

“I DIDN’T KNOW THEY MADE MORE CINDERELLA STORIES, AND CHANGE THE
COLOR”: COUNTERSTORIES FROM AN AFTER SCHOOL BOOK CLUB”

By

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ABSTRACT

“I DIDN’T KNOW THEY MADE MORE CINDERELLA STORIES, AND CHANGE THE COLOR”: COUNTERSTORIES FROM AN AFTER SCHOOL BOOK CLUB”

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In this study, I examine how three African American girls who participated in a multi-cultural after school book club make sense of race and gender as they read versions of the Cinderella story in which the Cinderella character is Black¹. Analysis of data from interviews and book club discussions suggests that adolescent African American females expand their repertoire of female gender roles when exposed to Pan-African Cinderella’s by taking up the texts in ways that both challenge and reinforce family-based female gender roles. I explore the implications of these findings for our understanding of the reading experiences of urban African-American female adolescents.

Keywords: adolescent literacy, multicultural folktales, book club, multicultural education, critical race feminism

¹ In this study, I use “African American” to indicate the racial and ethnic background of the participants and myself, and “Black” to indicate the people and places of the global African

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

CRF: Critical Race Feminism

Introduction

Advocates of African American and African children's literature assert that folklore portraying feminine ideals of beauty as White alienate female readers of color (Christensen, 1995). This is especially relevant in the Cinderella fairytale, numerous retellings of which depict the protagonists as European, thus making it the normative version. In comparison, less attention is paid to the African American and African versions of this story, and their effects on African American female readers. While literacy researchers have sought to understand the reading experiences of African American students, and of male readers particularly, less attention is paid to the representations of African American females in children's literature, or how African American female readers make sense of these images (Brooks, 2006). Therefore, there is a gap in the field of literacy research; specifically, a lack of analysis of the raced and gendered identity construction of African American females through an examination of their representations in African American and African Cinderella retellings.

The present study examines how three young women in middle school negotiate their ideas of race, gender, and beauty through participation in an after school book club. In doing so, the study will contribute to a better understanding of the intersection of race and gender in literacy engagement. This paper seeks to answer the following question: How do African-American female adolescents negotiate ideas of race and gender, through their engagement with African American and African Cinderellas?

More than any other genre in children's literature, folklore is given an explanatory power that, left unquestioned, can normalize the depictions of people in the story, whether or not these depictions are fair, representative, or accurate (Christenson, 1994). Because most people encounter folklore early in the process of learning to read, the socialization work folklore

engages in often seems natural, unlearned, and a part of the reading experience, and thus questions of how it may perpetuate hegemonic discourses can go unnoticed for some readers (Heath, 2011, in Wolf, Coates, Enciso, Jenkins, 2011). Another important stage of socialization occurs during the developmental period where students begin to questions who they are, who they want to be as adults, and, sometimes, how depictions of people like them can affect them, which is typically referred to as adolescence. The Cinderella story itself can be read as a hegemonic story about the role of women in Western society, yet this story is most famously known in the U.S.A through the Disney version, which some suggests serve to tell women that to be beautiful and therefor worthy of male attention, is to be blonde and blue-eyed. This leaves women who do not fit this image in a conundrum: Where do women who look like me fit into the hierarchy of desirability? In this study, I chose to examine adolescent's engagement with folklore because exploring topics such as race and gender identity becomes especially salient during this period for these preteens. In addition, folklore contains familiar stories, which can help students begin to interrogate literature.

In the following article, I use Critical Race Feminism (CRF) as a theoretical framework to review the literature on African Americans children's literature and, specifically, to describe the archetypes of African American females. Next, I discuss the effects of the scant positive images of African American women in children's literature. Then, I assess CRF's application to urban youth literacy engagements. Finally, I examine the discourses of three African American females for themes of race and gender identity to theorize about the role of literature and identity in the literate lives of urban youth today. I discuss the findings in the context of CRF. In doing so, this study hopes to advance the argument for increased attention to the intersections of race and gender in children's literature.

Literature Review

Historically, the issue of race in African American folklore has been an important topic to both the African American community and to those outside of the African-American community. In her 1965 article, “The All White World of Children’s Books”, Nancy Larrick wrote that, “Integration may be the law of the land, but most of the books children see are all white...There is no need to elaborate upon the damage, much of it irreparable, to the Negro child’s personality” (Osa, 1995, Page 1). In the decades that followed, publication of children's literature exploded, yet still books on or about African American children lagged behind representative portions, meaning that the percentage of African American books published annually was smaller than that of the percentage of African Americans in the United States. In 1965, the Council on Interracial Books for Children formed, with the following mission statement:

“[w]e believe books can do much to create the will and enlarge the capacity to achieve an integrated society. Our aim is therefore to encourage the writing, production, and effective distribution of books to fill the needs of non-White and urban poor children. Through such books, we think all American children will gain a fuller awareness and a keener understanding of one another. (*Interracial Books for Children*, 1967, Page 9, in Sims-Bishop, 2007, Page 85)

While this statement is very inclusive, it leaves out how these books might help children to better understand themselves, in addition to being better able to understanding other children. It is interesting to note here that the Negro child is depicted as gender-less, within the context of race, which may work to position African American females as the same as males, a positioning CRF would tell us is problematic because it does not represent the differences and complexity of African American female realities.

Given the formation of the CIBC, it would seem that the decades of the mid-twentieth century were receptive to new, more positive images of African American children; yet, in 1984, Larrick again publicly lamented the proportion of children's books by and for African Americans (Gary, 2009). The criticism towards the world of children's books remained race-specific, with the issue of gender remaining on the back burner. This does harm to those who inhabit a marked category in both race and gender; namely, African American females.

In fact, Bishop (2008), suggests that, "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part" (Sims-Bishop, 2008, Page 24). In essence, the ways in which literature is used to shape the racial identification processes of African American children has been a topic of debate for much of the twentieth century. However, significant gaps still exist in examining how the gendered identities, in addition to the raced identities of adolescents are shaped in response to African American Cinderellas, which might better mirror their realities than European Cinderellas. A lack of attention to African American females, their narratives, representation, or even their roles within literature ignores the literacy needs of African American females.

Archetypes of African American Females in Children's Literature: Girls?

Historically, the issue of race in children's literature has been a more widely researched topic than the intersectionality of race and gender to both the African-American community and to those outside of the African-American community (Cai, 1998; Harris, 1992; Osa, 1995; Sims-Bishop, 2007; Smith, 2004)². This means that there has been a lack of attention to African American girls in folktales. African American scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and Arna Bon Temps have long argued for the need for African Americans to produce childrens' literature that provides positive images of African Americans for those who could both read and afford to buy the *Brownie Books* magazines (DuBois, 1919; Bontemps, 1944; Harris, 1992; Osa, 1995; Shannon, 1982). Such literature is seen as providing a critical counter-narrative to the White-dominated childrens' literature in which African Americans are either invisible or depicted through negative and degrading stereotypes (Harris, 1992). This situation is applicable to the Cinderella story, in that of the over 400 variations of the story, less than half center on African or African American versions of the story. The question of where these depictions leave the African American female adolescent has yet to be fully explored by the children's literature community. In addition, the time has come to explore race and gender from an intersectional perspective, given that relatively few scholars address the ways European Cinderella stories overlook the girls who do not resemble European Cinderellas, such as girls of color, and more specifically, African American females.

Currently, scholars such as Cai (2002) draw attention to the issue of race by calling for a closer examination of the effects of multicultural children's literature. Suggesting that

² While this study focuses on African American and African folklore, because it is often conceived of as a part of the umbrella term "multicultural children's literature" within the wider field of children's literature, it is necessary to discuss African American children's literature within these contexts.

multicultural literature is a political movement to claim space for historically marginalized parallel cultures (Hamilton,), Cai (2002) argues that the imbalance of power contained in gross misrepresentations of these cultures must be questioned by voices from these communities. Thus, while it is critically important to study race in children's literature, it is imperative to study it with an intersectional lens focused on race in addition to other identity markers, such as gender. The lack of a central focus on narratives of females of color is highly problematic when viewed in this light.

Given the historic importance of positive images in both the African-American women's and children's literature communities, it seems telling that the same emphasis has not been put on producing positive images for African-American girls specifically (Evans-Winters, 2005??). In fact, Harris (1992) suggests that the images of African-American femininity in children's literature have built explicitly on negative stereotypes such as "the Mammy" in Elsie Dinsmore (Finley, 1868), and Epaminondas and His Auntie (Bryant, 1938). The lack of positive images of African-American femininity is especially poignant for African-American girls. Because representations of beauty have been traditionally important for females, how African American women are portrayed in children's literature in relation to notions of beauty is especially relevant to how African American girls will respond to such literature. The shortcomings of the literature on African American females includes a lack of attention to the raced and gendered narratives of African American females, thus rendering more challenging for researchers seeking to investigate their narratives, representations, or roles in literature to fully do so.

The scarcity of any images, let alone positive images of African American women reflective of African American notions of beauty speaks volumes about the historic interpretations of what it means to be an African American girl. Therefore more research is

needed to better understand how audiences, especially African American adolescent females, make sense of these representations, in terms of race, gender, and beauty.

For the purposes of this study, multicultural Cinderellas are those versions of the Cinderella story that feature non-European protagonists. Further, we do not know how African-American girls take up these stories in ways that both challenge and reinforce family-based, traditional gender roles for women.

Race, Beauty, and the Dominant Discourse on African American Females

When we look at the role of race in twentieth-century children's literature, the issue of negative images of African-American children becomes complicated through the topic of gender. Because feminine gender roles have traditionally been constructed around the issue of beauty, topics associated with beauty such as ideals of beauty become central to the concept of femininity, especially in the context of race. Because historic images of African-American women have cast African American women as anti-feminine, their beauty and therefore, their status as women, is depicted as in jeopardy. It is therefore important to understand how the dominant discourse on African-American women is one that shapes them as ugly and unfeminine, in contrast to White women and other women of color. In this light, the work of DuBois and others to interject a discourse on African-American children as beautiful can be seen as a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse on African-Americans. However, without a focus on gender, this counter narrative may not be fully activated in analysis of images of African-American females in children's literature. Indeed, DuBois' emphasis on African American children as "warriors" may bespeak an implicit focus on African American males (Smith, 2004). CRF would suggest that this is an instance of race being privileged over gender, which creates a false reality, given the constant shifting of circumstances in which differences in social location between African American men and women can create distinct challenges for each, so that ranking one category as systematically more important, without consideration of multiple others, is a misrepresentation of social reality. In essence, we have to consider the complexity of the African American female experience as simultaneously similar and distinct from the African American male experience.

To understand how beauty is central to constructing femininity, and to defining women, we must first understand the dominant narrative of African-American women. This narrative of African-American woman has historically comprised three major tropes: Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel. In the Mammy trope, the African-American woman is conceived of as a hyperactive caregiver who lavishes attention on the white family that employs her, to the exclusion of caring for her own family (Ladson Billings, 2009). The image of Mammy is fat, ugly, and dark-skinned (Ladson Billings, 2009). While she is feminine in that she is a mothering figure, it is not at all clear that Mammy is a woman in any other sense. Though depicted as the ultimate mother she is also a largely sexless character who lacks any sensuality or sexuality. This trope is embodied in children's literature through characters such as Mammy in the *Blue Magic* series of the publication *St. Nicholas*, whose over-protectiveness of her White charge is demonstrated on a trip to the Nile. Mammy states, "Lawdy, Lawdy! One of dem heathen men! Hyah, you! Git out ob here! Did n'I allus says dis was a onnatchel lan'? Oh, Massa Fen! Honey chile, doan't let dat air E-gypshun critter tech you!" (Sims-Bishop, 2008, Page 24). It should be noted that the exaggerated version of African American Language used by some White writers to 'demonstrate' the ignorance of African Americans is used here to depict Mammy as unintelligent, as well. Sims-Bishop suggests that the use of this trope indicates "the persistent presence of stereotyped images of Blacks and assumptions of natural superiority of whites that lingered in one form or another in children's literature through at least the first five or so decades of the twentieth century" (Sims-Bishop, 2008, Page 24). The use of tropes to negatively characterize African American women has a long, and yet recent, history in children's literature.

The Sapphire trope is a woman who is ornery, vengeful, and difficult at every chance, and this meanness serves to make her ugly. Again, we see that these are all unattractive traits,

especially for women, and in the case of Sapphire, they serve to make her repugnant to marriageable men, and beyond love or sympathy (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Recently, the Sapphire can be seen in the image of Queen Constantina in Rodger's & Hammerstein's on-screen adaptation of *Cinderella*, played by Whoopi Goldberg, whose attempts to badger, scold, and control her son and husband are her defining characteristics (Lacey, 2008). Thus, the trope of Sapphire continues to exist, and purport negative ideas about African American women within contemporary Cinderella stories.

The third and final trope most often associated with African-American women is that of Jezebel, a hyper-sexualized woman who uses her prowess to manipulate, control, and deceive those around her. Physically, Jezebel is imagined as mulatto, perhaps with more physical attributes of white beauty ideals such as fairer skin and straighter hair than the Mammy trope, but with a voracious sexual appetite that places her outside the sphere of proper womanhood. All three tropes cast African-American woman in an overly deterministic and negative light, but more importantly, unfeminine. It is Sapphire's meanness that makes her ugly, and it is Mammy's sexlessness that prevents her from being identified as feminine. Finally, Jezebel's sexuality is regarded as a source of male manipulation, and therefore devilment. Due to Jezebel's highly sexualized nature, she is very rarely seen in children's literature historically, but can be witnessed in contemporary examples of youth media aimed at teens through shows such as MTV's "Confessions of a Video Vixen" (Ford, 2010). It is through these tropes that we can see how African-American women are frequently depicted as unfeminine not only in children's literature, but also in youth media aimed at older teens.

The predominance of these tropes validates the racial hierarchy in which White women are viewed as the true image of womanhood and femininity while African American women are

subordinated to this image. The absence of alternative visions of African American women beyond such stereotypes in children's literature leaves readers with a very limited view of what African-American women are and can be, and with few positive images of African-American women with which to combat the pervasive negative stereotypes that exist in the broader American cultural repertoire. By studying African-American adolescent females' responses to African American and African Cinderellas, we may be able to understand how they interpret White and African-American ideals of beauty, in addition to how they develop positive racial and gender identity. Such explorations can help us understand the potential and limitations of folklore that focuses specifically on race for addressing the self-image and literacy needs of African American girls. Because the community of scholars of African-American children's books of the early twentieth century such as DuBois (1919) and Bontemps (1944) have not historically foregrounded a conception of race that is entangled with ideas of gender, this issue is ripe for current exploration. Without paying attention to this issue, it might be difficult to ask questions such as, "In what ways has the field of children's literature articulated critical stances toward race and gender?", or, "How is the intersection of race and gender represented in the field of children's literature?", or, "How might critical attitudes toward race eclipse issues of gender?"

Critical Race Feminism: A New Lens for Children's Literature

In order to explore such responses, I draw on Evans-Winters' (2005) use of the theory of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) in urban education, which was inspired by the earlier work of Adrien Wing (2003). CRF, in part, aims to create a space to examine gender in conjunction with race, class, and economic status in national and international contexts through the lenses of intersectionality, voice, and narrative (Wing, 2003). By highlighting the notion of intersectionality, CRF promotes the idea that the lived experiences of women of color are influenced by the dual oppressions of being marginal in both the race and gender categories. CRF is particularly relevant for understanding how African American girls make sense of and respond to images of African-American women in children's literature due to its focus on voice, or the idea that the people most marginalized have valuable experiential knowledge. With its emphasis on intersectionality, CRF helps to illuminate the complexity of African American girls' responses to images of both White and Black women in such texts. In particular, it points to the need to consider how African American girls variously take up, adapt, and resist ideals of White beauty, tropes of White and Black femininity, and images that seek to counter or reinforce both. CRF also highlights the importance of considering how African American girls construct ideals of African American womanhood from their interactions with African American women and others in their everyday experiences.

Critical Race Feminism Adapted to Education & Literacy

Much of the literature surrounding the educational experiences of urban African-American female adolescents is focused on the drop out or teen mothering rates. Evans-Winters (2005) suggest that this is because education researchers see race, gender, and schooling inequalities through a lens of pathology. Research from this lens emphasizes the cultural and individual characteristics of people of color, while pushing the issues of racism and sexism to the periphery of the conversation. CRF, with its emphases on the intersection of race and gender, the narratives of Black women, and the experiential knowledge present in Black women's communities, is a theoretical framework uniquely positioned to analyze African American female youth engaging with multicultural literature. Because of its focus on the how images African-American girls are constructed, a CRF analysis can provide insight on the construction and reconstruction of African-American adolescent girls' ideas about gender, race and their intersections. In this paper, like Evans-Winters, I am adapting the theory of CRF to the area of literacy engagement, in order to better describe the complexity of the literacy practices of urban youth.

As a leading theorist of Black Feminist Thought, Collins (2000) argues that the oppressions of race and gender are mutually-constructed, intersecting systems of power. Because African-American and African women have unique experiences at this intersection, they have created worldviews out of a need for self-definition as well as to work on behalf of social justice. Because the epistemologies of first-wave feminism tend to describe the world of non-African American females, and the race-based epistemologies often used in education are concerned with the barriers that negatively impact African American males, there is a need for a

theoretical framework that looks specifically at the experiences of African-American females in schools through the lenses on intersectionality, narrative, and voice.

To answer this need, Evans-Winters (2005) adapted the theory of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) to the study of education, which contends that African-American females face unique challenges in schools, and that they develop equally particular strengths for managing and overcoming these challenges. Scholars such as anthropologist Signithia Fordham (1993) have suggested that in the folk theories of urban schools, African-American females are characterized as loud, aggressive, and masculine, in part to be heard in classrooms which would otherwise marginalize them. Other scholars, such as O'Connor (1997) and Henry (1998), have suggested that high-achieving African-American females embrace strong and positive female identity, and that this in fact contributes to their school resilience and success. From this literature, it is clear that gendered and raced ideas of identity play a large role in how African-American adolescent females navigate school.

Methods

To best explore these issues and capture African American girls' own voices I conducted a participant-oriented intrinsic case study, using one school as a case, that examines how African American middle school girls construct their ideas about gender and race as they respond to multicultural folk tales in an after-school book club (Glesne, 2006).

Site

The book club met once a month over a period of three months. As a full participant, I was facilitator of the book club, and so responsible for book selection, read-alouds, facilitating discussion, and providing prompts for writing assignments. The book club was part of a student

organization at Midwestern University³ focused on mentoring middle school girls from a K-8 school in a large urban center in the Midwest. The organization was founded in 2006 and is directed by a professor in the English department. Some of the objectives of the program include: to expose young Black females to an array of educational, cultural, and artistic opportunities through mentor interactions with Black female undergraduate and graduate students; to build healthy self-concepts, esteem, and refinement among participants; and to promote accessibility of higher education and increase awareness of various career opportunities among participants. It was in my capacity as graduate co-coordinator of this program that I first met the girls who would become my participants, and so co-constructors of my research.

Program

During the school year when I collected data, I was, and still am, the graduate co-coordinator of this program. As graduate co-coordinator, I was responsible for planning fundraising and co-coordinating events, such as the girls' overnight campus visit. I also attended mentoring sessions with the girls on Saturday each month, and participated in farm visits, bowling, and various activities with over thirty girls over the course of the school year. Because I initially met the three girls who would become participants in my study in the context of the mentor group, I felt it was easier to become reacquainted with them through the book club than it would have been to meet new people to talk about such personal topics as race, class, and gender.

Researcher Role

While I found that my roles as researcher, mentor, and facilitator opened up opportunities for me to talk to the girls, it also posed challenges in that, as a facilitator, I had goals and

³ In the interest of protecting the privacy of my research co-constructors and learning community, I have used pseudonyms for the names of people and places.

expectations of what I wanted the girls to learn and how I wanted them ultimately to respond to the books. When the girls did not respond as I expected, I was initially disappointed in their responses and felt they lacked the sophistication that I had hoped. In order to overcome this negative positioning of the participants I had to question my own interpretations. This was furthered by on-going conversations with colleagues about my initial findings that led me to rethink my analysis and to work harder to listen more carefully to the voices of my participants.

Participants

My study participants were African American girls who participated in the DOC book club and attended middle school in inner-city Midwestville. There were three main participants who consistently attended book club. The oldest at twelve, Inez, aspired to be a fashion designer. The doodles I found in her journals were frequently sketches of outfits, and it was clear that style was an important part of how she viewed the world. Inez was often picked up by her mother, and spoke frequently of looking after her little brother. Her engagement in the book club was consistently focused on wider issues of popular culture. At ten, the youngest participant, Charlotte, was the vivacious cousin of Inez. Often quickest to respond, Charlotte enjoyed book club discussions where she got to share about her life at church, and family relationships like those between herself and her sister. Charlotte wanted to be a singer, and a lawyer when she “grows up”. She was also the most effervescent and cheerful member of the book club, and quite loquacious. Finally, my third participant, Alicia, was eleven, and often shared her experiences with her all-girl classroom in book club discussions. Alicia aspired to be a fashion designer and singer, and often was the voice of dissent in book club discussions. She often sought to bring out both sides of any issue and was not afraid to challenge other’s ideas for the sake of discussion. Alicia was a balancing force in our book discussions, and often excited to engage in debate.

Data Collection

Interviews and participant observations comprised the central data collection strategies. Though the book club extended over a three-month period, due to several contingencies related to the school site, I was actually only able to conduct three book discussions of three different texts. As part of these discussions, I conducted group read-aloud of one text per meeting, which lasted an hour and a half. After the read-alouds, we discussed each text as a group for twenty to forty minutes, starting with questions such as “What is the main point of this story?” The discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. They included questions about the literary elements of the story, such as, “Which characters are most/least like you?”, depictions of beauty in the story, such as, “What makes this Cinderella beautiful?”, and depictions of women and men, such as, “What are the main concerns of the main women in the story?” I posed most of the questions, which were sometimes taken up and debated by the girls and sometimes not. Often, Alicia bucked the trends of the conversations to bring in other questions, which broadened the perspectives of the group. When this occurred, the girls were able to explore ideas with one another without much assistance from my prompting questions. This follows the traditional book club approach of student-led discussions, and demonstrated that the girls were comfortable sharing their ideas in a small group setting (Raphael and McMahon, 1994).

I conducted one semi-structured interview for thirty minutes (Seidman, 2006) after each book club meeting with one participant for a total of three interviews total, with one interview of each student. The interviews enabled me to ask the participants about their personal responses and thoughts on the text in a more intimate setting following the small group discussion. The interviews included open-ended questions about literacy, gender, and beauty, such as “What

makes Black women beautiful?” as well as a short written statement focused on their personal interpretation of the text before the interview, such as “If you were the villain, what would you do differently?”. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Finally, I provided participants with a writing prompt for journaling, such as, “If you were in the main character’s shoes, what would you have done differently?” after each group discussion. The written response to the discussion focused on how the participants saw themselves in relation to the protagonist of the story in terms of race and beauty. I collected copies of this writing for analysis. For the purpose of this report, the data is focused on the interviews, and group discussions.

Data Analysis

In the first stage of thematic analysis, I listened to the interviews and transcribed them into Word documents, paying special attention to instances where race and gender were jointly discussed. After complete transcription, I carefully reviewed the audio recordings to check the validity of my transcriptions. During the audio-review state, I kept a journal of transcription and interview notes to inform the later stages of coding. Additionally, I used the journal to monitor my stance of reflexivity to ensure accurate representation of the observations of the participants, and to keep the focus of CRF, which were intersectionality, voice, and narrative, at the forefront of my analysis (Glesne, 2006). By critically analyzing my own commitments to the book club and to my participants, I was able to reflect on how our interactions might influence one another, both as African American females, and as adolescents and a young woman. After I created the transcripts, I inductively coded them in several stages.

In the first stage of coding, I analyzed the transcripts for repeated words and phrases surrounding the joined topics of race, gender, and beauty. Based on multiple reviews of the

transcripts, I developed word lists for each preliminary code. For example, I identified one preliminary code as “beauty.” This code included references to words and phrases like “ugly”, “pretty”, and “lookin’ decent”, which the girls used to describe the females in their classes, family, and communities. These words comprised the word list associated with the code “beauty”. I also checked the consistency of the coding by comparing phrases and words that were like-coded. This ensured that the most appropriate codes were consistently used for similar data.

For the second round of coding, I used inductive coding to generate subcodes to further refine the major codes. Because the “Beauty” category was the most frequently coded for in the first round of analysis, I began to look for specific instances or clusters where beauty was highly coded to further explore the category, and to see where it was connected to other categories such as race and gender. On closer inspection, these passages included additional phrases the girls used such as “nice”, “mean”, “kind” and “nasty”, which created sub-categories such as “Beauty-Attitude” and “Beauty-Behavior.” In addition, these subcategories began to overlap with the race category, which showed me how these topics were connected through conversation. Creating these subcategories indicated that beauty was not simply an observation of another person, but also a result of specific behaviors and attitudes in addition to physical appearance. In the analysis stage, these subcategories allowed me to see where the categories overlapped to suggest differing gender roles for African American women in the girls’ conversation.

In the final phase of coding, I focused on locating places where the “Nice/Mean” dichotomy surfaced because it seemed to be the most frequent way that participants talked about different types of African American women or ideas about femininity. In the second round of coding this dichotomy emerged as discussions of what “good” and “bad” women “did.” I hoped

to find a pattern in when and how this characterization came about in conversation. In using this single code, I was able to uncover that the instances where the nice/mean contrasts were made were almost exclusively around non-racialized topics. These topics centered on traditional roles for women like those of wife and mother, and the characteristics embodied by these roles, such as obedience, the importance of education, and temperament. These topics often arose around discussions of differences between Cinderellas and their stepmothers and stepsisters. In fact, in these instances, the dialogue tended to center around traditional roles for women, such as that of daughter, mother, and wife. This led me to use these roles as sub-categories such as “obedience,” “importance of education,” and “temperament” for the larger categories such as “Gender.” I used narrative vignettes to display the data, and drew conclusions based on the frequency of usage of each category, which answered the research question by showing which types of gender roles were most prevalent.

I checked the strength of my interpretations throughout the analysis in several ways. First, triangulating the interview, discussion, and written data enabled me to cross-check my interpretations and to identify disconfirming evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In addition, I engaged in on-going conversations with colleagues in which I presented my initial analyses. My colleagues challenged the strength of the evidence I presented and asked me to go back to the data to reconsider my analyses (Glesne, 2006).

Findings

One goal of this study was to understand how African American female adolescents negotiate issues of gender and race as they read multicultural folktales. While some multicultural educators believe that such literature can facilitate positive identity development, I did not find the connections between the youth and the text to be obvious or clear-cut. Instead, I found that the relationships the participants developed with the black Cinderella texts were complex. When the girls respond to the textual Cinderella, they articulate very traditional gender roles for women. However, when they talk about black Cinderellas in the context of their lives they articulate action-oriented gender roles for women in a positive light. This suggests to me that they extend their ideas about race and gender roles to both traditional, that is family-based, and non-traditional, that is, individually-based, ideas. Although, it must be noted that the Cinderella folktale, even when the race of Cinderella is changed, is quite focused on informing the gender identity, instead of the raced and gendered identity of the characters, and thus may limit the girls' ability to bridge the gap between the two types of gender roles. These responses related to three major themes: (1) the girls' view of race as centered on appearance, (2) their reaffirming traditional gender roles in response to the text, and (3) their affirmation of anti-traditional gender roles when discussing their lived experiences. Thus, I found that the girls both noticed and interpreted race in highly nuanced ways. For the sake of clarity, I have listed the titles, authors, and origins of the texts we read in book club in the following table.

Title	Author	Origin
Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters	John Steptoe	South Africa
Cendrillion	Robert San Souci	Martinique
The Gospel Cinderella	Joyce Thomas, David Diaz	Southern U.S

Table 1: Texts read in book club

Race and Beauty: Colorblindness in Observable Features and Physical Differences

In both book club meetings and interviews, the girls talked about notions of race based on observable physical features. By this, I mean that the girls' ideas about race were often expressed through their ideas of physical appearance. For instance, the girls' responses to my questions about the ways in which they thought about race in the Cinderella texts tended to focus on observable physical features of individual characters, such as hair and eye color, but, importantly, without an explicit valuation of blonde hair and blue eyes over brown hair and brown eyes. The following exchange typifies the girls' notions of race:

“Carleen: So, ladies, what were some similarities and differences that you saw between the Disney Cinderella and the Gospel Cinderella?”

“Alicia: Ok... the similarities, was that they were both treated bad by their families. And the differences was that the old Cinderella was white with yellow hair, and the Gossip [Gospel] Cinderella is black with brown hair and brown eyes”.

For Alicia, and the other two girls, the “old” and the “new” Cinderella merely look different. Their hair and eyes are different colors. Neither Alicia nor the other two girls went further in differentiating the “old” and the “new” Cinderellas. Most importantly, during the book club conversation, they did not expressly attach any kind of significance to the differences in the Cinderellas' race. The Cinderella story remained the same, regardless of Cinderella's race. CRF might suggest that this is because, although African American women experience similar oppressions, we do not all interpret or value them the same ways, due to other intersections of identity such as class.

At other times in our conversations, however, the girls expressed an awareness of the different values and cultural norms associated with race, particularly as it was associated with

ideas of beauty. In the following exchange, I attempted to push the girls' understanding of race by asking them to consider whether the assumption that Cinderella is white is problematic:

Carleen: "Is it a bad thing that the only Cinderella people know is yellow-haired and blue-eyed?"

Inez: It's not a good thing, and it's not a bad thing. It's like, it's like Barbie dolls. Like, people, like when I was little I used to really like Barbie dolls, and I would always want to be one, and stuff like that. And then, it's like, because you is, you have, you light skinned and have long hair, then you're a Barbie doll and stuff like that. And that's how it is with Cinderella. People want to be Cinderella and stuff like that, because she was a Cinder girl, I mean she cleaned people and then everything happened out good for her."

In this exchange, Inez is negotiating two different responses to Cinderella. Both of these responses center on race and gender simultaneously: one has to do with White notions of beauty and one deals with how she individually responds to these notions. When Inez first suggests that she's attracted to Barbie because of the ideal of beauty she represents through her blonde hair and blue eyes, she is indicating her awareness of White beauty ideals, and moreover, the value that dominant discourse ascribes to them. CRF might suggest that this is due to the role of the media in perpetuating the feminine ideal as White, to the exclusion of African American women, who are frequently framed using tropes such as Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel. Though in other instances they do not ascribe value to either conventionally conceived of White or Black physical traits, Inez's comments here suggest that the girls are aware of how dominant society ascribes value to these traits. CRF might suggest that this is one form of resistance to multiple oppressions, or one way that women of color refuse to give their power of self-definition to hegemonic discourses.

In a move to discuss both race and gender intersectionality, Inez also highlights her response to one hegemonic discourse within Black community centering on how mainstream beauty ideals are filtered through a specific cultural lens. Her awareness of the intersections of race and gender for African American women are seen in her expression of these beauty ideals with terms such as “light skin-ded” and “long hair”, which reference an cultural code among the African-American community that CRF would suggest is a historical wound left by slavery, and currently perpetuated through constant attacks on African American women through controlling images (Collins, 2006). Specifically, Inez is highlighting the issue of “colorism”, or “...a system that privileges the lighter skinned over the darker skinned within a community of color” (Hunter, 2002). While colorism is rooted in racism, it is not the same, although it can be used to manufacture a structure of privilege based on physical features, which Inez is picking up on here. Because colorism constructs privileges for typically white physical traits, Inez’ comments about light skin can be seen as referencing one particular beauty ideology in the Black community. In this way, Inez is drawing an intersectional connection between race, gender, and beauty by demonstrating her awareness of linkages between White ideals of beauty and how they are taken up in the Black community. This suggests that Inez’ response can be viewed as an instance of intersectionality.

Just as Inez appears aware of discourses of intersectionality, the girls’ apparent ambivalence around issues of race might reflect their awareness of other discourses on race, such as that of colorblindness. This might have been a signal that they notice and respond to the pull of colorblind discourse. In the quote above, Inez first suggests a neutral stance on the blonde and blue-eyed Cinderella. In contrast, one participant responds that, “It’s different! I don’t mean to be racist, but it doesn’t have white people, it has black people in it.” This may suggest that the

act of naming race makes the person doing the naming racist, which Bonilla-Silva (2010) highlighted as a hallmark feature of colorblind discourse. Even when naming physical traits in order to attach a race to a person, which can be a perfunctory act, there is the threat of being labeled racist because one is talking about race. CRF would suggest that this may indicate a strategy of simultaneously expressing and not expressing knowledge through action, perhaps to gain access into a conversation which is rife with hegemonic discourses, or as a way of navigating the discussion in a manner which demonstrates awareness of the discourse without validating it.

We can see this strategy in another instance, specifically, the warm-up discussion preceding the reading of *The Gospel Cinderella* the girls are asked what Cinderella looks like. Alice suggested, “Cinderella? Um...Um, she like, not being racist but um, she's white, and she had yellow hair.” Here, Alicia is actively disclaiming racist motives for noticing the physical features of the Disney Cinderella, and naming her race. This may suggest that, although they may not be comfortable talking about race, nonetheless, the participants have a sophisticated awareness of race and racial discourses, based on comments made about beauty ideals as represented by Barbie. In the following exchange, some of Charlotte’s ideas about race are displayed.

Carleen: Umm, how does it make you feel that all the characters, that there aren’t any white people in the story, like you just told me?

Charlotte: It’s ok.

Carleen: It’s ok? Why is it ok?

Charlotte: It’s like Martin Luther King said, it doesn’t matter the color of your skin, it matters what’s inside your heart.

From this exchange, I might conclude that the participants are responding to the pull of color-blind discourse on race, which some scholars, such as Bonilla-Silva (2009), suggest currently dominates American culture. While Bonilla-Silva (2009) highlights how young White Americans employ a colorblind racist discourse to justify and maintain White privilege without appearing to be racist, my data suggests that young Black Americans might also participate in colorblind discourse when discussing hegemonic narratives such as the Cinderella story. CRF might suggest that this is a strategy which attempts to put African American women's voices into conversations where they have been excluded. Specifically, Inez' first stance of neutrality, followed by her recognition of dominant discourse, and lastly, her suggestions of how communities of color take up dominant notions of beauty follow the pattern of some discursive strategies described by Bonilla-Silva (2009). In fact, Inez's first stance of neutrality is a fundamental element of colorblind discourse. In this instance, Inez uses this discourse to justify her right to talk or not talk about race, which CRF might suggest is an example of using raced and gendered discourse to navigate to a place/a privilege of self-definition.

CRF would suggest that, in contrast to non-Blacks and Whites in Bonilla-Silva's (2010) study, who used colorblind discourse to avoid talk about race, Inez, Alicia, and Charlotte, like other young African-Americans, use the discourse to assert multiple claims about race. These include: that race is based on what people look like, that you can name race without being racist, and that they can choose when to talk, or not talk about race. Because color-blind ideology positions the person who talks about race as racist, it positions Black people as racist for talking about the ways in which structures in society produce disparities in educational opportunity and wealth based on race. This ideology also positions White people as victims of Black Americans' unearned privileges in terms of policies such as affirmative action to manufacture a stance of

reverse-racism. These two stances might be used simultaneously to silence the voices of people of color who speak out against racism in America, thereby questioning or undermining the need for multicultural Cinderellas in the world of children's literature. In my data, the idea that the girls said that changing Cinderella's race does not change the story might similarly reflect how colorblind racism has positioned the girls to avoid acknowledging race to avoid being viewed as racist or attempting to earn privilege, as those are the limits the discourse sets on race. The girls' various positions of acknowledging dominant discourse focus on White beauty, or revealing beauty ideals in communities of color, or even refraining from ascribing value to White features, all demonstrate that, even under the constraints of colorblind discourse, they find ways of talking about race that do not neatly fit into the narrow avenues of this ideology. In some ways, CRF might suggest this is an example of using raced and gendered discourse to develop a discourse of resistance.

Expanding the Trope of the Traditional Cinderellas: Textual Response

While the girls may recognize and resist the color-blind ideology, at times they also embraced and challenged the conventional gender roles associated with the Cinderella stories, which CRF would suggest is a result of them having multiple gender roles to draw from, given the differences in how African American women are portrayed in the media, and how African American women exist in the lived experiences of the girls. When the girls talked about Cinderella in general, they suggest that women should be “obedient”, “respectful”, and “kind”, ideals consistent with traditional view of feminine roles. Even in response to the African-American Cinderellas, the girls describe the gender of the character, and what that suggests about proper behavior for her, more often than her race, and how that might affect her actions. For example, when asked to describe any Cinderella including African-American Cinderellas, Charlotte said, “She's sweet and kind”. At other times, the girls suggested that non-traditional, that is, active, decision-making roles for women were appropriate, depending on the context. Regardless of the race of the different Cinderellas the girls were exposed to in the book club, then, the girls took up both a traditional, family and home-oriented idea of femininity and a non-traditional idea, individual- and work-oriented, for women. CRF might suggest that in the multiple stories, they found an avenue for expressing their myriad experiences of race and gender roles for African American women to include both traditional and non-traditional ideas about women.

It should be noted that the Cinderella folktale in all its forms, does not seem to suggest non-traditional gender roles for women, but instead encourages women to maintain traditional standards of behavior until they are rewarded. Even current feminist retellings of the story, such as “Cinder-Edna” (Jackson & O'Malley, 1998) and “Princess Smartypants” (Cole, 2005), focus

on the women's conduct as an expression of gender without regard to race. For example, the dual plots of "Cinder-Edna" demonstrate that a traditional, passive Cinderella who ends up married to the prince is just as happily married at the end of the story as the progressive, active Cinderella who ends up married to the prince's younger brother, and running an orphanage for kittens. In essence, the Cinderella story is about fulfilling traditional gender roles, but when exposed to it, the girls often articulated both traditional and non-traditional gender roles for women.

According to my data, at times the girls' associate traditional gender roles for women with Black women, but it is not clear that this happened in any systematic way. CRF might suggest that this is a product of the diverse experiences African American women represent, and bring to bear on everyday discussions. As I note above, when asked to describe Cinderella, Charlotte used words like "kind" and "considerate". Significantly, when asked if she thought most black women were kind and considerate, Charlotte responded:

Charlotte: Not, Not all of them (Carleen: Not all of them) only some of them... Like this girl Asia in my class, Ms. Guss said she have like the sweetest temper. She don't get mad no matter if you yell at her or not. She'll just...like once you say something to her or sit down and you mad approach her...all she don't cry or nothing all she will do is try to do right the next time. She sweet, that's all. She never got mad at nobody from what I been seeing."

In this exchange, Charlotte appears to acknowledge that she notices traditional expectations of women in that they should be good-natured and slow to anger. When Alicia expresses that "Only some" Black women fit traditional gender roles, she is acknowledging that there are Black women outside of traditional gender roles, and extending the category of gender roles to include both traditional and non-traditional behaviors for women. This creates a space to

discuss non-traditional gender roles for Black women, if need be. But in the story Alicia tells, her friend “Asia” is an example of a Black female whose even temperedness and refusal to become angry put her in the category of traditional gender roles. It seems that, even though Alicia suggests that not all Black women fit traditional gender roles, there are females in her life that do. CRF would suggest that this is reflective of both her awareness of dominant discourses, and her awareness of how dominant discourses do not match her lived experiences.

In the following exchange, I asked the participants to describe the women in the book in terms of real-life roles for women. In the book *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters*, the main characters are two sisters: Manyara, the mean sister, and Nyasha, the nice sister, a pairing that puts into play the nice/mean dichotomy. The girls must compete to be the prince’s wife, and therefore a queen. Through a series of trials, Nyasha’s demeanor prevails over that of her sister’s, and Nyasha marries to the prince, thus reinforcing the connection of “nice” with femininity as well as reinforcing a narrative in which women are divided from each other through competition for men. CRF would suggest that this maybe reflective of the effects of a dominant discourse that women are always in competition with one another, even across race lines.

Because the story sets up a dynamic of competition between the sisters, the girls picked up the contrasts between the two easily, and even projected their ideas into a hypothetical situation involving the sisters as mothers. In this exchange, it is the traditional category of “mother” that, someone ironically, gives rise to a very anti-traditional idea about what’s right for women to do when.

Carleen: Why would Nyasha be a better mom?

Charlotte: Because Nyasha would be kind to them and correct them, but Manyara would be mean to them, yelling at them like the old Cinderella’s stepmother.

Alicia: Don't give them no break or nothing. Just, keep workin!

Carleen: Ok, so you think Manyara would tell her kids to keep working. Work seems to be an important theme in this story, huh?

Alicia: If she worked her sister like that, um, what makes yall think that she won't work her kids? Like, clean up, and she'd just sit back, like the whole time!

Carleen: Ok. Do you think that parents are supposed to work their kids?

Alicia: They could tell them to clean up, but they ain't gotta work them. Like, if you gotta boyfriend, and he just sit around and eat and sleep and your kids, like run around slaving for yall two, and then, you gotta take responsibility. Like, you gotta tell him 'you gotta pick up too, and if not, you gotta move back with your momma, to yo mamma's house.'

In this exchange, the girls' expression of gender roles for women centers on their roles within the family, which CRF would suggest are important roles for women of color, given their economic history of only having domestic work available to them. However, when the girls talk about parents generally, Alicia suggests that the appropriate action is not for the mother to remain passive and thereby possibly be taken advantage of by a boyfriend who does not help out around the house and thereby does not contribute to the well being of the family. Instead, the appropriate response, according to Alicia, is to be active in either getting help from the boyfriend, or telling him to leave. In either situation, the mother becomes the active protector of her children in opposition to a negligent male, thus displacing the male as the traditional protector of the family. The girls, especially Alicia, seem to attribute value to this position for the mother. CRF might suggest that this is reflective of the matriarchal nature of African American families.

The ideal mother that the girls construct here, thus differs considerably from the notion of femininity promoted in Mufaro's *Beautiful Daughters*. Rather than subjugate herself to winning and keeping a man by being nice, the ideal woman the girls narrate frees herself and her children from men who take advantage of their strength rather than contributing to the family as co-equals. While the girls thus first take up the notion of woman as "nice" and dependent upon a relationship with a man for their definition, they ultimately combine that vision with a notion of woman as also independent, active, and strong. CRF may posit that this represents the product of experiencing African American women as different in reality than in hegemonic discourse, which suggest that these active gender roles are a resources students bring to the discussion on race and gender.

Meanness: The Race/Gender Ambivalence

CRF might suggest that the girls' ambivalent views of the Cinderella stories show how they picked up on the nice/mean dichotomy within the hegemonic discourse on African American women, and how they use their experiences of African American women to combat this discourse. Traditionally, this dichotomy has been used to cast doubt on African-American women's femininity. Because the norm is that females are "nice", words like "mean" often express deviant, or socially unacceptable behaviors for women. While "nice" is the category which denotes socially acceptable behaviors for women, it is one which often only encapsulates the expected behaviors of non-Black women (Troutman, 2010). Defining White femininity in terms of "niceness" is often used to suggest that Black women are not in fact "women" because they are defined by meanness, not niceness. CRF would suggest that in defining Black women, this perception of "meanness" as racially authentic works to create a stereotype of Black womanhood which is based on a category of negative behaviors for women, such as the shrewish and aggressive Sapphire, who is one example of a 'controlling image' (Collins, 2006). In one way, the accepted roles for Black women challenge the accepted "nice" behaviors for women, which could potentially lead to servitude. But on the other hand, these behaviors are also used to imply that Black women are not really women. In this way, the idea of meanness is a major factor in shaping how anti-traditional gender roles are considered acceptable for Black women in America. CRF would suggest that the girls' sophisticated navigation of this topic indicates how it might function as a site of resistance to dominant discourses on African American women.

For the participants, "mean girls" often behaved in ways that were both valued and devalued. Inez, for example, suggested that her favorite character was the evil sister Manyara, "Because it takes guts to be bad!" and "She had guts not to be bad in front of her Dad, and go

into the forest by herself.” Conversely, Charlotte suggested that Manyara was her least favorite character because “she was rude, disobedient, disrespectful. Um, hurtful, displeasing, and RRRude.” In this instance, it seems that meanness is something that some participant puts some value on, while others might suggest is not worth valuing. Overall, it seems that there is no direct link or clear, consistent pattern of how the girls interpret “meanness” in relation to Black women. CRF would suggest that this is reflective of the diversity of experiences represented by African American women’s experiences of multiple oppressions.

When participants discussed how black women came to behave differently than Cinderella, they often demonstrated that there are circumstances that change girls’ behavior toward one another. In the context of Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters, the topic of attitudes came up as one of those circumstances that might have an effect on the ways that girls behave. For example:

Carleen: Okay, so do you think girls naturally have bad attitudes or do you think some girls go through experiences like you said being bullied and picked on that make them into mean girls?

Alicia: Like once you get bullied and picked on it will like change you so you won’t get bullied and picked on no more.

Carleen: Right, right. So do you think that girls are naturally nice and sometimes they have experiences that turn them into a mean person?

Alicia: I think sometimes they have experiences that turn them into a mean person, like if I get bullied on by her and then I’m going...I wanna be a bully so that nobody else won’t bully on me next time.

In this exchange, Alicia articulates that some girls are mean (“wanna be a bully”) as a way of defending themselves (“so that nobody else won’t bully on me next time”). What cannot be discerned here is whether or not Alicia is talking about women generally or black women specifically. It is significant that Alicia locates these responses in the context of type of girls, thereby suggesting that even though they may behave in ways that are traditionally not associated with women, Alicia still believes them to be feminine. This suggests that she has a sense of gender roles that extend beyond the traditional ones most often assigned to women. In sum, when talking about their own lives, the girls describe aggressive behavior toward them as a catalyst for transitioning from nice to mean. The continued focus on behavior seems to suggest that behavior is more important than race when it comes to gender roles. CRF would suggest that the girls’ sophisticated navigation of this topic indicates how it might function as a site of resistance to dominant discourses on African American women.

Conclusion

In this study I have tried to understand the ways African-American middle-school girls construct and reconstruct their ideas about race and gender in response to multicultural folktales in the Cinderella type. My findings suggest that African American girls see race in the Black Cinderella stories and in their lives in insightful ways. Rather than evoking predictable responses that encourage them to construct conventional notions of positive images of African-American women, the Black Cinderella texts were taken up by the girls in complex and often contradictory ways that both ran counter to and reinforced the ideas about African-American women that they constructed in light of their everyday lives. This ultimately suggests that there are limits to merely changing the race of the folktale characters.

Such findings, however, remain highly tentative due to the limitations of study. The study included only three participants and examined their responses to only three texts in three book club discussions. In addition, I was an inexperienced book club leader. I was not able to engage the participants in the type of sustained and substantive discussions that I had initially hoped. Both the study's small size and my own inexperience significantly limit the insights that can be drawn from the study. To theorize, this study suggests that culturally-responsive texts can inform African-American adolescent readers' sense of race and gender in important ways. Given these limitations, the study thus raises more questions for both book club facilitators and researchers than definitive claims about the experiences of African American girls with multicultural literature. I explore these questions below.

For book club facilitators, the study points to the need to consider using folktales texts that differ from the mainstream version in more than one way. For example, if race is connected to gender, and they are both connected to class, national origin, and sexual orientation, then in

order to accurately portray the complexity of identity formation at the crossroads of all of these, it is necessary to have characters which differ from the mainstream Cinderella in more than one of these ways.

For future book club leaders, it is important to consider questions of how you actually engage children and youth with questions of race that go beyond them acknowledging change in race, and how you get them to talk about what that means. In this study, I found, for example, that the girls did not explicitly make the connection between meanness and African-American women, or meanness and women in general. I cannot be sure whether or not this issue resonated with them personally or that they recognized the connection between the trope, images of African-American women, and their lives. In order to help students parse out the differences between women and African-American women, there need to be contrasting books that provide youth with racial and gender differences to help draw out distinctions in their ideas about women at large, and women of specific cultural groups. For some students, this may provide the basis for analysis and comparison to sharpen their ideas. Additionally, book club leaders may have to push for them to think about their ideas of women in general, and be more explicitly about how they see women in general and in relation to black women specifically.

The challenge of researching one's own race, and especially in a segregated city like Midwestville, and a racially homogenous Afro-centric school like Midwest K-8 means that you have to raise issues you did not think you had to. For instance, because the participants do not have inter-racial interactions on a regular basis, it was challenging to get them to articulate their ideas about race. Because many people around them are also African-American, these settings can serve as ideal situations to help develop positive race and gender identities. It also means that the girls often do not see their lives as racialized. For future book club leaders, it may be

important to help students talk through and document their initial perceptions about race prior to entering complex conversations about race and gender.

Implications for future research include the need to consider how racially different characters may be considered by the students. Although the differences in race and culture were not interpreted as affecting the story, across the titles, shifts in characters generated complex views of Black female gender roles. The differences in the casts of the books opened opportunities to discuss non-traditional family structures, such as blended families, and at time, the anti-stereotypical roles for Black women in these circumstances. Additionally, this study raises questions about the potential of using Cinderella stories to develop positive identity among African American girls. It suggests that without a focus on gender in addition to race, researchers can end up re-purposing hegemonic ideals about the perfect woman to a different audience. It appears that even when the Cinderella tale is changed to embody different races, cultures, languages, and family structures, the myth itself may not lend itself to the development of positive racial and gender roles for African-American adolescent females in an urban schooling context.

Finally, the differences in how students interpret culture, language, and character shifts in pan-African Cinderellas suggest that there is more work to be done to understand several questions. For example, why is it that the students were very responsive to questions of characters and their roles in family structures? Further, how might they understand issues of race and gender as they affect family situations? Finally, what might it mean for diverse representations of women's roles in children's literature if there are no feminist, and non-White Cinderellas? While there are several feminist re-tellings of the story, I have not yet come across a Cinderella story that encompasses both a racial shift and a gender role shift. Without

modifying both race and gender, it seems that even ethnically diverse retellings can perpetuate stereotypical views of women's roles in society.

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