GENDERS, CULTURES, AND LITERACIES

Understanding Intersecting Identities

EDITED BY BARBARA J. GUZZETTI

GENDERS, CULTURES, AND LITERACIES

This volume brings together leading scholars in their fields who offer much needed and wide-ranging perspectives on the intersections of genders, cultures, and literacies. As incidents of racial and gender aggression grow in number and in global attention, it is essential to understand how racial and gender identities and their expressions interplay and influence literacy development and practice. Contributors examine how social identities intersect and are expressed in literacy practices across an array of school and out-of-school settings and discuss how gender and race are represented in individuals' multimodal practices. Chapters address such topics as the literacy practices of incarcerated fathers of color, Black girls' literacies, Indigenous students' cultural literacies, the writing practices of Latinx women for identity representation, and more. Ideal for scholars in literacy studies, gender studies, and cultural studies, this volume is a necessary and original update to the ways cultural, racial, and gender identities are viewed in current educational and sociocultural climates.

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Understanding Intersecting Identities

Edited by Barbara J. Guzzetti

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This book is dedicated to all those who stand up to gender and racial discrimination and advocate for social justice.

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FOREWORD

As a teacher, teacher educator, and researcher in literacy education, I know that Barbara J. Guzzetti's *Gender, Cultures, and Literacies: Understanding Intersecting Identities* is an important book being published at a critical time. Throughout this country's history, the hallmarks of American democracy – opportunity, freedom, and prosperity – have been largely reserved for white people through the intentional exclusion and oppression of people of color. The deep racial and ethnic inequities that exist today are a direct result of structural racism: the historical and contemporary policies, practices, and norms that create and maintain white supremacy. Within the context of this ongoing tumult, this book explores the role of literacy educators and researchers within school and community settings and beyond.

I am an African American woman who grew up in the segregated Deep South, in Albany, Georgia, a midsized community during the 50s and 60s. As a young child, I found racism confusing and disheartening; I remember asking myself if I were being punished for something. Now, as an adult I am still asking myself the same question. America's challenges around race, gender, and income inequality recently rose to the forefront of our collective consciousness. George Floyd's murder unleashed a torrent of pain and anger not only in the Black community but also among many sympathetic whites and other people of color. We are hearing story after story about how all Black people (regardless of education, occupation, or socioeconomic status) regularly confront the humiliation and scourge of racism. We can no longer pretend these are isolated incidents. How can we make sure we no longer look the other way? My answer to this question is: Stop! Do not read *Gender, Cultures, and Literacies: Understanding Intersecting Identities* unless you are willing to take a hard look at your beliefs and attitudes about gender and racial aggression. It also requires that you have an understanding that all children

can, in fact, learn, and even achieve at high levels if given the opportunity under the right conditions. Those who share that belief and understanding will find this book a useful guide and resource.

American classrooms are becoming more diverse every year, which means diversity in the classroom is becoming an increasingly important issue for educators throughout the education system. Ignoring the increase in diversity is not a helpful response. Barbara J. Guzzetti has assembled a group of emerging and well-known researchers whose chapters are all humanly inspired voices to which we must listen for our own growth and for the enhancement of the nation's peaceable and orderly progress. Some voices may jar us, others may comfort, but all should teach us. As we listen carefully to their intent, we will perhaps be impelled to share more fully in their earnest striving not for the lesser good of human betterment but for nothing short of the greatest good of complete human liberation and fulfillment.

The book is remarkable for the comprehensiveness of the connections it makes.

This book in all its parts is the result of the authors' searchings and findings. As readers we are invited into their discourse, within which we can learn to hear their teaching not only as insightful but as agentive. If we begin by listening carefully with them, we may come to hear and speak our own teaching in new ways.

This book challenges the reader to do the right thing by their students by learning from them and with them. Anyone who reads this book will come away with a feeling that the kind of change in schooling that the authors advocate is both desirable and possible. You will be well-advised to keep this book nearby for ready reference, and perhaps even have it displayed on the homepage of an electronic reading device. And, I predict that you'll place this book alongside those educational readings that you value; you will draw on it regularly for implementation, insight, and inspiration.

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PREFACE

The impetus for this book was stimulated by reoccurring incidents of gender and racial aggression, as the USA, like the rest of the world, is experiencing a dual pandemic – the virus of COVID-19 and the virus of racism. Members of the press have continually reported assaults on men and women of color, beginning in 2013 with George Zimmerman, a white man who was acquitted for shooting and killing an unarmed Black teenager, Trevon Martin (CNN Editorial Research, 2020). Two other high-profile deaths occurred of unarmed African American men, Eric Gardner in Staten Island, New York (Sisak, 2019), and Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, at the hands of white police officers who were ultimately not indicted (AP News, 2019). These incidents sparked the Black Lives Matter international activist movement that began as a hashtag on Twitter and now campaigns against violence and racism to stimulate social change. In May 2020, Ahmaud Arbrey, an unarmed Black man jogging through his neighborhood in Georgia, was shot and killed by a white man, a former police officer, and his son (Fausset, 2020). George Floyd, a Black man in Minneapolis, was killed by a white police officer who was convicted of murder in 2021 for holding Floyd down by the neck with his foot despite repeated pleas for mercy from the victim and bystander witnesses (Hill et al., 2020). The organization, Stop AAPI Hate, has drawn attention to 6,603 hate crimes against Asian Americans reported between March of 2020 and March of 2021 (Sprunt, 2021), prompting President Joe Biden to sign Anti-Asian Hate Crimes legislation into law.

Women, who are also a minority group due to their lack of social power and subordinate positioning by men (Turner, 2017), fare no better as victims of aggression. The National Organization of Women (2018) reported violence against women that disproportionally impacts women of color, immigrant women, LGBTQ+ women, and disabled women. During the first half of 2021,

there were high-profile incidents of Asian women being assaulted by men captured on viral videos, such as the 69-year-old Asian woman from the Bay area of California who was pushed to the ground, held down, and robbed (Dowd, 2021). A young white woman in New York City, Dounya Zayer, protesting the death of George Floyd, was pushed to the ground by a white male police officer for simply asking "why" when asked to leave the protest. The incident was recorded on a viral video (Parascondola & Tracy, 2020). National attention to incidents like these and the social movements of Black Lives Matter and #MeToo has raised awareness of prevailing physical aggression toward men of color and sexual harassment and violence toward women.

Incidents of racial and gender aggression are global concerns recognized by international organizations. Protests resulting from the death of George Floyd and the injustices of racial prejudices have sprung up in other nations. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued their 2014 report, *Gender Equality, Heritage and Creativity*, calling for research on and raised awareness of human rights and cultural heritages, particularly for minorities and women whose voices are often silenced and whose access is often denied due to stereotypes about their gender and culturally appropriate roles. The International Literacy Association (2020) and the Literacy Research Association (2016) each issued position statements denouncing racism and racial violence, calling for research that enriches understanding of literacies in multicultural societies and supports inclusive and antiracist educational spaces. The Literacy Research Association also recently released their *Racial Justice Research Report* (2021) and the *LRA Statement Against Anti-Asian Violence* (2021). The National Council of Teachers of English (2018) published their Statement on Anti-Racism to Support Teaching and Learning.

These organizations recognize that violence against and hatred toward marginalized people are typically motivated by fear, by ignorance of unfamiliar groups, and by dehumanizing diverse individuals (American Psychological Association, 2017). Consequently, there is a pressing need for information that alleviates ignorance and apprehension of those who are different by dispelling stereotypical notions of the performance of gender and race. Drawing attention to individuals' expressions of racial and gender identities and describing how their genders and cultures influence their literacy development and practices are visible ways to address this need.

The chapters in this volume authored by emerging and well-established researchers offer insight and transformative vision that respects and embraces differences while creating spaces for resistance. These scholars' original research and research reviews promote familiarity with and understanding of diverse cultures and alternative gender representations. Raising awareness of how gender and culture are represented in diverse individuals' literacy practices can inform educators and others outside the field, promote acceptance of alternative ways of being in the world, and advance culturally responsive citizenship.

Organization

This volume is organized into three sections based on the settings in which the studies reported in the chapters were conducted. The three sections include Literacies and Identities in School Settings; Literacies and Identities in Institutions, Agencies, and Community Settings; and Literacies and Identities Beyond Schools, Institutions, Agencies, and Community Settings. Although the authors used varying theoretical perspectives in conducting their studies, depending on the social identities of the populations they studied, each of them were representative of a view of literacy as a sociocultural practice (Street, 1995).

Section I: Literacies and Identities in School Settings

The six chapters in this section focus on research conducted in K–12 schools and university settings. In Chapter 1, "Family Involvement, Intersectionality, and Critical Digital Storytelling," Caroline T. Clark and Jenell Igeleke Penn describe how parents and teachers in a family involvement course composed digital stories to interrogate the "single stories" participants carried about schools, families, and communities, resulting in understanding how intersectional identities of race, gender, and social class affect family involvement in schools. In Chapter 2, "Culture and Gender in the Literacy Practices of Seminole Youth," Melissa Wicker and Jiening Ruan examine from a view of Tribal Critical Race theory how Seminole adolescents engaged in and perceived their in-school and out-of-school literacy practices in a tribal sponsored after-school program, illustrating the disparity between school-mandated literacy practices and those favored and used by the youth and their communities. In Chapter 3, "Positioning Gender Through Interpreting Character in Reader Response to a Multicultural Text," Monica S. Yoo examines from a perspective of intersectionality and theories of Black masculinity and Latino masculinity how diverse adolescents constructed and negotiated gender and race through positioning characters in a story of an African American boy's childhood. In Chapter 4, "Dream a Little [STEAM] of Me: Exploring Black Adolescent Girls' STEAM Career Futures Through Digital Multimodal Compositions," Jennifer D. Turner and Autumn A. Griffin describe from Black feminist and Black girlhood frameworks how Black adolescent girls created digital dream boards and multimodal texts to author new dreams for their scientific futures. In Chapter 5, " 'Teaching My Language Empowers Me': Korean Immigrant Women Teaching Heritage Language, Literacy, and Culture," Kwangok Song describes from a perspective of Asian feminism how immigrant Korean women teaching at a heritage language school maintained or expanded their gender and cultural roles and how these experiences provided opportunities for them to reshape their own literacy practices. In Chapter 6, "Digital Storytelling, Black Masculinity, and Contending With Racial Capitalism," Becky Beucher and Kimberly McDavid Schmidt used theories of Black masculinity to examine

how a Black male adolescent composed autobiographical digital stories to deconstruct and contend with racial capitalism and control, complicating liberatory narratives of a youth's agency to transform his conditions.

Section II: Literacies and Identities in Institutions, Agencies, and Community Settings

The four chapters in this section focus on research conducted in community organizations, public libraries, social agencies, and institutions other than schools. In Chapter 7, "Voicing Vulnerability: Narratives of Healing Among Culturally Diverse Adolescent Girls in a Community Based Setting," Crystal Chen Lee, Kelsey Dufresne, Laura Jacobs, Caitlin Donovan, and Jennifer C. Mann describe from a framework of gender theory how culturally diverse girls writing of girlhood in the context of healing transformation can reflect vulnerability as strength. In Chapter 8, "Rereading Fathers Behind Bars: Children's Literacy Assistance Practices of Incarcerated African American, Native American, Hispanic, and White Fathers," Theodore S. Ransaw and Tyler Thur describe how fathers across racial groups had positive K–12 schooling experiences and valued and engaged in sustained literacy practices with their children while incarcerated, dispelling misconceptions about minority imprisoned men being distant and uninvolved fathers. In Chapter 9, " 'Switchin' My Style Up!': A Case Study of a Black Girl's Literacy and Language Practices Across Three Contexts," Delicia Tiera Greene explored from a Black Girls' Literacies framework how a Black girl disrupted dominant ideologies that marginalize Black girls in her online and offline writing practices. In Chapter 10, "Writing My World: An Adolescent Mexicana's Process of Writing to Represent Herself," Tracey T. Flores and her participant, Fabiola Guadalupe Rodriguez Flores, describe from a Chicana feminist framework how Fabiola Guadalupe used writing to reframe her life experiences.

Section III: Literacies and Identities Beyond Schools, Institutions, Agencies, and Community Settings

The six chapters in this final section focus on studies conducted outside of schools, community organizations, agencies, or institutions that were representative of more informal settings. In Chapter 11, "The Critical Knowledge Production of Black Girls Through Digital and Multimodal Literacies," LaTasha Mosley and Gholnecsar E. Muhammad, using a Black Girls' Literacies framework, conducted a review of studies that focused on Black girls' multimodal literacy practices, finding that Black girls used their digital literacies as tools for resistance to reframe oppressive narratives. In Chapter 12, "Voices From the Margins: Latinx and Chicanx/Filipina Women Writing Ephemeral Texts for Representation and Resistance," Barbara J. Guzzetti describes how two women of Mexican descent wrote zines to chronicle the personal and political oppression they faced resulting

from stereotypical expectations for performing gender and race as women of their culture. In Chapter 13, "Men's Zines Down Under: Exploring Gender, Race, and Social Class Through Literacies," Katina Zammit used theories of whiteness and gender to examine how white men from Australia and Finland composed zines that reflected on their social identities as white men. In Chapter 14, "Tales from TikTok: Gender and Cultural Intersectionalities," Donna Alvermann, Ellen Wynne, and William Wright used a performative theory of gender to examine how diverse Generation Zers used a popular video-sharing app, describing how their bodily and textual performances contributed to their gender and cultural identities. In Chapter 15, "Enacting Resistance to Intersecting Oppressions Through Satirical Digital Writing on LGBTQ+ YouTube," Addie Shrodes, Jolie C. Matthews, and Wan Shun Eva Lam used theories of intersectionality and queer theory to examine how digital composers in LGBTQ+ reaction videos mobilized discursive repertoires of satirical humor to challenge and discuss hegemonic ideologies. In Chapter 16, "Girls and Gaming Literacies: Dynamics of Gender and Culture," Barbara J. Guzzetti, Lesley M. Foley, and Elisabeth Gee report their critical review of the research on girls of color and video gaming from the perspective of intersectionality, finding that studies emphasized players' responses to feminine or racial stereotypes in games or discrimination in online gaming communities and identified girls' coping mechanisms and strategies of resistance to oppression.

In summary, I hope that you will find these chapters useful in considering current issues regarding gender and race that are represented in diverse individuals' literacy practices. As the book's editor and as a chapter author, I join the other contributors in hoping that our ideas will raise your awareness of alternative ideas about contemporary social issues and social identities that permeate daily life and influence individuals' world views. You will find that much of these chapters were written from the viewpoint of education, since we are all teachers and learners in our interactions with others whether we find ourselves inside or outside of schools. I hope that these research reports and reviews will offer alternative viewpoints that will resonate with you and inform your future attitudes and actions.

Barbara J. Guzzetti

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SECTION I

Literacies and Identities in School Settings

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1

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND CRITICAL DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Caroline T. Clark and Jenell Igeleke Penn

As longtime educators and as mothers, we have experienced the call for family involvement in schools from "both sides," recognizing the fears, assumptions, misunderstandings, and exclusions that can often shape interactions between teachers and parents (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Likewise, as female, cisgender, critical, feminist, and activist scholars, we both understand our identities as intersectional (Crenshaw, 1991), but in ways that play out differently in terms of power, equity, visibility, and vulnerability. For Caroline, who is a white, queer, woman, whiteness will always provide privilege and power that cannot be ignored. For Jenell, who is a Black, middle-class woman, her Blackness will always be the most visible of her identities, making her constantly vulnerable to racialized violence and disposability. In short, the two of us reflect and recognize "the tremendous heterogeneity that currently characterizes how people understand and use intersectionality" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2).

Our Perspectives

We brought intersectionality to bear as we examined our work together, teaching and documenting a course on family involvement. Drawing on the writings of feminist theorists Collins and Bilge (2016), we define intersectionality as:

> a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being

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> shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Intersectionality as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves.
>
> *(p. 2)*

We couple intersectionality as an analytic tool with critical theories of pedagogy (Freire, 1970) because we recognize our own positionalities as university researchers and educators are fraught with power relations and therefore necessarily open to critical interrogation and inquiry in disrupting scholar-activist divides (Collins & Bilge, 2016). More importantly, however, we bring this lens to our work because of our commitments to dismantling social inequalities and systemic racism, working toward more just and equitable schools, and establishing the right for everyone, including parents and teachers, to be more fully human in these relationships (Freire, 1970, p. 90).

Our Purpose

Much research has been done on family involvement in schools, touting the benefits in terms of improved student achievement and attendance, and increased rates of graduation (e.g., Barnard, 2004). Few studies, however, have brought a critical lens to bear on these relationships (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), and the framework of intersectionality has rarely been used to examine parent and family engagement in schools (Durand, 2018). As a result, "the ways that schools often privilege the needs and agendas of parents who sit in dominant intersectional spaces, while marginalizing opportunities for those who do not" (Durand, 2018, p. 143) remains a largely unexplored issue.

To address these gaps in research and theory, we redesigned and delivered a university course on parent participation asking the overarching research question: What happens when parents, preservice educators, and in-service teachers who bring intersectional social identities related to gender, culture, class, and education participate together in a family involvement course?

Our Procedures

To answer this question, we adapted an existing university course, "Family Involvement," from its typical place of delivery (on campus), its typical audience (university students), and its typical approach (faculty-led lecture/discussion). Parents were positioned not as the objects of study, but as co-teachers/co-learners alongside of preservice and in-service teachers and us as professors and researchers. Two sections of the course were redesigned and taught on site at two partner schools. Recognizing our approach as quite different from the usual approaches to

teaching and learning about family participation, our course became the subject of an "outlier case" study (Thomas, 2021, p. 111). Bringing together distinct groups of parents, teachers, and university students in the course allowed us, in turn, to examine intersectionality relative to family involvement in detail.

The first partner school (all schools and named participants are pseudonyms), Stone Expeditionary Learning Academy (SELA) was a centrally located public-charter school for grades K–8. SELA followed an Expeditionary Learning (EL) curriculum model, focused on engaging students with real world problems in the local community, and drew students from throughout the midsized, midwestern city. It was a small, tight knit school of about 160 students and 40 staff members. The student population within SELA was very diverse in terms of race, language, sexuality, gender expression, religion, and ethnicity; however, many of the students fell within lower levels of socioeconomic statuses and the majority of students identified as Black. The second school where the course was held, Upland Elementary, was a neighborhood, public school in the city school system, serving predominantly poor Latinx, Black, and white students from preschool through grade 5. The neighborhood was originally home to generations of white, Appalachian families who relocated to the city from the rural, southern parts of the state and nearby states.

Focal Participants

Across the two sections there were a total of 30 participants, 17 at SELA (four teachers, seven parents, and six preservice teachers), and 13 at Upland (nine teachers, three parents, and one preservice teacher). Of the participants at SELA, four were teachers from the school (one white, straight, female; one Black, straight, female; two white, lesbian, females); seven were student intern teachers (five white, straight, females; one white, straight, disabled male; and one Black, queer, male); and seven were parents (four white, straight, females; one bi-racial, straight, female; one Black, queer, female; and one Black, straight, female). Some of the teachers and interns were also parents; and some of the parents had been teachers. Of the nine teacher participants in the course held at Upland (all white, straight, female), five were teachers at Upland Elementary, while four were from nearby middle schools for which Upland was a "feeder school." Two of the parent participants (both white, straight, females) had children attending Upland, and the other (a Black, straight, female) had a daughter who attended one of the nearby middle schools. All of the participants across both sections were cisgender (i.e., their biological sex and their expressed or felt gender aligned). Thanks to a small grant, parents were paid as consultants and participated in all course activities. Each section of the course met once per week, and the grant also paid for childcare and healthy snacks, enabling parents to fully participate in the semester-long course.

Data Collection

Using a combination of practitioner inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) and ethnographic participant observation (Frank, 1999), Caroline studied her own practice, and Jenell engaged as both a participant in and observer of the course. All of the 3-hour class sessions were video-taped (28 total, 14 at each site) and all of the course materials (e.g., the course syllabus, all readings, and teaching plans) were collected, along with Caroline's post-teaching reflections, Jenell's field notes, and the participants' materials, including course writings, class assignments, and digital stories. Both Jenell and Caroline conducted semi-structured interviews with course participants, paying specific attention gender and cultures, and how these intersectional identities shaped their understandings, experiences, and enactments of family involvement in schools.

Data Analysis

Using thematic coding, we iteratively reviewed our data, paying attention to when feelings related to family involvement (i.e., hopes, fears, concerns, barriers) were expressed and how teachers and parents were positioned in these moments. To identify these key moments, we viewed videos of course instruction, noting moments that surprised us or went differently than we might have expected. Based on these moments, we then looked at course materials, readings, and assignments that linked to these moments, and overlaid them with Caroline's reflections and Jenell's observations, as well as interviews with course participants and participants' digital stories in order to understand what was happening in the context of this course, and our case, relative to intersectionality.

Our analysis led us to identify several "storying events" throughout the course. We provide a glimpse into some of these key storying events across both sites, looking specifically at critical digital storytelling in one of the sites, SELA, and two participants at that site: Roberta, a Black, queer, mother with a daughter attending SELA; and Hannah, a white, lesbian, second-grade teacher at SELA who had recently become the lead, elementary administrator in the building. We close by arguing for the importance of "restorying" (Worthy, Consalvo, Bogard, & Russell, 2012) parent involvement and parent/teacher relationships in order to critically trouble existing power structures and hold space for intersectional identities and voices that are frequently silenced or rendered invisible in discussions of families in schools.

Storying Family Involvement

At the core of our approach was storytelling, and a focal component of the revised course was the crafting of digital stories, which we explain in more detail later.

Like Green (1994), we see storytelling as a critical act of human connection and meaning making. We also understand storytelling as a key part of naming the world to change it and as "not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone" (Freire, 1970, p. 88). Our focus on storytelling was evident in our course focal questions: *How do our own experiences in communities and schools shape our experiences as teachers and family members working with children in schools? What are the single stories we carry about one another, based on these experiences? How might we rewrite these? How might these new stories support K-8 students, teachers, and families in schools?* These questions were taken up throughout the course in several activities and assignments, and emerged, as well, in our analysis.

Key Storying Events

From the outset, we made it clear that stories would be a primary means of engaging in our shared learning contexts. We read stories, told stories, and viewed videos, including TED Talks, positioning storytelling as an important and legitimate form for engaging in this class. We shared our own stories of schooling, parenting, and family involvement and invited participants to do the same. Stories allowed everyone to find some footing in the class with all of us reflecting on our multiple and intersectional positionings.

Introducing Ourselves Through Stories of Schooling

A key storying event from the first night of class provided a telling example of these positional shifts. At both Upland and SELA, participants paired-up to share memories of K–12 schooling. In her reflections on the sessions, Caroline noted a story pattern across both sections: more than half of the stories of schooling were negative, often focused on shame and embarrassment, rooted in core stereotypes related to gender, race, class, and ability.

At Upland, Gloria, a white, female middle school teacher who grew up poor, shared a story of being forced to stand in a trash can as punishment by an elementary teacher, and the shame and embarrassment of feeling like "white trash," which she carries to this day. And Beverly, a white female preschool teacher at Upland, shared a negative story when her Kindergarten teacher yelled at her for being late and said she was "not smart," a memory that she described as "burned in to my head" as a woman.

At SELA, similar stories were shared. Jan, a Black female parent shared how, growing up, she was misunderstood and punished for being outspoken rather than being challenged by her mostly white teachers, who she felt couldn't see her as possibly being "smart" as a Black child. And Kevin, a white, disabled, single-father and university student shared a story of being mis-named at his high school graduation ceremony, an embarrassment capping off years of feeling unseen in

school. Following the story sharing, Carla, a white, middle-class teacher from SELA noticed:

> The most interesting part was that most people's stories were about a time where they were really embarrassed or felt like their teacher had treated them unfairly. It was interesting to me that this is what stands out the most in people's memory.

Based on her own love of school and her teachers, this surprised Carla, leading her to pose new questions:

> So this has me thinking. I love school. I assume all of my kiddos love school. What's not to love, right? I really don't think much about redirecting them. I try to [redirect] discreetly and silently, but if I can't, I don't really sweat it. I wonder if I need to be extra careful about this. Especially based on the fact that almost every single person's most memorable moment was based on something said by a teacher in a pretty off-hand way. I'm going to work on this.
>
> *(CB, Weekly Reflection)*

The shift here is subtle, but worth noting. Like many white, straight, abled, middle class teachers, Carla's privileged positions allowed her to fit comfortably into the white normative space of schooling, and she assumed others did as well. But, hearing the stories of shame, embarrassment, and hurt, particularly from people who sit at the intersection of marginalized identities, led Carla to ask new questions and recognize that her own perspective was limited and warranted further questioning and reflection.

Reading and Imagining Ourselves Into Stories

Another key storying event involved participants imagining themselves into fictional narratives, including the short story "Eleven" by Cisneros (1993). In this story, the first-person narrator, Rachel, is embarrassed by her teacher, Mrs. Price, who assumes that a smelly, red sweater that was found in the cloak room must belong to Rachel and forces her to put it on. Because it is told from Rachel's perspective, readers are left to wonder about Mrs. Price's motivations, and whether these are based on race/ethnicity, class, gender or other/a combination of factors. Rachel feels humiliated, frustrated, sad, and angry, emotions she connects with being different ages and that detract from what should be a celebratory day, her eleventh birthday. Ultimately, another girl, Phyllis Lopez, recalls that the sweater is hers, but this is no consolation for Rachel, who simply wishes she were older and could float away from this horrible day like a balloon.

After reading the story aloud, Caroline invited participants to position themselves in the story as either Rachel's mother or Mrs. Price, to imagine they were going to have a Parent-Teacher conference to discuss what happened, to make some notes to prepare for the meeting, and to include what they might say and why. Tina, a white single mother of two children at Upland, who was homeless at one point in the semester and whose partner, the father of her children, had been deported to Mexico, imagined herself as a parent in the story and described her response accordingly:

> I would approach Mrs. Price and ask for a moment of her time. I would begin by saying my child was upset and quite uncomfortable with the situation. It's never nice to be called out. It's easy pickings for other children. And I feel an apology was in order just to make the child more comfortable.

In her imagined response, Tina was deferential, planning to approach the teacher and request just "a moment of her time," then respectfully pointing out that if a teacher singles out a child in front of peers that child becomes "easy pickings" for abuse from other children. While her response could be read as gendered in terms of its politeness and deference (Sunderland, 2004), we see an interesting intersection and disruption among Tina's identities in her imagined exchange. Tina is intentional in making a demand of the teacher, matching her language to the middle-class norms of schooling and claiming her power as a parent, a move that is common among white middle-class parents (Vincent, 1996), but rare among poor parents and parents of color because of the fraught relationships of these parents with education (Malone, 2015). This response, and others she made throughout the course, often disrupted stereotypes of mothers like Tina – poor, white, single women parenting biracial children – who are sometimes positioned as problem parents or lacking in "parenting skills" (O'Connor, 2001) and whose presence in the course was itself a rebuttal to such narratives.

Other Key Storying Events

Across the course, other key storying events contributed to further shifts in positioning and a developing sense of intersectional identities, as participants learned about Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's concept of "single stories" – overly simplistic or stereotypical and limiting perceptions of individuals or groups – and watched her widely viewed Ted Talk (Adichie, 2009). Immediately following the video, participants responded to the prompt, "*Because of, I think*," on a sheet of paper without names. After answering this prompt, participants formed a circle, crumpled their papers, threw them on the ground in the middle of the circle, picked up a paper that was not their own, and read the unattributed responses aloud. Some example responses included: "*Because of my parents, I thought all Black people were scary*"; "*Because of things I've seen or experienced, I thought all Christians*

were homophobic"; and "*Because of my age (Millennial) people think I am stupid.*" Anonymously surfacing these thoughts and feelings, and identifying the fears, experiences, and stereotypes at their roots (Pain, 2001) was an important entry point into noticing intersectional identities related to race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, and religion, among others, to understand how these affected and shaped perceptions of parents, teachers, and family involvement.

Moving from anonymous sharing to personally authored stories was difficult work, which we supported by viewing Brené Brown's TED Talk on shame and vulnerability (Brown, 2010). The participants also read research on and took an online test of implicit bias, which led to some important discomfort among participants like Nadia, a white teacher at Upland who grew up and attended school in New York City before moving to the Midwest after college:

> I stopped writing this response in order to take the Implicit Association Test. I would like to read more about why this test legitimately is accurate. My immediate skepticism is naturally because my results were that I have a moderate automatic preference for European Americans. I take umbrage at this because I actually embrace diversity and if anything, I prefer to have more of it in my life. I love a classroom with many different types of students. I want my friend group to be expansive and inclusive and indeed my mother used to say my friend group could advocate at the United Nations meeting. I am not sure why some keys I pressed on a computer make me biased but I feel uncomfortable and can't see evidence of my so-called bias. I wish I knew how I am being biased so I could fix it.
>
> *(NB, Weekly Reflection)*

Nadia was unsettled by her results and initially reluctant to acknowledge her own implicit biases, which did not fit her identity as a white, progressive woman. But, as the class members continued to surface stories, read articles, and pose problems (Freire, 1970), they interrogated their single stories and implicit biases, always cycling back to how individuals are positioned by their race, class, gender, and cultures and how emerging understandings of the complexities of intersectional identities informed understandings of family involvement.

Critical Digital Stories

The ultimate outcome of our course was to create digital stories of family involvement, multimodal narratives composed of words, sounds, colors and images (Lambert, 2006), designed to counter some of the implicit biases and deficit-based narratives we had heard, read, or come to believe about one another and ourselves, whether as parents or as teachers. Our approach was rooted in the grassroots movement of digital storytelling (Lambert, 2006), where ordinary people are supported in using digital media to "share aspects of their lives through story" (Aguilera & Lopez, 2020, p. 583). To do this, we watched examples of digital

stories and introduced the "4Cs" structure: context, crisis, change, and closure as key story components to help guide the creation of digital stories (OSU Digital Stories). Next, we participated in a "story circle," a structured space of trust and mutual support, where participants could share initial ideas for stories about family involvement without interruption. On story circle night, participants came to class with a story about families and schooling written down, using the 4Cs structure. After each story was shared allowed, everyone provided a written, affirming response framed as "*What I liked about your story . . .*," and then provided supportive feedback, framed as "*If it were my story . . .*." Everyone had the same amount of time in which to share stories and hear responses. All participants received written feedback from everyone in the story circle, and all participants understood the risks and vulnerability of the space, agreeing that "What happens here stays here."

From these initial stories, participants created "scripts," versions of their stories that they cut for timing and effect to be read aloud and recorded as part of their digital story. They also collected images, created soundtracks, and used the online story-crafting software, WeVideo, to develop, edit, polish, and record their digital stories. Several Upland teachers created stories about their own experiences as parents, where their identities as white teachers intersected with their roles as women and mothers. These included stories about their children's teachers labeling their sons and daughters with ADHD and other dis/abilities, and stories about struggles with fertility and miscarriages. Viewing family involvement from these intersectional, parent perspectives, as women and mothers, gave them a newfound appreciation for the parents of students in their own classrooms. Others created stories that disrupted assumptions about family involvement, like Heidi, a white middle-class teacher at Upland who created a story about her "most involved parent," a poor, Latinx, single mother who persisted in staying connected with Heidi and engaged in her sons schooling even as she struggled with drug addiction, a near-death overdose, and temporarily losing custody of her child. In her story, Heidi highlighted how this mother's identities were all ones that were usually stigmatized in schools, but instead of demonizing her, Heidi celebrated her dedication. She contrasted this mother with herself, a privileged, white, middle-class woman who is lauded for being an engaged parent, but for whom family involvement was easy by comparison with this mother who worked so hard and overcame so much. Recognizing their intersectional identities and dual positions as parents and teachers and seeing themselves as both the subjects and objects of these framings led to more nuanced, compassionate views of families. Frequently, however, these digital stories of family involvement were complex and critical. Roberta, a parent, and Hannah, a teacher, both at SELA, provided two examples of this described as follows.

Roberta's Digital Story: The Struggle Is Real

Roberta's digital story was short and powerful, consisting of still images that she found online, a few personal images of her daughter, who at the time was an

eighth grader at SELA, and her recorded narration. Her images were paired with direct statements of frustration with schools and teachers, past and present. The images she selected included an image of former President George W. Bush sitting next to a young Black girl in front of a book titled *Bluff Your Way in Public Speaking*; a drawing of two Black men and a Black woman in the slave era watching young Black children dance under the words "Calender's Minstrels"; and a white woman in an ornate headpiece holding the shoulders of a man in blackface. To see some examples from Roberta's story, visit the book's Support Material page at www.routledge.com/9780367742751.

The first image and text pairing helped to illustrate Roberta's argument that the methods that had been used to support her daughter were not working and despite requests for help, she and her daughter were not heard. Noticeably, a book titled *Bluff Your Way in Public Speaking* (Steward & Wilkinson, 1993) is shown in the background, which helped to further emphasize her statement and pushed back against promises (or bluffs) in education that are not paired with intentional action to effectively serve the needs of children of color and build sustaining relationships with their families. The second and third images and text pairings drew on long-held deficit narratives about the capabilities of Black children. By using these grotesque images from a 19th-century minstrel show featuring Black children with exaggerated features, and an explicitly patronizing white-faced figure hovering next to a man in blackface, Roberta boldly rejected the ridiculousness of these narratives and made visible the power white supremacy has had in constructing educational experiences and potential for Black people, including parents and their children.

Roberta used her digital story to speak back to not just the racialized oppressions she saw her daughter experiencing at SELA, but also to the racialized violence that she encountered growing up in their neighborhood. In her digital story, she stated,

> Why do I not get involved? Why do I not hold the teachers accountable, as well? I believe I do not because growing up the only time teachers reached out to our family is when I did something wrong. I also used to hear that teachers believe that [Black children] weren't able to learn and let many pass although they did not know the work. I never received a call when she was failing, sinking, drowning with an F. It just feels like since we are Black, white teachers do not go the extra mile for us because they do not understand us. I took her out of that school . . . and decided to give SELA a try. . . . Here we are with the same B.S.

Roberta found these experiences to be linked across generations and sought to disrupt a repetition of her experiences so that her daughter would have access to an educational experience that they both deserved. Her digital story made visible the ways in which many Black people have historically and generationally

been positioned within schools, as disinterested, uninvolved, and underachieving (Crozier, 2001; Allen, 2017).

A Black parent's relationship with school does not necessarily change upon becoming a parent of a Black child who is in a school. In Roberta's words, we see that the same feelings of distrust she felt as a young Black girl are just as present in her role as the parent of a Black girl, feelings that impacted the ways in which she saw her access to her child's school. She felt that school was culturally irrelevant, racist, criminalizing, and neglectful for her, and she had witnessed some of the same "passed along" practices with her children. She mentioned in her interview that "[the school] passed [her daughter] off," especially because Roberta was not able to "be in their face all the time" due to her need to work.

Many white parents in the course felt empowered and part of the school community, as many of their social identities as white, stay-at-home parents, and middle class were acknowledged and understood in the context. These feelings were predictable as Kirkland (2013) has identified how schooling is made more comfortable for white people and how literacy is presented in schools as the practice of white people. In contrast, Roberta's historical oppression based on her race and income status matched with her experiences with the ways that "school" made her feel powerless. Although many of the white parents trusted the school system and found value and validation in being part of the SELA community, Roberta did not. By participating in the family involvement course, Roberta's view of her own agency shifted from powerlessness to powerfulness and through the creation of her critical digital story, Roberta was able to speak back to deficit narratives about her daughter and about her involvement as a parent.

Hannah's Digital Story: Bringing Your Best Self Each Day

Like Roberta's story, Hannah, an administrator at SELA, composed a digital story that consisted of a mixture of personal photographs and images found on the Internet paired with narration that sought to disrupt deficit narratives. In her story, she shared how, for about 20 years, she hid her sexual identity as a lesbian. Her images included an image of a street sign pointing in seven directions with the words, Lost, Confused, Unsure, Unclear, Perplexed, Disoriented, and Bewildered; a faceless person wearing a yellow hoodie; a silhouette photograph of a woman in profile holding a finger to her lips; and a close-up of two women holding hands. To see some examples from Hannah's story, visit the book's Support Material page at www.routledge.com/9780367742751.

In the first image and text pairing, Hannah troubled notions of what it means to be "a girl" and tied this to being confused about her gender and sexual identities. This is the first time in the story where she pushed back on "societal norms," acknowledging that against the backdrop of these norms, her intersectional identities were positioned as a deficit and to be hidden away.

In the second image and text pairing, Hannah highlighted this tension with the use of the word "normal." Growing up in a very small, conservative town, Hannah knew her lesbian identity was not considered "normal" and would not be accepted; therefore, she dated boys openly while in a secret relationship with her girlfriend throughout high school to avoid detection. The image she chose for this pairing was a person with no face, which assisted her in illustrating the erasure and isolation she felt as she tried to navigate what she knew to be her truth in juxtaposition to the "societal norms" pushed upon her.

In the third image and text pairing, Hannah showed and discussed being encouraged by her family to hide her lesbian identity once she became a teacher to protect herself. Being from a small town, she already did not fit "all of the societal norms" and her parents worried she would lose her job. Because she had not felt supported or safe enough to come out, Hannah felt that she was not bringing her "best self each day." Her use of "best" can be interpreted as full or whole but she also aligned the word "best" with her identity as a lesbian, an intersectional identity that she was made to feel ashamed of for 20 years, which she now celebrated as her "best" self.

Hannah's experiences reflect the heightened heteronormativity of schools in which lesbian and gay teachers can feel ambivalence toward comingling their sexual and professional identities, distancing themselves from their sexual identities at school (Connell, 2015). It is important to note that Hannah had not come out to the SELA parents before taking the course, and her wife was also in the class, although she was not out during the semester until she shared her critical digital story, nor did they ever self-identify as a couple during the course. Through her participation in the family involvement class, however, Hannah saw possibilities for not only making her "best" self visible every day so that she could live a freer, more present life, but also for being an example for students at SELA who may be questioning their own gender and/or sexual identities and their value in the world.

Restorying Family Involvement

Through our analysis of this course and these digital stories, we saw some parallels with "restorying" as a process of disrupting the negative stories held about some children in classrooms (Worthy et al., 2012). Like children who bring "additional baggage, including school labels (e.g., learning disabled), along with more personalized identities formed in response to situations and interactions in previous contexts" (Worthy et al., 2012, p. 569), parents (and some teachers) whose identities, lives, and experiences do not align with those of parents who "sit in dominant intersectional spaces" (Durand, 2018) may also bring baggage shaped by their experiences in schools based in race, gender, sexual identity, ability, and the myriad intersections among these subjectivities. This baggage affects their feelings about (re)entering schools, precedes their interactions with their children's teachers, and often prefigures how schools view and treat them.

What is required, then, we argue, is space and opportunities for critical restorying. Such an approach would not be carried out by teachers *for* parents, or by teachers *about* parents, but rather by teachers *with* parents. This critical repositioning of teachers and parents – as well as university faculty and students – seems essential for the restorying of family involvement to occur. For too long, courses on family involvement have subscribed to a banking model of teaching (Freire, 1970), which assumes teachers and parents are "empty vessels" with no understandings or experiences in common, and presenting the life-worlds of both teachers and parents as static, singular, and nonintersectional. Bringing the storied lives of teachers, parents, and teacher educators together in a risky, vulnerable space allowed for the necessary work of (re)building complex relationships and community by addressing long-held deficit narratives and implicit biases about families and their involvement in their children's lives.

Story circles and the creation of critical digital stories were ways to create or "hold space" (Hikida, 2018) for intersectional and often marginalized identities, which are not always afforded equal access or voice in schools. Sometimes, these openings were as simple as teachers shifting their perspective from their experiences as white educators, to their experiences as mothers of children in school, and reflecting on their own experiences of family involvement, as was the case with Heidi. But often, these shifts were more deeply rooted in consequential histories and experiences in school as dehumanizing and isolating, as was the case for Roberta and Hannah. In order to do this restorying work, then, particularly in spaces that deem themselves to be "progressive," such as SELA and many teacher-education programs, this progressive stance needs to be continuously examined in terms of what this means and when, where, and how families of marginalized and/or intersectional backgrounds are positioned and heard. If not, certain social and cultural oppressions can be reproduced as was the case for Roberta.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Defining and researching family involvement in a vacuum without considering the complex interrelationships of various social identities reproduces inequitable conditions in schools instead of deconstructing and (re)building school communities that include access for all families. By centering personal and identity stories, educators can design courses in family literacy and family involvement in education that can become a space for critical restorying for all participants to (re)narrativize and co-construct stories together. The creation of critical digital stories can allow participants to center nondominant and intersectional parts of themselves and explore their own definitions of what family involvement is and can be, definitions that can blur and shift.

This is not a victory narrative and critical digital stories are not "the answer" to ruptures in parent participation in schools. Instead, it is a call to continually

question what educators think they are doing when teaching and learning about "family involvement" and family literacy in schools and assist them in continually striving to do this work more critically, more compassionately, and more humanely. It also then makes sense that teacher education programs do more to prepare preservice educators to engage with and include families in their practices, especially when working with communities of people who have historically experienced oppressions based on their intersectional social identities.

Families want to be involved and are involved in their children's schools. They come with their own stories, some interwoven with the contexts of their children's schools and some contradictory. Even if their stories are contradictory, schools must hold space for those stories and for varied ways of being and participating in schools. Thus, it is critical that families not only be involved in the process of making schools more welcoming and accessible, but that administrators, teachers, and parents holding volunteer positions consider the intersectional identities of their families and students when planning when, where, and how family involvement activities take place. Creating critical digital stories is one way that families can share their stories and have a voice in schools. The more opportunities families have to share their stories and restory negative and/or misconstrued stories about them, the greater the potential for more connections to be made and more openings to be established.

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2

CULTURE AND GENDER IN THE LITERACY PRACTICES OF SEMINOLE YOUTH

Melissa Wicker and Jiening Ruan

Despite efforts to improve the literacy performance of Indigenous youth through educational reforms and research-based practices, many with good intentions, the reading achievement scores of eighth-grade American Indian/Alaska Native youth remain lower than their white, Asian, and Hispanic counterparts (De Brey, Snyder, Zhang, & Dillow, 2021). Teachers often view these students and their abilities from a deficit perspective (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Manning, Martin, Reyhner, Steeves, & Macfarlane, 2020), and they continue to adopt assimilatory practices (e.g., standardized tests, packaged curriculum, one-size-fits-all literacy instruction, et al.) espoused by neoliberals (Hursh, 2007) in an effort to improve their students' literacy scores. Meanwhile, Indigenous students' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Smagorinsky, Anglin, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2012), knowledge derived from their familial, cultural, and community languages, practices, and experiences, are often disregarded, and their identities and voices are rarely recognized or supported (Wilson & Boatright, 2011).

Euro-American schooling, which favors the language and literacy practices of the dominant culture, is an extension of colonialism and its historical demand for assimilation (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018). Schooling has long served as a tool to separate Native American youth from their cultures and languages, to deny their sovereignty and identity, and to perpetuate historic and institutionalized racism against Native Americans (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; White-Kaulaity, 2007). Standardized tests are created to measure the level of knowledge, skills, and language valued and endorsed by the dominant culture, so these test scores do not accurately reflect Indigenous students' true literacy knowledge or ability. Rather, they measure the degree to which they have assimilated into the dominant culture. Therefore, examining and interrogating the true causes of the so-called achievement gap is imperative.

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This study attempted to reframe the dominant narrative, which casts the literacy learning of Indigenous adolescents as a problem that needs to be fixed. It is time that their voices and experiences are welcomed into the conversation. By centering their literacy learning experiences and "making visible those who have remained invisible in schooling" (Guzzetti, 2021, p. 15), we may gain valuable insights into their successes and challenges so that we may be allies in their journey to become lifelong literacy learners.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand how Seminole adolescents perceive literacy and the literacy practices in which they engaged both in and out of school and how culture, gender, and identities intersect and play out in the literate lives of these youth. The research questions that guided this study were: How do Seminole adolescents in a rural after-school program for Indigenous youth define and perceive literacy? What literacy practices do Seminole youth engage in both in and out of school? What role does gender play in Seminole adolescents' in-school and out-of-school literacy practices?

We use the terms Indigenous, American Indian, and Native American interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to the original inhabitants and their descendants of the United States and Canada. These terms have been used by the authors cited in this chapter, and whenever possible, we use the terms the youth used to describe themselves, their identities, and their communities. We recognize, however, that not all Native American tribes are alike, and we remind our readers that our study focused on Seminole youth.

Our Perspectives

Several theories informed this study. Through a lens of critical literacy (Freire, 2018) we examined the social, cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts of literacy. Critical literacy critiques the practice of favoring the literacies and literacy practices of the dominant culture at the expense of others, especially through assimilatory schooling practices. This perspective posits literacy as a tool to examine the impact of power on literacies and literacy practices and to transform society by challenging inequitable distributions of power (Luke, 2012).

Tribal Critical Race theory or TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005), an extension of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016), asserts that settler colonialism subverts Indigenous people's rights to autonomy, sovereignty, self-determination, and self-identity. TribalCrit denounces racism and assimilatory schooling practices because they denigrate Indigenous cultures, languages, and literacies and they allow settler colonialism to maintain its monopoly of culture, knowledge, identity, and power. Viewing literacy, literacy practices, and schooling through

this lens, we recognize the harm assimilatory practices inflict on Indigenous youth and their communities.

Broadening the scope of critical gender theory (Butler, 1990), critical Indigenous feminist theory (Mouchref, 2016; Ramirez, 2007) challenges Western patriarchal gender norms, roles, and behaviors that are imposed and perpetuated through oppressive assimilatory practices. These often stand in stark contrast to the matrilineal structure and gender roles inherent in many Indigenous cultures, which posit men and women as equals and encourages all members to contribute equally based on their skills and talents. Both TribalCrit and critical Indigenous feminist theory emphasize the inherent power of stories to talk back to oppressors, disrupt stereotypes, and reclaim sovereignty and self-determination (Brayboy, 2005; Glenn, 2015; Weaver, 2015).

Our Inquiry Methods

Setting

Our research took place at a tribal-sponsored after-school program, housed at a local elementary school. Located in a rural community in the southwestern region of the United States with a high Native American population, the program was designed for Indigenous adolescents, ages 12 to 22, of any tribal affiliation. Its goals included encouraging academic development and healthy lifestyles; supporting Native language acquisition; examining the effects of historical trauma on youths' lives; and developing positive cultural, academic, and personal identities to improve self-confidence, attitudes, and self-worth. The adolescents met at the school's cafeteria for language, culture, and academic learning activities and the gym for games and other physical activities.

The Participants

The participants in our study were selected through purposeful sampling or by choosing those who could best inform us. The selection criteria included being actively enrolled in the after-school program and attending one of the four middle or high schools in the area. Devin (male), Anna (female), and Lexy (female), all pseudonyms, were three Seminole adolescents who met these criteria and volunteered to participate in the study. The youth lived in the southwestern region of the U.S. and were from low socioeconomic households.

Our Data Collection and Analysis

The lead researcher, Melissa, observed the youth in the program as an observer for approximately three months. She visited the school where the program was housed twice a week for approximately two hours with each visit for three

months. Most of the time, Melissa observed from the back of the cafeteria while the youth engaged in learning activities or observed from the sidelines as they played in the gym. She occasionally played games with the youth and informally talked with them to establish a relationship with them. At the conclusion of the three months, she conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant. In the interviews, the youth were asked to describe themselves, their literacy practices, and their thoughts and beliefs about literacy practices both in and out of school. Data for this project included the transcribed interviews and field notes from these multiple observations.

The interview data were analyzed inductively through an iterative process (Shank, 2002; Morse, 1994) along with the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We read the interview transcripts line-by-line multiple times and assigned codes to the data. Next, we looked for patterns and collapsed individual codes that were interrelated into larger categories. Finally, major themes emerged when we repeatedly examined the data and searched for categories that were common across the interviews of all three participants. The field notes were also analyzed following a similar process and used to confirm the findings from the analysis of the interview data and to construct the final themes. Member checks (Merriam & Tidsdell, 2016) were also performed by sharing the findings from data analysis with the program director and the participants who verified the accuracy of the findings and our interpretations.

Our Insights

This section starts with the profiles of the three participants. We also report four major themes along with their supporting data.

Devin

Devin was a dark-haired, quiet 15-year-old. He had changed schools often and had attended several schools, including boarding schools for Native American youth. When asked to describe himself, he quickly responded, "I barely know anything about myself." Devin labeled himself as "antisocial" because, he said, when he transferred to his current school in the sixth grade, no one really wanted to talk to him. He admitted, however, that he now has good friends at school and two of his friends attend the program with him. While attending the program, he was often reluctant to actively participate in whole-group activities, but he enjoyed socializing and interacting in smaller groups.

Devin shared that he spent his spare time sleeping and playing basketball. He was close to his family who lived in their tribal community. Devin also enjoyed spending time outdoors and cooking with his family, especially French fries, chicken, pork chops, and mashed potatoes. He loved music and would listen to most anything although he often listened to the hip hop and rap his brother

played. He liked reading action stories, comedies, and manga books at home. Devin wrote funny stories frequently at home, but mostly kept his writing to himself. He played multiplayer strategy games, like the board game *Battleship*, with his friends. He did not use social media often because he did not like the arguments and offensive or graphic content it often contained.

Anna

Anna was 14 years old with long, dark hair, and, although she initially appears quiet and reserved, she is actually boisterous and talkative with those familiar with her. She has "switched schools many times," and she "grew up rough" because she was removed from her mother's care at a young age and had to live with her grandfather. Only recently was she able to reunite with her mother. Anna tries hard to suppress negative memories from her past as they still bother her. These experiences are manifested in an apathy toward school and resentment toward people who dismiss or disregard her experiences or her feelings.

Anna is extremely creative and inquisitive. She enjoyed food and often had various snacks to share with friends at the program. Anna loved manga, the band BTS, and scrolling through social media. While at the program, she could often be found staring at her phone with headphones in her ears. She typically resisted joining whole-group activities; she did play basketball with the other youth and often complained loudly about doing so, however. She reported briefly playing on a football team until she broke her wrist. At home, Anna was often in her room playing role-playing games similar to the videogame, Fortnite, on her phone or sports games on the Xbox, texting or chatting with friends on social media, or reading. She is an avid writer who writes fictional stories constantly at home. Anna and Devin were good friends who attended the same high school and often spent time together at the program.

Lexy

Lexy was a slight 13-year-old who often dressed in athletic wear. Seemingly carefree, she tended to be absentminded. During the interview, Lexy spoke quietly with her hand in front of her face – perhaps to hide the scars on either side of her mouth. Her usual personality, though, was quite different as she often laughed and talked loudly with other youth in the program. Like Anna, Lexy enjoyed food and either had snacks in her bag or asked others to share theirs.

Lexy came from a large family that spent a significant amount of time together. She and many of her siblings played on their school's basketball team, and they often played together as a family, as well. At the program, she and two of her brothers were typically in the gym challenging each other and the other youth to various basketball-based games. Lexy enjoyed listening to music and communicating with her friends on social media, but she did not actively seek out

opportunities to read and write. Watching scary movies and playing video games, especially Minecraft, Fortnite, and Pokémon, were also some of Lexy's favorite activities.

Perceptions of Good Readers and Writers

The youth's descriptions of good readers and writers were limited to performances and behaviors within the school and classroom contexts. They all said good readers are smart and get good grades. Devin noted good readers know difficult vocabulary, or "big words," and they read out loud well while Lexy commented good readers "will read to you." The youth mentioned their teachers tried to help them become good readers. Devin reported his teachers "help me read and go faster," and Anna's teachers taught her "the skills and stuff" she needed to know, including how to identify literary elements.

The youth's perceptions of good writers were similarly limited to skills and abilities, such as neat handwriting, proper punctuation, and a mastery of sentence structure and essay construction. According to Lexy, good writers "do their best and try hard." Anna stated good writers "get As on their papers because they complete it," while Devin stated, "they practice a lot of writing. . . . They do essays or important stuff."

Interestingly, both Devin and Lexy described good writers as artistic. Lexy described them as "artistic. They can write good and draw." Devin felt "they could be painters too cause the way they write, they're using paintbrushes. Plus, they usually write good in cursive too."

Self-perceived Literate Identities

Reflecting on themselves as readers and writers, the youth viewed their literate identities through the lens of classroom-based literacy practices, others' perceptions of their ability to read and write, and, perhaps most significantly, their grades. Lexy described her reading ability as "in the middle" and "kinda good" because she "can read the words in a sentence," but she reported she is a "bad" writer because others "can barely understand it." She prefers books with pictures because she "can just imagine what they're saying" because without pictures, "it's hard to imagine. . . . I'll forget the words while I was reading."

Anna considered her reading ability "surprisingly good" because her grade in reading "is a B, and I thought it would be an F by now." She said others may not describe her as a reader because "they don't see me read." She hated to be bothered or distracted while reading and preferred to read "in my [class]room, just like with my hood on in class. Just sit there, nobody bothering me."

On the other hand, Anna described herself as "a very deep writer. . . . I'm a storywriter" whose writing is "psychological," yet she also said, "I don't really like" writing because, in her view, good writers write in complete sentences and

complete their work and she often does not. Having been exposed to the rich tradition of storytelling in her Seminole culture, Anna produced writing that did not conform to Western academic standards. Yet, by insisting on telling and writing her stories in her own ways, Anna exercised her agency and used writing as an opportunity to position herself and her experiences within the world around her (Brayboy, 2005).

Devin did not have a strong reader efficacy or identity, and although he read quite often at home, he said:

> I don't really like to read that much. I used to be a good reader when I was little, but I guess when I got older, I stopped reading, so I'm like a really slow reader now. I take my time, and sometimes I stutter my words.

Others have told Devin that he is a good reader because "when I read, they think I sound good." He recalled when his teacher told him, "You're a good reader. You should read more," but he told her, "No, I don't know about that."

Devin did have a strong writer identity. He stated he is "a good writer" and he "already taught myself" how to write. At home, he enjoyed writing, especially writing comedies and funny stories. At school, he preferred to write on his computer because he could think a lot faster and because writing on paper "takes me a long time."

In-school Literacy Practices

All three of the youth indicated they had difficulty connecting with school-based literacy practices. Lexy remarked that "we have to read our language arts book. And our . . . I don't know what's our book called. It's a big ol' book." She did not like "reading out loud," and she complained about having to read the class novel, *Holes*, because she found it boring and struggled to connect with the story. Most of the writing she described engaging in were classroom-based assignments. Lexy reported that in mathematics class, "we have to write the multiplication and division. In reading [class] we have to make stories up. In science, we have to write down the things [in labs like] the ingredients." She also recalled writing fairy tales, myths, and fables in English class. She liked to write myths because "they're easier . . . It's a little bit short[er] than stories." Lexy did not enjoy writing "long stories" because "your hand will hurt, and you want to stop, but you can't," or "long paragraphs" because they are difficult and "you forget how the words spell and you have to go back and look at it. It takes time."

Anna read in all her classes, especially English and history, but she sometimes struggled to complete assignments. While she might understand directions when she read them herself, she said she did not always understand her teachers' verbal instructions. The activities she described completing in class included having to "find the definitions [of a word] then explain it in your own words and stuff like

that" and reading paragraphs or stories and answering questions about them. She considered these as easier tasks because "you automatically know" the answers.

Anna dreaded writing in school. She shared an anecdote about having to write about her feelings on the first day of school. This triggered a very strong reaction from Anna. "I'm like, 'No, I don't feel like expressing my feelings' [because] you don't know what you feel at that time cause you don't know if you feel happy, sad, mad, or what." She also expressed frustration at writing because her teacher often corrected her grammar and punctuation instead of focusing on her ideas. Anna commented:

> She's like, "You need a punctuation here." It's a place where [I] usually don't put punctuations. And she . . . was like, "You need to put a punctuation there. I always tell you this." And I'm like, "No you don't!" or "I always leave it blank like that!"

Anna's irritation may have been alleviated had she been able to express herself through more culturally responsive and sustaining modes (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Kupidonova, 2017) such as telling stories verbally or through multimodal practices including digital storytelling (Smagorinsky et al., 2012).

Anna was not the only participant who balked at engaging in literacy. Devin said he stopped reading in sixth grade and now the "only books I read is just like school." Before he stopped reading, though, he read three or four books during the week and one or two on weekends "so I keep my AR [Accelerated Reader] points going up so I won't get in trouble." In his reading class, they read books together every month or two, as well as passages their teacher chooses for them. He also reported he and his classmates are required to read and take notes in history class before they have a section test.

Devin stated he "just write[s] stuff down," and the writing he did in school was often taking notes in class to "get grades." Sometimes he got distracted while he wrote in class; he commented, "I'm not thinking [about] that specific topic – what I'm supposed to do cause I like I get lost and forget what I'm supposed to do." Devin often worried about the supplies and materials needed to complete his assignments because he hated to ask other people for supplies. For example, he said, "If you use a pencil, and it runs out, you sharpen it. I feel like when I get done with my essay, my pencil, it's gonna be like smaller or it just won't be there no more."

Interestingly, both Devin and Anna reported completing literacy tasks to appease their teachers. Anna complained that "you can't really tell the teachers everything cause they think they'll just correct you if you're wrong or something like that." As a result, "if they tell me how to do something, I'll just do it their way. I ain't gonna do it any other way" to avoid confrontations. Likewise, Devin stated, "I just write in school. Do whatever they tell me. Never wrote like about myself or what I'm thinking."

As a tool for assimilation, literacy has been used in a colonialist way to suppress and eradicate Indigenous languages and cultures (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Guzzetti, 2021). Assimilatory practices remain an integral part of contemporary schooling practices, and because they alienate students from their culture and languages, these practices often result in student frustration and resistance (Cleary & Peacock, 1998). With passive resistance, these youth understood that they had to conform to the colonial, oppressive reality of schooling (Brayboy, 2005) to avoid confrontations with authorities.

Out-of-school Literacy Practices

The youth disclosed active engagement in multiple out-of-school literacies, including reading and writing activities that appealed to their interests and personal lives. They all agreed they had more control over their reading and writing apart from school. The youth did not seem to consider those activities as literacy related. Instead, they considered those as personal activities while literacy activities are related to school.

Lexy enjoyed reading graphic novels, such as *Captain Underpants*, *Dork Diaries*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and *Adventure Time*, as well as manga and comic books. She hated her mother's suggestion to read cookbooks or books about *Pinkalicious*, a young girl who likes anything pink, which were on display at the local Walmart, because Lexy felt they were either too juvenile or uninteresting. Lexy liked spending time on her cell phone, browsing SnapChat and Instagram before and after school, looking at pictures and funny videos, and texting with her friends. She often played various strategy-based videogames, such as Surviv, Fortnite, Minecraft, and Pokémon.

Anna prolifically engaged in out-of-school literacies. She enjoyed adventure and scary books but did not read Marvel comics or superhero books. She hated biographies because she said that her life is full of problems and she has no interest in reading about other people's problems. She wrote extensively in private and preferred to keep her writings to herself because, in the past, some of her peers and teachers had reacted negatively to what she wrote.

Writing at home was often a way for Anna to process her emotions and experiences, especially what she referred to as her "lifestyle, how I grew up or something like that . . . what I've done to make it through life." Anna wrote about "deep" topics, including struggles and death. She commented: "You never think a teenager could write all that stuff." She began writing after she was taken away from her mother and began living with her grandfather. "When I was probably like four or something like that, I started getting, like, really depressed, so I'm just like, okay, I'll just start writing my feelings out and hope somebody [meaning her grandfather] sees it eventually." However, Anna's grandfather never acknowledged or responded to the notes she left him, which continued to dismay and frustrate

her. Writing, for Anna, was used as a therapeutic and cathartic tool to explore and express her emotions and find healing (Bolton, 2011).

Like Lexy, Anna also enjoyed spending time on her cell phone. She texted with her friends frequently and often in long paragraphs. She recalled that once, when she was upset about a friend, they texted each other for two hours. Anna also played a Fortnite-type game on her phone with her friends, Amazon for interesting books, and searched for audiobooks and Japanese anime on the Internet. She also spent a significant amount of time on Instagram, which allowed her to stay in contact with friends who were not able to text.

Although Devin reported that he stopped reading books in sixth grade, he did still read occasionally, but preferred fast paced or action-packed books he could connect with like *Hatchet* because it is a story about survival. For a while, he wrote letters to stay in touch with his incarcerated uncle, but he stopped writing him when his uncle was released. Devin also enjoyed writing comedy and funny stories at home. Devin remarked:

> When teachers teach a lesson or something, or they talk about something, that gets me ideas that pop in my head, and I keep them there until I get home so I remember. And when I get home, I start writing about it. Make it into a, like, a little comedy. It's pretty funny.

Devin stated that he will often "throw them away cause sometimes I don't want to show them cause I don't want no one to see them," however. Devin's comedies served as a form of resistance to his schooling experiences (Brayboy, 2005); destroying what he wrote reflected his awareness of the hegemonic, gendered view of writing as non-masculine (Glenn, 2015).

The youth participated in rich literacy practices while they attended the program. For example, as a group and with tribal elders' guidance, the youth designed, created, and voiced an animated video of a traditional story to submit to a state-wide Native Language Fair competition. The youth reported being surprised they won first place. They were proud of their video and their accomplishment, and they enjoyed showing their video to us.

Other literacy practices were common in the program, as well. The youth learned and practiced speaking Mvskoke, the language spoken by the Seminole and Creek tribes. They researched topics relevant to their health and community and created public service announcements to share what they learned. An Indigenous nutritionist visited, brought various types of snacks, and engaged the youth in a discussion about their diet and health. Elders, adults with extensive cultural knowledge in the Seminole community, visited as well. One of these elders taught the youth about traditional footwear and, over the course of a week, assisted as each of them constructed a pair of their own moccasins.

Gender and Literacy Practices

Devin was a unique adolescent who did not ascribe to strict Western gender norms. He often listened to rap and hip hop, but he also enjoyed cooking and helping with housework. Although he reported he stopped reading when he attended boarding school, he named an eclectic mix of favorite genres that included action, comedies, and nonfiction as well as anime and fiction. He also mentioned that fairy tales were one of his favorite genres, even though these stories are not typically associated with male readers. Although Devin was apathetic toward reading, he was an avid writer who enjoyed spinning his experiences at school and what his teachers said or talked about into comedic and funny stories. Adolescent males may be reluctant to engage in literacy, especially writing, because they view it as a predominantly female activity (Senn, 2012), but Devin did not view writing as a stereotypical female activity. Instead, writing served as a creative outlet for his emotions and feelings about school, allowing him to regain control over his schooling experiences.

Anna did not adhere to stereotypical gender norms either and chose to engage in atypical gender literacy practices (Gee & Lee, 2016). She preferred manga, hiding in her hoodie, and reading adventure books in addition to playing on a football team and playing basketball and video games, which are typically male-dominated new literacies (Gee & Lee, 2016). Because her teachers often critiqued her writing for technicalities instead of supporting her ideas, Anna abhorred writing in school. She simply completed writing tasks to conform to her teachers' expectations. She fully understood the power inherent in writing and creatively crafted stories and personal notes to process her experiences and feelings outside of school.

Similarly, Lexy's literacy practices broke with Western hegemonic views of femininity (Glenn, 2015; Kupidonova, 2017). She preferred writing genres and topics, such as myths and functional writing; video games, such as Surviv, Fortnite, and Minecraft; and playing sports over literacy activities consistent with those of stereotypical Western males who tend to engage in videogames more than girls (Gee & Lee, 2016). Lexy resisted school-based reading, especially reading out loud, and writing activities that were irrelevant to her culture or her life experiences. She also rejected the cooking and girlish reading materials her mother recommended to her, which are typically associated with Western female interests.

Our Reflections

The findings indicate Seminole youth struggled to construct a comprehensive view of literacy that incorporated both their in-school and out-of-school literacy practices. Instead, they perceived reading and writing as school-based literacy practices, consisting of discrete, isolated skills that directly connected to their

teachers' expectations (Luke, 2012; White-Kaulaity, 2007). This perception was evident through Devin and Anna's assertions that they just do what their teachers told them to do, suggesting they have internalized and chosen to conform to the dominant culture's definitions and expectations of literacy. Confirming the findings from prior research on literacy practices of Native American students (Smagorinsky et al., 2012; Wilson & Boatright, 2011) the school-based literacy practices of these youth stood in stark contrast to the rich literacy practices in which they participate outside of the classroom. Although these youth engaged in relevant, engaging, and enjoyable out-of-school literacies, including writing stories, reading a variety of texts, playing multiplayer and strategy games, and using social media, they did not view these activities as literacy practices.

This disconnect between these adolescents' in-school and out-of-school literacy practices offers some explanation as to why efforts to improve the literacy achievement of Indigenous youth have failed to produce meaningful results (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Manning et al., 2020). Primarily, these school-based efforts have embraced assimilatory schooling practices that forward the dominant culture's literacy practices without critique (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Weaver, 2015). Neither Anna, Devin, nor Lexy explicitly questioned their teachers' expectations; rather, the youth were indoctrinated to view themselves as inadequate and deficient literacy learners, and they tied their literate identities to the dominant culture's literacy practices rather than to their cultural and community literacy practices (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018; Glenn, 2015). As a result, these youth did not view their out-of-school literacy practices as legitimate or valuable.

This study reveals the lingering effects of colonization, which are maintained through assimilatory schooling practices that the youth find boring and alienating. These practices did not validate and support their literate and cultural identities, and they denied the youth's right to self-determination and sovereignty (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). The cycle of assimilation has remained unchallenged and undisrupted as educators and educational policies have continued to promote and praise skill-based literacy practices at the expense of other forms of literacies or literacy practices (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018; Glenn, 2015). It is apparent that these youth are also unable to critique or challenge these practices in school settings, so they have become passive participants in their schooling.

Despite engaging in prolific and enjoyable literacy practices outside of school, the youth tied their literate identities to how others, especially their teachers, viewed them and their mastery of literacy skills. As a result, they failed to recognize themselves as proficient literacy practitioners (Manning et al., 2020). These adolescents were unable to recognize the power and value of their cultural literacies across multiple contexts, and they were unable to construct a solid identity because their school and community literacies were at odds with and separate from each other (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Manning et al., 2020).

The findings suggest a blurring of gender lines in the literacy practices in which the youth chose to engage. Their literacy practices often countered the

hegemonic views of gender appropriate roles and behaviors (Brayboy, 2018; Wieser, 2017) as is seen in the materials Devin and Lexy prefer to read. In addition, in this study, engaging in literacy, particularly writing, was often the means through which youth negotiated both their cultural and gender landscapes. In accordance with Indigenous cultural values, they pursued interests based on their own talents and abilities (Mouchref, 2016; Ramirez, 2007), and they were not compelled to engage in the literacy practices that the dominant culture deems as gender appropriate.

In this study, Devin was able to recontextualize, rename, and reshape his experiences at school by engaging in writing. At the same time, however, he understood that writing is an activity not typically associated with adolescent males (Glenn, 2015), and he went to great lengths to dispose of his creations. Similarly, Anna used writing as a cathartic tool to enact her feminism by taking control of her feelings even though they were neglected by her grandfather. For her, writing was an agentive process that empowered her to reclaim some authority over her own life and to demonstrate her agency. Lexy enacted her feminist views by rejecting her mother's book suggestions, which reflected colonizers' view of females as homemakers and immature characters (Glenn, 2015), and instead chose to read graphic novels and manga that featured young male protagonists.

Through their out-of-school literacy practices, these youth, perhaps unknowingly, resisted and challenged colonialist binary notions of gender roles and norms. Instead, they choose to engage in personally enjoyable activities consistent with their cultural traditions and values regarding gender (Pleasants & Kersey, 2010). The youth's literacy practices reflect the tension between how the dominant culture defines masculinity and femininity and the universality of Seminole gender norms, which are more fluid and flexible (Mouchref, 2016; Ramirez, 2007).

Finally, this study suggests that Indigenous youth can use literacy practices as strategies to talk back to oppressive systems, including schools, and resist the hegemonic gender roles imposed by colonial values. By engaging in their chosen out-of-school literacy practices, these youth defined themselves on their own terms. In doing so, literacy can become a tool to break the dominant culture's monopoly on literacy, knowledge, power, and gender norms and to reclaim sovereignty and self-determination (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Luke, 2012).

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

This study affirms the need to change how educators, researchers, and policy makers view Indigenous youth and their literacy practices and the need to eliminate deficit models of thinking. These youth actively engaged in rich literacy practices and in doing so enacted their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that have long been deeply undervalued. It remains necessary to disrupt the cycle of skill-based literacy practices that do not value or incorporate Indigenous

literacies and cultures. This study suggests the real and continued need for culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogies (Brayboy & Lomawaima, 2018; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). To accomplish this agenda, educators will need to listen to their students' voices, affirm their cultural identities, validate their out-of-school literacy practices, and incorporate them into in-school literacy practices. By doing so, students will understand and appreciate the connections between their in-school and out-of-school literacy practices, and teachers will be able to encourage and support students' cultural and academic literacies (Manning et al., 2020).

Decolonizing literacy education is vital to the cultural and literate identity development of Indigenous youth. Teachers must purposefully embrace and incorporate Native American students' culture and literacy practices into their curriculum choices and instructional practices (White-Kaulaity, 2007). Educators, researchers, and policy makers must critically interrogate how and why literacy curriculum, practices, and resources are implemented. Instead of continuing to alienate Native American youth through practices that deny their literacies, cultures, and identities and inhibit their literacy development, they should be encouraged to engage in those practices that are of value to them as individuals and that honor their experiences, literacies, cultures, and identities.

The youth in this study displayed an abundance of literacy skills and abilities and actively engaged in out-of-school literacy practices, but they did not see the value or relevance of their in-school literacy assignments. Therefore, adults such as teachers, those who work with youth in after-school programs, and parents will need to encourage adolescents to develop critical literacy or their abilities to deconstruct and resist limiting textual practices, so Native American youth are able to recognize the past, understand the present, and envision a transformative future. By reconceptualizing literacy, adults can help adolescents to not only achieve their personal goals, but also support and improve their families and communities while still actively participating in their cultures.

Adults, such as parents, family members and those who work with youth in out-of-school programs will need to recognize the power of literacy within the lives of young people, particularly Native American youth. Writing has the potential to help adolescents process their feelings and reclaim authority and agency over their lives as demonstrated by Devin and Anna. Writing can be an effective coping strategy to process difficult or challenging experiences, and authentic writing can support personal development and literacy growth (Bolton, 2011). Publishing their works online via various forums and participating in Indigenous writing outlets, like Indigenous ComicCon, may also be effective for some Indigenous youth who seek authentic audiences. By creating spaces in which nondominant cultures, literacies, and genders are validated and incorporated, Indigenous youth can be enabled to critique and challenge the social structures that have erased their cultures and identities, to defy rigid hegemonic views of gender norms and behaviors, and to achieve sovereignty and self-determination.

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3

POSITIONING GENDER THROUGH INTERPRETING CHARACTER IN READER RESPONSE TO A MULTICULTURAL TEXT

Monica S. Yoo

Literacy research conducted to describe readers' interactions with texts has emphasized how shifting positions affect, alter, and convey social relationships and power (Bomer & Laman, 2004; Enciso, 1998; Thompson, 2011). These studies have been conducted from a view of positioning theory (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999), which notes that although positions are fluid, dynamic in nature, changing, and in flux, they are defined in the moment based on how individuals position themselves, position others, and are positioned by others. While much research on positioning has focused on the social interactions between individuals, those studies also have introduced theories of how texts, written and read, can serve as mediating tools that can be employed by readers to enact a story line. Positioning theory draws on "a knowledge of social structures and the roles that are recognizably allocated to people within those structures" (Davis & Harré, 1990, p. 52). Studies on readers' positioning in the aesthetic reading of popular fiction have examined ways in which readers' identification with particular characters, their personality traits, and actions within a story line allow various kinds of "self-other" positioning (McVee, Brock, & Glazier, 2011), in which the self is defined in relation to being similar or dissimilar to a fictional other (Enciso, 1998).

Such research on "self-other" positioning in relation to characters in a text aligns well with Rosenblatt's (1983) transactional reader response theory in which students interpret a text based on their own experiences and how they "live through" a text, especially as they choose to identify or not identify with particular characters. As students read texts, they often position themselves in relation to being similar or dissimilar to the characters or people within a text to express and define who they are.

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"Living Through" Multicultural Literature: Possibilities and Limitations

Readers' transactional experience of "living through" the text includes how their cultural, social, and personal histories and their intersections determine how individuals make meaning (Rosenblatt, 1983). Transacting with literature can provide readers with the opportunity, as Rosenblatt (1983) noted, to "acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience*" (p. 38) that differs from what they may have previously encountered in their lives. Drawing on Banks's (2002) transformational approach to multicultural education – with a focus on restructuring curriculum to provide access to various perspectives in order to help students examine how multiple experiences, rather than just that of the dominant Euro-American group, have formed America – *and* transactional reader response (Rosenblatt, 1983), Cai (2008) explains that teachers who teach multicultural literature do so with the hope to have students "transact to transform" (p. 212). Through transaction with multicultural literature – which focuses on "persons who differ . . . from the dominant white American cultural group" (Cai & Bishop, 1994, p. 58), including individuals from ethnic minority groups, and those with disabilities, gender identifications, or lifestyles that may be viewed as outside of the mainstream (Smith, 1993) – transformation can take place.

For students who are from communities other than the dominant Euro-American mainstream, multicultural literature can provide opportunities to relate and connect to characters and authors who are more like themselves than those typically represented in the traditional literary canon (Möller & Allen, 2000; Norton, 2020). Barrs (2000) noted that as individuals transition from childhood to adulthood, reading can be "one of the main psychological tools available to us in the process of becoming a person because of the access it gives us to other and wider ways of being" (p. 289). For those who are part of nonmainstream cultures, reading can provide an experience for reflecting on who they are and who they would like to become, with options that may differ than those typically presented by society at large.

While reading multicultural literature can be affirming for adolescents of color, reading such texts may not provoke empathy or understanding in the ways that proponents of multicultural education would hope. Research on examining Euro-American students' (dis)engagement with multicultural literature have found that a reader may resist, discount, or choose to overlook elements within a text that point to racism or uncomfortable topics related to race, often due to the discrepancy between the reader's experiences and that of the characters or author (Dressel, 2005; Pace, 2006). At times, multicultural texts also may reify ideologies of monoculturalism, and thereby undermine the value of cultural diversity (Yoon, Simpson, & Haag, 2010). Although reading multicultural literature may expose readers to experiences of those from backgrounds other than their own,

this exposure does not mean that their previously held viewpoints related to race, ethnicity, class, and/or gender will change. While ingrained beliefs, values, and/or dispositions may not shift, however, multicultural literature may still influence readers' abilities to take on another's perspective, which may be a small, yet meaningful, step toward the possibility of future transformation (Beach, Thein, & Parks, 2012).

My Purpose

My research question was: How do adolescents' racial and gender identities position them and influence their perceptions as they read a well-known multicultural text? To answer this question, four adolescents from different cultural backgrounds were asked to read and think aloud as they transacted with an excerpt from Wright's (1993) semi-autobiographical narrative, *Black Boy*, a text that explores the intersectional connections of what it means to be from a low-socioeconomic status background, African American, and male in the South during the era of Jim Crow – state and local statutes that legalized segregation.

My Perspectives

To attend to themes of injustice and oppression within multicultural literature, it is necessary to consider the intersectionality of identities (Crenshaw, 1989, 2016) or social factors, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and gender, represented in the text and positioned by the reader (Blackburn & Smith, 2010; Lloyd, 2006; Thein, Beach, & Parks, 2007). The lens that a reader brings to a text is often intersectional due to the overlapping interplay of these identities that will be reflected in a reader's transactions with a text. Yet, different aspects of identity related to these intersections may be more central than others at certain points when reading, given the nature of the themes and topics embedded within a text.

Consequently, this study was informed by theories of masculinity for men of color. The analysis was informed by theories of Black masculinity (Kirkland, 2013) and by theories of Latino masculinity (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008; Opazo, 2008; Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2010) to analyze the reactions and interpretations of those adolescent readers who were Black males or Latino males. These theories describe the expected and traditional or stereotypical roles and representations for men of their culture in performing masculinity.

My Inquiry

Participants and Context

This study was stimulated by a larger study that focused on adolescents perceived and actual strategies for reading and writing in several different academic genres

(Yoo, 2010). While my prior study examined both students' perceptions and enactment of literacy strategies, I did not closely examine how race, class, and gender intersected with adolescents' responses to multicultural literature, which is the focus of this present chapter.

The ninth-grade participants, who were given pseudonyms, included Dyshaun, an African American male; Luis, a Latinx male (Latinx is a term that recognizes the gender diversity of people of Mexican descent); Annabelle, a Euro-American female; and Sonia, a Latinx female. All were students from an English classroom at a semi-urban high school in a working-class neighborhood on the west coast. The participants were chosen to reflect the demographics of the school and its surrounding area, along with the makeup of their English classroom. At the time of the study, the school's demographic breakdown by ethnicity was: Latino 50.5%; African American 21%; Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander 17.2%; white 10.3%; American Indian or Alaska Native 0.2%; with 46.6% of students receiving free or reduced lunch.

Given the school's demographics, the English department integrated multicultural texts into their curriculum to appeal to the students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Several of the department members remarked how they felt these books had more appeal for "non-white" students than the traditional literary canon. Key texts regularly taught to freshmen included *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros, 1991); *Bless Me, Ultima* (Anaya, 1994); *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago* (Jones, Newman, & Isay, 1998); excerpts from *Black Boy* (Wright, 1993); poetry by Langston Hughes; and short stories by various other African American, Latinx, and Asian American authors.

Data Collection and Analysis

Observations

I observed the focal adolescents three to four times a week over 19 weeks during a daily 90-minute English Language Arts block. I audio-recorded the class sessions and students' conversations and I took field notes during this time to document my observations. These observations provided me with a sense of who the focal adolescents were as readers and as students.

Interviews

The focal adolescents were interviewed about how they viewed themselves as readers through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. I asked each one to tell me about their personal stories as readers, including their reading experiences and histories, and about the individuals who may have influenced their reading trajectories along the way. I took notes, audio-recorded, and transcribed all of the interviews.

Think Aloud Procedures

Each focal youth participated in a think aloud protocol (Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters, & Afflerbach, 2006), in which I asked each youth in a one-on-one setting to read the text aloud and verbalize their thoughts as they were reading. If they did not stop to think aloud for more than 15 seconds, I asked them to tell me what they were thinking.

The Text

The text selected was an excerpt from *Black Boy* by Wright (1993), a memoir recounting the author's upbringing and youth when living in the southern region of the United States. I chose this text since the students had already read other parts of the longer work and were familiar with the author.

In the excerpt, Richard Wright – the protagonist – conveyed that the dynamics of the household shifted when his father left his family. As part of this shift, his mother sent young Richard food shopping on his own for the first time. She provided him with money for this errand and sent him on his way. Richard was challenged when a group of boys overtook him, beat him up, and stole his money. On returning home, he relayed what happened to his mother who handed him money again and had him return to the store. Like the first time, he got beaten up by the boys once more. Upon returning home, his mother refused to let him in without the groceries. She gave him money yet again, handed him a long stick, and directed him to fight.

Data Analysis

All data from students' reading and think aloud protocols were recorded and transcribed. Using a constant comparative analysis approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2017), I examined patterns and themes related to how students positioned themselves in relation to issues of gender, which emerged across the cases. The data samples in this chapter have been selected from transcripts of students' think aloud protocols. The parts in italics represent what the students read directly from the text while the plain text portions are what they voiced as they thought aloud about what they had read.

My Findings

Viewing Themselves as Readers

In her interview about how she viewed herself as a reader, Annabelle stated that she was a slow reader until the fifth grade. She explained how she started to read more fluently when she started finding books that she liked. She disclosed,

"I normally read like romance novels. Or like my favorite author's like E. Lockheart. She writes a lot of like uh fiction about made up girl – like teenage girl characters and their lives." She enjoyed fiction in which the characters were like her and her friends. Annabelle's preference for romance novels is consistent with gendered choices of fiction that girls tend to gravitate toward in their reading preferences and selections (Topping, 2014).

In her interview about how she views reading, Sonia noted that she "only now" liked reading "good books," a view that was similar to Annabelle's views and meant that she was finding books that she enjoyed. She had recently developed an appreciation for reading because she had discovered novels and autobiographies by Mexican American and other Latinx authors. Sonia explained that she did not always understand Spanish words when authors code-switched (shifted between English and Spanish), but she was able to ask her mother for help with them. Her reading interests related to learning more about the Mexican American and Latinx experiences of real or fictional others with whom she could personally identify as a Mexican-American, and this provided her with motivation to read on her own and not just for school.

Luis spoke about reading mostly in relation to his performance on assessments and how his reading might be characterized by his teachers. Luis related that he had loved picture books as a child and found that his fluency and "Lexile" or reading level improved as he started reading more "challenging" books. He noted that he ran into some trouble reading in the seventh grade, but that he was able to gain "motivation and fluency" when he worked individually with a special teacher.

Although Dyshaun had loved reading when he was younger, he stated that this shifted for him when he was in middle school. Unlike the other focal participants, who discussed their improvements in reading as they grew older, Dyshaun claimed he no longer liked pleasure reading and noted that his reading abilities had declined. When asked to give reasons why he felt this way, he was reticent to offer an explanation and stated that he did not know why.

While both girls discussed how their interest in reading grew because they had found books with topics and themes that related to their lives, based on either their gender or ethnic identities, neither of the boys mentioned this interest. Instead, the boys mostly reflected on their abilities in reading and their motivation or lack of it.

Luis: Becoming a Man

Upon reading the excerpt, Luis explained: "Since he [the main character, Richard Wright] has no father no more, he has to be the man of the house. And he has to do the groceries and help out his mother." He invoked the story line (Davis & Harré, 1990) of a father who is the provider and protector – the man of the house. Luis thought it was the boy's responsibility to "help out his mother" as he must

take on his father's previous position. Luis' response was consistent with the patriarchal structure of Latino homes where men are expected to be the heads of the household (Arciniega et al., 2008; Opazo, 2008; Saez et al., 2010).

Luis commented on how the mother's actions were justified due to the father's absence and her duty as a parent to help Richard make the transition from boyhood to manhood. He did not question the mother's motives or the changes related to her character.

Luis: [reading the text aloud] *"If those boys bother you, then fight." I was baffled. My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she had never done before. "But I'm scared," I said. "Don't you come into this house until you've gotten those groceries," she said. "They'll beat me; they'll beat me," I said. "Then stay in the streets; don't come back here!"*

Monica: What are you thinking?

Luis: His mom is trying to teach him how to stand up for himself no matter what. Cuz he's gonna grow up to be a man someday and he has to learn how to fight.

According to Luis, Richard had no choice but to fight, which is part of growing into being a man. Luis drew on the story line that men must demonstrate their masculinity through physical prowess – fighting is a form of protecting oneself and others.

Intersecting with this story line is one in which parents, as guides, must teach their children to stand up for themselves. The mother in Wright's text, therefore, is only doing what she should according to this story line. At a point during the think aloud, Luis mused, "How did my parents show me how to protect myself when I was a kid?" Here, he tried to make both a personal and global connection to Richard's experience with his mother, who recognized that being a "man someday" entails learning "how to fight," as others may take advantage of you. Luis' comments are reflective of the enactment of maschismo, a stereotypical notion of the performance of masculinity among Latinos that has been associated with violence (Opazo, 2008).

Dyshaun: Earning Respect

The ways in which Dyshaun positioned himself in relation to the text was also similar to Luis' positioning in regard to the necessity for Richard to learn how to fight and as he transitioned from boyhood to manhood. Upon reading the same section, Dyshaun equated being a boy to having the protection of one's mother, while being a man meant being able to fight for oneself.

Dyshaun: *I was baffled. My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she had never done before.* So, I guess he [Richard] was surprised because his mother had

> never told him that he had to fight before. I guess his mother normally fought his battles for him. . . *"But I'm scared," I said. "Don't you come into this house until you've gotten those groceries," she said.* So, I guess until he learns to fight for himself and get the groceries, he can't come into the house.

Dyshaun commented on the boy's surprise regarding the change in his mother's actions. She had been willing to protect him by fighting his "battles for him" when his father was living with them, but she was no longer willing to do so. For Dyshaun, this shift had a negative connotation. Since Richard's father had left the home, his mother was no longer willing to protect her son and would not welcome Richard back into the house until he became a man who could "fight for himself."

Upon reading about Richard's eventual victory over the boys, Dyshaun voiced his thoughts aloud:

> *On my way back, I kept my stick poised for instant use, but there was not a single boy in sight. That night, I won the right to the* street *[streets] of Memphis.* I think when it says he [Richard] won the right to the street, I guess people like those boys will respect him now and stop trying to beat him down. . . . I probably would try to do the same thing just to protect myself.

Dyshaun's comment that "people like those boys will respect him now," acknowledged that Richard had garnered the respect of other males who would no longer "beat him down" since he could now defend himself. Noting that he would do the "same thing," Dyshaun positioned himself alongside Richard Wright.

Both male students espoused a hegemonic masculine story line that did not hold room for other performances of masculinities (Connell, 2005) to be considered. Through this positioning, they expressed their views about what it meant to become a man. As boys of color, their view of what it meant to be a man aligned with stereotypical notions and enactments of masculinity often associated with African American men, such as physical aggression and hypermasculinity perpetuated by the media (Kirkland, 2013) and with Latino men's "machismo" (Opazo, 2008; Saez et al., 2010), or stereotypical portrayals of Latino youth as physically volatile (Arciniega et al., 2008). This interpretation was also consistent with a view of Latino men as heads of the family who simply protect and provide (Arciniega et al., 2008).

Sonia: A Mother Isn't "Bad and Mean"

In contrast to the two males, Sonia and Annabelle reflected quite a bit on the positioning of the mother. For both females, trying to reconcile this character's actions with the story line of a benevolent mother caused tension. While Sonia recognized that the mother may have been mentoring Richard by promoting

self-defense, she did not view this as part of a mother caring for her son, like the male students did.

> *Sonia:* *"But they're coming after me," I said, "You just stay right where you are," she said in a deadly tone. "I'm going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself"* . . . . His mom knew that they were gonna beat him. . . . She's that bad and mean. Or maybe she's gonna teach him how to fight and stand up for himself.

Sonia believed the mother sent her son back into the throes of a fight, knowing that he would get hurt, because she was a "bad and mean" or uncaring mother. While Sonia briefly conceded that Richard needed to learn how to "stand up for himself," she contrasted this mentoring with meanness through the use of the word "or." She was unable to simultaneously take up both of these positions: one could either be a "bad and mean" mother "or" a mother who was trying to help protect her son and teach him self-defense; one could not be both, however. As Sonia continued to read and think aloud, she concluded that the mother was "aggressive and really mean":

> *I ran up the steps and tried to force my way past her into the house. A stinging slap came* into *[on] my jaw. I stood on the sidewalk, crying. "Please, let me wait until tomorrow," I begged. "No," she said, "[Go now!] If you come back into the house without those groceries, I'll whip you!"* Well, I think his mom is aggressive and really mean to him because she slapped him and wouldn't let him in without the groceries.

Sonia positioned the mother as an "aggressive" woman, due to the departure from a benevolent mother story line. Therefore, Richard's mother was not a woman that Sonia wanted to identify with – especially because she allowed her child to get beaten by a gang of boys.

While Luis and Dyshaun viewed Richard Wright's mother's demand as a necessary step toward helping him "learn" how to become a man, Sonia thought that the mother's directive was "messed up" and unwarranted. In the end, she was unable to look past the story line of the mother as a benevolent, kind, gentle and nurturing figure, and could not figure out how the mother's take on violence could be a part of such a story line. Furthermore, she did not take into account the ways in which the character, whose experiences, intersectionally (Crenshaw, 2016), as an African American, single female with few financial means, may have led her to take on a "tough love" approach, knowing that her son would encounter difficulties as an impoverished, young, African American male living in the South. Sonia only considered the female-as-benevolent mother story line without taking into account the other intersectional aspects of the character's identity.

Annabelle: Much to Consider, But Only One Possible Way

Of the four focal students, Annabelle seemed to have the most nuanced view regarding Richard and his mother's positioning. Her reading and think aloud indicated how she grappled with the character's experiences:

> *"Take this money, this note, and this stick," she said. "Go to the store and buy those groceries. If those boys bother you, then fight back." Okay, she's definitely trying to teach him self-defense, but I don't think that's the best way to do it, 'cuz giving someone a heavy stick that might injure another boy, you know. I was baffled, my mother was telling me to fight . . . a thing that she had never done before. So I think maybe now she's almost desperate 'cuz the father situation. "But I'm scared," I said. "Don't you come into this house until you've gotten those groceries."* That seems kinda mean to me. I mean, if I was a mother, I wouldn't want my son to get beat up, but I don't know. *"Then stay in the streets; don't come back here." I ran up the steps and tried to force my way past her into the house . . . . A stinging slap came on my jaw. I stood on the sidewalk, crying.* So, like this boy has gone through a lot. I picture him really like shocked, 'cuz it doesn't sound like – his mother's never acted like this before, like she's changed.

Annabelle noted that she disagreed with how the mother taught Richard self-defense. She considered the mother's hardships once the father had gone – noting that "she's almost desperate" and this may have "changed" her since she had "never acted like this before." Although Annabelle, at one point, contemplated whether the mother was "mean" for sending her son back out to purchase the groceries, she seemed to express uncertainty about this, as she stated, "I don't know," which expressed her hesitation about making a judgment about the choices of someone different than herself. While Annabelle did not condone the use of violence, she recognized why, given the circumstances, the mother had "changed" and was giving her son the directive to fight. In addition, Annabelle sympathized with Richard, stating that he has "gone through a lot" and was "shocked" and unable to recognize who is mother was, given her actions and words. Annabelle continued:

> "*I clutched the stick, crying, trying to reason.* I picture him really confused like not knowing what to do, whether he should like sit on the stairs till the boys go away, or go." To Annabelle, Richard's indecisiveness was not necessarily about his fear or lack of masculinity but may rather about his confusion surrounding a moral choice.

Annabelle read and concluded, "*That night, I won the right* of [*to*] *the streets* in [*of*] *Memphis*. So, I think he thinks he gained control, but I think he just did it in the wrong way."

Although Annabelle took on the perspectives of the mother and Richard throughout her reading and could articulate and unpack why they made the choices that they did, she ultimately took a position in opposition to theirs and pronounced that this was the "wrong way" to resolve the problem. By adding "I don't know" and "I think" to her statements that express moral positioning, she softened her standpoint, indicating her recognition that her moral positioning was different from that of the characters. Unlike the other focal students who believed that Richard had no choice but to use the stick violently for self-defense in order to earn "respect" and to prove that he could be a "man," Annabelle thought that Richard had more choices and that he had chosen the "wrong way."

Reflections

While I did not initially set out to examine issues of race, class and gender in my prior study, these focal students' transactions with *Black Boy* and their positioning vis-à-vis the characters begged the need for a closer look at how students took up these categories. Given the story's coming-of-age focus on a protagonist of color from a working-class neighborhood, I wondered if the students felt a kinship with the characters. This seemed to ring true for Luis and Dyshaun who repeatedly emphasized how Richard needed to prove himself to be a man in order to earn the respect of others and survive. These boys positioned themselves as aligned with Richard Wright's circumstances and choices and voiced how they "lived through" the characters, hinting that they, too, could imagine a similar scenario happening to them or to someone they knew. Neither of them posed questions or concerns regarding the attack by the bullies in the neighborhood nor did they consider other nonviolent possibilities for Richard. The story line of this form of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) seemed almost too familiar, and, perhaps, too unchangeable in their minds. For Luis and Dyshaun, their "lived through" experience and self-identification with the character affirmed that this is how life is for a working class "*Black Boy*."

The male focal students held to a story line about the boy becoming a man while Sonia focused on the story line of the benevolent mother. Although Sonia briefly entertained the mother's position as a mentor who would teach Richard how to fight, she was unable to reconcile how the mother could advocate violence as a mentor and still care for her son. As the mother's words and actions did not fit into her story line, she was unable to accept it, but rather focused on how Richard's mother took on masculine qualities, like being "aggressive," which did not mesh with feminine qualities related to being a benevolent mother.

Instead of critically examining what took place in the text, these three students adhered to well-known gendered story lines: men, as protectors and fathers, must prove themselves through physical prowess; and in opposition to that, women, as

nurturers and mothers, must not endorse violence. A critical lens is not often easy for students to take up – especially when the social realities of vulnerable students' lives come to the fore in academic contexts. These kinds of lenses are difficult to negotiate partly because power structures reify whose opinions and experiences count and are valued within the classroom (Finders, 1996). When students challenge what is outside of expected story lines, it becomes difficult to know how others, including teachers and students, will react or how such positionings will be supported, accepted, or rejected (Lensmire & Price, 1998). Students may question to what extent someone might back them up if they express ideas outside of societally accepted story lines, especially as critical examinations may be destabilizing to the story lines that students already know, upsetting previously upheld views of the world that align with deep-rooted personal value systems (Thein et al., 2007).

Annabelle took on a more critical lens overall compared to the others. She focused on the characters' circumstances and took these into consideration, rather than placing gendered expectations on how the characters should be as a mother and soon-to-be man. Yet, in her reading transaction, Annabelle was unable to question or examine her moral stance in relation to the characters' actions. Of the four focal students, Annabelle's experience, as that of a Euro-American female, was most removed from Richard Wright's. In addition, she was "one of the best" students in the class, according to her teacher, and she often participated vocally and frequently in class discussions. Her "power," given her intersectional identity and her positioning as a "good" student, may have given her greater license to explore the issues in the text more critically than the others without the fear of feeling disenfranchised. Although she sympathetically positioned Richard and his mother, Annabelle's "power" also seemed to provide her with the latitude to express that their choices were "wrong" rather than ones that were justifiable, given their circumstances.

The findings related to Annabelle's moral positioning are similar to those noted by Beach et al. (2012) who have observed that while characters' and authors' multicultural perspectives may be temporarily taken up, moral positionings are much harder to transform, despite the application of a critical lens. The varied positionings brought up by the focal students also raise the question of how comfortable it may be to take on a critical lens when the topics are too familiar, too close to home, or too difficult to unpack when particular power dynamics may be in play. For example, both Luis and Dyshaun were already somewhat disenfranchised as readers who often judged their own reading and abilities based on how they were classified and categorized according to their "Lexiles" or reading levels, and the system's assessment of their abilities. They were neither seen as good readers nor as good students. If they already felt disempowered by their reader and student status, would they feel safe and confident to express transactions with texts that explore ideas outside of prevalent story lines?

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Although multicultural literature can be valuable in terms of helping diverse adolescents see themselves in the texts, it is important that texts be interrogated through a critical lens. Much of the research regarding the need for a critical lens centers on how readers from the dominant Euro-American culture often derive the wrong message or may not examine sexism, racism and injustice from a nondominant perspective if they are not taught to be critical (Beach et al., 2012; Cai, 2008; Dressel, 2018; Lloyd, 2006). Yet, those from nondominant cultures might also reaffirm the reification of particular story lines that reinforce their subjugated positions rather than promote diversity, equity and inclusion within greater society (Yoon et al., 2010) if they are not provided with critical tools. Applying a critical lens to the reading of multicultural literature must take into account not just the consideration of one facet of identity, such as race, but rather the intersection of identities that impact the experience of the characters, the author, and the reader and their positioning within society.

The application of such a critical lens needs to start with individuals' personal transactions with a text based on their experiences and backgrounds (Cai, 2008). Young people can be led by adults, such as teachers, parents, or out-of-school literacy providers, to examine what may lead them to have certain biases, morals, and values. Brooks and Browne (2012) have advocated a framework for culturally situated reader response as a vehicle for exploring intersectional identities while guiding readers to critically read multicultural literature. Readers can start with a "homeplace" consisting of their social and cultural positions, including the influences of family, peers, and community groups. Applying such a framework to individuals' lives to better understand how these influences have shaped their identities can assist youth in applying these positions to what is familiar and unfamiliar to them in multicultural literature.

As the work of examining positioning and identities can be quite personal and, at times, difficult to share due to the power dynamics of the classroom or other institutional, educational and social settings, youth can be encouraged to first examine their homeplaces, along with supporting positions, through the use of journal writing. They can also draw or create graphic representations of these positions and write notes on these depictions about what might influence their personally held ideas and beliefs and examine their perceptions about gender roles. They may engage in these activities and apply them to the characters in a story. They can also research an author's biographical information and do the same. Considering how readers, as well as characters and authors, are culturally situated in relation to multicultural texts may be a way into exploring and accepting the validity of others' intersectional experiences while also examining the larger societal forces that shape and determine how youth become, but also can change, who they are.

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4

DREAM A LITTLE [STEAM] OF ME

Exploring Black Adolescent Girls' STEAM Career Futures Through Digital Multimodal Compositions

Jennifer D. Turner and Autumn A. Griffin

In the United States, there is significant concern about the severe underrepresentation of Black women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. While Black women comprise 7.6% of college students enrolled in STEM programs, they account for only 2% of the STEM workforce (National Science Foundation & National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2017). Research suggests that Black women may be more likely to enter STEM fields if their STEM aspirations, or science and math career dreams, are cultivated and nurtured in early childhood and adolescence (Allen-Handy, Ifill, Schaar, Rogers, & Woodard, 2020; King & Pringle, 2018; Lewis Ellison, Robinson, & Qui, 2020).

The problem is we know very little about the STEM dreams and aspirations of Black teen girls because they have been systematically "hidden" (Ireland et al., 2018) in three critical ways. First, Black girls' STEM career dreams and aspirations have been silenced by long-standing racist (mis)conceptions positing that Black girls do not have the intellectual capabilities, interests, confidence, or motivation to persist in rigorous science and mathematics professions (Ireland et al., 2018). Second, in P–12 schools, Black girls' science and math dreams and aspirations are often crushed by low teacher expectations, limited access to rigorous STEM curricula, and STEM education that is disconnected from their raced, gendered, cultural, and sociohistorical realities (Allen-Handy et al., 2020; King & Pringle, 2018; Mensah & Jackson, 2018). Finally, Black adolescent girls may experience unique difficulties imagining that they "belong" in science and math fields because middle-aged white men have long been portrayed as quintessential STEM professionals and Western scientific methods and STEM knowledge are viewed as superior (Mensah & Jackson, 2018). Within this traditional Eurocentric ideology, Black girls' intersectional identities are frequently conceptualized as a

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risk factor in pursuing STEM careers, and their creativity, artistry, inventiveness, and multiliteracies are devalued as STEM knowledge (Allen-Handy et al., 2020; Lewis Ellison et al., 2020; Mensah & Jackson, 2018).

As Black women scholars, we recognize the importance of illuminating Black girls' dreams, particularly in the STEM fields. We know that Black girls do dream, because Black women across time, from Harriet Tubman (abolitionist, activist, and the most famous conductor on the Underground Railroad in the 1840s and 1850s) to Ella Fitzgerald (legendary jazz singer dubbed the "First Lady of Song" whose career began in the mid-1930s and spanned nearly six decades) to Dr. Mae C. Jemison (an accomplished scientist, physician, and the first African American woman to travel into space in 1992), have articulated the importance of *dreaming and dreams* in the lives and futures of Black girls and women. Drawing on this rich heritage of Black women's dreamwork, we assert that STEAM experiences that integrate the arts (e.g., visual art, dance, music) into STEM education may further help Black girls actively "see" themselves as scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. STEAM curriculum enables girls from diverse racial backgrounds to employ "21st-century tools [i.e., communication, innovation, collaboration] and problem-solving methods to cross disciplinary boundaries. . . [and] to creatively see the world in new, open-ended, and personal ways" (Liao, Motter, & Patton, 2016, p. 29). For Black girls in particular, STEAM approaches may deepen their connections between STEM and their everyday intersectional experiences; build on their multiliteracies (e.g., creativity, inventiveness) for solving problems and learning STEM concepts; and develop multimodal compositional practices (e.g., digital artmaking, interactive journaling, sketching) for "talking back" (hooks, 1989) to racism and sexism in STEM fields (Holbert, Dando, & Correa, 2020; King & Pringle, 2018; Lewis Ellison et al., 2020). Additional studies that center Black girls' unique STE(A)M dreams and aspirations while examining the creative multimodal meanings that Black girls make of their own science and math career futures through the arts may support the diversification of the STEM workforce.

In this chapter, we highlight the STE(A)M career dreams and aspirations of two Black adolescent girls, Shani and Shuri (all names are pseudonyms). Viewed through an Afrofuturistic feminist lens (Morris, 2012), a theory that centers Afro-diasporic people and Black feminist practices as the keys to progressive and just futures, Shani and Shuri are featured as *21st-century dreamers* – Black girls who use digital multimodal compositions (DMCs) to creatively and artistically express the possibilities that they see for their futures in science and mathematics and to combat their erasure in STEM trajectories (Ireland et al., 2018; Shetterly, 2015).

Afrofuturist Feminist Perspectives on Black Girls' STE(A)M Dreams

This study is informed by Afrofuturist feminist perspectives, or epistemologies, that bring together Afrofuturist theory and Black feminist theories to transgress

traditional futurisms projected by a white patriarchal society (Morris, 2012). Coined by Mark Dery in the 1990s, Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic that affirms Black people's existence in the future, and illuminates their transdisciplinary and creative efforts (e.g., art, literature, science) to "reclaim and recover the past, elevate positive realities that exist in the present, and create new possibilities for the future" (Toliver, 2021, p. 133). Black feminist theorists (e.g., Collins, 1991) disrupt and dismantle patriarchal futurisms that position men as the creators of life possibilities (e.g., family, work, politics) and women as passive receivers of life circumstances. Together, Afrofuturist feminism provides a liberatory space for celebrating Black futuristics and their imaginative technocultural productions, particularly those that reject traditional race-gender hierarchies of dominance and promote progressive visions of the future rooted in shared power and recovered Afrodiasporic histories (Morris, 2012).

We use Afrofuturist feminist perspectives to theorize Black girls as speculative writers who dream of possible futures through creative literacy compositions. Historically, Black women (e.g., Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, Ella Fitzgerald, Dr. Mae C. Jemison) have employed speeches, writings, songs, and other creative literacy practices to manifest collective dreams of freedom for Black people, and for Black women more specifically. Today, Black girl dreamers engage 21st-century literacies to create digital multimodal compositions that challenge negative societal stereotypes of Black girl/womanhood (e.g., unintelligent, aggressive, promiscuous) while (re)claiming positive representations of themselves and their imagined life trajectories (Griffin, 2020, 2021; Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Ohito, 2020; Turner & Griffin, 2020). Digital multimodal compositions (DMCs), in our study, are defined as visual images curated in digital spaces that creatively combine one or more communicative modes (e.g., sound, image, language) and design elements (e.g., color, perspective, salience) to express meaning (New London Group, 1996). By (re)positioning Black girls as agentive, knowledgeable, and multiliterate, DMCs become sites of possibility and disruption that protect and advance their goals and aspirations; validate their intersectional knowledge and identities; and privilege their digital savviness, brilliance, criticality, and creativity (Brown, 2013; Lewis Ellison, 2018).

Relatedly, Afrofuturist feminist perspectives help us see more clearly how Afrofuturistic arts can "disrupt dominant notions of what counts as STEM as well as who belongs in these fields" (Holbert et al., 2020, p. 329). Importantly, Holbert and colleagues (2020) make the case that diverse futures require diverse voices and visions for the future as well as broader interpretations of design. We argue that extending understandings of STEM to consider arts-based design practices (i.e., STEAM) allows room for varied voices to not only contribute tangentially, but to play a major role in the design of scientific and technological futures (Holbert et al., 2020). In addition, incorporating the arts into STEM learning, design, and future-making allows Black girls to leverage their full lexicon of knowledge

and literacies from their foremothers, families, communities, and other Black girls/women (Allen-Handy et al., 2020; Brown, 2013; Lewis Ellison et al., 2020).

Our Inquiry

Focal Participants and Data Sources

This interpretive inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) brings together participants from two qualitative projects. Shani is a participant in a longitudinal study of Black girls' images of career futures, which Jennifer initiated in 2012 and continued with Autumn in 2018–2020. In 2019, Jennifer facilitated a two-and-a-half-hour session where study participants ate, talked, and listened to popular music (e.g., hip-hop) while creating digital multimodal compositions (DMCs) as *career dream boards* comprised of online images and/or personal photographs that represented their career futures, life goals, and support systems (e.g., family, friends). After designing their DMCs, participants individually recorded an audio narration to explain the images and their meanings, then engaged in a group discussion about how the popular media that they curated (e.g., movies, music, podcasts) inspired and nurtured their personal and professional futures. Here, we focus on Shani's DMC and her audio-recorded narration transcript.

Shuri was a participant in Autumn's 2020 study of Black girls' multimodal depictions of self-love. Shuri and Autumn, along with eight other Black adolescent girls engaged in 15 sessions where they read about and discussed self-love as it pertained to Black women and girls. In this session, Jennifer joined Autumn and her eight research partners in a discussion of their hopes, dreams, and plans for their futures. Together, the group discussed mainstream depictions of Black girls' futures, as well as the infinite possibilities for their own. As a final activity, the girls created dream boards that depicted their visions for their futures and briefly detailed their DMCs for the group. In the following analysis, we present Shuri's dataset from the session, which included (1) her digital dream board and (2) the transcript of her description.

Data Analysis

As Black women literacy researchers, we recognize that our multiple positionalities profoundly shape our understandings of Black students' multimodal compositions (Ohito, 2020). Given that Afrofuturist feminism was a shared conceptual and analytic grounding, we intentionally employed this lens to "read," code, and interpret the girls' DMCs in a three-step process. First, we independently read the girls' DMCs and coded the elements that were perceptual (e.g., characters and action; visual design features) and ideo-structural (e.g., future-oriented motifs, meanings, and themes shaped by the sociohistorical context and the creative

practices of Black girl dreaming) for each image (Griffin, 2020, 2021; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Next, we engaged in holistic readings of the girls' DMCs. We took detailed notes on how the girls articulated their intersectional identities (e.g., their races/ethnicities, gender, ages) and their STEM dreams and interests through visual imagery, particularly attending to the modal coherence (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) of the entire composition. We also coded the girls' transcripts for themes that confirmed, extended, expanded, or revised our interpretations of the images to enhance the rigor of our visual analyses (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Finally, following multimodal analytic procedures established in our ongoing collaborative research (Griffin & Turner, in press; Turner & Griffin, 2020), we engaged in multiple readings across both girls' digital multimodal compositions, discussed our initial interpretations, clustered codes and categories into broader themes, and verified the themes.

Black Girls Designing Humanizing Futures in STEAM

Themes derived from our Afrofuturist feminist readings of the girls' DMCs foreground their creativity, criticality, and STEAM career interests. Through their DMCs, Shani and Shuri moved beyond revising STEM trajectories that privilege older white men (Lane & Id-Deen, 2020) to redefining the ways that Black girls' identities and their professional work are envisioned more expansively as STEAM futures. Specifically, the DMCs illuminated their intersectional identities (e.g., images primarily featuring Black people and particularly Black women), enabling Shani and Shuri to imagine their STE(A)M futures in more humanizing ways. We present separate analyses of the girls' DMCs to honor their individual dreams, experiences, and perspectives.

Shani's DMC: A Blueprint for STEAM Futures

At the time of the study, Shani was a 16-year-old girl who identified as African American, and lived with her mother, father, and twin sister in a predominantly Black community in a mid-Atlantic state. Shani attended a local Catholic high school that took pride in offering a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, and she had taken numerous classes in her freshman and sophomore years (e.g., calculus, physics) that would help her achieve her postsecondary dreams of majoring and working in STE(A)M fields.

Planning for Successful STEAM Futures

As a young Black girl with enduring interests in architecture, Shani's composition signifies a "blueprint" for professional and personal success (see Figure 4.1).

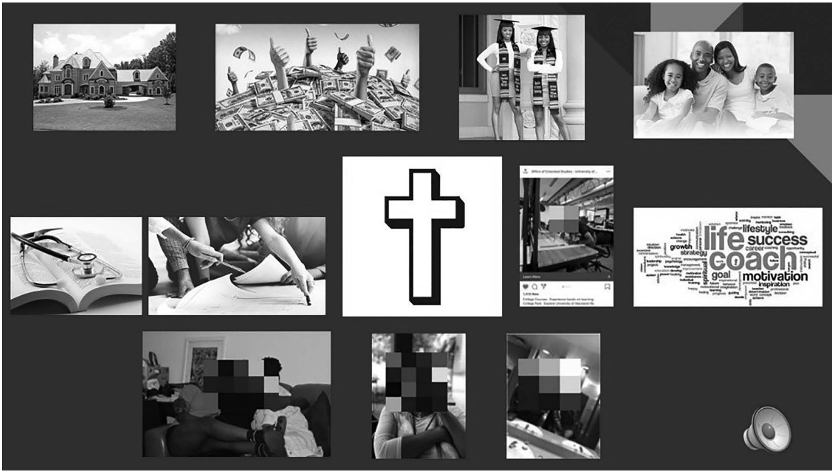

FIGURE 4.1 Shani's Digital Multimodal Composition

Like the architectural sketches that pictorially represent the structure of buildings with white markings against blue paper, the color palette of Shani's composition, with its deep blue background and three white "lines" composed of 12 brightly colored images, evokes a similar sense of design. The first "line" represents Shani's life goals through images of a large mansion with a sprawling manicured lawn; piles of money with raised hands holding dollars; two young Black women wearing college regalia; and an image of a Black family (i.e., a mother, father, son and daughter) sitting on a sofa. The second "line" illustrates her STEAM career aspirations through an image of a stethoscope (i.e., doctor), an image of two women's hands pointing down at a blueprint, a photograph of Shani working at a drafting table at a university STEM camp (i.e., architecture), and a cloud of multiple-sized red, yellow, and black words including "success," growth," "lifestyle," and "strategy" (i.e., life coach). This second line also visually portrays Shani's strong spirituality as a Christian through a white cross outlined with thick black lines – the largest and most salient image in the composition. In the third "line," Shani features personal photographs of her father sitting on a sofa with his arms wrapped around her and her twin sister; a photograph of her mother on her cell phone; and a selfie of Shani and four adolescent Black girls taken in a public restroom mirror. Disrupting dominant narratives that Black girls have low STEM self-efficacy and confidence (Ireland et al., 2018), Shani explained that she deliberately chose the online and photographic images in her DMC "to show I'm motivated and that I have . . . an actual plan that I'm going to follow through. And none of these goals are too far out of there; they're all somewhat in range that I know that I can accomplish."

Designing and Building Lives Through the "Sacred Work" of STEAM

Shani's awareness of the deep connectivity between her STEAM aspirations and her spirituality was beautifully illustrated in her DMC. Although seemingly disparate goals, Shani's career choices, represented by the images in line two, centered on helping people to design and build strong bodies, homes, and minds. Through the images of women pointing to blueprints and her own personal photograph at a STEM camp, Shani imagined becoming an architect "because I want to build things. I want to make people's dreams come to life." With the image of the stethoscope on the book, Shani acknowledged that she aspired to a medical career because "I like to help people." Finally, the word cloud image resonated with Shani's desire to become a life coach: "I want to inspire people, and I want to be one of the reasons why people keep pushing and just help them get over obstacles in life." By connecting these career images with the image of the cross in the middle of line two, Shani signified that this work serves a higher purpose beyond her own self-interests. For Shani, the designing and building of people's physical, material, and mental wellness through STEAM careers represents sacred work (Brown, 2013) – a calling that (re)affirms Black girls' values, spirituality, and passions while (re)defining Black women's labor as healing work.

Dreaming of STEAM Futures That Honor the Past and Critique the Present

Like other Afrofuturist feminist art (Morris, 2012; Toliver, 2021), Shani envisions STEAM futures built from the past and the present in her DMC. She honored her family histories through personal photographs of her mother, father, and sister, explaining that "they all support me . . . my mom is someone I want to be just like because she perseveres even when she's tired." In addition, Shani acknowledged that the funny selfie with her four close friends demonstrated how they strengthened her resilience: "I included this selfie with my friends because they make me laugh. They get me through hard times during school." The location of all these photographs in Shani's DMC – the bottom row (line 3) – visually represents how her future successes as a college graduate, homeowner, partner and mother, and STEAM professional, are solidly grounded in supportive family and peer relationships. For Shani, the cross in the middle of line two serves as the literal and figurative "center" of her life and her composition, demonstrating how some Black adolescent women rely on their religious faith and spirituality to resist and persist against negative social stereotypes (Ferguson, 2015).

While honoring her family and personal histories, Shani's images on the DMC also reflected her critique of the existing underrepresentation of Black women in STEM fields. Shani chose to represent her STEAM career aspirations with images of architectural, medical, and life coaching tools (line two) because she could not

find many images of Black women STEM professionals. She further explained in her narration:

> I didn't find a lot of images of Black [women]. . . . In the medical field, they're not really represented, and there's not a spotlight on them. So I want to help them in that field. And in architecture, there's some Black people, but it's usually men, too. And then a life coach, I think that's pretty like even.

Notably, Shani explained that she used the STEM camp photograph to "show that I can do it and I can get through any obstacle and that I work hard," thus (re)claiming her space as a Black girl in STEAM and (re)asserting her own confidence, determination, and intelligence. Rather than accepting invisibility as a Black girl within dominant STEM story lines, Shani boldly inserted herself into her own STEAM narrative through her own photographic image, declaring that she and other Black girls/women belong in scientific futures.

Shuri's DMC: A Mind Map for STEAM Futures

At the time of data collection, Shuri was a 17-year-old high school junior; she has since graduated and is now a freshman in college. Throughout high school she lived in a predominantly Black community in a mid-Atlantic city with her mother and brother and attended a public charter middle and high school in the same city. The school offered an international baccalaureate (IB) curriculum to all its students, allowing them to choose between the IB diploma program (DP) or career program (CP). Shuri explained that as a DP student, she was required to take three "higher level classes" and that her classes of choice were "bio [biology], English, and history." In addition, all students at the school were required to choose one of three language tracks in either Spanish, French, or Chinese; Shuri was fluent in Chinese.

Designing Expansive STEAM Futures

Shuri, who dreamed of pursuing a career in either the political or psychological sciences, designed a DMC (see Figure 4.2) that was expansive in size, projected futures, and definitions of STEM/STEAM.

Shuri's DMC was created using Google slides, which provides a slide template of a standard size for users (five inches vertically by nine inches horizontally). Shuri's DMC, however, far exceeded the bounds of the slide by at least three inches horizontally on both the left and right sides. Comprising 15 individual images, Shuri's DMC highlights her interest in pursuing a career in psychology, and it is reminiscent of a mind map. Three of the photos are directly related to her educational aspirations, representing universities she hopes to attend, as well

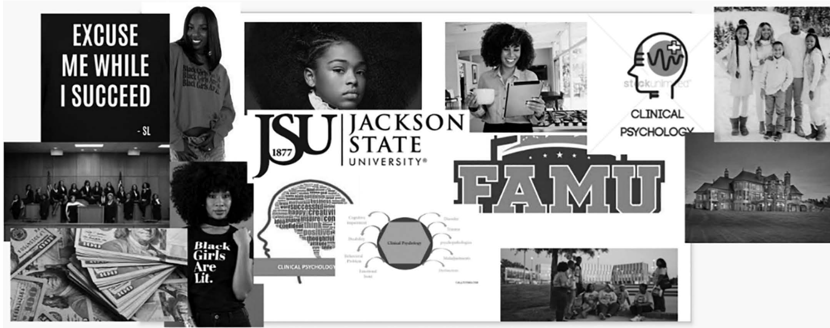

FIGURE 4.2 Shuri's Digital Multimodal Composition

as student life on a college campus. Five of the images depict her career aspirations, including one image of an all-Black woman legal team in a courtroom; three images depict diagrams of clinical psychology; and one image was of a Black woman holding her tablet and drinking a warm beverage. Her hopes for a family, large house, and financial success were represented on the outskirts of the collage and were represented (respectively) by the image of a Black family pictured in matching outfits in the snow, a mansion with a well-manicured lawn, and stacks of 100-dollar bills.

As an Afrofuturist feminist speculative writer, Shuri inserted a representation of her own image into the narrative of her future, incorporating several "pictures of Black women being successful." In addition to the group of college students enjoying campus life, her DMC includes two pictures of Black women wearing clothing with affirmations, stating "Black Girls Are Lit," and the photographic image of Zoi, an 11-year-old Black girl with a large Afro and a futuristic version of a colonial outfit (Acquaye, 2018). Finally, in the top left corner, Shuri included an image with a Black background and white lettering that read "EXCUSE ME WHILE I SUCCEED," a prophetic message of her own future success. Similarly, the images she selected to represent her future career were not limited to one choice, but rather included options related to the political sciences (depicted in the middle row on the left) and clinical sciences (represented in three different images on the DMC), representing the vast options she held for her future.

Making Lemonade out of Lemons

In Beyoncé's 2016 film *Lemonade*, viewers are introduced to her husband's grandmother, Hattie White. Playing over the visual of her 90th birthday celebration is a voiceover of her speech at the event. Seemingly reflecting on her life over the past nine decades, she says, "I was served lemons, but I made lemonade." Her statement is reflective of the experience of many Black women and girls throughout

the United States who are often forgotten, dismissed, or disparaged, especially in their work lives (Collins, 1991).

As represented in her DMC, Shuri takes up this work of making lemons out of lemonade. Elsewhere (Griffin, 2020; Turner & Griffin, 2020), we have drawn on the work of Noble (2018) to discuss the notion that the bias of Google's white-male dominated staff often influences the search engine's algorithm and thus the depictions and representations of Black girls. With specific regard to the varied career representations of Black women and girls, Google searches often yield limited results, if any at all. Likely unable to find images of Black women psychologists in her Google search (much like Shani), Shuri made the deliberate decision to make lemons from lemonade, opting instead to include faceless images to represent her career future where Google might tell her the images do not exist. Two of the three images feature the silhouette of a human head with either words or pictures representing the work of a clinical psychologist. Shuri's DMC also includes a diagram with the words "Clinical Psychology" written in the center of a green hexagon with green arrows pointing to the specific functions of a clinical psychologist. Shuri's STEAM aspirations are represented not only in her career choice as a social scientist, but also in the creative visual interpretation of the career.

It is no coincidence that as a student at a charter school in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood and with a teaching staff that is reflective of the teaching pool at large, Shuri has selected four images that represent her desires to attend an HBCU (Historically Black College or University). These images take up a large portion of her DMC and are placed close to the center, signifying particular importance for readers. "I first have like three colleges I'm interested in," she said: "Jackson State, FAMU, and North Carolina A&T." Research has suggested that not only do HBCUs allow Black students to develop strong cultural affiliations but also the opportunity for active racial self-development (Van Camp, Barden, Sloane, & Clarke, 2009). Fulfilling the prophecy she wrote for herself on this board in 2018, at the time of this writing, Shuri is currently a student at an HBCU, serving as living proof that Black girls are capable of making their own dreams come to life.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Findings from our study suggest that adolescent Black girls need multiple opportunities to *dream* – to freely compose new STE(A)M futures on their iPads, sketchpads, and laptops – and deserve to have teachers, parents, and community educators who acknowledge, respect, and support their aspirations and goals. Re-envisioning educational spaces in schools and communities through Afrofuturistic feminist activities may be especially useful for supporting and sustaining Black girls' STE(A)M dreams and aspirations. Black girls need additional opportunities

to engage speculative writing, in print (e.g., interactive journaling; Lewis Ellison et al., 2020) and digital (e.g., multimodal compositions) formats, where they can (re)define the boundaries of the genre as they compose their own nonfiction futures. Connecting speculative nonfiction writing with reading practices, Black girls interested in clinical psychology like Shuri might read nonfiction works, such as *Hidden Figures* (Shetterly, 2015) and Dr. Mae Jemison's biography *Find Where the Wind Goes: Moments From My Life* (Jemison, 2003), to better understand the socioemotional, psychological, and cultural practices that Black women leverage to "make lemonade out of lemons" – or achieve their own professional dreams while navigating intersectional oppressions in STEM fields.

Afrofuturist feminist speculative fiction with STEM-related themes like *Orleans* (Smith, 2013) may also help Black girls like Shani who aspire to medical careers to critique the racist ways that researchers have used Black bodies for experimentation in the name of scientific advancement. History is replete with such atrocities; in the late 19th century, Dr. James Marion Sims, hailed as the "father of modern gynecology," subjected Betsey, Anarcha, Lucy, and other enslaved Black women to excruciating experimental procedures without anesthesia due his racist belief that Black people did not feel pain like whites (Holland, 2017); from 1932–1972, hundreds of Black men in the Tuskegee Experiment with latent syphilis were told that they were receiving care but were left untreated so that researchers could track the full progression of the disease (Nix, 2017); and in 1951, cells obtained without consent from Mrs. Henrietta Lacks, a 30-year-old Black woman who died from cervical cancer, established the immortal "HeLa" cell line that has continues to play a key role in groundbreaking medical research around the world (Skloot, 2017). Through *Orleans* and other Afrofuturist feminist works, girls with medical ambitions like Shani can critique the harm that Black people in the United States have endured in the name of scientific discovery as they work to imagine new possibilities for racially just medical practices.

STEM programs in schools and communities must provide culturally responsive experiences that nurture the dreams of Black girls. STEAM-oriented approaches where adolescent Black girls can use the arts (e.g., visual arts, music, dance) in conjunction with their own creativity, multiliteracies, and cultural knowledge to explore, engage, and play with STEM concepts may enhance their STEM identities, confidence, and belongingness (Allen-Handy et al., 2020; King & Pringle, 2018; Lewis Ellison et al., 2020). Design pedagogies like the Remixing Wakanda project (Holbert et al., 2020) provide spaces where Black girls cultivate their technology skills and STEAM knowledge as they honor the past and critique the present to build more restorative futures. Evoking the words of Dr. Jemison (2003), these STEAM design experiences enable Black girls to agentively "create their own futures" and "make them happen" by leveraging the legacies of Harriet Tubman, Ella Fitzgerald, and other foremothers, as well as their own digital literacy practices, as they imagine and design the scientific futures that they desire.

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5

"TEACHING MY LANGUAGE EMPOWERS ME"

Korean Immigrant Women Teaching Heritage Language, Literacy, and Culture

Kwangok Song

In the last decade, literacy researchers have increasingly attended to the literacy practices of women in immigrant and transnational communities. The literature on Korean immigrants has highlighted mothers' strategies to support their children's language and literacy learning in English and their heritage language (e.g., Jeong, You, & Kwon, 2014; Kwon, 2017; Song, 2010). This research highlighted Korean immigrant women's gender roles as mothers in a transnational context in which they and their children negotiate cultural, ideological, and linguistic boundaries. Immigrant women have volunteered in community-based heritage language schools by teaching heritage language and culture to immigrant descendants (e.g., Kim, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2016; Shin & Wong, 2017). This line of inquiry has focused on how heritage language teachers' identities as teachers were negotiated and transformed as they interacted with heritage language learners.

Despite culminating research focusing on women's roles in young children's heritage language learning in both homes and communities, there has been a paucity of research focusing on how Korean immigrant women's participation in literacy practices in communities are influenced by their intersectional identities or by interrelating social factors, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and social class (Chen, 2007). One related study on Korean transnational mothers' engagement in teaching their children both English and their heritage language described how mothers' gender roles were extended as they taught their children and organized literacy activities for their children (Jeong et al., 2014). Examining how Korean immigrant women negotiate and transform their gender roles within their cultural positions can further our understanding of particularized and nuanced ways women of color engage in literacy practices.

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My Purpose

The purpose of my study was to examine how two focal Korean immigrant women's gender and cultural identities shaped and reshaped their participation in literacy practices in their ethnolinguistic community. The following research questions guided this study: How did Korean immigrant women's gender and cultural experiences inform their engagement in their literacy practices in the community? How did immigrant Korean women's participation in the community as heritage language teachers shape their literacy practices?

My Perspectives

Butler's (1990) notion of gender normativity highlights how gender is socioculturally constructed through repetitive acts within cultural norms. Butler indicated that "gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities" (p. 6). Therefore, situated within various sociocultural contexts, gender normativity cannot be separated from a repetitive positioning of oneself in relation to others. Gendered identities are shaped and reshaped through individuals' perceptions of the world and their social relationships with others. The performative acts of gender are agentive in that they are based on one's desire to act according to sociocultural and political expectations (Salih, 2002). Lived experience in various sociocultural and political contexts can shape, transform, and reshape gender identities that are "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p. 25).

An Asian feminist perspective further adds to gender normativity by providing a framework to illuminate the role of cultural practices in intersectional identities of Asian women (Chen, 2007). Critiquing the Western feminist discourses that alienate and victimize Asian women without considering their cultural contexts, Asian feminist scholars viewed that Asian women's experiences need to be understood within the intersection of culture, gender, and race/ethnicity (Chen, 2007). Okin (1999) urged that multiculturalism advocating for marginalized group's rights should embrace feminism to advocate for Asian women's rights. In this sense, an Asian feminist perspective assists in understanding how gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and cultural background influence subjectivity and agency because cultural practices are integral part of the lives of linguistically and culturally marginalized women of color (Chow, 1987).

The New Literacy Studies (NLS) provide an understanding of multiple forms of literacy practices in communities (Street, 1995). Literacy practices are purposeful and ideological social practices that are situated in local sociocultural and political contexts (Street, 2012). Each social institution affords ways of engaging in literacies based on shared expectations and anticipated social relations (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000). People in each institution draw on socially and

culturally distributed and constructed epistemological values or beliefs as they build attitudes, perspectives, and their social relationships in engaging in literacy practices in social spaces (Gee, 2015).

Engaging in literacy practices situated in a particular context can influence individuals' identities as people try to adjust their acts and discourses to meet the expectations of the context. Local contexts, however, are always connected to global contexts, and local literacies are constantly influenced by what happens in global contexts (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006). In negotiating across national, physical, virtual, symbolic, and linguistic borders, immigrants participate in transnational literacy practices that allow them to maintain ties across borders and contexts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002).

My Inquiry

The current study focused on two immigrant Korean women's literacy practices who were teaching in a community-based heritage language school in a large city in the midwestern United States. I employed a narrative inquiry approach that used storytelling to recount participants' lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004).

Participants and Context

The focal heritage language school was established approximately 40 years ago to support Korean immigrant descendants' heritage language maintenance and learning about cultural traditions. The school offered Korean heritage language classes for preschool through grade 8 students on Saturday afternoons. The focal teachers were Mrs. Yoon (all names are pseudonyms) and Mrs. Shin who were in their mid-50s. Mrs. Yoon had taught for approximately seven years, and Mrs. Shin had taught for approximately 13 years at the focal school. When this study was conducted, Mrs. Yoon was teaching fourth- through seventh-grade students who had been attending the school for a few years, whereas Mrs. Shin was teaching primary grade students who were relatively new to the school. Mrs. Yoon held an early childhood teaching certification (pre-K–K) from Korea. Mrs. Shin did not have a teaching certificate but had participated in an online program to earn a certificate to teach Korean-as-a-foreign-language teacher for adults.

Data Collection

I used multiple approaches to collect data for this study. Two semi-structured interviews with the focal teachers were conducted in Korean. Each interview took between 60 and 80 minutes, and all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview questions addressed the two women's immigration background, motivation to teach at the heritage school, teaching approaches,

choice of teaching materials, views of teaching literacy, strategies to prepare for classes, and their literacy practices as a result of teaching heritage language and culture.

Other methods triangulated the data collection. I observed these teachers' classes for approximately 30 hours in total and took field notes. During these participant observations, I engaged in informal interviews with them to learn about their intentions for their interactions with their students during classes and for selecting materials and activities for their teaching. I also observed faculty meetings and school events while taking notes on these meetings. Additionally, I took photographs of the instructional materials (e.g., posters, booklets, vocabulary cards) and students' paper crafts and writing samples. I also collected publicly available information from the school's website and took screenshots of messages and photos from the school's webpages.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved recursive and repetitive processes including reading transcripts and field notes, taking analytic and theoretical memos, and developing themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In the first phase, I listened to the audio recordings of the interviews several times to summarize teachers' responses while taking notes on their experiences and approaches. In the second phase, I transcribed the interviews for coding. I read and reread the interview transcripts and took analytic memos. As I reviewed the summaries and analytical notes, I coded the data and I compared cases to develop themes. The last phase of data analysis involved selective coding in which I formed key categories to examine the relationships with other categories. Reoccurring categories across the data set became themes or propositions.

Immigrant Women and Heritage Language Teaching

Mrs. Yoon: Achieving Personal Growth Through Teaching

Mrs. Yoon had immigrated to the United States with her husband and three young children; her youngest son was born in the United States after the family's immigration. She was a kindergarten teacher in Korea before she gave birth to her first child. She did not continue her career to stay home and take care of her family, following the gender norm that women are responsible for taking care of children (Oh, 2018). Whereas such a gender norm is still common in many societies (Erchull, Liss, Axelson, Statebell, & Askari, 2010; Okin, 1999), it was openly more imposed as a social expectation in Korea at the time (Choe, 2006).

After her family immigrated to the United States, Mrs. Yoon worked in part-time positions as a store clerk while caring for her family. Despite her skills and experiences in early childhood education, she could not obtain a teaching

position in her newly immigrated country. Such a deskilling experience is more common for immigrant women than for men for several reasons, including gender expectations for women in taking care of family and literacy requirements in the new language (Mollard & Umar, 2013).

Mrs. Yoon decided to teach at the Korean heritage language school approximately 20 years after she left her teaching position. She recalled when she was first asked to teach at the school by the previous principal:

> At that time, because of my age, I forgot most of how to teach because I had taught before getting married. After coming to the U.S., we were so busy with making a living. Immigrant life was tough. I worked manual jobs a lot, and both of us worked. Regarding teaching at a Korean school, I questioned if I could do well. Because there was a lapse of several years in my career, I was scared of teaching somewhere new.

Mrs. Yoon's tentativeness and lack of confidence in her ability to teach due to her career lapse after her marriage seemed to be influenced by a gender norm for Korean women (Min, 2001). Mrs. Yoon's teaching certificate and previous experience were no longer considered valid for a similar job in the United States, and she had stopped teaching when her first son was born, in accordance with Korean gender norms (Oh, 2018). Despite the sense of uncertainty about her own ability to teach, Mrs. Yoon decided to teach at the school to continue supporting her youngest son in learning Korean and fulfill her long-lost aspiration to teach young children.

An Immigrant Mother and the Meaning of Heritage Language Teaching

Mrs. Yoon's experience as an immigrant mother who had longed for her own children to maintain their heritage language stimulated her devotion to teaching Korean as a heritage language. She realized early in her immigration that her children's ability to speak and understand the Korean language did not improve while their English skills increased through their schooling in the United States. Because she viewed that her children's Korean language maintenance was integral to her family's solidarity, she supported all of her children's heritage language learning throughout their childhood by sending them to a Korean school despite the financial hardship. She eventually realized that her children became disinterested in and even resistant toward learning Korean. She recalled her frustration:

> My kids complained about why they should speak in Korean. Because both my husband and I are Korean, we always communicated with them only in Korean before they started kindergarten. We ate Korean foods. It was only five years though. It was short. Then, I realized that they started changing after they turned six years old. After they went colleges, I felt that they

> were completely different people, so I cried a lot. I was so saddened. . . . It [maintaining Korean] was to keep my dignity.

Mrs. Yoon struggle as an immigrant mother who witnessed her children's devaluing of the Korean culture and language was echoed by studies examining immigrant descendants' heritage language loss or deterioration across generations (e.g., Alba, Logan, Lutz, & Stultz, 2002). Wong-Fillmore (2000) noted that immigrant children's loss of the home language could hamper unity and communication among family members. Whereas Mrs. Yoon's children experienced a transformation of their sense of self due to their new lives in a new language in a new country (Hoffman, 1990), Mrs. Yoon perceived the distance she had felt from her children was due to her children's depreciation of the language of her family. She thought that her children's disinterest in the Korean language and culture was a sign of a decreasing sense of their ethnic identity. As she considered maintaining the Korean language as critical for her family and her children's sense of themselves as Korean descendent, she viewed that other Korean immigrants and their children needed to maintain the Korean language. Mrs. Yoon cast her concerns toward her students and their parents:

> The Korean school children have Korean parents, eat Korean foods, but they change after starting to attend (American) schools. The ideology in the U. S. education is based on individualism so they (children) do not feel the need to speak in Korean but just think speaking in the language of America is enough. Likewise, some (Korean) moms speak only in English to their kids, so their kids don't understand Korean. I sympathize with them. I think if one is Korean, s/he needs to speak Korean first and then English. I feel that they lose their identity and agency (if they lose the language). So, I think being able to speak Korean is critical for keeping their self-worth.

Mrs. Yoon's lamentation for Korean families' devaluation of communicating in Korean with their children and her concerns about children's loss of ethnic identity has been well demonstrated in the literature (e.g., He, 2010). Oh and Fuligni (2010) highlighted that heritage language competence and use of the heritage language are associated with a sense of ethnic identity. Teaching at the heritage language school extended her role as a mother who tried to support her children's heritage language learning. Mrs. Shin taught to fulfill her wish for other Korean immigrants to continue supporting their children in developing Korean language skills.

Expanding Literacy Practices Through Teaching

Mrs. Yoon's experience as an immigrant mother with her children as heritage language learners guided her choice of instructional content and learning materials for her class. As one way to teach the heritage language and culture, Mrs. Yoon

taught Korean proverbs popularly used in conversations. She explained how she came to teach proverbs:

> I sent my youngest son, born in the United States, to a Korean school when he became a first-grader. Although I am an educator, it just happened that I couldn't teach him Hangeul (the Korean writing system) at all until then. In his Korean class, he learned proverbs. One day, when we went grocery shopping, he picked up a penny and said, "Mom, many a little makes a nickel." I was so impressed. So, I just recalled that moment when I started teaching. I thought that they (my students) could do this (learning proverbs).

Mrs. Yoon considered teaching Korean history as another way to transmit the language and culture. Teaching history and culture to heritage language learners was initially encouraged by the National Association of Korean Schools (NAKS). Nevertheless, there was no set curriculum or specific guidelines on what and how to teach Korean history, and it was not required. Mrs. Yoon took the suggestion from the NAKS as an opportunity to teach what she believed critical for immigrant descendants' understanding of Korea, the country of their parents. She stated, "My role is to instill their (ethnic) identity by teaching Korean, and to cultivate a mindset to appreciate Korea." Because she viewed that significant figures in history and their achievements could be inspiring, she decided to introduce several Korean historical figures who made notable contributions to promoting social and technological development during the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1897) and to those who devoted their lives to regain the nation's sovereignty power during Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945).

Finally, from her experience with her children and previous experiences with other children of Korean immigrants throughout her teaching, Mrs. Yoon was aware that her students could be struggling with attending the heritage language school. To promote her students' engagement, she employed various multimodal literacy activities, including a play, a musical, origami, and readers' theater. She also crafted multimodal materials, such as paper models, dioramas, and paper maps, to explain historical events to strengthen students' understanding and engagement (Lenters, 2018).

Teaching at the heritage language school reshaped Mrs. Yoon's literacy practices in several ways as the Korean school offered her space to engage in extended literacy practices in the community. In a way, the focal Korean school seemed to act as a "sponsor of literacy (Brandt, 1998)" for Mrs. Yoon, as it required Mrs. Yoon to develop literacy skills that she could not develop in her everyday literacy practices. Mrs. Yoon came to engage in searching for information about instructional activities and resources to use for her class to teach history:

> I review some books and the resources posted on the StudyKorea website (http://study.korean.net/index.jsp). When I visit someone's house,

> I sometimes notice interesting children's books. Just like an expected mother, who only notices other pregnant women and baby clothes, I notice things (that can be used for teaching). I love teaching kids, and I want to do the best for my students. So, I always do research and constantly think about how to teach in the next semester.

As demonstrated in this quote, researching the content to teach, instructional materials, and activities became a critical part of Mrs. Yoon's literacy practices. As the current digitally charged reality requires people to develop the necessary skills to use various digital technologies critical to jobs, teaching in this era also requires teachers to obtain such skills to help their teaching preparation and instruction. Mrs. Yoon developed skills to use digital tools, such as Microsoft Office and Google Drive, to create a collection of reading materials and associated handouts for her students by using the resources she found. Mrs. Yoon had opportunities to use her skills to create multimodal crafts, which she had developed as a kindergarten teacher.

Mrs. Shin: Contributing to Strengthening the Community

Mrs. Shin started teaching at the Korean school a few months after she arrived in the United States with her two children to support their learning English. Mrs. Shin's family was a *gireogi* [goose] *family*, a term coined in South Korea to refer to a transnational family whose members are voluntarily separated in two countries due to children's education (Jeong et al., 2014). Usually, in a *gireogi family*, the father lives in Korea to work, whereas the mother and children move to the United States or to an English-speaking country. Around early 2000s, *gireogi families* increased due to the impact of *English fever*, the phenomena that English-as-a-foreign-language education for K–12 students became overly emphasized as English became the critical linguistic capital in Korea for academic and career purposes (Park, 2009). Although Mrs. Shin and her sons came to the United States with the purpose of learning English, she could not give up her sons' heritage language learning because she highly valued bilingualism and biliteracy in the transnational world. Her decision to support her sons' heritage language development was somewhat contrary to that of some transnational and immigrant mothers who prioritized their children's English acquisition while discouraging their children's use of Korean (Jeong et al., 2014; Song, 2010).

Literacy Practices to Support the Heritage Language School Community

Mrs. Shin considered teaching at the Korean school as extending her role as a mother. She said, "My students are my children. So, I want them to feed more than those in other classes and to teach them better." This view of her gender role is consent with prior research that identified how women's gendered views

of themselves as nurtures and caretakers influences their teaching (Hubbard & Datnow, 2010). Mrs. Shin tried her best to provide individualized attention in instruction and emotional well-being through her interaction with students. For this reason, Mrs. Shin attempted to create an encouraging and enjoyable learning environment. She said, "I don't want to create a restrictive environment that disallows children's talk during class even if it gets noisy at times." Reflecting on her son's experience, Mrs. Shin noted that teacher's kindness and attention toward a child could impact the child's attitudes positively even after he or she left the school. Mrs. Shin said,

> These kids come here forced by their parents. They are not self-motivated [to learn Korean]. My second child used to say, "Mom, the Korean school teacher whom I really liked always gave me candies whenever we met, and I really liked her." He is now a college student. Even when he was a high school student, he really appreciated this teacher due to that simple reason. Motivation for kids to come to the (Korean) school is not in learning Korean. They do not think, "I need bilingualism." Instead, they would come to the school every week if they find any joy in there even if that is small. So, I want to create small happiness for my students.

According to Clegg and Rowland (2010), kindness in teaching involves recognizing and serving students' needs while understanding students. Teachers' acts of kindness can impact the classroom community and their sense of belongingness (Binfet & Passmore, 2017). As shown in the preceding quote, kindness and caring that Mrs. Shin attempted to exhibit in her teaching involved acknowledging her students' lack of motivation to attend the Korean school. Thus, Mrs. Shin believed it was imperative to create a learning environment conducive to make students feel a sense of excitement and achievement in learning. In displaying compassion, Mrs. Shin was consistent with stereotypical gender norms that kindness is a feminine attribute (Seppala, 2013).

Mrs. Shin's intention in creating an encouraging learning environment was also embodied in her instruction. Mrs. Shin's class focused on learning about the basic Korean writing system along with vocabulary words with target letter combinations (e.g., 가, 나, 다). In teaching the writing system, Ms. Shin relied on multimodal and interactive activities. For example, she created kinesthetic movements to teach basic vowel letters in the Korean writing system so that children could sound out letters while making their bodies into the shapes of those letters. Instead of using handouts with repetitive handwriting practices that were common among other teachers of the focal school, she used wax sticks with which students could create letters and assemble them to construct words. Such multimodal instructional practices using bodies and craft materials for letter formation encouraged students' engagement and understanding of the writing system.

To teach heritage culture, Mrs. Shin incorporated cooking a few times each semester, a practice that is associated with feminine activity in traditional Korean culture and a valued skill that Korean women are expected to possess (Bak, 2014). She created opportunities for her students to make Korean dishes in class and bring some portion home. For example, to teach students about Chuseok, the traditional Korean fall harvest festival, Mrs. Shin and her students made Songpyeon, a Korean traditional sticky rice cake (*Tteok*) with sweet or semi-sweet fillings, including steamed beans, chestnuts, and sesame seeds with brown sugar. In doing so, Mrs. Shin showed a short educational animation explaining Chuseok and talked with students about what they noticed in the video. Mrs. Shin also cooked popular Korean dishes with her students so that her students could taste the dishes and talk about them. When she incorporated cooking into teaching, Mrs. Shin taught how to read the words for ingredients for each dish with her students and discussed briefly students' prior experience with each ingredient (e.g., shape, color, taste), which served as her vocabulary instruction. Mrs. Shin's incorporation of cooking into her teaching created embodied cultural experience as her students engaged in learning to read words, talking about their experiences, experiencing how to cook a dish, and tasting the food with their peers and family members.

As a parent who had actively involved in her own children's language learning, Mrs. Shin acknowledged the importance of parent involvement in student learning and engaged in new literacy practices in doing so (Street, 1995). Mrs. Shin wrote detailed emails to parents containing information about instructional activities and resources used in each class. She thought that these emails could teach parents how to support their children in learning their heritage language. Her efforts to share information with parents was her way of extending her role as an experienced mother with less experienced parents. Mrs. Shin considered her online communication with the parents of her students as one way to support her students' learning beyond her classroom and provide mentorship for their parents. Therefore, in offering tips for children's heritage language learning, her emails contained information about multimodal resources (e.g., educational video clips) that parents could use, details of what she taught, and how she taught in each class and instructions for parents on how to support their children's learning of the Korean writing system at home.

As much as Mrs. Shin cared for her students' learning, she was also willing to help the school by taking extra responsibility. To support the school, Mrs. Shin actively participated in other new literacy practices (Street, 1995), such as posting on social media to publicize the school. She posted the photos of activities and events at the school on the school's Facebook page and wrote briefly about the events and classes. According to her, some families and adult learners joined the school after they learned about the school's activities via the school's Facebook page. Mrs. Shin thought it was important to publicize the school's efforts to preserve the heritage language and culture. Mrs. Shin's agentive role in supporting

the school seemed to contribute to the vitality of the school by publicizing the school's efforts and attracting more students.

Reflections

The Korean immigrant women in this study reinforced, extended, or modified their gender roles as they participated in literacy practices in their ethnolinguistic community by teaching their heritage language and culture. The findings of this study suggest that Korean immigrant women continue to take up gender identities ascribed to them by their cultural heritage to some degree. Yet, their border-crossing experience influences and transforms their gender roles. The Korean immigrant women's traditional gender roles as mothers who cared about their own children's education was intermingled with their position as linguistically marginalized immigrants in the United States. Beyond their roles in taking care of their own children, teaching the heritage language and culture in a community-based heritage language school enabled the women to take up agentive roles in their ethnolinguistic community. By teaching at the community-based heritage language school, they supported other Korean immigrant children's heritage language learning and other immigrant families' communication and unity. Korean immigrant women were able to transform and reconstruct their gender roles not only by achieving personal growth but also contributing to the linguistic diversity and the vitality of their ethnolinguistic community.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

These immigrant Korean women's transformative engagement in literacy practices through teaching their heritage language and culture at a community-based heritage language school has implications for literacy educators. The focal women's efforts to preserve heritage language and culture exemplified the Korean immigrant community's deeply rooted aspiration to preserve heritage language and culture in the United States. Such efforts call for collaboration between parents and those working with multicultural youth in out-of-school programs to motivate young immigrant descendants to learn heritage language and culture. Heritage language is particularly critical for establishing affective and cognitive empathy within families as it allows communication among family members. Community-based heritage schools can create spaces for parents, teachers, and community members to engage in ongoing conversations on ways to create viable strategies to support heritage language learners.

Community literacy program providers can create additional opportunities for immigrant women to participate in communities that enable them to expand their gender and cultural roles. Okin (1999) noted that protecting marginalized groups' heritage languages is a way to protect the rights of women from

marginalized groups. Participating in literacy practices in their heritage language can empower immigrant women because it allows them to capitalize on their linguistic and cultural repertoire and to expand their personal capacity in a newly adopted country.

Finally, adult literacy educators working with immigrant women can create spaces for immigrant women to explore their intersectional identities and to build a supportive community. Potentially, providing supportive resources can encourage them to deepen their understanding of their rights while reflecting on their transnational experiences. For example, the Asian American Feminist Collective (www.asianamfeminism.org/) offers community events and resources that allows Asian immigrant women to engage in collaborative work with other women who share similar but different cross-cultural, cross-linguistic experiences. Participating in literacy practices through such a supportive community may enable immigrant women to examine their diasporic identities while potentially exploring opportunities to transform their gender roles and evaluate cultural representations.

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6

DIGITAL STORYTELLING, BLACK MASCULINITY, AND CONTENDING WITH RACIAL CAPITALISM

Becky Beucher and Kimberly McDavid Schmidt

> You have watched a video of your boy [Devonte] and his everyday life of struggling to finally try to make his dream come true. Though it's been a rough struggle and a roller coaster. To finally to see your dreams unfold and really happen in front of you. It's been a blessing to live this life I've been living. Cuz a lot of people where I'm from normally reach the age I'm at right now. So, it's always a blessing to know that you're still living and that God has blessed you with another day. To final life and try to pursue your dreams. I'm on my way to pursue my dreams right now. I'm on this marathon shit. You know, tryna, tryna, li, tryna get it man tryna make my Moms proud. That's my biggest goal in life. Tryna make my sisters and everyone that's in my family proud of me. That's why I'm the man I am today, that's why I do the things I do today. Thank you all for watching.

This opening quote showcases how Devonte (pseudonym), a young Black male who was asked to compose and reflect on a digital autobiography for his English class chose to conclude his narrative. Devonte's words illustrated his chilling awareness of the fragility of Black lives, including his own. He did not place blame, nor did he seek explanation for the burdens placed upon his Black body. Instead, he expressed gratitude and reiterated his goals in life, which include making the Black women in his life proud and realizing his dreams.

Devonte's narrative alluded to the current and historical context of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, the recent murders of George Floyd, Michael Brown, Andrew Brown Jr., Tamir Rice, Botham Shem Jean, E.J. Bradford, Michael Deem, Jamee Johnson, and the disproportionate policing of the Black male body (The Washington Post, 2021). Kirkland (2017) identified an increasing chasm in wealth between whites and those of color and described mass incarceration of

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Black youth, many of whom schooling have failed. Due to this cultural climate, it is necessary to understand how the production and consumption of emancipatory texts can be used to bolster Black males' critical consciousness. Therefore, there has been a call to center the lives and experiences of Black youth in responsive ways that Kirkland (2021) identified as "critical consciousness," or "wokeness"; and through this explicit centering, demonstrate "a value of Black life and Black lives" (p. 61).

Digital Storytelling

One way to address this need to center Black lives is through the production and consumption of identity texts or life stories or personal narratives constructed and told through images, words, sounds and color in a process called digital storytelling. Digital storytelling was developed on the premise that everyone has a story to tell (Davis & Foley, 2016). Since its inception in the 1990s, digital storytelling has remained a popular form of digitized and narrativized writing for promoting youths' voice and civic engagement. Much of the research on digital storytelling has identified and celebrated its possibilities for promoting the voices of Black and Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) and those whose voices and experiences have been marginalized (Wu & Chen, 2020). BIPOC youth, positioned as Othered or in marginalized subject positions within society and school, may self-censor their digital stories as they attend carefully to peer and school-based audiences, however (Pandya & Low, 2020). These findings both align with and challenge the affordances of digital storytelling.

Authoring Black Masculinity

Black males have been stereotypically portrayed in the media as hypermasculine, violent, dangerous, and hypersexual (Kirkland, 2013). Yet, a small but growing body of recent research has countered these stereotypical portrayals. Researchers have described how Black males have complicated and re-narrated images of Black men as hypermasculine through composing alternative texts. These texts have included poetry (Kirkland, 2013) and zines, self-publications authored or edited as alternatives to commercial magazines (e.g., Guzzetti, 2019; Guzzetti & Lesley, 2017).

In a study focusing on a Black adolescent male composing poetry, Kirkland (2013) described Tyrek, a young Black author, who wrote a poem titled, *Cry No More*. Tyrek wrote of how he was "drowning in the tears of my own endless seas" (p. 134). For Tyreck, tears symbolized sadness and pain as the tears smother the Black masculine body, illustrating how oppressive structures "cover/clothe and possess/drown Black men" (p. 134). Tyrek's poetry sustained normative Black masculinity as he described his love for his mother and sister in relation to his protective role.

In a study of Black men's zines (Guzzetti & Lesley, 2017) a young African American father, Jonas, produced a series composed of poetry, visuals, and prose that dispelled stereotypical notions of African American men as cold, emotionally distant, and uninvolved in their children's lives. In his zines, Jonas wrote to his unborn child, recalling his memories of his own emotionally absent father in a display of sentiment and emotionality that countered gendered notions of the performance of Black masculinity. In a similar case study, Guzzetti (2019) described how a young African American man, Lawrence, created zines that dispelled gendered and racist stereotypes about Black men. Lawrence composed cartoon zines that refuted and called into question images of young Black men like himself as violent gang members due to the notoriously high crime area in which he lived. Lawrence also wrote of how language can impact others' perceptions of the performance of Black masculinity as he cartooned his friend's date with a woman who told his friend he was not like other Black guys because he did not "Black speak," but spoke proper English due to his education, defying constraining notions of how a Black man should be and act.

A larger body of literacy studies explored the affective intensities that arose as youth shared their stories in multimodal composing processes. This work investigated how youth experienced emotions and new ways of becoming in relation human and nonhuman agents (Schmidt & Beucher, 2020; Beucher, Handsfield, & Hunt, 2019). Schmidt and Beucher (2020) illustrated how youth redefined themselves within the parameters of a collaborative multimodal project. Students' identities associated with failure and shifted from frustration to joyful play and gestures and words in solidarity. Similarly, Ehret and Hollett (2014) explored the ways an "affective atmosphere" (p. 433) was created through collective emotions in relation to composing digital narratives in divergent spaces, such as classrooms or digital networks. Beucher et al. (2019) asserted how love for a student can be illustrated through material-discursive analysis.

Our Perspectives

We extended this body of work by focusing on affect in relation to discursive positioning specific to Black masculinity. We used critical affect theory, a theory that situates affect as emerging within and in response to sociopolitical and historical forces (Beucher et al., 2019; Zembylas, 2015) to inform our analysis. We centered our analysis on discourse to understand the complexities of literacy practices as situated in social, historical, and cultural contexts (Beucher et al., 2019).

To frame our study, we also drew on two principles of Anwaruddin's (2016) Critical Affective Literacy (CAL), a pedagogy that examines the associational nature of emotion and how emotions are produced and circulated. This critical framework allows for the exploration of how emotion serves a crucial role in informing the co-constructed relationship between telling and feeling. The first principle that informed our study was "examining why we feel what we

feel" (Anwaruddin, 2016, p. 390) in particular situations. This principle includes examining an orientation toward or away from other objects by examining affective language, directing our attention to what Devonte discursively turned toward and turned away from, and guiding us to examine the emotionally laden, or affective, language that explained these turns.

The second principle that informed our study was "striving to enter a relation of affective equivalence" (Anwaruddin, 2016, p. 391). This principle invites empathetic engagement with the storyteller. Anwaruddin (2016) drew on Butler (2010) to expound on the disparities in how a society's peoples grieve (or do not) Black death, directing us to examine Devonte's agency as encompassed in his presentation of identities and how those identities were received. Black adolescents agentically tell their stories, choosing what to highlight, remember, and rewrite, and identify the ways they hope to be seen and heard by others. As Black males, they self-author amidst a forced "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1897).

Materialities, Memories, and Emotions

We also framed our study from a theory of materialities that allowed us to examine how human agents perform, negotiate, transform, and engage with racialized discourses (Butler, 2010) and understand how human bodies intra-act with other human bodies toward humanizing ends. Assemblages, or a "constellation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of fluid entities are constantly being remade and constitute intra-actions among and between human bodies intra-acting with other materialities (memories, discourses, things, chemicals, elements). Thus, intra-actions among materialities are transformative and therefore, potentially disruptive of racist discourse (Smiley & Fakunle, 2016). In this respect, socially and culturally constructed discourse shape (Schmidt & Beucher, 2020) affective intensities (Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021), or "feelings" (Lemke, 2013) with important implications for how human agency is shaped in relation to material and matter.

Educators and other adults shape youths' emotional experiences through daily inter- and intra-actions. As Ahmed (2004) argued,

> emotions are not simply something "I" or "we" have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made: the "I" and "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others.
>
> *(as cited in Anwaruddin, 2016, p. 10)*

Carten and Dutro (2020) illuminated how affect is not only felt in the present moment but travels across time: "affect brings us viscerally into the present moment and is always spilling over with the resonance of the past and the potential of the future" (p. 587).

Discourses of Black Masculinity and Organic Phenimism

A final theory that informed our study was one of discourses of Black masculinity (Kirkland, 2013). These discourses are socially constructed within inequitable structures of power that position the Black male as hypermasculine, a stereotypical characterization perpetuated by the media (Kirkland, 2013). While masculinity is a gendered invention that is socially constructed (Butler, 2007), it is also political and positions the Black male in negative story lines, such as Black men as subhuman, cold, and distant, that require deconstruction. Kirkland (2013) described the term "organic phenimism" (p. 132) as an analytical lens to understand counter stories (in narratives and poetry) when Black men express tears and sadness in their writing. Phenimism is a fluid analytical lens that shifts based on the sociocultural and political context and in accordance with a Black man's interactions with the female touch. Thus, through a mother or sister's touch and care, both men and women come to understand the world through Black femininity.

Transformative and Collaborative Digital Storytelling

Through both oral and written narration, Black adolescents may emphasize certain autobiographical memories in their composing process that they share with trusted adults, but rewrite and share other memories. Memories function as a part of identity construction and maintenance, and the memories that a person draws on and holds onto are fundamental to the "self-story" (Smorti & Fioretti, 2016). Memory studies reiterate the semantic connections among affect, autobiographical storytelling, and transformative possibilities for healing through storytelling with an empathetic listener. An autobiographical memory, such as one told in a digital story, is "a type of episodic as well as a semantic memory for specific life events related to the self in relation to others remembered from the present perspective" (Smorti & Fioretti, 2016) define p. 298). Memory transformation is possible based on the emotive context and how a person retrieves a memory (Smorti & Fioretti, 2016). Retrieving memories in a positive, supportive context can potentially affect emotions related to that memory.

Our Purpose

We were interested in one male Black adolescent's conscious choices in tandem with how contextual affect may shape the potential for transformative self-narration. We asked: How did intra-actions trouble or shape oppressive and intersecting discourses about racism, gender identity (Black masculinity), and social class? What affects or emotions might emerge through the intra-actions among discourses, conversations, digital stories, and reflections on the digital life story?

Our Procedures

The Participant

To answer these questions, we conducted a case study (Stake, 1995). We focused on understanding the intra-actions of one Black male adolescent, Devonte, and his autobiographical storytelling practices during his senior year of high school. Devonte was 18 years old at the time of this study. He lived with his mother and younger sister and brother. During his senior year, he was recruited to play college football on a full scholarship.

Data Collection

Becky (the first author) gathered all data and led data-analysis and synthesis and Kimberly joined the project to co-analyze and co-synthesize data. Becky accessed and co-inhabited the school spaces, including Devonte's African American English Language Arts classroom, three computer labs, school hallways, and a junior/senior hangout space called "The Future Center." Becky attended four one-hour long classes a week from September through December 2012. During this time, Becky audio recorded up to five select groups of students spread across the room, observed class discussions, took field notes, participated in informal conversations with students and the teacher during small groups or during unstructured time.

Beginning in November 2012, Becky's role as a participant observer shifted to instructor and facilitator. Becky followed students into different spaces within the school as they worked on their digital narratives. She worked closely with Devonte throughout much of his digital narrative production process.

Our data also included documents and artifacts. Becky collected all class assignments, formal and informal, to examine how Devonte told stories across contexts. We collected Devonte's college essay in which he described early memories of witnessing his mother pleading with a landlord to not evict their family, and in which he quotes from rap artist, the late Tupac Shakur, whom he said was a great influence on him, and through which he relayed plans for his future career. We archived Devonte's autobiographical digital story.

Other data triangulated these data collection methods. Becky took notes on the informal interviews and conversations she had with Devonte while he was composing his digital story. Becky conducted an end-of-project semi-structured interview with Devonte that she audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview questions included inquiries about Devonte's approach to constructing his digital story, as well as his reasoning for why he made certain design choices.

Data Analysis

After an initial reading of all the data, Becky and Kim inductively coded the multiple data types, with codes focused on emotion, such as pain and joy; and

codes pertaining to race and gender discourses, such as Black, African American and masculinity. Patterns of meaning, or themes emerged in our thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012) in relation to Devonte's affect as he drew across multiple materialities, such as hustling, childhood innocence, and judgment. We selected pivotal moments where Devonte was rewriting his original narrative in relation to his identities informed by discourses of race and masculinities for analysis. By using a material-discursive analysis of the assemblage composed of data types, we located illustrative instances in which Devonte contended with racist discourses specific to how Black males are perpetually entrapped in cruel constructions of criminality.

We organized the data into a data table with columns for each data type (interview transcript; digital story transcript, process transcripts; college essay). Next, we created rows to organize the data according to Devonte's memory recall in the present moment, and in his construction of future trajectories. We analyzed and compared the ways he told stories across contexts with the autobiographical narrative structure of past, present, and future. Next, we looked across the data types for evidence of affective intensities and labeled these as: positive, negative, and neutral affect. Finally, we organized our findings in relation to three Anwaruddin's (2016) four relevant principles, which we selected based on their alignment with our data.

Our Insights

Devonte opened his digital story with 11 pictures of himself as a young child, ranging in age from infancy through about six years old. Two pictures included his brother and three pictures included him and his brother with their mother. Devonte juxtaposed these images with quotations that included writings of independence, being a product of society, choosing to live compassionately or engage in evil acts, living a safe childhood, staying close to family, and having precious childhood memories. Devonte often alluded to Black male artists like TuPac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. The quotations, coupled with Devonte's choice to play the popular hip-hop song "Juicy," by the Notorious B.I.G., added multidimensionality to his public identity narrative in a manner that he believed preserved the theme of innocence while enabling him to contextualize his life story in his memories of his upbringing shadowed by the material effects of racism and economic inequity.

Feelings, Orientations, and Narrative Choices

Devonte's description of remembering gave rise to themes and feelings of genuine happiness and joyful, happy memories as he recalled memories between his mother and himself as a child, remembering sharing these joyful memories.

One of the themes that emerged early on in Devonte's description of his digital story was his intention to project a sense of innocence around his childhood. He explained:

> I want to start off my story from being a kid. I thought that is when I had most of my memories was I was like basically happy. I'm happy now, but like when I was really like genuine happy.

Devonte offered a complex notion of happiness by referring to happiness as something that he feels now, but that he felt most fully when he was a child, a time that he remembered as holding genuine happiness. Devonte experienced happiness in the present through the process of remembering, or, "reminiscing" about moments spent with his mother recalling early memories. Devonte's reminiscing mirrored similar findings to those in Davis and Weinshenker's (2012) case study of a 13-year-old youth, Isaiah, who shared a story about his birthday party when he was 11 years old where he recalled providing impromptu entertainment for his guests by talking to them after sucking helium out of balloons.

Devonte recalled sitting on the floor with his mother, digging through a duffel bag of old photographs. Becky asked him to tell her more about what it was like to sit with his mother and remember:

Devonte: It was fun. It was fun. It was laughing about all the times she cuz she writes my name and then she writes all the events.
Becky: Mm Hm.
Devonte: On the back of all the pictures.
Becky: Mm Hm,
Devonte: So she, it was like reminiscing.
Becky: Yeah.
Devonte: Of all the stuff. Of how times was and how times is now. So.
Becky: Yeah.
Devonte: I liked it. I like doing that.

Traces of positive affect were intensified through this ritual activity in which he and his mother engaged on a regular basis. Devonte explained, "Like every like two months we like to do it, like a big occasion where we have to use like baby pictures or somethin', like our senior pictures, we whip em' out and just look at em' and laugh." There was a clear connection among the positive affect elicited through the act of orienting toward memories that Devonte remembered as enjoyable. What he found joyful were both the memories and this embodied act of remembering. A memory of sitting on the floor with his mother evoked a genuinely happy feeling during a shared moment of laughter and joy and love.

Reworking Painful Memories Through Empathetic Engagement and Pheminist Discourse

In principle two, Anwaruddin (2016) invited educators "to imagine standing in the shoes of others" (p. 383). It is a common practice for an English/language arts teacher to ask students to share personal connections they are making to course texts, and to write about themselves. When Black youth are asked to make these connections, however, these stories may be heard and/or told through harmful discourses informing the storytellers' or hearer's biases. Therefore, Anwaruddin (2016) invites educators to consider youths' stories with compassion and empathy. Smorti and Fioretti (2016) asserted that meaning making is a co-constructed activity between storyteller and audience. Davis and Weinshenker (2012) underscored the potential for cultivating positive affect in classroom spaces in their case study findings, which demonstrated "how the day-by-day processes of script development, revision, and eventual showing of digital stories before a supportive audience of peers were associated with positive re-constructions of self with long term effects" (p. 327).

The storytelling context and audience mattered for Devonte. He explained that he closely protected his personal story, sharing it with a select few. Yet, he opened up to Becky after only a short time of working together. At one point in their interview, when talking about what he did not want to publicly share about his early childhood, Devonte stated, "So, I keep it on lock. But I feel comfortable with you telling you about it because I feel like it's necessary to tell."

In contrast to his digital story that had a positive tone, Devonte began his college essay by centering a memory weighed down with negative affect (sadness, grief, pain). Devon wrote:

> Boom Boom the cold sound of a cold door on a October day. [It] is the manager of [our] apartment, asking for this month's rent. My mom rushed to fix herself to ask for extension, even though we were already 3 months behind. He placed a note that read "eviction" on the door, the sound of a cold crisp are hitting my spine like a ton of bricks used for building houses fell from a two-story building that just got vacated out cuz of a company that bought one another was doing rebuilding hit me as I saw the note. The pain of seeing your mom cry changes a man, it cut him deep in his soul where words or healing don't help, but make it harder.

Devonte's opening lines palpably denoted a feeling of desolation contained in this memory. His identification with masculinity both shaped his pain and his reaction to witnessing his mother's desperation. At the end of this opening paragraph, he referenced the pain of bearing witness to his mother's pain and sadness: "The pain of seeing your mom cry changes a man, it cut him deep in his soul where words or healing don't help, but make it harder."

Here, Devonte was orientated toward his mother's tears, naming his own pain as irreparable. Alluding to the work of other Black male writers and artists, Kirkland (2013) wrote, "the tear acts not only as symbol, but also as space that invites possibility for Black men to write with weeping and in the lineage of a historical lamentation that places pens in the hands of modern Black male psalmists" (p. 132). Pheminism (Kirkland, 2013) alludes to the relationship between females and males as the "female within" (p. 133) to understand the ways a Black man expresses love and care that contradicts negative tropes of masculinity.

The hidden narrative behind this pain that Devonte was not sharing in this opening paragraph is that he was ten years old when he witnessed this event; yet, he referred to himself as a man, as this serves as the moment in his life timeline where he became a man.

In his rethinking of the school to prison pipeline, Kirkland (2013) soberly asserted, "In addition to physical living conditions, such citizens find themselves perpetually locked into labels that at all facets of confinement reinforce their internment, from one institutional margin to another, from the brims of birth to the edges of death" (p. 469). Around the time of his life that Devonte alluded to in his college essay, he and his brother had turned to the streets in the evenings to earn money for the family. He explained that out of this income, he paid the family's $1,200 a month rent. In addition, Devonte was watching people around him die:

Devonte: Growing up. Cuz, I didn't come from nothin'. Like everything I have on, I hustled for. . . .

Devonte: So every. I was paying that, and (nst) people was passing away. Like, it was it was took a toll on me, so I felt like I don't need to be hustling no more to be doing this. I found a job and then my mom met my step dad and stuff started to fall into place. But, it all just takes a toll. I don't want to go back to my life, man.

Here, Devonte signaled the negative affect attached to remembering his childhood; the desolation that came with having to carry the burden of poverty forced upon people of African descent under the weight of white supremacy backing up hundreds of years before one was born (Bell, 1992) carried across generations, hung in the air, saturating his words as he explained how and why he constructed his digital narrative in the manner he had.

Devonte: Cuz it's bad memories of what I had to do.

Becky: Mm Hm.

Devonte: So, I didn't want to put none of that hustling thing in there or like a theme like that I wanted to be like where I was innocent.

Becky: Mm Hm.

When Becky asked Devonte his thoughts about other students in the class sharing painful memories in their Digital Media Products, Devonte applauded their efforts, but spoke to the pain and shame he connected to his own story:

Devonte: I feel like, if you feel comfortable telling people about what's really going on and what happened, and you feel something deep in you that motivates you that you should speak to the class and tell them about that. I think that's great. But in my situation, I would never want to tell nobody to do what I had to do.
B: Mm Hm.
Devonte: Or live the life I had to live. I think that's. That took a lot from my childhood. From when I had to hu, I had to hustle for everything.
Becky: Yeah.
Devonte: I would never wanna tell the class about that because I don't want to be judged.
Becky: Mm Hm.
Devonte: For the life I did. . . .
Devonte: I mean. It all takes a toll on me. A little bit, like right now. I'm re I'm thinking about the time, like the dark night. I, it was a lot.
Becky: Yeah.
Devonte: From ten years old to 15 hustling, every day. Trying to pay, trying to get food on the table. And I would never wanna. I would never want any kid, na, growing up from my situation to do that, ever.
Becky: Yeah.
Devonte: So, I would never. I would never tell nobody about that honestly.
Becky: Yeah.
Devonte: So, I keep it on lock. But I feel comfortable with you telling you about it because I feel like it's necessary to tell.

Devonte explained that he felt comfortable sharing this story with Becky because he knew that she would not judge him as he was judged by his peers. Devonte's reported experiences that were similar to those reported by the middle-school youth in Davis' and Weinshenker's (2012) case study. Davis and Weinshenker found that their participant, Isaiah, received conflicting messages daily about who he is and what should matter to him . . . and that "in the hip-hop world that nearly all of his peers participate in to some degree, name-brand fashion, athleticism, toughness, and street-wise savvy are key to status; crying while watching movies with your mom and 'being polite' are not" (p. 18).

While the scope of this chapter does not allow for a lengthy discussion of how Devonte juxtaposed the images of his childhood with quotations from renowned hip-hop artists, Tupac Shakur and the song, "Juicy" by the Notorious B.I.G., it is important to mention that Becky has written elsewhere (Beucher & Seglem, 2019) about how Devonte and other Black male youth in this study used Black

male literacies to situate their narratives in discourses of Black masculinity. So, Devonte couched what he kept "on lock" within the music and quotations threaded across his digital narrative and quotes in his college essay. Yet, Devonte carried the affective weightiness of these memories on his shoulders. Kirkland emphasized, "a pedagogy for Black people is about Black people, useful for the social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and political emancipation of not only the bruised Black body but also the tethered Black souls" (p. 60).

While Devonte shared joyful memories spent with his mother and brother and shared painful memories with Becky, he chose to exclude these memories from five years of his life in the final digital narratives he crafted for his classmates. He carefully crafted a narrative based on the ways he wanted to be seen and heard by others to mitigate judgment for living life in survival mode. He displayed "double consciousness," an awareness of how he was perceived through the eyes of others (Du Bois, 1897) with a desire to be perceived in other ways. Devonte's story made us acutely aware that reliving painful memories collects a physiological tax that over time makes the human body vulnerable to illness (Greenberg, Wortman, & Stone, 1996, p. 588).

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

We believe that Devonte's affective orientation toward joyful memories shared with his mother and autobiographical storytelling with a witness who enabled him to feel comfortable and free from judgment offers a window to possibilities for how classrooms and other educational spaces might enable Black youth to offload heavy burdens cast on their bodies. Digital storytelling with a compassionate and supportive context has the potential for offering youth transformative opportunities to organize details of their lives into "coherent narratives" and generative reimaginings of future life trajectories (Davis & Weinshenker, 2012, p. 22). Yet, more work needs to be done to create educational spaces that feel safe enough for minoritized youth to bring this kind of vulnerability to digital storytelling.

Literacy educators and those who work with youth educational programs in out-of-school settings can facilitate this vulnerability by intentionally cultivating affective atmospheres that center storytellers. Cultivating an affective atmosphere of care does not begin solely with units focused on autobiographical storytelling, but rather is embedded in daily practices. For instance, classes or sessions might begin by inviting youth to share their feelings and their thoughts pertinent to content and to life. Literacy educators might share their own lives with vulnerability and empathetically respond verbally and nonverbally to youth's stories. Moreover, tantamount to anti-racist pedagogy is a willingness to examine and deconstruct one's own biases. Biases dangerously play out as microaggressions through intra-actions with one another, which can undermine good intentions

and well-meaning words. As more Black males share their stories, their joys and their pain, they can narrate and shape their lives by sharing their memories orally and in writing in ways that bring rise to a myriad of emotions that are central to healing (Smorti & Fioretti, 2016).

We see possibilities for centering Black youth's autobiographical narratives in literacy curriculum by using Anwaruddin's pedagogical framework to situate how students are taught to affectively engage with literature and their own stories. In this manner, youth can practice examining and feeling with Black male pain in a collective space where youth can choose to name their own pain (or not) as a part of this pedagogical practice. Adults who work and interact with youth, such as parents, out-of-school literacy providers, and teachers might work with countering the shame connected to hustling, which was evidenced in both Biggie Smalls' "Juicy" and in Devonte's narrative. We ask: How might educators, adults who work with youth, and young people re-envision a youth who hustles to pay rent as entrepreneurial genius? How can feelings of shame be turned toward celebration of survival and accomplishment? How do these affective mechanisms support young Black males in remembering their past selves with feelings of pride so that they do not have to keep turning away from themselves and instead turn to embracing all of who they are? This to us is social justice.

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SECTION II

Literacies and Identities in Institutions, Agencies, and Community Settings

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7

VOICING VULNERABILITY

Narratives of Healing Among Culturally Diverse Adolescent Girls in a Community-Based Organization

Crystal Chen Lee, Kelsey Dufresne, Laura Jacobs, Caitlin Donovan, and Jennifer C. Mann

The lights in the farmhouse dimmed as one spotlight turned to Hope, executive director of CORRAL Riding Academy, a culturally diverse nonprofit that supports adolescent girls in high-risk situations through a program of equine therapy, academic learning, and holistic programming. It was December 10, 2020, the end of a year where a global pandemic and systemic racism directly affected many of the girls in the program. Wearing masks in the farmhouse and sitting spaced apart in an effort to socially distance, a few girls in the CORRAL program were getting ready to tell their truths to an audience on YouTube livestream for a "Night of Stories," a space that was created for girls to tell their stories in a year when many culturally diverse adolescents had felt and been both unseen and unheard. Hope approached the podium as the livestream rolled. She looked at the camera as she acknowledged the 250 community members who were live-chatting and watching on the screen safely at home:

> This summer, after canceling our largest fundraiser of the year, we knew we would need to come up with a new, virtual way of inviting and involving you all in our mission, but we weren't quite sure how to . . . when we couldn't physically invite you to our farm. So we asked the girls. . . . "Girls, what do you want people to know about you? If you could tell people anything, what would it be?" The answers overflowed . . . but what we heard over and over again is that: "No one listens to us. No one hears us." We knew that it was our responsibility to amplify their voices.

As the night continued, one by one, girls at CORRAL looked into the camera and into the eyes of their community audience and portrayed their truths through

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poetry, essays, and narratives – some were works in progress while others had been published through a university–community partnership.

"Night of Stories" was a celebration of a 14-month writing project that is an ongoing university–community partnership centering girls' voices. Writing is intricately connected with adolescents' voice and agency in such a way that can lead to transformative and empowering outcomes (Morrell, 2008). One of the safest spaces for the writing process to occur is within a community-based organization (CBO) where students feel seen, heard, and understood (Wong, 2010). CBOs for marginalized students particularly provide a counter-public space where the tension and power of agency and vulnerability can simultaneously live (Hill, 2011) within a culture of belonging and acceptance. Therefore, we explored this writing project by examining the intersections of writing agency, adolescent girls' voices, and the notion of vulnerability in resistance among the CORRAL Riding Academy girls' narratives and writing processes by examining the girls' narratives that explored intersections of identity, such as culture, race, and gender.

Our Perspectives

Writing and Storytelling as Naming and Healing. Because girls at CORRAL have experienced specific trauma in their lives and had worked with counseling professionals to identify and heal from trauma, we drew on theories that centered our participants' identities and experiences. We drew from Spear's (2014) "wounded healer pedagogy," arguing that writing is particularly powerful: "stories arise not only in efforts to remember the past but also in hopes of creating meaning, putting together the fragments, and reestablishing a sense of order" (Spear, 2014, p. 64). Storytelling and writing can allow individuals to "establish a new self with a (healing) purpose that transcends the trauma" (Spear, 2014, p. 66) and affords an opportunity for confronting, deconstructing, and reconstructing identities of self (Fine, Weis, Centrie, & Roberts, 2000).

Writing also provides an opportunity for creation by means of personal healing transformation (Spear, 2014). The notion of self is simultaneously understood and crafted, individually and collectively within one's community and through relationships. This process of formation involves not only creation, but continuous re-creation (Spear, 2014) in response to past experience, personal reflection, and deliberate action. To give voice to reality, individual and collective experiences and injustices are together named and critiqued (Ngo, Lewis, & Maloney, 2017). Naming and pushing back against personal and systemic injustices is particularly important for girls of diverse backgrounds, and a culture of belonging and acceptance enhances the opportunity for their authentic participation.

A theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), a view that social identities, such as gender, race, and social class, intersect as points of oppression, also informed our study. The lived experience of culturally and linguistically diverse girls often involves combating "humiliating public representations of their race,

ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality" by confronting, deconstructing, and reconstructing new identities of self and the imagined possibilities of the future self (Fine et al., 2000, p. 132). When positive perspectives of girlhood are represented in media, they are often centered on Western, white, Anglo, middle-class, suburban populations (Moscowitz & Carpenter, 2014). Girls not fitting this demographic "rarely are . . . given the opportunities to become active producers of cultural content" (Moscowitz & Carpenter, 2014, p. 28). Girls who experience multiple marginalizations contend with the greater complexity of intersectionality, and demonstrate how different aspects of identities and positionalities result in differentiated and multiple layers of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989), as they decipher when, how, and to what extent they ought to comply with and/or resist the dominant discourse and narrative around girlhood.

There are various factors that influence the determination of the way in which narratives are told. Spear (2014) establishes the role trauma plays in the telling of narratives as part of what she calls wounded healer pedagogy. Wounded healer pedagogy "involves all participants, teaches with compassion, and uses personal stories to yield communities, interconnectedness, and transformation" (Spear, 2014, p. 68). The telling and retelling of traumatic stories contributes to healing transformation and is part of the process of reestablishing a sense of self. The opportunity to share one's experience and name one's truth is crucial because trauma disrupts and/or alters a person's identity (Spear, 2014), ultimately resulting in a "self-shattering" (Gilmore, 2001 cited in Spear, 2014). Through the telling and retelling of one's traumatic experiences, one attempts to find and/or create meaning from the situation and in the course of meaning-making, healing transformation occurs.

In sharing a personal story and moving toward healing, it is important to recognize and name realities (Ngo et al., 2017). Naming of experiences, naming of oppressive forces, and even naming of self are crucial elements in the process. One space in which naming occurs is in the writing space. Writing, under the umbrella of critical literacies, pushes students to read the world as text to deconstruct and reconstruct it (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019); reconstruction can and does occur through wielding of the pen. Writing provides participants a platform to reflect upon, critique, name, create, and re-create ideas and images. It is through this process that transformation can occur, both individually and collectively, as inequitable practices and problematic perspectives are challenged through the written word.

Gender Theory and Vulnerability as Agency, Resistance, and Transformation

Vulnerability is required for honest evaluation in confronting personal and collective reality, Vulnerability is a state that denotes fragility and risk for harm from outside forces; the possibility of attack or harm suggests the need for external protection that can undermine strength in an individual (Butler, 2016). Gender

scholars like Butler (2011, 2016) who see gender as a performance, posited that vulnerability must be reconceptualized as a form of strength, one that can be leveraged for individual and collective agency and transformation (Gilson, 2011).

Troubling Vulnerability as Weakness

The conception of vulnerability as weakness is persistent, pervasive, and tied to specific groups. The label of vulnerability is frequently bestowed upon historically marginalized groups with less power. Butler (2016) noted that political discourse surrounding marginalized populations frequently relegates "the condition of vulnerability to those who suffer discrimination, exploitation, or violence" (p. 22). Due to traumatic experiences, youthfulness, and marginalization, women are frequently labeled as vulnerable. Gilson's (2011) analysis of the interconnectedness of vulnerability and oppression, demonstrated there is a troubling tendency to consider vulnerability as weakness, and those who are vulnerable as weak. Petherbridge's (2016) research on vulnerability noted that vulnerability has been unequally distributed throughout history and is associated more with "women, victimhood, passivity, or those who lack agency and are incapable of self-representation or political action" (p. 591). The notion that those who are vulnerable are thus incapable of self-representation and action furthers the concept of vulnerability as weakness by suggesting that vulnerable individuals and communities cannot act to save themselves.

Under Butler's revised conception of vulnerability as a social and political state, the perception of vulnerability as weakness suggests a troubling level of paternalism, and search for protection from a more powerful or established group and a need for safeguarding rather than independent or communal action; generally, those considered vulnerable are considered in need of protection by others, rather than having the power or agency to protect themselves (Butler, 2016). The dominant narrative of women, particularly women of color, as vulnerable and needing assistance supports a flawed discourse and undermines the concept of vulnerability as a neutral critical category. Petherbridge (2016) commented that vulnerability should be recharacterized by ambivalence "in the sense that it designates neither positive nor negative states of being or forms of relationality but contains the capacity for either or both" (p. 591). Reconceptualizing vulnerability as a more neutral space, one free from the pejorative connotations of weakness and victimhood, allows for women to reclaim a sense of self-empowerment and interconnectedness.

Vulnerability as Solidarity and Empowerment

Vulnerability within a network of solidarity and resistance can provide a space to destabilize institutional inequity for women and marginalized populations, fostering relationships between women and strengthening a reimagining of the self. While vulnerability has been associated both with weakness and a susceptibility

to harm, it can also be reframed as a "constitutive openness to the other" (Petherbridge, 2016, p. 590), or simply "a basic kind of openness" (Gilson, 2011). Openness provides an opportunity for creation and re-creation of the self in relation to power and prior experience. This form of vulnerability "refers to a psychological openness that affirms the individual and provides her with the capacity for a positive relation-to-self" (Petherbridge, 2016, p. 598), thereby reframing a traditionally deficit view of vulnerability into a more neutral state of transition and transformation (Gilson, 2011). To be vulnerable is to be open to considering oneself, one's community, and one's experience. There is precarity in this openness, but there is also space for growth and strength. Vulnerability has been identified as weakness, when in actuality it is a wellspring of resistance, agency, action, and power. We blend Butler's (2016) concepts of receptivity and responsiveness with Petherbridge's "constitutive openness to the other" (2016, p. 590), to define vulnerability as an openness to the examination of disempowering experience and building of communal relationships.

Resistance can constitute a physical, political act, but we argue and demonstrate that it can also be found in the opening of relationships garnered through writing. Relationships and relational openness can be a source of resistance; all action requires support, both infrastructural and relational, to support engagement (Butler, 2016). Writing provides an opportunity for recognition and a space to explore personal and linguistic vulnerability, understanding the sense of who one is and reinforcing one's ability to survive (Butler, 2016).

Through this framework of vulnerability as resistance and empowerment, we identify that writing in community spaces serves as a twofold tool: (1) writing provides a safe space for vulnerability, particularly among those who have experienced trauma, and (2) provides a transformative space for reclamation. In these ways, vulnerability becomes an effective mobilizing force that facilities the ability to learn from situations and re-recreate the self (Gilson, 2011; Spear, 2014). Using a more nuanced understanding of vulnerability provides girls with the opportunity and freedom to examine their past experiences and confront the transgressions they face.

Our Inquiry

This 14-month qualitative study was part of a larger longitudinal study on the Literacy and Community Initiative (LCI), a university–community partnership project that examined youths' voices, advocacy, and leadership in community organizations that work with culturally and linguistically diverse youth. LCI's mission is to amplify youths' voices through their publication, advocacy, and leadership. This project is built upon university–community relationships and connections among four community-based organizations, but for this chapter, we focus on the ongoing partnership with CORRAL Riding Academy. All participants' names are pseudonyms.

In 2019, Crystal Chen Lee, the Primary Investigator of LCI, first established the partnership with CORRAL with a cohort of 12 adolescent girls. In collaboration with CBO staff, she and the research team designed a publishing curriculum that aligned with the organization's values and aimed to include the students in all facets of the writing process. With the guidance of Crystal, various LCI team members taught the LCI curriculum at CORRAL Riding Academy over the course of 14 months. Kelsey, Laura, Jen, and Caitlin have all been graduate research assistants with LCI and have been involved in the teaching and research of the CORRAL writing project. As female educators committed to educational equity, we approached our work as learners who listen and hear the experiences of our participants. Through a critical literacy framework, a framework that imagines ways of examining and reconstructing inequitable systems (Vasquez et al., 2019), the curriculum explored the girls' lived experiences, specifically on naming past, present, and future reality, and exploring their identities as girls. In analyzing this study, we asked, "How does the act of vulnerability support opportunities for healing and self-exploration through writing?"

Participants and Context. CORRAL Riding Academy is "a faith-motivated nonprofit that prepares adolescent girls in high-risk situations with skills, resources, and opportunities so they can gain access to brighter futures" (CORRAL, 2020, para 1). They do this through a long-term, holistic program of equine therapy and education that focuses on three pillars: horse therapy, academic support, and mentorship. Using equine-assisted psychotherapy, they address issues of adverse childhood experiences and work to support improved mental health through relationship building between horses and the girls (Craig, 2020). Girls at CORRAL are referred by schools and social services and have been identified as having experienced trauma or abuse prior to entering the program. In addition to counseling services, the girls also receive tutoring, vocational training, and mentoring through a formal mentoring program. As an organization, CORRAL has made a commitment to meet the needs of culturally diverse students while also informing the community of marginalized youths' needs through hosting webinars, community discussions, and events that center on educational equity.

The study occurred from September 2019-December 2020. Due to the nature of the organization's recruitment and intake process, the number of participants increased over the course of the project. From September 2019 to August 2020, 12 girls participated in the writing project program and had self-published a student-authored book with LCI entitled *A Leg Up*, which was made available on Amazon.com for the community to purchase at an affordable price. Between September 2020 and December 2020, four more girls joined the program and increased our participant number to a total of 16 girls. The girls' ages ranged from 11 to 18 years old. Eight girls identified as white; five girls identified as Black; one identified as Pacific Islander/Asian; and one identified as multiracial.

Data Collection. Our data sources included observations, a focus group with participants, audience questionnaires, the girls' published book of narratives, and

the girls' in-process writing that explored intersections of identity, such as culture, race, and gender. Participant observations focused on the writing lessons and process at the CORRAL community-based site and community events, such as the "Night of Stories" reading. Researchers who were participating in the observation and teaching wrote and transcribed memos after each meeting.

Documents we collected included the students' in-process writing and their published book, *A Leg Up*, which included poetry, essays, and narratives. The girls' latest writing also explored what it means to be a girl. These pieces included love letters to self, short fiction pieces exploring formative memories, critical lists of lessons learned and those needing to be unlearned, blackout poetry (a form of poetry that redacts phrases, words, and letters to construct a new poem) constructed in CORRAL from influential women's speeches and other reflective forms of writing. In addition to these data, we conducted a 90-minute focus group with participants from the first cohort of 12 girls. We asked questions about their writing processes and the impact of their writing on their self-esteem.

Finally, audience members who heard the girls' writing spoken and read out loud at the "Night of Stories" answered questionnaires in response to the girls' work. The questionnaire included questions such as "What is something you learned about the event? What will you do with that knowledge?" and "What is something you would like to tell the girls?" Such questions were used to evaluate the impact of the girls' writing on the community and the audience responses to the girls' words.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an iterative process of inductive and deductive coding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). First, we coded the data across data sources and found keywords that became codes, such as "community," "healing," "trust," "accountability," support," and "relationships." We also then deductively coded the data by examining illustrations of our theoretical principles, such as "vulnerability as strength" from our theoretical frameworks. We then collapsed our codes into focus codes, such as "relationships and community" and "identity and self," and developed these focus codes into two themes: (1) restorative vulnerability and (2) reciprocal vulnerability. These two themes were used to develop our findings on how the act of writing as rooted in vulnerability opened opportunities for healing and self-exploration.

Vulnerabilities

Our findings showed that vulnerability can serve as a vehicle for resistance and agency to empower identity exploration through restorative and reciprocal vulnerability. We found that girls enacted (1) restorative vulnerability when naming,

identifying, and acknowledging the self; and enacted (2) reciprocal vulnerability when participating in relational healing.

Restorative Vulnerability: Naming, Identifying, and Acknowledging the Self

We saw that restorative vulnerability was made visible through the girls' process of naming, identifying, and acknowledging the self in their writing and actions. We define restorative vulnerability as vulnerability rooted in self-healing. Through writing and sharing their stories, the girls were able to create possibilities to name the self. For example, Ja'leaha, a 12-year-old Black girl, acknowledged this concept through reflective questions in her writing in her blackout poem:

> We wanted to make our parents proud
> Our beautiful dreams turned into nightmares
> When my world suddenly changed, my priorities changed too.
> I decided to speak up.
> It is the story of many girls.

In this poem, Ja'leaha identified the pressures and tensions of girls dreaming for others rather than for themselves. She expressed a turning point where she learned to speak up, relating her experiences to "the story of many girls," who may have their dreams deferred or unrecognized, until they learn to emphasize themselves. Self-advocacy through writing afforded Ja'leaha and her peers the opportunity to inspire others to dream and to speak up. Other researchers have noted that it is especially important to seek opportunities for Black girls in America to dream, future make, and inspire through writing and other literacies as they push back against multiple oppressions experienced through both raced and gendered marginalizations (Turner & Griffin, 2020).

We saw similar instances of self-identification, power, and healing represented in the act of sharing the girls' written words. These forces were demonstrated in Gracie's blackout poem. Gracie, an 18-year-old white girl, blacked out words from U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's speech (C-SPAN, 2020) in response to Representative Ted Yoho's verbal attack against her in July of 2020 that is available on YouTube (https://youtu.be/LI4ueUtkRQ0).

In an act of restorative vulnerability, Gracie chose to read this blackout poem at the "Night of Stories" to speak her truth, thus aligning with the genre of blackout poetry in taking the words of powerful pieces and transforming them into one's own powerful poem through a process of redesigning and reconstruction. Figure 7.1 shows Gracie's blackout poem.

Gracie's poem relays not only immense trauma and pain but also simultaneous vulnerability and strength. It is important to note that Gracie's blackout poem drew upon Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's speech that was

Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's speech:

My father, thankfully, is not alive to see how Mr. Yoho treated his daughter. My mother got to see Mr. Yoho's disrespect on the floor of this house towards me on television, and I am here because I have to show my parents that I am their daughter and that they did not raise me to accept abuse from men.

Now, what I am here to say is that this harm that Mr. Yoho levied, tried to levy against me, was not just an incident directed at me, but when you do that to any woman, what Mr. Yoho did was give permission to other men to do that to his daughters.

He — in using that language, in front of the press, he gave permission to use that language against his wife, his daughters, women in his community, and I am here to stand up to say that is not acceptable.

I do not care what your views are. It does not matter how much I disagree or how much it incenses me or how much I feel that people are dehumanizing others.

I will not do that myself. I will not allow people to change and create hatred in our hearts.

And so, what I believe is that having a daughter does not make a man decent. Having a wife does not make a decent man. Treating people with dignity and respect makes a decent man. And when a decent man messes up, as we all are bound to do, he tries his best and does apologize. Not to save face, not to win a vote. He apologizes genuinely to repair and acknowledge the harm done so that we can all move on.

Lastly, what I want to express to Mr. Yoho is gratitude. I want to thank him for showing the world that you can be a powerful man and accost women. You can have daughters and accost women without remorse. You can be married and accost women. You can take photos and project an image to the world of being a family man and accost women without remorse and with a sense of impunity. It happens every day in this country. It happened here on the steps of our nation's Capitol. It happens when individuals who hold the highest office in this land admit, admit to hurting women, and using this language against all of us.

FIGURE 7.1 Gracie's Blackout Poem

intended to illustrate the sexism in the United States Congress and throughout the country. By using Congresswoman Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez's words, Gracie also described the violence done against women, but did so through a personal act of vulnerability. Through her writing, Gracie named the domestic abuse, abuser, and the violence she experienced at home.

In the same manner in which Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's speech created space within Congress for her, as a woman of color, to address inequities in some of the highest offices, committed and perpetuated by white men, Gracie's poem also created space to explore, address, and vocalize her own trauma experienced by a white man within her world. Both women named and acknowledged the inequity and sexism in their worlds, both publicly named

the offender, and both refuted injustices by reclaiming themselves. In analyzing Gracie's poem, we saw that the act of writing rooted in vulnerability offered opportunities to reclaim and restore power to oneself and for a community of women.

Yet, reclaiming and restoring was never easy, and we identified tensions in exploring the act of writing rooted in vulnerability. As we collected data, we also revised our teaching methods as participant-observers who were sensitive to the girls' needs. For example, we recorded in research memos that "identifying a place" from their past may be "triggering experience" for some girls who have been misplaced. Therefore, we would revise writing lessons and modify prompts that best fit the girls' emotional needs. An example of us listening to the girls' needs was when we read Autumn's email communication to our team. In the email, Autumn, a 16-year-old white girl, expressed the tension among writing, expression, and recognition:

> I would like to let you know this writing is out of my comfort zone a little bit which is okay, if you're asking me to write about my past it's going to be a challenge for me and going to need some support, I have my own poems and stuff I wrote or changed some poems and made them my own, there really personal to me and I would love for people to see it and everyone knows what I have overcome and stuff but there is also the part where it's personal and I'm not a big fan of bringing it up again.

In this reflection, Autumn grappled with writing as an act of vulnerability. While writing requires support and is incredibly personal, it is also shareable, communal, and allows an opportunity to permit others to see an authentic version of the author. As Autumn emphasized, this is difficult, especially when writing explores personal trauma and tragedy. We listened to Autumn, acknowledged those tensions, and ensured that her writing was rooted in an act of vulnerability that was restorative.

By welcoming this open communication, we found that restorative vulnerability was not only seen in the girls' writing but also was expressed by the girls in other ways. For example, at "Night of Stories," Deja, a 16-year-old Black girl, remarked how sharing her vulnerabilities helped her to be more emotionally healthy, saying, "I wanted to [share my writing] because I need to say how I feel. I tend to keep my emotions in and then explode. I've learned not to keep things in because keeping them in is just not healthy." Similarly, Ja'leaha, a 12-year-old Black girl, shared the importance of two-way flowing communication that began in writing rooted in restorative vulnerability when she said,

> And when we come to talk to you it is really such a big deal because they minimize so much mental health and so many things in today's society and in today's world. So, when we come talk to you, please open up.

These examples are illustrative of how Black girls have used writing to make sense of their identities for their personal development and to author their lives (Muhammed & Womack, 2015).

As Black adolescent girls who both shared about their mental health journeys, Deja and Ja'leaha demonstrated how writing about their identity formation is important to present ideals of self that authentically represent Black girlhood. Speaking against "false and incomplete images" of Black girlhood that portray Black girlhood as "angry, loud, and violent" (Muhammad & MacArthur, 2015, p. 133), Deja and Ja'leaha, like the Black girls in Muhammad and McArthur's (2015) study, wrote against such portrayals, spoke of their experiences, and positioned their vulnerability as strength.

This restorative vulnerability in writing was also demonstrated in white girls' perspectives, as well. Meadow's claim that, "Most teens, especially girls, need to be reminded that they can do what they set their minds to. In my life I didn't really grow up with confidence, so now I try to tell myself as much as I can that I'm loved and I deserve the world" illustrated this restorative vulnerability. Similarly, at the end of her speech at "Night of Stories," Gracie expressed: "Now I'm excited for the future because I actually have one, and I now see myself doing things I never could before." Both Gracie and Deja, a Black girl, expressed their college plans, and Riley, a white girl, shared her goals of writing a book about the foster care system to help others going through the same journey she did. Through their expressions like these, we saw that the girls named and identified their pasts while also looking ahead, planning, and identifying their possibilities for the future. Together, the girls strove to understand one another's experiences as they united in their dreams for brighter tomorrows.

Reciprocal Vulnerability: Rooted in Relational Healing

We also identified reciprocal vulnerability, the girls' intentional efforts to be vulnerable with one another. In writing and sharing their stories, they articulated how they experienced relational healing, the ability to build and develop relationships. This reciprocity is particularly significant because of CORRAL's intentional equine therapy and programmatic activities that are used to foster relational healing. Many of the girls came to CORRAL with anger and disappointment due to their past traumatic experiences and voiced that they had difficulty developing relationships because of former broken ones. CORRAL's mission is to provide a space and opportunity for girls to experience self-healing among peers who could understand one another. Because of the safety and support that CORRAL provided, girls articulated that they learned how to build interpersonal relationships within this community.

We also identified that girls found this relational healing through writing rooted in reciprocal vulnerability. In their writing, they often were able to write and discuss how CORRAL had helped them in their relational healing. For

example, Nina wrote, "CORRAL taught me how to like trust people and how to be ok with people, and then it taught me to like make friends."

We saw that reciprocal vulnerability was sustained beyond the CORRAL community. While the girls initially composed their pieces as a practice for healing, they also recognized the influence the publication of their stories had on their community and beyond. In a focus group conducted after the book had been published, the girls were asked, "How do you think your stories will impact other people?" Nina, an 18-year-old white girl who had been through orphanages and foster care during her childhood, responded that their writing showed "that everybody has trouble going through stuff." The girls also agreed that their ability to be vulnerable could inspire and encourage others to write and share their own stories. When asked to describe their book, *A Leg Up*, in one word, the group agreed upon the words, "powerful," "relatable," and "should be shared." The girls demonstrated relational healing when they publicly shared their stories. Girls shared their writing and were publicly vulnerable in an act of power and courage, naming past traumas to demonstrate how they were healing from prior relationships.

These girls' writings impacted many beyond their own CORRAL community. After the "Night of Stories" public reading, the audience shared their reactions to the event, recognizing the girls' courage, calling their stories "powerful," "original," and "honest." When asked what they were surprised by during the event, one audience member expressed: "I was surprised by their willingness to be vulnerable, which actually shows the strength they have!" Another stated, "I was surprised by the depth of understanding the young women had regarding the systems they are in and the injustices those systems perpetuate, even if unintentionally." Moved by the vulnerability displayed, an audience member credited the girls for rekindling her own enthusiasm for writing: "By sharing their feelings and passions through writing, they reminded me that I haven't been following my own passion: writing! I fail to make the time. They've motivated me to get back to it!" Ultimately, participating in the writing program not only afforded the girls a place for healing, but an opportunity to teach and inspire others to be courageous in their own vulnerability.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

The study provides insight into how writing rooted in vulnerability is a form of courage for girls, and especially for Black girls who seek to establish selfhood among stereotypical public perceptions that do not always offer varied representations (Muhammad & Womack, 2015). This study has implications for how literacy educators can foster healing and self-exploration by framing vulnerability as a strength in writing activities. In working with the girls of multiple races from CORRAL Riding Academy, we saw that writing rooted in vulnerability led to

self-healing and relational healing. Educators can encourage this self-expression in classrooms by writing activities that lead to restorative potential. Poetry and creative narrative can prompt girls' ability to write about their past, present, and future journeys through voicing their vulnerabilities. Educators can also use culturally relevant texts that open doors for students to relate to others' lived experiences, particularly for girls of color.

The study also advances research on how community-based organizations (CBOs) can foster vulnerability that is not harmful but is rooted in healing. CORRAL staff and our project co-teachers encouraged acts of self-exploration through creative projects. CBOs can create powerful spaces that schools may not be able to offer (Wong, 2010). University–community partnerships can be mutually beneficial to one another in learning how to use trauma-informed education to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma.

This research also has implications for examining feminist notions of vulnerability among adolescent girls. Educators and community members can push against the concept of vulnerability as weakness and provide opportunities for girls to tell their authentic stories. By providing a safe space for self-expression, teachers and those working with girls in out-of-school programs can foster the notion of vulnerability as strength. Through countering dominant narratives, girls, particularly girls of color, can seize the transformative power of the word (Ngo et al., 2017). In doing so, it is our hope that community members can adopt Hope's words to the CORRAL girls at the "Night of Stories": "Your message was heard."

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8

REREADING FATHERS BEHIND BARS

Children's Literacy Assistance Practices of Incarcerated African American, Native American, Hispanic, and White Fathers

Theodore S. Ransaw and Tyler Thur

Ninety-three percent of federally incarcerated people are men (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2020). Although the gap is closing, there are still more Black men who are incarcerated than white or Hispanic men (Pew Research Center, 2019). For example, in 2018, there were 2,272 Black male inmates, 1,018 Hispanic inmates, and 392 white male inmates per 100,000 in the U.S. (Granlich, 2020). That means that there are a substantial number of fathers of all races in prisons that have children growing up without a father. In fact, 2.7 million children born in the U.S. have a parent behind bars, and more than five million children have had a parent incarcerated at some point in their lives (Prison Fellowship, 2020).

Children who do not have access to their fathers because of incarceration are a dilemma because children who grow up without a father often have additional negative life outcomes. In fact, the impact of parental incarceration on a child is so severe that it is recognized as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) (Felitti et al., 1998). The significance of ACEs is startling since the number of children who have fathers in prison has grown by 79% since 1991 (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). Fatherless children are at risk from numerous obstacles in life, including a decreased likelihood of having a successful life, an increased chance of drug addiction, and an increased likelihood of underachievement in school (Brown, 2021; Rampey et al., 2016).

What is even more alarming is that children of incarcerated parents are six times more likely to be incarcerated (Martin, 2017). A missing father in a child's life has negative educational and literacy outcomes since fathers positively contribute to early language development separately and independently of a mother (Pancsofar & Vermon-Feagans, 2010). A father's engagement with his children in homework assistance, reading, and story time can complement the mother's

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involvement in developing their children's reading and writing skills (Palkovitz, 2002).

Positive forms of fathers' involvement include participating in child-related activities, engaging in multiple forms of practices, and developing a positive father-child relationship (Adamson & Johnson, 2013). Fathers' involvement includes direct interaction (or engagement) with the child in the context of caretaking, play, or leisure, accessibility (or availability), being physically or psychologically available to the child; responsibility, assuming responsibility for the child's welfare and care, including organizing and planning his/her life (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). This model has been and is presently the most widely accepted definition of fathers' involvement, as it focuses on a father's feelings about fatherhood and society's perceptions of masculinity (Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

Background

There are 1.5 million children who have an incarcerated father in federal prisons (Couloute, 2017). Children of incarcerated parents and their life outcomes are a growing concern in the United States. Children who grow up in fatherless homes have adverse educational outcomes, including a four times greater risk of living in poverty; being more likely to have behavioral problems; being more likely to abuse alcohol; being twice as likely to drop out of high school; being more likely to commit a crime; and being more likely to go to jail (Pascoe, Wood, Duffee, & Kuo, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Consequently, fathers who are incarcerated have children who are less likely to achieve in school (Shlafer, Reedy, & Davis, 2017).

Additionally, fathers who are incarcerated have a lower level of educational achievement than do other fathers. Less than 35% of incarcerated fathers have a high school diploma or GED and less than 6% of formally incarcerated men have a college degree (United States Census, 2019). In 2015, 75% of state inmates and 59% of adult federal inmates did not complete high school (Michon, 2016). Many incarcerated fathers are adult inmates who typically have lower literacy rates (Rampey et al., 2016).

Why is literacy so important? According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011), students who do not read well in the third grade are more likely to drop out of school. Literacy is so interrelated to crime, many states use low third and fourth-grade reading scores to determine and predict how many prisons to build (Trivani, 2009; A.B. 4822, 2016). Michon (2016) posits that lack of exposure to literacy practices is a key indicator why some children fail in school. On the other hand, fathers who model being an engaged reader are a good predictor of a child's interest in reading (Ransaw, 2017).

A father's involvement in his child's early literacy development is important. Reading picture books and using new vocabulary has been found to be related to children's advanced language development as evidenced at 15 and 36 months old

(Pancsofar & Vermon-Feagans, 2010). In fact, a father's attempts to foster his children's early language abilities can positively influence his children's verbal development and IQ (Clark, 2009). Research also suggests that time spent by fathers reading to very young children is consistently associated with their early literacy outcomes and greater interest in reading books in their later years (Clark, 2009).

One reason why a fathers' engagement in literacy practices increases their children's literacy involvement is because of the natural approach it constitutes in connecting with children (Ransaw, 2017). For example, rough and tumble play (a characteristic that is more typical of a father's 'masculine' involvement) positively influences children's cognitive, emotional, and language development by appropriately stimulating play within a supportive relationship (Roggrman, 2004).

Our Purpose

The purpose of our study was to understand the childhood schooling experiences of incarcerated fathers before their incarceration, particularly fathers of color, and to lend insight into how fathers engaged in literacy practices with their children after their incarceration. For the purpose of this study, literacy was defined as a continuum of reading and writing skills and abilities and can include basic arithmetic skills (UNESCO, 2000).

Our Perspectives

Connell's research on masculinity is one of the most cited, discussed, and influential theories of our time (Wedgwood, 2009). Connell originally started researching class structure and education inequities, two issues specifically pertinent to fathers. For example, in Western educational systems, sports activities exemplify masculinity in terms of a gendered or stereotypical hierarchy of masculine behaviors (Connell, 2005). Current social conditions and power structures are based on patriarchal norms that represent the desired ideals of a small and select group of men (Connell, 1995, 2005). Connell's theory of masculinity is sometimes referred to as hegemonic masculinity, a practice of legitimizing men's dominant position in society and the subordination of women; her ideas pertain to both hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity. In this respect, fathers are not a homogenous group and have diverse aspects of identity that influenced and in turn and are influenced by the experience and practice of fathering (Williams & Kelly, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity is a practice that is constantly being recreated under changing conditions, including resistance to subordinate groups. Consequently, working class and ethnic minority men, two groups historically affected by incarceration, find that definitions of being a good father based on being a provider are inadequate and are not inclusive of their realities. For Latino men, masculinity is stereotypically associated with being a provider and a protector (Opazo, 2008); Saez, Casado, & Wade, 2010). Black men are stereotypically associated

with hypermasculinity, aggression, coldness and irresponsibility (Kirkland, 2013; Ransaw, 2013). Understanding the relationship incarcerated fathers have with parenting and schooling before their incarceration may help to clear up misconceptions about the relationship between a father's schooling, incarceration, and literacy support of his children, particularly for men of color who are often depicted as irresponsible men and uninvolved fathers (Ransaw, 2013).

Our Approach

Study Design and Data Collection

We used a pragmatic mixed-method research design for our study of fathers in a mid-American prison. Pragmatism is a method that capitalizes on practical approaches that can adapted to conduct research in prisons (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Our mixed methods design incorporated a phenomenological component. Van Manen (1997) described phenomenological research as a process that yields a rich or dense description of a phenomenon in a specific context. Phenomenological research designs typically consist of interviews with up to ten participants when the aim is to understand the essence of a phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Hein & Austin, 2001). This qualitative component of our study was included since qualitative studies allow for the analysis of social productions, practices, and perspectives of small sets of participants more so than the large data sets collected in quantitative research (Flick, 2014).

The qualitative data consisted of an interview and a focus group based on fathering involvement that also included questions regarding homework assistance. Fathering involvement questions focused on three elements of fathering: (1) direct interaction (or engagement) with the child in the context of caretaking, play, or leisure; (2) accessibility (or availability), being physically and/or psychologically available to the child; and (3) responsibility, assuming responsibility for the child's welfare and care, including organizing and planning his/her life (Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 1999). Interviews did not begin until each of the participants had signed their consent forms.

The quantitative component of the study consisted of a survey. We used a questionnaire to collect demographic data and data related to the fathers' homework assistance and literacy practices. At the start of the questionnaire administration and subsequent interviews, our study's procedures were clearly outlined, including mentioning a follow-up meeting where participants would have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews to check for accuracy, make corrections, or engage in 'member checking' at the end of the study (Merriam, 1998). Member checking is a "way of finding out whether the data analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92); it is best conducted when the interpreted pieces are presented as

themes and patterns that emerge from the data and not just from transcripts alone (Creswell, 2009).

The Research Process

Selecting and Recruiting Participants

After two full Institutional Review Board (IRB) meetings, the State Department of Corrections (SDOC) was contacted for permission to conduct a fatherhood study. The SDOC reviewed the IRB proposal and approved it. A Memorandum of Understanding, MOU, was approved by the university IRB and the SDOC. The sample was recruited from a level IV prison. Although level IV correctional facilities may house inmates who have committed violent crimes, level IV correctional facilities typically do not house inmates that require maximum security accommodations for the extremely violent, chronic offenders or prisoners sentenced for life. Hence, the inmate participants in this study may represent unique perspectives of fathers behind bars. A fictional name was suggested for the prison, the Mid-American Correctional Facility (MACF), and the researcher was given a MACF contact person. With the help of an IRB and SDOC approved recruitment flier, the MACF contact person assisted in recruiting inmate fathers for the survey, interview, and focus group, as well as in scheduling and finding a place/space for the study in the facility. A flier announcing the study assisted us in recruiting incarcerated men between the ages of 18 and 52 who were the fathers of at least one biological or nonbiological child. There were no incentives to participate.

Obstacles to the Study

We did experience some obstacles in conducting research with men in prison. The first obstacle was that electronic devices were not allowed; therefore, the interviews were unable to be recorded and transcribed. We compensated for this by taking notes during the interviews. While the interviewed fathers were able to look over the interviewer's notes, there was little time for participants to reflect and make substantive additions. Since there are many prison program attendance requirements, unscheduled visits with attorneys and family members, as well as prison transfers while incarcerated, there was no guarantee that inmates would be available on a return visit. In addition, mail service behind bars is typically subject to a month-long quarantine and communication is sporadic even when inmates are eligible to receive and send mail. Keeping track of paroled or released prisoners is also difficult since the interviewers were not allowed to take personal information, such as an address for follow up contact or longitudinal research.

Participants and Participant Confidentiality

Eighty fathers participated in the study. Forty-four of the incarcerated fathers identified as white, 20 identified as Black or African American, four identified as Hispanic or Latino, three identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, eight identified as two or more races, and one participant's race was not known. Thirty-five of the participants were between 34 and 42 years old; 21 were between 26 and 33; 17 were between 43 and 51; five were 52 or older, and one was between 18 and 25. Participants for the interviews as well as the focus group were selected from the survey participants.

The participants were told that their participation was voluntary and that refusal to participate in the survey, interview, or focus group would not prevent them from receiving any benefits they were entitled to receive. Participants were also told that they could end their participation at any time. The incarcerated fathers were also told that were no anticipated risks in participating in this research other than possible mild discomfort in addressing issues of difficult parenting strategies from behind bars or from exploring experiences that may have affected their academic success in school. Participants were also told that the risk of confidentiality was small because the researcher would not record inmate names, numbers, or direct identifiers. The incarcerated fathers were also told that their confidentiality would be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Each interview participant also was given a code number and, later, a pseudonym.

The participants were told that only the primary interviewer and the university's Human Research Protection Program would have access to identifying information and that data would be stored in a locked file cabinet and kept for at least three years after the project closed. The inmate participants were informed that their confidentiality would be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law and each participant was given a code number and, later, a pseudonym.

The survey took an average length of time of 20 minutes to complete. The total average length of time for the interviews was one-hour, with an average of 30 minutes spent on the open-ended questions and fifteen minutes spent on the photo reflection questions. The focus group was approximately two hours long. Audio recording equipment was not allowed in the MACF facility. Consequently, the interviews were subjected to member checks at the end of the study.

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Data Analysis

Survey

Survey data from the questionnaire were analyzed both in terms of how incarcerated fathers experienced parenting generally and fathering responsibilities tied to their children's education before they were imprisoned. While statistically relating past experiences to current parenting practices is beyond the scope of this paper, summarizing how participants conceptualize parenting and have experienced fathering is still valuable to better understand the sample of fathers engaged in the survey. Instead, we used descriptive statistics and frequencies reported as percentages.

Interviews and Focus Group

Interview and focus group data were coded using a hermeneutic phenomenology analysis. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) describe phenomenology analysis as a process that includes emersion, understanding, abstraction, synthesis and themes development, illumination, integration, and critique of findings within the research and out. These data were coded and analyzed for reoccurring themes across the interviews and focus groups.

Parenting Behaviors of Incarcerated Fathers

Our findings include information about when the participants first became fathers, their relationship to the mother of their child or children, whether they experienced a father figure growing up, and whether they had a mother figure when they were younger. In general, most fathers surveyed first became a father between the ages of 20 and 23 (34%), 16 and 19 (28%), or 23 and 26 (18%). Of these respondents, most individuals lived with the mother of their child or children for at least one year (69%). That said, 18% of participants never lived with their significant other. This category was the second most frequently reported one for the question. It is also worth noting that more participants had experiences with mother figures growing up than with father figures. At least 36% of the incarcerated fathers surveyed had no father or father figure in their life when they were younger. On the other hand, only 4% had no mother or mother figure in their life when they were growing up.

We also asked respondents to consider how often they participated in changing diapers, feeding, or taking their child(ren) to school per week before incarceration. Most respondents (58%) selected the highest frequency category of 16 or more times per week. Only 5% of respondents reported never participating in these activities. We also asked how many hours per year fathers spent going to school visits or parent-teacher conferences and how many hours per week fathers

spent attending school board or Parent Teacher Association (PTA), and/or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings before incarceration. Responses to these two questions indicated lower levels of engagement. Sixty-four participants responded that they spent less than three hours per year attending school visits or conferences, and 84% commented that they spent less than three hours per week engaging various school organizations. Eighteen percent of respondents indicated that they spent 12 or more hours participating in school visits and conferences per year, and 10% of the fathers surveyed estimated that they spent between four and seven hours per week engaging groups like their school board, PTA, or PTO.

The most frequently selected range of time fathers spent helping their child(ren) for each of the subjects and activities asked about was between zero and three hours per week. This option was selected 41% of the time for helping with sports activities; 48% of the time helping with other school activities such as PTO/PTA meeting; 51% of the time assisting with reading; 61% of the time helping with mathematics; 63% of the time assisting with English; 66% of the time helping with science; and 75% of the time assisting with social studies. While very few respondents estimated spending 12 or more hours per week assisting their children in any of these subjects or activities. Eleven percent of fathers surveyed estimated they spent this amount of time per week helping with sports. Also, 11% of the fathers in this study reported that they enjoyed reading to their children.

The Fathers' Schooling

To begin the process of understanding why incarcerated fathers might have been engaged with their children in certain subjects, respondents were asked about their experiences with schooling when they were growing up. Most participants attended schools in an urban setting. Their strongest subjects were mathematics (26%), science (23%), reading (11%), and English (10%). Interestingly, three of these subjects (math, English, and science) were also reported as participants' weakest subjects. This finding indicates significant heterogeneity in participants' academic performance. A similar split existed when participants were asked when they were the most and least engaged in school. The 13 to 16 age group was both the second most frequently selected response for when respondents were the most engaged in school (29%) and the most often chosen answer for when participants were the least engaged (45%).

Profiles of the Fathers: Vignettes

The purpose of the following vignettes describing four of the fathers who participated in the focus group component of our study adds context and descriptive information about the incarcerated fathers in our sample. Their responses inform the participants' K–12 experiences that impacted or did not impact their

interactions with the prison system. These vignettes also add the kind of nuance or complexity to our findings that is typically not found in quantitative research that is not supplemented by qualitative methods, such as the interviews and focus groups that informed our study of these men and their lives.

Doerner

Doerner identified as Black. At the time he was 27, having earned around $60,0000 a year before incarceration. Doerner had seven biological children, two who were five years old; one who was four years old; three who were three years old; and he had a one-year old child. Although he belonged to a gang, Doerner did not have any behavioral or academic problems in school. He was given a car by the older gang members for getting good grades and encouraged to go to school to become an attorney for the gang. Doerner had not participated with homework assistance or literacy activities with his children before his incarceration, but he read to his daughter over the phone while incarcerated. Doerner's case illustrates that men like Doerner show how a Black man can defy hegemonic notions of masculinity that are constructed around opposition to stereotypically feminine behaviors and roles (Weaver-Hightower, 2003), such as engaging in literacy practices with his children.

Raven

Raven identified as white. He was 40 years old. He had earned about $25,000 a year before his incarceration. Raven had six children, five of which were his biological children. The oldest was 24 years old; the others were 13, 10, and eight; he had two children that were one-year old. Raven had problems in school during fifth grade because he had no educational support at home. Raven had enjoyed mathematics and school in general, but he did not mention a topic he struggled with the most. Found it difficult to focus because of his unstable and chaotic home life and inattentive parents. Raven picked up his children from school and helped with homework assistance and literacy practices about 40% of the time before his incarceration. Also, before his incarceration he focused on helping his children with alliteration in their speaking and punctuation in their writing. Raven also read to his children at least an hour a night but spent more time helping them with their mathematics homework before his incarceration.

Meranti

Meranti identified as white. He was 36 years old. He had earned about $50,000 a year before he was incarcerated. Meranati had three biological children, ages 14, six, and five. Meranti started having difficulty in school during tenth grade for non-school-related reasons. He stated that his life outside of school made it

dangerous for him to travel to and from school, as well as to attend school and did not elaborate. One of Meranati's children had special needs so he had hired a special needs teacher. Meranti had helped his children with their homework assistance or literacy practices about 30% of the time before he was incarcerated. Meranti also said that he read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* books to his children before his incarceration. Meranti's report of his reading aloud to his children, a practice that is typically associated with mothers, reminds us that masculinity is an identity performance that can be fluid and be contextually dependent (Bean & Harper, 2007).

Nehemiah

Nehemiah identified as half Native American and half white. He was 45 years old. Nehemiah made about $35,000 a year before he was incarcerated. He had two biological children, ages 27 and 13. Nehemiah got into trouble at school when he started drinking at 13. Nehemiah and his wife did not have custody of their children and Nehemiah had no contact with his children before his incarceration. Consequently, he did not help by providing his children with homework assistance or their literacy practices during that time. Nehemiah did, however help his son with reading and writing about one hour a day while he was incarcerated. Nehemiah's report of his parenting practices while incarcerated is consistent with the research on Native Americans' fathers that found Native American definition of being a good father included spending quality time and believing that reading to their children was important to their children's emotional stability (Shears, Buber, & Hall, 2011).

Our Reflections

Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005) was a fitting theoretical perspective for this study because the theory provided insight into how these incarcerated men were alike, as well as different in their enactment of masculinity and fathering. For example, it was surprising that out of the 80 incarcerated fathers that participated in this study, some found math (26%), science (23%), reading (11%), and English (10%) to be their strongest subjects in school while other fathers found math (27%), English (12%), and science (11%) as their weakest subjects in school. Also, surprising was the fact that the 13 to 16 age group, was the simultaneously the *most* engaged (29%) and the *least* engaged (45%) school age time of involvement in school for the incarcerated fathers in this study. Only 36% of the incarcerated fathers in our study grew up without a father in the home and 69% of the fathers had lived with the mother of their child or children for at least one year before they were incarcerated. The fathers in this study who did not read to their children before incarceration did read to them while they were behind bars for their own personal motivation. This finding is consistent with research asserting

that maintaining strong connections with their children while behind bars helps incarcerated fathers cope with prison (Block et al., 2014).

Clearly, this study dispels assumptions about incarcerated fathers' experience in urban schools as being a negative one; refutes misconceptions about imprisoned men not having a father figure while growing up; and refutes stereotypes of fathers being disengaged from their children before and after incarceration.

The findings in this study are important because the results call into question stereotypical assumptions, particularly those about incarcerated father of color, and their literacy achievement and practices. Our findings challenge preconceived notions that all fathers behind bars are alike in their educational backgrounds and involvement in their children's literacy development and practice. This study has challenged stereotypical ideas that incarcerated fathers have had negative experiences in school, particularly with literacy, before their incarceration, and that fathers behind bars do not engage in literacy practices with their children after incarceration. This study points to the need to reread these false assumptions.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Findings from this study have implications for those working in adult literacy and family literacy programs. First, this study has challenged the common assumption that a low literacy rate is characteristic of incarcerated populations, particularly men and men of color (Rampey et al., 2016). Second, this study has revealed the kinds of literacy practices that incarcerated fathers, including fathers of color, engage in with their children given the number of men who reported they enjoyed reading and school and read to their children. These findings may be surprising to some who have a deficit view of prisoners' educational attainment and literacy engagement and may assist in shifting that deficit view to an additive one. Having proficiency and love for reading may not always mean that someone is literate, but a more nuanced understanding of literacy practices and proficiencies among those who are incarcerated has the potential to inform the field of literacy education with implications for designing literacy programs for millions of fathers around the world and their children.

This study also has implications for gender studies and interdisciplinary fields. Findings from this study have dispelled stereotypical notions of incarcerated men of color, as tough, cold, and distant from their children, responding to the call for studying how cultural notions of masculinity relate to men's everyday practices of parenting and literacy (Gottzen, 2011). Prior research has suggested that Black men suffer from disparaging depictions of them as both men and as fathers (Ransaw, 2013), including being stereotyped as hyper-masculine, violent, and uninvolved with their children's education (Kirkland, 2013). Findings from this study dispel those stereotypical notions. More research needs to be conducted to describe how men of color become involved as active parenting partners. By

lending insight into incarcerated men's parenting practices, this study provides an alternative model of masculinity that allows for more inclusive performances of gender roles and representations in literacy and parenting practices.

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9

"SWITCHIN' MY STYLE UP!"

A Case Study of a Black Girl's Literacy and Language Practices Across Three Contexts

Delicia Tiera Greene

> *I am always switchin' my style up! I think it is important. There isn't one version of Denise. There are many layers to who I am. I think different situations call for different versions of who I am.*

Denise, a 16-year-old Black girl participant in a book club spoke candidly about how she navigates literacy spaces and constructs her own identities. Denise highlighted how her identity grounded in her literacy and language practices are not fixed but are constantly shifting and are shaped by social norms and particular circumstances. She revealed that her identities are multiple, and each context required a different version of who she was in that context. She highlighted that this need to "shapeshift" (the ability to adjust to situations) was an integral component of navigating across varying contexts.

Being "double minorities" at the intersection of Blackness and femaleness, Black girls are constructing their identities and representing self while being confronted with negative images of Black girlhood (Richardson, 2013; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Black girls' literacies entail "enacting special knowledge and ways of being to navigate the world" (Richardson, 2003, p. 329). They use their literacy and language practices, steeped in activism as tools of survival and resistance in a society designed to oppress them (Collins, 2000; Price-Dennis, Muhammad, Womack, McArthur, & Haddix, 2017). Richardson (2003) argues that Black girls' ways of being and knowing entail their "cultural identities, social location, and practices that influence how they make meaning and assert themselves socio-politically in out-of-school and in-school contexts" (p. 329).

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Traditional Models of Literacy Instruction and Language Education

Traditional models of literacy instruction and language education often privilege scripted programs, teacher-centered instruction, and prescriptive writing instruction and assessments (Muhammad, 2015; Young & Martinez, 2011). In instances in which literacy and language is incorporated into the curricula, teachers often do not allow opportunities for Black girls to focus on agency, identity construction, or meaning making, but instead are used solely to complete tasks (Dooley, Ellison, & Welch, 2016). Further, teachers often incorporate literacy and language within school spaces in ways that are decontextualized and not grounded in the lived experiences of Black youth. This is further compounded when white literacy teachers (who make up 84% of the teaching force) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020) lack an understanding of the literacy traditions, cultural histories, and linguistic nuances of historically marginalized youth, specifically Black girls (Greene, 2016). These identity markers are often silenced or pathologized in school spaces (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). Given the current sociopolitical climate, Black girls are continuing to negotiate their identities while navigating the misrepresentations of Black girls prevalent in school spaces (Price-Dennis et al., 2017).

Digital technologies are often incorporated into curricula in school spaces and out-of-school programs in ways that maintain traditional social dynamics between adults and adolescents and between teachers and students (Vasudevan & Hill, 2008).

> Digital technologies are used in formal institutions in urban communities as a curricular tool to educate students about new literacy, instead of being used in transformative and emancipatory ways to engage the critical capabilities that students already bring to new literacy.
>
> *(Vasudevan & Hill, 2008, p. 2)*

Digital literacies provide new types of counter-storytelling by serving as tools of resistances to rewrite images of self (Ellison, 2014; Greene, 2021). This new type of counter-storytelling allows Black girls to represent themselves in ways that they cannot in their school life by strengthening their sense of self, autonomy, and their level of engaged participation (Muhammad & Womack, 2015).

My Focus

The purpose of my study was to examine how one Black adolescent girl navigated and represented self across three literacy contexts (an online book club, a face-to-face focus group interview, and a journal writing session). The following research question drove this study: In what ways does a Black adolescent girl

represent self within and across three contexts (an online book club, a face-to-face focus group interview, and a journal writing session)?

My Perspectives

Black Girls' Literacies Framework

According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), Black girls are not engaging in one literacy practice, but instead are engaging simultaneously in *multiple* literacy practices. Literacy practices shape and are shaped by Black girls' own construction of identities and representations of self. The ways in which Black girls interpret, making meaning of, and connect to both print text and multimodal texts are extensions of their selfhood. According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), Black girls' literacy practices are *historical* and are grounded in cultural nuances and historical traditions rooted in African lineage.

Black girls' literacy practices of today are part a strong lineage of African American literary societies. Black girls' literacy practices are *intellectual* in analytical thought and discussions and draw upon societal problems affecting the Black community broadly and affecting Black girls specifically (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Black girls' literacy practices are both *political* and *critical* and are tied to power, privilege, and positionality and the ability to push back against and disrupt dominant narratives of Black girlhood (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). The Black Girls' Literacies Framework informed my understanding of the ways in which Black girls navigate and represent themselves across multiple literacy contexts.

My Inquiries

Selecting the Participants

For the current study, I selected one Black girl participant in a book club as a focal participant based on the following criteria: (1) an adolescent between the ages of 12 and 17; (2) an avid reader of street literature texts; (3) a user of digital tools, specifically the social networking site Facebook; and (4) access to technology. The Black girl participant selected for this study also participated in previous community literacy projects that I had administered.

Collecting Data

The primary focal site was the online social networking site Facebook. The secondary focal site was an urban public library. Data were collected for two weeks. The data derived from a range of data collection sources: (1) field observations, (2) online Facebook book discussions, (3) face-to-face semi-structured focus group interviews, and (4) journal writing entries.

Field Observations

Field observations entailed immersing myself in the experiences of the Black adolescent participant and examining her literacy and language practices across contexts. Field observations provided a rich source of data in the online book club, as well as in the face-to-face focus group interviews. Field observations in the online book club, as well as in the face-to-face focus groups entailed recording the participant's literacy and rhetorical strategies, emojis/facial expressions, voice intonations, nonverbal cues, and other forms of body language. Both the focus group interviews and the journal writing session occurred in the urban public library. In the first week, observations in the online Facebook Book Club were conducted every day. In the second week, observations were conducted once during the focus group interview. I conducted the focus group interviews while serving in a participant as observer role. In this capacity, I posed questions and also engaged in discussions. Observations were recorded in the form of field notes. The observations lasted 30 minutes each day in the first week and one hour in the second week and were audio-recorded.

Facebook Discussion

The participant read and participated in an online discussion of Sapphire's *PUSH*, a street literature text. Street literature is a collection of culturally conscious, coming of age, first-person texts that graphically depict inner-city life and vividly illustrate Black youth living in marginalized societies (Morris, 2011). Street literature is both location and language-specific, situated in urban metropolitan cities and drawing upon elements of Black Language and hip-hop dialect (Morris, 2011). Street literature centers Black girls' identity formations via navigating interpersonal relationships. As a facilitator, I posed prompts in the online book discussion in the second week of the study. The prompts and responses were posted and archived in a private online Facebook group for later analysis. Facilitation entailed a question and answer format. The discussion questions focused on the Black female condition.

Semi-structured Focus Group

A focus group interview supplemented the online book club discussions and served as "targeted data" providing opportunities to clarify responses, pose follow-up questions, and probe for responses. Grounded in a Black feminist perspective, the face-to-face focus group interview provided a space for oral group resistance narratives, which validated the participant's experiences. The participant engaged in one focus group for one hour. The discussion prompts focused on Black motherhood. The focus group interview was audio-recorded.

Journal Writing

Journal writings were auto-ethnographic in nature and provided private spaces for the Black girl participant to express her thoughts. Auto-ethnography entails the participant using reflection and writing to explore personal experiences and the connections these experiences have to broader cultural, political, social meanings, and understanding (Ellis, 2004). Each journal writing session occurred at the library and lasted for 30 minutes immediately following the focus group interview. The journal writing session was comprised of prompt-driven write. The prompt-driven write focused on societal perceptions of Black girls and a personal narrative on Black girlhood. I collected the journal for later analysis.

Data Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

I used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interpret these data (Fairclough, 1989; Rogers, 2003). CDA frames discourse as inherently political and rooted in how identity markers, including social class, racial, gender, economic, and religious affiliations, shape social relationships and identities. Literacy and language cannot be considered as neutral because communication is situated within political spheres that account for patterns of power, privilege, and positionality (Baker-Bell, 2020). CDA focuses on the interplay between the textual and social world and the linkage between talk and written word by focusing on the linkages among three levels of interacting or orders of discourse: genre, discourse, and style.

In this study, orders of discourse each represented a particular aspect of discourse that represented self. Genres are "ways of interacting" and represented the use of linguistic devices in discussions, such as agreement, disagreement, interruptions, or use of pronouns (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). Discourses are "ways of representing" and describe how knowledge is represented and from what perspective (Fairclough, 1989). Luke (2000) argues that discourses are "systematic clusters of themes, statements, ideas, and ideologies" (p. 456). In the current study, discourse accounted for ideologies around thematic topics. Styles are "ways of being" and represented position taking (Rogers, 2003) through the use of local and dominant linguistic strategies (Baker-Bell, 2020; Richardson, 2007; Smitherman, 2006). In the current study, styles accounted for the use of White Mainstream English and Black Language. According to Smitherman (2006), Black Language is a style of speaking English that is rooted in African cultural and rhetorical traditions. Black Language served as a counter system of discourse resistance based on the experiences of enslaved Africans during the antebellum period (Smitherman, 2006). According to Smitherman (2006), White Mainstream English is a style of English that is deemed "standard" because it derives from white ways of speaking, which has been dominant in U.S. society (Alim & Smitherman, 2012;

Smitherman, 2006). Both linguistic terms account for the "relationship between language, race, anti-Black racism, and White linguistic supremacy" (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 2). CDA accounts for the sociopolitical influences embedded in multiple literacy and language practices that are often vastly different from dominant literacy, language, and discourse patterns (Baker-Bell, 2020; Rogers, 2003).

Analysis

Data collection and analysis were ongoing and recursive. I developed a codebook to standardize the analysis process. The first level of analysis entailed multiple readings of the data sets, which allowed me to take a broad look at the data. The second level of analysis examined patterns and themes related to instances of representation of self within and across data points, including initial coding of the data (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). In the third level of analysis, I collapsed the initial codes into categories in relation to the research question resulting in themes across the data sets, including identity; in-school literacies; out-of-school literacies; in-school language practices; out-of-school language practices. I cross-compared the emerged themes with the theoretical framework of Black Girls' Literacies and refined them. I selected examples that represented 'cruces' and compared and contrasted them to the theoretical framework (Rogers, 2003). I cased the "joint" by collecting information about the study context, participant, and activities to fully capture factors that influenced multiple representations of self (Dyson & Genishi, 2005).

My Focal Participant: Denise

Denise was a 15-year-old Black female student who was born and raised in Syracuse, New York. Denise was a musician, trained dancer, illustrator, and spoken word poet who chronicled her lived experiences through the arts. She was both a pianist and a drummer in the music ministry at her church. Denise was also a blogger, creating digital content on social issues. She also enjoyed reading street literature texts and memoir texts. She often discussed how school spaces did not create opportunities to focus on her interests. A case study model was employed because it captured how context shaped the ways in which Denise socially participated and represented self (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Therefore, her conversations and interactions with other girls in the program are reported.

Findings

The findings that follow highlighted how Denise's lived and literate experiences, cultural nuances, linguistic traditions, and preconceived norms for out-of-school and in-school literacies were embedded in representations of self across multiple contexts.

"We Cannot Even Really Count on Society": Digital Written Discourse on the Black Female Condition

The first street text participants read was *PUSH* by Sapphire. The story detailed the experiences of an African American illiterate 16-year-old, Claireece Precious Jones, who endures hardship at the hands of society, her parents, and the school system. Precious endures being sexually abused by her father and physically abused by her mother, resulting in having two children by her father.

In the initial Facebook book discussion, I posed the following question to the Facebook group: "What was your initial reaction after reading PUSH?" The discussion that follows details an exchange between Vanessa and Denise in response to that question I posted online:

Vanessa: When reading the first few chapters in my head I was just watching Precious the movie but then it got more in depth than the movie about her life and I learned things I didn't know. Although I haven't gone through the same things as Precious I felt a connection just being a girl. We are all teenagers and go through obstacles at school and we still face rejection at some points. I really liked the book.

Denise: I agree with Vanessa. Our experiences as young Black women in society is somewhat similar. Although our situations are not as deep as Precious' situation, we still have similar experiences. It also shows me that being Black is somewhat looked at as a downfall or as a disadvantage. That we cannot really even count on society & be so dependent on them but on ourselves.

Vanessa highlighted how she connected to Precious as a girl since there tended to be shared feelings around rejection and acceptance. Denise made personal connections to Precious as a girl. By agreeing with Vanessa, Denise responded to her attempt at solidarity and illustrated her own gendered positioning in relation to Precious' gendered position. Denise extended Vanessa's response by highlighting that her connection to Precious was not only based on gender, but also on race. Noting the intersection of both race and gender allowed Denise to analyze the social conditions that Black women like Precious are confronted within their everyday lives. Despite employing distancing language ("*although our situations are not as deep as precious*"), she acknowledged the similarities in their life experiences ("*we still have similar experiences*"). Using gendered and racialized associating language, Denise highlighted the hegemonic ideologies at play and its impact on Black girls. Denise identified and confronted the obstacles and ideologies that perpetuate the Black female condition in society.

Denise further established how her intersecting identities dictated the ways in which society views her Blackness and femaleness ("*It also shows me that being Black is somewhat looked at as a downfall or a disadvantage*"). Denise took solidarity a

step further and established a Black female solidarity with Vanessa through her use of the pronoun "our" ("*our experiences as a young black woman in society is somewhat similar*"). Denise further mentioned the consequences that came with being both Black and female and declared self-reliance as the collective act of resistance ("*We cannot even really count on society & be so dependent on them but on ourselves*"). Denise's emerging power can be described as becoming an agent of knowledge (Collins, 2000). She was both a self-defined and self-reliant individual who confronted race and gender, with that knowledge empowering her. By doing so, Denise offered a counternarrative about what it means to be both Black and female in society.

In formulating her counternarratives, Denise's linguistic style was characterized by White Mainstream English in her online discussions. In my observations of Denise, I would see that she would often ask her fellow participants to read her Facebook posts before she would press "Submit." Denise's conversation with fellow participants could be overheard in our workspace, asking another girl, "Can you read this post for grammar before I submit it? I don't want Ms. Delicia to be disappointed." This comment indicated that within an out-of-school community program, Denise perceived the kind of teacherly expectations that are typically embedded in school norms even when she represented herself virtually.

"It Takes a Village": Oral Discourse on Black Motherhood

In the face-to-face focus group interview, I posed the following question: "What was Precious' relationship like with her parents?" In the face-to-face focus group interview, Denise, Lisa, and Tammy each discussed their perspectives on Black motherhood:

Denise: (sits up and repositions herself in the chair) She was born into dysfunction. Her motha was sexually abusing her. Her motha allowed her husband to abuse Precious. Her motha was sick in the head!!

Lisa: (holds head down, slouches in the chair, folds arms, and lowers voice) It was nasty. Her father abused Precious. Her [Pause] well at the end her father died. It was like the relationship was [Pause] it was not like people's relationship with dere father is. Precious said it felt good!? (frowns her face)

Denise: (looks at Lisa and repositions herself in the chair) I always try to figure out what options they had in that particular situation. I can't judge character negatively if circumstances led them down the wrong path and they didn't really have no options to turn their life around.

Denise attributed Precious' circumstances to her "upbringin" and being "born into dysfunction" respectively. Denise positioned Precious' mother, Mary, as both a willing participant and an accessory, associating her actions to mental illness.

Denise's multimodal resources (sitting up and repositioning herself in the chair) are indications of asserting her presence and her perspectives. In response to Denise, Lisa's multimodal resources (physical signs of closed body language, including holding her head down, slouching in the chairing, folding her arms, and lowering her voice) indicated instances of being uncomfortable in a tense conversation. Despite her acknowledgment of the uneven power dynamics and years of sexual abuse, Lisa is perplexed with Denise's perspective that Precious being born into dysfunction normalized her experiences of being sexually abused.

In response to Lisa's judgment of Precious saying "it felt good," Denise repositioned herself in her chair and made direct eye contact with Lisa indicating Denise's attempts to assert herself and center her perspective. Denise highlighted that she chose not to judge decisions that Precious made without knowing what options were afforded to her. Further, she acknowledged that a character's circumstances may be a result of external factors that make it difficult for that person to turn their life around. This comment indicated Denise's understanding of how external factors may be outside of a person's control and may determine a person's fate.

After a tense exchange between Denise and Lisa, the interactional pattern shifted and Lisa was less talkative and less attentive throughout the rest of the focus group interviews. As survivors of sexual assault at the hands of family members, Denise and Lisa shared vastly different perspectives on Precious' sexual assault. In the focus group interviews, Denise's employed Black Language in her discussions with Lisa. She code-meshed in her use of the word "motha" and "fatha" (mother, father). Code meshing is a rhetorical strategy that entails merging mainstream (White Mainstream English) and local (Black Language) within any single context of communication (Young & Martinez, 2011).

Further, in Lisa's conversations with Denise, she also code meshed and drew upon the habitual 'be.' (*The relationship was not how people's relationship be with their fathers*) to indicate a condition that occurs habitually. The use of the habitual 'be' is a prominent linguistic feature in Black Language. Denise and Lisa's interactional patterns were shaped by the form and function of oral discourse, the tenseness of the conversation, and the collective influence they had on each other's stylistic choices.

"Society Views Black Girls as Constant Threats!!": Written Discourse on Societal Perceptions of Black Girlhood

In response to a journal prompt, Denise accounted for her perspectives on aspects of Black girlhood. The writing prompts included: What does it mean to you to be a Black girl? How does the media portray Black girls and Black girlhood? How do these media images make you feel? Do these images influence how you see yourself? If so, how? How do these images influence how you see yourself?

Journal Entry #1:

> Being a Black girl means having to ALWAYS overcome obstacles because the world comes for us! To be able to survive the negative treatment we have to be emotionally and mentally strong all the time. Black girls have to stand up for each other and for what is right and change the world by not being what society convinces everyone we are. Society views Black girls as constant threats!! We are seen as beneath everyone all the time! We are portrayed as sex objects. Like video vixens. Black girls are always seen as GHETTO even though everyone copies the things that they say make us GHETTO like our fashion and music. These images in the media are hurtful and discouraging. It makes it soooo difficult for me to think positively about myself. Between reality shows and music videos and Instagram, we are reminded of how much the world hates us.

In Denise's prompt-driven journal entry, she highlighted how hegemonic ideologies determines the societal hierarchy. She accounted for Black girls' social positioning and the barriers they face. These barriers entailed the erasure of Black girlhood, the sexualization of Black girls, and the co-opting of Black culture. Denise highlighted that Black girls' ability to thrive despite societal barriers is a revolutionary act. This revolutionary act entailed Black girls advocating for each other by assuming a Black female collective identity around issues that impact them. Denise also accounted for the ways in which negative images permeate every aspect of popular culture and its impact on how she sees herself and the broader message it sends to Black girls. Denise code meshed and employed White Mainstream English and Black Language in her journal entry. Further, she merged both styles in her journal entry while also placing emphasis on her perspectives by employing exclamation marks, all caps, and word elongation.

Reflections

Denise accounted for the ways in which her social positioning as a Black woman mirrored the social positioning of Precious. Specifically, Denise highlighted how hegemonic ideologies continue to ensure Black women's positions at the margins of society. Denise also mentioned how Black girls' individual identities are situated within a broader, collective Black identity. She highlighted how important it is for Black girls to be in relationship and in community with one another as they navigate in society. Although Denise accounted for the social barriers designed to marginalize Black women, she conformed to white ways of being through her perceived expectations of White Mainstream English in the online discussions. This representation conformed to perceived expectations of social norms prominent within school literacy spaces.

Denise considered how sexual trauma was normalized in Precious' home. This also led to Denise and Lisa's face-to-face focus group interview surrounding

Precious' comment that "it felt good." Denise and Lisa connected personally to Precious' experience, however their response to her circumstances was vastly different. Denise continued to account for the Black girl condition and how family dysfunction shaped Precious' decisions and life choices. Given this, Denise felt it was unfair to demonize Precious without understanding what options were afforded to her to redirect her life. In their interactional patterns, both Denise and Lisa code-meshed, which is rooted in the free-flowing nature of oral discourse as well as the tense nature of their conversation. Code-meshing entails the blending of local and dominant dialects in conversations. Code-meshing was an indication of power and resistance among participants. The "linguistic push and pull" was a clear indication that Denise constantly negotiate multiple identities – a dominant identity and a local identity (Smitherman, 1977, p. 129).

Denise's journal entry continued to account for the hegemonic ideologies and its impact on Black girls. Denise contextualized Black girls' experiences as she accounted for the ways in which popular culture and digital technologies are uses as avenues to create images that situate Black girls intersecting identities at the margins. She further highlighted how despite Black girls social positioning, they pose a constant threat to society. Denise accounted for both the hypervisibility and invisibility of Black girls in society. She code-meshed merging White Mainstream English and Black language. Denise's use of Black Language entailed employing terms commonly used in Black culture, including "comes for us." "Comes for us" indicates seeking Black girls out for retribution. Comes for us is rooted in the phrase "Don't come for me," which means one reconsidering bringing any issues to someone. Denise also used all caps and elongated words to place emphasis on society's image of Black girls and its obsession with Black culture (i.e., GHETTO).

Across these three contexts, Denise's literacy practices entailed consistently disrupting hegemonic ideologies designed to perpetuate the marginalization of Black girls' intersecting gendered and racialized identities. Denise understood the factors and implications that continue to impact Black girls' lives. Further, Denise applied this consciousness to both her experiences, as well as Precious' experiences. Despite the consistent disruption of hegemonic ideologies, Denise's linguistic style was varied across contexts. In the online discussions, she sacrificed what Smitherman (2006) describes as her mother tongue or her dialect. Given that the online discussions were not time sensitive, these discussions provided opportunities for Denise to attend to grammar and spelling that conformed with a more formal version of English grammar. In the focus group interviews, the form and function of oral discourse aided in a more authentic way of being, which entailed the use of Black Language. The "linguistic push and pull" across both the online discussions and the focus group interviews revealed Denise's identities were without boundaries and were fluid across and within particular contexts. Denise's journal writing drew upon writing features that expressed emphasis, including Black discourse terms, exclamation marks, and full capitalization.

This study is significant because it informed and reimagined literacy teaching and learning. Findings have implications for working with Black girls in the urban secondary literacy classroom and in out-of-school programs in efforts to improve the education of Black girls. This study highlights the importance of honoring and centering Black girls' literacy traditions, cultural nuances, social identities, and discourse practices that shape Black girls' representation of self.

Implications for Literacy and Language Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

This study demonstrated why adults, such as parents, teachers, and those who work with adolescents of color within school programs or in out-of-school programs need to understand the cultural historical traditions and cultural nuances embedded in Black girls' home and community identities. Too often, Black girls' home and community identities are not fully centered and honored in literacy classrooms. Black girls' multiple literacies and language practices are often deemed indications of low academic achievement as opposed to multiple representations of self (Greene, 2020). Given this incongruity, it is important that adults who work with Black girls adopt a more inclusive conception of literacy that entails recognizing and incorporating Black girls' home and community identities into literacy instruction and language education.

Teachers can also honor and privilege the multiple literacies and language practices of Black girls by incorporating narrative writing, such as journal writing, into literacy instruction. Narrative writing allows Black girls to amplify their voices through their local dialect. In addition, dialogic journal writing provides Black girls the opportunity to engage in intimate conversations in safe spaces. Another pedagogical strategy literacy teachers can employ is to work across content areas and merge language arts and social studies in the secondary contexts (middle school and high school) and encourage Black girls to use technology as a springboard to address social justice issues that affect their personal lives and their communities. Black girls can use social networking platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, to post their perspectives during class time on a wide range of social justice issues. One example of this could be a student-led and student-sustained online discussion addressing both local and national issues affecting diverse populations. This would provide students the opportunity to use technology as a tool of activism and a source of empowerment.

Teachers and literacy providers such as those in out-of-school programs in libraries or community agencies can also encourage Black girls to engage critically with street literature texts by analyzing how identity markers, including race, gender, social class, culture, and language shape the experiences of the characters in the texts. Black girls can also examine the linguistic tensions the Black female protagonist, Precious experiences between White Mainstream English

and Black Language throughout her schooling experiences (Baker-Bell, 2020). Teachers can also encourage Black girls to analyze relationships between Precious and her mother and discuss how power structures assisted in perpetuating certain types of human relationships and life experiences. Black girls can examine how the Precious' embodiment of Black Language shaped her ability to navigate and survive in the world (Baker-Bell, 2020). Black girls can also center their own lived experiences and account for how they have used language in their own lives. It is important for literacy teachers to emphasize the relationship between language and style. Literacy teachers can honor code-meshing by incorporating creative assignments that illustrate a range of styles. Multi-genre papers consist of various genres (plays, diary entries, poems etc.) that illustrate the mixing of styles (Romano, 2000). This assignment provides Black girls with creative expression by allowing them to select styles for their writing artifacts.

By incorporating these strategies into instruction, literacy teachers and those who work with adolescent girls of color can communicate to Black girls that the literacy classroom or out of school space honors their multiple literacies and language practices. Doing so can also communicate that differences are not deficits and that the learning space is inclusive to enable Black girls to view literacy and language more broadly and bridge their out-of-school and in-school literacies and language practices.

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10

WRITING MY WORLD

An Adolescent Mexicana's Process of Writing to Represent Herself

Tracey T. Flores and Fabiola Guadalupe Rodriguez Flores

> *Sharing my stories is sharing a part of me with the world. I'm a novice in writing, but felt like I have been writing for such a long time. My goal as a writer is to help people identify themselves with my stories like Latinas, kids, preteens, students, daughters and like a writer. I never won a writing award, but I discovered my love for writing in this camp. ~ Rosa, Somos Escritoras Writer*
>
> *Compartiendo mis historias es compartiendo una parte de mi con el mundo. Soy una novata con la escritura pero siento como si he escribido por tanto tiempo. Mi meta como escritora es que la gente se identifique con mis historias como Latina, niña, pre-adoloscente, estudiante, hija y lo más importante como escritora. Nunca gané ninguna medalla como escritora pero encontré el amor por la escritura en este campamento. ~ Fabiola Guadalupe, Somos Escritoras Writers*

On our final day together at Somos Escritoras/We are Writers, a creative space for adolescent Latina girls (grades 6–12) that invites them to share and perform personal stories from their lives using art, theater, and writing as a tool for self-reflection and self-examination, Fabiola Guadalupe, a 12-year-old writer, wrote the preceding words in response to the questions: *Why do you write? Who are you as a writer?* Fabiola Guadalupe explained how writing and storytelling serve as a tool to open her life to others. She wrote, "Compartiendo mis historias es compartiendo un parte de mi mundo [Sharing my stories is sharing part of me with the world]." Through writing, Fabiola Guadalupe also described her goals as a writer and the people and communities that she hoped to inspire with her words and stories. Fabiola Guadalupe's words illustrate a young girl using writing to reflect and to describe and to define herself as a writer stepping into her writing in newfound ways.

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The preceding excerpt is one example of writing that Fabiola Guadalupe composed during her participation in Somos Escritoras/We are Writers. The goal of Somos Escritoras is to support Latina girls to continue to develop their writing while learning new tools to speak their truths, define themselves, and amplify their voices within a supportive community of Latina girls and women. Fabiola Guadalupe spent two weeks participating in Somos Escritoras/We are Writers, writing and sharing her perspectives, experiences and stories alongside 13 Latina adolescent girls and writing mentors in Central Texas. Together, girls and writing mentors read and discussed literature and texts written and created by self-identified Women of Color (WOC) focused on themes related to gender, language, culture and identity. The collective voice of these writers was an invitation for girls to examine their lived experiences and compose stories from their own lives, in their own words.

Historically, Latina, Mexican American, and Mexicana women have used their writing to dismantle outdated and controlling images of Mexican women as silent, second-class citizens without a voice or political views (Enoch & Devreaux, 2019). In the early 1900s, Sara Estela Ramírez, Jovita Idár and Maria Rentería, all contributors to the Spanish language newspaper, *La Crónica*, wrote to redefine views of the Mexican woman and her place in society along the Texas and México border. Their writing offered a counter-narrative to Anglo writers that wrote the Mexican woman as "submissive" and "docile," thus ascribing a narrow gender role as the dutiful, passive wife. In their writings, these mujeres, Ramírez, Idár and Rentería composed "new definitions of the Mexican woman" by "nam[ing] themselves in ways that recongiz[ed] and reject[ed] debilitating definitions that either degrade them or prohibit their active participation in their Mexican communities" (Enoch, 2004, p. 26). Their writing traces the ways that Latina, Mexican American, and Mexican women in the borderlands region of the United States used writing to make their voices public and create new definitions of Mexican women and their role and place in society at the intersections of gender and culture. Drawing upon their historical legacy, these Mexican women composed to redefine, call to action, and to raise consciousness, pointing to the necessity of contemporary understandings of the ways that adolescent Latina girls, like Fabiola Guadalupe, use art and writing today to amplify their voices, perspectives and "write about what is right in their li[ves]."

My Purpose

I conducted this study to focus on the experiences and perspectives of Fabiola Guadalupe as she participated in Somos Escritoras to describe the ways that she used art and writing as a tool of reflection and examination of self and world. For my inquiry, I asked the following question: How did participation in a creative space that centered the cultural and gendered ways of knowing of Latina girls encourage one young Latina to engage in personal writing and storytelling?

Scholars have conducted research with *and* alongside Girls of Color highlighting how they use writing and art to tell their stories across time, space, and borders, real and imagined (Brown, 2013; Cisneros, 2021; Muhammad, 2012; Player, 2021; Sánchez, 2009; Smith, Kelly-Morris, & Chapman, 2021). I anticipated this study would contribute to that line of inquiry.

Methodology and Methods

Using case study methodology (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), I drew upon the writing and art that Fabiola Guadalupe composed. I observed her participation in the program and took field notes. I conducted audio recorded semi-structured interviews transcribed to written record. I noted informal interviews and ongoing dialogue with her to illuminate the purposes for her writing and the ways she viewed writing before and after her participation in Somos Escritoras. This inquiry was co-authored with Fabiola Guadalupe as a co-researcher as she reflected on her experience in Somos Escritoras as a rising seventh-grade student. She provided feedback and comments throughout, extending my insights and offering her reflections and suggestions.

Guiding Perspectives

To understand Fabiola Guadalupe's art and writing that she composed at Somos Escritoras, the intention behind her words and the ways she was embracing her identity as a writer within a comunidad of writers, I drew on sociocultural theories of literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Gee, 2012; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). This perspective views literacy as a social act that is dependent on the sociohistorical and sociopolitical contexts in which literacy, in this case writing, occurs. It recognizes the importance of the histories of the writer and the ways in which composing is influenced by these contexts across time, space and geographies. From this perspective, both the contexts *and* the constructions of space (Gutiérrez, 2008) are critical to the way literacy is understood and to the writer writing within a community of writers.

Black and Chicana Feminist Theories of Writing as a site of healing, self-definition, and transformation also informed my inquiry of Fabiola Guadalupe's writing and her identity as a writer (Anzaldúa, 1999; hooks, 2015; Lorde, 2007). Writers have composed from across their identities and geographies to break silences, rewrite oppressive narratives and render themselves and their communities visible. In *A Letter to Third World Women Writers*, Anzaldúa (1983) wrote a letter to her "hermanas" calling upon Women of Color as writers and creatives to dismantle the historical marginalization we have endured in order to render ourselves visible and make our voices audible in *and* through writing. Similarly, in *The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action*, Lorde (2007) urged a break in a history of silences by "bring[ing] silence into language and action"

(p. 40), challenging us to speak our truths "even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood" (p. 39). In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, hooks (2015) stories the gifts of her family, stating, "My elder female ancestors gave me the important gift of bold speech" (p. x). From this gift, she theorized the importance of speech – of voicing and talking back as critical forms of resistance for girls and women from marginalized communities. Collectively, the writings of these women provide *teorias* (Anzaldúa, 1990), a view of writing as an expansive and embodied practice, often not realized in formal school settings.

Tracing these perspectives, I situate Fabiola's writing in Somos Escritoras within *and* alongside the research conducted alongside and with Black and Brown girls that has illuminated their many literacies and ways of knowing and being (Brown, 2013; Muhammad, 2012/2015; Sánchez, 2009). This research highlights the ways that Black and Brown girls engage in writing and creative projects alongside each other and women within the space through dialogue and reciprocal sharing of life histories. This research tends to the organizations and (re)mediation of spaces in which Black and Brown girls perspectives, voices, and literacies are at the center. Within these studies, the organization of space is just as important to our understanding of the lives of Black and Brown girls as the design of the inquiry and the positionalities of the researchers.

Somos Escritoras Workshops

Somos Escritoras workshops were held for two weeks during the summer 2018 break. As the director/researcher, I met daily with the girls for six seven-hour workshops. This included a campus visit to the University of Texas at Austin where girls participated in a theater workshop facilitated by Fine Arts faculty, attended a special lunch panel with Latina doctoral students, and engaged in a writing marathon where they explored different landmarks on campus through personal writing (Flores, 2019). Somos Escritroas workshops were free to girls and all art and writing materials were provided, as well as a lite breakfast and lunch.

All workshops were facilitated by a team of self-identified Latina/Chicana women that I recruited from the university and the community. These women served as writing mentors throughout Somos Escritoras workshops, facilitating and sharing alongside girls and each other. Together, we designed workshops that centered on the girls' cultural and linguistic resources. Workshops were facilitated in English and Spanish because we wanted to create a space that invited girls to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires. Each day, we read and discussed poetry, digital narratives, artwork, Instagram stories, and other social media platforms in which the designers and composers created work with themes related to identity, language, culture, gender, and family.

A majority of the texts that we explored were written by Women of Color (WOC) who used writing, art and other modes of expression to make visible

their experiences and the realities of their lived conditions and those of their families and communities. After discussions of paired texts related to the same theme, girls created art and composed original poems and stories that related to their own personal experiences. We ended each workshop with a writer share, in which each girl and mentor was invited to read aloud to the group their writing in progress.

My Positionality

A Chicana Feminist Epistemology recognizes the many sources of knowledges and experiences – the cultural intuition – that Chicana researchers draw upon throughout the entire research process (Bernal, 1998). Somos Esctitoras, as a creative space for Latina girls to compose their stories and bravely amplify their voices, is rooted in my own lived experiences as a second-generation Chicana and former classroom teacher in K–8 schools. Specifically, I think about myself as a young Chicanita, who did not name and define herself as such until I was pursuing my doctorate and learned of the Black and Chicana feminist writers who speak of the importance of defining oneself as an act of survival and resistance. Our intergenerational stories and storytelling were central to our conversations around the dinner table and at family gatherings. From my family, I learned the power of our stories, and carried this into my own classroom in which I invited my students and their families to participate in family writing workshops in which we came together to orally share and write our personal stories (Flores, 2019). The evolution of Somos Escritoras, and my work alongside adolescent Latinas, as a Chicana, who was once a Chicanita, and is now a writer, facilitator, and researcher, draws on very personal and professional experiences that are vital to the ways in which I represent girls, our work, and our theories.

My Inquiry

In my work alongside Fabiola Guadalupe in Somos Escritoras, I participated as a writer, researcher and participant observer (Spradley, 2016). I openly and bravely composed and shared my personal stories and experiences alongside Fabiola Guadalupe and all girls and mentors.

These multiple roles are an important part of the program and how I came to this inquiry as a researcher, drawing upon my cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) in data collection and analysis to center girls' voices and experiences through close participation alongside them.

For this case study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005), I focused on the experiences and perspectives of one writer – Fabiola Guadalupe. I selected Fabiola Guadalupe through purposeful sampling, choosing her as someone who could best inform me because of my continued relationship with her both in and out of Somas Escritoras workshops. She participated in Somos Escritoras two years in a row,

as a rising seventh grader and rising eighth grader. During our first workshop, Fabiola Guadalupe participated as a junior mentor alongside our team of writing mentors. In this role, she led parts of the workshop and shared her own writing and experiences with girls while encouraging them to share their writing. Our collaboration for this chapter focuses on her participation as a rising seventh-grade student.

La Escritora: The Participant. I first met Fabiola Guadalupe during our summer 2018 Somos Escritoras workshop offered in Central Texas. The summer before seventh grade, Fabiola Guadalupe attended Somos Escritoras workshops that we hosted in an office space of an organization that serves Latina mothers and daughters in the community. Fabiola Guadalupe's mother had learned about Somos Escritoras from this organization and signed her up. Fabiola Guadalupe attended workshops with her close friend Claire, whom she called her comadre. Their mothers were good friends, who supported their daughters and each other in and out of the program.

Fabiola Guadalupe was born in México and is the youngest of two children. Fabiola Guadalupe is a self-identified Mexicana and takes great pride in being bilingual and biliterate in English and Spanish. In school, she enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to support her acquisition of English. At workshops, the majority of Fabiola Guadalupe's writing was composed in Spanish first and then translated into English.

Throughout my time, writing and learning alongside Fabiola Guadalupe, I observed an eagerness to learn more about herself and the other girls and mentors. She openly and honestly shared her feelings and ideas, volunteering to read her writing aloud to the group. Fabiola Guadalupe wrote about her experiences at school related to learning English and sometimes feeling isolated and alone. She described her ESL classes and only seeing her friends between classes. She sketched images of herself, creating self-portraits that further reflected and examined her experiences. Fabiola Guadalupe was always supportive of all the girls, encouraging everyone to share their perspectives and stories openly and honestly.

Fabiola Guadalupe enjoyed listening to music and expressing herself through writing, composing, and drawing. She liked her mother's cooking and sharing meals with her family while listening attentively to the family's fine comedians. She loved spending time outside to unwind and knot colorful friendship bracelets.

Data Collection and Analysis

At workshops, I wrote field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) of my observations as a writer/facilitator/researcher alongside the girls. In my notes, I focused on discussions of mentor texts and the ways that Fabiola Guadalupe responded to other girls in relation to their dialogue and her personal experiences. After each workshop, I scanned copies of her sketches, art, writings (e.g., quickwrites, final

pieces), closing reflections and curriculum documents (e.g., essays/poems) and organized them by day and workshop topic.

After workshops ended, I conducted a semi-structured interview (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) with Fabiola Guadalupe at her house. Prior to the interview, I spent time visiting with Fabiola Guadalupe and her mom, catching up and enjoying homemade tres leches cake. Our interview was digitally recorded and lasted one and a half hours. I asked her ten questions related to personal interests, identities (e.g., gender), and writing, asking probing questions to encourage storytelling. Additionally, throughout the entire data collection and analysis, I wrote detailed research memos (Saldaña, 2016). These memos helped me to document my thinking, learning and evolving understandings as I composed alongside girls and analyzed data.

I analyzed data using constant comparative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data analysis took place throughout all phases of the entire study. I coded all data by hand using process coding and invivo coding methods (Saldaña, 2016) in which I coded, recoded, organized into categories based upon emerging themes. Throughout analysis and writing of this manuscript, Fabiola Guadalupe and I engaged in constant dialogue through Zoom, phone calls, and email, expanding and revising different parts to ensure that her voice and experience were represented in the ways that she intended.

Writing in Community

Fabiola Guadalupe participated in Somos Escritoras alongside her comadre, Claire. They signed up for the program together, and Fabiola Guadalupe entered not really knowing the experience she would have in Somos Escritoras. In an email conversation that we had, Fabiola Guadalupe wrote:

> When I came in, I was not expecting anything. I knew it was about writing, but I never went to a writing workshop or even heard of a program in Austin about empowering Latin women. I was new to everything. I was very nervous. . . . The only person who I knew was Cheyenne. She gave me a lot of strength and trust because if I was by myself, I wouldn't even have the courage to speak or share my writing.

Fabiola Guadalupe recalled her feelings of uncertainty prior to the first workshop. She did not have any previous experiences in spaces like Somos Escritoras and found comfort participating alongside her friend, Claire. As the week progressed, Fabiola felt more comfortable writing, stating, "Each day I came with more bliss and excitement."

At Somos Escritoras, we intentionally design writing activities that invite the girls into examination and reflection of their lives. Mentor texts are carefully selected to open dialogue and inspire writing of personal stories and histories. We

read and discuss mentor texts that focus on topics related to gender, language, culture, and identity written by Women of Color writers and poets. For example, to invite girls to examine their language histories and stories, we read and discussed *How to Tame a Wild Tongue* (Anzaldúa, 1999), *Mi Problema* (Serros), and *To Be a Pocha or Not to Be* (de Anda, 2014). These three texts directly speak directly to the "linguistic terrorism" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 80) that Chicanas/Mexicanas/Latinas endure at the intersections of language, culture, and identity that exists due to historical policies and mandates enforced by the dominant culture to uphold Dominant American English (DAE) as the standard, and Spanish as "illegitimate." These writers describe the tensions that they experience in being shamed for not speaking Spanish they way the "should" and to the borders, real and imagined, that they navigate on a daily basis. These texts provided girls and mentors with tools to examine and theorize their own language stories and histories. Fabiola Guadalupe recalled, "My writing was inspired by the prompts, but I always thought that not a lot of girls would relate to my writing. I wrote about my life in México." Given the space, choice, and encouragement to pursue writing topics, Fabiola Guadalupe drew upon her experiences growing up in México to compose poetry and narratives about these memories that were close to her heart.

Writing in community provided Fabiola with the opportunity to remember different experiences in her life. Alongside her fellow escritoras and writing mentors, Fabiola Guadalupe learned about the ways that writing could be more than what she experienced in school. She recalled,

> I thought of Tracey [the director] as charismatic. . . . I'm grateful for her showing her support as a writer. She showed me how writing is not all essays and current events like writing in school. I learned that writing can be as expressive as you want it to be.

Her words point to the importance of time and space (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001) to compose meaningful, personal topics and the necessity of writing curriculum that is relevant and related to lived experiences of girls and youth (de los Ríos, 2020).

"Writing About What Is Right About My Life"

Beginning on the first day of Somos Escritoras workshops, all writing activities were designed to invite girls into reflection and examination of their personal experiences and their worlds. Writing activities were open-ended although we discussed and modeled different ways that girls might compose their pieces such as through poetry, narrative and storyboarding for comics. The goal was for girls to pursue art and writing activities that were meaningful and relevant to their lives while opening space for freedom of expression to make intentional writerly decisions of topic, language, and genre.

In an email conversation with Fabiola Guadalupe, she spoke directly to what she composed at workshops. She recalled, "My writing in camp was a lot about my life and therefore I see it as something precious and valuable. . . . Each day, I kept writing about what was right and about my life." This life writing was reflected in the quickwrites, poetry and narratives that Fabiola Guadalupe composed at daily workshops.

At early workshops, we read and discussed the poems, *De Dónde Yo Soy* (Romero, 2009) [Where I'm From] and *Where I'm From* (Lyon, 1999). In these poems, the poets write about all the people, places, and moments that are part of who they are and where they are from, beyond location. These poets both use descriptive language and dialogue that draw upon the five senses to bring their lived histories to life. While Lyon's poem was written in English, Lyons intentionally code meshed (Canagarajah, 2006), a translanguaging strategy employed by multilinguals by strategically switching back and forth from English to Spanish throughout this poem. Together, these poets' poems are an invitation to reflect backwards and think about the present while looking forward to the future.

After group reading and discussion of both poems, Fabiola Guadalupe composed her own *De Donde Yo Soy* poem. In her poem, she lifted the lines, "Yo soy" and "De donde yo soy" from Romero's poem, weaving them in throughout her writing:

> Yo soy una de esas personas que le entran duro al café
> Yo soy como un abrigo en el invierno
> Yo soy una consejera de Consuelo
> Una felizidad ajena
> Una flor en el cemento
> Una lagrima en el desierto
> Una ciudad chiquita pero grande
> Donde nos inclinamos a Díos
> Y a sus angeles que nos protegen
> De donde yo soy
> Las Milagros existen
>
> Los libros habran con derecho
> Los niños son fruto del amor
> Los cielos son claros y azules como el oceano
> De la verdad, las nubes un grupo de oreja
> Mando en un nuevo amanecer
> Los viejos cuentan sus anecdotas en la noche mas oscura todas vamos a brilla
> Con el esplandor de nuestros almas
> De donde yo soy es un paraiso

In translation to English, Fabiola's poem reads:

I am one of those people who likes coffee hard
I am like a coat in the winter
I am a counselor of Consuelo
Someone else's joy
A flower in the cement
A tear in the desert
A small but big city
Where we bow down to god
And his angels that protect us
Where am I from
Miracles exist
The books will have the right
Children are the fruit of love
The skies are clear and blue like the ocean
The old people tell their anecdotes in the darkest night we are all going to shine
With the splendor of our souls
Where I'm from is a paradise

For Fabiola Guadalupe, this poem was about remembering and writing about what was good and right in her life. She stated:

> "*Where I'm From*" is a special piece. It was really written as a piece about my life in Mexico. I used to be so homesick because I left my grandma, my cousin, my aunt and my friends. I left many things and this piece of writing was showing precious memories that I had been proud about and the cultural roots of where I'm from.

This writing was a source of strength for Fabiola, to remember the beauty of México and the people that were an important part of her life and to speak to the longing in her heart.

Writing to Reframe Experiences

As hooks (2015) wrote, "Finding our voice and using it, especially in acts of critical rebellion and resistance, pushing past fear, continues to be one of the most powerful ways feminist thinking and practice changes life" (p. xi). Throughout her participation in Somos Escritoras, Fabiola Guadalupe used her voice to make visible her experiences while also reframing them. Her writing focused on reframing gender scripts and society's views of the body and of languages. For example, during a discussion on body image and body positivity, Fabiola

Guadalupe discussed the insecurities that she had internalized due to comments that people had made to her about her "hairy arms." She drew a picture of herself with hairy arms and then addressed her self-image in her writing. In her writing, she explicitly named this insecurity, but then embraced her hairy arms, reframing her internalized narrative.

For our final celebration of writing, Fabiola Guadalupe composed a poem titled, *Don't You Dare*. In this poem, she drew upon all of our conversations, readings, and her personal experiences to examine gender stereotypes and society's narrow view of beauty.

She took this piece through the writing process, receiving feedback from mentors and other girls. At our celebration, in front of an audience of family and friends, Fabiola Guadalupe, made her writing and voice heard. She read:

> Don't you dare tell me I'm ugly
> Don't you dare tell me I'm weak
> Don't you dare tell me I'm tiny
> Don't you dare tell me I'm a fool
> Don't you dare tell me I'm wrong
> And that my heart is my weakest spot
> Ugh
> Get it right
> You're the one
> Who is wrong.

Fabiola Guadalupe remembered why she composed this, describing it as "a rant, of social expectation, and a beauty standard rant. I tend to ignore all this, but I still feel the sour angsty feeling on my throat. It was meant to be something to be read out loud. Something to get all that sourness out."

Fabiola Guadalupe's writing served as a tool to examine her experiences alongside society's controlling stereotypes of girls and women of color. These discourses center whiteness as the norm and become reproduced across generations and institutions (Weeks, 2009). They saturate the media in images and words and become part of the ways that children and youth engage with one another at school. Fabiola Guadalupe's writing was directed toward dismantling these controlling images by reframing an outdated, binary perspective on gender, beauty, and body image.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Fabiola Guadalupe's writing can provide literacy educators and those working with girls of color in out of school settings, such as agencies and community organizations with insight into the ways that they can design curriculum and

activities to leverage the resources of all writers. First, writing curriculum must be connected and relevant to the lived experiences of all writers. This must include time and space each day for girls to write and dialogue about their practice and craft. Writers must be encouraged and supported to write openly and freely on a variety of topics without fear of censorship.

Fabiola Guadalupe's writing can inform literacy educators in K–12 schools, adult literacy providers, and community-serving agency and organization staff by providing a model to follow in stimulating girls' writing engagement by choosing their own topics through reading and discussing published and unpublished writings by women of color (WOC). Girls and women will need to be introduced to the many ways that writers, historical and contemporary, have used writing as a tool to render themselves visible, dismantle false narratives, make their voices audible, and raise the consciousness of the lived conditions of their families and communities. One practice toward this end is through intentional selection of mentor texts and by dialogue about those texts that is related to purpose, intent, and rhetorical moves toward change and activism. Fabiola's writing is one example of how she wrote in ways inspired by the WOC authors whose work served as an example to write through experience toward change.

Since research focused on the writing and other literacies of Latina girls is limited, I call for more expansive research focused on their identities, languages, cultures, and ways of knowing and being in all their complexities and joy. Like Fabiola, girls and women of color can become writers and researchers of their own writing practices. By drawing on girlhood studies, critical feminist perspectives, cultural studies, and anthropological perspective, interdisciplinary approaches to working with and alongside Latina girls can be fostered both inside and outside of literacy classrooms.

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SECTION III

Literacies and Identities Beyond Schools, Institutions, Agencies, and Community Settings

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11

THE CRITICAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION OF BLACK GIRLS THROUGH DIGITAL AND MULTIMODAL LITERACIES

LaTasha Mosley and Gholnecsar E. Muhammad

> Digital technologies have increasing capacity for individuals to adapt the tools for their own information and communication purposes. Students have the capability to apply literacy skills to real world problems and knowledge building. They are able to exercise creativity, work for social justice, and pursue personal passions.
>
> *(CCCC Feb. 2004 position statement)*

Literacy has been central to African Americans' journey toward liberation in the United States since their forced arrival in 1619. African Americans have relentlessly pursued literacy as they navigated laws that prohibited them from learning to read and write and subjected them to separate and unequal schooling experiences legally enforced by white people who vehemently opposed their education. Despite these challenges, African Americans have claimed spaces of their own to obtain literacy and use it for their own liberatory pursuits. This practice has been evident with the creation of "secret schools" where Black men and women passed on their reading and writing skills to others (Holt, 1990). The inception of Black literary societies stemmed from African Americans' desire to elevate the intellectual, cultural, and critical development of both its members and the larger Black community (Muhammad, 2020). By claiming their right to literacy, African Americans have used the opportunities afforded through literacy to read texts and the sociopolitical world around them (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Black women and girls have used literacy to chart their own path toward liberation by using literacy to engage in the sociopolitical arena. Through an analysis of the work of 19th-century Black women writers, Royster (2000) found that Black women primarily used nonfiction prose, specifically essays, to critique their

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social, economic, and political conditions. Although these writers often wrote across genres, essays provided a distinct pathway to intellectually engage with the public. Unlike fictional accounts, essay writing allowed Black women to speak directly to their readers in comparison to speaking through a character. Essays provided a space for Black women to assert themselves as intellectuals, theorists, and critics of the world in which they lived. Through their essays, Black women did not simply inform their readers about their lives, but actively advocated for their needs as Black people generally and African American women specifically. In the 21st century, Black girls have taken up this mantle and continued this historical practice through their use of digital tools.

Contemporarily, Black girls use digital tools such as social media, films, blogs, and podcasts to resist oppressive conditions they face in society, rewrite deficit narratives placed on them, and claim a space of fulfillment much like the Black women before them. As Black girls have taken the digital area by storm, they are innovating it through their creative brilliance. This is no easy feat considering the required attuned awareness of the platforms used and one's intended message. Through Black girls' ability to transmediate across various modalities, they have changed the landscape of digital technologies (Mills, 2016). The recent wave of the natural haircare movement was birthed out of Black women and girls using the video sharing platform, YouTube to affirm, inform, and support each other's transition back to their naturally curly, coily, and kinky manes (Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016). Unfortunately, Black girls' digital multimodal literacy practices remain largely understudied, which is troubling considering the potential affordances of digital engagement.

Digital tools provide both a means and location for unrestricted literacy expression often unavailable within traditional classrooms. This restriction is due to the privileging of a limited range of literacies in schools primarily reading, writing, and speaking (Johnson, 2017). Digital engagement can be especially captivating for youth from marginalized communities to explore their identities (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2018), participate within creative communities (Ajayi, 2015), and speak out against false or incomplete narratives of their lives (Gibbs Grey & Jones Stanbrough, 2019). Unfortunately, schools often privilege the acquisition of skills over other equally important aspects of students' development such as their identity formation and the ability to consider and address issues of equity, power, and oppression within society (Muhammad, 2020). As evident in the literature reviewed, Black girls use their digital literacies to connect with others who share their views of the world, bring forth their own narratives against their false or incomplete portrayals in the media and society, and critically engage in an increasingly technology-driven culture.

Understanding which digital tools Black girls gravitate toward and how they use these tools are extremely important for all educators. Due to the rapid changes in the ways younger generations are developing and utilizing their literacy skills, adults must be equipped to meet their intellectual needs and personal interests.

For Black girls who are already critical producers and consumers of multimodal texts, understanding how they engage with these tools is vital to facilitate their continued development as public intellectuals.

Purpose of the Literature Review

Considering the limited research on Black girls' engagement in digital literacy practices, this study aimed to understand the digital literacy practices of Black girls by using the following research question: What digital tools are Black girls using to engage in multimodal literacy? How do Black girls use these digital tools in the 21st century?

Our Methods

Data Collection: To collect literature for this review, we sought empirical studies of Black adolescent girls using digital literacies. We found that Black girls within the 21st century engaged in digital, multimodal literacy practices by communicating through social media, blogs, videos, digital art, and forums. Our goal was first to understand what digital tools Black girls are using when engaging in multimodal literacy practices; our second goal was to determine the ways in which they use these tools. We relied on several electronic databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest. Terms such as "African American," "Black," "girls," "multimodal," "media," and "digital" were primary search terms. In addition, we used terminologies that were synonymous to these terms. We included research articles from the fields of education, psychology, media studies, and women studies.

The guiding questions for this review of the literature include the following: What has been researched about Black girls' and 21st-century literacies? How did Black girls' assert themselves as producers of digital multimodal texts? In addition to posing these overarching questions in our review of the literature, we were interested in answering the following questions: What types of methodological studies have been conducted? What digital tools were used by the participants? What age categories were the participants? What type of conceptual models and theories were used to frame the research? Was the research conducted in school or an out-of-school setting? Was the literature written from a deficit or asset perspective?

Other inclusionary criteria for articles included studies of Black or African American girls in grades 5–12. Due to the novelty of digital literacy, we widened the search to include studies conducted both within the United States and abroad. We excluded articles that, although centered on Black girls, focused on disciplinary specific use of technology, such as science or mathematics, as our aim was to highlight studies that examined Black girls using their digital literacy practices more broadly.

TABLE 11.1 Summary of Studies on Black Girls and Digital Multimodal Compositions (n = 16)

Characteristics	*References*
Publication Years	
2005–2010	1
2011–2015	5
2016–2020	10
Design	
Qualitative	5
Practitioner Research	1
Case Study	6
Ethnography	3
Online Content Analysis	1
Age of Participants	
Grades 5–8	4
Grades 9–12	7
Range Across Grades 5–12	4
Unknown	1
Context	
In-School	5
Out-of-School	7
Neither	4
Content Area	
English Language Arts	3
Elective	1
Humanities	1
Non-applicable	11

Data Analysis: Using the Black Girls' Literacies Framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) described later in the chapter as a model, we reviewed each study and noted the ways in which participants enacted the six elements of the framework that will be expounded upon further in the synthesis of the literature. Prior to providing a synthesis of the themes prevalent in the literature, we have included a summary of the publication years, methodologies, age range, and location of the studies we reviewed in Table 11.1.

Our Perspectives

The theoretical perspective that informed this study was Muhammad and Haddix's (2016) Black Girls' Literacies Framework (BGLF). This framework was birthed out of the second author's analysis of the literature on Black girls' engagement in

English education classrooms. We found that in nearly all of the studies, researchers were facilitating Black girls in literary pursuits both implicitly and explicitly in six distinct ways. We argued that these six elements aided in Black girls' literacy development and should be used to teach Black girls more excellently in English classrooms today. We termed the collection of these six components, the Black Girls' Literacies Framework, which centers Black girls' ways of knowing and being in the world.

There are six elements of Black girls' literacies. First, Black girls' literacies are perceived as multiple because as they engage in literacy practices, they use more than one modality. When they are reading text, they are also making sense of it through the use of writing, performance, and digital compositions. Second, their literacies are tied to their identities. As they read and write, they center their race, gender, class, and other identities such as their roles as a sibling or a daughter. Third, Black girls' literacies are historical. Their literacy practices are aligned with those of Black women historically. Researchers also often used historical frameworks, such as critical race theory and Black feminism to examine the literary pursuits of Black girls. Critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) posits that race is a social construct maintained to oppress people of color through systemic means such as tracking in schools where students are separated based on their perceived academic ability in their courses. Black feminism theories, such as Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990) center the perspectives of Black women and girls to produce and validate their knowledge. Fourth, Black girls' practices are collaborative. They engage in these practices not as individual acts but often with other girls or in conversation, through their work with other Black women and girls. Fifth, their work is intellectual. They develop their ideas through critical thought, discussion, and reflection on how their lived experiences and the lives of others are influenced by social inequalities. Finally, Black girls' literacies are political and critical as their reading of texts is connected to issues of power and oppression and aims toward social transformation.

Our Synthesis of the Literature

Digital Tools for Reframing Narratives

A prominent focus in the literature was the use of digital tools for the purpose of upsetting dominant discourses about Black girls within the media and society. Black girls often created digital stories, some with the guidance of an adult. Regardless of their origin, repositioning their narratives to the forefront provided Black girls the freedom to voice their disapproval in an agentive fashion and depict themselves in ways that captured the fullness of their lives.

Hall (2011) documented the digital storytelling of three Black middle-school girls who filmed public service announcements to center their multiple identities and perspectives on the world. The girls were participants in a summer program,

which foregrounded intellectualism and culturally responsive pedagogy. For their cumulative project, they collaboratively produced a film that displayed sisterhood amongst Black girls who supported and encouraged one another as one of them battled depression. In a society that privileges individualism, the girls used their collective strength to help their friend navigate this challenge. They contested the idea that this was a problem that resided in the young girl's individual psyche alone. Instead, they saw her individual battle as a confluence of multiple sociocultural issues, including emotionally shouldering her family's financial burdens and the physical manifestation of stress as a result of living within a society that constantly ignores societal inequalities placed on people of color and instead resorts to victim blaming.

In a similar way, Ajayi (2015) documented in his multiple case studies how Black girls' enacted criticality through their multimodal critiques of gender bias prevalent within their school textbooks. Across five months, Ajayi led 38 ninth-grade girls in critical literacy instruction that taught them how to deconstruct and interrogate texts related to issues of identity, agency, and power within their all-girls school in Nigeria. In their final activity, they read a tragedy that dealt with gender hierarchy from their English textbook and drew portraits as critical responses. They were also encouraged to use the class's Facebook page to engage in discussions with their peers around the lessons. Their drawings and written responses allowed them to critique society's perceptions of men and women. Through social media and browsing the Internet, the girls were able to locate examples from the media and highlight experiences from their own lives that went against dominant narratives regarding the positioning of women within their society.

Muhammad and Womack (2015) led middle and high school girls in digital compositions that highlighted the traditional and digital writing practices of Black girls. Using the writings of Black women writers and other literary artifacts as mentor texts, the girls were able to connect their experiences with that of Black women historically. When taking up their own pens, they found that the girls wrote against false notions of beauty, the objectification of Black women and girls, and society's failure to acknowledge their brilliance. Participants used multiple mediums such as images, collages, poetry, and videos to elevate their voices above the constant murmur of negativity from society and individuals who failed to notice their brilliance.

During an analysis of the literary expressions of two high school Black girls, Gibbs Grey and Jones Stanbrough (2019) found that the participants used their digital literacies to engage in their neighborhoods as community activists, process traumatic events, make political statements through fashion, and affirm their identities. One girl used social media to reframe the way in which others portrayed her on their digital platforms by posting images on her profile that highlighted how she wished to be perceived. These posts affirmed her as a young Black women, debater, and innovator.

In conducting the only study that used a content analysis, Phelps-Ward and Laura (2016) analyzed the videos of Black girls as content creators. They recognized YouTube as an affirming space to uplift Black girls with natural hair. Through the videos they posted and in their responses to viewers' comments, the girls created a space privileging self-love, uplifting one another, and politically contesting beauty standards by affirming the beauty of Black hair.

Digital Tools as Facilitators

In some studies, virtual spaces served as a way to facilitate discussions of texts. Greene (2016) led a group of six Black high school-aged girls who were avid readers in discussions of street literature by using the social media platform Facebook. Through this collaborative space, the girls were able to use reading to unearth the shortcomings of society. They used their critical lenses to unveil the societal factors and resulting trauma that influenced the circumstances in which the characters found themselves. They were able to connect these external factors to issues within their lives as Black girls. Their Facebook discussions became opportunities to privilege their viewpoints of the world. Interestingly, Greene noted that although they were comfortable discussing in-depth their opinions of the readings online, they used academic language in their published work in comparison to their use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) during face-to-face interactions. Greene believed that although their discussions occurred within an out-of-school digital space, the participants "representations of self were rooted in perceptions of social norms around literacy, learning, and language" (Greene, 2016, p. 284).

Dillard (2012) also lead a book club with Black high school girls as a moral obligation to expose them to books written by African American women authors. Some of her participants never had the chance to read the work of sister authors. She found that through the anonymity of online chat, the girls problematized what it means to be a Black girl. They learned that Black girls are of a range of hues and have various aesthetic interests. This online community provided a place for the girls to learn from others with different perspectives than their own through dialogue. The medium of digital chat also gave them space to question the intentions of sister authors whom they felt failed to accurately portray Black girls in multidimensional ways.

Digital Tools as Resistance

Black girls use digital tools as an active way to resist both systematic and individual censorship of their perspectives. Scott (2005) observed middle school Black girls' development of their digital literacies in two separate ethnographies or long-term observational research. To her surprise, she found that the girls were able to quickly acquire these skills through the support of their peers. Once mastered, they used

technology as a means to stay connected with one other even during assignments intended to be completed individually. Through instant messaging, uploading photos, and developing webpages, they used their imaginations to travel across time and space and publish their future aspirations for the world to see. Outside of their virtual interactions, the girls questioned the media's biased portrayals of their community. Their websites became a way for them to deconstruct these narratives with their own stories. As young girls, they were still subject to issues with their body image and used the digital editing features on their computers to manipulate their hair length, body size, and skin complexion, however. Scott argued that in order to help these Black girls resist mainstream beauty standards, the "girls need more guidance as they progress through the trajectories of self-definition" (Scott, 2005, p. 10).

Kelly (2018) conducted focus group interviews with Black girls who were seniors in a predominately white high school, revealing that social media provided them a safe space to voice their opinions about social issues within their communities and in the world. Their school was known for its history of racial insensitivity toward its Black student population. Social media also served as a text that the girls read to raise their awareness of social justice issues. This space was not completely trustworthy, however, as voicing their opinions on the Internet was often used against them by school administrators when their sentiments were deemed inappropriate by school leaders.

Black girls in Wade's (2019) study actively sought to avoid this censorship from their school and other adults in their lives by refusing to relinquish their space in the digital world. They actively guarded against adults accessing their social media by strategically using two social media platforms, one primarily for family consumption and the other reserved for friends. Social media became a sort of "hush harbor" (Kynard, 2010) where they developed shared, coded language used both in the digital world and in-person that allowed them control over who accessed their space and ultimately, determined how they self-represented.

McLean's (2012) ethnography of two Caribbean American immigrant sisters revealed that digital spaces may function as resources for Black girls to negotiate the ways in which their bodies are positioned in the world. When confronted with the issue of being judged for the way they dressed, one sister used her Facebook status to purposefully position herself in a way that at first glance appeared as an attempt to subscribe to gender norms. However, this virtual move allowed her to stay firm to her beliefs while accessing vital social networks within school. One of the sisters was able to reclaim her voice, which had once been silenced by using texts and images on her blog. Blogging allowed her to not only advocate for herself as she attempted to find her place in this new setting, but also enabled her to engage in digital social activism with others from diverse backgrounds.

Digital Tools as Curriculum

Digital tools have also been used by educators to incorporate new technologies into their curriculum. Kendrick, Early, and Chemjor (2019) examined 32

aspiring journalists in Kenya as they developed their use of multimodal tools. Through direct instruction in an after-school journalism club, the Black girls learned how to video record with a digital camera. As they mastered these digital literacies, they began using these tools for their own journalistic quests. Through their newly acquired skills, they were able to question issues of power and inequality within their community by interviewing individuals directly involved within the hierarchical structure. As student journalists, they were able to access spaces unafforded to them without their camera.

Price-Dennis (2016) instructed fifth graders in a curriculum that leveraged the use of multiple 21st-century tools such as digital storytelling, digital applications and platforms, podcasts, and tablets. The Black girls in the class not only used these tools to demonstrate their academic literacies, but saw themselves as content creators of images, video, written texts, and poetry. Their digital compositions challenged stereotypes placed upon Black women and girls that were often invisible or perhaps ignored by their peers.

bell hooks served as a literary mentor to inspire feminism within an elective course in Troutman and Jiménez's (2016) study. They found that the Black girl highlighted in their case study was influenced by hooks' work and used her posts on the class blog to engage in critical thought. Through her posts, she critiqued the paradoxical hypervisibility and invisibility of Black women and girls within our society. Her blogs addressed issues such as the limitations Black girls have in claiming their sexuality and the lack of awareness regarding Black women and girls who encounter state-sanctioned violence.

Although their ethnographic study was based on the reflections of two participants, one a Black Muslim girl and the other an Afro-Latino male, Stornaiuolo and Thomas's (2018) study was included in this review. The filmmakers in their study used storytelling to demonstrate their mastery of academic competencies valued by their school and reimagine the world into the one in which they wish to live. Through their film, these young media producers historicized the discrimination faced by Muslim Black girls and were able to connect the participant's individual story with the numerous experiences of Muslims in America especially young Muslim women.

The use of digital multimodal literacy practices within classrooms did not always provide Black girls freedom of expression. In McDavid Schmidt and Beucher (2018) embodied analysis, fifth-grade Black girls used digital, multimodal tools to highlight a theme predominant throughout their class's readings of picture books and novels by Jacqueline Woodson, an award-winning African American author. Their reading of the literature was informed by their racial identity. The girls engaged in critical dialogue regarding their chosen theme of unity by reflecting on the existence of racial segregation within the text and the contemporary manifestation of racial segregation with school choice policies. Their final project represented a more color-blind portrayal of unity, however. The authors concluded that "the girls' negotiations that resulted in the erasure of a salient racial discourse of disharmony and inequity should raise concerns for

those of us invested in supporting critical literacies for youth of colour" (McDavid Schmidt & Beucher, 2018, p. 130).

Reflections on the Literature

Findings from this literature review have indicated that researchers are engaging Black girls with digital multimodal tools in four distinct ways to (1) reframe narratives, (2) to facilitate book discussions, (3) to serve as tools of resistance, and (4) to serve as curriculum. These areas synthesize the emerging body of literacy related to Black girls and digital literacies within the past decade and a half. Some of the studies cut across all four elements. However, we have grouped these studies based on the most prevalent usage of the digital tools by the participants in the studies. Based on the present literature, it appears that researchers are engaging Black girls with digital literacies in the ways just mentioned almost equally.

As expected, social media appears to be the primary place (see Table 11.2) used by researchers to engage Black girls in digital literacy practices and the chosen forum among Black girls themselves. Table 11.2 provides a list of the digital tools used in the studies with Black girls including social media platforms, digital video, blogs, chatrooms, and web 2.0 applications and platforms. This is not surprising bearing in mind that Black teens are the largest group of social media users (Associated Press's NORC Center for Public Affairs Research & American Press

TABLE 11.2 Summary of Digital Tools Used in Black Girls' Compositions

Digital Tools Used	
Social Media	*Digital Video*
Facebook (Wade, 2019; Greene, 2016; Ajayi, 2015; McLean, 2012)	(Hall, 2011; Kendrick et al., 2019; Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2018)
Snapchat (Kelly, 2018; Wade, 2019)	**Blog**
Twitter (Kelly, 2018)	(McLean, 2012; Troutman & Jiménez, 2016)
Pinterest (Muhammad & Womack, 2015)	**Chatroom**
YouTube (Phelps-Ward & Laura, 2016)	(Dillard, 2012)
Not Specified (Gibbs Grey & Jones Stanbrough, 2019)	**Web 2.0 Applications and Platforms**
	Instant Messaging and website development (Scott, 2005)
	Voicethreads (Dillard, 2012)
	Class websites, Google Form, memes, animation film, BlendSpace, podcasts, Google Slide (Price-Dennis, 2016)

Institute, 2015). The shortage of studies where digital tools are employed in the classroom is troubling, however. Technology is intertwined with people's existence especially in the lives of youth who interface with television, social media, music, and their phones constantly. It would be expected that teachers would use the accessibility of digital tools as an invitation to integrate technology within their classrooms. The digital platforms mentioned in Table 11.2 can serve as guidance when selecting digital tools for adults working with youth who would like to increase their digital engagement.

Based on the research conducted so far, the use of digital media in classrooms may afford students opportunities to engage in social justice (Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012), foster critical media literacy (McArthur, 2016), and participate in safe spaces, especially for those from marginalized communities (Kynard, 2010).

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Findings from this research synthesis have implications for the use of digital tools in classrooms for Black girls, which can also be applied to all youth, as well. The Black Girls' Literacies Framework and its components can be productive for all children. Throughout the content areas, learning must be grounded in multiple practices of literacy, such as reading, writing, thinking, speaking, critiquing, and listening. This include using digital tools to engage in literacies. Literacy practices should not be reserved for traditional humanities, such as English/language arts or social studies. Learning must also connect to students' identities and histories.

Teachers across the disciplines may ask: What are the critical social issues in the world and how can I connect them to my skills and standards taught in class? Learning must also enable intellection (by asking *what are students becoming smarter about?*), criticality (by asking *how does instruction help students to understand and disrupt oppression?*), and collaboration (by asking *how are students working together to enable social change in communities?*). These questions and approaches are centered in the Black Girls' Literacies Framework. Digital tools can and should be used across all content areas to reframe narratives that are imposed (those that are both positive and negative) on the lives of the students. Second, digital tools can facilitate discussion and comprehension of learning. Students can use the tools to push back in topics learned across mathematics, science, history and English language arts – topics such as environmental justice, pollution, gentrification, racism, sexism and disparities in health care. This then becomes a new type of curriculum in which students do not only gain academic success but also criticality in socio-political consciousness to teach the whole child and to assist in children's personal and academic development.

Adults, such as parents and those who work with youth in out-of-school settings, as well as educators should refer to the work of critical scholars who have served in the role of public intellectuals through using their words of wisdom

and work to inform the public of their social, economic, and political concerns. Public scholars, such as Anna Julie Cooper, W.E.B. DuBois, Jamilla Lyiscott, and Kendrick Lamar, have laid foundations for what criticality looks like in practice. Their writings can serve as mentor texts for youths' production of their own digital work. Young people need a space to practice their digital literacies and discuss and address contemporary sociopolitical issues. Black girls are already critically engaging with the world everyday multimodally. This necessitates that we nurture their skills and abilities to continue the legacy began by African Americans long before to not simply consume texts but to use their literacies to place their mark or post on HERstory.

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12

VOICES FROM THE MARGINS

Latinx and Chicanx/Filipina Women Writing Ephemeral Texts for Representation and Resistance

Barbara J. Guzzetti

Researchers (e.g., Avila, 2019; Gonzales, 2016; Martinez, 2018) have begun to explore how females who are Latinx (a term used to respect the gender diversity of people who identify as being from Latin American descent) compose identity texts. The advent of the People of Color Zine Project founded by Daniela Capistrano, a queer Chicana who is a self-taught media professional (King, 2013), that archives and showcases zines (self-publications constructed as alternatives to commercial magazines) created by diverse individuals have promoted Latinx women's zines. Latinx females in the academy and others (e.g., Bold, 2017; King, 2013; Weida, 2013) have raised awareness of how women of Mexican descent produce these print and multimodal texts that assist them in representing themselves as women of color by drawing attention to these creative efforts. These lines of inquiry that describe and showcase how textual forms can be vehicles for self-expression may serve as models for others in finding their voices.

These studies have provided valuable insights into the realities and lived experiences of Latinx women and their construction of multimodal texts for expression of gender and racial identities. Martinez (2018) examined poetry and art by women of color in the grassroots feminist zine (a self-publication created as an alternative to a commercial magazine), *Flor y Canto*, published by the East LA Chicana Collective, Mujeres de Maiz, finding that Chicanas deployed their artism to critique patriarchy, speak against gender violence, and heal from trauma. Antoinette Avila used the concept of neplanta (Anzaldua, 2002), a word that means in between, to explore gender identity beyond traditional gender binaries of Mexica culture to understand how indigenous youth express gender, finding that girls stayed within ascribed binary-based gender presentations in creating self-illustrations. Gonzales (2016) examined six Latinx zines, finding that zines

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supported development of sexual subjectivities and assisted their creators in surviving racism, sexism, homophobia, and other social inequalities.

These investigations have also illustrated the need for additional explorations of Latinx women's construction of multimodal texts for expression of gender and racial identities due to their limitations. None of these studies included observations of and interviews with Latinx women creating multimodal texts that could lend insights into their motivations and their intentions as to the messages they wished to convey. Hence, these studies lacked the creators' perspectives and self-interpretations of their own textual productions.

My Purpose

The purpose of this investigation was to expand on the extant research by conducting a case study (Stake, 2005) of an under-researched population, Latinx women, who compose zines (self-publications created as alternatives to commercial magazines) and related multimodal productions as identity texts. I focused on how Latinx women created perzines (personal zines of their writings and art) and related media to advance their agendas and represent themselves as women of color. Zines have been known for their political promise, offering alternative social frameworks as counter-cultural productions and responses to social contexts (Licona, 2012), articulate alternative ways of being the world, and reflect the work of disidentification or negotiations of marginalized people against the dominant society (Munoz, 1999). I asked: Why do Latinx women compose zines and related media? How do Latinx women produce zines that represent their gender and racial identities? I anticipated that answering these questions could provide insight into the roles and functions literacy can serve in the life of Latinx women and by making their writings visible provide mentor texts for other young women of color to stimulate their own production of identity texts.

Perspectives

A theory of writing as meaning making informed this study (Andrews & Smith, 2011). In this view, writing is a way of making sense of the world and the self and a means to communicate. This perspective focuses on how writers develop, what functions writing plays in people's lives, and why people write. Studying why and how people write can assist others in developing their writing. This view is consistent with a sociocultural perspective (Street, 2014) underlying the new literacies or those literacy practices that are chronologically new and represent new ways of communicating, including an ethos of participation, collaboration, and distribution of content (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007). This perspective recognizes multimodal forms of text (Cope & Kalantas, 2000) and semiotic constructions of meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). A social-semiotic perspective focuses on

making meaning through situated practices and interpretation, multiple modes, and representational features (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Multiliteracies scholars consider all meaning-making as multimodal, requiring navigating multiple modes of communication (Kalantas & Cope, 2012).

This study was also informed by intersectionality theory or intersectional feminist views (Crenshaw, 1989, 2015) recognizing the multiple oppressions that stem from intersecting subjectivities, including race, gender, and social class. This view recognizes concurrent and overlapping forms of oppression resulting from interacting social identities to understand inequalities. Patterns of oppression are not simply interrelated but are influenced by their interrelations. Intersectionality seeks to identify related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination that are experienced in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity.

A final perspective that informed this study was Anzaldua's (2012) theory of conocimiento, a word that means knowing or a longing to understand, representing a decolonial epistemology that recognizes the (re)generative capacity of the creative process. Concocimiento seeks alternative ways of knowing that extend beyond seemingly objective truths, valuing intuition and perception, leading to a deepened awareness of reality and a decolonial way of understanding. Anzaladu's Coyolxauhqui imperative, named after an Aztec goddess who rebelled against patriarchal violence, or the ability to create, heal, and sustain differences and Anzaladu's concept of a bridge, symbolizing the work of women of color in forming alliances, sustaining action, and recognizing differences in the pursuit of social transformation, also informed the study (Anzaldua, 2002).

My Inquiries

Selecting the Participating Women

I focused on two Latinx women who produced zines, self-publications that are authored or edited and distributed as alternatives to commercial magazines by those who create them, referred to as "zinesters." I purposively selected these women for case study (Stake, 2005) due to their racial and ethnic backgrounds as Latinx and Chicanx/Filipina women. They each produced multimedia in print, visual, and digital forms, including their personal or perzines of their own poetry, comics, or prose; supporting social and Internet media; and extended texts. Their real names have been used with their consent for attribution.

Collecting and Analyzing the Data

I observed and photographed these young women discussing and distributing their zines at a national Zine Fest held in 2018 in Phoenix, Arizona. I took field notes and conducted in-situ interviews with these women as they distributed and discussed their zines. I collected one issue of their zines at the symposium and

other issues by mail. Each zinester completed a demographic questionnaire, asking their ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, educational and professional experiences, as well as their zines' purposes, messages, distribution, audiences, and readers' feedback.

Following the zine festival, I conducted audio-recorded, semi-structured, and transcribed interviews with these women by telephone. The interview questions focused on the women's influences, inspirations, messages, zining trajectories, and how their related social media supported their zines. I conducted informal interviews with them by electronic mail to clarify and elaborate on their questionnaire responses. I examined their zines and related websites and social media and extended texts of flyers, posters, art, and business cards. In doing so, I followed the zinesters on their social media and became their Facebook friends, taking screen shots of their posts.

I conducted an inductive thematic analysis (Patton, 2014) in which I read, reread, annotated, coded, and categorized the data. Reoccurring categories across the data forms became themes. I also deductively coded and categorized the data for illustrations of constructs from the theoretical frameworks. Member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were conducted by returning interview transcripts and manuscript drafts to the women for their modifications, resulting in corrections to information that was unclear, incorrectly recorded or represented updates.

Researcher Positionality/Reflexivity and Limitations

Although I do not write or edit my own zines, I consider myself an "acafan" (Hills, 2002), an academic who is also a fan of zines, and see myself as a member of the zine community, having attended several zine symposiums in different cities in the United States and maintaining a personal collection of zines that I read, share, and gift to others. As a feminist qualitative researcher and a member of the dominant white society who is not a Spanish language speaker, I recognize my limitations in conducting research with Latinx women on their media production. I acknowledge the dangers of essentializing Latinx women without noting the characterizations of individuals or imposing my own cultural perspectives. In this chapter, I use the terms Latinx or Chicanx/Filipino as they were used by the zinesters in referring to themselves and their ethnic/racial/gender groups. I have tried to counter any tendencies toward Eurocentrism by involving my informants in the research process and soliciting their comfort with my interpretations.

The Zinesters and Their Zines

Maxi Rodriguez

When I met her, Maxi was a single 29-year-old Latina woman from Norwalk, California, who described herself as lower-middle income despite having a

master of fine arts degree from California College for the Arts (Figure 12.1). Maxi identified as heterosexual, used the pronouns of she/her, and had a boyfriend in medical school who she featured in her zines. Maxi works as a graphic designer and comic artist, stating that zining is a freelance career she chose, creating "plus size girl feminist/Latinx zines" and art. Maxi publishes her zines under her pen name, Kasuto Productions, titled after a fictional town in a video game. Her semi-autobiographical comic-strip perzines include *Plus Size Girl Magic* and

FIGURE 12.1 Maxi Rodriguez

Brown Girl Awkwardness in which she hopes to convey the message, "Love yourself and embrace who you are." Maxi also publishes comics she characterizes as "a slice of life with feminist and Latinx elements" on a digital platform, WebToons (www.webtoons.com/en/challenge/chronicles-of-a-chubbybunny/list?title_no=175804), promoting her zines and comics through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube and distributing them at zine fests and at Sol-Con: The Brown, Black and Indigenous Comics Expo (https://odi.osu.edu/sol-con). To supplement and promote her zines and comics, she also produces business cards, art work, and posters. She had recently been interviewed in a panel presentation on her zines for Podcast MexAmeriCon (www.mexamericon.com/); Comadres y Comics (www.podomatic.com/podcasts/comadresycomics), a podcast hosted by three women to highlight female and Latinx presence in comics; and Part-Time Fanboy (https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/part-time-fanboy-podcast/id505834613), a weekly podcast covering all aspects of popular culture and media.

Breaking Gender and Cultural Stereotypes

Maxi used her comics to chronicle her inner struggles and feelings of sadness and pain, emotionality that she reported is stigmatized in Latino culture, and wrote to combat oppression resulting from the intersections of her gender, culture, and body size. Inspired by interviews with fat-bodied men and women in the blog on the website Fatness Fiction (https://fatnessfiction.com), Maxi created her comic zine to counter portrayals of fat-bodied super heroes in comic books that she finds offensive for their promotion of eating disorders or for their character's ultimate destruction/marginalization in the story lines. Her admiration for the Baroque female painter, Artemisia, who painted a woman slaying the king oppressing her people also inspired her stories of female empowerment.

As a Latina girl, Maxi considers herself to have "two strikes against me," compounded by the physical manifestations of her depression and anxiety in a plus-size body. In her zines, the main character, Artist, is a plus-size Latina who lacks self-confidence and struggles with depression and anxiety, but creates the persona of Chubby Bunny, a plus-size version of herself who is confident and fights back against her negative feelings and would-be oppressors. Artist has a boyfriend, Handsome Stallion, who is portrayed as "the opposite of machismo culture" as a tall, muscular man who loves traditionally feminine pursuits of manicures, facials, and cooking and is not afraid to show his emotions, particularly his love and devotion to his "Chubby Bunny," a term of affection he coined for Artist, that Maxi illustrates along with his other emotions he displays in her zines. Maxi commented:

> In the Latino culture, it is wrong (especially for men) to show emotions of sadness and pain. Mental health is stigmatized and those who often go and seek help are shamed and deemed "crazy" and some are often associated

> with being possessed by a demon. It is valid to feel sad. The cultural expectation is, "Don't show emotion." I break cultural stereotypes.

Aside from her semi-autobiographical story lines, Maxi highlighted and countered racial/ethnic stereotypes and misconceptions she encounters in her everyday life as people make false assumptions about her based on her skin tone and body size stemming from their own ignorance of cultures and ethnic/racial differences. In her zine, *More Brown Girl Awkwardness*, Volume 2, she illustrates Awkward Moment #2, "People assuming you're not from here," being asked if she spoke English, and Awkward Moment #9, "When you're chubby and brown, people assume you're Samoan," being asked how it was in Hawaii. In Awkward Moment #11, Volume 2, she illustrated herself with her buddy, Breenache, being referred to as "two Mexicans" when her friend is Central American. Maxi also illustrated people calling the Spanish language "Mexican" in Awkward Moment #12, Volume 2, as she is being told, "You speak Mexican." These microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) or verbal indignities deny the individual as a cultural being, "otherize" or marginalize difference, and perpetuate racial/ethnic inequalities. By cartooning her experiences like these and by using code meshing (Canagarajah, 2006), a translanguaging strategy employed by multilinguals, in writing dialogue in English and Spanish within or in nearby frames of her comics she assisted readers in understanding and conveyed a reader-friendly tone. In doing so, Maxi raised awareness of the often unspoken of or ignored racial/cultural slights that perpetuate colorism and racism, an act representing disidentification with dominant ideologies (Munoz, 1999).

Resisting Racial/Sexual Harassment and Aggression

As a brown plus-size woman, Maxi has been the target of objectifying comments from men, particularly those that alluded to her as consumable. In her zine, *Brown Girl Awkwardness*, Volume 1, Maxi illustrates Chubby Bunny being referred to by men as "milk chocolate," "caramel," or "spicy," with one "dude" sneering, "I love me some spicy milk chocolate." She counters these unwelcome sneers with retorts, such as "Dude, you want to die a virgin or without your dick?" During her interview for the *Comadres y Comics* podcast, Maxi related the story of a man telling her in Spanish that she looked and probably tasted like a grape: "A mi me gustan asi como cuerpo de uva," a comment that is more insulting in Spanish than when translated to English. In *More Brown Girl Awkwardness*, Volume 2, Chubby Bunny is seen as exotic because of her body size and brown skin as a man leers, "I'd love to explore your exotic curves" followed by her admonishment, "I'm a woman, not a piece of land." Maxi also confided experiences she has had in which she has been reduced to a fetish that some men have with fat women.

Men's harassing advances have not only included comments of sexual objectification but have also extended to physical aggression. In Volume 2 of *Plus Size Girl Magic*, Maxi related her real-life story by writing of Chubby Bunny at a swimming pool wearing a two-piece swimsuit when "a random pervert" tried to hug her and force her on his lap, putting "his hand on my butt" – even after she tried to dissuade him by telling him she was married (Figure 12.2). She expressed her shock and dismay that he continued to try to take advantage of her in a vulnerable situation despite her verbal protests. She stopped going swimming, felt scared and humiliated, and blamed herself for the incident that destroyed her confidence, vowing to never wear a two-piece swimsuit again, and not relating the incident to anyone. After confiding in her boyfriend, her suegra (her mother-in-law), and her therapist, she realized that no one blamed her for this sexual assault. She proactively switched gyms and wore a two-piece swimsuit again, remarking how being able to talk (and write) about it openly allowed her to move forward, a manifestation of the Coyolxauhqui imperative of deconstruction and reconstruction as a strategy for survival (Anzaldua, 2002).

In addition to sexual objectification and harassment, Maxi has also been subjected to men's lewd propositions. Maxi details the toxic masculinity she experienced from men who with their misogynist logic expected her to be grateful for any male attention due to her body size. In *Plus Size Girl Magic*, Volume 2, Maxi

FIGURE 12.2 Excerpt from Maxi's Zine, Plus Size Girl Magic, Vol. 2

cartoons an incident in which a man attempted to intimidate her into having sexual relations by threatening to gossip about her as being "super easy" sexually if she refused, retorting to him that she would retaliate by gossiping that he was inept sexually, writing of resistance, and cartooning clever ways she confronts her oppressors.

Establishing Sites of Resistance

For Maxi, zines were a way of finding her voice, allowing her to name intersecting sites of oppression, identify cultural ignorance, and challenge sexist or stereotypical notions of the performance of gender, race, and sexuality, allowing her to refute stereotypical discourses of Latinas as uncontrollably sexual (Garcia, 2012). In commenting on her stories of sexual harassment, Max reflected, "Most women are afraid to speak up. We're blamed for it – like we asked for it." Sharing her life experiences through a fictional character allowed Maxi to "talk back" to her oppressors, to speak out and speak up.

Maxi's stories and art celebrated body positivity, vehicles for self-acceptance, self-love, and resistance against negativity and discrimination due to body size and were considered by readers as relatable texts. In volume 1 of Plus Size Girl Magic, Chubby Bunny looks in the mirror and sees her stomach, but exclaims, "I'm cute!" Reflecting on her fictional character, Maxi posted on Facebook, "Chubby Bunny has allowed me to be comfortable and create a safe space for my feelings [about my body] that I'm slowly learning to express." Maxi saw her comics as "relatable to all genders, especially those with plus-size bodies." She reported that one fan saw her at Rose City ComicCon in Portland, Oregon, and confided, "I've been going to ComicCon for 10 years and I never felt like I belonged. I never saw plus size comics." Maxi's zines created a safe space for her and her readers to feel represented and respected, reporting that her readers responded with tears of happiness "because I gave someone a place to belong."

Marissa Aguliar

When I met her, Marissa was a 22-year-old woman from a middle-class area of Phoenix, Arizona, a single person who self-identified as a queer, half Hispanic, half Filipino female (Figure 12.3). She had a bachelor of science degree in criminal justice, worked as a judicial assistant, and aspired to be an attorney. Although she had always enjoyed writing poems, Marissa published her first and only zine, a perzine of poetry, *My Mother Started Turning White When I Was Nine & Other Reflections*, under her own name, having been stimulated to create it by the announcement of the Phoenix Zine Festival. She promoted her zine by advertising it on Facebook and Instagram, noting that it mainly has attracted queer of color folks.

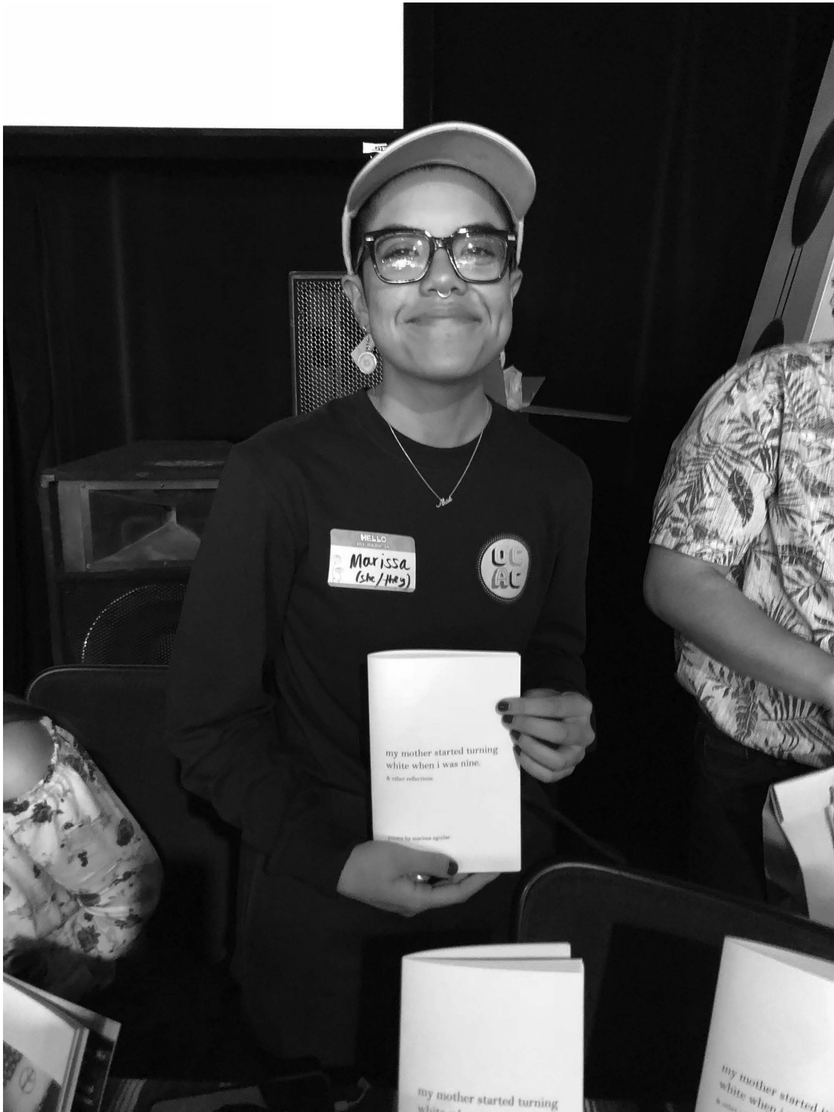

FIGURE 12.3 Marissa Aguilar

Reflecting on Subjectivities and Loss

In her questionnaire responses, Marissa described her zine as a reflection on "living as a queer femme/woman of color in my social circles (romantic relationships, family, etc.)." In doing so, a theme that was repeated in her writing was loss. For example, Marissa wrote of the loss of a romantic relationship due to her skin color

(i.e., "you will always leave me and my brown skin for something fairer," p. 3). Her poems also conveyed the marginalization and separation of family, culture, and friends she experienced resulting from others' aspirations for her identification with and emulation of whiteness, an imposition she eschewed.

From an early age, Marissa has felt pressured to assimilate to white culture and to change herself and her appearance accordingly. Marissa's poetry relayed the anguish of adolescent peer rejection due to her skin color and her sexual orientation. She penned:

> The girls I grew up around
> convinced me that femininity did not look good on me
> that my masculine tendencies and characteristics were worthy of disgust and shame
> that aspiring plummeting to whiteness was the most noble thing
> my little brown body could do.

In this example, her poetry conveyed the pressure she received from other girls to assimilate to a different culture, the majority and dominant white culture, an expectation of cultural shift and marginalization that is typically not experienced by white women. As a self-described intersectional feminist, Marissa believed that "true feminism is recognizing the disadvantages and barriers that women of color have to face that white women typically do not." This cultural rejection was one of those barriers identified in Marissa's poem.

Pressure to identify with and conform to whiteness not only permeated Marissa's social circle but her family circle, as well. In her zine's title poem, Marissa related an incident where her mother who was half brown and half white acquired a white boyfriend, and with him also attained an aspiration to whiteness for herself and her family. Marissa's poetry conveyed this "whitewashing" of her culture, uprooting a foundation on which her familial world was built. She recalled:

> The first time we met,
> he noticed the colors of the walls –
> declared they would look better white than tan
> and began painting the inside of our home
> to reflect what he was doing to our mother. . .
> [he] used delicate strokes to make our home look like him
> an act of erasure of identity
> pictures removed
> memories reconstructed
> in order to fit the correct narrative. . .

In her poem, internal oppression from within her family resulted in the imposition of whiteness that destroyed cultural identity. Marissa's poems like this one

illustrated her desire "to recognize whiteness and how it permeates into our society in a negative way." Marissa characterized whiteness as "a set of privileges granted to white-skinned individuals and groups, normalized in its production/maintenance for those of that group such that its operations are invisible to those privileged by it (but not to those oppressed/disadvantaged by it)."

Marissa's two poems reflect her agenda to bring awareness to the systematic whiteness that exists within society. Her writings are reminders of "the conscious collective of whiteness as social norm" (Guess, 2006, p. 650). Each speaks to the trauma caused by systemic oppression of ethnocentrism and racism that impacted her as a member of multiple socially constructed groups (Crenshaw, 1989). This cultural erasure constituted ethno-racial trauma, or psychological distress caused by experience witnessing discrimination, threats of harm, violence, or intimidation (Chavez-Duenaz, Adames, Perez-Chavez, & Salas, 2019).

Creating Spaces for Healing

Marissa aspired for her work to be a healing space for herself and others. Zining has allowed her catharsis by providing an opportunity to reflect on her past experiences and trauma and recover from those incidents. She described her writing as a healthy outlet that was a "very personal and honest" process. Through her zines, Marissa hoped to reach others who could identify with her experiences and "bring people of color together to create spaces of healing and joy," a bridge to women of color consciousness (Anzaldua, 2002). Marissa reported that she had been told by her readers that her words are "powerful inspirational and relatable." Marissa hopes that her zines "convey the message that queer people of color deserve opportunities to share their work ubiquitously because our stories are necessary."

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

These zinesters inform literacy education by serving as examples of how writing can be used to resist marginalizing social/political messages and to form community for social transformation. These zinesters demonstrated how Latinx women can write in multimodal genres to refute gender and cultural stereotypes, resist oppression, and offer alternative views and representations that challenge dominant ideologies. This study of their zines constitutes one of few investigations (e.g., van Amsterdam, 2013; Harjunen, 2003) identifying body size as a site of oppression from an intersectional framework. Findings demonstrate how alternative media can be agentive vehicles for identifying sites of oppression, providing safe spaces for self-representation of racial, gender, and body-positive identities, and for creating sites of resistance against subjugation.

Although zines should not be reduced to writing assignments in schools or made to be institutionalized, school appropriate, or graded, youth may be made

aware of zines and how zining can be supported in other settings. The People of Color Zine Project (https://issuu.com/poczineproject) is an online archive that makes zines by individuals of color easy to find, distribute, and share. Free digital publishing platforms, like ISSUU (https://issuu.com) enable self-publishing. Teachers, parents, and others who work with marginalized populations may encourage the consumption and production of identity texts in multimodal forms that allow young women of color and others who have been oppressed to name sites of oppression and author their lived experiences for self-representation and identification.

This study also advances a theory of zine making as feminist pedagogy and practice with implications for professionals, students, and scholars in other fields, including women's and gender studies, English, and communication. Although much has been written on zines as feminist literacy practices (e.g., Clark-Parsons, 2017; Piepmeier, 2009), little scholarly attention has been paid to women of color who create zines and related media (e.g., Bold, 2017), a line of inquiry that should be pursued in future research agendas in cross-disciplinary fields and included in the curriculum in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary areas. These writings may serve as models for other women of color and those who have been marginalized to find their voices through agentive practices like zining. By writing and self-publishing media in online and offline forms and forums, Latinx women and other women of color can be enabled to construct, celebrate, and share diverse performances of gender, race, and culture.

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13

MEN'S ZINES DOWN UNDER

Exploring Gender, Race, and Social Class Through Literacies

Katina Zammit

Stereotypically, females have been considered to be capable readers and writers in contrast to males who have been perceived as less capable in literacy but more accomplished than women in the sciences and sports as these fields are perceived as male domains (Guzzetti & Zammit, 2019, in press), particularly sports that require the expression of hegemonic masculinity that values aggression and assertiveness (Jacobson, 2019). Gender stereotypes such as these represent a binary view of gender by attributing certain characteristics as "natural" to men and to women. These stereotypical beliefs associated with biological sex can impact individuals' education, cognition, and career or life choices and are based on beliefs about the personal capabilities, thoughts, behaviors, roles, and interests of each gender (Kollmayer, Schober, & Spiel, 2018). Social expectations can affect a person's self-concept and view of self.

It has been tacitly accepted in education and in the media that girls "naturally" would do better in reading and language-related subjects and that boys perform better in subjects like mathematics and physics (Barrs, 2000). English/language arts can be considered a gendered subject that is neither neutral nor impartial, but is associated with stereotypical ideas about masculinity and femininity and which genders engage and perform well in the subject (Thomas, 1991). Demonstrating excellence in English/language arts, which requires literacy abilities such as reading and writing, can put boys at risk of being positioned as feminine (Skelton & Francis, 2011). Literacy has typically been presented in schools as the domain of females and whites (Kirkland, 2013).

While being part of a literacy community by being involved in different literary discourse communities is becoming more socially accepted for boys and men, such engagement can still evoke feelings of being an outsider for the 'everyday' male. The zine community composed of those who self-publish their

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own alternatives to commercial magazines called zines, can provide a publishing avenue for men to demonstrate their literacy practices and present alternative views of gender. Zinesters can share their points of view with like-minded people within an affinity space where "people relate to each other primarily in terms of common interests, endeavors, goals or practices, not primarily in terms of race, gender, age, disability or social class" (Gee, 2005, p. 225). Communities, like the zine community with zines that challenge dominant representations of masculinity, promote alternative discourses, practices, and options for men at a time where the general public may perceive there are few alternative role models for young men and when instances of toxic masculinity are being identified by women to promote societal change with the advent of digital social movements for gender and social justice, like the #MeToo movement (https://metoomvmt.org) that brought sexual harassment and assault to the forefront. Researchers exploring the literacy practices of men making media found zines allow for alternative representations of gender, race, and social class that promote inclusivity and provide a space for resistance against oppression (Guzzetti, Foley, & Lesley, 2015).

Zines and Zinesters

Zines as self-publications can be authored or edited in myriad genres, forms, and styles, and written on a range of topics (Duncombe, 2008). There are many different types of zines, such as fanzines, science fiction zines, music zines, sports zines, television and film zines, political zines, feminist zines, personal zines or perzines, collections of the authors' own poetry and prose, scene zines, network zines, fringe culture zines, religious zines, vocational zines, health zines, sex zines, travel zines, comixs, literary zines, art zines, social zines, and others (Duncombe, 2008; Guzzetti & Zammit, 2019).

Zines provide their makers with opportunities to share aspects of their lives, their passions and obsessions, and can be activist media created by zinesters as "a tool for inspiring other forms of activism; and a medium. . . [to] effect changes within themselves, including confronting their own weaknesses, such as racism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudice" (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004, p. 411). Being a zinester provides men with a space to share their literate selves with others where they can "author their lives, asserting alternative representations and performances of masculinity, expressing their conflicts, genres of emotionality that are atypical for their gender" (Guzzetti & Zammit, 2019). Zines represent a counterculture that enables identity construction to be fluid.

My Perspectives

This study was conducted from a view of gender as a fluid construction (Bean & Harper, 2007), variable and subject to change. Butler (2004) noted that people "do" or perform gender in their everyday lives and that gender performance can vary depending on the context. Kehler (2010) noted, "there is no one form of

masculinity or femininity but rather competing, contradictory, and overlapping forms" (p. 353). Connell (1995) argued for a variety of manifestations of masculinity, with hegemonic masculinity subjugating others.

These theoretical trends have led researchers to refer to masculinity and femininity as plural – masculinities and femininities (Francis, 2010; Francis & Paechter, 2015), which challenges the categorization of behavior as "masculine" or "feminine" embedded in gender binaries. Kehler (2010) noted: "there is no one form of masculinity or femininity but rather competing, contradictory, and overlapping forms" (p. 353). Alternative views of gender present gender as a social construction in which differences between girls and boys and women and men are not natural, essential, or biological, but are entrenched in social norms, practices, and rules (Callahan & Nicholas, 2019; Subrahmanian, 2005).

Theories of whiteness also informed the study. Whiteness theory examines how white identity affects other identities in a white person's life, such as gender or social class (Hartman, Gerties, & Croll, 2009). Whiteness is a social construct and a standard to which racial minorities are compared. Whiteness theory sees whiteness as invisible to those who possess it, resulting in unintentional or intentional otherization or margination of other racial groups (Ahmed, 2012).

My Purpose

The study of zines, zine communities and zinesters has predominantly focused on the production of zines authored by females (e.g., Guzzetti, 2021; Guzzetti, 2013; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004), particularly feminist zines (Clark Parsons, 2017; Martinez, 2018). There has been, however, an increasing interest on men who zine with recent publications focusing on their zining practices (e.g., Guzzetti et al., 2015; Guzzetti & Zammit, 2019). Several of the most recent investigations have described the zining practices of men of color who express alternative forms of masculinity and parenting that break stereotypical conceptions of masculinity for African American (Guzzetti & Lesley, 2017) and Chicano men (Guzzetti & Foley, 2017).

Most of this research on men who zine has been conducted on and with zinesters producing zines within the United States. Consequently, little is known about how Australian men construct zines, for what purposes, on what topics and for whom. Therefore, I asked: How do Australian men who are white represent their masculine identities and position themselves as white men through the zines they create? How do Australian men express their gender and social class identities in zines?

My Inquiry

The Zinesters

I focused on two white male zinesters in their twenties, Chris from Australia, and Simon (their actual names used with their consent), as informants for this study.

Chris co-authored zines with a Finnish friend, Tuukka. They were selected due to their ability to inform the study as authors of personal zines or perzines and for their willingness to participate. I met them at a zine convention in Sydney, Australia in 2018 that they had attended to share, trade, or sell their zines and to be a part of the broader zine community.

Collecting the Data

The data included my observations of the two of the men (Chris and Simon) at the zine convention distributing and discussing their zines. I also collected copies of their zines: *Dirty Details* (series of 5 zines) from Chris; and Simon's *Darling*, *Neopolitan Melbourne Tryptych: The Vanilla Zine* and *TV Hypocrites No. 9*. I constructed and administered demographic questionnaires assessing their backgrounds and missions. I took photographs of the zinesters and their zines and I captured screen shots of their supporting webpages and/or social media (i.e., Instagram and Facebook). I also conducted semi-structured interviews with Chris and Simon, but not Tuukka, which were audio-recorded and transcribed, about their purposes, audience, influences, and the messages they wished to share with others about life through their own experiences and self-reflections. Chris and Simon provided permission to use their data and zines. Tuukka's contributions to the co-authored perzine are included based on Chris' permission and no demographic information was obtained for Tuukka.

Analyzing the Data

I used an interpretive paradigm to analyze the data. Thematic analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013) was employed with the qualitative data (i.e., demographic questionnaires, semi-structured interviews). I used a social semiotic approach to analyze how different modes, such as visual, written and multimodal, convey meanings through the choices, patterns and grammars (Machin, 2007) of each mode and combination of modes as an interpretive lens to examine their textual products. I also used multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) to analyze and describe the zines and the zinesters' social media texts for their visual construction or composition, representations or topics, and how the zinesters connected with their readers/ consumers. Connections were made between the analyses to link the zinesters' ideals and point of views to the representations and messages embedded in their perzines.

The Zinesters and Their Zines

Chris (and Tuukka)

Chris, a white Australian man, was 29 when I met him. Chris co-authored a perzine with his white Finnish friend, Tuukka, titled *Dirty Details*. Further

demographic information about Tuukka, beyond the information provided in the zines, is not available as he was not interviewed during the study. There were five issues in this series consisting of their personal reflections and commentaries on their lives and identities as men.

Writing Style

A range of writing styles, including comic strips, are present in the *Dirty Details* zines. The series was largely text-dominated, hand-written in capital letters, and written almost entirely in first person. The images were hand-drawn illustrations of the written text.

Figure 13.1 shows exceptions to this writing style that included comic pages, lists on particular topics ("Things That Make People Feel Bad or Uncomfortable," "A Bunch of Quotes And Anecdotes," "My Celebrity Crushes"), or insight into their private actions ("Divulging Secret Secrets of the Secret Handshake," which included diagrams and instructions to perform the handshake). Chris and his co-author used a pastiche of techniques, mimicking different mediums to express their views. There was a clear structure as all zines in the series began with an introduction, followed by text-heavy pages, then followed by more image-dominated pages toward the end, concluding with either a review of the issue or a preview of the next one.

Intentionality and Masculinities

Chris created zines for "a sense of purpose and legitimacy; a way to express emotions that are not typically discussed between males." Chris and Tuukka both explored masculinity in their writing. Chris encouraged younger males not to be constrained by fears about "showing too much emotion or being too friendly" with other male friends. Chris modeled a man expressing alternative forms of masculinity through emotionality in writing. For example, in *Dirty Details #1* Chris' response to Tuukka's comment about Chris was a missive that explained their feelings for each other, the importance of their friendship, and their personal limitations. Tuukka wrote:

> You share my love of ambitious plans paired with slacker lifestyle and a love/hate relationship with the world. . . . I can get possessiveness of my friends and it's something I'm not proud of. . . . I think as long as we can have those moments every now and then of just the two of us everything else will work out fine. I love you Chrissybaby.

In response, Chris wrote to Tuukka:

> I'm sorry if you felt any neglect of rejection. . . . You're super important to me & I really appreciate your friendship. . . . I wish I could show you

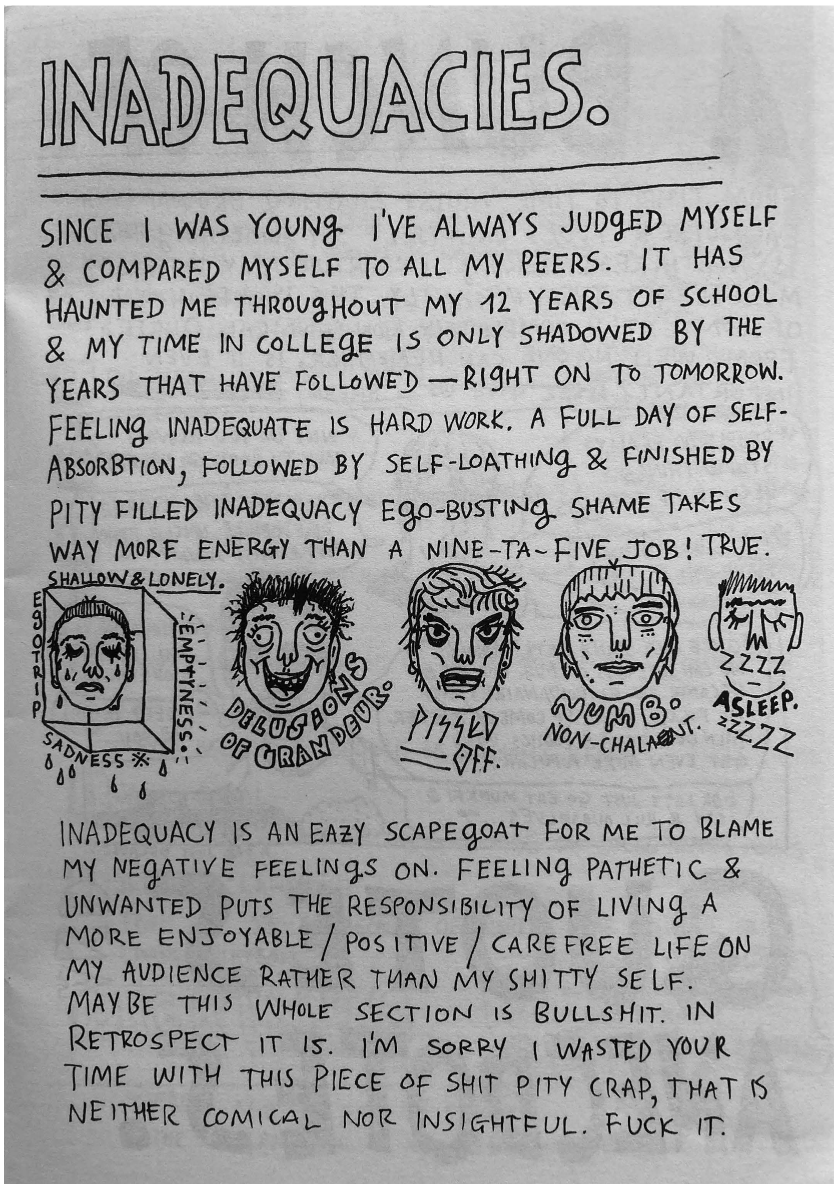


FIGURE 13.1 Writing-Dominated Page on Inadequacies from Dirty Details #2, p. 3

everyday how important you are and how much you mean to me. Unfortunately you're a needy little jerkface and all the kisses, home cooked meals and creepy faces I make will never cut the mustard for your insatiable thirst for attention.

This exchange between the two zinesters demonstrated how they displayed alternative performances of masculinity through emotionality. In doing so, they resisted stereotypical notions of men as distanced from their feelings. Their exchange is a reminder of the theory that as social and financial capital may be allocated to men who display aspects of femininity such as "being sensitive to emotional well-being, ability to communicate, awareness of health issues, aesthetic presentation of oneself" (Skelton & Francis, 2011, p. 472) these dispositions are being taken up by men.

The zine series, *Dirty Details* was a compilation of individual topics, ranging from personal reflections to commentary about the men's lives and their identities. Their individual texts were self-reflexive and often self-deprecating as each compared their lives, opinions, and identities with the perceived norms for an adult male, troubling what is "normal," socially accepted, and hegemonic masculinity with words such as: "Feeling inadequate is hard work. A full day of self-absorption followed by self-loathing and finished by pity filled inadequacy ego-busting shame takes way more energy than a nine-ta-five-job" (Issue #2).

By referencing popular culture representations of masculinity in relation to their own lives, they critiqued and questioned their identities as men, lamenting, "But I really fucking wished I was just like Grimes. I wish I was less cynical, less Chandler and more Phoebe" (Issue #2). Grimes was a famous, white female musician from a middle-class background, who embraced alternative indie-style music; Chandler (male) and Phoebe (female) were two white characters from the situation comedy, "Friends," portrayed as middle-class working people. Chandler's male character was cynical in his commentary on his and the other five friends' lives; Phoebe was portrayed as less concerned with what others thought and who often said inappropriate things in situations. Chris' comments regarding these characters indicated Chris' desire to have been less serious, more accepting, and less inclined to react negatively to others and to life in general aligning more with feminine traits.

Their critiques also referenced the stereotype of a "successful" man. Tuukka wrote:

> Lately I've been questioning my life choices. Sleeping in, taking naps, playing Super Nintendo and watching TV every night, going to the beach, playing basketball, drinking coffee, eating a frozen schnitzel for lunch. What kind of life is that? I could be working 9 to 5, making a difference or study and get an education, be a professional. What is my role in this society? I feel like trash. I've been conditioned to judge myself and I can't help it.
>
> *(Issue #3, p. 4)*

Tuukka's comments on his lifestyle alluded to his engagement in sporting culture, a pastime that is central to the ideals of white masculinity in contemporary

Australia (Waling, 2020). His unemployment or underemployment that allowed him the time to engage in a sport like basketball was indicative of the kind of "sitting on the sidelines of the workforce" that represent modern challenges for working-class men (Weir, 2017).

In the zine, *Dirty Details*, Chris also examined his attitudes toward and involvement in work that differed from his coauthor's disposition:

> I'm the kind of person who is good at working but nothing else. I get so used to working that when I get home I feel empty and useless.
>
> *(Issue #3, p. 10)*

Chris' comment alluded to the centrality of work in the formation of masculine identity (Besen, 2007). Work has been considered "a masculinity contest" (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018). In this culture of toxic masculinity, men "prove" their manhood by working long hours and making work central to their lives as Chris had done. Chris may have been enabled to make work his dominant activity by his independent but passive disposition he expressed in an earlier zine:

> I want to be one of those people that just do their own thing and don't care what other people think. But I'm a terrible people pleaser . . . it causes me loads of brain hurt, because it makes me let racist and sexist etc. remarks slide because I'm too uncomfortable to open my mouth.
>
> *(Issue #1, p. 5)*

Chris' comments alluded to how white privilege is reproduced through prejudices and stereotypes. It may be that Chris was reluctant to speak out as alerting people to their white privilege can evoke hostile reactions (Clark Parsons, 2020).

Reflecting on Mental Health

Chris was worried about "triggering" or arousing readers' own feelings about or memories of a traumatic event due to the zine's content that dealt with mental health, including the advance warning to readers: "*Trigger Warning! Contains talk of depression, suicide and violence*," which was included in the first issue and reframed in Issue #2 as a "Spoiler Alert." Chris believed that "people need to be aware that if they are reading anything personal from anyone else's experience, that there's going to be triggers, content warnings are implicit almost." To offset these possible triggers, Chris used humor to deflect from the seriousness of depression and self-destructive thoughts or behavior. For example, "Is life worth living? What's in the cupboard? Something tasty-salty or sugary I hope . . . oooooo coffee & cereal. Maybe life is good! Let's eat cereal, drink coffee & watch TV or lets just

kill ourselves and save ourselves from a life of monotony & routine depression. Yeah" (Issue #1, p. 2).

Explicit reference was made to the impact of mental health on a person's behavior and self-doubt throughout the series. In Issue #3, on the last page (see Figure 13.2) there was a dialogue between the two authors about the project moving from positivity to negativity ending with Chris' comment:

> Bipolar swaying from over confident to panicky self doubt might be our downfall . . . insulting the audience and feeling bad is not the same as being confident and charismatic. Genuine attitude feels different to forced attitude. Basically Don't Be Yourself. . . (Because you're an asshole).

In Issue #4, Chris provided information on being diagnosed as bipolar, sharing his feelings about living with the diagnosis, joining a group to learn coping strategies and recognizing, "Because I have it somewhat under control. It's kind of awkward for me to talk about and I'm already tired of explaining the symptoms to people." Chris' issues with mental health he expressed here have typically been associated with the pressures that men experience from the norms of masculinity and gender stereotyping (Hamilton, 2016). As Powell explained in an interview with Hamilton (2016), gender norms that require men to be self-reliant and stoic can dictate the ways in which men seek help.

Despite his bipolar diagnosis, Chris was a productive zinester who possessed technical skills although in *Dirty Details #3* he recounted his loathing of being the "go-to egghead" for technical issues. Chris mentioned that he also had experience with what he called "anarcho-DIY" and the queer scene. Zinesters like Chris embody the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) culture as they design, write, draw, construct, choose paper, print, staple, and publish their self-made products for distribution. DIY culture "facilitates sites of cultural practice and engagement which are self-defining and empowering" (Poletti, 2005, p. 186).

Simon

Simon, an Australian man, was 26 years old when I met him. He created perzines that featured journal entries and personal confessions as "an outlet for creative energy that is natural and a break from [his] other more intense projects." Simon authored a variety of perzines, including, *Darling*, *Neopolitan Melbourne Tryptych: The Vanilla Zine*, and *TV's Hypocrites No. 9*.

Writing Style

Simon's zines, *Neopolitan Melbourne Triptych: The Vanilla Zine* (henceforth, *Vanilla Zine*) and *TV's Hypocrites No. 9* (a collaborative zine with two other zinester)

FIGURE 13.2 Dirty Details Issue #3 (last page), "Don't Be Yourself"

employed multimodal design, using images and written text, while *Darling* was predominantly text-based. *The Vanilla Zine* was an account of Simon's trip to Melbourne for a zine fair, including his daily activities (see Figure 13.3), while *TV's Hypocrites* was more of a pastiche, employing a comedic style, and *Darling* is "anonymous," consisting of love letters to an unknown person (see Figure 13.4). *Darling* was written in a literary fashion using metaphorical language to describe

his obsession for a person he loved plotting the development of their relationship. Simon wrote in first person, using hand-written text and word-processing text in different colored fonts, displaying the text in a graphic style.

The *Vanilla Zine* (see Figure 13.3) included intertextual references to popular culture that Simon associated with and construction of relationships including images on the left page of fellow zinesters/ friends playing pinball) opposite the writing (right page), a pattern throughout the zine except for one page. *Darling* (see Figure 13.4) has smaller decorative illustrations of items that are relevant to the theme of the page's "love letter" with the pages printed in red font to symbolizing the color of passion, which is the theme of the zine. In comparison, *TV's Hypocrites* includes many individual drawings that are linked to the written text that contains a series of thoughts parodying the Australian magazine *TV Hits*.

Simon's zines, except *Darling*, referenced people in the zine community through "name-dropping" by using names of people and places involved in the Australian zine scene. His writing evidenced his fascination with the zine community and the zine scene in Australia. Simon noted that he sees his audience as his peers and friends who also frequented the zine fairs around the country. "It's kind of niche, and a bit marginal, so I've made strong friendships with dedicated zinesters, those are the people you make zines for."

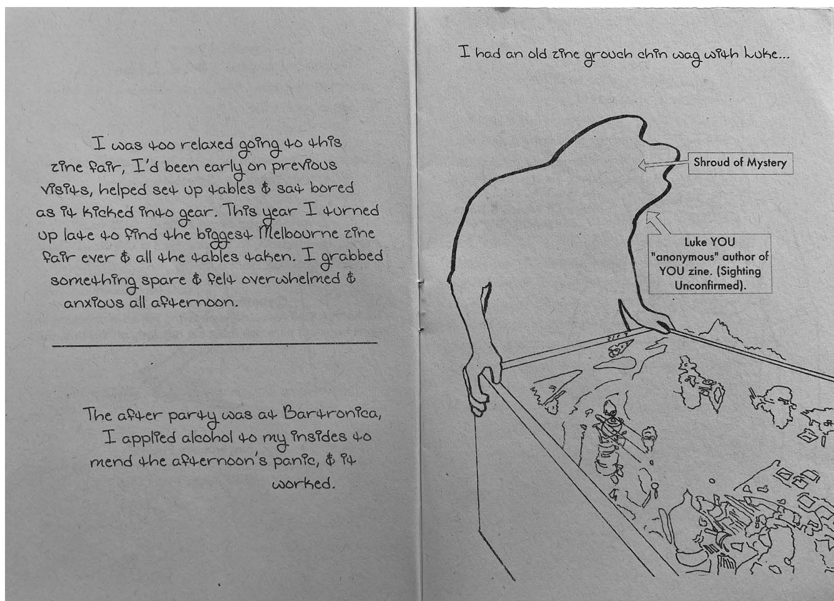
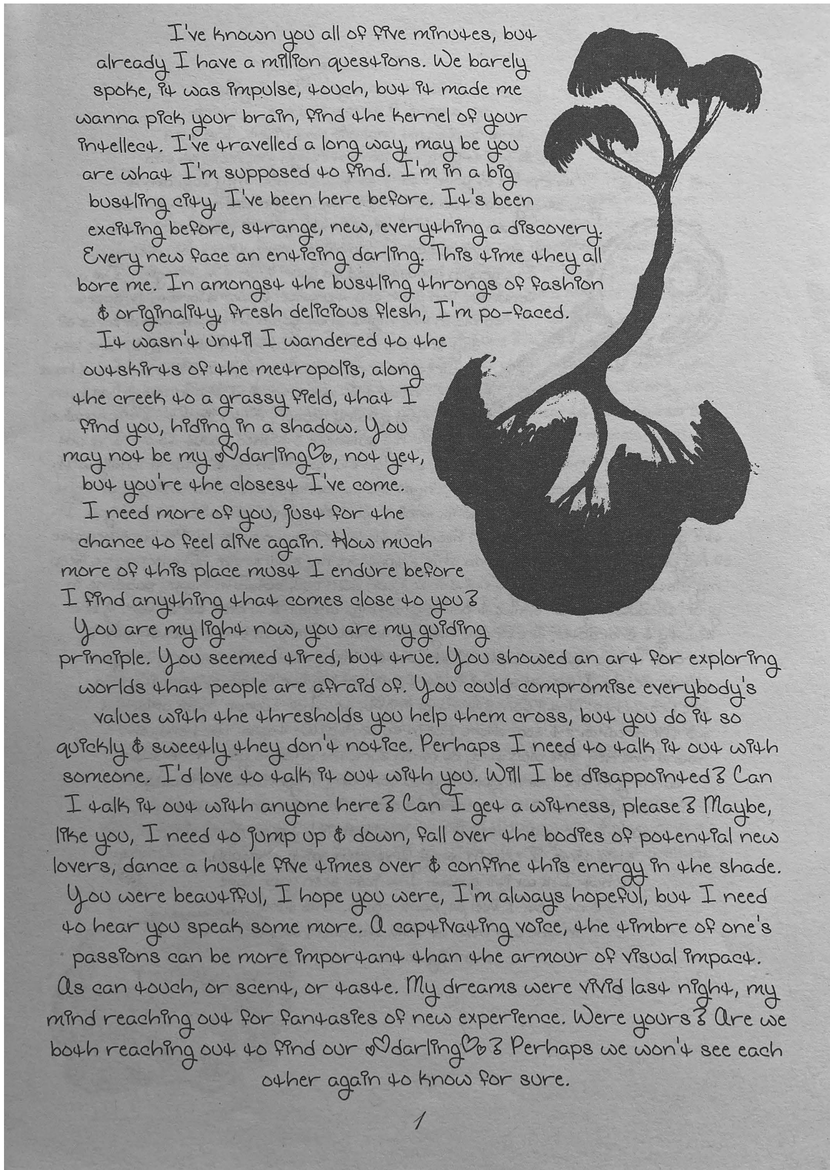


FIGURE 13.3 *Vanilla Zine*, pp. 4–5



I've known you all of five minutes, but already I have a million questions. We barely spoke, it was impulse, touch, but it made me wanna pick your brain, find the kernel of your intellect. I've travelled a long way, may be you are what I'm supposed to find. I'm in a big bustling city, I've been here before. It's been exciting before, strange, new, everything a discovery. Every new face an enticing darling. This time they all bore me. In amongst the bustling throngs of fashion & originality, fresh delicious flesh, I'm po-faced.

It wasn't until I wandered to the outskirts of the metropolis, along the creek to a grassy field, that I find you, hiding in a shadow. You may not be my ♡darling♡, not yet, but you're the closest I've come. I need more of you, just for the chance to feel alive again. How much more of this place must I endure before I find anything that comes close to you?

You are my light now, you are my guiding principle. You seemed tired, but true. You showed an art for exploring worlds that people are afraid of. You could compromise everybody's values with the thresholds you help them cross, but you do it so quickly & sweetly they don't notice. Perhaps I need to talk it out with someone. I'd love to talk it out with you. Will I be disappointed? Can I talk it out with anyone here? Can I get a witness, please? Maybe, like you, I need to jump up & down, fall over the bodies of potential new lovers, dance a hustle five times over & confine this energy in the shade. You were beautiful, I hope you were, I'm always hopeful, but I need to hear you speak some more. A captivating voice, the timbre of one's passions can be more important than the armour of visual impact. As can touch, or scent, or taste. My dreams were vivid last night, my mind reaching out for fantasies of new experience. Were yours? Are we both reaching out to find our ♡darling♡? Perhaps we won't see each other again to know for sure.

1

FIGURE 13.4 *Darling* (p. 1)

Reflections on Marginalization and Affirmation

Simon described himself as having a "working-class status" and being from a "nontraditional family" with a "broken home" background. He was inspired by the power of satire and *MAD* magazine during his childhood and the difficulties he experienced as "a broken-home kid." Simon spoke of the "emblem of the

patriarchy that is my own existence," feelings of being marginalized by his low socioeconomic status, despite having been the first in his family to attend a university and therefore "privileged in the educational sense." He believed that being working class did not define him.

Through his connections and friendships in the zine community, Simon obtained affirmation and acceptance, countering his feelings of marginalization and loneliness. For example, he wrote: "It was nice to be asked to participate in such a thing [each make a zine of their trip], we're all happy to pursue this idea" (p. 1), and he penned: "Over pastrami rolls Andrew told me about his science-fiction themed podcast project & asked me to contribute" (p. 9), referring to how his friend in the zine community accepted him.

The *Vanilla Zine* brought to life Simon's desire to be part of a community as he travelled alone on the bus from Adelaide to Melbourne to take part in the zine fair, illustrating his self-reflection on his emotional reactions to events and the positive impact of spending time with his friends who create zines. For example, he wrote:

> "I was worried that the bus ride would exhaust me" (p. 3); "I applied alcohol to my insides to mend the afternoon's panic, & it worked" (p. 4) and more positively: "I had an old grouch chinwag with Luke" (p. 5); "Successful communication landed myself, Gina, Bec & Andrew at 1000£ Bend for coffee & breakfast. Andrew pulled out a drawing game & Gina Instagrammed the results. We traveled to Brunswick & visited Squishface Studio & walked with the Squishface artists to get more coffee & browse Savers."
>
> *(p. 9)*

While mentioning "Squishface Studio" (a comic artist studio) and "Savers" (a charity second-hand store) required contextual knowledge of both the place (Brunswick, Melbourne, Australia), and of the comic/zine world, it was clear that this was a space that Simon felt comfortable and happy to be in at the time.

Questioning Masculine Boundaries

Both Chris and Simon's perzines were a collection of prose relying more heavily on the written mode with images used to illustrate. Simply authoring/writing a zine can be considered to be constructing an alternative masculinity since both challenged the social norm that men do not engage in writing, and challenged the notion of engaging in literacy practices as a female activity (Barrs, 2000). Their zines were self-reflexive, referencing the stereotypical male in relation to their own lives, questioning their identities as men based on perceived norms for an adult white male, and troubling what is "normal" for the performance of gender, race, and social class. Both men explored masculinity in their writings in relation to and interaction with race and/or social class, performing different

masculinities. The DIY culture of zines "facilitate(d) sites of cultural practice and engagement which [were] self-defining and empowering" (Poletti, 2005, p. 186).

In reflecting on his identities, Simon deconstructed his gender identity by offering alternative performances of masculinity, but referred to his cultural background as "a boring old WASP" (White, Anglo Saxon, Protestant) due to his white or "vanilla" culture, failing to recognize whiteness as a culture. He did, however, expand on masculinity by encouraging younger males to not be constrained by fears about showing too much emotion or being too friendly with other male friends, offering them permission for the expression of alternative representations of masculinity. He wrote about the "emblem of the patriarchy" in his own existence and of being marginalized by his working-class status and nontraditional family, using what he referred to as "the power of satire" to convey his messages. For example, *TV's Hypocrites* parodies an Australian magazine *TV Hits*, which is no longer in production but was part of Simon's youth. Its target audience were teens, with around 25% male readers and the rest female predominantly from a working-class background. Being a male fan of the magazine in 1990s would not have been considered a socially acceptable display of masculinity as the articles were on (mostly male) stars from Australian television. The covers were designed to attract headlines, such as, "Who's Hot and Who's Not," "The Next Big Thing," "Jim Carry: The World's Craziest Guy," and exclusives. On the *TV's Hypocrites* cover, Simon included a hand-drawn cartoonish image of Snoop Doggy Dogg holding a *TV Hypocrites* magazine in his hand and included the statement "This magazine is extremely underrated," satirizing the fan magazine and its contents.

In his writings, Simon tended to ignore the privilege he was provided by his race and/or gender as white privilege, particularly white male privilege (Weeks, 2009). Simon seemed to dismiss any possibility that his gender and/or his race may have enabled his writing. Being a male may have provided him with the confidence and assertiveness commonly associated with and displayed by men (Jacobson, 2019) that enabled him to self-publish his writing. His schooling may likely have presented him with examples of white male authors typical of the literary canon as Kirkland (2013) alluded to in his characterization of literacy presented in schools as a practice of white people.

While Simon questioned the discourse around masculinities and social class by not being defined by them, he still appeared to identify as part of the patriarchy, at times reinforcing hegemonic discourses around being and doing masculinity (Butler, 2004). For example, in *Vanilla Zine* he writes, "I hung around, sampling the back bar and maintaining delusions about the eye contact I had with the bar staff" (p. 7) and "Our time together reuniting today was peppered with single guy & thirty-something sharehouse observations. This continued while we had a drink in armchairs in the shed" (p. 11).

Chris and Tuukka, who were from different cultures, (Australian and Finnish) questioned their life choices and reconciled these choices with what they wanted

in life in comparison to what they were expected to be or thought they should be as a man. Both Chris and Tuukka each explored masculinity/ies (Connell, 1995; Francis & Paechter, 2015) in their writing. Chris commented that he wanted to encourage younger males not to be constrained by fears about "showing too much emotion or being too friendly" with other male friends. They shared their frustrations at the limiting nature of masculinity/ies and their performance as men or "doing" the male gender (Butler, 2004).

Chris also created zines as "a way to express emotions that are not typically discussed between males" by drawing attention to mental health issues, depression, and self-destructive thoughts or behaviors so that others could be encouraged to express themselves. Through sharing their feelings and emotions in their perzines, their performance of masculinity/ies was counter-hegemonic, demonstrating alternative ways of doing masculinity (Kehler, 2010). Being accepted into the zine community enabled these men to align with like-minded people within the zine community in general, as well as within specific affinity groups, such as men who zine (Gee, 2005). Simon wanted to be viewed as a member of the zine community so he included other dominant zinesters in *Vanilla Zine* who would identify themselves and be identified by others to gain acceptance into the subculture and affinity space. Being a member of the zine discourse community, however, was not constrained by alignment to specific affinity spaces; zinesters can produce zines on a range of topics and designs, which can represent "a rebellious state of mind, a liberating experience where a creative person shares with an imaginary audience their sense of freedom, rebellion, passion and frustration" (Grishin, 2010, p. 9).

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

People engage in literacy practices within their social networks that serve as resources for exchanging knowledge and skills in which individuals are treated as equals and not as "literate" or "illiterate" (Guzzetti & Zammit, in press). Zines provide examples of multimodal texts that:

> exemplify in varying degrees diverse forms of spiritedness (gutsiness), a "do it yourself" (DIY) mindset, ability to seek, gain and build attention, alternative (often in-your-face anti-establishment, although not always nice) perspectives, street smarts, originality and off-beatness, acute appreciation of subjectivity, tactical sense, self-belief, enterprise, and a will to build and sustain communities of shared interest and solidarity.
>
> *(Knobel & Lankshear, 2002, p. 165)*

By challenging assumptions of what constitutes literate practice and by recognizing diversity of alternative textual forms, teachers might expose students to

zines as reading material that complement content instruction (Guzzetti & Foley, 2017) or serve as models to follow in writing their own identity texts. Zines like the ones described here may raise awareness of the privilege white males enjoy and serve as reminders to teachers to present literacy as a racially diverse practice. Although zines should not be made mandatory writing assignments to be graded or censured or made "school appropriate" (Guzzetti & Foley, 2017), zines can open spaces to promote engagement in literacy. Zines in the classroom as reading material and as models of writing may provide students with "access to fringe, or invisible communities and topics," which can include "anti-capitalism, disability (both visible and invisible), environmental issues (including for example veganism), migration and borders (including first person accounts of seeking asylum) and a wide range of specific reference points for students" (Lymn, 2018, p. 24).

Zines like the ones described here can help to disrupt accepted gender stereotypes (Berry, 2018), particularly for boys and men. Zines can counter restrictive representations and performances of masculinity by demonstrating writing is not an activity engaged in only by females. Zines written by men can provide boys and other young men with permission to write of emotionality and sentimentality, and in doing so, provide alterative models of masculinity.

The personal nature of zines is also likely to be engaging for those attending community center literacy activities, adult literacy programs, or those living in assisted living facilities or nursing homes (Houpt, Balkin, Hunt Broom, Roth, & Selma, 2016) as they exemplify alternative writing practices that do not follow formal structures (Martin, 2020). Through reading and making zines, individuals can challenge the oversimplified and essentialized notions of boys'/male girls'/female learning styles, behaviors, and activities (Guzzetti & Zammit, in press) that reinforce entrenched behaviors and dominant male/female stereotypes (Kehler, 2010). Zines illustrate the "living of livable lives" (Butler, 2004). Those who create and read them can "acknowledge that children's and adults' ways of approaching daily life, including their gendered identities and performances, may not always conform to the [social] expectations" (Paechter, 2012, p. 230) and can form community to resist and rewrite gendered, racist, and essentialist notions of the performance of identities.

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14

TALES FROM TIKTOK

Gender and Cultural Intersectionalities

Donna Alvermann, Ellen Wynne, and William Wright

Not surprisingly, researchers find Gen Zers or those born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019), an attractive go-to population when questions arise relative to social media use. Members of Gen Z comprise the first generation to experience social media firsthand from early childhood onward (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). As a social media platform, TikTok promotes a form of self-expression focused on appearances and vocals, and the relatively brief time limit allocated for posts means ideas must be expressed concisely.

Viewed within some contexts, performing one's identity is thought to reproduce marginality (Hinchman & Alvermann, 2019), a potential precarity for youth on the cusp of adolescence and adulthood (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). In other contexts, presenting and performing identity is deemed a powerful literacy practice (Helmer, 2016). In still others, performing identity is a radical practice aimed at maintaining marginality within certain cultures. For instance, consider hooks' (1990) response to a question posed on why she supported maintaining cultural marginality:

> I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather or a site one stays in . . . because it . . . offers the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.
>
> *(pp. 149–150)*

Marginality, as such, dwells at the cusp of new and uncharted latitudes. For it is in the margins, the interstices between cuts, where new "movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161) may be discovered to think and do differently, allowing for new conceptualizations in

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regards to what noted scholars have described as the "future to come" (Derrida, 1996, p. 68) and even "people to come" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 176).

Our Purpose

We wanted to explore TikTok trends in exaggerated performances of gender dress and mannerism, skits calling attention to the arbitrary and constructed nature of gender roles, and confessional-style narrations. Specifically, we wanted to document examples of how Gen Zers conceive of and express gender, especially where gender is considered with other facets of intersectional identity such as race, culture, and ethnicity. We were especially interested in how TikTok as a social media platform contributed to gender and cultural expression. Thus, our research questions were: How did our participants conceive of and express their gender identity? How did the specific features of TikTok shape the participants' gender expression and cultural identity? Rather than analyzing videos from many different TikTokers, we decided to focus on the channels of just a few. Through viewing multiple videos from the same TikTokers, we were able to gain a more complex understanding of their identities, as different facets (and different aspects within those facets). This method fit our performative understanding of gender as "reiterative" rather than "a single 'act'" (Butler, 1993, p. 2), and as an ongoing construction rather than a static internal state.

Our Perspectives

We began our study by understanding gender through the lens of Butler's (1993) concept of performativity, in which she defines gender not as, "a single or deliberate 'act,' but as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (p. 2). That is, gender is not an internal state a person is born with, but a social construction developed as people are encouraged to imitate the behavior of those in the same gender category they were assigned at birth, and punished for deviation. Over time, imitation becomes habit, which reproduces the performance and representation of gender in stereotypical ways and blinds individuals to gender's construction, making it seem natural to them. To say that people perform gender, then, would be a vast oversimplification: it is more that gender performs people.

People are not slaves to gender, however. As the arbitrary, constructed nature of gender becomes apparent, so does the possibility of deviation from those habits once thought natural and unchangeable. "Gender itself is a kind of becoming or activity. . . [and] ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (Butler, 1990, p. 112).

How, then, do individuals come to see the constructed nature of gender? According to Butler (1993), it is precisely in the moments when expectations of assigned gender are not met that there is insight into the possibility for varying

gender expressions. It is these "gaps" that we have hoped to find on TikTok – more precisely, we have sought to find those encouraged by the platform itself.

Gender is also not one thing, but many things influenced by other facets of identity, such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality. For this reason, we have also assumed a perspective of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1990) that understands these facets not as isolated from one another but as interacting, creating unique identity and experience that cannot be broken down into parts. Collins and Bilge were especially interested in how these intersections shape relations of power:

> people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.
>
> *(p. 2)*

Through intersectionality, we hoped to understand the complexity of these TikTokers' identities and the world(s) they live in.

Because identity explorations have shifted into online spaces, we took up Smith and Watson's (2014) concept of automediality (Smith & Watson, 2014). Automediality as a methodological approach understands media not as a blank canvas for identity to be expressed upon, but as an active agent in shaping that identity. According to Smith and Watson (2014):

> Media cannot simply be conceptualized as 'tools' for presenting a pre-existing, essential self. Rather, the materiality of the medium constitutes and textures the subjectivity presented. . . . Media technologies . . . do not just transparently present the self. They constitute and expand it.
>
> *(p. 7)*

Social media highlights ideas critical to automediality. The same person will use different platforms, which may indicate the need for different modes to express different facets of identity. This suggests not only that these platforms excel at different kinds of expression, but that identity itself is multiple and contingent upon the platform (Triggs, Møller, & Neumayer, 2019; van der Nagel, 2018).

Methodology and Methods

To answer these questions, we selected a case-study method (Stake, 1995) with the following parameters. First, the design had to provide limits on the number of videos we would view. Second, we would need a way to sort relevant from irrelevant video content. Finally, intersectionality as a concept required that we take sufficient note of counterpoints as they arose, receded, or mediated other facets of instances of expression of identity.

Guided by these criteria, we decided to analyze the channels of three TikTokers as this number allowed us to show different perspectives without sacrificing depth or detail in our analysis. Through viewing multiple videos from the same TikTokers, we would gain a more complex understanding of their identities as different facets (and different aspects within those facets). This method fit our performative understanding of gender as "reiterative" rather than "a single 'act'" (Butler, 1993, p. 2), and as an ongoing construction rather than a static internal state.

The Participants

We had four criteria for selecting participants for our study: first, we required that they be self-identified as Gen Z through their profile page and/or a video. Second, we required that participants be involved in gender expression (whether through appearance, vocals, commentary, or some combination), preferably in a manner that subverted cultural expectations. Third, we required that participants had commented on some other aspect of their intersectionality, whether that be race, ethnicity, and/or sexuality. Finally, to provide multiple perspectives, we required that participants inhabit different intersectionalities from each other.

These four criteria led us to select three TikTokers as participants. First was Prudence Smalls (@prudencesmalls, via Bytedance, 2019), a Mexican American youth who, at the time of writing, identifies as a transgender woman and uses "she"/"they" pronouns. At the time of data collection, however, they called themselves Javier Smalls (@javiersmalls), identified as nonbinary and gay, and used "they" pronouns. Here, we refer to them as Prudence Smalls to respect their identity. Next, we selected Kxtty (@notyourabg, via Bytedance, 2019), who was of mixed Indonesian and Irish heritage and identified as Muslim. They used "they" pronouns, and, while they did not explicitly state their gender, frequently spoke on women's experiences, including sexist discrimination. While Kxtty sometimes referred to their real name in videos, they expressed discomfort with viewers using it; thus, we refer to them only by their TikTok name. Of note, Kxtty was the only participant to make a definitive statement on whether they used a different name for TikTok. Our third participant was Mycah♥ (@mycahangelou, via Bytedance, 2019), an African American youth who identified as nonbinary, transmasculine, and gay, and used "they" pronouns. Finally, because identity is not static, all three of these TikTokers may no longer identify with statements they made about themselves in the videos we analyzed.

Our Procedures

Data Collection

Once we had selected our three TikTokers, we viewed all the content on their channels, paying special attention to those videos that focused on gender and/or

other aspects of the TikToker's intersectionality, and especially those that reflected their most typical modes of expression. We took detailed notes on these videos as we found them, listing the video's date-stamp, description, hashtags, and sound-clips. This process of watching videos and taking notes took about a week for each TikToker.

We found there were still too many videos to do justice to every single one within the limits of our study; thus, we decided to focus on concision, including videos that best represented a quality (or qualities) important to understanding each TikToker's overall themes and modes of expression. In practical terms, this meant analyzing about six videos per TikToker, and only citing their other videos that contained important information but were redundant or not representative of the TikToker's content. We focused on those details that seemed important in understanding the main ideas and attitudes conveyed in each video.

Although it might have been interesting to interview the TikTokers about their intentions, our framework of performativity lent itself more toward analyzing the performances themselves. We could not directly experience intentions in the same way we directly experienced audio-visual cues; moreover, knowledge of the participants' intentions might have blinded us to any unintended subtext. Therefore, we restricted contact with our three TikTokers to informing them of the study, gaining their permission, and showing them our work. Although we were open to changing or removing content that they were uncomfortable with, no such changes were necessary.

Data Analysis

For visual description in our content analysis, we focused on a TikToker's dress, gestures, and settings – especially when they were different from those more typically seen in their videos and/or seemed to be important to the representation (for example, a Renaissance gown shown off in a garden rather than a kitchen), and any visual effects such as facial distortion. For audio, we focused on any music or sound-clips (making note of their original context), and/or the TikToker's vocal performance, not only what they said but nonverbal qualities like volume and tone of voice. We also noted the videos' descriptions and hashtags. We then analyzed the implications of these choices, focusing on how they worked together. Did they support each other, or was there ironic subversion?

Guided by our framework of automediality, we also sought to understand how the TikTok platform shaped the choices we were seeing. While the audio-visual aspect was our primary focus, we also honed-in on TikTok's brief time limit for videos, as well as the swiping feature to switch between videos. Furthermore, we wanted to know how each video fit into the context of each TikToker's channel: Was it consistent with their image or was there a contradiction? Did it show change over time? How did the video position the audience?

Our Findings

Several prominent trends were observable in our three TikToker's content. The first was a tendency to communicate through showing rather than telling, using attention-grabbing visuals and audio rather than narrative to get their points across. This reliance on performance may be due to TikTok's relatively short video-length and swiping system. There is no room for long narrative; TikTokers must grab viewers' attention immediately or risk being swiped past. Furthermore, the prominence of TikTok's "For You Page" also created an experience centered more on content by strangers than on "real life" acquaintances (Feldman, 2019), meaning TikTokers must make their videos stand out if they hope to gain attention.

The focus on performance created a sense of gender in action, rather than gender as a static state of being. Because action requires a context, the TikTokers elaborated on the construction of gender, presenting the people, places, and things that influenced their expression and identity. Reading and writing bodies via TikTok's textual performances produced fluid rather than clear-cut states of being. This fluidity was but one aspect of a larger identity structure thoroughly riddled by the three participants' other subjectivities. For example, Prudence Smalls had a video wherein they revealed their family in Mexico did not know they were gay, thus suggesting the influence geography and community on identity. Kxtty frequently talked about experiencing judgment from their elders in their Muslim community for their fashion choices, showing how age is a factor in how identity is socially constructed. Mycah♥ observed that their generation's willingness to protest injustice was influenced by popular YA literature of their youth that featured teens overthrowing oppressive governments.

All three of our TikTokers used their own voices at times, but also frequently relied on music and sound-clips to create a dramatic effect or a humorous contrast. Some performances and sound-clips were memetic, with TikTokers trying out their own versions of trends, perhaps hoping to gain views from users searching the platform for various iterations. This finding was especially relevant to those videos that referenced popular media – possibly because viewer interest in a particular medium could boost views. Although the three TikTokers sometimes included families or friends in their videos, most focused on themselves, perhaps because smartphones limit the frame and make selfie-style video an accessible option. Finally, all three had multiple videos stretching back over a period of several months to over a year. These videos were undoubtedly socially constructed in part by viewers in response to their content. Responses included likes, shares, and comments, which in turn enabled others to view how the participants' identities evolved over time.

The differences between our three TikTokers were just as striking as the similarities. Prudence Smalls, for example, demonstrated a strong interest in modeling.

Their video of July 12, 2020, compared still shots of their "masc" and "fem" looks, paired with Flo Milli's (2020) song "Not Friendly" (@prudencesmalls, via Bytedance, 2019). The camera returns to Prudence, who makes a slashing motion across their throat and lip-syncs to the lines, "Fuck that, I don't wanna choose." They also frequently played fictional characters, such as in a November 9, 2019, video where they performed the character Maddie from HBO's *Euphoria*, primping themselves and lip-syncing to the lines, "We should just pick the hottest, most confident, bad-bitch version of ourselves, and be that for the rest of the school year" (Levinson, 2019).

Meanwhile, Mycah♥ often commented on their personal experience of gender through skits, and sometimes addressed the audience more directly through vlog (video log) videos. In a February 22, 2020, video, they act out handing water bottles to the audience with the text, "God handing out correct genders" across the screen; in the last clip, however, the text changes to "God tricking me for the first 13 years of my life only to let me realize [i'm] trans," and Mycah♥ pulls the bottle away and runs off camera. One of their vlog-style videos from June 3, 2020, pictured Mycah♥ as a member of the Black community supporting Black Lives Matter in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Mycah♥ shared that their father had recently given them "the talk" about police brutality because their new masculine appearance put them at greater risk.

Of all our participants, Kxtty was probably the TikToker who commented most often and overtly about their cultural background. They incorporated several different cultures into their construction of femininity. While their typical day-to-day dress included a hijab (a headscarf worn by Muslim women, often, as in Kxtty's case, covering the hair and neck without obscuring the face incorporated a Goth aesthetic. As used here, Goth refers to fashion originating in the 1970s from the British Punk Rock scene and today is characterized by black clothes, pale skin, and heavy eyeliner (Sweet, 2005) in a style called *alt hijabi*. Kxtty also dressed in garb from the European Renaissance, and cosplayed (costume role played) fictional characters from Japanese anime.

Throughout their channel, Kxtty expressed feelings of not belonging. As a biracial person of color, they were accused of being not Asian enough when they tried to express their Indonesian heritage and not Celtic enough when they engaged with Irish practice, which reflects common issues of acceptance among multiracial people (Albuja, Gaither, Sanchez, Straka, & Cipollina, 2019; Parker, Morin, Horowitz, Lopez, & Rohal, 2015).

Although Kxtty did not use the term in their videos, "Hapa," a Hawaiian word meaning "half," has traditionally been used to describe those of mixed European and Asian and/or Pacific Islands descent (Thompson, 2000). For Hapa, racial identity can feel like a choice between two distinct categories; they may identify with one parent's culture and distance themselves from the other (Thompson, 2000). How much choice do they really have, however? Hapa may feel that they

are "not Asian enough" to truly identify as Asian, and their identity and performance may be in part constructed by how others categorize them (Matthews, 2007; Thompson, 2000). A lack of representation may further difficulties in finding figures with whom to identify (Lierte, 2009; Matthews, 2007; Thompson, 2000). Again, however, this inability to easily categorize themselves presents a "gap" through which the socially constructed nature of race becomes apparent: they are treated as wholly one or wholly the other in different contexts, often based solely on appearances (Matthews, 2007; Thompson, 2000). This familiarity with not fitting a binary also seems to lend Hapa insight into the nonbinary nature of other aspects of identity, including bisexuality:

The complexity of identity, however, can make it difficult to fit in with any group:

> The question that still lingers in my mind is who will be loyal to me? Which group/community/movement(s) will claim me as their member and comrade? I want to see a movement against oppression that does not trivialize or deny me any aspect of my identity, that recognizes the interconnectedness of my sexuality, race, gender, and politics.
>
> *(Thompson, 2000, p. 178)*

Many Hapa have answered this call by connecting with each other through organizations like collegiate clubs, where they collectively negotiate Hapa identity and form support networks (Lierte, 2009; Thompson, 2000).

We argue that Kxtty and other mixed race and/or Hapa individuals on TikTok have created a similar space, one where they can mutually construct identity and offer moral support through representation. Unlike in-person meetings, participation on TikTok requires little time commitment or travel, which may make it a more accessible option for many (we do not intend to suggest, however, that TikTok should replace in-person meetings and community organization).

For participants like Kxtty, TikTok also seemed to be a space for talking back to their critics. For example, a video dated June 18, 2020, with the description, "archery and horseback riding are sunnah" (Sunnah referred to "the body of traditional social and legal custom and practice of the Islamic community"; Afsaruddin, 2018, p #). The video showed them in a point-of-view perspective wearing a black hijab and pale pink top along with bright red eye shadow, lipstick, and nail polish. They wield a bow and arrow against the "judgmental religious men" who tell them to dress more conservatively.

Figure 14.1 is a screenshot of the video in which Kxtty appears in point-of-view perspective wearing a black hijab and pale pink top, along with bright red eye shadow, lipstick, and nail polish; this shot captures Kxtty as they raise their bow to take aim at the "judgmental religious men" who tell them to dress more conservatively.

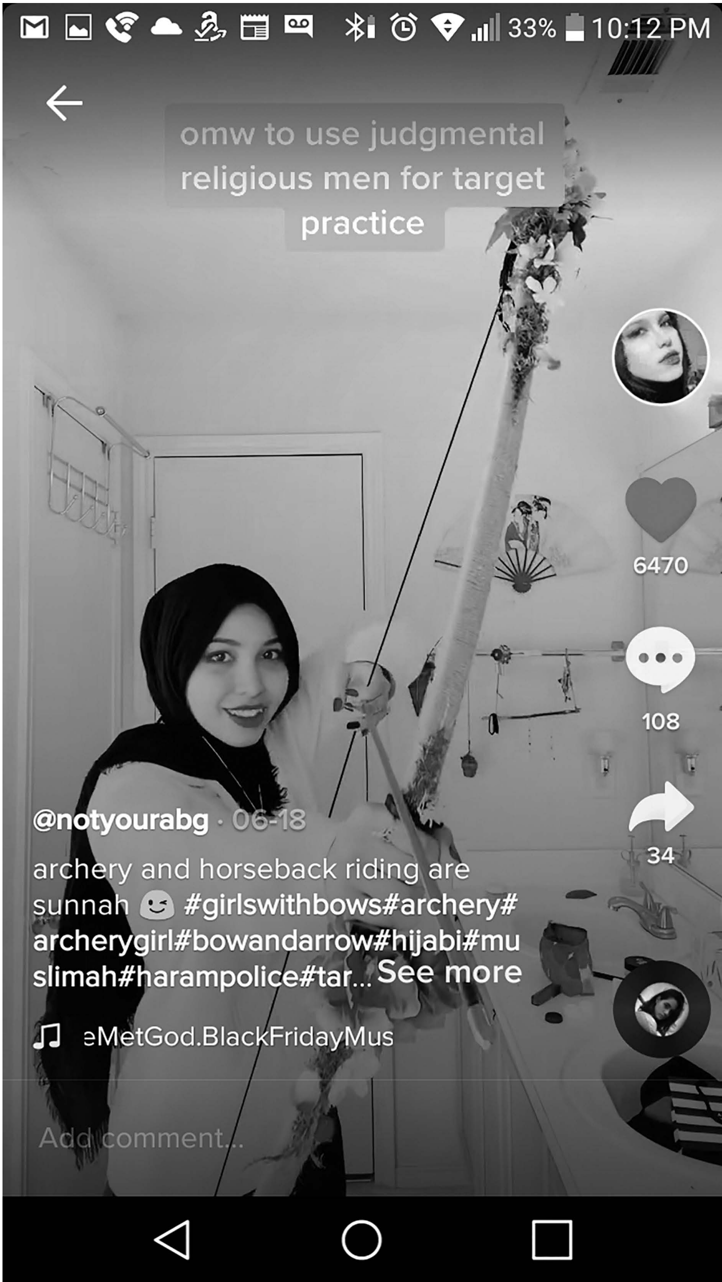

FIGURE 14.1 Kxtty Takes Aim at the Religious Men Who Judge Their Choices of Expression

In the video, a male voice pleads, "For the love of God," but Kxtty responds (lip-syncing to a confident feminine voice), "Oh, I've met God, he had nothing nice to say about you" (Blim, 2019). The video ended with a thwack sound effect and the camera cutting out as Kxtty presumably shot the arrow. They are center-stage here, assertive, and out-spoken, yet still feminine (Parker, Horowitz, & Stepler, 2017). On the other hand, the male antagonist does not appear in the shot; his appearance is irrelevant, and he speaks only in reaction to Kxtty's actions. The audience is positioned in his place, confronted with the image of the assured archer as they deliver justice. Although Kxtty speaks against Muslim men who would place limitations on them, their wearing of the veil and use of the concept of Sunnah to justify their choices shows that their religion is still important in the construction of their femininity. The implication, however, is that they can interpret the religion just as well as these men, and in fact, understand it better.

On the other hand, the sound-clip, which originated from the musical Black Friday, showed how American popular culture has influenced Kxtty's gender identity and expression. The use of lip-syncing demonstrated the social aspect of gender construction, as Kxtty used someone else's feminine voice reciting lines written by yet another person to represent their own femininity. The lines' musical source also worked to denaturalize that construction as scripted and practiced. Furthermore, the video subverted traditional understandings of gender – the feminine is centered and empowered, while the male is submissive. Kxtty's appearance, however, suggests that "girly" expression is valid; their version of femininity has room for both makeup and martial arts. These "gaps" in traditional understandings of gender, race, and ethnicity presented in this video may help viewers develop a more complex concept of femininity, especially Muslim femininity, which may be especially important to young Muslims like Kxtty who are developing their own sense of gender identity.

Reflections

Online youth culture is complex. We would be remiss, for example, if we did not mention the fact that TikTok, for all its popularity as a platform, remains fraught with concerns over copyright and fair use, privacy, sexual predatorship, cyberbullying, and racist abuse. There are also concerns about TikTok's aggressive AI (artificial intelligence) algorithms (i.e., "viewers who watched this embolden bigotry (Fox, 2020; Kelion, 2019; Wright, 2021). Notably, the app also became embroiled in a series of international disputes in the latter half of 2020, such as the K-Pop fan community's prank reservation of tickets for a Trump rally and the United States' charges that China may be using the platform as a means of overseas surveillance. Clearly, the app remains a subject of controversy.

To blanketly dismiss TikTok and other youth-dominated mediascapes as problematic, paltry, or immature would be to overlook their creative dynamism and subversive potential, however. It remains true that sharing one's voice on TikTok and other participatory platforms is highly contingent on one's technological

access and familiarity with dominant online discursive practices. Yet, we would also like to suggest that attending to the margins of online youth culture works to counteract the all-too-common tendency for adults to essentialize, stereotype, or disregard the vibrancy and activist spirit of young people, and Gen Zers in particular.

Certainly, we do not take lightly the everyday courage of minoritized and nonconforming young people who risk their well-being to speak and be seen on social media nor do we overlook, for instance, students who upload mobile footage of school security officers using violent force against their peers. These are forms of activism, too. As two of the authors here have observed elsewhere (Alvermann & Wright, 2021),

> Whether and in what ways the activist energies of youth ought to be encouraged, nurtured, supported, cultivated, honed, and so on has . . . become a topical and in many ways urgent question in the field of adolescent literacies.
>
> *(p. 9)*

The three TikTokers we have discussed here all demonstrated that youth "are often political insofar as they aim to influence or change existing power relations" (Brough & Shresthova, 2012). The "more playful style of activism . . . emerging through [the] appropriative and transformative dimension of participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2016, p. 2) could certainly be included here, such as parody, political trolling, and gender play.

Too often, social science research has been bent on corroborating or otherwise affirming what is already held to be true. Contrapuntal work, on the other hand, which we have tried to spotlight here, offers vital opportunities to think and imagine differently. Although young people rarely frame it in the way academic researchers looking to push the boundaries might, it is certainly the case that TikTokers actively generate counterstories (Delgado, 1989), strive to become worthy witnesses to one another's testimonies (Saavedra, 2011), and frequently look to push beyond "an easy sense" (Mazzei, 2014). It is these small, everyday revolutions that become habits and trends that Shukaitis (2009) described as "movement[s] through and of the entire social field [that] are nearly impossible to describe without imposing closure on them as open and constantly fluctuating processes" (p. 16). These movements at the margins, in many ways, escape signification, and it may well be the fact that they are difficult to pin down that leads to their eventual, widespread acknowledgment and acceptance.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Often, adults do not see the sides of youth that they show to their friends or social media followers. For literacy teachers and educators, we recommend opening

spaces – in conversation and in the curriculum, if unforced – to conceive of the ways these and countless other youth construct their gender and cultural identities as embodied meaning-making in practice. Cultural signifiers, such as hair length, wardrobe decisions, makeup choices, facial expressions, verbal intonations, and song riffs all emanate in kaleidoscopic ways to produce dynamic associations that do not tend to square with the static, univocal, text-centric forms of literacy that remain privileged in schools. All the more reason, we propose, to encourage play and critical introspection in the name of political and personal transformation.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that any adult, such as parents or those who interact with youth in out-of-school settings and programs, might learn – always – to better attune themselves to the intersectional explorations of young people. This does not necessarily mean keeping up with the latest trend or being able to identify budding cultural groups; rather, it is to keep dogmas at bay and to celebrate and defend these vibrant fusions that inspire hope, beauty, and ingenuity.

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15

ENACTING RESISTANCE TO INTERSECTING OPPRESSIONS THROUGH SATIRICAL DIGITAL WRITING ON LGBTQ+ YOUTUBE

Addie Shrodes, Jolie C. Matthews, and Wan Shun Eva Lam

Through digital writing on social media, young people mobilize discursive repertoires to challenge injustice and construct social identities (Lam & Smirnov, 2017; Wargo, 2018). We understand discursive repertoires as ways of beings expressed in linguistic and symbolic resources and cultivated through participation in practice (Martinez, Morales, & Aldana, 2017). Digital platforms have given rise to participatory cultures in which youth are active participants and producers of media rather than passive consumers (Matthews, 2016; Shrodes, 2020). In contrast to the linear, individual framing of writing for school, digital composition in participatory cultures tends to be collaborative, iterative, and multimodal (Kim, 2016). Yet, studies of writing and literacies in out-of-school participatory cultures can inform curriculum and pedagogies (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 2018). Scholarship often examines how digital composition arises through interaction with another writer (Lam, 2009; Lewis Ellison & Wang, 2018). In this chapter, we consider the collective nature of digital composing – how literate practices emerge from the wider participatory contexts of online spaces and platforms.

Digital cultures and platforms dynamically shape the discursive repertoires available for meaning making and expression (Matthews, 2018). Given that digital cultures also reproduce interlocking structures of power, digital composing on social media has the potential to both resist and reproduce hegemonic beliefs and norms that undergird these structures. We explored how digital composers in LGBTQ+ YouTube reaction video channels used repertoires of satirical humor from memes – or humorous images, videos, and textual forms that are circulated widely on social media – and reaction videos to resist hegemonic ideologies. Reaction videos emerged in the early 2000s as a widely popular video form in which a maker watches and responds to clips from other media, circulating "affectively intense" responses (Warren-Crow, 2016, p. 1113).

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Our Purpose

We focused on reaction videos that responded satirically to media undergirded by hegemonic ideologies, including white supremacy, cisheteronormativity – the regulatory norms of cisgender identity and heterosexuality, and anti-Blackness (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Our analysis was guided by two research questions: (1) How and in what ways do commenters resist hegemony through satirical digital composition? (2) What tensions and contentions arise in these literate activities?

Background

We define literacies as communicative and interpretive practices dynamically situated in social, cultural, political, and ideological contexts (Street, 1995). Through developing practices such as the ability to interpret hegemonic ideologies, people make meaning of, contest, and transform their social contexts (New London Group, 1996). Increasingly, literate practices leverage multiple modes (e.g., text, images, emojis, sound) from digital technologies and culture to make and transform meaning as writers respond to multimodal compositions, such as videos and forum comments.

Being a participant in social contexts, including digital spaces, involves constructing and positioning multiple identities within activities and using a variety of cultural resources available (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Although hegemonic beliefs and norms in cultural contexts shape identities, people can resist and revise oppressive identity positionings to create new ways of being. In doing so, identity construction is a generative literate practice because identities can form the basis for creating new forms of participation and new social contexts (Holland et al., 1998).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus other gender and sexual minoritized (LGBTQ+) youth develop literate practices and construct identities through their participation in queer and transgender or trans spaces and by resisting hegemonic norms (Blackburn, 2003; Johnson, 2017). As they learn practices to participate in affirming LGBTQ+ spaces, often in digital culture, LGBTQ+ youth also develop literacies to interpret and contest social injustice, and refuse the oppressive identity positionings of race, gender, and sexuality found in dominant culture (Blackburn, 2003; Wargo, 2018). This need to develop literacies across contexts is especially true for queer and trans youth who are Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and disabled. Black queer and Black trans youth may also participate in and create Black LGBTQ+ community spaces, as well as contest racism, white normativity, and transphobia in other queer spaces (Love, 2017; Johnson, 2017).

Researchers who seek to understand and support LGBTQ+ youth must take up theories that account for the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability, themselves developing literacies to "read and produce meaning across

'many worlds of sense'" (Cruz, 2011, p. 549). Digital contexts are fruitful places to study issues across intersecting lines of gender, sexuality, race, and class, including who becomes "popular" in digital environments and how different audiences respond to online content based on their own intersecting identities, as well as the content creators' social identities.

Our Perspectives

Intersecting Oppressions

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* as a response to the way conversations around race and gender traditionally occurred in scholarship and society broadly. Specifically, Crenshaw argued that the discourse around gender oppression focused on white women, and the discourse around Black racial oppression focused on Black men. Black women experience intersecting oppressions compounded by both their race and gender, however. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality extends a tradition of Black feminist thought, notably the Combahee River Collective (1977), a group that argued systems of oppression overlap, fit, and work together. Over the years, intersectionality has expanded to look at the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, coloniality, religion, ability, class, age, and more. It is a call to not treat these dimensions in isolation or as equal, but rather to examine how these dimensions interact and affect individuals' experiences on micro and macro levels to create various forms of discrimination and privilege in a society or a given space.

Collins (1990) further developed a theory of an interlocking matrix of domination that organizes intersecting oppressions through structural (e.g., social institutions), disciplinary (e.g., social policies and surveillance), hegemonic (e.g., dominant ideologies), and interpersonal (e.g., everyday interactions) domains. In this study, we were particularly attuned to the hegemonic domain of domination in which systems beliefs, norms, and representations of identities become tools to legitimize and justify oppression. Hegemony organizes consent to domination by marginalized groups by normalizing dominant ideologies and norms, which shift constantly to accommodate resistance and reestablish consent (Shrodes, forthcoming). Through reflection and action, individuals may see personal experiences as part of shared struggles, developing collective identities as members of marginalized communities engaged in fights for justice and liberation (Collins, 1990). The shift from the personal to the collective is vital for the development of critical consciousness to resist and transform intersecting oppressions.

Humor in Counter-hegemonic Practice

Scholars in queer of color critique (Muñoz, 1999), queer theory (Halberstam, 2011), and decolonial feminism – a body of thought that attends to colonialism as

an axis of power and unsettles the relationship of gender and coloniality (Lugones, 1987), have theorized forms of humor, such as playfulness, irreverence, and satire as tools to resist white, colonial, and cisheteronormative hegemony and perform other ways of being in community. Humor may create generative distance from hegemonic beliefs and norms to recognize hegemony, rupture consent to domination, and form oppositional communities. Muñoz wrote, "comedy does not exist independently of rage" (p. xi) and can be positioned as "a bid to take space in the social that has been colonized by the logics of white normativity and heteronormativity" (p. xii). Our analysis of satirical digital compositions in response to reaction media was informed by theories of humor as a tool for disrupting hegemony and forming collective identities in the face of intersecting oppressions (Shrodes, 2020). This potential is also fraught by the ways in which counter-hegemonic practices often use the tools of hegemony in their resistance (Schey, 2020).

Intersectionality, Hegemony, and Counter-hegemony on Social Media

Social media presents an important context to consider how satire may both reproduce and contest hegemonic beliefs and norms that organize intersecting structures of domination. As widely circulated forms of reaction media, memes demonstrate key tensions around how funny discursive tools can simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony. Digital blackface, or non-Black people using images of Black facial expressions, Black bodies, Black humor, or Black pain to express their thoughts and emotions around events and situations on social media, is just one example of how real world and historical oppressions continue to reproduce digitally, and how acts of hegemonic normativity emerge across contexts (Fernández, 2020; Sobande, 2021). On the other hand, satirical memes may offer young people discursive tools to contest hegemonic beliefs and norms and relate to shared struggles in the face of marginalization. Our analysis in this chapter considered how commenters on YouTube resisted the hegemonic domain of intersecting structures of domination through satirical digital writing, as well as the ways in which those satirical moves can reproduce hegemony.

Our Procedures

Situating the Analysis

The analysis of satirical discursive repertoires employed within commentary on three LGBTQ+ reaction videos on YouTube emerged from a virtual ethnography, a qualitative method to study online communities (Hine, 2000), of LGBTQ+ video channels on YouTube conducted from April 2018 to November 2019. Broadly, the larger virtual ethnography (Shrodes, 2020, under review) examined

how humor and radical joy in participatory communities on YouTube mediate political possibility by shaping how a community came to feel about injustice, act toward social change, and sustain struggles for justice and liberation. The ongoing focus on humor led to an interest in understanding how commenters resist hegemonic beliefs and norms through satirical composition. In this study, we were interested in further exploring the tensions or constraints that arose in these literate activities and participatory communities.

Participants, Videos, and Comment Threads

Our analysis focused on popular comment threads in response to three videos by Ash Hardell, MacDoesIt, and Strange Aeons, which are all screen names. Ash Hardell (they/them or all pronouns) self-identifies as a white queer and trans nonbinary person; MacDoesIt or Mac Kahey (he/him) self-identifies as a Black cisgender gay man; and Strange Aeons (she/her), who self-identities as a white cisgender lesbian woman. Cisgender or cis describes people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. We focused our analysis on these videos because of the large number of comments the videos had, indicating a robust participatory community of engaged viewers (see Table 15.1).

Guided by our research questions, we selected ten popular comment threads (sorted by the most recent comments) on each video that (1) responded to one moment in the video; (2) employed satire or humor in the comments; and (3) mentioned more than one identity or structure of power. For instance, the ten comment threads in Strange Aeon's video respond to a moment in the video in which she humorously disrupted the phenomenon of "straight pride" with the metaphoric meme form, taking up the meme to draw comparisons across race, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability as structures of power.

We defined popular comment threads as comments with more than two replies and a large number of 'Likes' relative to the number of comments on the video (e.g., for a video with 70,000 comments, the comment thread must have at least 70 Likes). Popular comment threads might feature as few as three replies to more than 100 replies. For videos with higher viewership, selecting comment threads that were "popular" largely excluded racist, homophobic, transphobic, and ableist

TABLE 15.1 YouTube Participatory Community as of November 2019

Video Maker	*Active Since*	*Total Video Views*	*Sub-scribers*	*Focal Video Posted*	*Video Viewership*	*Number of Video Comments*
Ash Hardell	November 2009	60,558,826	652K	March 2018	848,196	8,280
Mac Kahey	August 2012	204,316,096	1.93M	February 2017	13,446,971	75,610
Strange Aeons	September 2012	37,038,525	581K	June 2019	552,298	7,354

comments, which typically did not receive a large number of Likes, although other commenters often responded to shut down the hate.

In selecting and analyzing comments and threads, we did not collect identifying information. This resulted in our being unable to discuss demographic information beyond the identities described in the comments. In analyzing excerpts at length, we included the usernames of commenters when they preserve anonymity; if the username ostensibly included a full name, we changed the last name to a pseudonym or initial.

Data Analysis

We used qualitative procedures in the grounded theory tradition (Charmaz, 2014) that we explain here to analyze the data set of 30 popular comment threads, totaling 841 comments with 218 comments on Mac's video, 337 comments on Strange Aeon's video, and 286 comments on Ash's video. Addie, (the first author), began by reading through the comments multiple times, taking analytic notes. During the process of iterative readings, she constructed three conceptual categories based on prominent ideas in the data and our theoretical framework. These conceptual categories identified that commenters (1) compared intersecting structures of power; (2) disrupted interlocking hegemonic normativities; and (3) constructed collective identities. She reviewed these categories with the research team and proceeded to refine them through focused coding of each comment thread to identify specific discursive moves that commenters employed. The process of focused coding allowed us to examine the nuances and contentions in the discursive practices and surfaced the use of humor and satire in the comments, which we then made explicit in the conceptual categories (see Table 15.2). Our analytic process led us to the themes that we discuss later, exploring how commenters enacted resistance in satirical digital writing by using memes to compare intersecting structures of power, satire to disrupt hegemonic normativities, and shared humor to form collective identities.

Situating Composition in Response to Videos

While we focused our analysis on how commenters used satirical discursive repertoires, these collaborative compositions must be understood in the context of the videos to which they respond. The three video moments to which these comments responded, described next, modeled many of the literate practices that we observed in our analysis, such as drawing comparisons between structures of power through satire.

In Ash Hardell's video (2018), Ash and their partner, Gray, reacted to conservative news coverage of a sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) curriculum by poking fun at the lyrics of a song used in the curriculum. The conservative clip sampled the song, *Rainbow*, by Lora Bird, highlighting the phrase, "Gender won't decide the choices we make/some boys like dressing up, some girls like catching

TABLE 15.2 Conceptual Categories, Focused Codes, and Themes

Conceptual Categories	*Focused Codes*	*Themes*
Compare Intersecting Structures of Power with Meme Forms	Comparing straight pride and white history month Comparing straight pride and able-bodied people parking in disabled parking spots Comparing homophobia and systemic racism Comparisons that flatten power structures	Commenters used humorous meme forms as tools to compare intersecting structures of power, a practice of critical analysis that also flattens analysis of power when commenters do not attend to the ideological and material dimensions of oppression.
Satirizing Interlocking Hegemonic Normativities	Satirical moves to name and disrupt normativities Ironic participation in normative positionings Sarcastic quips	Commenters disrupt interlocking hegemonic normativities through satirical humor, which establishes creative distance from and destabilizes regulatory norms.
Form Collective Identity Through Shared Humor	Naming shared experiences of resistance to gender and sexual norms Satirical naming of resistant social position Naming felt affinity within and across difference	Commenters construct collective identities at the intersections of queerness by expressing shared feelings (e.g., "OOF SAME"), often shared humor that arises from occupying a resistant social position.

snakes." While they resisted the hateful nature of the conservative clip, Ash and Gray paused to playfully make fun of the lyrics. In so doing, they claimed space for LGBTQ+ perspectives in the face of hate.

In Mac Kahey's video (2017), Mac satirically reacted to a religious media clip that used a metaphor of checking baggage before getting on an airplane to suggest that LGBTQ+ people need to leave their sexual orientation behind in order to get into heaven. He satirically improvised with the religious analogy: "Moral of the story: If you gay, leave it behind [starts laughing]." He played up the metaphor repeatedly, demonstrating his comedic defiance. He extended the analogy to racial identity: "Can I do the same thing with my Blackness? Just like put it in a bag, drop it off, give me privilege." As a Black gay cis man, Mac demonstrates, through humor, the need for intersectional analysis of injustice.

In her video, Strange Aeons (2019) responded to heterosexual or straight pride, using an extended metaphor to humorously disrupt the phenomenon that co-opts LGBTQ+ pride:

> straight pride is a 7th grade dance where all the boys stand on one side of the room and all the girls on the other and then you slow dance for three minutes without making eye contact because jesus is watching you.

Through this comedic metaphor, Strange Aeons pointed out the absurdity of hosting straight pride in a hegemonic culture of cisheteronormativity.

Enacting Resistance With Satirical Digital Compositions

In this section, we explore the three themes constructed through thematic coding to explicate how commenters resisted hegemony through satirical digital compositions. Throughout, we consider the tensions and contentions that arise within these literate practices.

Comparing Intersecting Structures of Power With Meme Forms

In the popular comment threads on Mac and Strange Aeon's videos, commenters used metaphoric textual meme forms to compare intersecting structures of power around race, gender, sexuality, and dis/ability. In Strange Aeon's video, commenters frequently took up the metaphoric meme form that she introduced in the video with phrases such as "straight pride is," "straight pride sounds like," and "straight pride is like." Those satirical forms become tools to identify and relate power structures, most prominently cisheteropatriarchy – a sociopolitical hierarchy based on the supremacy of cisgender and straight men and people, white supremacy, ableism, and classism. A comment thread from Garrett F with 1,725 Likes and 84 replies began with, "Straight pride is like/White History Month/Soup Kitchens for Rich People/Going to the Hospital Because You're Healthy."

Multiple comment threads on Strange Aeon's video drew a comparison between cisheteropatriachy and white supremacy by comparing calls for straight pride with white history month. In a comment with 263 Likes and 12 replies, SunnyXEggs wrote in metaphorical form, "Straight pride is like taking away black history month and making it white history month." These threads often unpacked the need for commemorative months, underlining the dominant ideologies underneath oppressive structures – a nuance that arose as commenters responded to hateful trolls. Ariesturtleneck replied to a troll who claimed there is "no need" for Black History Month by saying, "black history is a thing because black people's achievements have been overshadowed and even taken credit for by white people." Although commenters who defended observances of Black History Month attended to the ideological dimensions of power, they also glossed over contending perspectives within marginalized communities on national observances. Black History Month can reproduce white hegemony because it isolates Black achievement into a single month that celebrates the same few Black individuals to the exclusion of others, and it focuses on a narrative of progress for Black people while sidestepping the discrimination and violence they still face today (Glanton, 2021). Pride Month has been fraught with racism, transphobia, sexism and, more recently, corporatization that can co-opt the LGBTQ+

community as a consumer base, rather than advance queer and trans liberation (Kumar, 2019).

Commenters on StrangeAeon's video also made frequent and popular comparisons between LGBTQ+ pride and parking spaces for people with disabilities. A comment from Zachary K, "Straight pride is like people who complain about the fact that they can't park in a handicapped space when they have the entire damn parking lot," received 3,144 Likes and 45 replies. Throughout, commenters used metaphoric meme forms as discursive resources to see struggles as related. By emphasizing the need to create parking spaces for people with disabilities, analyses of ableism also attend to some material implications of oppression.

On Mac's video, commenters often extended the comparison he drew between homophobia and experiences with anti-Blackness. Although commenters resisted power through these comparisons, they also risked forwarding flat analyses of intersecting structures of power, analyses that conflate, equate, or otherwise flatten the distinct dimensions of structures of power. We see this tension exemplified in the popular comment thread excerpted, in which commenters cite and extend Mac's comparison between homophobia and anti-Blackness:

Excerpt 1 (429 Likes and four replies on the thread):

Line	Commenter	Likes	Comment
1	Lara Farber	429	"Put my blackness in the bag"
2			"GIVE ME PRIVILEGE"
3	ayde gonzalez	4	Can i do the same thing with my mexican
4			put in the bag make me white turn me in too
5			a man so i can have privileges
6	Jin The Eomma	1	I searched for this comment thank you lol
7	song wolf	9	Can I do that with my depression and
8			anxiety? Put it in a bag. Give me happiness
9	that's mine thx	0	MEE

Lara Farber (lines 1–2) restated Mac's satirical reaction with comedic emphasis, creating and using a textual meme form to draw a comparison between homophobia and anti-Blackness. ayde gonzalez took up the satirical form composed by Lara Farber to comically point out the interlocking nature of anti-Blackness, systemic racism, xenophobia, white supremacy, and misogyny (lines 3–5). In response, song wolf adapted the discursive form further to speak to questions of dis/ability and ableism (lines 7–8). We considered how song wolf satirically pushed on ableist norms to put aside or get over mental illness. Yet, ultimately, the comment flattens the nature of power by equating experiences with mental illness with experiences of anti-Blackness. While comparing structures of power allowed commenters to see their struggles as related, the comparison also needed

to meaningfully address difference, which involves analysis of ideologies underpinning, and the material consequences, of the oppressions.

Satirizing Interlocking Hegemonic Normativities

In response to all three videos, commenters used satire to identify and subvert interlocking hegemonic normativities, including white normativity, cisheteronormativity, and able-bodied normativity. These counter-hegemonic practices of humor ranged widely and included sarcastic quips ("I thought this was Paradise where's the chipotle"), funny analogies ("Straight pride sounds like someone selling milk flavored ice cream"), and playful phrasing of affirmative claims ("All genders can catch snakes"). Together, these literate practices demonstrate a pattern of composing that challenges dominant beliefs and norms through satire.

Most of the comments satirically disrupted cisheteronormativity, which naturalizes and regulates binary gender and heterosexuality. On Strange Aeon's video, that comedic disruption poked fun at the compulsory nature of heterosexuality. A comment from Mikail R. with 1,170 Likes and 24 replies began with: "Straight parade? Did you mean: walking outside." The comment denaturalizes heterosexuality by making visible the assumption of straightness. Another comment from lettuce child with 401 Likes and four replies joked: "Smh [shaking my head] we already have straight pride, it's called the KIA SUMMER SALES EVENT." Since LGBTQ+ pride arose as a defiant assertion against stigmatization, erasure, and violent policing of cisheteronormativity, straight pride would be a parody of compulsory heterosexuality. The satire disrupts cisheteronormativity as a dominant social construct laden with beliefs, values, and practices.

In response to Mac's video, commenters used or remixed the meme form "Me:/Also Me:" to comedically illustrate the multiplicity required to navigate cisheteronormativity as a regulatory regime that polices identity and expression. In a comment with 1,289 Likes and 11 replies, Animatea wrote "Me: stuffs gay in bag/Me: Whistles/Also me: RUNS AROUND GAY DETECTOR." This meme irony, playing on the metal detector metaphor introduced in the video, satirizes the boundary policing inherent in cisheteronormativity. A comment from Death Itself with 216 Likes and nine replies further satirizes these normative positionings and the ways boundary policing can be internalized: "Me: shoves my genderfluidity into the depths of my backpack/My Genderfluidity: crawls out like a demon/Me:/Me:/Me: screeching." Textual meme forms here are an emotive, creative resource for enacting critical disruptions of normativities.

Responses to Mac's video coded under this theme occasionally spoke to the intersections of racial, gender, and sexual identity, serving to disrupt white normativity and cisheteronormativity. These threads mostly played on historical changes experienced by the Black queer community. In a comment with 2,964 Likes and 37 replies, spongebob k wrote, "In the 1900's,/Gay and Black – ya nasty/In the 2000's/Gay and Black – omg yas queen slay." We might read the

comment as a nod to potential gains for Black LGBTQ+ representation or lessening of negative and hateful stereotypes. Yet, the comment also might serve as a critique of the ways in which hegemony adapts to maintain power in the face of resistance. Black queer culture (e.g., language, fashion, dance) has become commodified and appropriated by the mainstream media and dominant culture (see Brammer, 2018), yet that does not mean that hegemony of anti-Blackness and cisheteronormativity has come to an end.

Constructing Collective Identity Through Shared Humor

Throughout the threads, commenters wrote of or alluded to shared feelings (e.g., "SAME GURL") to construct collective identities at the intersections of queerness. Feelings figure centrally in reaction media. In fact, the circulation of feelings may be one of the primary functions of reaction videos, and one that drives popularity. As Warren-Crow (2016) explained, "The more (apparently) fresh and honest, the more affectively intense, the better and more shareable the video" (p. 1113). It follows, then, that the comment section would be filled with reflections on shared feelings. In this analysis, we explored how these reflections on shared feelings that arise in experiences of, and resistance to, marginalization may lead to collective identities that form the basis for new ways of being.

The comment responses to Ash's video illustrate how jokes about deviance from norms can galvanize shared feelings of humor that lead to the construction of collective identities. The joke that plays on the lyrics of "girls like catching snakes" animated many of the comments, sparking the formation of a collective queer woman identity in opposition to gender and sexual norms. In a comment with 2,885 Likes and 118 replies, Kendra S. wrote, "Um hi I'm the girl that catches snakes . . . also the girl that got in trouble for chasing the boys with said snakes." As Kendra played on the joke, she also articulated her resistance to hegemonic gender norms. Many of the replies articulated shared feelings (e.g., "Honestly same here girl"), support ("I applaud you"), and admiration ("MOOOD also hifive"). A number of replies sought to build friendships with Kendra S., with comments such as "Holy shit can I be your friend please." Together, these comments illustrate how collective identities can emerge from shared feelings toward resistance.

In response to Ash Hardell and Mac Kahey's videos, commenters frequently replied to popular comments with phrases such as "SAME" and "same gurl," which we read as gestures to collective queer identity. Phrases such as "OOF SAME" in response to comments about LGBTQ+ sexuality gestured toward collective identities around felt queerness. Frequent uses of "same gurl" or "same here sister," with the addition of a feminine noun, were meaningful discursive resources within queer communities to construct and position LGBTQ+ identities. In both forms, commenters constructed collective identities through felt experiences of marginality within and against hegemonic beliefs and norms.

A popular thread on Mac's video illustrated the way satire can be a tool to simultaneously disrupt hegemony and construct collective identities. In a comment with 3,223 Likes and 77 replies, Simone R. wrote "I am gay, black, and left handed. I would have been TROUBLE 50 years ago." This satirical articulation of a resistant social position vis-à-vis the dominant culture gave rise to numerous replies that expressed shared feelings. Many replies constructed a collective identity around Black queer experience of marginality, with comments such as "I'm Bi, Black+Puerto Rican, and I have religious parents," "I'm black, trans, gay, and left handed. Wanna be friends?" and "I'm lesbian, black and I write with BOTH hands. . . . Oh boy you and all of your replies including me are in A LOT of trouble." Like Mac and Simone R., the repliers positioned a collective identity that coheres through routine experiences of anti-Blackness, homophobia, and transphobia and through struggles for Black queer liberatory futures. These posts illustrate that collective identities can support resistance against structures of power and give rise to new ways of being. These identities are also negotiated and socially accomplished in participatory cultures.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Implications for Literacy Education

Studying how young people use and learn with digital media in informal contexts, such as social media opens new avenues to understand language, literacy, and identity. Popular media can be an important pedagogical tool for literacy education (Alvermann et al., 2018). Reaction videos in particular have potential for use in critical media pedagogies, or teaching youth to critique media texts, and other literacy approaches that focus on understanding and disrupting the ways in which structures of power undergird media forms and technologies. Our analysis of these comment threads indicated that interacting with videos that react to oppressive media can facilitate comparisons between structures of power and disruption of hegemonic norms. Educators can sharpen young people's literate practices by guiding them to deepen and complicate their analyses, attending to difference, and unpacking the ideological and material dimensions of power structures.

Humor offers an important set of practices that complement and extend critical analysis. As our analysis demonstrated, humor can facilitate contestation of hegemony and the construction of collective identities in struggles against oppression. Given the potential for humor to support transformative practices, critical literacy educators can develop visions to cultivate practices of humor. Educators might incorporate satire as a form of literary study or ask students to select humorous memes to analyze together in the classroom. Future research and practice in literacy education should consider how humor can facilitate forms

of collective identities that sustain struggles against intersecting oppressions, as well as support coalition building to connect across differences. Collins (1990) argued that coalitional politics are necessary for dismantling complex, interlocking systems of domination. Our analysis indicated that both collective identities and coalition are interactional achievements that must be continually negotiated.

Implications for Cross-disciplinary Fields

Attention to humor in everyday digital practices can expand interdisciplinary attention to the intellectual, affective, and cultural work of funny digital media. Our analysis indicated that reaction videos and memes can serve as analytic and imaginative artifacts that might guide the development of critical consciousness to apprehend, speak about, and ultimately resist experiences with social injustice. The videos also serve as an archive of feelings that structure contemporary LGBTQ+ cultures and identities (Cvetkovich, 2003). Ultimately, scholars across disciplines might understand LGBTQ+ reaction videos and comments as cultural performances of resistance that gesture, in moments, to other possible futures.

The project also has the potential to extend critical understandings of humor in multiple fields. Building with queer of color critique, queer theory, and decolonial feminism, humor is a critical, creative force for rupturing consent to domination and gesturing toward utopian possibilities (Halberstam, 2011; Lugones, 1987; Muñoz, 1999). Humor can serve as a practice of freedom. Although theorists often develop understandings of humor as a practice of freedom through analyzing the performing arts and films, our analysis of LGBTQ+ YouTube demonstrates the affordances and constraints of locating humor in the ordinary. Laughter as a practice of everyday life may be necessary to cultivate critical distance from hegemonic beliefs and norms and ultimately elaborate new ways of being. Yet, important tensions arise in spaces of everyday interaction, from trolls who perpetuate hate to critical commenters who flatten or equate structures of power. In studying practices of freedom, scholars must create room for these constraints, contingencies, and even setbacks.

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16

GIRLS AND GAMING LITERACIES

Dynamics of Gender and Culture

Barbara J. Guzzetti, Leslie M. Foley, and Elisabeth Gee

No longer just for entertainment, video gaming, considered to be a practice of the new literacies (Gee, 2003), has rapidly become a popular lifestyle, a retirement pastime, a competitive e-sport, and a career choice. Video games play a considerable role in many people's lives, so much so that there is an unofficial holiday on July 8th for people around the world to celebrate games (Mews, 2014). An increasing number of universities and colleges in the United States now offer bachelor's degrees in video game design and development or in game art and their programs have been ranked (Akins, 2019). There has been an increasing demand for graduates of these programs as game developers, especially since the global games market is a booming industry, generating over $159 billion dollars in sales in 2020 (Clement, 2021b).

Gaming and Social Identities in the United States

Video gaming has gained in popularity across genders, racial groups, and ages. According to *5 Facts about Americans and Video Games*, a 2018 report of a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (Perrin, 2018), 90% of teens in the United States ages 13 to 17 play video games on a computer, game console, or cellphone or mobile device. Substantial majorities of both boys and girls play video games with 97% of teen boys playing video games compared with 83% of girls. The number of female gamers has grown, accounting for 41% of gamers in the United States in 2020 (Clement, 2021b) and 48% in Canada (Fisher & Jenson, 2017). Almost half (48%) of women ages 30–49 play video games (Brown, 2017). This trend holds true for older adults, as well; survey research by the American Association for Retired People (Terrell, 2019) found 49% of the almost 4,000 respondents ages 50 and older were women gamers with 53% of them playing

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every day compared to 40% of the men who reported engaging in video gaming. Across all ages, people of color now compose the largest group of gamers in the United States, with 48% of African Americans, 44% of Hispanic, and 41% of whites who engage in gaming (Brown, 2017).

Gaming in Other Nations

Gaming has also increased in popularity in other nations, such as Canada and China. Video game play has become one of the major forms of entertainment in China where it is ranked as the top leisure activity (Gackebach, Yue, Lee, Zhou, & Yu, 2016). The market research company, EDDAR, has estimated the Chinese gaming population to be 517 million, which outnumbers the entire population of the United States (FlorCruz, 2014). About half (44.2%) of China's gamers are women (MobData, 2018). Consequently, a female-dominated occupation has emerged in this market called *piewan* where people are paid to accompany customers in playing digital games in Internet cafes (Liu & Lai, 2020). China also has the largest smartphone market in the world with games adapted to their mobile platforms, which has increased the number of video gamers. It is also surprising to note that although known for their slow Internet upload speed, Canadians spend more time online than people of any other country (CIRA Factbook, 2013). Canadians' online time is spent engaging in social media, viewing online videos, and playing games with half (50%) of Canadian gamers who are female (Clement, 2021a).

Gaming and Women of Color

Despite the fact women make up roughly half of the United States population and women and people of color combined make up approximately half of the U.S. and China's gaming population, women of color are severely underserved in both games and the gaming industry. African American women make up only 1% of those who work in the gaming industry (Fourlezo, 2019). Women of any race make up only 24% of the global gaming industry (Weststar, Kwan, & Kumar, 2019), according to a survey conducted by the International Game Developers Association.

Although studies on gender and video games (e.g., Richard, 2016) have brought into focus the challenges that women face in the male-dominated gaming community, such as sexual harassment or marginalization, these studies have often failed to acknowledge the diversity inherent in the female gamer population (Harris-Lowe, 2017). Researchers have tended to treat females as a wholistic group and their experiences in gaming as alike. Queer women and females of color have typically not been included in conversations about and representations of diverse gamers. As Richard (2016) explained, GamerGate, an antifeminist hashtag movement that began in 2014 within the gaming community became

associated with a mascot, Vivian James, a caricature of a white female player who was supposed to represent diversity in the gaming community, but actually typified the historical reality that queer people and women of color are often excluded from popular culture narratives surrounding video games (Nakamura, 2012). The practice of treating all women as alike has ignored the unique experiences of women of color in the gaming subculture (Rankin & Han, 2019).

Recent studies have begun to address these limitations by providing information about the races/cultures and ethnicities or other subjectivities of female gamers, such as their ages, geographical locations and sexual orientations and by describing how these intersecting identities have influenced females' gaming experiences. Female players of color have become a current focus in gender studies in gaming, drawing particular attention to the overlapping social constructs of identity, such as race, gender, age, and social class (Rankin & Han, 2019) that coalesce inseparably. Richard (2013, 2016) has referred to this line of scholarly inquiry as a "third wave" of research on gender and game play, beginning in post-2008 and continuing to the present day. This research that is still in its infancy has begun to examine gaming experiences across social identities, such as gender, race, sexuality, gender identity, age, and socioeconomic status. To date, however, no systematic review of that literature has been conducted to describe how women and girls of color of varying subjectivities experience gaming.

Our Purpose

The purpose of our research was to conduct a systematic review of the extant research on the experiences of girls or women of color in playing or making video games. We anticipated that categorizing, summarizing, and critiquing that literature would provide insight into the attitudes and experiences of an under-researched population – girls and women of color – in gaming and provide direction for future inquiries. We also wondered what types of studies have been conducted on girls or women of color related to video gaming. Therefore, our research questions were: What types of studies have been conducted on girls and women of color in video gaming? What are the key findings on diverse girls' and women's attitudes toward and experiences with video gaming and game creation? What are the limitations of and recommendations from the extant research that could provide future direction for this line of inquiry?

Our Theoretical Framework

We conducted this review of studies on girls/women and gaming as an examination of how multiple identities are represented in that literature. In doing so, we used intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) to guide our analysis. This perspective identifies the intersection of multiple social identities, such as race, gender, age, sexual identity, and social class that influence representations and

interactions and identifies the intersection of those subjectivities that relate to contextual conditions and result in unique forms of oppression.

Our Stance as Researchers

Each of us on the research team are white, cisgender, and upper-middle-class women. We have each conducted research on girls or women of color and new literacies practices. One of us has conducted extensive research on girls and gaming, including a longitudinal study of girls and women of color in gaming. Another of us has developed and taught courses on gender, culture and literacy and is an affiliated faculty member in her university's Center for Gender Equity in Science and Technology. We all advocate for equity and justice and are committed to the study and practice of social change.

Our Procedures

To answer our research questions, we conducted a critical review (Grant & Booth, 2009) of the literature. A critical review requires an extensive search and analysis of the existing research that transcends mere description to note the quality of the studies under review and evaluate the state of a body of research. The method seeks to identify the most significant studies in the field and resulting a hypothesis or model, such as identification of key themes across the studies and direction for future research.

Data Collection

Our first step was to conduct an extensive search of the literature to discover the extant research that examined girls' and women's gaming and game creation and identified their races. The three of us coauthors conducted independent searches of various data bases to ensure we located as much of the available research as possible. Key words we used in our searches included the terms: Asian; identity; gaming; gender; gender fluid; LGBTQIA+; girls; women; culture; race; African American, Black; Indigenous; intersectionality; Latinx, Latina; and video games. We recognize the limitations of search terms that collapse complex categories into simple binaries and how these terms can flatten a heterogenous group into a single category.

The data bases we searched by using these terms included Dissertation Abstracts International, ERIC, Google, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and WorldCat. We also used bibliographic branching by examining the reference lists in the studies we located that might direct us to other studies. In addition, we enlisted the assistance of two reference librarians located at our two universities in conducting our search. Finally, we asked scholars who had produced these studies for their works in progress or their unpublished research.

Data Analysis

We read and reread each of the studies we discovered. In doing so, we conducted a matrix analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2019). We categorized the studies by their area of focus (e.g., video game content; gaming experiences) and by their methodological type (e.g., case study, interview, survey). We noted the characteristics of the populations studied, including their racial/cultural backgrounds, ages, socioeconomic status, and geographical locations. We recorded the researchers' theoretical frameworks (e.g., intersectional feminist theory/intersectionality, theories of gender, communities of practice) for each study. To characterize the literature, we noted the copyright date of the studies, type of publication (book, book chapter, or journal article) and their authors' countries of origin. In addition, we noted any limitations the authors identified, or those that we found.

In completing our analysis, we recorded the key findings in each study. We identified reoccurring themes in the studies' findings across the studies within each genre and/or area of focus. From these analyses, we formulated our synthesis, including implications and recommendations for future research.

Our Discoveries

Characterizing the Research

As a result of our searches, we found three types of studies. These studies included content analyses of the racial and gender representations in video games. Since these studies did not relate to our research questions, we did not analyze them or report their findings here. A second genre we discovered included research related to our central research question that reported girls' racial and/or gender experiences with and attitudes toward gaming, including descriptions of sexual or racial harassment, strategies girls used to resist sexual or racial harassment, and how females made their own games for alternative representations of gender and race. A third type of study we identified was reports of minority women's involvement and their experiences. Since these studies did not relate to our central research question, we did not analyze them or report their findings here.

Of the studies that related to our second research question, 20 were reports of research (some of which were pieces of larger studies) containing data related to girls or women of color and their experiences participating in playing or creating games. Those studies are marked with an ampersand in our reference list. In our review, we focused on the research that reported on how girls of color experienced gaming, game creation, and the online gaming community, studies that best addressed our curiosities. Our comments that follow characterize and synthesize findings from that focused line of inquiry.

Researchers and Participants

All the studies but two were conducted by authors located in the United States. One study was conducted by a first author who was from Canada (Gackebach et al., 2016) and represented a research team studying Canadian and Chinese women gaming. Another study was conducted by an author located in China (Liu & Lai, 2020), who investigated Chinse women playing games with men in China.

Most studies focused on adult women, although one was an intergenerational exploration of Mexican American families' gaming practices (Siyahhan & Gee, 2016). Studies that explored girls of color in game creation included younger females. Of these, one explored the gaming creation practices of Black and Latina females, ages 8 to 18 (Peppler & Kafai, 2010). The second study investigated how African American girls in middle school designed games for social change (Thomas, Rankin, Minor, & Sun, 2017). A third study explored how white and Indigenous girls in grades 6 and 9 created video games in sex-segregated spaces with Indigenous mentors in a summer camp for game design (Dahya, Jenson, & Fong, 2017).

Researchers tended to focus their attention on females who were African American/Black and/or Latinx. Asian women were included in studies that explored Chinese women's gaming practices (e.g., Liu & Lai, 2020) or surveys of diverse groups (e.g., Harris-Lowe, 2017). Some studies also included boys or men in their participants in their studies of girls' and women's interactions with others playing or making games (e.g., Gray, 2012a, 2014; Peppler & Kafai, 2010; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018; Siyahhan & Gee, 2016).

Race/Ethnicity/Culture, Sexuality, and Social Identities

Like other researchers who conducted a review from the view of intersectionality in synthesizing identity research on human computer interaction (Schlesinger, Edwards, & Grinter, 2017), we found that investigators addressed race and ethnicity in their studies in one of three ways, and sometimes these ways overlapped. First, researchers selected their studies' participants from specific racial or ethnic groups (e.g., Gackenbach, Yue, Lee, Zhou, & Yu, 2017; Liu & Lai, 2020; Thomas et al., 2017). Second, scholars examined how girls created or engaged in video games from a theoretical lens that accounted for racial or ethnic intersections with gender (e.g., Rankin & Han, 2019; Richard, 2016). Third, researchers described the ways in which race/culture/ethnicity did or did not impact girls' gaming engagement or game creation (e.g., Harris-Lowe, 2017; Shaw, 2012; Siyahhan & Gee, 2016; Richard, 2016).

Few studies addressed identities beyond gender and race to include other subjectivities. Most often, researchers who did address other social identities beyond gender and race did so by focusing on sexual orientation, including lesbians in

their samples (e.g., Gray, 2017; Richard, 2016; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018; Shaw, 2012, 2017), and transgender, gender fluid, and pansexual participants (e.g., Harris-Lowe, 2017; Richard, 2016). Age was considered in some studies, particularly those that focused on college women (Rankin & Han, 2019), intergenerational gamers (Siyahhan & Gee, 2016), or senior women (Russworm & Blackmon, 2020). Only three studies included older women, two of whom were women who were 39 years old (i.e., Rankin & Han, 2019; Siyahhan & Gee, 2016) and one study of women who were over the age of 55 (Russworm & Blackmon, 2020). Even fewer studies identified the social class of their participants (e.g., Dahya et al., 2017; Peppler & Kafai, 2010).

Theoretical Perspectives

Although several studies used multiple theoretical frameworks, the most common theoretical perspective researchers used or noted in these studies was a theory of intersectionality or intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1989). Six of these studies either referred to intersectionality (Siyahhan & Gee, 2016) or had a focused analysis from a framework of intersectionality (Gray, 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2016; Rankin & Han, 2019; Richard, 2016). This framework was applied in different ways across studies either to emphasize the effects of multiple inequities or to illustrate the complexities of women's experiences (Rankin & Han, 2019).

Other less-commonly used perspectives aside from intersectionality also emphasized race and facilitated the examination of racial identities. Two studies (Gray, 2016; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018) used Black cyberfeminist theory (Gray, 2015), a view that women and people of color, like others, are unable to forgo the physical body when they venture online and take with them aspects of their physical selves that identify them as marginalized bodies. One of the studies (Gray, 2017) also incorporated critical race feminist theory, a view that stresses the importance of allowing all women to define themselves (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2009). This theory was applied in examining identity formation and community building among queer identifying Black and Latinx women known as "gaymers" (Gray, 2017).

Other theoretical perspectives were theories of gender or gender identity. For example, the second most popular lens researchers used to collect and examine their data was Butler's (1990) post-structural feminist theory, a view of gender as a performance, particularly as an identity instituted through repetitive acts. This theory appeared in studies by Dahya et al. (2017), by Liu and Lai (2020), and by Shaw (2012, 2017).

Additional theoretical lenses researchers used in their studies did not relate directly to examining multiple subjectivities, such as race or gender. These included a theory of community of practice, the formation of communities or groups bound by common interests (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This perspective

was typically included in studies that had multiple theoretical frameworks (e.g., Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018; Siyahhan & Gee, 2016; Thomas et al., 2017).

A few studies did not incorporate a theoretical perspective that would allow for the analysis of gender and/or race but were included in this review as they contained data related to gender and/or race in girls' gaming experiences. These studies examined girls' gaming from a view of social constructivism and communities of practice (Peppler & Kafai, 2010; Thomas et al., 2017) or by resource mobilization theory (Gray, 2013). One survey was atheoretical and did not identify a theoretical perspective (Gackebach et al., 2016).

Methodology and Methods

A range of methodological approaches and methods was represented in these studies. Most studies were qualitative and used mixed methods, such as observations and interviews (e.g., Gray, 2012a, 2012b; Liu & Lai, 2020) or triangulated these data collection methods with online journals (Thomas et al., 2017). Others were embedded in some type of longitudinal or ethnographic research (e.g., Siyahhan & Gee, 2016; Thomas et al., 2017), including virtual ethnographies (Gray, 2013) or critical race ethnographies (Gray, 2017). Research that relied solely on self-reports included two studies that constituted or included survey research (Gackebach et al., 2016; Harris-Lowe, 2017); one study that used online questionnaires and focus groups (Rankin & Han, 2019); and one study that relied on interviews (Russworm & Blackmon, 2020). Other studies used discourse or narrative analysis embedded in a critical ethnography (Gray, 2017) or included critical discourse analysis (Gray, 2016).

Our Reflections on the Research Designs

In reflecting on the features of these studies, we discovered a few surprises. Our first surprise related to the limited racial or ethnic groups in the populations studied. In these studies, women and girls of color tended to translate to African American/Black or Latinx females. No studies were conducted solely on Native American girls or women. The one study that did focus on Indigenous females and white girls gaming did not distinguish the analysis by racial group (Dahya et al., 2017). No studies focused solely on Asian American women representing ancestry from countries such as Korea or Taiwan.

We were also struck by the disparity in the ages of participants in these studies. Relatively few studies focused on preadolescent or adolescent girls of color. Only a few studies included older adolescent girls ages 18 or 19 (e.g., Gray, 2013, 2017; Rankin & Han, 2019). There was an absence of older women of color in this line of inquiry with only one study investigating the gaming practices of four Black women over 55 years old (Russworm & Blackmon, 2020), despite reports that an increasing number of senior women ages 50+ are playing games to stay

alert mentally, connect socially, reduce stress, and have fun (Terrell, 2019). This is surprising since senior women interact socially by engaging in both nongame and game discussions during game play (Nelson-Kakulla, 2019).

In reflecting on the silences and shortcomings in these studies, we are reminded that research that is intersectional, exploring females' experiences in gaming across gender, race, sexuality, gender identity, and social class, is a relatively new line of inquiry. Richard (2016) noted that such studies represent a "third wave" of scholarship that began only about a decade ago. Therefore, although it understandable why this research is underdeveloped, it is noteworthy to draw attention to the absence of studies exploring players' multiple social identities in gaming when planning future research agendas.

Females of Color Playing and Creating Video Games

Our second research question related to how women of color experience video gaming and making games. Some authors (e.g., Richard, 2016) began their reports with an explanation of why video gaming and the physical and online spaces it creates as gaming communities through chat boxes, headsets, Skype, or communication forums within multiplayer games have been considered male dominated and marginalizing arenas. Historically, gaming has privileged and embraced male participation and has been a space for men to address "the fragility of masculinity in geek identity" (Richard, 2016, p. 73) by using gaming communities for performing and experimenting with masculinity (Burrell, 2008). Some men have considered these communities to be male bonding spaces (Kimmel, 2008).

While gaming communities can facilitate masculine expression, they can also create spaces of exclusion. This exclusion is often directed at those that may threaten that expression and can punish women for being in spaces where they are perceived to not belong (Kimmel, 2008). The exclusionary nature of gaming spaces was exemplified by GamerGate where gamers threatened female video game developers with violence for raising problematic gender issues in video game culture (Gray, 2012b).

Gatekeeping by Harassment

Men have engaged in gatekeeping by harassing women and ethnic/racial minorities by "griefing" or annoying women or by "flaming" (insulting or using foul language). Players have engaged in linguistic profiling (Gray, 2012b), distinguishing gender and/or race/ethnicity by the ways in which other players spoke, particularly when players used African American vernacular English (Gray, 2012b). Others have "biostalked" by examining gamers' online profiles and biographies to discern their gender and racial identities (Richard, 2016). Researchers subscribing to a theory of Black cyberfeminism (Gray, 2015; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018) have noted this inability to leave the physical body behind in cyberspace.

One researcher found that women reported that gamers were more hostile to women than to minorities (Harris-Lowe, 2017), perhaps due to the absence of racial information or clues. Women reported being more likely to be harassed due to their gender than to their race (Richard, 2016; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018). This was the case for women of color except when racial identifiers were present (Richard, 2016). Black women have reported that Black men have been as oppressive to them as white men (Gray, 2014).

Forms of Harassment

Richard and Gray-Denson (2018) identified three types of harassment women of color experienced: harassment focused on appearance, sexuality, or appropriateness in the gaming space. These forms were prevalent across racial groups. For example, both Latina and white female players identified harassment that was sexist or gender devaluing (Richard, 2016). These comments focused on women's stereotypical gender roles (e.g., "go back to the kitchen"), their weight (e.g., "fat"), their appearance (e.g., "ugly"), or their sexual availability (e.g., "slutty"), implying that women gamers were too unattractive to be feminine or were there to cater to males' desires (Richard, 2016, p. 80). A Black woman of color reported experiencing sexism from men of all races within the gaming community, including requests for sexual favors, pictures of her, and her social media profiles (Harris-Lowe, 2017).

Researchers also reported that these forms of sexual harassment are transnational as Chinese women players were subjected to insults and foul language, alluding to women as incapable players who deliberately trade their physical beauty for male gamers' help (Liu & Lai, 2020). The most common of these insults was being referred to as "lying whores" (*tang biao*). Chinese women interviewed reported the typical experience of having their skills and performances questioned and evaluated in negative terms by men with the stigma of being poor players and being solicited by men for dates after posting their photos on their personal profile pages. Yet, Chinese women reported engaging in games more often than did their white Canadian peers (Gackebach et al., 2016).

Investigators also reported women's experiences with racism by harassment consisting of threats of violence or racial slurs due to their racial/ethnic identities. For example, one woman who identified as Hispanic/Latina reported that after playing the game, *Call of Duty: Black Ops 3* online, the men she had played with tracked her down and threatened to rape and kill her (Harris-Lowe, 2017). One man stated he was "part of the Ku Klux Klan and hated Hispanics/Latinos/Mexicans and he would slit her throat and throw her back over the border" (Harris-Lowe, 2017, p. 57). This form of harassment was not unique to Latinx women as Black women also reported being subjected to racial slurs from other players (Rankin & Han, 2019; Richard, 2016; Russworm & Blackmon, 2020). Gray (2012b) noted that Back women reported that white women never

discriminated against them because of their race or used racist language toward them within the Xbox Live community. Black women only experienced racism and sexism from Black and white men. In a study of Black men playing in Xbox Live, Gray (2012a) found racial slurs, including those that were directed at her as a Black female, were typically characterized by an initial inquiry into a person's race (e.g., "Are you Black?") followed by a provocation similar to griefing in incidents that happened quickly and then expired. Those who made racial slurs did not consider themselves to be racist.

Coping Mechanisms

Several studies reported the ways in which women of color reacted or responded to these incidents of gender or racial harassment by using what we and/or the researchers categorized as coping mechanisms. These tactics used by women of color included avoiding men's comments by such means as not wearing a headset (Harris-Lowe, 2017); muting them; avoiding strangers; refraining from speaking to avoid linguistic profiling; not gendering gamertags; suggesting they were "one of the guys"; or by having private discussions about the best way to deal with acrimonious players (Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018). Other means included pandering to male dominance by playing as a sole female instead of in a group of females or by presenting as male (Harris-Lowe, 2017).

Resistance Strategies

Like other researchers (Fisher & Jenson, 2017), we found that girls of color were not hapless victims of marginalization. Researchers reported women being proactive and enacting strategies of resistance against dominant structures and oppressive environments. Some girls of color created their own games (e.g., Peppler & Kafai, 2010; Thomas et al., 2017) by learning coding programs like SCRATCH that enabled them to develop design thinking skills and problem-solving abilities. Making their own games allowed girls to avoid large platforms like Xbox where they experienced harassment. In one study (Thomas et al., 2017) African American girls designed games for social change.

Women of color have increased their gaming skills to reduce instances of hate and inequalities. Excelling in game play allowed females to thwart the oppression they experienced in online gaming by focusing attention on the game (Gray, 2012b; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018). This strategy allowed women to experience a degree of empowerment they had not previously enjoyed.

Some Black and Puerto Rican women segregated and formed their own clans as groups that would play together (Gray, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018). Queer identifying Black and Latinx women also formed their own communities within Xbox Live that enabled them to be themselves (Gray, 2017). When women of color were asked to leave a gaming forum due

to tensions surrounding their appeals for acknowledgment and recognition of oppression among women, particularly white women, they created their own online forum space in Xbox Live. In this forum, they were enabled to discuss the lack of attention given to issues faced by women of color in the gaming community (Gray, 2016).

Some strategies of resistance women employed were more aggressive. Black and Latina women engaged in griefing or deliberately annoying other players in response to oppression (Gray, 2012b), both individually and collectively as response to organized oppression (Gray, 2013). Two Chinese women reported using verbal attack as a strategy by leading their teams to victory, then switching on their microphones to call out male players (Liu & Lai, 2020). This was a strategy also used by queer identifying women of color who used their play to resist the patriarchy, sometimes referred to as "transgressive play" (Aarseth, 2014), symbolic of rebellion against tyranny.

Expressions of Gender and Culture in Gaming

Another genre of studies was reports on how gender and/or race or ethnic culture were expressed by girls or women of color in choosing games, playing games, or creating games. One of these was an intergenerational study of three Mexican American families' gaming practices (Siyahhan & Gee, 2016). Although all the mothers in these families (ages 36–39) played games at one time or continued to play them, they had differing attitudes toward and experiences with video games. One mother was concerned about the addictive nature of gaming and became a rule enforcer, regulating how much time her children played, the games they played, and with whom they played. Another mother was not only a rule maker, but a co-participant in gaming, playing regularly with her sons; the other mother despite her self-perception as a poor control user engaged in gaming as much as her son did. The only gaming practice tied to these families' Mexican culture where video gaming is quite popular (E-Marketer, 2014) was watching the children play soccer FIFA games together. Otherwise, race/ethnicity/culture did not seem to influence these families' social or physical arrangement around or engagement in games.

Only two other studies reported familial gaming (Rankin & Han, 2019; Russworm & Blackmon, 2020) although one study mentioned an African American woman playing with her brother (Shaw, 2012). Russworm and Blackmon (2020) noted that a Black woman enjoyed playing casual games, like fashion games with her granddaughter. This was the only study that focused on women of color over 50 years old, finding that older Black women played games as a form of self-care to learn new skills and preserve mental acuity that would help them live longer lives. Their promotion of gaming as self-care was characterized as activist activity that enabled socialization and organization. Rankin and Han (2019) also reported Black women's remembrances of playing video games with family

members when they were younger than their current ages of 18 to 39, reflecting on how male relatives taught them how to play console games.

Two other studies reported how collaboration with others facilitated video game design for girls of color. Thomas et al. (2017) described how African American middle school girls in an all-girls setting worked together to develop games. Girls worked collaboratively together to resolve problems and overcome difficulties of personality differences, social awkwardness, or their partner's absence. Peppler and Kafai's (2010) reported how low socioeconomic African American and Latina girls made games in a mixed-gender setting. One 11-year-old African American/Latina girl created a gender stereotypical story line of a woman as a victim, featuring a princess locked inside a castle by a wicked witch, crying for help, and in need of rescue by the players. When facing difficulties in her design, boys came to her aid to find the princess.

Other studies explored identity and representation in gaming, distinguishing between those who identify as a gamer and those who count as gamers. These studies consisted of interviews with diverse participants to determine what influenced their self-identification as gamers and their attitudes toward gaming and how much influence representation had in their gaming choices and practices. Shaw (2012) noted that two women of color were influenced by gender considerations in their attitudes toward gaming. An African American woman begrudgingly accepted the lack of diverse representation in video games, expressing her impression that the situation would not change. A mixed-race Japanese/white woman expressed her perception that gamers were usually men. Richard (2017) found that Asian women were more vulnerable to stereotype threat or negative stereotypical biases and expectations than were white women, which had negative effects on their gaming self-confidence and gaming identification. In considering race, Shaw (2012) reported that none of the interviewees mentioned that not being white was a reason for not identifying as a gamer. With respect to sexuality, Shaw (2012) found that not all gamers who were nonheterosexual identified as gaymers and participating in gaymer communities did not necessitate being gay and a gamer.

Shaw (2017) also found that many of her diverse interviewees did not need to see any one aspect of their identities, such as race, gender or sexual orientation represented in all their media. These players believed their identities and relationships to media characters were complex enough to let them feel they could connect with a wide array of characters. Yet, they did express the desire to see people like them represented in games in a wider intersectional sense.

Our Final Reflections on the Research

As Gray (2013) noted in her research, women of color have refused to become victims or passive receivers of harassment in the gaming community. Like Gray (2013), we found in our review that women of color were gamers who responded

to inequality in an organized, collective manner, regardless of the outcomes. As Richard and Gray-Denson (2018) noted, "women have been constant in gaming culture and have continued to make their own mark and defy the contentions and limitations that have traditionally confined them" (p. 32).

These experiences of women of color in the gaming communities were characterized not only by exclusion and subjugation they experienced, but also by their resistance and resilience (Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018). We are reminded by this work that it is often through resistance that new spaces are created and that resiliency assists in forming alternative ways of existence exemplified through how girls and women of color have adapted in positive ways within adverse environments (Richard & Gray-Denson, 2018). It is this tenacity and ingenuity displayed by girls and women of color in the gaming community that we found most remarkable in our review.

Implications for Literacy Education and Cross-disciplinary Fields

Video gaming as a practice of the new literacies extends communication abilities (Gee, 2003). As such, playing video games can foster girls of color (and others) in developing 21st-century skills and abilities, such as multitasking, collaboration, and making intertextual ties between multimodal forms of text. Making games can teach girls design thinking skills and enhance their critical thinking and reading abilities (Gee & Games, 2008) and give girls opportunities to author their own subjectivities and rewrite gender and racial stereotypes found in games (Fisher & Jenson, 2017).

Teachers, adult literacy educators, and those working with girls and young women of color in out-of-school programs can make girls of color aware of gaming organizations and opportunities for them. One of these organizations is Latinx in Gaming, organized and run by three Latinx women in the gaming industry (Poggi, 2020). This organization provides a centralized hub for Latinx gaming events and communities through a website (www.latinxingaming.com/home); a social media presence on Facebook (www.facebook.com/latinxingaming/); and a Discord channel for people to connect and get support for their gaming projects. Another such organization is Black Girl Gamers, a multi-platform age and LGBTQAI+ online gaming community on Facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/905013919573042/), a group of over 7,500 women united in their love of gaming (Blue, 2020). The group has sponsored community events, such as Gamers Girls Night and an online gaming summit, and has a Discord channel, guest hosting Black female streamers.

This review also has implications for those in Women's and Gender Studies and for those in interdisciplinary fields. The girls and women of color in these studies illustrated principles from a variety of theoretical perspectives that demonstrate how females can resist and respond to oppression of the patriarchy

by embodying resistance and resilience. Their examples can serve as models to follow in the quest for gender and social justice and as reminders that women, particularly women of color, are capable, creative, and courageous.

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