney & Clemens, 2011, p. 24). Researcher bias was a factor that had to remain bracketed during data collection in accordance with the SCK method and Critical Race Theory. Since this framework pays special attention to race as a dominant factor in examining the student's experiences of literacy, the interpretation of the data by the researcher was bracketed out. Although the data was member checked, coded, and recoded, interpretation and transferability is made by the reader. Shenton (2004) explained "that a key criterion for confirmability is the extent to which the researcher admits his or her own predispositions" (p. 72). Therefore, the field notes/ journal was key

to balance the researcher's assumptions with the tangible data collected from the co-researchers in order to reduce contaminating the findings. One strength of qualitative researcher is "its capacity to allow the reader to understand the situation not so that the next study will be precisely like the last, but to think about how the particular study might inform future ones or different situations" (Tierney & Clemens, 2011, p. 31).

Although some limitations were presented within this study, these areas can be addressed by future research to enrich the data and increase trustworthiness on the body of work regarding this subject.

Recommendations for Further Research

This researcher recommends that multiple studies be conducted nationally regarding home-based literacy experiences of inner city African American adolescents to gain a broader understanding of the phenomenon. This could be done by using this study's methodology with inner city private schools first and eventually incorporating public school districts. Alternatively, this study could be conducted on suburban African American adolescents to identify if their lived experiences regarding home-based literacy and the Eurocentric literacy canon are similar. A similarity that could be investigated is whether the classroom reading disconnect theme transcends location and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, this research could be conducted on middle class African American adolescents to determine if their socioeconomic status factors into the literacy exposures and parental influence from the lower income co-researchers.

This research method could also be adjusted to a mixed methods approach. Within a blended design, future research could incorporate pre and post tests and implement this researcher's *Model for Literacy Improvement for English Practitioners*

(Figure 6 below) to identify if there is an engagement and performance difference based on the acknowledgement and curriculum changes made. Future researchers could extend the data collection period from six weeks to a full academic year in order to have quantitative results to compare to the interviewed experiences. With a mixed approach, future researchers can explain the interviewee responses with written artifacts from the students.

Finally, independent schools may consider this study in the following areas: build on this study by investigating the home-based literacy exposures of their students before the commencement of the year to inform curriculum designing and create and provide workshops to provide teachers with culturally responsive teaching tools specific to the findings of this study. Finally, independent schools could provide summer opportunities for students to select a pool of books leveled appropriately to their grade so English teachers have a basic understanding of what would be of interest to their inner city African American adolescents.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

To incorporate this study within a classroom or school, teachers would have to incorporate culturally responsive teaching across all content areas. It is important to delineate between culturally relevant and culturally responsive instruction. Culturally relevant pedagogy empowers students (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and gives teachers permission to incorporate culture into the classroom. Whereas, culturally responsive teaching includes students' cultural references (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and therefore is the application of the instructional practice.

Culturally responsive teaching is the use of "cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Within this pedagogy, there are five critical components that have to be learnt and implemented institution wide: developing cultural diversity knowledge basis, designing culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, cross-cultural communication, and cultural congruity in classroom instruction (Gay, 2002). By incorporating this pedagogy, student cultural experiences will improve the achievements of ethnically diverse populations (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Figure 6 *The Model for Literacy Improvement for English Practitioners*
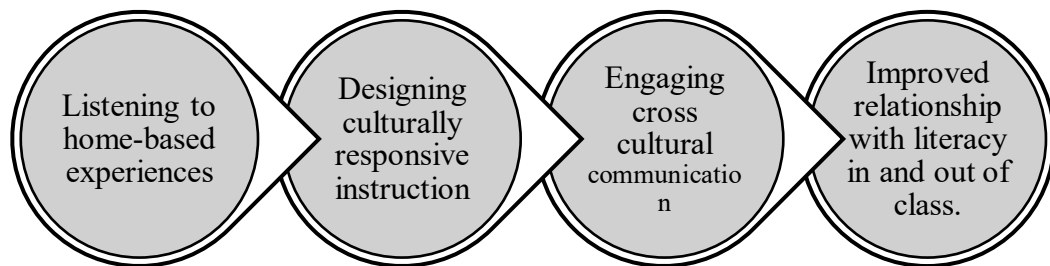
Figure 6, The Model for Literacy Improvement for English Practitioners, is a model developed by this researcher for practitioners when working with inner city African American adolescents. This model could be effective in guiding English practitioners who work with this demographic to engage and improve literacy perception. The removal of personal bias and experience by the practitioner will establish an alliance between the teacher and student to increase trust and allow for increased learning to occur

(Basch, 2012). This model presents the student as the focal point for all English curriculum development. By inquiring of their home-based exposures before defining the norms and overall curriculum of the course, the teacher establishes the priority of the student's lived experiences versus instructor comfort. Overall, there is no perfect approach to cultural competency but given the findings of this study, prioritizing the historical context of the students as a determining factor when selecting texts for class or incorporating cross-cultural communication standards for spoken language can strengthen the instructional curriculum of practitioners and in-school literacy experiences of the learner.

Conclusion

Davies et al. (2005) explained that safe schools provide opportunities for students to be their authentic selves. Inner city private school African American adolescents are an often overlooked demographic. From their socioeconomic disadvantage to the uniqueness of their home-based experience, this group deserves to be studied and educated in a manner that reaches them and does not require them to conform to what is easiest or most convenient for instructors. In order to address this social component of instruction, culturally responsive teaching must be at the forefront of the discussion and research.

More research from varying ages of inner city African American students needs to be conducted in order for a clearer picture to be painted. The findings from this study suggested that Eurocentric texts have been a common reading tool as well as the lack of language acceptance within inner city private school African American classrooms. By continuing this work amongst various ages, future research can identify if this experience transcends age or determine when the reading and linguistic disconnect begins.

Practitioners should work closely with school districts to stop the current inner city curriculum trend. Techniques and interventions should be the next step to improving inner city private school African American adolescents' perception of English literacy and how they feel about how their teachers meet their needs. Improving teacher techniques could directly impact what the new norm is in English classrooms.

This transcendental phenomenology qualitative research study was significant to the researcher. As a former inner city private school African American adolescent, the researcher gained an understanding during this study of the obstacles 21st century students encounter. Throughout the data collection process, the lived experiences of the co-researchers informed the researcher of where her lived experiences differed from theirs and gained insight to the frustrations of a new generation regarding literacy. The voices and experiences of the co-researchers both related to the researcher as well as disappointed her since the progress she believed had been achieved regarding cultural competence and curriculum development had not been as prevalent as she initially thought. As an English instructor, the essence and phenomenon of this study provided the researcher practical tips to incorporate in her annual curriculum planning and design to ensure her students do not experience the disconnect and feelings of language confusion or denial in her classes.

APPENDIX A

Principal Consent Form

Dear Principal:

Your school has been selected to be used as a site to conduct a research study to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. This study will be conducted by Lupita-Maria Matadi, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Lisa Bajor, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling.

If you agree to allow your school and students to participate in this study, the researcher may ask to gain access to student files and records and/or test scores. The student participants will be interviewed and asked to explain the role literacy (reading, writing, listening and speaking) plays in their home, the impact of literacy on their English class performance, and their relationship with literacy in and out of their English classroom. The study is anticipated to be a onetime session lasting a minimum of 20 minutes per participant. All sessions will be <u>video and audio recorded virtually through Zoom and Dolby On.</u> The recordings will be kept in a locked file and destroyed after the study is complete. There are no known risks associated with your site participating in this research beyond those of everyday life. Prior to student engagement, parental consent and participant assent forms will be sent and signed explaining the study and the role of the participants.

Although you nor your students will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand the experiences of home-based literacy in inner city private school African American adolescents.

Confidentiality of you and your students' research records will be strictly maintained by removing you and your students' name. Any identifiers will be replaced with a pseudonym. Consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the interview documentation and will be stored in a locked file. Your students' responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your responses will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary. For interviews, questionnaires or surveys, your students have the right to skip or not answer any questions they prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect their grades or academic standing.

If there is anything about the study or your students' participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related

problem, you may contact Lupita-Maria Matadi, at lupitamaria.garza17@my.stjohns.edu, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Lisa Bajor, at bajorl@stjohns.edu, St. John's University, Sullivan Hall 4th Floor, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

<u>Agreement to Participate</u>

Yes, I agree to allow my students permission to participate in the study described above.

_____   _____

Principal's Signature   Date

Yes, I agree to allow the researcher permission to **video and audio record** sessions with my students.

_____   _____

Principal's Signature   Date

President Consent Form

Dear President:

Your school has been selected to be used as a site to conduct a research study to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. This study will be conducted by Lupita-Maria Matadi, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Lisa Bajor, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling.

If you agree to allow your school and students to participate in this study, the researcher may ask to gain access to student files and records and/or test scores. The student participants will be interviewed and asked to explain the role literacy (reading, writing, listening and speaking) plays in their home, the impact of literacy on their English class performance, and their relationship with literacy in and out of their English classroom. The study is anticipated to be a onetime session lasting a minimum of 20 minutes per participant. All sessions will be <u>video and audio recorded virtually through Zoom and Dolby On.</u> The recordings will be kept in a locked file and destroyed after the study is complete. There are no known risks associated with your site participating in this research beyond those of everyday life. Prior to student engagement, parental consent and participant assent forms will be sent and signed explaining the study and the role of the participants.

Although you nor your students will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand the experiences of home-based literacy in inner city private school African American adolescents.

Confidentiality of you and your students' research records will be strictly maintained by removing you and your students' name. Any identifiers will be replaced with a pseudonym. Consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the interview documentation and will be stored in a locked file. Your students' responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your responses will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary. For interviews, questionnaires or surveys, your students have the right to skip or not answer any questions they prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect their grades or academic standing.

If there is anything about the study or your students' participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related

problem, you may contact Lupita-Maria Matadi, at lupitamaria.garza17@my.stjohns.edu, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Lisa Bajor, at bajorl@stjohns.edu, St. John's University, Sullivan Hall 4th Floor, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439.

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You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

<u>Agreement to Participate</u>

Yes, I agree to allow my students permission to participate in the study described above.

President's Signature	Date

Yes, I agree to allow the researcher permission to **video and audio record** sessions with my students.

President's Signature	Date

Greetings,

Your child has been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. This study will be conducted by Lupita-Maria Matadi, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Lisa Bajor, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling.

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, you will be asked to sign a parental consent form. If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, they will be asked to do the following: sign a participant assent form and complete an interview explaining the role literacy (reading, writing, listening and speaking) plays in their home, the impact of literacy on their English class performance, and their relationship with literacy in and out of their English classroom.

Although you nor your child will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand the experiences of home-based literacy in inner city private school African American adolescents.

If there is anything about the study or your child's participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Lupita-Maria Matadi, at <u>lupitamaria.garza17@my.stjohns.edu</u>, St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Lisa Bajor, at bajorl@stjohns.edu, St. John's University, Sullivan Hall 4th Floor, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair <u>digiuser@stjohns.edu</u> 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, <u>nitopim@stjohns.edu</u> 718-990-1440.

Before agreeing to participate in the study described above, please indicate if your child or anyone in your household speaks another language besides English.

- ☐ English is the only language spoken by my child and everyone in my household
- ☐ There are two or more languages spoken by my child or anyone in my household

If you are willing to agree to your child's participation in this study, please reply to the email with the answer above identified.

Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent of Participant:

Based on your response to the invitation letter, your son/daughter has been selected to participate in a research study to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. This study will be conducted by Lupita-Maria Matadi, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Her faculty sponsor is Dr. Lisa Bajor, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling.

Now that your son/daughter has been selected, you will have to sign this parental consent form. If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be interviewed and asked to explain the role literacy (reading, writing, listening and speaking) plays in their home, the impact of literacy on their English class performance, and their relationship with literacy in and out of their English classroom. Your child's interview responses will be video and audio recorded virtually through Zoom and Dolby On. Participation in this interview will involve a minimum of 20 minutes of their time to complete. The recordings will be kept in a locked file and destroyed after the study is complete. There are no known risks associated with your child participating in this research.

Although you nor your child will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator understand the experiences of home-based literacy in inner city private school African American adolescents.

Confidentiality of you and your child's research records will be strictly maintained by removing you and your child's name. Any identifiers will be replaced with a pseudonym. Consent forms will be stored in a separate location from the interview documentation and will be stored in a locked file. Your child's responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others. Your responses will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your child at any time without penalty. For interviews, questionnaires or surveys, your child has the right to skip or not answer any questions they prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your child's grades or academic standing.

If there is anything about the study or your child's participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Lupita-Maria Matadi, at lupitamaria.garza17@my.stjohns.edu,

St. John's University 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439 or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Lisa Bajor, at bajorl@stjohns.edu, St. John's University, Sullivan Hall 4th Floor, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens NY, 11439.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

<u>Agreement to Participate</u>

Yes, I agree to have my **son/daugther** participate in the study described above.

Parent's Signature	Date

Yes, I agree to allow the researcher permission to **video and audio record** sessions with my child.

Parent's Signature	Date

Participant Assent Form

Dear Participant:

You have been selected to participate in a research study to learn more about the home-based literacy experiences (reading, writing, listening and speaking at home) of inner city private school African American adolescents. This study will be conducted by Lupita-Maria Matadi, Department of Education Specialties and Counseling, St. John's University, as part of her doctoral dissertation work. Your parent(s) know I am talking with you about the study. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in it.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed and asked to explain the role literacy (reading, writing, listening and speaking) plays in your home, the impact of literacy on your English class performance, and your relationship with literacy in and out of your English classroom. Your interview responses will be video and audio recorded virtually through Zoom and Dolby On. Participation in this interview will involve a minimum of 20 minutes of your time to complete. The recordings will be kept in a locked file and destroyed after the study is complete.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by removing your name. Any identifiers will be replaced with a pseudonym. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For the interview, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your grades or academic standing.

Agreement to Participate

Yes, I agree to participate in the study described above.

Participant's Signature	Date

Yes, I agree to allow the researcher permission to **video and audio record** sessions with me.

Interview Protocol (Questions)

Exposure to Literacy Prior to School

1. Were you read to as a child prior to attending school for the first time?
2. How frequently were you read to?
3. What types of printed material were read?
4. Was reading encouraged in your home? How?
5. What type of language was used at home? (Slang, Standard American English, etc.)
6. Do you feel being able to read and speak (literacy) was considered important in your home?
7. How was this importance (or lack thereof) expressed by your parent(s)/guardian(s)?
8. Were there other things your parents did to develop your language and reading skills (Leapfrog, television, etc)?
9. What type of education did your parents have?

Literacy Development

10. By what age did you know the alphabet by heart?
11. Were you able to spell your own name prior to attending school?
12. Were you able to write your name and address before attending school?
13. Were you able to read before you attended school?

Home and School Literacy Exposure

14. What type of books, if any, did you read as a child?
15. What, if any, was your favorite book and why was it your favorite?
16. Was "environmental print" a focus of learning to read at home? (The print that appears in signs, labels, and logos. Street signs, candy wrappers, labels, etc.)
17. What, if any, types of books were you exposed to at home? At school?
18. Did you have a library at home (collection of books in one place in your home)?
19. How often did you visit the public library prior to attending school?
20. How often did you visit the public library while attending school?
    a. Can you tell me about that book?
21. What Eurocentric books have you read for school?
22. Did the books you read at school connect to you personally/ culturally?
23. Where do you complete your writing assignments at home?
24. How have you received support from your parents/guardian on your writing assignments?
25. Was school more important in elementary, middle, or high school?
26. When did you receive the most homework support?

Literacy Socialization

27. How did your skill, or lack of skill, in literacy (reading, writing, and speaking) influence your relationship with teachers and other students?
28. Do you remember having any conflicts with your parents related to the way you spoke (used language) at home?

29. Have your teachers ever told you that your use of language was not appropriate or incorrect in school?
30. If they did, how did this make you feel? How did this make you feel about them?
31. Do you remember having any conflicts with your teachers related to the way you spoke (used language) at school?
32. How did your close relatives influence your academics and socialization?
33. What would you change about the way you learnt to read/write? Why?
34. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Do you have anything else that we haven't discussed that you'd like to share about your literacy experiences?

APPENDIX G
Institutional Review Board Approval

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Aug 27, 2020 12:28 PM EDT

PI: Lupita-Maria Matadi
CO-PI: Lisa Bajor
Education Specialties

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2021-15** *UNDERSTANDING INNER CITY AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT EXPOSURES TO LITERACY*

Dear Lupita-Maria Matadi:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *UNDERSTANDING INNER CITY AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT EXPOSURES TO LITERACY*. The approval is effective from August 26, 2020 through August 25, 2021

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

Marie Nitopi, Ed.D.
IRB Coordinator

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