“All the trappings of racism are here and I live in them”: Resistance, Counterspace, and Identity Socialization as Afro-Caribbean Women Raise Second-Generation Immigrant Sons and Grandsons in the Racialized U.S. South

Dissertation Abstract
Michelle Grace-Williams
Department of Instruction and Teacher Education

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

Key words: Racism, racialization, Afro-Caribbean immigrants, Jamaican immigrants, ethnic-racial socialization, counterspace, counter-narratives, social justice, critical race, Black Feminism