“READIN’ SISTAHS AFTER SCHOOL: COUNTERSTORIES FROM AN ALL BLACK GIRL BOOK CLUB”

By

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ABSTRACT

"READIN' SISTAHS AFTER SCHOOL: COUNTERSTORIES FROM AN ALL BLACK GIRL BOOK CLUB"

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This study uses ethnographic tools to analyze one after-school Black girl book club. It addresses the question, "How do the students construct raced and gendered identities as they engage with texts?" While some studies highlight the need for teachers to employ culturally relevant curricula, more studies are required to illuminate how students themselves define which texts are culturally sustaining. Drawing on Gee's model of discourse as type of toolkit, this study investigates the stories narrated by six female African American[1] seventh-graders over the course of one school year in a large Midwestern city. Using critical discourse analysis, this study illustrates how written and oral story-telling can support students' critical literacy development. This dissertation expands the literature on identity and literacy. It expands our knowledge about an oral narrative in conversational response to text, thus uncovering the potential of narrative and conversational response to text as a tool for both young adult identity development and teacher education, especially among young women of color studying English in urban settings.

[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 Diaspora.

To Miss Millie, my first advocate, and to all those who advocate, protect, and support Black girls through teaching, researching, parenting, grand-parenting, mentoring, befriending, and aunty-ing, this project is for you.

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PREFACE

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"The book as home, retreat, and reliable source of knowledge could be inciting resistance or rebellion" (Heath, 2011)

"It's REAL LIFE!" Media Literacies of Adolescent Girls

Everyday contexts, such as The Lifetime Movie Network and school dances, give the girls a variety of images of Black womanhood and girlhood that they sought to understand, question, and revise in book club. To prompt their thinking, I used race- and gender-specific texts, such as Mildred D. Taylor's *The Land*, the sequel to the classic *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. In the next passage, the girls discuss one character, Thelma, as an image of Black womanhood.

> Carleen: So what's going on in that passage?
> Tasha: They are saying that a boy is trying to go out with her and he's saying wait until she gets grown and see how its going to turn out.
> Carleen: How do they think Thelma is? What's she like?
> Tasha: That's a weird kind-of-name
> Ebony: I get it, they are talking about… women talk too much
> Carleen: Right!
> Jasmine: They DO talk too much!
> Tasha: No, *YOU* talk too much!

Over the course of our nine months together, the book club girls turned to critical readings of media to help them crystallize and perform their emerging adolescent roles as young women of color. This process came along with the development of critical literacy skills and perspectives. Keisha, a brown-skinned, chubby-cheeked Hello Kitty fan, initially described her

reasons for liking Lifetime movies by saying, “They’re real life! They actually happened!” When this response was examined in discussion with peers and in relation to other texts, Keisha had an opportunity to re-visit her assumption that the events really happened, why a movie was made about them, and why it might resonate with her. Though literature discussion, this study shows club members coming to critical readings of popular culture in ways that as Morrell (2002) suggests, "can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society” (p.72).

In the following pages, I tune in to the frequencies of one group of African American students as they participate in an after-school book club with me. As book club leader, I was careful to separate out my middle-class

In tuning in, I discuss (1) how students’ understandings of race and gender are both confirmed and contested; (2) how analysis of novels and characters is informed by understandings of black womanhood in popular culture; (3) that identity group memberships within groups conditions literacy practices, and (4) their interactions with texts shape and shift the social roles the girls to which the girls are exposed. Historically, the extracurriculum has been conceptualized as a space where those people who are excluded from formal learning situations come together in pursuit of skills, knowledge, and through literacy practices, engage in the work of “defining their own cultural identity” (Gere, 1997). I look for themes of counterstories, which are: “...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 and Yosso, 2002, p. 47).

I sketch the varied and complex pressures facing the girls as preteen, African American adolescent females. Heeding Ladson-Billings' imperative to consider "the broader constructions of Black women as unattractive, undesirable, and morally suspect (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 87) I highlight that "students' performances within the classroom cannot be free from sociopolitical tangles" (Finders, 1997, p. 5). I wonder if and how these tangles' historical and current dimensions shape how black girls use literacy practices to fashion new ideas, such as race-gender roles.

Literacy Environments: Engaging Raced Gender Ideas at Mid-Western K-8

With the exception of Ebony, a slender mahogany-skinned basketball player, the book club girls studied in single-sex classrooms. This was a structural decision the principal explained to me as "helping all students to learn" (Carey, personal communication, 12-4-13). At Midwestern K-8, coed classrooms were reserved for the seventh and eight grade honors classes, and the book club girls, though able students, were not enrolled in these classes. Nonetheless, the girls in book club socialized with boys in the halls between classes, formed friendships, went to the movies on weekends, and had romantic relationships with the boys. In book club, the topics of gender and race were discussed in relation to the girls' school life, the book club texts, and the movies, T.V shows, and music the girls encountered in their everyday lives. For example, when asked for weekly updates, Jasmine replied, "Updates? (*Books fall, giggles*) The updates are at the dance this one nasty trick was dancing on this boy…" and Ebony chimed in "Exactly, Devin! He

was all like *this* and she was all like *that*..."[2] and Jasmine cuts in to say "hip-rollin,' grindin, poppin', twerkin!...You are in the *seventh grade* honey, you are NOT supposed to be doing that!" While the girls' sometimes used negative images of Black femininity ("nasty trick"), they also shifted some discourses for their specific use, such as injecting an age-based rationale for justifying the immorality of their school mate's behavior at the spring dance.

In grappling with these representations, the girls reveal the ways they used literature and literacy for their emotional, social, and individual needs, i.e figuring out whether or not talkativeness is an individual trait or a gender trait, and whether women's talkativeness is innate or ascribed by men. In doing so, they demonstrate that literacy educators need new ways to attend to the cultural and developmental contexts of these learners.

Research on the links between black girls' literacy practices and identities reveals that literacy has a transformative power to change the narratives of their everyday lives (Winn, 2011). Yet, in order to achieve powerful transformations with literacy, students need opportunities to practice and material to read. Because the school's library collections were lost in a natural disaster that destroyed their building, the current library selections were slim pickings, with titles such as *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief, Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, Monster, The House of Dies Drear,* and *The Cay.* With so few books relative to the student body, most were only available for in-class reading, but this did not stop students from seeking out texts for pleasure reading outside of class. The girls in book club reported finding reading material at their local public libraries and bookstores, and in the collections of older family members at home (Carey, field notes, 11-26-12). In response to my

[2] A note on conventions: In this project, I use *italics* for emphasis and *(italics)* to indicate physical movement. I omit line numbers, and use ellipses … to indicate pauses.

question: “What are some things you think you would like to read?” the girls gave varied responses.

Tasha: Mystery like *Pretty Little Liars*!
Jasmine: Oh my God that is so good! How about “The Lying Game?”
Carleen: Ok, so how many people have read “Pretty Little Liars?”
Ebony: I’ve read the first one.
Carleen: So, everyone has read the first one. It was a good one? How about the other book, “The Lying Game”?
Ebony: Oh yes.
Jasmine: There’s a library were you sign-up for the book and if its not on the shelf they can order it from another library for you and you just pick it up.
Carleen: Is that were you tend to get your books from the library? What about you guys?
Ashley: I go to the library!
Carleen: Is that the school library or another library?
Student: No it’s the public library…Mine’s is Cherry Lane Library.

In book club, I tried to supplement their resources by providing the students with new copies of the texts we read together, and free-choice used books to read. They often looked forward to new books, inquired about specific titles and authors, and asked if they could take more than one book, often for a friend or relative. They were voracious, active, and avid readers, with literacy practices both rooted in and spanning across cultural contexts. While literacy researchers such as Weistein (2002) underscore students “self-motivated literacies,” a small and growing body of work examines the school and out of school contexts where these literacies take shape, and their connections to Black female students raced and gendered identities (Evans Winters, 2010; Finders, 1997; Fordham, 1993; Gibson, 2010; Henry, 1998; Kynard, 2010; Richardson, 2002, 2009; Smith, 1997; Staples, 2009; Weinstein, 2002; Winn, 2011). That is, there is a gap between the research we need to more deliberately educate Black girls for critical literacy, and the research that has been done.

Urban Education in the Midwest: Rustcity, USA

Rustcity, a Midwestern historic destination for Southern African Americans during the First and Second Great Migrations, was once a center of American industry, and popular music culture; yet has been in decline for the latter half of the twentieth century. White flight has moved much of the tax base from city center to the suburbs, resulting in a persistent racialized poverty that affects the city's economy, housing, transportation, and education (Sugrue, 2005). The dominant national narrative is that Rustcity is a crumbling town already lost to urban decay; yet a crucial missing piece of this narrative is that of the educational changes taking place in the heart of the city. In the midst of the city, seated just off a major highway, Midwestern K-8 is public charter school at the center of a cultural shift in education. With gifted leadership, faculty, and students, Midwestern K-8 is one example of the successes of culturally-sustaining (Paris, 2012) education that are often overlooked in the haste to pathologize urban education. According to Paris (2012) culturally-sustaining pedagogies are those that "seek to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 93).

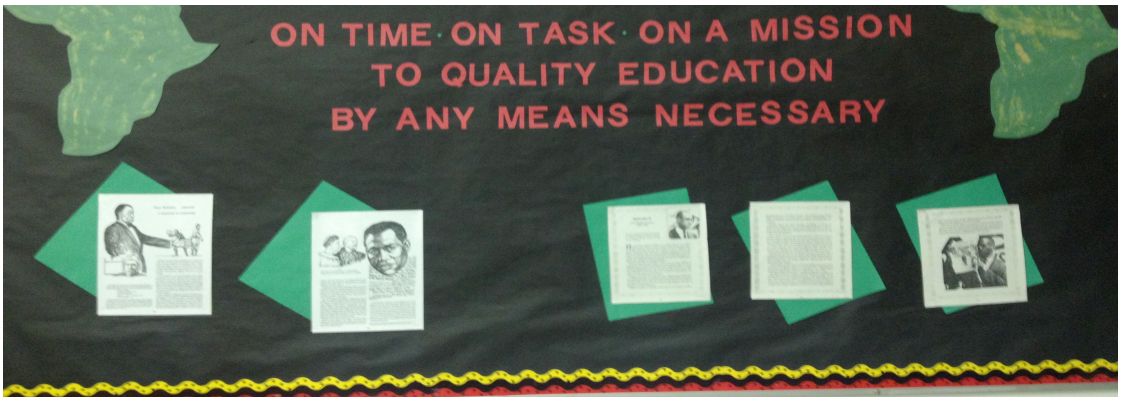


Figure 1: The Motto

Midwestern K-8: Afrocentric Schooling in Urban Context.

Like Rustcity, Midwestern K-8 is in the process of reinventing itself. It is now housed in the former Foxfield Middle School building, which had a reputation of producing stellar students for the city's top high schools. The schools' catchment area encompasses a small chunk of the city that rests against the northern city limits, butting up against a township that spells the beginning of the sprawling suburbs. The blocks around the school are dotted with abandoned houses, and decaying buildings, remnants of the booming auto factory town Rustcity once was.

After a natural disaster destroyed the previous historic building it occupied, Midwestern K-8 moved to a former middle school. What this new building lacked in architectural charm, it made up for in amenities like an indoor gym, a tennis court, and lab rooms for instruction. The tennis courts, a jungle gym, and a baseball diamond are separated from the school building by the teachers' parking lot, and after three in the afternoon, the area buzzed with children playing while they wait for pick-up, or walk home.

The principal, Mr. Freeman, reported that prior to housing Midwestern K-8, the previous school, Foxfield Middle School, had a sterling reputation for educating the students of the mostly middle-class neighborhood. When Midwestern K-8's population of working-class families moved into the building, there were fears that this perceived reputation of the school would be negatively affected, despite Midwestern K-8's state test scores being the same or higher. This was a story later corroborated by one math teacher, Mr. Brown, who taught in the building prior to and just after the transition. Mr. Brown suggested that the "quality" of the student body had "gone down" after the move (Carey, field notes, 9-7-12). According to the school's profile posted on the district website, of Midwestern K-8's five hundred total students, approximately seventy percent qualify for free and reduced lunch and ninety-nine percent are identified as

African American, while one percent are identified as Asian American. These perceptions, which essentially equate socioeconomic class to school performance, stand in stark opposition to the facts, such as the school's twenty-point gain in writing and reading scores on state tests in the 2012-2013 school year.

Seventy-five percent of the faculty and staff of Midwestern K-8 are founding teachers, meaning that they have taught at the school from the time it was founded until now, according to Mr. Freeman, and they are dedicated to the school's mission of "Education by Any Means Necessary." This mission was highlighted in the districts' *School of The Week* bulletin, which states that it "is rooted in the belief that cultural context and critical consciousness is integral to teaching, learning, and the well-being of the whole child" (Rustcity Public Schools, 2013). This is the definition of African-centered that this study will use. To this end, the school employs African-centered curriculum, which means "the process of making the students the center of all learning; teaching students what African Americans contributed to American society and the world" (Rustcity Public Schools, 2013). This curriculum is evident in the ways students address teachers as Baba and Mama ('father' and 'mother' in Ki-Swahili), which is both a nod to share African heritage and a gesture revealing the communal spirit of the school. Ki-Swahili is also a foundation for the behavior expectations, which are posted in the front office bulletin board with the African American Creed.

Figure 2: School Office Bulletin Board and Postings

Physically, the hallways of the school are papered with posters of historic figures in African American history, current facts about African nations, and the artwork of students. In classrooms, quotes of African American writers are displayed alongside grammar rules, research reports/assignments on Historically Black Colleges and Universities are part of 7th grade ELA classes, and videos such as Alex Haley's *Roots* miniseries were a topic of discussion in both social studies and in ELA classes. Grade-level classrooms are divided by gender, with the exception of the honors courses in seventh and eighth grades, in an effort to further support all students' learning, according to Dr. Freeman. After school, teachers not only tutor, but run enrichment programs such as Art Club, Golf-Math team, and various sports activities from cheerleading to basketball. On weekends, students are invited to participate in the gender-based mentoring programs of local universities, which is where I first came to know the school and students. The African-centered curriculum is present in many facets of the school's daily functions, and serves to empower the students to serve their community.

While the majority of the school is African-centered, the use of the Open Court Reading program represents a puzzling departure. While one sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Lincoln, remarked that "…I don't like the stories in the textbook, they are so dry!" (field notes, 11-30-12). The textbooks and the basal readers represented only a part of the classroom literacy environment. Students bought in their own texts, bookshelves were stocked with both fiction and non-fiction, and in the girls' seventh-grade classroom, magazines and trade books were available for DEAR (Drop Everything And READ) time. Programs such as BookIt (see *Figure 3*) also encouraged students to read in and out of class. While Mrs. Lincoln emphasized oral reading through student read-alouds and ran weekly spelling bees, Mrs. Washington's 7th grade girls' class focused on practicing PowerPoint presentation skills with students and reading comprehension strategies.

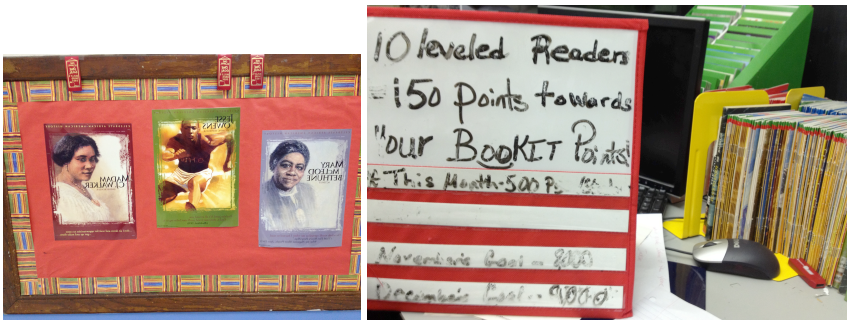


Figure 3: Afrocentric ELA Classroom Walls, BookIt Program with basal readers

Bounding the Study

Teacher educators such as Alvermann (2010) suggest that these students' identities as readers have been largely decided for them in deficit terms, and I wonder if this is a mischaracterization that prevents educators from seeing the full scope of the emotional, social, and cultural identity analyses that these students perform when they read. With students like these in mind, teacher educators have long called for an explicit, complex examination of culture

in curriculum and instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Florio-Ruane, 1994, 2001). While pedagogies of youth popular culture[3] (Duncan-Andrade, 2004) and critical literacy (Morrell, 2007) illuminate effective practices for urban teachers, fewer educational researchers have documented how these teens define culturally-sustaining texts and use literacy practices to identify themselves in and out of school (Kinloch, 2011; Kirkland, 2011; Morrell, 2002, 2007; Paris, 2009, 2012; Winn, 2011) .

To practice culturally-sustaining pedagogies, educators have to value students' multiple group memberships. Valuing students' identity is tied to recognizing how they experience culture, and especially, the ways they experience culture in terms of shared meaning and practices within a group. Specifically, this study does this by focusing on six preteen, African American females as they encounter African American young adult fiction, poetry, popular music, T.V shows, and other forms of media. This study asks broadly, "How do African American adolescent young women enact and negotiate raced[4] and gendered[5] identities through their reading experiences?"

English Curriculum for City Kids: Off Script or On Target?

Increasingly scripted English Language Arts curricula such as Open-Court in classrooms stifle the voices of teens for expressing their views on texts beyond standardized assessments (Jaeger, 2013)**.** Yet these voices are the only ones that can tell teacher educators if, how, when,

[3] Defined as (Duncan-Andrade, 2004)...youth popular culture includes the various cultural activities in which young people invest their time, including but not limited to: music, television, movies, video games, sport, Internet, text messaging, style, and language practices (p. 313).

[4] "Race involved the assumption that individuals can be divided into groups based on phenotype or genotype and that those groups have meaningful differences…race is an ongoing phenomenon that is accomplished in interaction with others and that is situated in social contexts "(Burton, Bonilla-Silva,, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010, p. 41).

[5] "…even in an African-centered classroom, where African pride is embraced and celebrated, some Black female students may still have to confront gendered dynamics that overlook, ignore, or suppress their multiple identities as women of African ancestry" (Evans Winters, 2010, p. 13).

and which texts are important to their identities as raced, gendered, and cultured readers. With this problem in mind, this dissertation attempts to describe teens' negotiation of identity in their talk about texts within the informal setting of an after school book club for girls. Traditionally book clubs have meant spaces to center students around group discussion of books, (Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Daniels, 2002; Mahon et al, 1997) and I expand this notion of book clubs by including lyrics, movies, T.V shows, Tweets, Facebook statuses, and magazines as texts. For this project, I consider the role of the extra-curriculum, or purposeful learning in informal education spaces (Gere, 2001), as a context for the voices of participants. I then analyze the girls' talk about self and texts, and discuss findings related to their emotional, social, and cultural meaning-making. I close the dissertation with a consideration of how students "identity" talk in concert with text can help teacher educators and beginning teachers to explore shared meaning-making at the intersections of race, gender, and literacy (Gere, 2001).

Let's Talk: Literacy Identities in Social Context

Here, *identity talk* is conceptualized as the explicit construction of raced and gendered identities discussed, narrated, drawn, and written by a group of African-American adolescent females, who represent a small and important slice of the heterogeneity of urban learners. This dissertation explores how the negotiation of intersectional raced and gendered identities through reading, writing, and discussion may provide these students with space to explore, critique, and possibly transform the representations of African American young women in and across texts (Crenshaw, 1991).

Historically, the extra-curriculum has been conceptualized as a space where those people who are excluded from formal learning situations come together in pursuit of skills, knowledge,

and through literacy practices, engage in the work of "defining their own cultural identity" (Gere, 1997). In this study, the extra-curriculum is an after school text club, which I modeled after traditional book clubs which use literature as the focal point of discussion. I extended the role of "text" to music and images in order to more fully capture the kinds of texts the girls encounter and produce. Because the purpose of this study is to explore identity across texts, the materials of the club are focused on African American culture, and specifically that of the narratives of teen black girls, as written by Black women.

I use the term 'extra-curriculum' to indicate the setting of the book club. This term highlights the learning that students do outside of the school day and beyond classroom walls. I also use the term because the history of the extra-curriculum shows that those people marginalized by formal schooling structures have used the extra-curriculum as a space to engage in not just learning, but political and social activism as well (Gere, 2001).

One of the tensions this work addresses is the paucity of theoretical and methodological tools for exploring, naming, and examining Black girls' lived realities and literacy practices as they engage in cultural work to define themselves. In this study, I used the available theoretical tools, with the intention of expanding them to include Black girls. However, the data suggested that the girls in this study enact identities through lenses permeated with age-based/specific understandings of race, gender, and stereotypes about Black Women as they read texts. To describe these understandings, I will use the term "Critical Girlhood Literacies" or CGL, which refers to a theoretical framework focused on recognizing the raced-gendered resources Black girls and girls of color, bring to the reading task, activating these through engagements with multiple texts over time, and highlighting the emotional, social, and personal work the girls engage through their critical literacy development. CGL is further discussed in chapter seven.

Taking the position that literacy is one stage on which identities are performed, I speak of acting on a stage as a metaphor for the public performance of identity. I am not thinking of enacting one's identity as performance of a predetermined role, as in a script. Instead, identity is more like a performance of stories of the self negotiated in interaction with others, as in improvisation (Gee, 2008). The *Readin' Sistahs* book club I created for the purpose of this study sets up an activity setting where students are invited to come together in various engagements with text, which may or may not interrupt the performance of their school identities. This club is conceptualized as a place of kitchen table literacies, or extracurricular informal discussions by community members where school-based literacy practices are reclaimed for personal ends through participation in shared meaning-making within a group of practice (Ruggles-Gere, 2001). This space is also a place where "identity events" can take place and where there are instances in discussions on texts that identify individuals in socio-culturally specific ways within the shared community of practice (Wortham, 2005). Exploration of the extracurricular site can lead to the illumination of critical connections these youth make to texts, thus providing teacher educators with deeper insight into their meaning-making literacy strategies. The text club, the temporal, physical and social site of this text-talk, occurred during the students' after-school activities period over the course of one academic year.

Discourse and Textual Analysis in Negotiating Boundaries

In this dissertation, the girls' discursive identity work is important primarily because it extends the boundaries of prior and current conceptions of culture and identity in literacy practices, especially as they relate to preteen Black young women in urban English learning contexts. For example, identity scholarship in literacy uses the metaphor of literacy as a narrative

or story (Moje et al, 2009); yet it has been used without an explicit focus on how these stories map onto larger, hegemonic discourses about African American women, and more specifically, their representations in children's/YA media. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) suggest "empowered groups long ago established a host of stories, narratives, conventions, and understanding that today, through repetition, seem natural and true." These narratives are rooted in socio-cultural contexts, and dynamics power and oppression. Upon critical interrogation, these stories are revealed to have explicit ties to what Carol Lee (2003) calls "folk theories about groups in the human family that are inextricably tied to the relationship of power and dominance". It is for this reason that the girls in the book club are presented with texts that tell different stories about Black young women, and encouraged to dialogue about what these stories represent, to whom, in what context, and for what purpose.

Because scholars have suggested that stories are an important site of deep meaning-making, it is imperative to focus on the ways cultural narratives such as those about preteen Black readers, about children's literature, about Black femininity, connect with one another in intertextual ways, i.e, text-text; text-reader; reader-reader; hegemonic narratives- counter-narratives (Gee, 2008). Educators and learners have used book clubs as a means to challenge deficit narratives of marginalized groups, such as women's writing groups in 18th century literary societies (Gere, 1987), and to uncover teaching candidate's views on culture (Florio Ruane, 2001). While it is challenging to find contexts in which to prompt alternative stories about marginalized groups in teacher education, where deeply held cultural narratives are widely shared, tacitly held, and self-perpetuating, this study attempts to create one instance to do so. Without the inter-textual focus, it is difficult to explore the research questions addressed in this study, such as how young women of color enact/perform their raced and gendered identities

through engaging with these representations and stories, as this dissertation does. Without asking such questions, the widespread under theorization on this population continues unchecked, thus rendering the literacy needs of these young women unaddressed.

By emphasizing identity as a constant negotiation between text and reader in a community of practice and as a social construct[6], the discursive identity work detailed in this study seeks to equip learners with a means to interrogate explanations of who African American women and girls currently are, how they came to be, and in the future, who they may become, especially as it relates to their identities as learners, readers, and writers (Adams et al., 2013; Tatum, 2008). Taking the historic and current narratives of the Black female community into account, the discursive identity work in this dissertation seeks to illuminate a specific avenue for these teens to express their understandings of culturally-sustaining texts and to exercise emancipatory critical literacies, as indicated by prior critical English Education research (Bitz, 2009; Boyd et al., 2006; Brooks & McNair, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2003, 2007; Morrell, 2004b, 2007). In addition, Florio-Ruane with deTar (2001) suggested that notions of culture are imperative to understanding the nature of learning and teaching, yet often go unaddressed in teacher education. To respond to this need, more research is needed which is specifically focused on how culture-sharing groups, such as African American adolescent young women, define/negotiate raced and gendered identities through their reading experiences.

In the preceding chapter, I will introduce the study, describing its rationale, goals, theoretical framework, and potential significance to the learners, educators, and activists in

[6] In this study, I use the term "social construct" to indicate an idea which is based upon hegemonic categories made of oppositional binaries that perpetuate a false reality through establishing and maintaining norms that privilege the dominant group. One example is race, which is largely thought of as Black vs White in America, leaving out Native Americans, Latino/@as, Asians, among other racial or ethnic groups (see Adams et al., 2013)

working together in cities worldwide. In these spaces, disparities in learning opportunities across socioeconomic groups move literacy educators to examine students' discussion of text outside of schools. This inquiry serves as one means of connecting with preteens to remedy the educational debt by investing more time, energy, and resources into extended literacy learning opportunities for urban[7] students, who may identify with historically disenfranchised communities (Brooks, 2006; Kynard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Staples, 2009; Winn, 2011). Therefore, this complex context requires tuning educators in to the ways text[8], identity[9], and culture[10] influence the out of school reading experiences of the heterogeneous learner population.

[7] I use the term 'urban' to signal that the study takes place in a city like other U.S cities, which are characterized by large, concentrated populations (in this case 700,000 residents) and to refer to a complex set of factors including industrialization and gentrification. I do not use 'urban' as an essentializing cover term for poverty, ethnicity, or race, or to erase rural education inequalities.

[8] defined as "...more than sites of information or aesthetic expression; they are cultural tools for establishing belongingness, identity, personhood, and ways of knowing"(Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000, 167)

[9] defined as "being recognized as a 'kind of person' in a given context….In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected not to their ;internal states; but to their performances in society."(Gee, 2001, p. 100)

[10] defined as "culture, therefore , understood in its concrete forms, as practice, as a system of accumulated human social, material, and ideological experiences…cultural life consists of multiple voices, of unity as well as dischord, including an imperfect sharing of knowledge; of intergenerational misunderstanding, as well as common understandings; of developing both adaptive and maladaptive practices while discarding others-in short, of human actions that are always creative in the fact of changing circumstances…(Lee & Smagorinsky, 2003)."

CHAPTER 2: Introduction to the Study

In this chapter I will introduce the study, describing its rationale, goals, theoretical framework, and potential significance to the learners, educators, and activists in working together in cities worldwide. As background to my study, my own lived experience as Black as well as my extensive review of scholarly literature has led me to a particular stance that both colors and animates research. For example, in recent years disparities in school learning opportunities across socioeconomic groups have moved literacy educators to examine students' discussion of text outside of schools (Staples, 2009; Wissman, 2007). In the areas of policy and practice, learning outside school is studied and seen as one means of connecting with preteens around authentic academic learning (e.g., literacy, science) to remedy the educational debt by investing more time, energy, and resources into extended literacy learning opportunities for urban students, who may identify with historically disenfranchised communities (Angela Calabrese Barton & Edna Tan, 2010; Brooks, 2006; Gibson, 2010; Kynard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Mahiri, 2004; S. Smith, 1997). Researching teaching and learning in this context both attunes educators to their adolescent learners in new ways and affords ways for re-thinking school literacy. It also serves to introduce educators to ways that text, identity, and culture influence the out of school reading experiences of the heterogeneous learner population in cities (Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000; Paris, 2012; Winn, 2010).

Teacher educators such as Alvermann (2001) suggest that urban students' identities as readers have been largely decided for them in deficit terms, meaning that some groups, i.e., are expected to have literacy learning deficits. In reading these scholars' work and conducting the

pilot research (Carey, under review) it inspired, I have further come to wonder whether this mischaracterization not only prevents schools from helping all students reach their full potential as literate citizens, but also that thinking this way presents educators from seeing the full scope of the emotional, social, and cultural identity analyses that these students engage when they read.

Because these beliefs are sedimented in the culture of schools and schooling, they are powerful factors influencing the attitudes of those who choose to enter the teaching profession, thus perpetuating beliefs that truncate the possibility of more just and equal education (Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Lee, 2007; Morrell, 2004). For this reason, teacher educators have long called for an explicit, complex examination of culture in curriculum and instruction (Florio-Ruane, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1992). While pedagogies of youth popular culture (Duncan-Andrade, 2004) and critical literacy (Morrell, 2007) illuminate effective practices for urban teachers, fewer educational researchers have documented how these teens define culturally-sustaining texts and use literacy practices to identify themselves in and out of school (Kinloch, 2011; Kirkland, 2011; Morrell, 2002, 2007; Paris, 2009, 2012; Winn, 2011). According to Paris (2012) culturally-sustaining pedagogies are those that "seek[s] to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling (93)." This kind of valuing students' identity is tied to recognizing how they experience culture, and especially, the ways they experience culture in terms of shared meaning and practices within a group. This dissertation continues the line of research described above, focusing on one group of preteen, African American females as they encounter African American young adult fiction. This study asks broadly, "How do African American adolescent young women enact and negotiate raced and gendered identities through their reading experiences?"

ELA in Urban Contexts: Open Court, Open Minds?

Increasingly scripted English Language Arts curricula such as Open Court in classrooms stifle the voices of elementary school youngsters and preteens for expressing their views on texts beyond standardized assessments (Jaeger, 2013). Yet these voices are the only ones that can tell teacher educators if, how, when, and which texts are important to their identities as raced, gendered, and cultured readers. Moreover, using their voices to talk about text in ways that enhance comprehension and critical response is something that must be planned for by the teacher and used and practiced by learners. It is, in and of itself, both a process to be learned and a site for learning from text (Raphael, Florio-Ruane, Kehus, Hasty, & Highfield, 2001). This study's book club provided one such site, in the hopes of capturing the contours of this process through the girls discourse.

With this problem in mind, this dissertation turns to a context less constrained by contemporary educational policy and practice in order to create a space in which to study teens' negotiation of identity in their talk about texts. Although it takes place within the informal setting of an after school book club for girls, the study is intended to enrich and challenge the current conversation about the aims of literacy education in our nation's schools.

Traditionally book clubs have meant spaces to center students around group discussion of books, especially full-length works of literature (Raphael & McMahon, 1994; Daniels, 2002; Mahon et al, 1997). I expand this notion of book clubs by including lyrics, movies, T.V shows, Tweets, Facebook statuses, and magazines as texts. For this project, I consider the role of the extra-curriculum, or purposeful learning in informal education spaces (Ruggles-Gere, 2001), as a

context for the voices of participants. I then analyze the girls' talk about self and texts, and discuss findings related to their emotional, social, and cultural meaning-making. I close the dissertation with a consideration of how students "identity" talk in concert with text can help teacher educators and beginning teachers to explore shared meaning-making at the intersections of race, gender, and literacy.

Title	**Author**	**Selected By**	**Date**
The Skin I'm In	Sharon Flake	Researcher	Oct-Nov
More Spice than Sugar	Lillian Morrison	Girls	Dec
The Road to Paris	Jacquiline Woodson	Girls	Jan
Copper Sun	Sharon Draper	Researcher	Feb-March
If You Come Softly	Jacquiline Woodson	Girls	April-May

Table 1: Books Read in Book Club

Literacy and Identity in the "Extra-curriculum"

In this study, identity talk is conceptualized as the explicit construction of raced and gendered identities discussed, narrated, drawn, and written by a group of African-American adolescent females, who represent a small and important slice of the heterogeneity of urban learners. This dissertation explores how the negotiation of intersectional raced and gendered identities through reading, writing, and discussion may provide these students with space to explore, critique, and possibly transform the representations of African American young women in and across texts (Crenshaw, 1991).

Historically, the extra-curriculum has been conceptualized as a space where those people who are excluded from formal learning situations come together in pursuit of skills, knowledge, and through literacy practices, engage in the work of "defining their own cultural identity" (Gere, 1997). In this study, the extra-curriculum is an after school text club, which I modeled after traditional book clubs which use literature as the focal point of discussion. I extended the role of "text" to music and images in order to more fully capture the kinds of texts the girls encounter and produce. Because the purpose of this study is to explore identity across texts, the materials of the club are focused on African American culture, and specifically that of the narratives of teen black girls, as written by Black women.

One of the tensions this work addresses is the paucity of theoretical and methodological tools for exploring, naming, and examining Black girls' lived realities and literacy practices as they engage in cultural work to define themselves. In this project, I chose to study Black girls, in part because of this neglect, and in part to begin fashioning better tools to study Black girls. As the analysis of discourse in my study will show, the girls in this study enact identities in narratives and from perspectives permeated with age-based/specific understandings of race, gender, and stereotypes about Black Women as they read texts. To describe these understandings, I use the term "Critical Girlhood Literacies" or CGL. This term references a theoretical framework based on recognizing the raced-gendered resources Black girls and other girls of color bring to the reading experience, activating these resources through engagement with texts, and emphasizing the social, emotional, and cultural work their analyses engage (see chapter seven.)

Taking the theoretical stance that identity is neither static nor ascribed but rather is negotiated and continuously created by people in their talk and action in context, I think of the

discussion of literature as an example of literacy as one stage on which identities are performed. I speak of acting on a stage as a metaphor for the public performance of identity. I am not thinking of enacting one's identity as performance of a predetermined role, as in a script. Instead, identity is more like a performance of stories of the self negotiated in interaction with others, as in improvisation (Gee, 2008). The Readin' Sistahs book club I created for the purpose of this study-sets up an activity setting where students are invited to come together in various engagements with text, which may or may not interrupt the performance of their school identities. This club is conceptualized as a place of kitchen table literacies, or extracurricular informal discussions by community members where school-based literacy practices are reclaimed for personal ends through participation in shared meaning-making within a group of practice (Gere & Robbins, 1996). This space is also a place where "identity events" can take place (Wortham, 2005), and where there are instances in discussions on texts that identify individuals in socio-culturally specific ways within the shared community of practice. Exploration of the extracurricular site can lead to the illumination of critical connections these youth make to texts, thus providing teacher educators with deeper insight into their meaning-making literacy strategies. The text club, the temporal, physical and social site of this text-talk, occurred during the students' after-school activities period over the course of one academic year.

Talk, Text, and Testing the Boundaries of Culture and Identity

In this dissertation, the girls' discursive identity work is important primarily because it extends the boundaries of prior and current conceptions of culture and identity in literacy practices, especially as they relate to preteen Black young women in urban English learning

contexts. For example, identity scholarship in literacy uses the metaphor of literacy as a narrative or story (Moje & Luke, 2009). However, it has yet to be used with an explicit focus on how these stories map onto larger, hegemonic discourses about African American women, and more specifically, their representations in children's/YA media. Delgado and Stefancic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) suggest "empowered groups long ago established a host of stories, narratives, conventions, and understanding that today, through repetition, seem natural and true. (135)" These narratives are rooted in socio-cultural contexts, and dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression. Upon critical interrogation, these stories are revealed to have explicit ties to what Carol Lee (2003) calls "folk theories about groups in the human family that are inextricably tied to the relationship of power and dominance" (4). It is for this reason that I presented the girls in the book club with texts that tell non-hegemonic stories about Black young women, and encouraged to dialogue about what these stories represent, to whom, in what context, and for what purpose.

Because scholars have suggested that stories are an important site of deep meaning-making, it is imperative to focus on the ways cultural narratives such as those about preteen Black readers, about children's literature, about Black femininity, connect with one another in inter-textual ways, i.e., text-text; text-reader; reader-reader; hegemonic narratives- counter-narratives (Gee, 2008). Educators and learners have used book clubs as a means to challenge deficit narratives of marginalized groups, such as women's writing groups in 18th century literary societies (Gere, 1987), and to uncover experienced and beginning teachers' views on culture (Florio Ruane, 2001). While it is challenging to find contexts in which to prompt alternative stories about marginalized groups in teacher education, where deeply held cultural narratives are widely shared, tacitly held, and self-perpetuating, aforementioned research has

attempted to do so by both texts and discussions oriented to exploration of difference. The study reported here also attempts to create such a context to foster critical literacy among its members, but it also affords teachers and teacher educators who read this report to learn about the varied perspectives of students about whom they might otherwise generalize for lack of knowledge about their narratives or one instance to do so.

A key feature of book clubs is duration, which gives them the opportunity to examine multiple texts in and through time. Without the inter-textual focus, it is difficult to explore the research questions addressed in this study, such as how young women of color enact/perform their raced and gendered identities through engaging with these representations and stories, as this dissertation does. Without asking such questions, the widespread under theorization on this population continues unchecked, thus rendering the literacy needs of these young women unaddressed.

By emphasizing identity as a constant negotiation between text and reader in a community of practice and as a social construct, the discursive identity work detailed in this study seeks to equip learners with a means to interrogate explanations of who African American women and girls currently are, how they came to be, and in the future, who they may become, especially as it relates to their identities as learners, readers, and writers (Adams et al., 2013; Tatum, 2008). Taking the historic and current narratives of the Black female community into account, the discursive identity work in this dissertation seeks to illuminate a specific avenue for these teens to express their understandings of culturally-sustaining texts and to exercise emancipatory critical literacies, as indicated by prior critical English Education research (Bitz, 2009; Boyd et al., 2006; Brooks & McNair, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lee, 2003, 2007; Morrell, 2004b, 2007). In addition, Florio-Ruane (2001) suggested that complex notions of

culture, while imperative to understanding the nature of learning and teaching, often go unaddressed in teacher education, where the tendency is to define and study culture in more static, descriptive ways. To respond to this need, more nuanced, interactive research is needed which is specifically focused on how culture-sharing groups, such as African American adolescent young women, negotiate raced and gendered identities through their reading experiences.

Theoretical Framework & Review of Literature

In this study, I ask how analysis of the text-related discourse of negotiation African American female young women in a book club can provide a window on their negotiation of identities as readers, as young women, and as African Americans. I am investigating in this participatory, qualitative study the expression of raced and gendered reading ideologies, defined as beliefs about who reads what text for what purpose, of one group of African American young women (Kirkland, 2012). Because I am looking at discourse in the same group over time and texts, I also investigate change or development within and among participants as they speak about who they are in response both to what they have read and what they and others have talked about in response.

This inquiry in terms of both its topic and its methods is critical to understanding how to prepare urban English teachers because these students are an integral part of urban classrooms, and may have literacy needs connected to their particular social location that, without looking at race and gender simultaneously, literacy educators may overlook, thereby leaving these learners' literacy needs unaddressed. Within the definition of identity on which this study builds, oral and

written stories are the units of analysis, and they operate as avenues through which socio-cultural processes of identifying are theorized to occur (Moje et al, 2009).

Because of its foregrounding the political and dialogic nature of identity construction and representation, the area of scholarship informing the concept of intersectional identity work used in this study is Critical Race Feminism (Wing, 2000), or CRF. This is a critical socio-cultural theory that simultaneously considers race and gender as fundamental lenses of analysis of the lived experiences of females of color. The voices, stories, and experiences of women of color are central foci of CRF. For this reason, it is a potentially powerful tool for examining and gaining insight into the identity constructions of African American female teens, especially by negotiation among possible selves available in their own personal narratives, those of their peers, and those available in texts (literary and otherwise). Specifically, since CRF is attuned to the joined issues of race and gender, it has the potential to show literacy research when, where, and how these identities manifest themselves in the reading experience. Finally, because CRF is attuned to the narratives of Black women, it is a theoretical framework useful for examining stories coming from the perspectives of Black women, although it is limited in its considerate of age. With its focus on voice, CRF provides space to explore the narratives, including the emotional, developmental-social, cultural dimensions of the stories of Black adolescent young women.

Historically, African American women have developed epistemologies centered on understanding the world from our triply marginalized (in terms of race, gender, and class) social location (Wing, 2009). From this position, Black female experiences are plural and are open to multiple possibilities and interpretations. To highlight the possible intersections, Wing (2009) suggests that,

> "I would reprise DuBois' refrain ('the problem of the twentieth century would be the problem of the color line') for the new century and state that the problems of this century will continue to be race and ethnicity, but compounded with a heightened awareness of gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation. (p.4)"

One of the less-studied axes of these intersections is age, which is a crucial component to how the girls in this study see themselves, and read the texts around them. Along with these experiences, Black girls in schools have developed strategies such as what Koonce calls *Talking With An Attitude* (Koonce, 2012) in order to be heard in classrooms and settings that might otherwise overlook us. What Koonce (2012) means by this term is that the discourse around Black girls is rarely framed in ways that see them as the receiver rather than perpetrator of micro-aggressions. This idea is important to my study is that it highlights the needs for educators need to pivot to understand the perspective of Black girls in adolescence, and their reasons for perceived acts of 'disobedience.'

Commenting on the ways in which African American women are largely absent from discussions of identity, scholar and cultural critic bell hooks suggested that "No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women...When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women" (hooks, 1996, p.6). CRF (Wing, 2000) addresses this sentiment by positing that the experiences of African American women are distinct from those of African American men and White women, and therefore worthy of a separate theoretical space.

CRF derived from Critical Race Theory (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005), or CRT, a socio-cultural theory of race and racism, and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), or BFT, a socio-

cultural theory of Black womanhood. Looking at the issue of raced and gendered reading ideologies through a CRF lens allows educational researchers to see instances where identity markers such as race and gender are not discrete categories, but are mutually intertwined in students' interpretations of themselves, their texts, and the world around them. Thus, a theoretical framework which focuses explicitly on the experiential knowledge and stories of African American women, such as Critical Race Feminism (CRF), is appropriate for examining questions of raced and gendered identity development in African American adolescent young women through their engagement with literature.

Research Questions

The challenges of preparing urban English teachers are many. In this dissertation, I explore the role of race, gender, and identity in the reading experiences of one group of African American young women. Due to the lack of stories about Black women in research and theory, I chose the texts for book club for their potential to prompt discussion of that nature and intersection of race and gender. This study asks broadly, "How do African American adolescent young women question, analyze, and interpret raced and gendered identities through their reading and text discussion experiences?" Specifically, using critical discourse analysis to interpret these students' constructions of race and gendered identities, the proposed dissertation seeks to address the following questions:

1) What is the nature of black girls' reading and discussion of African-centered and female-centered texts in an after-school book club?

2) Through engagement with these texts and one another's ideas in conversation, how do the young women define what researchers call, "culturally relevant" literatures?

3) What do these engagements tell us about how identity and text interact in the reading experiences of female black adolescents and in their negotiations of identity as Black young women?

Thus my dissertation research emerges out of and is part of an interdisciplinary conversation in several fields, including English Education and Black Women's Studies, and perhaps an emerging Black Girl Studies (Brown, 2009).

Critical Race Feminism: Critical Race Theory Meets Black Feminist Thought

CRF's focus on the idea that people's identities exist at the intersections of interacting social markers such as race, class, and gender, was deeply influenced by Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Collins (2000) argued that the oppressions of race and gender are mutually-constructed, intersecting systems of power that hold up White supremacist capitalism in the U.S, and that controlling images of Black womanhood are implicated in this ideology, or matrix of domination. Elite groups exercise power by manipulating images of Black womanhood through stereotypes, or specifically, in the case of Black women, controlling images such as Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire as anti-feminine.

Children's literature has historically used these tropes to distort images of Black women as "Mammy," 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, 2007, 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 of another in children's literature through at least the first five or so decades of the twentieth century" (Sims-Bishop, 2007, p. 24). The use of tropes to negatively characterize African American women has a long, and yet recent, history in children's literature.

Connecting Theory, Practice, and Methods: Framing the Research Questions

I connected these theories to the texts and activities of the book club in a variety of ways, beginning with the questions I used to frame the research project. I asked this set of questions because of my reflexive stance as a researcher, my prior research project on Black girls and Cinderellas (Carey, under review) and because in reviewing the research literature, these questions arose as not yet fully described, analyzed, or answered. These three questions are grounded in the complex educational problems facing Black girls (i.e, deficit framing of Black and Brown readers, teachers' lack-oriented cultural beliefs, negative perceptions of students from communities that have been marginalized, overlooking the intersections of race and gender in Black girls' school experiences, and especially misunderstandings of some Black girls' behaviors in response to disrespect at school and misrepresentations in literature) to the theoretical

frameworks discussed above. In doing so, they focus the study on the book club girls' voices and position the project to expand the research literature on Black girls' educational experiences.

I decided to center the first research question on description of the intersections of race, gender, and age, based on the CRT principle of endemic racism, or that racism is an organic part of American life, and the CRF principle of intersectionality. This question is also grounded in the educational problem of describing the literacies and literature of urban adolescents beyond the terminology of deficit. In terms of the design of the study, the first question centers the issue of culture, and signals that the study is qualitative in nature, and further uses ethnographic tools to investigate shared meanings. In constructing the first question as reflective of theory, practice, and method, I wanted to capture the sense of what these intersections are like in the context of adolescents' literacy practices in an after-school, informal learning space.

The second research question connects the theory of culturally-sustaining pedagogy to Black girls. In order to get at issues of perspective and to respect the plurality of students' knowledge and group memberships, I was careful to frame the question in terms of the girl's perceptions and ideas. Because of the educational problem of the paucity of research on black girls, I wanted to ensure that the girls' voices were central to the project. Without focusing in on the girl's ideas in an explicit manner, the project would risk talking over the students, instead of being an amplifier for their voices. I did this because the voices of young people, especially young women of color, need a distinct avenue to be heard. The third research question is grounded in the educational problem of mis-representing Black femininity in physical school spaces, as well as in the curriculum.

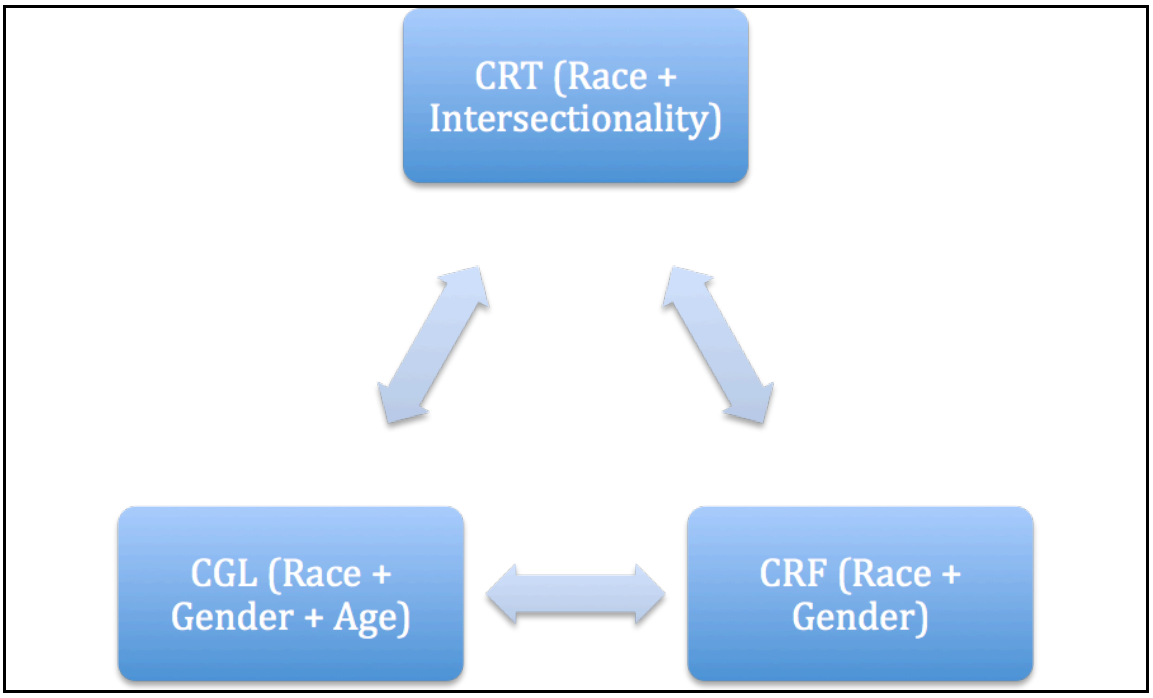


Figure 4: CRT vs CRF

Design of the Study: Ethnographic Tools Meet Discourse Analysis

To best answer my aforementioned research questions, this study is located in the ethnographic research tradition, within the scope of qualitative research. In education, qualitative methods are used to explore and describe topics of interest. Several characteristics typify qualitative research, especially in the tradition of ethnography: a naturalistic setting, the researcher as instrument, centering on participants' meanings, and the uses of multiple data sources, inductive data analysis, and emergent design to arrive at a holistic and interpretive account of problem under study (Creswell, 2009).

There are multiple approaches to qualitative inquiry, including ethnography, which is most appropriate to this study because of the emphasis on describing the reading experiences of one cultural group, i.e., African American female adolescents aged 10-13. Within education, there are three major approaches to ethnography: doing ethnography, which is meeting a

particular discipline's criterion for doing ethnography from framing and conceptualizing to writing and reporting, adopting an ethnographic perspective, in other words, using theories of culture from anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, sociolinguistics or education, and using ethnographic tools, or utilizing interviews, sound recordings, document content analysis, and time-activity charts (Green & Bloom, 1997, p.121).

Because my research questions, design, and analysis center on understanding what the reading experience is like from the perspective of African American females adolescents in an urban school within the culture-focused frame of CRF, this study is best described as using ethnographic tools. Further, because my research questions are informed by a desire to know more about the schooling experiences of African American female adolescents in order to the address the institutional and curricular challenges of schools, it is an "ethnography in education," rather than an "ethnography of education". Ethnographies in education are studies situated in the field of education that seek to inform education practitioners, researchers, and policy makers, rather than ethnographies of education, which seek to understand the effects of the education process in systemic terms (Heath and Street, 2008).

The Researcher's Role

Ethnography seeks to answer the question of "What is happening here at the field site I have chosen?" (Heath and Street, 2008, p.121). In addition, ethnographies "…aim to describe human behavior holistically, as it occurs naturally within social and cultural contexts" (Purcell-Gates, in Duke & Mallette, 2004). Black feminist theorists argue that the status of African American women within the academy grants the position of the "outsider within," which "provide{s} a special standpoint on self, family and society for Afro-American women"

(Collins, 1986). In conducting research, this position is useful in that it can allow participants to confide in a person that is an outsider more than if that person were located within the community, to see patterns that insiders might not see, and to engage in a type of objectivity involving being both close and far from participants (Simmel, 1921, in Collins, 1996). With respect to these individuals, I am an insider, in that I identify as an African-American female, and I am an outsider, in that I am from Virginia rather than Detroit, ten to fifteen years older than my participants, and a graduate student.

As a full participant and observer, I will be the facilitator of the book club, and so responsible for book selection, read-alouds, facilitating discussion, and providing prompts for writing assignments. The book club will be part of a student organization at Midwestern University[1] 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, through mentor interactions with Black female undergraduate and graduate students, exposing young Black females to an array of educational, cultural, and artistic opportunities, building healthy self-concepts, esteem, and refinement among participants; and promoting accessibility of higher education and increasing awareness of various career opportunities among participants. While I am no longer the graduate coordinator, it was in my capacity as graduate coordinator of this program that I first met the girls became co-constructors of my research. I subsequently became a regular part of their school setting as did the after school book club I started to help me research their talk about texts and identity.

Setting & Context of the Book Club

The book club met once a week over a period of one year. In August, I made contact with the principle, in order to make regular visits to the school in order to become more familiar with the school setting and experiences of the young women. Following contact, the principal and I agreed on the reading list, and craft a contact letter to parents making them aware of the study, which went home with the letters of informed consent for both parents and students.

Book Club Procedures

On the Mondays when Book Club occurs, I conducted three hours of classroom observations focused on the elective literacy practices of the girls, including note-taking, hand-clapping songs, and passing letters, in one sixth-grade classroom where most of the participants have their English Language Arts lessons. At times, teachers asked me to pass out papers, walk students to the principal's office, or call out spelling words for a spelling bee, and I became more of a participant in the classroom at these times than an observer.

After my observation, I hung out in the hall and corralled students into the classroom designated for the book club by the school's director of after-school programs. Because students have an after-school snack time in the school cafeteria, they arrived at the book club by 3:45p.m., following a 3:30p.m., dismissal. To start the book club sessions, I displayed the covers of picture books and novels featuring African American and African women, and I asked them to write short responses to questions such as: "What is going on in this picture? How do you know? How is this similar/different from your experiences?" After this five to ten minute writing assignment, we had group read-a-louds for the day, which lasted about fifteen to twenty minutes, and followed up with discussion on what we read, which lasted for twenty-five to forty-five minutes.

Following this, students were asked to draw their interpretations or thoughts on the reading selections, either on the blackboard or with crayons and paper. In some instances, we analyzed lyrics, as a follow up to our reading discussions, before having free reading selection, and ten-fifteen minutes of quiet reading with music, clean-up and snacks before leaving for the day.

The book club framework was inspired by the BookClubPLUS (BCP) (Raphael & Florio-Ruane, George, Smith, Compton-Lily, 2001) model, which is based on three criteria:

(1) It guides rather than prescribes;

(2) it addresses a common problem but is open to local adaptation; and

(3) it reflects current theory and research on the teaching and learning of literacy.

This model also might be characterized as "sustained, dialogic, and inter-textual" (Raphael & Florio-Ruane, 2001, p.3) in that it is based on the Vygotskian notion that learning begins in the social interactions of the learner, that "language use is fundamental to thinking", and that there is value in the idea of "increasing the role of literature in reading instruction." Literature is understood to mean "written text genres of literary quality as well as expository genres such as textbooks and brochures and transactional ones such as Internet documents." For the purposes of this study, I expand the notion of literature to include media, specifically those narratives expressed in popular music lyrics, on TV, and in internet blogs, Tweets, or magazine images. In the context of this study, the book club was student-centered and teacher-facilitated. This means that I was a participant as well as a guide, and I engaged with students in activities such as working in small groups, dyads, or individually in our literary excursions. BCP holds that "literature…provides a vehicle for exploring our culture and society," and it also suggests that the content of said literature should "prepare students to live and work in a diverse

democratic society" (Hiebert, 1991, p.4). Because the collective exploration of literature is a window into the lives of others and a mirror on our own, it has great potential as a medium for developing not only identity and culture, but also critical thinking about these topics. This was one reason I chose texts which were written by African American women about the period of adolescence for the girls.

Structurally, BCP is organized into three units, which fall under the theme of "Our Storied Lives." In Unit One, called "Stories of the Self," the focus is on autobiography and the many ways authors choose to reflect on their lives. For this study, texts in this unit were focused on short poems and songs, excerpted from books such as More Spice than Sugar: Poems about Feisty Females, by Lillian Morrison, and included Nikki Giovanni's The Drum, and Women by Alice Walker. We also analyzed the lyrics of Nina Simone's "Four Women." The girls chose this book from a selection of poetry collections I showed them in our opening section, when we discussed what kinds of books we'd like to read together in book club. While student activities in this unit can include making timelines of their lives to identify crucial events, writing personal narratives about these critical events, and an autobiography or obituary, we wrote some poetry of our lives. For the book club, we settled on making Bio-Poems, which were short, formulaic poems centered on names and adjectives. In these examples, notice the wide range of adjectives the girls use to describe themselves. While often represented as "loud," "tough," or "unruly" in the research literature, the girls' perceptions of themselves are couched in markedly varied terms, to create robust depictions of themselves (Fordham, 1994; Evans-Winters, 2005). In characterizing themselves as, "daughter," "kind," and "sister" the girls begin to reveal themselves as family-oriented, which is only one facet of their multiple identities. In doing so,

they demonstrate the complexity of how they see themselves, and how they interpret the difference in how other people see them.

The second unit is called "Family Stories" and centers on the idea that one's identity as an individual is intertwined with a family narrative, which can be a springboard for author study. For this study, texts used in this unit included *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *The Land* by Mildred. D Taylor; *The Skin I'm In* by Sharon Flake; and *The Road to Paris*, by Nikki Grimes. The students liked Nikki Grimes so much that we added a book, *I Hadn't Meant to Tell You This*, to our book club reading list, in order to more deeply discuss issues of family, friends, and the ties girls made between them. While student activities in this unit can include students interviewing family members of their grandparents' generation, writing a family story to share or making an oral presentation in a family artifact, in book club we decided to conduct short interviews in order to make bio-poems of family members, to find out what was similar and different between us and our family members.

The final unit, "Stories of Culture," focused on narratives of African American culture. Our last book club text was *Copper Sun* by Sharon Draper, and because we added a book to the previous unit, we weren't able to finish it, or start on *Kindred* by Octavia Butler. What we did read of *Copper Sun* was helpful for understanding the African heritage of the people who were enslaved, the connections that remained in African American culture, and what survival in the context of slavery involved for adolescent Black girls. The book helped us to contextualize, compare, and contrast their family stories with wider stories of African American culture. While activities for students can include writing essays about their family's histories, in book club we also focused on discussing and drawing the different versions of African American womanhood presented through each narrative. Through all three units, students had discussion, read alouds,

writing, silent reading time, journaling, and writers workshops, in order to explore the full range of literacy and literacy skills needed to participate fully and critically in the modern, information-based economy.

Actors

Developmentally, the participants range from the beginning to middle of adolescence, a period where young people begin to identify, rank, and decide which aspects of their identities are most salient to the person they want to become as an adult. Although there were between ten and twelve seventh-grade girls who showed up to book club, I chose to focus on the six who attended most regularly as the focal participants for this study. These six girls were open in sharing the details of their reading, writing, viewing, and social lives with me in book club. They were not all in the same class, but share the same grade-level and came together in book club. For chubby-cheeked Keisha, the book club was a space to share her writing (especially her poetry) and talk about becoming an author and a fashion designer. Monica, an outgoing former cheerleader, had aspirations of being a teacher (so she could 'yell at kids all day'). In book club, she was an avid doodler, who liked to illustrate our texts. Ebony, a self-professed 'manga-lover' who liked to read books on drawing manga and on Japanese culture, was often the first to share her writings. Jasmine was a shy basketball player whose favorite part of book club was choosing her free-reading books and talking with her friends. Ashley, cousins with Keisha, was an upbeat singer, who wanted to be a performer when she grew up, and liked the snacks in book club. LaToya was our resident fashionista who aspired to be a fashion designer and a lawyer, and preferred audio books for free reading. These participants all attend an African-centered K-8 school where they are exposed to a curriculum which respects the contributions of African Americans and Africans as much as those of Europeans. Students are immersed in different

aspects of African culture, such as using Ki-Swahili greetings, and starting the school day with Hirambe, a community morning meeting to share good news, such as victories in sports or birthdays, and to announcing upcoming events such as field trips, dances, tests, parents' events, and writing contests. Some participants live with their parents, some with other relatives, and all live within the catchment area of the school. Engaging with these participants allowed me to answer my research questions in several ways. First, because these young women are on the precipice of adulthood, it is a relevant time to explore how identities such as race and gender come together or are contested. Second, these participants are immersed in an African-centered school, within a largely African American city setting, which may give them greater access to narratives of African American women. Finally, these participants helped to answer my research questions because of their perspectives as young women of color who are not often heard in the research literature, and thus they will provide us with intersectional insights from this social location that other groups of young women cannot. In the next section, I will describe how collecting data with these participants enabled me to answer my research questions.

Data Collection Techniques & Sources of Data

In this section, I describe the data collection techniques I will use in the study, beginning with a short chart (see also Appendix A), which precedes descriptions of each technique and its role in the study. As displayed in the chart below, the central data collecting strategies will be video-recording book club discussions and interviews and collecting participants' written responses to multicultural literature.

By collecting data from conversations, interviews, field notes, artifacts, and the survey, I was able to triangulate the data in order more reliably to describe the results.

a) Community Share: As part of the book club, as facilitator, I led one group read-aloud each week to ask students to highlight quotes they found important in the reading, and to share my own quotes. After the read-alouds, we discussed the text in a group setting. The discussions included questions about the literary elements of the story, depictions of beauty in the story, and depictions of women and men in the story. I audio-recorded these discussion, which centered around the following questions:

(1) How are the female protagonists empowered and disempowered within the text, or genre?

(2) How are representations of Black adolescent femininity similar to and different from canonical texts such as Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye?

(3) What other cultural narratives (e.g., fairy tales, hip-hop) do these texts draw upon for familiarity?

(4) What are the implications when authors reclaim derogatory representations in genres, such as urban street fiction? How do authors do this? Are they successful?

(5) How can we better understand the ways linguistic violence and the negotiation of derogatory, wounding words function inside English classrooms and interrupted critical consciousness (Staples, 2007, 2008b, 2008c)?

b) Student Interviews: I intended to use Seidman's 3-Interview model (Seidman, 1998), I conducted three semi-structured interviews with each student. Because of cancelled school days and irregular attendance, I did not have the opportunity for all three interviews with each student. Instead the focal participants had two interviews, and the non-focal participants had one. These

interviews allowed me to track some changes in the participants' ideas about race and gender over the course of the book club. The interviews were a key data source, as they enabled me to ask the participants about their personal responses and thoughts to the texts in a more intimate setting. I conducted semi-structured interviews that include open-ended questions about literacy, gender, and beauty, as well as a short written statement focusing on their personal interpretation of the text. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. (See Appendix B for Interview Protocols.)

c) Student Written Responses: I provided participants with a writing prompt 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, beauty, and authorship. (See Appendix C for Writing Prompts.)

d) Observation: As a participant observer, I spent two hours a week observing the young women in the book club in their English class, looking for instances of literacy which are connected to their identity, and in the book club, so as to describe when and where the literacy practices of these youth are activated in the service of their academic and personal lives. (See Appendix D for Observation Protocol.)

Data Analysis Procedures

The objective of this analysis is to break the data into manageable pieces in order to answer the research questions of the study. To do so, I analyzed the data in several stages, using a sociocultural approach to Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2008). The first stage occurred as I transcribed the data into stanzas and lines. As I transcribed, I made note of repeated words and phrases that participants use in relation to issues of gender and race, as well as note my reflections going through the data to inductively code the data, as means of indexing and

organizing it. Some of the categories, such as race and gender, arose as they are part of my research questions, while others emerged organically from the data. This transcription and coding comprised the first stage in reducing the data to meaningful exchanges from larger conversations, and through creating codes I highlighted identity-based literacy events, such as explicit discussions of African American women. This allowed me to answer questions of how the students describe their reading experiences.

In the second stage, I used narrative vignettes to display the data, which will allow me to draw conclusions from it to generalize to theory. I displayed the data that appeared most frequently coded for, in an effort to reflect what the students talked about most, and thereby answer the question of how students talk about their encounters with representations of African American women in the texts.

Finally, in the last stage I cycled back to the research questions to contextualize the answers, and describe the different constructions of race and gender the young women employ in the book club. This allowed me to begin to generalize to theory, and thereby answer the questions of how African American females in an after-school book club build and contest their ideas of race, gender, and identity.

Reliability

Data from conversations, artifacts, interviews, and field notes were checked against one another, in order to establish reliability between the different data sources. Triangulation refers to "the process of securing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Norman & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7)." There are several stages and types of triangulation, which is essentially the practice of using of multiple methods of data collection, which this study does, and though using

several data sources to increase confidence in the findings of the research project (Glesne, 2006). This study uses triangulation in both ways; though using artifacts, participant observation, and interviewing to collect the data, and though analyzing these data in context with one another. During analysis, cross-checking multiple types of data is one way to locate both confirming and disconfirming evidence for research claims. In this study, I used member-checking, long-term and repeated visits, and peer examination to make sure the data I collected were accurate.

According to the Seidman model, member checking is an essential part of interviewing and critical to the practice of triangulation (Seidman, 2005). In this study, member checking occurred after the second interview with each focal student. I was able to ask the girls clarifying questions about their ideas about books, as reflected in their journals, or about statements they made in our group discussions. I used these interviews to further inquire about any unclear meanings. In this way, I worked with the data to ensure that they were accurate, and reflected what the girls wanted to say.

One other strategy for collecting sound qualitative data depends on the length of time and number observations trips to the field site. Because qualitative research focuses, in part, on finding key informants, it is necessary to spend an extended period of time in the field in order to build rapport and trust with research participants (Creswell, 2007). For ethnographic work in literacy education, the researcher's task is "sorting out as many connections of language and culture as possible across recurring and definable situations (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 11) ". The need for reoccurring situations also demands a long period of data collection, typically a year in ethnography. This study collected data over the course of the academic year, or nine-months, which gave me time to both establish rapport and to create recurring situations to observe the girls, thereby maintaining good conditions for collecting qualitative data. Out of a planned

twenty trips to the research site, I made fifteen trips to the school site, due to school cancellations because of snow and scheduled breaks for Christmas, winter, and Easter holidays. During these nine months, I continually analyzed the data as I collected it via researcher memos, field notes, and transcription notes. After I collected it all, I re-examined it for confirming, as well as disconfirming, evidence to check the reliability of the interpretations.

Triangulation can also happen when more than one researcher collects data, called investigator triangulation. Because I was the only data collector, I was not able to carry out this kind of triangulation. Instead, I used peer examination in order to better check my interpretations. After coding and as part of analysis, I engaged in constant conversation with colleagues, who challenged my conclusions and encouraged me to revisit my data.
In these ways, I worked with the data to ensure that they, and my interpretations were

Coding: Induction, Deduction, and Analysis

In this study, I used my field notes, students' artifacts, and transcripts of their written conversations as multiple sources of data. In analyzing the data, I inductively coded the transcripts first, then field notes, then the artifacts. When themes arose, I looked across types of data to check the consistency of code application.

In the first stage of thematic analysis, I listened to the group discussion sand interviews to transcribed them into Word documents, paying special attention to instances where race and gender were jointly discussed. After complete transcription, I carefully reviewed them with the audio recordings to check the validity of my transcriptions. During the audio-review stage, 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. I did this to break the data into manageable pieces, before I displayed it in narrative vignettes.

1st Round of Coding: Words, Phrases, and Preliminary Codes

In the first stage of coding, I analyzed the transcripts for repeated words and phrases surrounding the joined topics of race and gender. Based on multiple reviews of the transcripts, I developed word lists for each preliminary code. For example, I identified one preliminary code as "Race+Gender" This code included references to words and phrases like "lady," "304," "good girl," and "ho," which the girls used to describe the girls and women in their classes, family, and communities. Among others, these words comprised the word list associated with the code "Race+Gender". 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.

2nd Round of Coding: Sub-Categories Emerge

For the second round of coding, I used inductive coding to generate sub-codes to further refine the major codes. Because the "Race+Gender" category was the most frequently coded for in the first round of analysis, I began to look for specific instances or clusters where

"Race+Gender-bad type" 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 "304", "quiet," "ratchet", "lady-like," "tomby, '"ghetto, "trife-life," and "fast", which created sub-categories such as "Race+Gender-pos" and "Race+Gender-neg." In addition, these subcategories began to overlap with the age/development category, which showed me how these topics were connected through conversation.

Creating these subcategories indicated that gender performance was not simply an observation of another person, but also a result of specific behaviors and attitudes in addition to physical appearance, that the girls cast in moral terms. In the analysis stage, these subcategories allowed me to see where the categories overlapped to suggest differing gender roles for African American women according to age in the girls' conversation.

3rd Round of Coding: Emerging Binaries

In the final phase of coding, I focused on locating places where the "Race+Gender-pos/neg" dichotomy surfaced because it seemed to be the most frequent way that participants talked about different types of African American girls, women and ideas about Black femininity. In the third round of coding this dichotomy emerged as discussions of what "good" and "bad" women "did" in our novels, on T.V shows, in songs and in movies. I hoped to find a pattern in when and how this characterization came about in conversation, but instead found it permeated our conversations, forming a linkage through all of our texts.

In using this single code, I was able to uncover that the instances where the good/bad 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 protagonists such as Maleeka and Paris, celebrity women, and women in real life. 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 obedience," "importance of education," and "temperament" for the larger categories such as "Race+Gender-pos." 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).

In the next chapters, I will present the findings. First, in chapter three, I will discuss what "relevant literature" might mean for the book club both in terms of the social history of African American women in the US and also in terms of the genres over which the club members transact. As a group infrequently studied and a need for inquiry into what "culturally relevant text" might mean to them and in this context, I have made these topics part of my research along with my analyses of the actual discussions among participants. This background is necessary to understand what the following chapters describe.

Chapters Four through Six focus on the thematic ideas arising from the development of analytic categories across the different types of data. These themes, which answer the research

questions, are organized chronologically, as they emerged from the analysis. Because the first research question is focused on the describing the nature of the book club as a reading space, chapter four focuses on the girls' use of literacy as an emotional tool, both in their book club discourse and in their at home media viewing. The second research question is concerned with how the girls define what is relevant or culturally-sustaining in literature or media, and the fifth chapter addresses this through their discussion of colorism, and their interpretations of who has the right to tell Black women's narratives. The third research question asks what do these literacy engagements tell us about how race and gender influence the girls' reading experiences, which chapter six addresses in its analysis of empathy as resistance.

CHAPTER 3: Investigating Book Clubs: Who, What, How, and Why

As noted previously, while this study is primarily an analysis of oral discourse, to answer my research questions and, indeed to provide resources for participants to read and discuss, I began my research by investigating foundations on which my study was built—specifically the activity setting of "book club," the idea of culturally relevant texts, and the research on African American adolescent females as readers of canonical text and popular culture. This first findings chapter will extend the previous ideas by linking them current research in English Education to provide greater context for the project. To better frame the results chapters that follow, there are three sections related to the three parts of my research questions*: 1) The Extra-curriculum as a Stage: Book Clubs and the Politics of Exclusion; 2) Scripts, Gazes, Production: Negotiating Identity Performance in Classrooms; and 3) Casting Call: Race, Gender, and the Role of Intersectionality in Literacy Practices.* These sections describe how the group I started was deliberately designed to provide an alternate space for text-related talk among Black girls, a group that is marginalized in everyday life, literacy research, and especially in teacher education (Evans Winters, 2010).

Book clubs have long functioned as a stage of literacy practice, and a site of political resistance practiced in marginalized communities across America (Gere, 1997). In the first section, I give a brief overview of the history of women's literary societies as precursors to modern book clubs. This examination led me to select the book club space as a research site, by providing a historically-grounded perspective on the race-gender politics of book clubs. In the second section, I examine Black Racial Identity Development (Decuir Gunby, 2009) as a lens for understanding racial identity development, and I examine the Multiple Worlds Typology

(Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991) as a lens to describe the transitions adolescents make between the realms of school, peers, and family. Taken together, these led me to envision the book club as a place for the girls to make connections between identity, family, and peers through texts. This research guided my choice of reading material for the book club, in that I focused on titles that would give the girls traction on these three issues. In the final section, I examine the role of race and gender in the literacy practices of urban teens. In reviewing gender-based differences in literacy strategies, I detail my thinking for the activities I chose to engage in book club. The investigations I report in this chapter seek to understand how urban adolescents and the extra-curriculum have been situated in prior and current literacy research.

Throughout this chapter, I emphasize that the role of literacy as a resistance strategy. I reiterate that the people most involved in the extra-curriculum are often those systematically denied opportunities for formal education through de facto discrimination based on sex and race, not sex or race (Gere, 2001). Further, for these actors, literacy practices are a stage to perform raced and gendered identities in the extra-curriculum, in part as resistance to this discrimination. I continually ask if and how Black girls' critical literacies are built around an intersectional awareness of the ways race and gender influence their school lives, their family lives, and their representations in the media? Finally, I highlight the possibilities of the girls' out of school literacies to redefine themselves and transform their worlds.

The Extra-curriculum as a Stage: Book Clubs, Herstory, and Lifting as We Climb

Literary circles, such as those initiated by Margaret Fuller, were places collectively to read, write, and discuss literatures relevant to their local cultures and communities (M. White, 2005). Gere and Robbins contend that White women's literature circles date back to 1800, citing

records of meetings as evidence of literate activity in popular locations such as Boston (Gere & Robbins, 1996). For some New England White women, these literary circles were spaces to critically articulate the inequity in learning opportunities between White men and women and to influence society. While current studies of girls' after-school book clubs are not always politically-oriented, the value of shared literacy practice remains that it "makes possible for readers to be challenged, supported, and even transformed by the interpretations, perspectives, and life experiences of others (Park, 2012)."

Historically, women's literary societies were a stage to enact race as well as gender. However, Black women faced the distinct challenge of being seen as a racial representative rather than an individual, as we can see in the case of Phillis Wheatley. In 1773, being both Negro and female cast doubt on her reading and writing abilities, and her work required an "Attestation," for publishers to believe she wrote her own poetry (Gates, Jr, 1988). Nevertheless, Wheatley is considered the founder of both the Black female literary tradition and the Black literary tradition because of intersectionality of her identities. These literary traditions have been mischaracterized largely as oral, which theorists such as Gates critique as implying a lack of logic and sustainability, thereby distancing Blackness from intellectual ability.

Despite this mischaracterization, " literary journals, the Black press, literary writers, and literary societies, especially those of women, between 1830 and 1940 highly valued joint reading groups, creative writing efforts, and the role of literature in the lives of African Americans (McHenry & Heath, 2001)." Organizations like the National Association for Colored Women, which was founded in 1896, also fulfilled missions of simultaneous self-help and racial uplift in the Black community under the slogan "Lifting as we Climb." Centering on principles such as female achievement, self-sufficiency, and moral living schools for Black women, the legacies of

Cooper, Brown, Laney, and Bourroughs remain testaments to their advocacy (McHenry & Heath, 2001). The pressures of performing Black female identity may reside in individuals but collective literacy engagements across various contexts provide Black women with the chance to re-author the scripts of these identities.

The added perspectives these Black women brought to their literacy circles, is reflective of the differing issues arising from distinct social locations experienced by Black and White women. This pattern of joint reading and writing groups was later continued through Combahee River Collective founded in Boston in 1974 (B. Smith, 2000). In their guiding *herstory* statement, these women highlight the role of age in shaping their ideas about race and gender. They state:

> "…As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. (B. Smith, 2000, p. 265)"

The issues of performing a female identity and a Black identity have remained salient, yet the issue of age is one that has not fully been described for Black girls, as proven by the lack of research on Black girls in literacy education. In this context, the presence of women's literary circles among the Black community takes on a different meaning, a distinctly racialized and gendered meaning, than in the White community.

Black women such as Bethune, Cooper Brown, Laney, and Burroughs saw their own self-improvement as a means of race improvement simultaneously. Moreover, these women all opened a variety of schools for Black students in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which scholars such as McClusky (1997) contend were in response to the pervasive myth of Black women being inherently immoral. From this, we can see that while "literate" takes

on a racialized meaning in the American community, "education" takes on a distinctly gendered meaning, in that schools for Black women served a distinct socializing and political purpose, derived from a need to address the specific concerns of Black female morality. These issue of morality are salient to education today, as researchers have noted that Black girls' treatment by teachers is more social, rather than academic. Even in cyberspace, Black girls reach out to one another to build community in learning environments that ignore their needs (Kynard, 2010).

These historical events demonstrate the continued pattern of literacy circles in the extra-curriculum functioning as sites of reading, writing, and resistance in the Black female community. Moreover, they highlight the intricate weaving together of literacy practices, communities of practice, political resistance, and identities in informal learning spaces. Much like the present book club space, these historical examples demonstrate that collectively creating stories to counter hegemonic notions of Black femininity can happen outside of the constraints of formal institutions, such as schools. This was one reason that I positioned the book club in an after-school program, rather than during the school day. In the next section of the literature review, I continue to interrogate the role of identity in Black teen's literacy practices through examining the literature on identity development theories.

Scripts, Gazes, Production: Black Racial Identity Development In/Out of Classrooms

Literacy researchers have explored Black adolescent literacies through many lenses, but have yet to use the "Multiple Worlds Typology" (Holland et al, 1998; Urrieta, 2007)" to explore students' raced and gendered identities as they interrogate texts (Hill, 2009; Kinloch, 2011; Kirkland, 2011; Morrell, 2007). By carefully documenting how students interrogate texts in light of their identities, literacy researchers may be better able to understand how texts can be sites of

border-crossing. Through analyzing this talk through the lens of identity theories, literacy researchers may be able to better describe how book clubs can be sites of identity revision and enactment. I chose to review the Multiple Worlds Typology for its similarity to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literacies.

To understand better identity development, we first have to define Black Racial Identity (BRI), specifically as it relates to African American adolescents (Ducuir-Gunby, 2009). To define BRI, Decuir-Gunby (2009) suggested that "...in the case of African-Americans(sic)... BRI can be described as the attitudes and beliefs that an African-American has about his or her belonging to the black race individually, the black race collectively, and their perceptions of other racial groups" (Decuir-Gunby, 2009,p.103). In the context of urban schools, BRI can influence the students' perception of him or her self and school performance. BRI, as a key component of culture, can also influence the transitions that students make from the worlds of their family, school, and peers.

Researchers such as Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1998) developed the Multiple Worlds Typology to understand how some students are able to navigate cultural difference in schools. Drawing on notions of Cultural Compatibility theory, which suggests that differences in cultural knowledge and behaviors become apparent "…when schools require children to act in ways that are incongruent with what they have learned it home" which results in "misunderstandings, problems, and conflicts", the authors developed a typology for understanding student transitions (Phelan et al, 1998, p.10). They use the concept of social boundaries versus social borders to explain why some students are able to manage or avoid these problems successfully while others continue to be confounded by them. Phelan el all contend that social boundaries are sites of cultural difference which are, in their view, "politically neutral" but in which there are culturally

different standards of appropriate response. In contrast, social borders are politically charged sites of cultural difference, in which only one set of appropriate responses is rewarded (Phelan et al, 1998,p.10). Finally, Phelan (1998) suggested that the more rigid borders can be converted into permeable boundaries when the personal and psychic cost to adapting behaviors is low. But because the Multiple Worlds Typology does not account for how each individual decides if and when to cross boundaries, a theoretical framework such as Critical Race Feminism is needed to focus on how actors make meaning of social interactions in the extracurriculum.

To understand how students transition from their school literacy worlds to the world of the extracurriculum, we turn to Figured Worlds theory, which examines how individuals make sense of different social settings (Holland et al, 1998). Specifically, a figured world is: a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others. Each is a simplified world populated by a set of agents (in the world of romance: attractive women, boyfriends, lovers, fiancées) who engage in a limited range of meaningful acts or changes of state (flirting with, falling in love with, dumping, having sex with) as moved by a specific set of forces (attractiveness, love, lust) (Holland et al, 1998).

Finally, while there are many different types of borders, such as socioeconomic or psychosocial or structural, I will focus on linguistic and socio-cultural borders, which occur when the social components, such as learning or literacy style, in one world are viewed as inferior as those in another (Phelan et al., 1998,11). Because African American adolescents may be part of the African-American Language speech community, it is necessary first to examine the literature on language as a possible border.

Casting Call: Race, Gender, and the Role of Intersectionality in Literacy Practices

In addition to youth culture, other factors such as gender play a large role in how adolescents employ various literacy practices as a means of self-identification. By this I mean that literacy researchers have found that African-American male and female teens use different literacy practices for different purposes. In the work of Wissman (2007), African-American females use literary genres such as poetry to build stories of self-definition and social critique, and in doing so, they begin to practice authorship of their own unique identities. Additionally, Winn (2010) posited that adjudicated African-American adolescent females participating in a theatre program use the scripts of plays to re-write their identities. In one remarkable instance, students revised the ideal of the "ride or die chick" to one of an independent woman who was "down for the ride, but not the die" (Winn, 2010). In examples such as these, Multiple Worlds theory suggests that specific literacy practices, such as the use of individual genres, can provide students with resources to cross borders between their lived experiences and the traditional definitions of school-based literacy.

It is worth noting that African-American males also use literacy in their processes of identity construction. In fact, Kirkland (2011) suggested that African-American males practice literacy based on identity-specific principles, such as whether or not a text fits their perceptions of what will be relevant in the lives of African-American males. Further, researchers such as Alfred Tatum (2000) have suggested culturally-relevant approaches to literacy instruction for African-American males, specifically using culturally relevant literature , which helped his students to develop a broad sense of social consciousness. In Tatum's (2006) words, "History is laden with these kinds of enabling texts for African American males. An enabling text is one that moves beyond a sole cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include a

social, cultural, political, spiritual, or economic focus. (p.47)" For the purpose of this study, culturally-sustaining literature is that which the reader identifies as helpful to his/her social cultural and academic. In these examples, African-American students already employ literacies that allow them to cross borders between their social world and the worlds of the school. Beginning from the perspective of understanding what these literacies mean to these youths enables researchers to highlight these social funds of knowledge as part of the student, their social world, and the teachers' instruction. In this way, literacy researchers have been able to lower the emotional and psychic costs of adapting behaviors to cross from the students' world to the school world. Because literacy pedagogies are based on students' premises for engaging in literacy practices, that is, in speaking-back to the social world they live in, it may seem that sites of border-crossings that formerly require too high a psychic cost are now manageable.

Genres of Difference: Young Adult Fiction as a Potential Border Crossing

By examining language, literacy practices, and youth culture in the contexts of identity, I began to envision a design for my study.I piloted young adult book clubs (citation) and decided based on thepilot,to continue to use them as the setting for discourse about identity. As I thought about the range and variety of texts I might choose for the book club's reading and discussion, I recognized the potential relevance of such an activity not only for revealing identity work to the researcher, but for exploring how participation in intensive response to text and personal expression and reflection in an out of school context might have value for the classroom and for young adults meshing aspects of reading in and out of school in support of literacy growth.

Multiple Worlds theory (Phelan et al., 1991) which I discovered in my conceptual research reported above, suggests that students' various worlds can provide them with

knowledge that informs their ability to cross borders into the school world. Without doing so, it would be difficult to answer the questions this study seeks to address, which are: What is the nature of black girls' reading Afrocentric texts in an after-school book club? How are race and gender brought to bear? Through engagement with these texts, how do the young women define "culturally relevant" literatures? What do these terms mean to them? What do these engagements tell us about how identity and text interact in the reading experiences of female black adolescents?

I chose to answer these questions by designing a book club, and inviting participants to join me. I organized the book club based on having conversations with the girls in the mentoring program about what they liked to read, researching current and upcoming young adult literature featuring Black girls, and talking to my Sistah Scholah network of peers, mentors, students, and family members about books they liked when they were in seventh grade. I documented the book club through field notes, participant observation, and interviews. The full design of the study will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: The Case of Cyber-bully: Literacy as an Emotional Tool

Carleen: *Alright, so what kind of poems did you write this week?*
Keisha:* *One is about a cyber-bully and this girl is being bullied...*

One goal of this yearlong study was to analyze and describe the literacy engagements of one group of African-American girls in an after-school book club. In doing this research, I wanted to construct a deeper understanding of the book club, and the social interactions of its members. This study uses a socio-cultural definition of literacy meaning that literacies can only be understood in their specific social and cultural contexts as acts of meaning. One way to study local meaning in communication is by means of participant observation (Geertz, 1972). Researchers who participate in activities in order to understand the meaning that others make of them make use of both the rigors of a research process and also their human empathy (Mead, 1952). So, in order for participant observation researchers to produce accounts of local meaning resonant with the perspectives of those whom they study, they use particular research methods (as described in chapter two) and also make explicit the attitudes, prior knowledge, and predispositions that they bring to the activity.

In sharing race and gender with the girls in the book club, I found that my position as an insider and an outsider was helpful in many ways. As the earlier chapters of this dissertation demonstrate, in framing the research, reviewed literature on book clubs. I also studied theories that helped me think about identity, literacy, discourse, race, and gender. For example, and as illustrated in chapter three, I studied critical race feminism, critical race theory, organism, Africana womanism, black feminist thought, and feminism in the American context. In addition, as a literacy researcher in training my coursework featured works such as

Alvermann's *Sociocultural Constructions of Adolescence* (Alvermann, 2010), Bitz' *Manga High* (Bitz, 2009), Heath's *Ways With Words* (Heath, 1983), and Ladson Billings' *Critical Race Theory in Education*. The latter led me to review more Critical Race Feminism, and to use it in structuring this study.

By centering the research questions on the students' intersectionality, and focusing the data collection on the voices of the students, I threaded CRF through the design of the study. One of the research questions that this study seeks to address is: What is the nature of Black girls reading in an after-school book club? In this chapter, we see the girls using reading, writing, and dialog for a variety of reasons. First the girls' negotiations about what titles to read demonstrate that reading becomes collaborative, social, and emotional. It is collaborative in that the girls' offer and take up titled with flexibility to hearing one another. It is social in the sense that while the girls are choosing books, they are also aware of the shifting sands of being part of a new group, and sorting out what role they will occupy in the book club setting (Finders, 1997). Finally, it is emotional in the sense that while the girls invest value in the titles they discuss, they also are aware of the need to build bridges to one another and possibly to avoid factions in such a small group. Therefore, we can say that the nature of reading in the book club was multiple/pluralistic, in that it provided a space for the girls to collaborate on multiple levels, each of which plays a part in one central issue of adolescence: the task of figuring out one's place in the environment, and in the multiple social worlds each girl occupies.

As a researcher who shared some aspects of identity as well as some understandings of literacy in the context of urban education, I was keenly aware of the danger of over-determining conceptual categories and theories before completing analysis. The imposing of categories on my experience a prior would limit my participation and development of relationships so critical to

understanding others' points of view. It would preclude my discovering and describing the particulars of book club participants' talk and understandings in their terms.

I approached the book club from the perspective of someone who is interested and somewhat informed about literacies and about feminism yet I had many questions as to how the girls themselves understood both literacy and feminism. This meant that I had a hunch that was informed by not only my theoretical understanding but also my life experiences. This means that I was not a blank slate coming into the research site; in fact, I felt that the girls were engaged in literacies that as a field researchers and English education had not yet tapped into. Specifically I felt that there were unique ways of understanding and engaging literacy practices that black girls displayed which were overlooked by literacy researchers who often focused on other groups including white girls and black boys to the exclusion of black females (Gaunt, 2006). Below I will take up some of the ways that my inquiry involved both insider and outsider perspectives relevant to understanding how participants negotiated identities within the context of literature discussion.

The Raced-Gendered Researcher

Despite my awareness of the possibility of the determining categories for analyzing data, I was determined to understand both the girls saw their literacy in how they have these literacies reflected have a thought about themselves in terms of race and gender and in terms of the text that they read. Because ethnographic research involves analysis that is both inductive and deductive implicates the researcher as a participant as well as an observer, I was careful to journal my experiences with the girls (Geertz, 1973). Drawing on both personal experience and systematic observation and documentation of others activities and experiences, I connected how

my prior experiences influenced the ways I made sense of my direct experience, influenced my decisions about activities, and impacted my decisions about I was going to analyze and how I would be able to include the girls voices as they emerge from the data. In analyzing the data, I was careful to keep notes while I transcribed the data, which featured questions that I was asking myself, notes about the categories and what they should contain as the definitions of the categories might be open to shifting in later stages, and notes on what were alternate interpretations. By carefully documenting my own processes in analyzing as a researcher throughout the process of data collection with weekly memos following book club meetings, I felt that I could discern what my role in the book club entailed, and to become more aware of how my own lenses and experiences work coloring and their collection and analysis process. In some ways, the ways that I collected data were influenced by the research questions that I asked. In asking these research questions, I pre-constructed some categories for analyzing the data through the conceptualizing of and the designing of the study.

Unlearning My Inner Teacher as Researcher Identity

I came to this study with minimal experience as a teacher in the traditional classroom setting. Instead, I had some undergrad experiences in after-school programs in summer programs such as Upward Bound, and some experiences teaching first and fourth grade science at the local elementary schools. And in all of these contexts, I found that one of the ways to help students engaged in the content was to use literature that was relevant to their culture and the context of their everyday lives. For example, when my tenth-grade Upward Bound class read Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, where my first-generation students saw Spanglish in print for the first time, and discussion turned to their own immigration experiences, family member's

mispronunciations of English words, and the untranslatability of “wepa.” Our discussions were engaging, and much richer and deeper than when we read classics, such as *The Great Gatsby*.

My prior knowledge with reading, especially with students to very heavily on my own role as a reader myself. Although I did not learn to read until I was seven, once I did begin to read it was like a great fire began inside me. Throughout elementary school and even through college, I spent a significant time libraries and bookstores, and was always on a first name basis with every librarian I ever met. My passion for reading was something that became obvious to the girls even before the book club started when I was a mentor on in the campus-mentoring program. As a mentor, I was the lady who always tried to give the students books on to read on the way back to Midwest Ville from campus. Because of this many of the girls who were in the mentoring program had come to expect that I would be carrying around free books for them to read, which was not inaccurate. When I arrived at the research site, girls were coming to me in the hallway and ask "do you anything for me to read today?"

I also found that when the girls in the book club described me to girls outside of the book club they were describing as “their book club friend.”

> As the hallways empty out, I put on some music and peer around, curious to see where the children have gone, and I remember that the after-school kids go to the cafeteria for a snack before heading to their programs. I’m heading down the stairs when Ashley bounds past me, and breathes “I thought it was book club today and I just got my snack and I’mma get Ebony and Jasmine and come today.” I’m excited to see her, and ask if she’ll check the halls for anyone from book club last year while I go down to the cafeteria to see who I can see. She nods excitedly and bounces off, whispering “that’s my book club friend” to another little girl in the hallway, one I don’t know. (Carey, FN 11-26-12)

After book club, I walked the girls outside to the pick-up area, where I overheard them describe me to their parents when they came to pick them up from school they described me as their “book club teacher.” I thought that, like Finder (1997) and Ma’Ayan (2012), it was possible

that the girls referenced me as a "friend" to confer themselves status among their peers, and a "teacher" to their parents in order to explain why a slightly older but not quite old person might be hanging out with them after school. While I had previously invited all parents and family to attend book club in the introductory letter, this issue impacted my participation in the current study by causing me to reconsider the role I wanted to have, which was not peer or teacher, but a helpful guide.

While I understood myself to be a young adult, the students did have some questions about my age, as I was older than the eighth-graders at the school yet younger than most faculty members, many of whom were veterans from the founding of the school. I did not offer them my age because I was not sure that the decade of age difference between the seventh graders and myself was something that should be disclosed. I neither offered information about my private life freely nor obscured it if they asked me. Instead, I tried to use texts, such as the lyrics to Nina Simone's song *Four Women* (whose discussion will be described below), to tease out the girls' ideas about race and gender. When we listened to the song, and discussed the lyrics together, their talk revealed the relevance of age to them. Through their talk, I began to learn how they thought about age as it interacts with race and gender. In conclusion, it matters to these young women how old a woman was when she wrote about the topics in the lyrics.

Meeting at the Intersection: Emotional, Individual, and Social Needs in Book Club

In the week leading up to the Nina Simone discussion, the book club girls and I talked about the kinds of things we'd like to read and write about in book club. As illustrated below, the

girls listed multiple genres and topics, and included both book and movie titles, and the names of authors.

> Carleen: I need a favor from you guys. I need you guys to bring three examples of books by next Monday—books that have been turned into movies that you would like to read or books that have not been turned into movies that you think should be.
> Jasmine: Any book by Sharon Flake is good!
> Carleen: Is she one of your favorite authors?
> Jasmine: YES!

In this excerpt, the conversation starts when I ask a broad question about books that have been turned into movies, and takes a turn when Jasmine effusively expresses her affinity for books by Sharon Flake. In being the first person to get her ideas out on the table, Jasmine has taken a bit of a social risk, both because she does not know if the other girls will like her, and because she doesn't know if this will affect how they will support her choice. Although the girls are all in the same grade, they do not hang out together as a group outside of book club. In a sense, they are all getting used to a new peer group, in a new space.

However, as others have documented in studies of young women's book club talk (Florio-Ruane, 2001), the topic proffered by the first speaker was taken up by the subsequent speaker. Thus, in opening the conversation, Jasmine was not alone in liking Sharon Flake's novels. I spoke next, taking up Jasmine's topic-a move I made deliberately as a facilitator to encourage her and other to share more of their ideas. Keisha and Ashley then spoke to the same topic, although Keisha had not read the book, and Ashley said she did not want to read it.

> Carleen: There are a couple of really good books by Sharon Flake. Has anyone read the book, "The Skin I'm In"?
> Keisha: I was gonna read that book, but I got started reading something else...
> Carleen: Do you guys want to read that? Is this something you think you want to read in the future?
> Ashley: Can we read another book by Sharon Flake?
> Carleen: We can. The Skin I'm In is actually a really fun book. Its one I think I can buy officially.

In this instance, the girls continue to work through the topic of Sharon Flake, but with a new wrinkle: conflict around which title to read. Because Ashley is expressing some reluctance to re-read The Skin I'm In, contrary to what Keisha seems to be open to and what Jasmine is advocating, this is one instance where the girls are working through the practical matter of how to balance what people want to read individually versus as a group, the social matter of how to get along with a new group of people, and the emotional matter of what to get personally excited about, with what the book club wants to read as a whole. In this way, the data suggests that the nature of the girls' reading is not only social, but also cooperative. In the next turn of the conversation, we see the girls collaborating further to resolve the issue.

> Ashley (*reading the back of Money Hungry, another Sharon Flake novel*): It says, "A haunting story of greed and forgiveness, by the award winning author of The Skin I'm In..."
> Carleen: Yea, that's a good book! The Skin I'm In is interesting, I liked reading it a lot when I was your age. Is that something we want to try for in our second or third book in book club?
> Jasmine: There's another book it's called, "Begging for Change". It's about that this girl named, Raspberry—she lives in the ghetto.
> Carleen: Raspberry is a cute name, that sounds good.

In this turn, we see Ashley continuing to advocate for another book by Sharon Flake, but this time she is joined by Jasmine, who recommends another title, perhaps as a peace-offering to keep the group discussion on track, to relieve some of the social pressure of having made the first suggestion, or to relieve the emotional risk/pressure of displeasing someone else in a new group setting and space. The silence of the others is ambiguous but researchers have found silence functioning in a variety of ways, from assent to resistance (Florio-Ruane, 2001).

As book club leader, I was excited to hear that some of the girls were already familiar with Sharon Flake and the novel, which was relatively new when I read it as a teen and has since become extremely well known, especially among Black girls and women, because it addresses

an important issue to all women of all ages: colorism. The term refers to "inter- and intraracial discrimination based on skin color stratification (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008, p. 660) ." This discussion also shows some of the ways the book club girls notice, mediate, and take-care of one another's emotions in a new social situation, thereby answering the research question by revealing a care-taking function to the girls' book club discussions and behavior.

The discussion also shows some of ways the book club girls notice, mediate, and balance/take care of one another's emotions in new social groups/ situations.

I get way more bullying at home: Movie Responses as Emotional Tools

The idea of female care-taking of one another's emotions, in their discourse practices and also in their self-portraits of everyday experience was a topic raised in subsequent book club discussions. The girls' reported a similar sort of emotional care-taking with female family-members, for example, when watching movies at home, and taking on a good-daughter/sister/family member gender role. These roles also included literacy practices such as writing, and in the following example, we see the intersections of these practices with the girls' family identities.

In the example below, Keisha talks about a movie she watched with her sister in response to a question I asked, and looking carefully, you can begin to see where the emotional response is tied to media. As part of leading the book club, I asked the girls weekly what they had read, written, watched, and listened to over the past week. I fished around to get an idea of what media they consumed and produced, and to share some things I had written with them, also. When they didn't forget their notebooks, the girls were keen to share their fashion designs, stories, drawings, and in this case, even their poetry.

Carleen: Ok, I only saw a couple of notebooks, so I didn't know if anyone had anything to share. Alright, so what kind of poems did you write this week?
Keisha: One is about a cyber-bully and this girl is being bullied
Ebony: I love that movie!
Carleen: "Cyber-bully?"
Keisha: Yes.
Carleen: Ok, so what's your poem?
Keisha: "Today there are bullies,
you can't tell them from dark?
They prey on people,
even though they are aware,
There still are tears beyond this world.
to help someone who is bullied,
by writing a love song, singing,
" I wanna write you a sad song"

In this exchange, Keisha is indicating her awareness of the issue of cyber-bullying as presented in the ABC Family movie. In the first and second lines of the poem, Keisha describes the ambiguiety of cyber-attacks by comparing them to the dark. From emphasizing the dark as a kind of universal fear, she moves to evoking imagery of scary boogeyman and monster from horror movies by using the word "prey" to describe the bully in the third line. Keisha humanizes the victim by referring to them as "people." By using the "they" to refer to the bullies, she is positioning herself as being on the receiving end of the bullying, rather than the aggressor. In crafting the sentence that way, she may be establishing a connection with the victim in the movie. It's also important to note that she is writing as a form of emotional release, and showing emotions that are obscured by current paradigms of black girls, such as sorrow, fear, uncertainty, and hope. If we look at her writing as a type of individual coping strategy to deal with uncomfortable emotions, and her sharing as seeking social support, we can see that Keisha is using book club as a space to get help from the girls in dealing with the pressures of being bullied.

Even so, these emotions, and her descriptions of them become powerful tools her writing repertoire, which she is using in response to a movie that resonated with her on an emotional, social, and personal level. In sharing this poem in book club, she is being vulnerable, which may indicate the she feels she's in a safer space to do so, but also that she trusts the people there. This helps us to answer our research question, by revealing the nature of book club is one that supports a kind of transparency where the girls can be explicit about their emotional responses as a group. This suggests that the space is helpful for Keisha to try out coping strategies, not only for support, but to see if the other girls have similar struggles, or responses to them. This theme of seeking and finding support among other girls is rarely discussed when describing Black girls' educational experiences.

It is telling that Keisha's poem about cyber-bullies does not fall on deaf ears in book club. In the following excerpt, Keisha indicates that these shared emotions were experienced in a familial setting with her sister at home. The idea of preteen girls using literacy discussion with first with family members, and then again with peers outside of school indicates that they may be practicing finding community in new spaces. In the except below, we see the other book club girls take up the poem. It seems that the processing and to management of the emotional was also collaborative which demonstrates a level of gendered cooperation that suggests these middle school girls are invested and capable of emotional openness with one another.

> Ebony: Right, you cry until your tears run free, your tears come down, sad songs are made to cry, so…
> Keisha: I got two more!
> Tasha: How many do you have?
> Carleen: So, hold on, hold on. I like your poems; I want to go back to your first one--the one you said you wrote with your sister. Are there any particular instances, like do you write with your sister often?
> Keisha: *(Nods)*
> Carleen: Yes! How often?
> Keisha: Like at bedtime.

Carleen: So did you guys see "Cyber-bullies" together? So that's why you wrote the poem together, alright. I was just trying to get clear on that. Where there any particular scenes in the movie that you thought were relevant to school or relevant to your life?
Keisha: Yeah some things were like Facebook and taking pictures and can go anywhere and do bad things to your picture.

In this excerpt, we see Ebony affirming Keisha, although it is unclear if she's supporting her writing as a release strategy, or agreeing that music can trigger a physical release like crying, that can help you get out of a funk, a slump, or bad mood. While sharing the poem is an act of vulnerability on Keisha's part, Ebony's response of "Right" is in some ways validating that act. In this exchange, we can see the girls using discussion in book club to show care, build bonds and practice friendship. The girls talk about engaging in common literacy practices at home allows them to see each other as having similar issues. This helps us to further answer our research question, by demonstrating that the book club space provides room for the girls to engage in literacy practices that allow them to share response mechanisms and to support one another in ways that the research literature on black girls' literacy has yet to fully describe.

In the next quote, we can see that in response to Keisha's suffering, Ebony is exercising empathy and sympathy from her past experiences as a bullied person. In our interview, Ebony revealed that there is a bullying narrative present in the books she likes to read, such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Dork Diaries*, and in real life. Ebony had this to say about the topic:

Ebony: "Bullies pick on people because they know they're weaker…but one day, the dork grows up, and they get in a fight, and he wins the fight…And plus, bullying is a…bullying is affecting a lot of people lives these days.
Carleen: Why do you say that?
Ebony: Because up…scientifics…I think that's what it is, my teacher talks about it. And it's saying that like, our generation is…(*accepts Cheeto, eats it*) um, the most violent generation.
Carleen: O, do you mean statistically? Maybe she's saying that based on the numbers, on the amount of people that experience bullying in your generation?
Ebony: (nods) Yea…

Later, in her second interview, the topic of bullying resurfaces, although it has been six weeks since the last interview. In response to my questions about what she liked to write, Ebony is telling me about her experience winning an essay-writing contest, ('What Civil Rights Means to Me') sponsored by Kroger the previous year.

Ebony:…like, I was bullied in first, second, and third grade and that kinda bought down my self-esteem, but then when people wanted to be my friend, cuz people always wanted to be my friend, but I didn't let them in because I didn't want myself to get hurt. But once I won, I knew I was smart, I can do something with my life and nobody can tell me I can't.

Research on black girls in schools details their roles as "enforcers" and "helpers" regarding the teacher and their classmates, but this overlooks the emotional and the socio-emotional aspects of black girls' schooling experiences (Zinn & Dill, 1994). In the above quote, Ebony is revealing that these aspects are important dynamics to how the girls in book club engage learning, and more importantly, how they engage one another. Writing about students' responses, Dutro (2008) suggests " …the presence of students' hard stories, offered up in response to a textual encounter, require re-visioning the classroom as a space of testimony and witness." In some ways, Ebony performs the role of witness to Keisha's poem (or textual encounter) in the book club space. In doing so, Ebony is practicing empathy, by which I mean she is inferring, recognizing, and understanding the feelings of another person, such as those Keisha is writing about in her poem. In doing so, she is demonstrating concern and exercising care for Keisha.

Ebony is demonstrating that, in the book club space, it is an appropriate response to feeling empathy for someone who is suffering. It is also acceptable to make something for them to lift their spirits, or try in some way to express concern. Because the love song is highlighted as one way to help someone who was being bullied, an affirmation as offering affirmation which is

something that can provide healing or the space to step back and get perspective on the situation, and whether the bullying represents the full scope of the person being bullied.

The girls' ideas about bullying also revealed that they felt bullied off-line, as well. In the next exchange, the girls further demonstrate their connection with the "Cyberbully" movie, and begin to relate it to their family life. In this next excerpt, it is key to note that they are on the receiving end of the bullying rather than the aggression, and that the girls continue to share feelings of vulnerability, especially as it relates to gender, within race in the context of family.

> Ashley: Ok, I saw that movie on Lifetime. I thought it was real sad because she was trying to kill herself but I almost cried. But every time my brother jokes, and he tries to bully me, I get really scared, so like when he's bullying me-
> Carleen: I think that, umm, sometimes our siblings are the people who really torment and make us cry more so than other people.
> Ashley: Oh, yea, let me tell you, I got way more bullying at home than at school! Like, I got made fun of all the time because of the fact that they're browner all the time.

In her first line, Ashley lets us know how the movie makes her feel, and then in then in her second turn, she relates it back to when her brother teases her. In doing so, she steps outside of the girl to girl comparisons that have characterized the conversation so far to make a girl-boy comparison. By highlighting the issue of gender, Ashley connects her brother's bullying to her skin tone. The issue of skin tone as a type of social currency connected to economic mobility has a historical precedent in the U.S (Hill Collins, 2005). Even more importantly, skin tone is an issue with an inverse relationship to gender. By this I mean that skin tone operates differently for Black men than Black women, as the girls will describe in the next chapter. This is a valuable point because it the girls' awareness of skin tone affects how they perceive Black femininity and masculinity and attractiveness in book club. Because Black women are held to Eurocentric beauty standards, the lighter the skin to, the more "feminine" and "attractive" the woman; whereas for Black men, skin tone is not as definitive an issue for gender performance. In

highlighting skin tone, Ashley's demonstrating an awareness of Black womanhood as embodied, i.e not looking at race and gender as discrete (Gaunt, 2006). CRF would suggest that this is Ashley demonstrating her recognition that there are different experiences for Black women/girls and men/boys.

Black girls make the world a better place": Self-Image in the Book Club

Within Black female experiences, these differences are also rooted in the perceived meanings of behavior, such as wearing certain types of clothing. In book club, we talked about different kinds of Black girls, and I tried to advocate for the validity of plural experiences. The girls, especially Ebony highlight their understandings of differences in behavior in their written responses to the questions, "how would you describe Black girls, and why?" In this quick write Ebony writes:

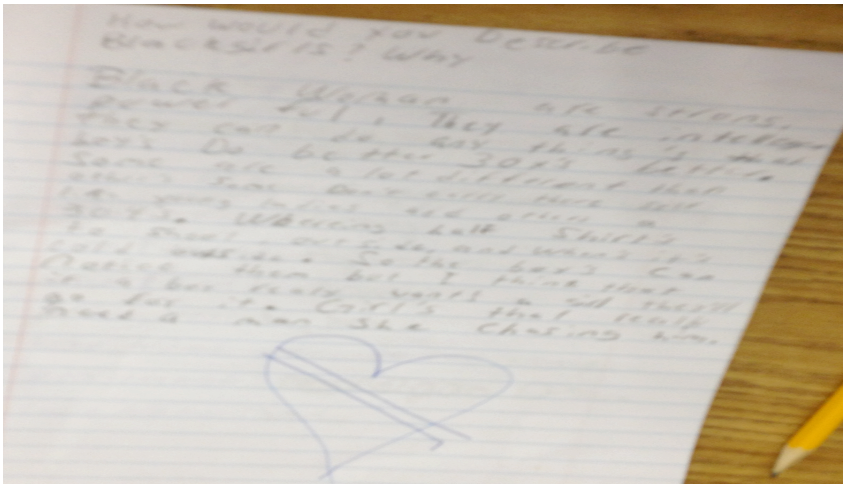


Figure 5: Ebony's Journal Entry #1 ***("Black women are strong, powerful. They are intelligent, they can do anything that boys can do 30x better. Some are a lot different than others. Don't carry there self like young ladies and others a 304s. Whereing half shirts to shool, outside, and when its cold outside. So the boys can notice them but I think that if a boy really wants a girl he'll go for it. Girls that really need a man she chasing him (Ebony, 11-26-12)")***

In this artifact, I want to note that although the question was framed around black girls, Ebony's response defines "women" in connection with positive adjectives, and draws a comparison between women and "boys," not men. When she talks about difference, she begins to distance these women from two groups: "young ladies" and "304s." In book club, the 304, whom the girls' described as being a girl that "chases after boys, has their belly out, wears tight clothes" (field notes,12-4-12) was one of the most frequently discussed themes. The girls explained their use of the term by saying, "if you enter the digits 3-0-4 into a calculator, and turn it upside down, it spells h-o-e", which they felt was extremely "harsh," so they used 304 as a code. In Ebony's dichotomy, she positions "304s" as girls who are not competitive with boys like "women" but instead pursue attention from boys, and she appears to place a lower value on these 304s, as well as the boys (who she describes a bit desperate and "really wants a girl") that participate in the 304's pursuit.

According to Ebony, for his part, if the boy wants a "girl," (perhaps instead of a "woman" or no matter what kind) he may go along with the pursuit, but he is clearly not referred to as a 'man.' The question of age is unclear here, as Ebony consistently relates "boy" and "girl" with low-valued behaviors. It is possible that her perception of "woman" is aligned with merit/behavior, rather than age. An alternate interpretation is that Ebony is constructing a continuum, where women are on one side, ladies are in the middle, and 304s are on the other side. What is unclear is if women are on the same plane as "young ladies" or "304s", or if its possible to move in both directions, or only one; which leaves us with the question, is this the beginning of respectability politics, or simply a response to being socialized to it?

For the same assignment, Jasmine went in a similar direction, but with very different results. She writes:

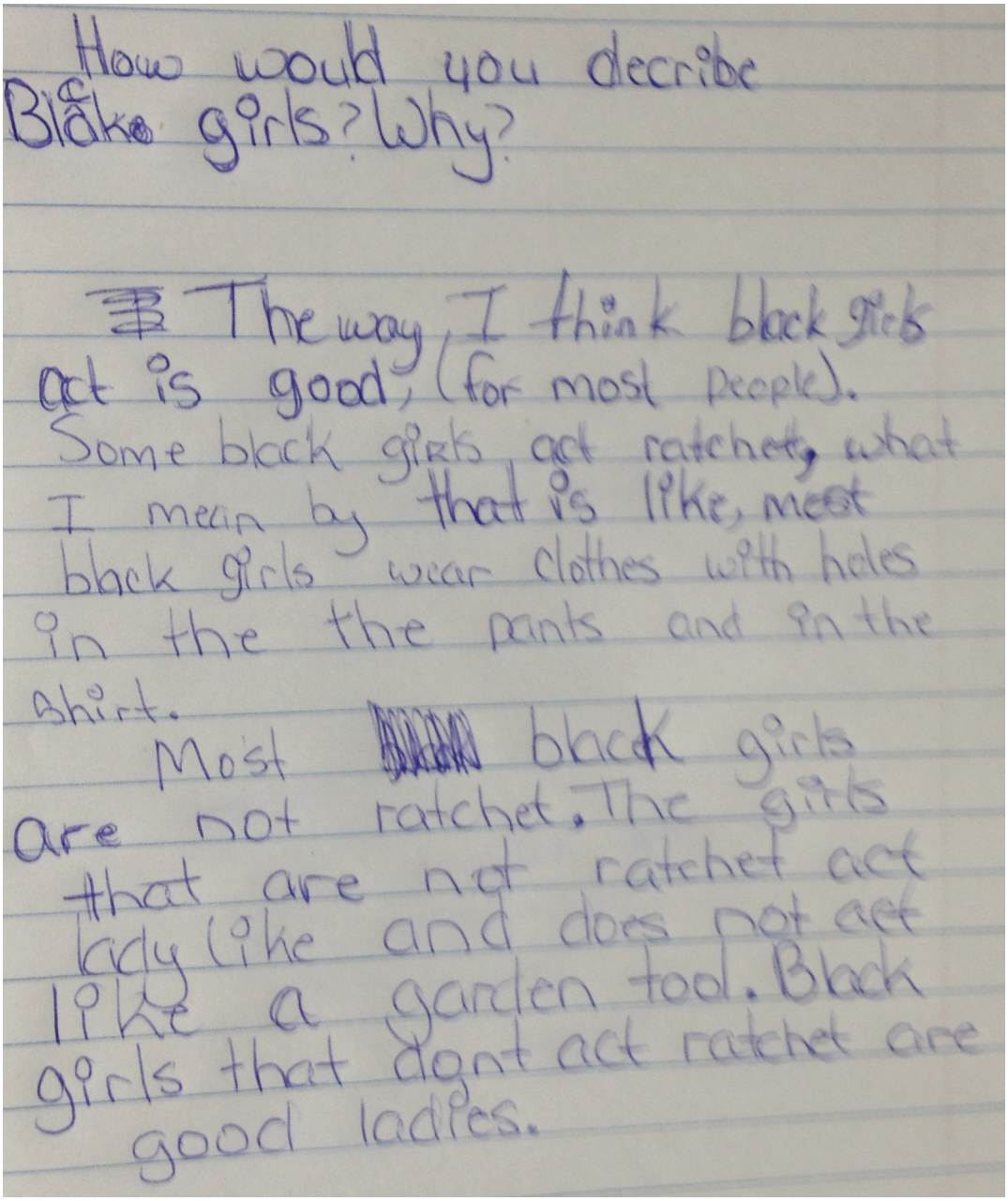


Figure 6: Jasmine's Journal #3 (*"The way I think most black girls act is good (for most people). Some black girls act ratchet, what I mean by that is like, most black girls wear clothes with holes in the the pants and in the shirt. Most black girls are not ratchet, act ladylike, and does not act like a garden tool. Black girls that don't act ratchet are good ladies.")*

In Jasmine's writing, we can see a similar beginning to Ebony's, where the girls begin by defining Black women in positive terms. For example, "we run the world" Jasmine relates media, in terms of the "Black Girls Rock" awards show, to the topic, and begins to illustrate all

the ways that Black girls are awesome. As part of this illustration, she details the way Black girls are different from White girls, but because she does not split the category of White into boys and girls, it seems as if she believes race and gender to be mutually intertwined for White girls as well as Black ones. CRF would suggest that by carving out a space for Black girls to be different than White girls, Jasmine is demonstrating the idea that these are integrated, and centering her writing on this experiences of women and girls of color. This centering is not without attention to the views of outsiders, who "think Black girls have too much attitude," which Jasmine rejects in favor of "you can have as much attitude as you want!" She goes on to say that "Black girls are powerful and inspire the new generation that is coming along" which perhaps indicates that she thinks of herself and other Black girls as role models, for younger people. She finally ends with the declarative statement "Black girls make the world a better place!" This writing, which counters hegemonic notions of Black womanhood and girlhood, is a powerful counter narrative. According to Solorzano and Yosso, "…the counter-story is a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege…personal stories or narratives recount an individual's experiences with various forms of racism and sexism (2009, p. 138)." In the example of Jasmine's journal, we see that the idea of counter-narratives can also be extended to include adolescents young women, whose voices are rarely heard in the research literature.

It is worth noticing that this declaration is positioned next to the idea that, race doesn't matter when it comes to having attitude. So, in addition to perceiving race and gender as intertwined, Jasmine's adding a layer of color-consciousness in context, rather than color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), that allows her to claim having attitude as a positive thing for all women. It is key to note that as students growing up in the age of "racism without racist (Bonilla Silva)," the girls' attitudes about race, racism, and color-blindness have yet to fully be described.

This could also be seen as a way to combat the stereotype of Black women having too much attitude, and to assert that all women have attitude, but that only Black women are singled out for negative attention because of it. Jasmine's ideas of race and gender, and her consciousness of the way it colors outsiders' perceptions of Black women/girls suggest that she understands some of the complexity of race and gender, and that she has begun to develop strategies to navigate around it, in terms of refusing to internalize the negative ideas.

In the next chapter, we see the girls taking a different angle, and discussing the differences in Black women's lived experiences, through the issue of colorism in Nina Simone's "Four Women", and Sharon Flake's *The Skin I'm In*. While I planned to talk about Nina Simone's "Four Women" to highlight the role of colorism in Black women's lives after discussing *The Skin I'm In* to link the issue of skin color with the next novel, Jacqueline Woodson's *The Road to Paris*, but the girls' discussion of the title gave me pause. I did not want to rush in with the novel and risk invalidating the girls' input, but chose instead to launch into the song as a way of echoing their sentiment, and giving things time to cool off.

CHAPTER 5: Four Women, Four Worlds: Critical Media Analysis in Book Club

On Colorism: "I think Simone Nina is trying to describe four things that colored women live through different" (Keisha)

Ladson-Billings (2009) argues that the negative images in the media of Black females influence how we are thought of as teachers, and I extend this notion to also include learners. In the following chapter, we see that as learners, black female preteens pick up and contest these images, demonstrating that Black girls' critical literacies are built around an intersectional awareness of the ways race and gender influence representations in the media. Further, they construct new images of Black femaleness through their discussion of music, and so demonstrate an embodied notion of race and gender (Gaunt, 2006). These constructions inform our second research question, "How do young women engage texts in book club?" by demonstrating how the girls' discourse contains intertextual counter-narratives.

Nina Simone's work is one example of black women using the media to define themselves for themselves, and her music, especially the song "Four Women" is a testament to the power of constructing composite counter narratives[11] during the Civil Rights Movement. *Nina*, a biopic about Simone's life, began filming in the fall of 2013. The movie producers stirred controversy in casting Zoe Saldana, an Afro-Latina actress with lighter skin, straighter hair, and thinner nose and lips to play Simone, a move that her family and estate publicly condemned. While some celebrities such as Aretha Franklin felt that the actress casted needed to

[11] Defined as a "type of counter-narrative usually offers biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color…in relation to U.S institutions and a socio-historical context (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 139).

play piano or sing to do justice to Nina's legacy, others such as Jill Scott felt that even though Saldana wore a prosthetic nose to make it appear wider and make-up to darken her skin, Saldana's acting skills justified her for the role. On the other hand, many felt that Simone's image had been whitewashed or changed to fit a Eurocentric beauty standard, and to rectify the wrong, an actress with more distinctly African features should be cast (Burton, Bonilla-Silva,, Ray, Buckelew, & Hordge Freeman, 2010). The recent controversy is part of the socio-historical context of the song, and reveals the issue of ownership of these stories. The controversy foreshadows that girls' analysis of the song, and both the question, "who has the right to tell Nina Simone's story, and how?"

The late Nina Simone raised these exact issues in her own artistic work. In her 1991 autobiography, Simone describes writing the song "Four Women." She says:

> The women in the song are Black but their skin tones range from light to dark, and their ideas of beauty and their own importance are deeply influenced by that. All the song did was tell them what entered the minds of most Black women in America when they thought about themselves: their complexions, their hair-straight, kinky, natural, which?-and what other women thought of them (Simone & Cleary, 1991, p. 117)

Because the theme of self-definition was one topic of Sharon Flake's book, *The Skin I'm In*, I chose to introduce the girls to some of Simone's most famous songs, including "Mississippi Goddamn" and "Four Women" just prior to beginning the novel. In the novel, the main character, Maleeka, is coming to terms with the big questions of adolescence, such as "Who am I?" while she is also subjected to teasing. While some of the teasing is about the clothes her mother makes for her as a means of grieving for Maleeka's late father, the teasing that really bothers Maleeka is about her dark skin tone and hair texture. To address these issues, Maleeka cuts her hair, and seeks comfort in different clothes, lent to her by the antagonist, Char, who lends her clothes, but talks about her to her face and behind her back, and spreads rumors that set

Maleeka up for a fight with another girl over a boy. Maleeka does not have very many friends, and through her experiences with Char's gang, is learning that conditional friendship is not acceptance. Through her relationship with Char, Maleeka learns that the people to keep close are those that see value in you as a whole person being herself, rather than in being someone else. Because the issue of skin tone and colorism is a central theme of the novel, I paired it with "Four Women" to see what sense the girls' made of the connections or disconnects between the two texts, and real life as a teen growing up in the city.

Researchers such as Hill (2009) describes one approach of using lyrics as literature for critical interrogation as *hip-hop literacy,* and this is one approach among many within the framework of pedagogies based on popular culture and critical media literacy (Duncan-Andrade, 2004; Morrell, 2007; Pough, 2007; Smith, 1997; Winn, 2011). Because cultural narratives connect with one another in intertextual ways, i.e, text-text; text-reader; reader-reader; hegemonic narratives- counter-narratives, I hoped to create an opportunity for intertextual engagement in the girls' responses (Gee, 2008). I also wanted to show the girls an example of advocacy for multiple narratives of Black womanhood, outside of the male gaze. I told them a little about Nina's Southern upbringing, her classical piano training, and her rejection from Juilliard. I also told them that these events occurred before she began making music during the Civil Rights Movement, such as "Mississippi Goddam."

In "Four Women[12]," Simone paints the picture of four different women whose differences, most notably in skin tone, result in dramatically different lived experiences. Colorism, is "an allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness and darkness of one's skin…[that] tends to favor lighter skin over darker skin as indicated by a person's appearance as proximal to a White Prototype" (Burton et al., 2010, p. 440). Colorism is a

[12] See Appendix for full lyrics

prominent theme in Flake's novel about one Black girl coming to terms with being teased for her dark skin (Brooks et al., 2008). I thought the song provided us with an introduction to the idea that images of black women have historically hinged on skin tone. The girls, however, thought otherwise, and discussed the lyrics in relation to stories about the women in their lives to construct an intertextual analysis.

On Colorism: "I think Simone Nina is trying to describe four things that colored women live through different" (Keisha)

In order to answer the research question of "How do young women engage texts in book club?" I want to describe how I set up that meeting, as it was different from book discussion days. In preparation for the meeting to discuss Four Women, I printed multiple copies of the lyrics to the song, downloaded a recording of a live performance at the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival on my computer, and jotted down several discussion questions in my field notes journal. These included: "What are the best/worst parts of this song?" "What, if anything, do you find compelling about this song?" "Do any of the four ladies sound like anyone you know? What makes them the same/different from you, and from each other? (Carey, field notes, 1-6-13)."

In short, I wanted to focus the discussion on the images of Black women in the song. I hoped that these questions would prompt inquiry about the role of skin color in determining or influencing the multiple narratives of Black Women, as both Flake's novel and Simone's song center on depictions of Black women of various hues. In the following section, I argue that the girls construct intertextual counter-narratives in response to the song, and these inform our second research question, "How do young women engage texts in book club?"

Shades of Colorism: Intertextual Counternarratives of "Four Women"

When I arrived at school, I set up our discussion circle and free-choice book table as always, and waited until 3:45 for the girls to come join me. I hung out in the halls, making small talk with the teachers and students I knew from the mentoring group or past school observations. Ebony was the first to join me, bounding in with her usual enthusiasm, and looking for new titles on the free-choice table. When everyone else arrived (Ebony, Jasmine, Ashley, Keisha, Alicia), we listened to the audio of the song once to get the idea of the song, then I handed out the lyrics with the instructions to "circle the words that stand out to you most," to begin rendering the text (Hill, 2009). We listened to the song for a second time, and then we opened discussion, where the girls were keen to ask questions about authenticity, ownership of narratives, and what was the purpose of Simone's song. Through answering these questions, the girls demonstrated a growing critical media literacy, and some awareness of the collective ownership of Black women's stories. I argue their own close association with the narratives, and also indicating where and how they saw themselves as black girls, demonstrates that their engagement with text is intertextual.

After listening to the song, we took a few moments to jot down some answers to the questions above as a warm-up to discussion. In the next passage, the girls talk about the multiple experiences of Black women's lives in the song to suggest first that "colored" women's lives are distinct from those of non-colored women, and that they are a part of womanhood as a whole.

> Carleen: So what do you guys think?
> (Hands raised as I count the order in which to speak)
> Carleen: One, two, three and four.
> Keisha: Um, I think I wrote in her name backwards. I think Simone Nina is trying to describe four things that colored women live through different. Different ways, and like, atmospheres, and this is what I think women are.

> Carleen: So you think black women are different and there are more than one experience of being a black women? Ok, cool. Ashley is next then Jasmine.

In positioning the four narratives as "things that colored women live through," Keisha is noticing that there are differences in how African American women live through the experiences detailed in the song, and perhaps implying that these are distinct from non-colored women. In the next sentence, she suggests, "different ways," further indicating some distance between the African American women of the song, and other women. In using "atmospheres" to describe the arrangement of types of experiences, Keisha indicates that even within the group of colored women, there are distinct spaces that women operate within, which means that she has an awareness of multiple experiences of Black womanhood based on how location may factor into how these experience. This is consistent with the dichotomy set up by Jasmine in the last chapter, suggesting a ranking or continuum of types of Black women, young ladies, and 304s. In *Between Good and Ghetto* (2009), Jones describes these dichotomies as "gendered constraints" which position girls in inner cities to navigate the categories with fluidity. These dichotomies also influence how the girls advocate for themselves in schools, view sexual agency, express emotion, write empowering texts, communicate across cyber-space, choose what to read, understand feminity and blackness, use art to narrate their stories and interpret the world around them (Evans Winters, 2010; Fordham, 1993; Gibson, 2010; Henry, 1998; Jones, 2009; Kynard, 2010; Leadbetter & Way, 1996; McNair & Brooks, 2012; Park, 2012; Richardson, 2009, 2002; S. Smith, 1997; Staples, 2009; Ward, 2009; Weis & Fine, 2005; Winn, 2011; Wissman, 2007).

Keisha finishes by saying, "this is what I think women are," which almost seems to bring these groups, colored vs non-colored, different narratives vs single narratives, all together under the umbrella of "women". In doing so, she tells us that her ideas of race and gender are deeply intertwined, that these influence how she reads media texts, and in some ways, organized by the

distinctions "women," "colored," and "non-colored." In separating out the experiences of Black women, she's beginning to carve out a space for a unique set of identities.

As the conversation continues, the girls suss out the idea of race, as it relates to the Black female experience, and what the effects of this relationships can be. In the next excerpt, the girls interpret the experiences described in the song, and draw out connections between images of black women, race, skin tone, desirability, and economic stability. This has undertones of what Hill Collins (2006) terms "black sexual politics" which is significant because it demonstrates their understanding of the ways sex and gender work differently for Black women, in and outside of the Black community. In the following quote, Alicia describes how Black women are 'hard,' and in doing so, demonstrates her understanding of the differences between Black and White women.

> Alicia: I think it was telling four different stories about black women. The first one, you know how hard women are but they are too strong to stop—so that the first one. And this one is about the white women, "I'm very sorry I don't mean to brag, I'm gonna marry me a rich man and he's going to take care of me!"
> Ebony: She said yellow!
> In this quote, we see Alicia and Ebony begin debating the race of the women in the song.

As Alicia interprets the narrative of Aunt Sarah, she indicates that the stories are about black women specifically, not only women of color. But when she describes the story, she uses words like "hard women," which references archetypes of Black womanhood that position Black women as a contrast to soft, passive ideals of White womanhood. This traditionally casts Black women as unfeminine, and therefore beyond love or sympathy (Ladson-Billings, 2006), yet Alicia sees this ascribed "strength" as a positive thing, in that Black women are "too strong to stop." It is unclear from her statement why she says this, but it is reasonable to suggest that the idea of being indomitable may be a resistance strategy to a growing awareness of racism and sexism. At the level of language, Alicia is not only responding to a cultural script, but flipping it,

and subverting the expected , White, middle-class norm to challenge hegemony (Alim & Smitherman, 2012).

Similarly, Alicia's idea of Black women being "too strong to stop" is a critical way of reading the song, not just in terms of race, but also in terms of gender. This is an example of a Black girl's critical literacy is built around an awareness of the ways racism and sexism influence representations in the media. In this case, Alicia is refusing to position Aunt Sarah as negative because of her strength, which the dominant discourse on gender would debased as 'unfeminine,' but instead positions her as a figure whose fortitude is an attribute rather than a flaw.

Alicia's next move is a discussion of the second narrative in the song, that of Saffronia. She describes her as "the white woman," who says "I don't mean to brag, but I'm going to marry a rich man." In doing so, Alicia highlights the role of race within the gender category, which uses controlling images of Black women as unfeminine to position White women as highest rung on the ladder of desirability (Collins, 2004). For example, Collins writes "blue-eyed, blonde, thin White women could not be considered beautiful without the Other-Black women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair (Collins, 2000, p. 98)." In "Four Women," Simone centers the issue of African features as beautiful in a non-hierarchial way, and Alicia picks up this ranking in her analysis of the "White" lady.

It is significant that Alicia describes the mini-dialogue as a "brag" because it suggests that, in her view, White women are aware of their racial privilege in conjunction with their gender, and proud of the resulting higher status awarded to them because of it, at expense of Black women. Further, the idea of being married to a rich man is extended to "...and he's going to take care of me!" which positions the white woman as an object of matrimonial desire, and

entitled to the economic benefits therein. It is unclear in this dialogue if Black women are excluded from desirability, marriage, and economic stability, by virtue of race. However, in describing the White woman as bragging, Alicia is revealing her understanding the hierarchies of racism and sexism in black sexual politics, from the perspective of a black girl.

When Ebony, jumps in to correct Alicia, saying "she said yellow!", she brings the conversation back to the lyrics of the song. While Alicia's interpretation of Saffronia's narrative is conflated with white womanhood, perhaps because of her father, who is described as "rich" and "white," it still reveals insights into how Alicia sees race and gender at play. However, Ebony brings us back to the topic of skin color. In the following exchange, the girls unpack the idea of not just race, but also biraciality, and what that means in terms of gender.

> Ebony: she said yellow!
> Carleen: So do you think it's about a woman who's only white?
> Alicia: No, I think she's mixed, like—"He's gone take curr of me!"
> Carleen: Why do you think she's mixed?
> Alicia: Cause she said that she has some white in her because 'he forced my mother late at night; like he raped her mother
> Carleen: Ok, and?
> Alicia: Her mother was probably a slave, that's why she said her mother did not like her.

This quote gives us a information about where the girls think colorism conflicts originate in Black women's relationships, further helping us to answer the second research question by demonstrating how the girls collaborate to understand representations of black femininity. After Alicia accepts the "yellow" correction, she finds the text to support the idea that Saffronia is biracial, demonstrating that literacy practices, such as constructing an argument, are embedded in the social realities of life outside of school, and attuned to the social dynamics of her role in book club (Finders, 1994; Mahiri, 2004). Yet, Alicia still holds on to the idea that Saffronia occupies a position of a woman who is taken care of, even in the context of rape, by virtue of her having

"some white in her." The privileging of whiteness is reflective of the idea of colorism, wherein privilege is awarded on the basis of closeness to a white European beauty ideal (Brooks, Brown, Hampton, 2008). In this anti-Black ideology, physical features such as straight hair, light skin, thinner lips, and a narrow nose are prized due to non-Africanness, and the girls in book club are aware of how this is mediated by both race and gender (Evans Winters, 2010). In according Saffronia similar status as the White woman she previously described, Alicia is demonstrating her awareness of the hierarchy of colorism and aesthics, in terms of the master narrative (Harris, 1990). Further, Alicia demonstrates that within the Black female community, this hierarchy is connected to that of the larger female category, and that she has to say something about it in order to resist this hierarchy (Wissman, 2007). This demonstrates that the girls' engagement with text produces counternarratives, and that the book club can function as an identity-affirming counterspace (Carter, 2007).

As Alicia brings the historical context of the rape of black slave women by white masters into the conversation, she is indicating that the sexual violence suffered by Black women has a role to play in Saffronia's narrative, as well as in her relationship to her mother. While the mother is not mentioned in the lyrics, Alicia muses about enmity between the two, but it is less clear if the cause of it is the rape, or the resulting higher status of Saffronia than her mother, due to her White features. In talking about this possibility, Alicia demonstrates awareness that relationships with the opposite sex, the act of sex, and even sexual violence, plays a role in how women of different races are perceived. Even within the gender category, the status of object of desire versus object of violence informs how women relate to one another across color lines (Collins, 2000).

CRF theorists of education would suggest that the girls are coming to understand the diversity of Black female experiences, and from this understanding are in the process of developing resilience as a strategy for self-advocacy (Evans Winters, 2007). In this section of the conversation, the girls have described how Black women experience life differently from other races of women and are detailing what race and skin color have to do with these differences. The girls are using historical context in the context of colorism. That they do so suggests that they bring their multiple selves to the their literary engagement. This is important because it means they can bring all of their funds of knowledge, their community memberships, their resources to the reading task, in order to make it authentic, relevant, and most importantly, transformative (Alvermann, 2010; Moje et al., 2000; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Paris, 2009; Tatum, 2008; Winn, 2010, 2011). Transformative literacy practices empower students to reject hegemonic narratives about their communities, and instead construct narratives about themselves and people like them for their own liberation (Morrell, 2007).

It is also true that they have begun to interrogate the role of sexual relationships, and their influence in shaping the hierarchy within the female gender category, thus giving themselves space for another emerging identity: that of themselves as romantic partners/adults.

Black boys, black girls: Adolescents on the Politics of Aesthetics

In this section, I argue that the girl's journals demonstrate an awareness of the different spaces adolescent boys and girls occupy within the Black community. Just as the girls discuss themes of economic status, and race privilege within the gender category, they also write about status and privilege in ways that suggest their engagement with text is multi-faceted and includes a critique or questioning of Black boys' masculinity. Additionally, the role of sex in determining

gender roles for black girls is something Ebony addresses in her written response to the discussion, which details not only the differences between Black boys and girls, but also describes her reactions to the song. In this written response, which I meant as a way to capture final thoughts on the discussion and give me time to set up snack before departure, Ebony details the differences she sees in how black boys and girls are perceived differently when engaging in the same behaviors. For example, Ebony references "chillin with the homies," which she interprets as ok for boys, but gets girls labeled a 304. In doing so, she reveals a facet of Critical Girlhood Literacies, a critical awareness of sexism viewed through a lens of ageism.

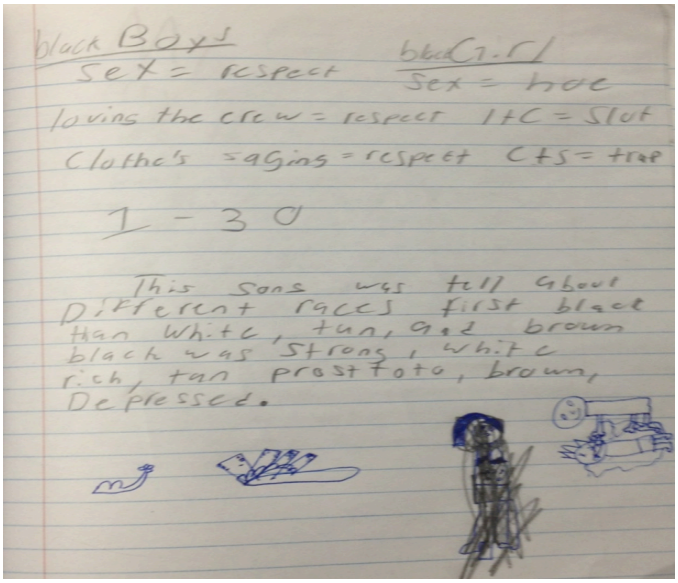


Figure 7: Ebony's Journal #2 ***(see below for transcription)***

("Black Boy Black Girl
Sex=respect Sex=hoe
Loving the crew=respect LTC=slot
Clothes saging=respect CTS=tramp
This song was tell about different races first brave, black was strong, white rich, tan prostitute, brown depressed.")

In the first half of this response, we can see Ebony's awareness of differences in perceptions based on gender within the "Black boys/ Black Girls" dichotomy she sets up. While sex is one aspect of behaviors that extends to clothing, as well as social relationships, she also

views the actions boys take as consistently resulting in respect, while the same actions for girls result in a variety of negative labels, such as "hoe," "slut," and "tramp." In depicting the imbalance of these perceptions, Ebony is describing the pressures of being both female and Black from the perspective of an adolescent, and also questioning why "respect" seems to be a constant for boys, but not for girls. This suggests that she is not only aware of an imbalance in the level of respect accorded to Black girls, but also questioning the validity of the respect given to the boys.

The idea of "respect" has a long history in the world of youth culture, especially in the development of hip-hop feminisms and Black Female Literacies, as detailed by Pough (2002) and Richardson (2002). Young women, perhaps even preteens, have long been aware of the imbalances in respect accorded to Black women in contrast to Black men due to both race and skin color. In the following discussion, the girls describe the different levels of attraction ascribed to boys and girls with dark skin.

In talking about the novel, *The Skin I'm In,* the girls sometimes related people at school to people in the story. In the following example, the girls describe one of their male classmates, Travis, as similar to a character in the story, yet they also use their notions of skin color and gender to characterize him.

(girls whispering, giggling)
Carleen: What is so funny?
Alicia: Davis was in this book!
Carleen: He acts like a girl?
Alicia: Yes, a girl!
Ebony: Davis D?
Carleen: Actually, there is something cute about Davis…
Alicia: Myyyy Davis?
Carleen. How is he your Davis?
Alicia: Well, he was, but then he got mad at me!

In this exchange, the girls do connect the characters in the book to characters in real life, in an instance of participant examples, demonstrating that text engagement in book club is characterized by the joint emergence of academic learning and social roles (Wortham, 2005). This suggests that these depictions of Black middle-schoolers are in some ways authentic enough for the girls to recognize, and so activate their own funds of knowledge to interpret the characters within the book (Moll et al., 1992). In this exchange, there's some contest between Alicia and Ebony, about the idea that Travis acts like a girl, and who exactly claims ties to him. In the next exchange, I tried to prompt them to describe him, and here we can see them using their ideas about skin color and gender to characterize Davis.

> Carleen: Ok, hold one second so Davis is a fairly dark-skinned guy, right? As opposed to Eric and Shawn?
> Ebony: Yes.
> Carleen: Do you think it works the same for girls as it does for guys? As far as the dark-skinned problem?
> Ebony: Well no, no
> Carleen: ok, how does it work differently?
> Keisha: No, because boys... they can have anything—girls they got mops-

In this exchange, the girls talk about different standards of beauty for Black boys as opposed to Black girls. In saying "boys...they can have anything," Keisha suggesting that the stringent Eurocentrism that characterizes aesthetic appeal for Black girls is absent from the aesthetic appeal of Black boys. This absence provides space for the privilege of "having anything" and still being considered attractive according to Keisha. This is privilege for Black boys that Black girls do not have. Instead, girls have to consider other features, which Keisha positions here as "having things" like attributes, to make them appealing. In fact, the issue of "mops," also known as the politics of Black hair, are so deeply embedded in and hotly contested in notions of beauty, value, and sex appeal, that I had to quickly redirect the conversation back to

skin color. I was worried that the discussion on Black hair would overwhelm the rest of discussion time, as the endless varieties of textures, styles, and regimens provide an endless source of discussion. In some ways, this is one of the problems with being both participant and observer, and being both a leader and group member. In the following excerpt, the girls get to the nitty-gritty of how skin-color works differently for girls than for boys.

> Carleen: I mean in terms of skin-color. Why does skin-color matter? Why isn't the same for girls as it is for boys?
> Keisha: Because boys—you can be dark, dark, dark, dark
> Ebony: Ok, we get the point!
> Keisha: ...you allowed to be dark and somebody would...and they still look cute! And girls, you don't!
> Alicia: -but um' if it's a girl and you dark-dark it don't...if you dark, you ugly!
> Carleen: Are you necessarily always ugly if you're dark?

In this exchange, the girls are expressing their perceptions of the freedom boys have to still be considered beautiful outside the confines of rigid Eurocentric beauty standards. In using words like "allowed," Keisha is suggesting that someone, in some way has removed Black girls' privilege, permission, or right to be considered beautiful if they have dark skin. When Keisha comments that boys "can be dark, dark, dark, dark" she's saying that having an extremely dark complexion is something not permitted for Black girls. She's also describing the degree to which boys can be dark, which suggests that Black girls are not allowed as many degrees of dark, if any. In the following exchange, the girls discuss the ramifications of being dark on personal relationships, both in terms of romance, and in terms of friendship.

> Alicia: I mean if you went to high school and college and...you will find somebody that will love you for you, but if your looks are different, they are not going to like you….
> Keisha: Or you might have friends who are like you, like shooott!
> Carleen: Ok, so is that just because you have dark-skin or it might be because..?
> Keisha: It might be, because Maleeka… I mean Maleeka wasn't like she was living in the woods…

Carleen: Maleeka lives in the 90s right? So is it just Maleeka's skin that's giving her problem or is it (like you said) that her M (m?)om sews her clothes, seems like she doesn't have very much money...
Alicia: Don't talk about money—she just stingy!

In this exchange, Alicia suggests that if you are a girl who is dark, you will have to wait a while to find love, because other people will not see you as an attractive partner, in part because of your skin color. On the other hand, Keisha suggests that you might have friends all along who are similar to you in looks. Implicit in their disagreement is the question of how much your looks influence how others relate to you, or identify you as valuable. Alicia's comment suggests that appearance is a part of why Maleeka isn't considered beautiful, but attributes it to things money can buy, rather than phenotype, or physical features.

While it is not clear here how Ebony connects the first half of the page to the second half, it seems reasonable to observe that there is something about the notion of respect at play here. It is interesting to note that she goes on to interpret the women in the song as being different races, "black/white/tan/brown", while only one ("tan") is linked to sex ("prostitute"). As I will discuss In chapter seven, outside of my researcher hat, as a Black woman, Ebony's interpretation of the tan lady is spot on, and the lyrics would support her conclusion, yet it is also significant that she attaches the label "depressed" to the brown woman.

Who has the right to tell these stories?:" Because her name is Nina, a name not necessarily common in this culture"-Ebony

In the following set of exchanges, which are responding to Nina Simone's "Four Women," Jasmine references the centrality of relationships in how black women understand themselves and one another.

Carleen: Why do you guys think Nina Simone is telling these four stories?

Jasmine: She's telling about her life
Carleen: Is it only her life, or is it these individuals', too?
Jasmine: No, it's the life that she going through and that she see other people going through. What her mom going through, sometime what her grandma did and all that.

Here, Jasmine locates the singer inside the narratives she tells, either through her own experience, or her bearing witness to the experiences of older female relatives. Yet, the conversation begins to turn here, as Ebony and Keisha take up the issue of whether Nina is an insider or an outsider in relation to the women whose stories she tells.

Carleen: ok--So, are we saying this is not only the story of her life but the story of all the things going on around her?
Ebony: I don't think so, I think this story got nothing to do with her.
Keisha: I think the song is made like its about somebody else's life, what they maybe going thru—not hers
Carleen: Ok, so…so you think the stories that Nina tells thru her song are not her personal stories and are not about her but belong to other people, who are like her? Why?
Ebony: Because her name is Nina, a name not necessarily common in this culture.

While Ebony's line of questioning may be up for debate, her move to define the singer as external to the black women in the song hinges on her idea of "this culture." This suggests that the ability or right to tell the stories in this community should be decided within that community, indicating that Ebony's feeling some sense of ownership or has a relationship to these stories, which would be violated or somehow tarnished if an outsider were telling them.

Carleen: Nina is her stage name, her real name is Eunice.
((Loud laughter))
Monica: Eunice?? Eunice??
Carleen: Eunice!
Monica: Eunice, her mother must have been on crack!
Carleen: Eunice, remember I said she was born in North Carolina, she was down south now...
Ebony: If I was the President, I would make that stop in South Carolina
Carleen: Noooo, you can't! It's still a good song, right? Do you think these stories only belong to Nina or do think these are stories about the women in her life?
Keisha: I think it's about her and she just tried to use different personalities, so you won't know
Monica: 'Cause how could she be like-
Keisha: That's how she felt, she felt like she could be like her Mom, and she felt like

Monica: Or its people she felt like she knows...

In this turn of the conversation, we see a few more theories about the song. We've gone from the position that Nina is telling her own story, and possibly the stories of women around her to the idea that one story can encompass all these experiences for one person. Keisha believes that by hiding the different experiences the song references behind changing names, the entire song is about Nina Simone, which demonstrates an attention to the diversity of roles one black women can play within one person's experience. It is key to note here that Keisha's understanding is that Nina can "play" or in this case, share the experiences of only the women she knows through kinship, or family relationships. Keisha's comments suggest that the song, or perhaps Nina's black female experience, is an amalgamation, or composite of the experiences of the black women around her. The narratives may be representative of a collective identity, or the song itself a composite counter-story.

CHAPTER 6: Black Girls Rock: Emotions, Empathy, and Empowerment in Black Girlhood Literacies

"They all worried about black people!"-Ebony

In book club discussions with the girls, current movies, news, books, and mainstream media outlets were frequently a hot topic. While some of the girls expressed ambivalence to the media as a source of unbiased information, all of the girls evidenced a sense of skepticism or even offense at the way black women are portrayed in the media. In the conversation, writings, and drawings that follow, we look at the girls' responses to the media to better understand how race and gender intertwine with a variety of texts to shape Black Girlhood Literacies.

Beginning with the girls' discussion of the "Black Girls Rock" award show, this chapter demonstrates how the girls interpret/read themselves as raced and gendered beings/readers/writers, as well as how they take up narratives of their favorite celebrities, who were a constant topic of conversation and journal entries. These interpretations inform our third question: what do these engagements tell us about how identity and text interact in the reading experiences of female black adolescents and in their negotiations of identity as Black young women?

Like the girls in the seventh grade, discussions on these celebrities became sites of contest, where the girls could try out different ideas, theories, and concepts about Black womanhood. Rhianna, a pop singer, and Raven Symone, an actress, presented the girls with a dilemma on the role of morality in relationships, while Lindsay Lohan presented them with another moral conundrum. In the case of Rhianna, whose tumultuous relationship with her pop star ex-boyfriend was colored by domestic violence allegations, the girls' discussions centered

around questions such as why she was engaged in the relationship, what she was getting out of it, what they would do in her place, and whether it was a wise decision to give a troubled ex-partner a second chance. Raven Symone presented the girls with different set of questions, such as whether or not being homosexual was a permanent state, if it was possible to perform T.V shows as a heterosexual character while being a gay or lesbian actress, and whether being homosexual was a choice. Research on adolescents' responses into sexuality in the media suggests that preteens like the girls, focus on relationships with peers, where dynamics of sexuality can color students' interactions (Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2008). In literacy education, discussions of homophobia and heterosexism can run the danger of being overlooked in the haste to address "bullying (Christenbury, Bomer, & Smagorinsky, 2010). " Further, the education experiences of queer students, which includes individuals who are pansexual, gay, questioning, transgender, lesbian, intersex, and bisexual are rarely discussed in the context of race (Kumashiro, 2001). This conversation leads us to expect that students' questions of sexuality within race and gender are ripe sites for examining the interactions between texts and identities.

In one particular book club meeting, centered on investigating teen magazines and their portrayals of Black girls, the girls' discussion of these two celebrities began to evidence themes of morality, as indicated by the repeated coding of words like 'respect, proper behavior, and inappropriate responses'. As we discussed the celebrities, the girls once again began to challenge the boxed notions of Black womanhood given to them; yet, this time, an overtly moral, and sometimes religious overtone characterized this conversation. In addition, the girls' writings about the "Black Girls' Rock" awards show characterize a sometimes-positive, sometimes negative aspect of the role of Black girls in one another's lives.

Black Girls Rock: Color, Race, and Achievement in the Media

The annual "Black Girls Rock" awards show airs on BET every fall, and is a showcase of the work ordinary and extraordinary women and girls to together under the auspices of the Black Girls Rock, Inc. organization[13]. The awards program was originally developed in 2006 by Beverly Bond, an entrepreneur, DJ and entertainer, as a mentoring-based non-profit to promote the arts to young women of color for empowerment. At its core is the mission to promote a critical dialogue about the images of Black women in the media. Between the show-stopping awards ceremony, volunteers throughout the country organize workshops, camps, and dialogs around the country with girls of color between the ages of 12 and 17. The Queens Camp, a two-week summer experience, is a central event to the organization. The movement has only gained momentum since its inception, and is widely thought of as one that showcases the advocacy of black women across industries such as sports and entertainment, as well as that highlights role models such as pioneering Black women whose roles in history may otherwise be overlooked, such as Marian Wright Edelman, the 2013 Social Humanitarian Honoree, and first Black women admitted to the Mississippi Bar Association, who also organized the Poor People's Movement with Dr. King, and founded the Children's Defense Fund.

In book club, I used the topic of the BGR awards show to bridge the issue of self-definition between the novels *The Skin I'm In* and *The Road to Paris* by asking the girls to get discussion started by writing. In the following writings, we tried to capture the Quick-Writing-Prompt (QWP) question " Have you heard of 'Black Girls Rock'? What does it mean to you, and why?" (Carey, FN 2-7-13).

[13] From <http://www.blackgirlsrockinc.com/>

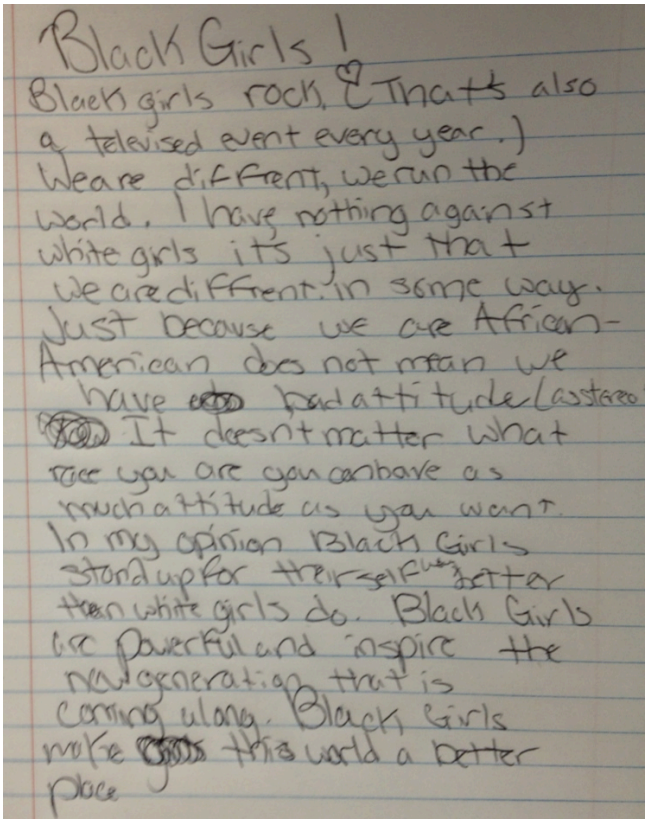


Figure 8: Monica's Journal #3 *("Black Girls! Black girls rock (that's also a televised event every year). We are different, we run the world. I have nothing against white girls its just that we are different in some way. Just because we are African-American does not mean we have bad attitude. It doesn't matter what race you can have as much attitude as you want. In my opinion Black Girls standup for theirself better than white girls do. Black girls are powerful and inspire the new generation that is coming along. Black girls make this world a better place.")*

In this journal entry, Monica is writing about the awards show specifically, and begins by identifying the event, but also using the slogan as a complete sentence, "Black Girls Rock." In doing so, she not only reiterates the motto of the Bond's program, but affirms it as a statement, demonstrating her belief in it as matter-of-fact. In her explanation of "we are different, we run the world," we can see Monica beginning to sketch out her definition of black girls experiences by using "we" in the collective sense, as Keisha did before in her interrogation of "Four Women", as well as possibly referencing world-class entertainer Beyonce's hit single "Girls!

(Who Run the World?)" As one of few music artists who employs an all-female band[14], Beyonce's "Sugar Mamas" band and stage image is one that is inclusive of all women of color, including Latina and Japanese women. In contrast, Monica begins to bring out the uniqueness of the black girl experience by placing a disclaimer ("I have nothing against white girls") and a boundary ("It's just that we are different. In-some-way."). Both of these are based on her perceptions of race, which suggests that she understands the role of race is to create or facilitate a distinction within the shared category of gender.

As she continues to explain, Monica pushes back on the assumptions often forced on Black women and girls; specifically, that "we have a bad attitude" which she notes is "a stereotype." One of the most frequent terms the girls used was "attitude," which included behaviors such as 'talkin back' or 'talking with attitude' which can be perceived by adults as disrespectful but can also serve as an emotional defense mechanism for the girls. Koonce reconceptualizes the conversation on attitude to be something a person can use with their own discretion to stand up for themselves and claim power in instances where they feel powerless, such as schools that foster environments of disrespect toward Black girls (Koonce, 2012). Similarly, in this case, Monica talks about attitude as something all women can have, regardless of race, if they elect to do so, rather than something that is mandated by race. In response to Monica's writing, Keisha and Ebony had a few things to say on the topic as well. In the next conversation, the girls are trying to suss out the connections Black women have to attitude, to one another, and to women of other races. In the context of Black Girls Rock!, this conversation centers on the effects of Black girls seeing the awards show.

[14] [2] From <http://vitaminw.co/culture/beyonces-all-female-band-challenges-music-industry-stereotypes>

"Carleen: Do you think black women relate more to other black women? Or do you think they relate more to other, different kinds of women?...white women, Asian women, Latino women?
Keisha: No, they relate more to black women.
(chatter)
Carleen: Wait, one at a time! Why? What do yall think?
Monica: If they they're the same color, no matter the race though…
Ebony: I think that like a black woman can relate to another black women.
Keisha: But I don't think a lot of other black women can relate to other black women like they go thru bigger things like…Let's say I met her and was like hey, like can be like--I can relate to her and she can relate to me. And so like, after we spend so much time together. Maybe to other people, they might not get it?
…It's like we may be like, not together. Maybe to other people it's not like we together or be that, um---like, have an attitude… the way we was raised up to be. Like, not talk back, disrespectful to our elders and stuff like that and some people weren't raised like that so we not gonna relate to each other."

In this excerpt, Keisha disses the issue of how Black women "relate" to one another. Keisha first replies that Black women relate more to other Black women. Monica responds by complicating the question in referencing "color" in terms of skin-tone, as opposed to "race." This mention of color echoes our examination of "Four Women" in that it highlights the role of colorism in shaping Black women's experiences, and how they might be shared within and across the category of Blackness. It extends this conversation by discussing the experiences Black women have as they "go through bigger things like" meeting one another. Then Ebony chimes in to support Monica's claim that Black women connect more to other Black women, indicating that Black women share at least some experiences as a basis for relating to one another. To extend her idea, Keisha then begins to wonder how and why Black women can relate to one another. First, she says, "But I don't think a lot of other black women can relate to other black women like they go thru bigger things like…" which adds some complexity to her original statement that Black women can relate to one another, by suggesting that there are also Black women who do not relate to one another. Keisha goes on to say that

> "Let's say I met her and was like hey, like, we can be like--I can relate to her and she can relate to me. And so like, after we spend so much time together. Maybe to other people, they might not get it?"

Keisha suggests that the relationships Black women have with one another, through meeting one another, talking, and getting to know one another over time are the foundation for getting to know to each other. In saying "I can relate to her, and she can relate to me" Keisha suggests that interpersonal relationships between Black women are built on reciprocal willingness to understand one another. Further, "after we spend so much time together" indicates that over time, these bonds grow. By puzzling over "other people" and specifically, their understanding of Black female relationships, Keisha's indicating that there may be a distinct aspect of Black women's relationships that people outside of them do not understand. As a response to "Four Women," this helps us to answer our research question by revealing that the nature of race and gender, at least to Keisha, are intertwined in the relationships they witness, how they understanding building community with other Black women, and how they interpret Black women's relationships in the song.

My interpretation of Keisha's statement is rooted in my experience as Black women. My personal history and research background lead me to believe that Black women are particularly located in ways that only reveal their humanity to similarly-situated people. Because of how the media constructs Black women as unfeminine, and beyond love or sympathy (Ladson-Billings, 2009), there's a history of overlooking the humanity of Black women, especially as it relates to the warmth, gentleness, softness, tenderness of the feelings and emotions encapsulated activities like bonding with one another through friendship. I wonder, though, is Keisha acknowledging that Black women are rarely thought of as deserving the empathy of one another?

Significantly, Keisha expresses that there may be something about how Black women relate to one another that other people do not understand, or "might not get", and gets closer to describing that something when she suggests:

> …It's like we may be like, not together. Maybe to other people it's not like we together or be that, um---like, have an attitude… the way we was raised up to be. Like, not talk back, disrespectful to our elders and stuff like that and some people weren't raised like that so we not gonna relate to each other."

In this excerpt, Keisha's discussion of the way other people perceive the "together"-ness or perhaps the unity of the Black female experience reveals that she understands that there are different experiences based on "the way we were raised up to be." In thinking of divergent values as a basis for not relating to one another, Keisha's again assigning a humanity to Black women as a group that is uncommon in the media, and in the context of schools that can mischaracterize Black girls as loud, and aggressive without understanding the full social, cultural, and emotional context of these acts as the girls understand them (Brooks, 2007; Fordham, 1993; Henry, 1993; O'Connor, 1997; Richardson, 2002; Wissman, 2007). This misappropriation means that while Black girls may see these acts in terms of self-defense, adults in schools may not be aware that they are unintentionally performing microagressions against them, which are informed by media images of Black women as harsh and unyielding. Research (Grant, 1997) suggests that Black girls are not seen as having the same multidimensional, complex needs as other learners, and instead have been cast as "enforcers" or "go-betweens" in the classroom. These differences in how much and what kinds of teacher attention Black girls receive are the result of differing teacher perceptions of Black girls as emotionally, socially, or personally sensitive to how they are treated.

Here, it is important to note that the kind of theorizing Keisha is up to is rarely as explicit as she discusses it, and even more so, the dominant discourse on Black women obscures both

questions of "how" and "why" Black women relate, or don't, to one another, through ignoring the diversity within the Black female experience-across race, ethnicity, and most importantly, age. By opening up the space to address these questions, Keisha is daring to articulate ideas that are often left unsaid. Outside of the Black female community, these ideas are rarely displayed in the media. In the pauses between "like"s and "ums" are the seams of secrets whispered over coffee and through tears at kitchen tables. I suspect that one of the reasons Keisha's articulating these ideas is that she has picked up on the narratives of Black female relationships from the women in her life, such as her mom, aunties, and sisters, and thereby evidencing an Organic Pheminism at the juncture of adolescence.

"They all worried about black people!": Race, Gender, and Celebrities in the Media

The girls revealed a skeptical perspective on the veracity of the media through their talk about the news, especially as it related to race, gender, and celebrities. In some discussions, the girls talked about the media as a possible source of misinformation about black people. In the following exchanges, I ask Keisha to elaborate on her statement that: "They all worried about black people," and in doing so the girls' reveal that they engage with the media as a text, especially as it relates to race and gender, from a critical perspective.

> Carleen: When you say "they" what do you mean?
>
> Ebony: Like the news and press and stuff. Like they didn't mention Cassie and Rhianna for theeee longest. But they keep putting on Lindsey Lohan and they don't want to say she has a drug problem. But they keep talking about Rhianna and Chris Brown!

In this quote, Ebony is defining the media as multimodal, and comparing the frequency and type of stories shared about Black celebrities as opposed to White ones. Ebony addresses the

mainstream media's silence around budding Black artists when she says, "they didn't mention Cassie and Rhianna for theeee longest". She highlights this as a problem, especially when juxtaposed with, in her view, a favorable portrayal of Lindsay Lohan. Ebony believes that "they don't want to say she has a drug problem", unlike either Cassie or Rhianna. But instead of celebrating non-drug-using Black women, Ebony notes that the story most frequently circulated featuring a Black female celebrity is that of Rhianna, and mainly in the context of an abusive past relationship ("they keep talking about Rhianna and Chris Brown!"), rather than her record sales, dramatic fashion sense, or successful cameos in action films. In noting these three things, Ebony is telling us that she knows something about how the media works to perpetuate stories of violence against Black women, while overlooking, ignoring, and thereby concealing the criminality and drug usage of White women. In this, she is demonstrating a critical awareness that the media is not reporting accurate stories without bias, but is an active agent in perpetuation image-smearing campaigns against Black female celebrities.

The girls' conversations on celebrities reveal that their critical media literacies are connected to media's role in controlling or distorting reality, as Ebony discusses in the next excerpt. For example, in saying "I see white crack heads but they don't ever talk about them, yet you hear about black crackheads all over the news," Monica demonstrates her belief that the discourse on criminality is largely based on race. What she reveals here, is that the connection between these false media portrayals and its effects on how people behave in real life is startling.

> Carleen: Ok, I have question: do you think that black women like Rhianna are treated differently by the media than white women?
>
> Monica: Yes!

> Ebony: I think because of the color of our skin that they hate on us and I think black movie stars and white movie stars are separate because you always hear on the news where black people getting beat, but you don't ever hear about white people get beat. I see white crack heads but they don't ever talk about them, yet you hear about black crackheads all over the news, like you see a black bums on street. There's a black man there a white man here and the white people will throw fifty cents to the white guy and nothing to the black man.

In Monica's example of "there's a black man there a white man here and the white people will throw fifty cents to the white guy and nothing to the black man," she talks about the effects of this unbalanced representation. By telling us that she believes race is a major deciding factor on which stories get aired on the news, she's indicating that the news is not always accurate in how it portrays people of color. According to Monica, the result of this inaccuracy is "the white people" have an inability to help the black bum, but do help the white bum by "throw[ing] fifty cents" to him. Through this example, Monica's demonstrates the real-world effect of mischaracterizing Black people on the news. This is a critical reading of the news as a text, and demonstrates that media analysis in book club is deeply influenced by race and gender.

In the following exchange, the girls begin to debate why it is that the media portrays Black people in general, and Black women more specifically in an consistently negative way. More specifically, the girls try to determine where this narrative of Black criminality is coming from.

> Ebony: well, by Chris Brown and Rhianna, it wouldn't be me, but when they were talking about this black lady that had stole something about that song, talking about she a smooth criminal like that song!
> Keisha: But when Lindsey Lohan was out there stealing a diamond necklace and they are still not talking about that necklace—gold and diamond necklace!
>
> Carleen: Holdup holdup, so from Keisha's point black people are treated different more by everybody—or is it just by white people, just about everybody, or just by black people?
>
> Jasmine: I won't say that black people who only get treated bad by white people but there are some white people who will treat black people wrong, but there are some Asians, Hispanics, etc., that treat black people wrong

Monica: I disagree, I disagree

The girls' debate on the media's role in the spreading and keeping alive the story of the abusive relationship illuminate not only the extent to which they are highly literate in readings of popular culture, but also how their ideas about Black women's roles in romantic relationships and roles in crime are shaped by the media's refusal to portray White women as criminal, i.e "they are still not talking about that necklace." The girls' exchanges on the topic were characterized as grounded theorizing about young Black women, like they will be in their mid-twenties, ie "it wouldn't be me."

We can see that Rhianna's story is instructive as one way of being a Black women, and it is also an instance of moratorium, or of trying on different identities (in this case, that of a celebrity), by saying, "it wouldn't be me." This instance of moratorium is critically important to mark, because here, Rhianna's position as a victim is not one that sits well with the established archetypes of Black women (D. G. White, 1999). While Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel are all familiar tropes, there are no trope which show young Black women as victims. In this example, the girls are constructing for themselves, through projecting themselves into Rhianna's situation, as unlikely as it is portrayed to be by the media; yet statistics on domestic violence would suggest otherwise. It is important identity work that they do here, because it demonstrates their ability to fill in the gaps of knowledge about Black girlhood as a collective, and also to separate the social fictions perpetuated by the media from the social facts of their lived realities. For some, this may be an example of playing-pretend or make-believe, but it is also an instance of sense-making, without the backdrop of sympathetic cultural models. As the girls negotiated their ideas about Black and White celebrity women, the narrative of Black womanhood, and girlhood began to shift into that of a critical media viewer.

Producing Media: Empathy and Affirmation through Poetry

While the girls often wrote in their journals in response to writing prompts I offered them, they also took the time to write their own poetry outside of book club, as well as to make drawings of their own choosing. Being careful to ask if they would like to share, or for me to see their poems and sketches, I was able to get a look into how the girls were critical media producers, as well as consumers, as demonstrated in the poems and drawings below. Morrell (2007) reminds us to look at students as producers, in order to understand how they use critical literacy to create liberating media.

Smiley Face: Shape Poems and Emotional Expression

The girls' writings in book club also focused on broader themes in the media and also served an emotional need for the girls to express themselves. In the shape poem below, Monica's "Smiley Face" stands as an example of the ways the girl' generated empowering writings for themselves, on their own terms. Although I began some book club sessions with a personal check in, such as "how are you feeling today?" to get a sense of how the girls were feeling. In these poems, notice the phrases and words she uses to make the eyes and eyebrows.

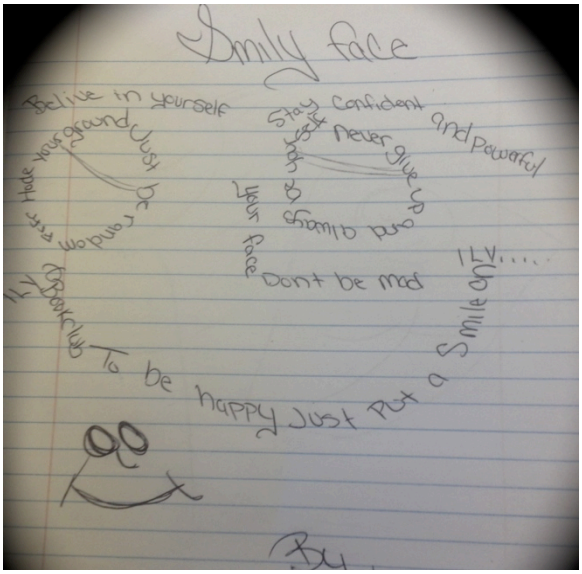


Figure 9: Monica's 'Smiley' Poem *("Smily Face Believe in yourself. Stay confident and powerful. Never give up and always love yourself. Just be random hold your ground.Your face can't be mad. Bookclub to be happy just put a smile on.")*

It is perhaps most significant that this poem lacks any references to race and gender, and focuses on empowering phrases like "believe in yourself," "stay confident," and "never give up!" This demonstrates another layer to Black Girlhood Literacies one that emphasizes that when the girls choose to write freely, they can do so without engaging historic debates around Black womanhood, and girlhood, by extension. Just as the girls are able to articulate critical stances toward the media's role in perpetuating damaging images of Black women, there is another aspect to their BGL toolkit: the ability to no discuss race and gender when it doesn't suit them (Carey, under review).

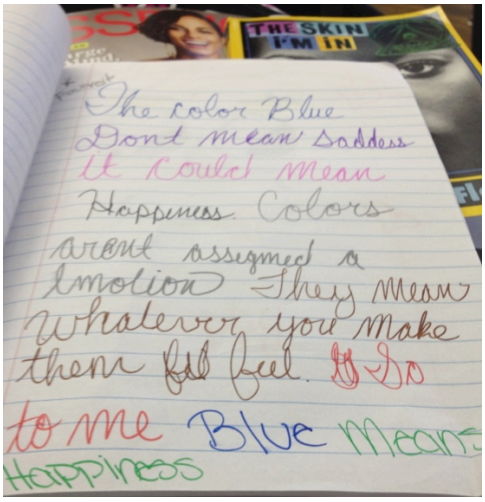


Figure 10: Ashley's 'Color' Poem *("The color blue, don't mean sadness, it could mean happiness colors aren't assigned a emotion. They mean whatever you make them feel. So to me blue means happiness.")*

In the colorful poem, Ashley's writing about the symbolism we associate with different colors, and how emotions and colors are individual, rather than universal. In Ashley's poem, notice the multiple colors she writes with, in an attempt to convey her message through her shape poem's literal figure and its words. I really liked this poem because it reveals how creative Ashley can be, even though she was one of the least vocal participants in book club. It also shows how adept she is at thinking in both the abstract and concretely about her own emotions. Ashley's poem helps to describe the kinds of work the girls engage in at book club, which is social but also emotional in terms of personal development.

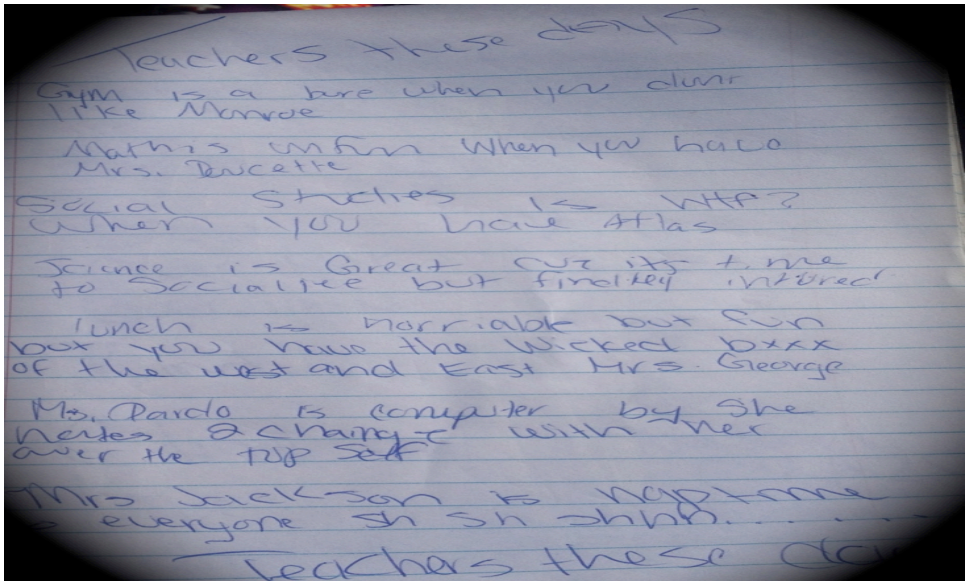


Figure 11: Monica's 'Teachers These Days' Poem *("Teachers these days Gym is a bore when you down like Monroe. Math is fun when you have Mrs. Durcette. Social studies is WTF? when you have Atlas. Jaime is Great cuz its to me to socialize but finally would. Lunch is horrible but fun have the wicked bxxx of the west and east Mrs. George. Ms. Daveto is computer by she hates to change with her over the top self. Mrs. Jackson is naptime is everyone sh sh shhhh….. Teachers these days")*

In contrast, Monica's poem (Figure 11) "Teachers These Days" expresses some frustration at the ways schools constrain teacher-student relationships. In pointing out that certain teachers don't like 2 Chains, only let students listen to gospel, spend lots of time "sshhh"-ing students, and making math "unfun", Monica can be read as venting some mixed emotions about the older women at school.

While most of the school's teachers were Black, and all of the teachers listed in the poem are, there seems to be a definite notion that these teachers need to change. While we did get the chance to discuss why it sometimes seemed that teachers were being mean when in fact, they were acting out of concern for the entire class, or were trying to protect students from harmful influences, to some of the girls, it seemed like teachers were unfairly hard on the girls as opposed to the boys. This illustrates that the girls approach interpersonal and intergenerational

relationships and interactions with a sensitivity toward sexism viewed through a lense of ageism, or that the girls' ideas about being treated differently than the boys are rooted in their own ideas about age-appropriateness and how teachers 'should' treat boys and girls the same, instead of receiving harsher punishments for the same behavior infractions. These themes are largely echoed in the girls' drawings as well as their writings.

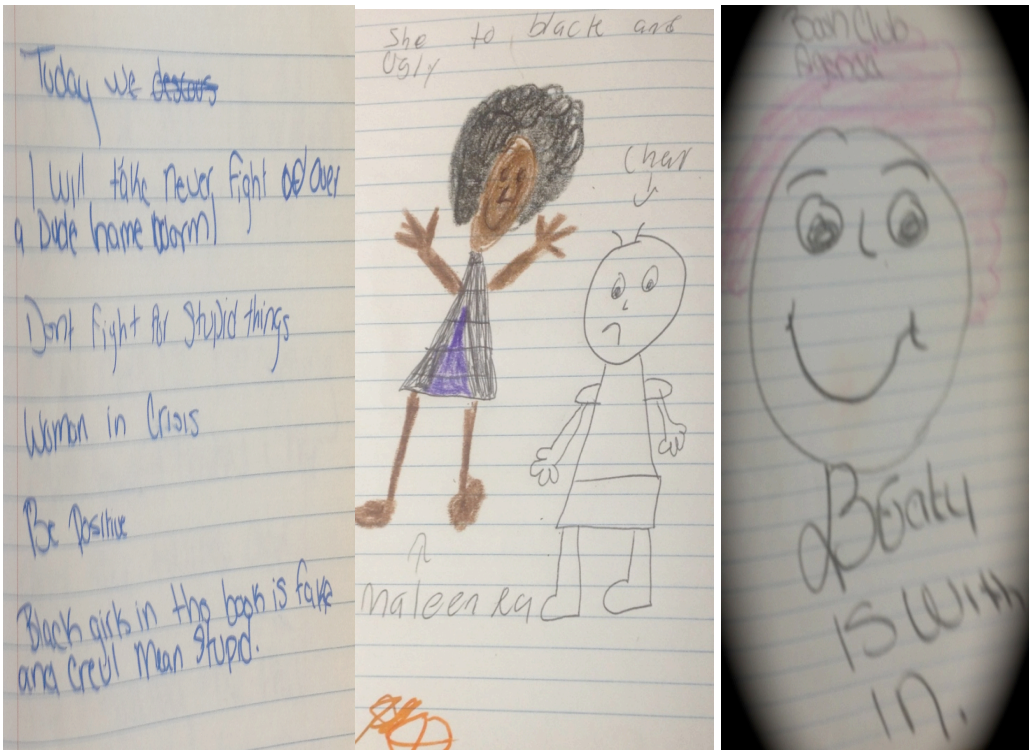


Figure 12: Ashley & Ebony's 'Beauty' Drawings *(left): "Today we I will take never fight over a dude name Worm. Don't fight for stupid things. Women in Crisis. Be positive. Black girls in the book is fake and cruel, mean stupid." (center): She to black and ugly. (right): Beauty is within.*

In the girls' drawings, particularly Ashley's (left, right) and Ebony's (center) drawings below, we can see that the images the girls themselves produce of Black women are simultaneously sites of renegotiating what it means to be a Black girl, and a site where some hegemonic notions of Black womanhood remain. In Ashley's response to *The Skin I'm In,* she writes about the feelings Maleeka is experiencing as she is bullied by Char and her clique of

girls. One of the key elements that she draws is the frown face on Char, which she discussed as being the real reason Char was mean to Maleeka. When I asked if the girls knew why some girls are mean to others, Ashley's response was that some girls do not like "themselves" so they take it out on other girls. In her drawing, Ashley underscores this with a distinct frown to reflect the inner world of girl-bullies as she understands it. This instance is one of many where the girls were able to demonstrate self-awareness and emotional maturity in terms of being able to put themselves in one characters' shoes. This evidences that reading comprehension is developed alongside emotional intelligence for Ashley in this case. While she does not write about being either a victim or a bully, Ashely's understanding of the social dynamics that make some girls targets (Maleeka being 'too black and ugly') and other girls the bully. In locating the problem with Char, Ashley demonstrates that the individual choice to bully exists within the social framework of colorism. In this way, she views the colorism aspect of racism through an age-based lens. In conclusion, when I looked closely at the writings and drawings of the book club girls, I witnessed them practicing an agency and emotional sophistication that they are rarely given credit for in the research literature. It is my hope that educators working with Black girls in the future will be able to position them as producers of media, and see similar effects.

CHAPTER 7: Real Talk in Implications, Discussion, and Conclusions

By means of this research, I learned many things about the plural answers to important questions about Black teen female readers. To demonstrate, in this chapter I will revisit the research questions of this study to generate implications for research methods, revisit theories for studying urban adolescent readers, and comment on the particular capacities and needs of African American young women that this study foregrounds. These capacities represent one resource on which schools and educators committed to the democratic project of education might capitalize.

Unlearning the Myths: Black Girls as Collaborative Literacy Leaders

One of the research questions that this study seeks to address is: What is the nature of Black girls reading in an after-school book club? In chapters four to six, we see the girls using reading, writing, and dialog for a variety of reasons. First, the girls' negotiations about what titles to read demonstrate how reading becomes collaborative, social, and emotional. It is collaborative in that the girls' offer and take up titled with flexibility to hearing one another. It is social in the sense that while the girls are choosing books, they are also aware of the shifting sands of being part of a new group, and sorting out what role they will occupy in the book club setting. Fine, it is emotional in the sense that while the girls invest value in the titles they discuss, they also are aware of the need to build bridges to one another and possibly to avoid factions in such a small group. Therefore, we can say that the nature of reading in the book club was multiple/pluralistic, in that it provided a space for the girls to collaborate on multiple levels, each of which plays a part in one central issue of adolescence: the task of figuring out one's place in the environment,

and in the multiple social worlds each girl occupies. The girls' collaborations demonstrate that pervasive myths about Black female adolescent readers did not always hold true in book club.

Myth #1: Black Teen Girls are Reluctant Readers

In the face of a very sparse to non-existant school library, the book club girls talked about finding reading material at the public library, and the bookstore. The girls' background knowledge of different borrowing systems, such as interlibrary loan, at different branches suggests that they are experienced patrons. In addition, the girls' use of the free choice table to take home two to three books per week indicates that they took advantage of opportunities to read. While the free choice table included a range of books, the girls' choices about what to read were highly individual. While Keisha cleaned up any poetry and writing books she could find, Tasha preferred to read mystery, Ebony liked romance and Jacqueline Woodson novels, Ashley liked science fiction, and Monica read cook books and advice books (Carey, field notes, 4-12-13). When the girls did not like a book, in the case of Tasha and After Tupac and D Foster, they bought them back to trade for something else. Typically, they looked for new titles each week to replace the ones they read from the previous week, and took extra books to read over long breaks. None of the girls seemed to like biographies of Black historical figures, informational texts, or classics like The Phantom Tollbooth or The Golden Compass, which lingered on the table week after week until I donated them to the school library. Even when I presented the girls with different formats, such as audio books on CDs, they responded by taking them all at once. While it is possible that this is because students choosing to participate in a book club might be already be inclined to like reading, I did see the free choice titles being circulated around in the 118 girls' classroom during DEAR time by non-book club girls. While the girls also liked to read

magazines about popular culture, like Teen Beat, Teen Vogue and Seventeen, when I bought in an Essence article on reality TV and teens, the girls gave it a lukewarm response. In short, any myths of reluctant readers were not evidenced in the girls' patterns of book taking, sharing, and discussing in and outside of book club. As educators, this reveals several important questions for future research. In terms of methods, this suggests that researchers should carefully construct opportunities to examine Black girls in groups, rather than individually, and to practice data collection techniques that center the voices of the participants. Specifically, observing the students across book club, and classroom spaces gave me the opportunity to see how the girls were using the books informally between their friends, even in formal spaces like classrooms. In order to capture these dynamics, it is important to structure some opportunities to witness the girls' interactions with other students, and to step outside of the role of book club leader to that of a careful observer. In answering the questions in this study, I am left with more questions for future research, such as how might book clubs supplement a culture of reading that already exists among Black girls? What kinds of opportunities do Black girls need to read what they want, at their own pace, and without interference from assessments? What is the role of the race and gender of the protagonist in whether Black girls choose to read a title? How does the informal space of an after-school book club influence how and what it means to read? What is the role of genre in predicting and supplying books Black teen girls want to read?

Myth #2: Black Teen Girls are Emotionally Immature

The second question this project addresses is: Through engagement with these texts and one another's ideas in conversation, how do the young women define what researchers call

"culturally relevant" literatures? From the data shared in this dissertation, the girls demonstrate that their notion of "culturally relevant" literature is based on how it enables them to practice personal skills and social skills. Critically, we see the girls using literature discussion as a tool to do emotional work, in terms of bonding with one another in the book club space, and in terms of practicing self-definitions that are resistant to hegemonic ideas of Black female inferiority, i.e., crafting counter narratives. Both of these tasks demonstrate that the girls are gaining social skills in terms of interpersonal relationships, and in terms of maintaining a strong sense of self. According to CRF, we can see themes of self-definition and race and gender intertwining in the girls' discussions and writings, and especially in the counter narratives they construct. In terms of methods, this study suggests that using the framework of counter narratives to design the study and analyze the data is a very promising method for uncovering the voices of Black girls. Counter narratives are: "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" and in the case of the book club girls, these are both the result of collectively discussing texts in the book club, and an 120 important constant in the girls' writings about being Black girls. While "the counter story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege," in some ways positioning Black girls as writers and readers in the field of literacy education is in itself a counter narrative (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). Black girls telling their own stories runs counter to "majoritarian stories…of gender, class and other forms of privilege" (p.27). In terms of centering their experiences, and the experiences of women and girls around them in their literacy practices, through using counter narratives as a framework, we see the girls' privileging their own ideas, rather than the stereotypes others may have of Black women and girls. Their consistent valuing

of Black womanhood is perhaps a response to knowing the obstacles facing Black women, and choosing to be resilient in the face of them (Evans Winters, 2007).

According to CRF, we can see themes of self-definition and race and gender intertwining in the girls' discussions and writings. Critically, we see the girls using literacy as a tool to do emotional work, in terms of bonding with one another in the book club space, and in terms of practicing self-definitions that are resistant to hegemonic ideas of Black female inferiority, i.e crafting counter narratives. Counter narratives are: "...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 (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002)." Black girls, among marginalized communities need these because "...the ideology of racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a 'master narrative' in storytelling …" and most importantly, "...majoritarian stories are not just stories of racial privilege, they are also stories of gender, class and other forms of privilege (p.27)." In terms of centering their experiences, and the experiences of women and girls around them in their literacy practices, we see the girls' privileging their own ideas, rather than the stereotypes others may have of Black women and girls. Their consistent valuing of Black womanhood is perhaps a response to knowing the obstacles facing Black women, and choosing to be resilient in the face of them.

In the previous chapters, both girls' written responses can be seen as evidencing a unique role for Black women, a key tenant of CRF. In Ebony's assertion that Black girls are different from Black boys, and Jasmine's assertion that Black girls are different from Black boys, there is an emerging/rooted concept of the Black female experience as unique, even at eleven. For Keisha, this poem has personal, emotional, and social ramification in the book club space. As

agents, the girls are shaping a role for themselves as fosterers of a space to be vulnerable, show scary emotions, and find support. This instance shows that, within the book club, the idea that all black girls are loud and aggressive is not consistent. In fact, Keisha's concerns about being the target of cyber-bullying via image distortion remind us that that the girls in book club are still preteens growing up in an increasingly digital world (influenced by the social context of damaging images of Black women.). By showing themselves to be effective agents of personal boundary-keeping, friendship maintenance, and bond-building through collective literacy practices, the girls are seeking similar ground with one another in book club.

Myth #3: Black Girls are Loud Aggressors

The third question this study addresses is: what do these engagements tell us about how identity and text interact in the reading experiences of female Black adolescents and in their negotiations of identity as Black young women? In the previous chapters, both girls' written responses can be seen as evidencing a unique role for Black women, a key tenant of CRF. In Ebony's assertion that Black girls are different from Black boys, and Jasmine's assertion that Black girls are different from Black boys, there is a rooted concept of the Black female experience as unique, even at eleven. For Keisha, this poem has personal, emotional, and social ramification in the book club space. As agents, the girls are shaping a role for themselves as fosterers of a space to be vulnerable, show scary emotions, and find support. This instance shows that, within the book club, negotiating Black female identity is an ongoing process, and the idea that all Black girls are loud and aggressive is not consistent. Keisha's concerns about being the target of cyber-bullying via image distortion remind us that that the girls in book club are still preteens growing up in an increasingly digital world that is also influenced by the social context

of damaging images of Black women. By showing themselves to be effective agents of personal boundary-keeping, friendship maintenance, and bond-building through collective literacy practices, the girls are seeking similar ground with one another in book club. Black girls' emotional capacities to experience empathy, bear witness to one another's struggles, practice vulnerability, and create a sense of shared common experiences with other another is one potential resources for educators working on the democratic project of schooling to examine. Through answering these research questions and uncovering these myths, I began to realize what was missing from the literature was a framework attuned to focusing on adolescent Black girls' particular voices, capacities, and smartness as readers and writers. In the hopes of helping more researchers to have tools for studying Black girls, I offer one theoretical and analytical framework, Critical Girlchild Literacies (CGL), for future use.

Critical Girlchild Literacies: A Framework for Readin' an' Writin' Sistahs

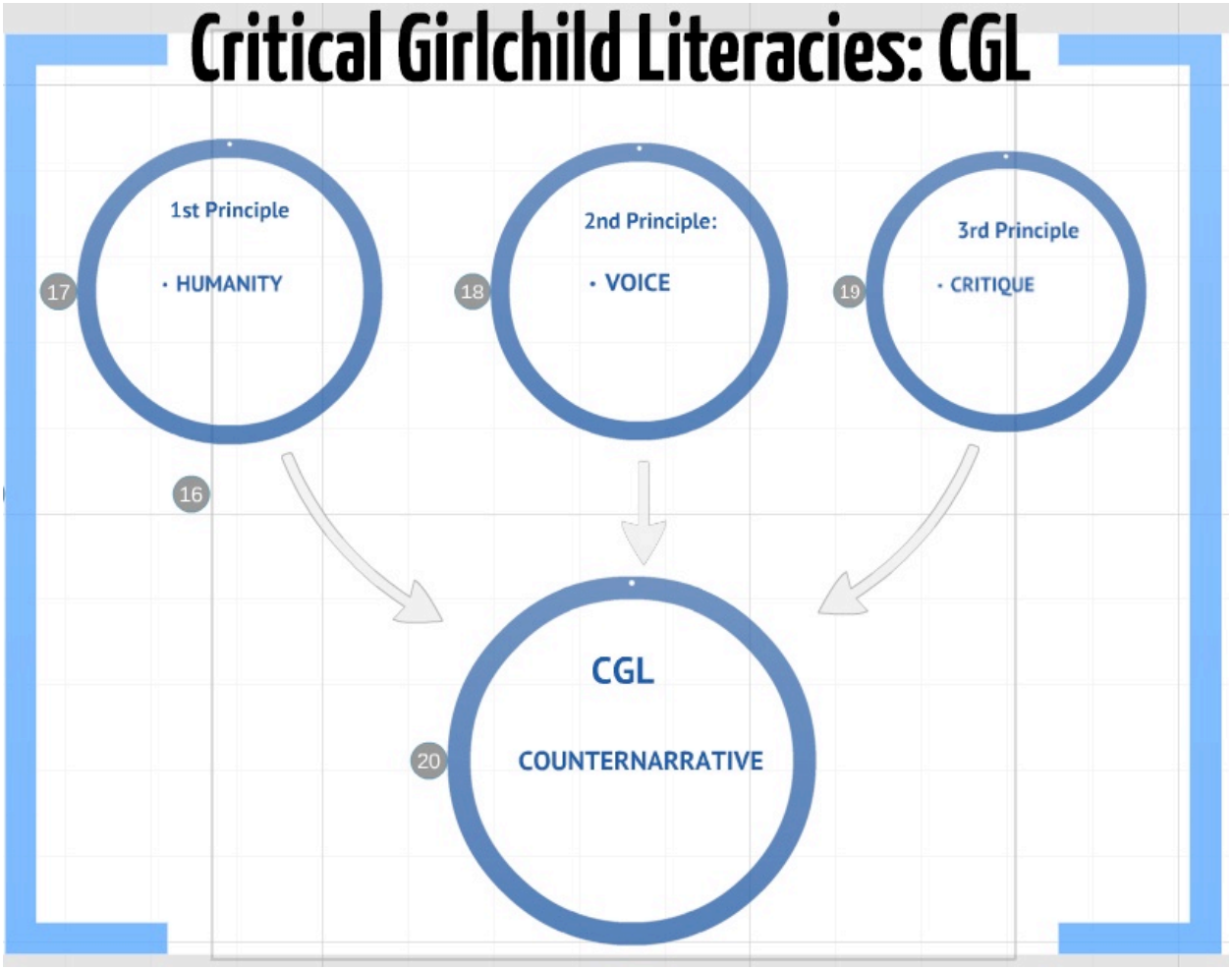


Figure 13: Critical Girlchild Literacies (CGL) Illustrated

In order to better understand how preteen Black girls engage in literacy, I will describe below one potential tool to collect and analyze these students' discourse in oral and written form. It is my hope that this theoretical and analytical framework, "Critical Girl-child Literacies," will help researchers and educators interested in further uncovering Black girls' literacy practices to shift the discourse on girls in urban education. In naming this framework, I have used "critical" to indicate that it is specifically concerned with the dynamics of privilege, power, and resistance

to oppression in its many intersecting forms. These intersections have disparate effects on different populations, and I highlight in particular the intersections of race, gender, and age through using 123 "girlchild," a term used by the character Sophia in Walker's *The Color Purple* to describe the struggle for self-definition, autonomy, and ultimately safety as a Black girl resisting domination. Specifically, in *Ways with Words Heath* notices the differences in how communities receive and construct gender, and the resulting effects of how girl children are treated in the context of community literacy. Additionally, UNICEF uses this term to recognize the specific challenges facing female children internationally. Because this term works at so many levels, in this study I use the term "girlchild" to deliberately indicate that accepted norms in how girl children are treated are specific to cultural contexts and thus those of the Black community are distinct. Finally, I use the term "literacies" to indicate that the book club girls' multiple analyses of movies, songs, television shows, poetry, and novels represent a widening of definitions of texts and readings that result in a form of resistance specific to this group of Black girls. I arrived at CGL through reflecting on the analysis of the data in this study metacognitively. Below, I explain how the themes of this project led me to conceive of the CGL framework.

First Principle: Humanity

Figure 14: Huminity Principle Illustrated

In chapter four, we analyzed discourse data to arrive at conclusions about the complex emotional, social, and individual purposes at work in the Book club girls' discourses and literacy 124 practices. These purposes paint the girls as thinking, analyzing, feeling, perceiving, and resisting agents of change, to contrast the flat, one-dimensional representations of Black girls in the research literature. Given this complexity, it is the first principle of CGL that the full humanity of Black Girls has not been realized in the research literature on learners in cities. More specifically, this means that the full humanity of Black Girls has not been described in the research literature on learners in cities, especially regarding the socio-emotional aspect. In order to address this gap, researchers using CGL seek to humanize Black girls by acknowledging that

the intersections of race, gender, and age coalesce to form distinct standpoints from which Black girls engage in literacy. These standpoints are indicative of the multiple ways there are to be a Black girl, and are dynamic so that they may respond to shifts in cultural context. The purpose of humanizing Black girls in the literacy research literature is to take seriously the imperatives to recognize the history of dehumanizing images of Black femininity, and to join the girls in refashioning these concepts to restore Black women's humanity.

Second Principle: Voice

Figure 15: Voice Principle Illustrated

I use the plural to indicate that it is imperative to address the idea that the Black female experience is monolithic in any way. By highlighting the wide range of mannerisms, accents, and ways of being that Black girls already display, researchers can begin to sketch out space for collectively and individually crafting new images, roles, and ideas about what it means to be a black girl in today's world. By helping students to understand the diversity within Black girls' experiences, it may be possible to equip students with new material for recognizing, rejecting, and revising narrow, oppressive ideas about Black girls. In helping students to grow their

vocabularies, researcher can empower them to name their own oppressions and use literacies to find ways to resist them in their everyday lives.

In chapter five, we analyzed discourse data to arrive at conclusions about how Black girls think about the diversity of Black female experiences and the sense of collective ownership. Given this proprietary understanding, it is the second principle of CGL that the Black Girls posses a unique claim to the Black female experience. These students' voices are central to understanding this intersection; thus research methods such as counter narratives that allow participants' readings, writings, and talking, that focus on discourse are integral to describing their experiences. In order to best describe this claim, researchers studying Black girls' literacies must center the voices of these students through research methods such as counter narratives that allow participants' readings and writings to reveal their potential as discursive identity work to uncover how Black girls understand themselves, and the connections between Black girlhood and Black womanhood.

Third Principle: Critique

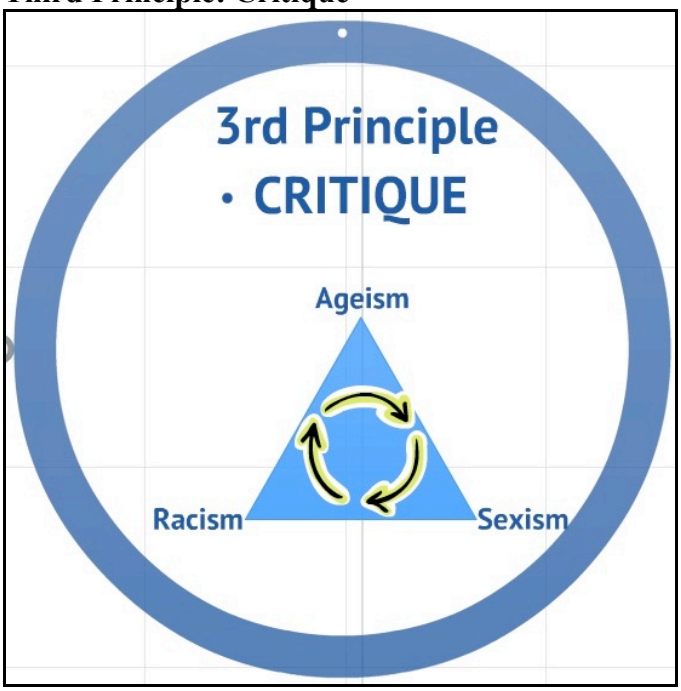


Figure 16: Critique Principle Illustrated

In chapter six, we analyzed the written responses to the question "how would you describe Black Girls and why?" to begin describing the raced and gendered aspects of the Book Club girls' critical media awareness. Given the interrelated nature of these aspects, it is the third principle of CGL that ageism is foregrounded in the simultaneous critique of racism and sexism is necessary to self-definition of Black girls for Black girls. A simultaneous critique of racism, sexism, and ageism is necessary to self-definition of Black girls for Black girls; it is also key to find and address instances where dominant narratives are reiterated, to investigate why.

Taken together, these tenants describe a theoretical framework for analyzing the literacy experiences of Black girls. CGL is not meant to be a definitive end-point, but instead a way to extend the conversation on Black girls' literacies. Just feminism is a journey where practitioners are continually learning growing, changing in their knowledge of it, is it important to see Critical girl-child literacies as also evolving. Therefore, the purpose of these tenants is to guide, and not

to prescribe, researchers who are thinking about ways to help Black girls amplify their voices through critical literacy practices.

Discussion: Implications

In better describing the role of texts in literacy engagements, and demonstrating the intertextuality of the Book Club girls ' analyses, the study has several implications for policymakers. Because recent waves of educational reform favor national standardization and canons instead of local knowledge and texts, policy-makers should reexamine local cultural context and texts as possible resources for increased literacy outcomes. The role of extendedlearning opportunities is also one avenue for addressing historic inequalities in education. Therefore, policy-makers focused on increasing equity and achievement would do well to focus on the cultural contexts, texts and locations of literacy for Black girls, among the diversity of learners in cities.

The first implication is that texts need to activate the funds of knowledge that students bring to the classroom to be culturally-sustaining (Paris, 2012). This requires policy-makers to look at the demographics of school districts through social, cultural, and historical lenses to understand the identities of learners in cities. On a related note, the definitions of texts need to be revised not just in terms of digital texts like ebooks and textbooks that have accompanying websites as study tools. If the goal is culturally-sustaining education that empowers students, policy-makers need to create learning environments that center the texts that students analyze and engage in their everyday lives such as music, web 2.0, TV, and movies.

The second implication from this study is that there is a need for extended learning opportunities that provide students with instances for critical literacy engagement with texts

around (as in, located in their everyday lives) and about (as in, centered on students' identities)them. By taking these implications into consideration, policy-makers can create learning environments that build on the students' prior knowledge, and approach informal learning as an opportunity for increased critical media literacy.

The third implication from this study is that there is a need for more room in the curriculum for reading across genres and media. In considering the ever-evolving world of technology, it is imperative to keep in mind the kinds of readings students perform in their everyday lives. Looking more closely at students' informal uses of literacy, especially on social media like Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter, may provide insight for policy-makers' strategies for decreasing the gap between preteen Black girls' in and out of school literacy practices.

These implications are offered in the hopes that they might help change-makers in education to plot a path forward centered on all students, especially Black girls, ' informal literacies and areas of expertise. The girls in book club demonstrated that their knowledge is one resource that stakeholders such as education researchers and teachers have overlooked. In positioning the girls' ideas as central rather than peripheral, educators gain an additional avenue for achieving greater educational equity in urban education. Aside from being bright, funny, and wise young people, the girls' experiences in book club offered a look at them as readers and writers. It is ironic that studies of black girls' learning demonstrates that they receive the least amount of academic instruction, but in book club their writerly selves came out to shine. It was clear that even when faced with the realities of cyber-bullying, racism, and sexism, the girls' strategies for navigating their worlds includes reshaping traditional ideas of femininity to include the qualities they find most helpful. Their budding ideas of femininity reveal that they already see their race-gender identities a tool for combatting the microaggressions they experience in

their daily lives. These implications are intended to connect the girls' ingenuity to theory, as one means of revising the agenda in urban education to more fully include all urban students, especially those whose voices have long been absent from the conversation.

Conclusion: Real Girls, Real Talk

In working toward Culturally-Sustaining Pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2014), I am sensitive to the critique that one to one matching of identities like race, ethnicities to pedagogies that center on that singular identity are unlikely to fully equip students with the multi-literacies they will need to advocate for themselves. Instead of this matching, educators seeking a more just pedagogy would be well-served to look at the pluralities and multiple identities students bring to their learning in and out of school. To help move us all toward recognizing these pluralities, I offer CGL as one means of entering into the conversation on the multiple experiences of one segment of the heterogeneous urban learner population.

I am also sensitive to the critique educators have to recognize that the importance of taking a balanced view of students' literacies. For example, while I was excited to see students fashioning new narratives about Black girls, I was frustrated by the constant repetition of phrases like "304," and "that's so gay," even after conversations on why that is not acceptable language. I am encouraged by the call to address problematic behavior when our students engage in it because it suggests that CSP is a process, not a destination. This leaves us room as educators and people who work with teens to continue fostering growth for ourselves and our youth.

As indicated by Ma'Ayan (2012), one of the hardest conversations for educators and parents to have exists around issues of sexual activity. However, it is imperative to have frank and honest conversations about puberty, sexual agency, and dating rights and responsibilities. One of the major impediments to this in book club was the heavy risk of shaming associated with even asking about these topics.

While I fielded questions about anatomy, Ph balance, pregnancy, PMS, chromosomes, and tampons, my main strategy was to talk about these topics, and then to provide resources in

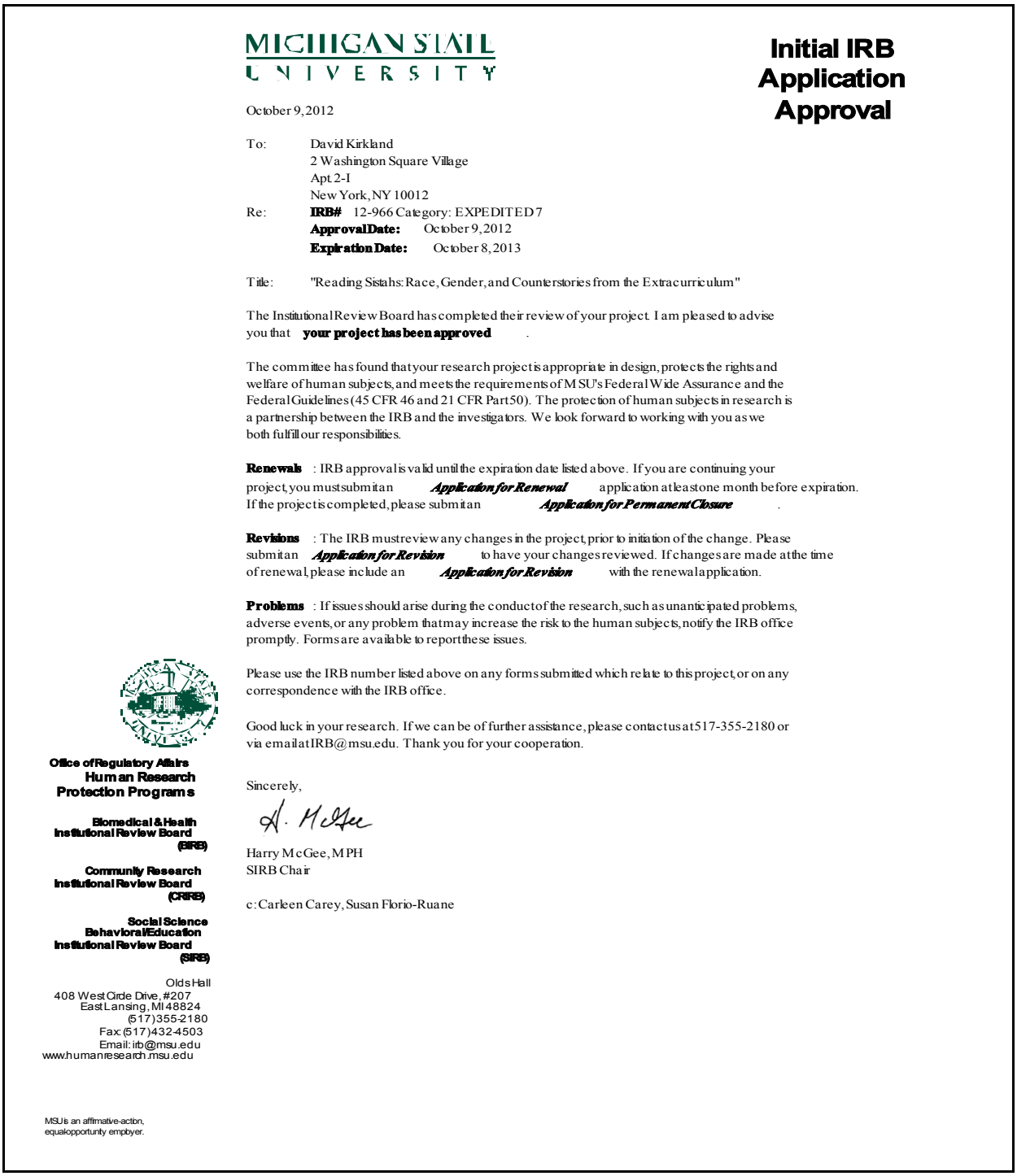
terms of titles such as The Period Book, The Care and Keeping of You, and Deal With It!. I felt that what I wanted to do was supplement, but in the case of these questions, I think more emphasis on the whole child from kindergarten through the stage of adolescence would be immensely helpful to the teens of both genders.

When I volunteered in the boys' 7th grade classroom, the issue of sexual assault came up in Monster. In discussing issues of consent, clear communication, and boundaries, I found that they boys' needed more opportunities to talk about these topics, just like the girls in book club. In sum, there is room in the after-school space to talk about these topics, but is there room in the formal curriculum to also discuss medically-sound sexual education?

In conclusion, these data imply that literacy can be used to meet students' non-academic needs. Informal literacies present educators with a wide avenue to collaborate with students, in terms of enabling students to empower themselves, become agents for their own interests, and protect their future. As educators, it may be hard to give up the riens of control, but we cannot always be around to ensure that our students, especially preteen Black girls, make decisions in their best interests. In recognizing the realities of this situation, we can only conclude that our best option is to help students discover their voices, practice exercising agency, critically examine their environments, and empower them to take charge of their literacy lives.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Initial IRB Application Approval

October 9, 2012

To: David Kirkland
2 Washington Square Village
Apt 2-I
New York, NY 10012

Re: **IRB#** 12-966 Category: EXPEDITED 7
Approval Date: October 9, 2012
Expiration Date: October 8, 2013

Title: "Reading Sistahs: Race, Gender, and Counterstories from the Extracurriculum"

The Institutional Review Board has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that **your project has been approved** .

The committee has found that your research project is appropriate in design, protects the rights and welfare of human subjects, and meets the requirements of MSU's Federal Wide Assurance and the Federal Guidelines (45 CFR 46 and 21 CFR Part 50). The protection of human subjects in research is a partnership between the IRB and the investigators. We look forward to working with you as we both fulfill our responsibilities.

Renewals : IRB approval is valid until the expiration date listed above. If you are continuing your project, you must submit an ***Application for Renewal*** application at least one month before expiration. If the project is completed, please submit an ***Application for Permanent Closure*** .

Revisions : The IRB must review any changes in the project, prior to initiation of the change. Please submit an ***Application for Revision*** to have your changes reviewed. If changes are made at the time of renewal, please include an ***Application for Revision*** with the renewal application.

Problems : If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects, notify the IRB office promptly. Forms are available to report these issues.

Please use the IRB number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the IRB office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517-355-2180 or via email at IRB@msu.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Harry McGee, MPH
SIRB Chair

c: Carleen Carey, Susan Florio-Ruane

Office of Regulatory Affairs
Human Research Protection Programs

Biomedical & Health Institutional Review Board (BIRB)

Community Research Institutional Review Board (CRIRB)

Social Science Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB)

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www.humanresearch.msu.edu

MSU is an affirmative-action, equal-opportunity employer.

Figure 17: IRB Approval Letter

APPENDIX B: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

"Reading Sistahs" Study - Parental Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study on multicultural children's literature. We are asking you to take part because your child is female, and identifies as African-American. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how students respond to literature by and about African-American women. Your child must be female to take part in this study.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct group read-alouds of the multicultural literature, then conduct up to three interviews with your child. The interviews will include questions about the literary elements of the story, depictions of beauty in the story, and depictions of women in the story. The interviews will take about 45 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to your child participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Benefits to your child include a greater familiarity with the elements of literature, and practice analyzing literature, which may enhance your child's performance in English/Language Arts classes. Multicultural literature is an important genre of American literature, and we hope to learn more about students' responses to African-American literature.

Compensation: Your child will earn a $20 gift card to Barnes & Noble bookstore for their participation, and an MSU t-shirt.

Your child's confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your child. Research records will be kept in a locked file with the primary investigator; only the researchers and the IRB will have access to the records. The data will be kept for at least three years after the project closes. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. Your child may skip any questions that they do not want to answer. If your child decides not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your or their current or future relationship with Michigan State University. If your child decides to take part, they are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Carleen Carey at Carleen.Carey@gmail.com or Professor Kirkland at davidekirkland@gmail.com or 308 Linton Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 or 517-884-6767. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 West Circle Drive, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions. I voluntarily agree to allow my child to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

This consent form was approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB) at Michigan State University. Approved 10/9/12 – valid through 10/8/13. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB # 12-966.

APPENDIX C: STUDENT ASSENT FORM

"Readin' Sistahs" Study-Assent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study on multicultural children's literature. We are asking you to take part because you are female, and an African-American. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to learn how students respond to different versions of the Cinderella fairy tale. You must be female to take part in this study.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct group read-alouds of the multicultural literature, then conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about the literary elements of the story, depictions of beauty in the story, and depictions of women in the story. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview.

Risks and benefits: I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Benefits to you include a greater familiarity with the elements of literature, and reading, which may enhance you performance in English/Language Arts classes. Multicultural literature is an important genre of American literature, and we hope to learn more about students' responses to African-American literature.

Compensation: You will receive a $20 gift card to Barnes & Noble bookstore for your participation, and an MSU t-shirt.

Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file with the primary investigator; only the researchers and the IRB will have access to the records. The data will be kept for at least three years after the project closes. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, it will not affect your current or future relationship with Michigan State University. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact Carleen Carey at Carleen.Carey@gmail.com or Professor Kirkland at davidekirkland@gmail.com or 308 Linton Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824 or 517-884-6767. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 408 West Circle Drive,MSU,East Lansing, MI 48824.You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions. I voluntarily agree to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

This consent form was approved by the Social Science/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board (SIRB) at Michigan State University. Approved 10/9/12 – valid through 10/8/13. This version supersedes all previous versions. IRB# 12-966.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Carleen Carey
PID: A42565020
IRB: 12-966

Interview Protocol*Adapted from Dorinda Carter's Case Study Assignment Models

Interview I & II: Reading, Race + Gender

Interviewer:

"Thank you so much for participating in this project! This interview will take no more than 60 minutes. I'm going to ask you questions related to your background, your beliefs about school and reading, gender, and race. I want to remind you that all your answers will be confidential.

The interview is confidential. That means that I won't share anything you say with anyone else, unless you tell me about a plan to hurt yourself or someone else, or if someone is hurting you. Anything you tell me will be private, and you won't get in trouble for anything you say. Only I will know what you said, so you can be honest. If you don't want to answer a question, just let me know. There are no right or wrong answers—I want to learn what you think. Does all that make sense?

I'd like to tape record the interview so that I can remember what you say, if that's okay with you. Is that okay? You can tell me to turn of the recorder at any point, if you want. I may publish my results as a book or in articles, or I might present the findings at conferences. I won't use your name or any other information that would identify who you are, so you can pick a code name so that I do not use your real name in any part of my data collection.

If after the interview is over, you want to withdraw from the study, I'll destroy your information. You won't get in trouble for withdrawing. I'm going to give you my information, so you can call or e-mail me to tell me if you don't want to participate anymore.

Do you have any questions?
Is it okay for us to start?

Name: _____
Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Background

1. How old are you?
2. What grade are you in?
3. What high school do you attend?
4. How long have you been attending this school?
5. Where did you grow up?

Gender Identity

1. _____Do you identify yourself with any particular gender? If so, which? Why?
    a. Do other people generally identify you with this gender? If not, why?
2. In your opinion, what is gender? How do you define gender?
3. How important is it for you to see yourself as fe/male?
    a. How important is it to you for others to see you as fe/male?
4. Are there benefits to being fe/male? Explain.
5. Are there disadvantages to being fe/male? Explain.
6. How important is it for you to have friends of your gender?
7. How important to your self image is being fe/male?
8. Are you proud to be fe/male? Explain.
    a. Are you ever regretful about your gender?
9. Do you believe that fe/males have made valuable contributions to society?
10. How do you think fe/males are portrayed in society?
    a. How do you think fe/males are treated in society?
    b. Do you believe fe/males are as smart as anyone else? As successful as anyone else? As intelligent as anyone else? Explain

Response to Story

1. Can you tell me the best part of the story we read today?
2. On a scale of one to ten, with one being 'not at all' and ten being ''strongly agree", how much you like the book we read today?
3. What do you think was the main point of the story?
4. Which characters did you like most? Least?
5. How would you describe the women in this book?
    a. How does that make you feel?
6. What was your favorite part of the story?
    a. Why?
    b. Least favorite?
7. How would you describe the main character?
8. If you could change any part of the story, what would if be? Why?
9. Is this book similar to the Disney Cinderella story? How?
    a. Different from it? How?
    b. How does that make you feel?

Racial Identity

11. Do you identify yourself with any particular racial or ethnic group? If so, which group? Why?
    a. Do other people generally identify you with this particular racial or ethnic group? If not, why?
12. In your opinion, what is race? How do you define race?
13. How important is it for you to see yourself as Black/African American?
    a. How important is it to you for others to see you as Black/African American?
14. Are there benefits to being Black/African American? Explain.

15. Are there disadvantages to being Black/African American? Explain.
16. How important is it for you to have friends of your same race/ethnic group?
17. How important to your self image is being Black/African American?
18. Are you proud to be Black/African American? Explain.
    a. Are you ever regretful about your race?
19. Do you believe that African Americans have made valuable contributions to society?
20. How do you think Blacks/African Americans are portrayed in society?
    a. How do you think Blacks/African Americans are treated in society?
21. Do you believe Black people are as smart as anyone else? As successful as anyone else? As intelligent as anyone else? Explain.

Race , Gender, and School

1. Do you think race or gender have affected your experiences in school? Why?
    a. Probe: academic success, peer groups/social success
2. Do you think your grades would be different if you went to a different high school? Explain.
3. Do you think your grades would be different if you went to school with more White or male students? Explain.
4. How do you think Blacks/African Americans girls are treated at your high school?
5. What are the different racial and ethnic groups of people at your high school?
6. Do you believe students treat each other differently based on race and gender at your school?
7. How would you describe race and gender relations between teachers and students at your high school?
8. Do you believe teachers treats students differently based on their race and gender?
9. Do you think racism and sexism can be a barrier to your success? Explain.
    a. Do you think racism and sexism can be a barrier to the success of Black girls in general?
10. Have you had experiences with racism and sexism in your school? Explain.
    a. How did that experience(s) make you feel?
    b. Do you know of others who have experienced racism and sexism in your school?
11. Do you think it is important to interact with people of different racial groups and genders? Explain.
12. Do you think it is important to have friends of different racial groups and genders? Explain.
13. Are you familiar with the term "acting White or mannish?"
    a. If so, what does this mean to you? Describe "acting White/mannish?"
    b. Have you ever been labeled as "acting White/mannish?" Explain.
14. Are you familiar with the term "acting Black/womanish?"
    a. If so, what does this mean to you? Describe "acting Black./womanish"
    b. Have you ever been labeled as "acting Black/womanish?"

Wrap-Up

1. Is there anything else that I didn't ask you that you would like to add?
2. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX E: NOTES ON METHOD

These findings, however, remain highly tentative due to the limitations of study. The study included only six participants and examined their responses to only five texts in book club discussions. In addition, I was an inexperienced book club leader. 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: To Lead, or To Follow?

For book club facilitators, the study points to the need to consider using multiple narratives of Black femininity, and multimedia texts that differ from the hegemonic narratives 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 narratives about Black women 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 our 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 ones' own race, and especially in a segregated city like Midwestville, and a racially homogenous Afro-centric school like Midwest K-8 means that you can raise issues like race and gender through local or regional writers. 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.

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