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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, (Re)claiming and (Re)Framing: Exploring How Black West African Immigrant Girls Depict Their Understandings of Self-Identity and Representations through Multimodal Literacy, by Maima Chea Simmons was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

____

Gholnecsar Muhammad, PhD.
Committee Chair

____

Jennifer Esposito Norris, PhD.
Committee Member

____

Detra Price-Dennis, PhD.
Committee Member

____

Michelle Zoss, PhD.
Committee Member

____

Date

____

Gertrude Tinker Sachs, PhD.
Chairperson, Department of Middle and
Secondary Education

____

Paul A. Alberto, PhD.
Dean, College of Education &
Human Development

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

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Maima C. Simmons

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Maima Chea Simmons
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University

The director of this dissertation is:

Gholnecsar Muhammad, PhD.
Department of Middle and Secondary Education
College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

CURRICULUM VITAE

Maima Chea Simmons

ADDRESS: Middle and Secondary Education
P.O. Box 3978
Atlanta, GA 30302

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2021	Georgia State University Department of Middle and Secondary Education
Masters Degree	2014	University of Georgia Reading Education
Bachelors Degree	2011	University of Georgia Secondary English Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2019-present	District Literacy Coordinator City Schools of Decatur
2018-2019	ELA Curriculum Specialist District of Columbia Public Schools
2017-2018	Instructional Coach Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools

PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS:

Cross, S.B., Cannon, S.O. Williams, M.J., Hale, J. J., Donovan, M.K., Thomas, C.O., **Simmons, M.C.,** & Downey, C.A. (2020, Oct.). Criticality and the Narrative Inquiry table: Travel stories and tensions.
Curriculum Inquiry, 22(1-2), 121-135.

Muhammad, G.M., McArthur, S.A., & **Chea, M.** (2016, Nov.) *Pens down, don't shoot: An analysis of how young Black women use language to fight back against racism*.

Paper presentation at National Council of Teachers of English Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Gordon, C., Council, T., **Chea, M.**, & Dukes, N. (2016, Nov.) *An African American read-in celebrating the literary legacies of African American females of the past, present, and future.*
Panel presentation at National Council of Teachers of English Annual Meeting, Atlanta, GA.

Hailu, M. & **Chea, M.** (2016, Apr.). *Americanized Africans: An auto-ethnographic approach to examining the experiences of first and second-generation Black immigrant women in doctoral education programs.*
Paper presentation at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.

Cross, S., Downey, C.A., Cannon, S., & **Chea, M.** (2016, Apr.). *Inductions: A narrative inquiry into former teachers becoming educational researchers coming alongside students becoming teachers.*
Paper presentation at American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C.

Chea, M. (2016, Jan.). Essay book review of Other People's English: Code-meshing, code-switching, and African American literacy*, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 59* (4), 483-484.

Chea, M. & Bryant, M. (2015, Mar.). *HOW much would YOU swallow a key for: A look at Joey Pigza!*
Paper presentation at Georgia Children's Books Awards and Conference on Children's Literature Annual Meeting, Athens, Georgia.

Chea, M. (2014, Mar.). *My Students are bored… What do I do? Culturally responsive assessment ideas for the high school ELA teacher.* Paper presentation at Georgia Children's Books Awards and Conference on Children's Literature Annual Meeting, Athens, Georgia.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

2020	National Council of Teachers of English
2016	Alpha Upsilon Alpha

(RE)CLAIMING AND (RE)FRAMING: EXPLORING HOW BLACK WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRANT GIRLS DEPICT THEIR UNDERSTANDINGS OF SELF-IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH MULTIMODAL LITERACY

by

MAIMA CHEA SIMMONS

Under the Direction of Gholnecsar Muhammad, PhD.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to understand how Black West African immigrant girls understood their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities through the analysis of media and textual representations of Black girlhood and Africa. I explored how Black West African immigrant girls utilized critical media literacy pedagogy (Kellner and Share, 2007; McArthur, 2016) to (re)create their own identities through multimodal literacy practices (Mills & Levido, 2011; Price-Dennis, 2016). I drew upon critical race feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), transnationalism (Chacko, 2019; Kebede, 2019), and the Black girl literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) as epistemological and conceptual frameworks to guide my research. To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences and triple consciousness as Black girls of West African immigrant descent, in the United States, I employed a narrative inquiry case study methodology. Narrative inquiry focuses on how individual and social lived experiences are translated and shared through stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, 2013; Montero and Washington, 2011). Narrative inquiry does not just consist of participants telling stories to researchers, but rather extends and complicates the notion of researchers "coming alongside" participants for qualitative inquiry. The study consisted of a collaborative literacy institute developed using the Historically Responsive Literacy Framework (Muhammad, 2020) and was supported by focus groups, interviews, and multimodal document analysis. Four adolescent girls, who identified as 2nd generation (Rumbaut, Massey, & Bean, 2006) West African immigrants and lived within a large metropolitan city in the Southeast region of the United States, participated in the study. Data analysis was guided by the constant comparative analysis method (Glaser, 1965). The study's finding illuminated that Black West African immigrant girls were aware of negative misrepresentations of Black girlhood and Africa but did not prescribe to these misrepresentations. The participants rejected these misrepresentations by developing positive self-

identity and counternarratives. The outcomes of the literacy workshop included increased self-confidence and written counternarratives and critiques that presented fuller representations of their identities as Black West African immigrant girls. The findings of this study suggest that secondary literacy educators should implement pedagogical strategies that emphasize collaboration, relationship building, and multimodal composition.

INDEX WORDS: Multimodal literacy, Critical media literacy, Identity development

(RE)CLAIMING AND (RE)FRAMING: EXPLORING HOW BLACK WEST AFRICAN IMMIGRANT GIRLS DEPICT THEIR UNDERSTANDINGS OF SELF-IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATIONS THROUGH MULTIMODAL LITERACY

by

MAIMA CHEA SIMMONS

A Dissertation

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Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

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2021

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Marquez, Reid, Ara, and John.

To Marquez, my husband, we met during the first semester of my doctoral program and you have been by my side ever since. Thank you for your unwavering love and support! Thank you for filling in every gap we needed in order for me to finish this dissertation. There aren't words to describe how easy you've made this journey for me in the face of my struggles. I love you and I dedicate this dissertation to you. I finally finished it!

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Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Philippians 4:6

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To Quez, my husband, my partner, my best friend- thank you for being so loving, kind, and supportive through this journey. I love you! To Reid, my baby boy - thank you for being my light in the midst of the hardest days. Your smile was my motivation to keep going. I love you!

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Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to all of the Black girls and women navigating spaces and places that were not made for us. I am you. I see you. My achievement is your achievement. Don't dim your light for anyone. We deserve all of the joy, love, success, and rest that this world has to offer.

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1 THE PROBLEM

Introduction

"Give your daughters difficult names. Give your daughters names that command the full use of tongue. My name makes you want to tell me the truth. My name doesn't allow me to trust anyone that cannot pronounce it right."

-Warsan Shire

Sometimes it's easy to forget where you come from. Sometimes you want to forget because being different is hard as a kid, but if you are not careful, your family's legacy can slip away from you. My name has always been enriched with my heritage but has set me apart from others. I have been called, *Mee-ma, Ma-ma, Miami, Mammy, Aunt Jemima,* and every variation of the five letters that make up my first name, Maima. My name is Maima, pronounced My-ma, of the Vai/Kru dialect of Liberia. My name means *to obtain something that you really desire*. There are other "Maima's" globally, but my name is an anomaly here in the United States. It sets me apart; it marks me as different and even 'weird' in some spaces. My name is a constant reminder of where my family is from and what we have overcome. It is my identity that also speaks to the importance of who I am now. I was born as Maima Waitee Chea at Grady Hospital in downtown Atlanta in January 1989. After my birth, my mother returned to Liberia. The Liberian civil war erupted in the early 1990s, changing my family's life forever. My parents, John and Ara, immigrated to the United States with my sisters, Telawo and Jandi.

Growing up as a Black girl of West African descent in a majority Black community in the southeastern United States required me to navigate and assimilate among three different spaces: Liberian cultural norms and values at home, Southern Black cultural norms and values at school

with my peers, and Eurocentric White American values and standards within my school environment and the society at large. These three cultures' intersection left me in a unique space of feeling not completely identifying with one group, mirroring what Winn (2010) named as being "betwixt and between" three cultural areas.

Background of the Problem

Betwixt and Between of West African Black Girls

To be "betwixt and between" means being neither one thing nor the other. Winn (2010) uses the same phrase, "betwixt and between," to describe in her study with formerly incarcerated Black girls trapped between the physical and symbolic concepts of freedom and imprisonment. Winn's research focused on how the girls understood their identity as Black girls and formerly incarcerated youth outside of incarceration through performative literacies. The notion of being trapped in the middle, between two worlds, is most popularly and historically described by the term coined by W.E.B. DuBois, *double consciousness.* DuBois defined double consciousness as the notion that African Americans are trapped between two worlds, forced to view themselves through a Black lens and an anti-Black, racist lens. DuBois (1903) writes, "One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder″ (p. 3). DuBois explicates many African Americans' doubleness as they try to negotiate their American identity with their African identity, riddled with patriarchal racism and White supremacy. Existing in two worlds is the reality that Black people face as we navigate life as visible others in a society that has historically and consistently marginalized and questioned Black people's humanity.

Still, the notion of double consciousness does not thoroughly examine the Black African immigrant experience (Lobban, 2013). This gap is why it is essential to highlight the voices of Black West African immigrant girls. In addition to the duality that DuBois names, I contend that there is a third space or a third consciousness that people of Black West African immigrant heritage in America inhabit, which includes youth. Mensah and Williams (2015) describe the same notion of "being double and consequently seeing double" as the pull between ethno-racial identity and national identity as it relates to African immigrants in Western countries (p. 39). This duality of space and positionality is similar to what I experienced as a Black West African immigrant girl navigating three cultural worlds. I argue that many other girls of Black West African descent growing up in the United States face a similar conflict as they navigate what it means to a Black African girl in a Eurocentric country.

Triple Consciousness

Black people of West African immigrant descent inhabit a third space as we must navigate life through the lens of being American, Black, and African. This tri-lens led to the need for the current study. The tri-lens illuminates how Black West African girls examine Black girlhood, African identity, and Black identity through representations. I learned more about how the participants understood and spoke back to negative representations that promote racist, sexist, and xenophobic ideologies through multimodal literacies. This study interrogated how Black West African descent girls develop their self-identity amidst a society that often privileges White and male voices and identities.

Outsiders to the Benefits of White Privilege

The consequences of living in a country dominated by White, male identities are best explained by critical race theory. In the United States, Whiteness is property. During

enslavement in the United States, Whiteness determined whether an individual was free or enslaved, had access to property ownership and equitable educational opportunities, and most importantly, Whiteness determined proximity to justice and safety. Being White in appearance offers benefits and protections that people of darker skin hues in the United States do not always have. These benefits and protections include immediate and guaranteed access to privileges like preferential treatment in schools, academia, or the workplace and respect from authority figures (such as police officers).

The year 2020 has been a tumultuous year for Black people in the United States, and the onslaught of state-sanctioned police violence directed towards Black bodies has been overwhelming. Police violence against Black women often does not even garner local and national attention in the same manner that police violence against Black men is acknowledged. Campaigns like #SayHerName work to raise awareness about how Black women are impacted by anti-Black police violence. In McArthur and Muhammad's (2020) words, the lives of Black women and girls are "devalued and dehumanized in the public eye as [our] stories are often left untold, falsely reported, or overlooked in the wider media landscape" (p.1). During the 2020 vice presidential debate, both candidates responded to whether they felt justice had been served in the case of Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old EMT, who was murdered in her sleep by police who served a no-knock warrant on her home erroneously. VP Candidate Senator Harris did not feel that justice was delivered in the case of Breonna Taylor and expressed her condolences to her family. However, the conversation then quickly pivoted to the police violence against George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, who was also murdered by the police. VP Candidate Mike Pence responded that he felt justice had been served and directed his response to his disapproval of looting and rioting. Even when directly asked about whether there was a fair outcome in the

judicial decisions made after the murder of Breonna Taylor, both candidates shifted their response to the violence experienced by Black men or property damage. The experiences of Black women are often ignored or subsumed under the monolithic Black experience, therefore furthering the nuanced intersection of how Black women and girls experience sexism and racism in the United States.

There are still tangible and intangible rewards for being identified as White in the United States education system, including (1) rights to use and enjoyment: for example, White students receive material benefits and above standard access to resources that historically and culturally marginalized students do not; (2) reputation and status property: White students benefit from attending schools and programs implicitly or explicitly labeled as White (or suburban), and to mark a school or program as non-White (i.e., urban or bilingual) diminishes the value of the entity; and (3) the absolute right to exclude: de jure and de facto segregation privilege and fund schools in primarily White neighborhoods, while schools in non-White neighborhoods are often underfunded and overlooked (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Whiteness provides tangible benefits to White individuals that Black girls of West African immigrant descent do not automatically benefit from. Identifying as Black, woman, and West African immigrant descent does not align with Whiteness or offer the benefits of White privilege. This outsider status reifies the idea of triple consciousness that emerges from being Black, West African, and a girl in a White male-dominated America by highlighting the three worlds that these girls must navigate while traversing academic spaces. I argue that this research focused on how Black African immigrant girls interpret textual and media representations of Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa in popular culture and speak back to these representations through multimodal literacy practices is significant due to how Black girls' racial,

ethnic, and gendered identities are developed through literacy practices, media representations, critical media literacy, and multimodal literacy.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding how first-generation, 1.5 generation, second-generation, and 2.5 generation Black African immigrant girls understand representations of Black women and girls and Africanness as a part of their identity development process is an integral part of improving their P-12 educational experiences and outcomes. This focus will elevate and illuminate their lived experiences, voices, and understandings within academia's scope. Representations in texts, television, movies, music, social media, and popular culture shape how youth are understood within the public sphere. These depictions can shape Black African immigrant girls' perception of their self-identity. Focusing on how girls of Black West African immigrant descent speak back to misrepresentations of Black women and Africanness with digital tools is integral to understanding how youth use multimodal tools to make meaning in multilayered ways.

Adolescent girls have the power to (re)create their identities through writing in digital mediums, including videos, social media, graphic design, blogging, and meme-making (Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Price-Dennis, 2016). The use of (re) in the words (re)create, (re)frame, and (re)claim is significant because it signifies what Dillard (2012) defines as “one of the many ways African feminist scholars working within endarkened frameworks are (re)membering or putting back together notions of time that honor and lift up the relationships that linger there” (p. 10). Dillard (2012) explains further that this pursuit is an “attempt to ask a different set of questions, starting first with ourselves” (p. 10). This way of knowing is important to this study because it was important for the Black West African girls in this study to speak back

to misrepresentations and define their identities for themselves. Within the next sections, I will problematize and draw attention to Black West African girls' identities, representations of Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa, critical media literacy practices, and multimodal literacies.

Identities of Black West African Girls

There is a shortage of academic research concerning Black African immigrant girls' unique positionality and educational experiences within a U.S. context. Black West African immigrant girls experience invisibility within educational research due to their ethnic, racial, and gender identity. In the following sections, I explore the limited representations of Black West African immigrant girls' experiences and perspectives.

Racial and Gender Identity

Educational research tends to problematize or ignore Black women and girls' experiences instead of delving into their cultural strengths and academic successes. Race-based research frameworks typically focus on Black boys and men's experiences and needs, and feminist research frameworks tend to highlight the experiences of White girls and women (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). The implicit and explicit erasure of Black girls and women in academic research contributes to perpetual "social invisibility" that many members of this group experience (Evans-Winters, 2014; Meyers & Gayle, 2015). Black West African immigrant girls are marginalized in the United States and experience sexism as girls in a patriarchal society, xenophobia as descendants of African immigrants, and racism as Black people. Because the identities and experiences of Black girls of West African descent are often underrepresented or pathologized in popular culture, these youth may experience even more social invisibility. They develop strategies to talk back to these misrepresentations through literacy practices.

Ethnic Identity

Black students in America are often referred to as a homogenous group, with limited attention to how ethnic group affiliations, socioeconomic status, and gender identity shape academic outcomes within educational settings (George Mwangi, 2014; Kim, 2014). Black African immigrants' experiences are encompassed within the broader racial category of Black, which completely ignores the nuanced differences of culture, language, migration, acculturation, and transition for Black African immigrants in the United States (Adjepong, 2018; Awokoya & Clark, 2008). Researching Black people in America as a monolithic group "neglects the increasing racial and intraracial strife that affects individual development and academic achievement" of Black African immigrants (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, p. 50). The ethnic and national identities of Black students shape not only how they see themselves but also how they form relationships with others and navigate education systems.

Most academic research overlooks Black African students' nuanced, complicated experiences by lumping them in with Black American students and ignoring the variance of intragroup experiences (Kim, 2014; Smith, 2019). Moreover, Black African immigrant students face varying levels of racism and discrimination within their racial group and outside of their racial groups, including negative stereotypes that may lead to decreased academic opportunities, engagement, and performance. Black immigrant students may experience isolation or hypervisibility because of their names, accents, and physical features in addition to racialization. Black African immigrant students' ostracization is exacerbated when teachers, researchers, and scholars ignore or misrepresent the cultures, experiences, and identities of these students.

Public Discourse about Immigrants in the United States

Black Africans' experiences are often ignored within immigrant discourse research and political arenas, as these areas tend to focus on immigrants of Latinx descent (Knight & Watson,

2014; Park, 2014). For example, NCTE's most recent position statement (2015) related to immigrant, undocumented, and unaccompanied youth, highlights the experiences of youth of Mexican and Central American descent. It does not address immigrant youth from other regions of the world (NCTE, 2015b). This type of social invisibility is indicative of the need for research that recognizes, explores, and supports the experiences of Black African immigrant youth. Furthermore, anti-immigrant discourse permeates American culture, further marginalizing and distorting Black African immigrants' experiences and concerns. Further, in 2018, President Trump called Haiti, El Salvador, and African nations "shithole countries," which directly reflects how pervasive anti-immigrant discourse is in American culture. Immigrants of color, especially those with darker skin, are depicted as a danger to national and financial security within anti-immigrant discourse (Allen, Jackson, & Knight, 2012; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017).

Triple Consciousness of Black West African girls in the United States

While the research on Black American girls and women is growing, the experiences of Black African immigrant girls and women are typically subsumed under this category without an interrogation of how ethnicity, culture, and identity shape the experiences of Black African immigrant girls and women (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Griffin, Cunningham & George Mwangi, 2015). Furthermore, Black African immigrant women and girls are often ignored within literature focusing on immigrant populations within a U.S. context (Agyepong, 2017; Allen, Jackson, & Knight, 2012; Park, 2014; Skerrett, 2012; Traoré, 2006). Black African immigrant women and girls' invisibility in educational research directly impacts how this group experiences schooling and negotiates their own identities (Agyepong, 2017). Many schools and educators are inadequately prepared to teach these students. They possess limited awareness about the rich cultural histories, traditions, and knowledge that these Black West African immigrant students

have (Allen, Jackson, & Knight, 2012; Park, 2014; Showers, 2015; Traoré, 2004; 2006). It is essential to focus on this population because they deserve a quality education that honors their identities and empowers them to fully express, explore, and challenge their lived experiences and understandings of their global communities through academic inquiries and culturally responsive curriculum.

Media Representations

Media has taken over how individuals learn, communicate, and interact with the world(s) in which they live. Today's children and adolescents have grown up with more exposure to the internet, television, social networking, and other media forms than past generations (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). The media images that permeate popular culture are often full of misperceptions, stereotypes, and negative portrayals of people of color, and especially, Black women and girls (Wissman, 2007). These negative portrayals include the stereotypical tropes of the angry Black woman, Sapphire, Jezebel, mammy, independent woman, welfare queen, and gold digger (Adams-Bass et al., 2014; Evans-Winters, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Lewis et al., 2013). Black girls and women in America are often erroneously stereotyped as loud, aggressive, sexually promiscuous, and economically dependent in mass media and popular culture imagery (Brown, 2014; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). These myths about Black womanhood are perpetuated by the media and affect how Black girls experience education within the U.S. school system (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). The limited representations of Black women and girls in the media preserve mainstream myths about Black womanhood. Enacting critical media literacy pedagogy is a tool that Black girls can use to critique misrepresentations and design new forms of text that depict Black girlhood in positive, multilayered ways that reflect Black girlhood's realities.

Critical Media Literacy

Educators who enact critical media literacy practices (CML) encourage and require students to analytically interrogate the media's messages, with particular attention to power relationships and privilege. Brown and Schwarz (2007) posit that youth must develop critical analysis skills to break down the constant, pervasive nature of media messages disseminated through the internet, television, and social media. Burnett and Merchant (2011) describe critical media literacy as an interface of three characteristics- practice, networks, and identity. Practice is defined as exploring what others do on and offline to make meaning of popular culture. Networks involve the connections between individuals in a range of social environments, such as online communities. Identity within critical media literacy focuses on how individuals engage in different social environments, develop agency, and build individual and collective ways of knowing. Kellner and Share's (2007b) five-step model for critique exemplifies critical media literacy pedagogy's fundamental understandings.

1. Consumers understand media forms as socially constructed messages, built with a specific cultural understanding or image in mind.
2. Consumers analyze the hidden messages present in media texts. These hidden messages are communicated implicitly through representations, misrepresentations, or omissions of representations.
3. Consumers recognize how different audiences make meaning of popular culture texts.
4. Consumers critique the entanglement of representation, ideology, and power in popular culture and mass media texts and how they interplay to make meaning.

5. Consumers consciously examine who creates popular culture media, which benefits from popular culture's mass production, and how controlling images permeate mass communication.

The first tenet of Kellner and Share's (2007b) model reinforces the notion that media messages are socially constructed, based upon specific cultural norms or myths. Media messages do not exist in a vacuum and are created based upon cultural understandings. Tenet 2 of the model asserts that hidden messages are always viable in media messages and presented through the omission or misrepresentation of certain groups, images, or ideas. Therefore, consumers must consciously analyze media to determine the hidden messages. The audience is the focal point of the third tenet of Kellner and Share's (2007b) model. Different audiences understand media messages in different ways, depending on their cultural identities and lived experiences. The fourth tenet explores how critical media literacy practices push consumers to question notions of power and representation in mass media to understand how these factors interplay to create meaning within media messages. The fifth and final tenet of the framework pushes consumers to examine how mass media producers shape the mass media to promote specific ideologies. It is crucial to understand who creates particular mass media images, who benefits from these images, and how the images are spread and reinforced throughout popular culture.

Employing a critical media literacy pedagogy created space to empower Black West African immigrant descent girls to challenge popular culture images, examine how media can shape lived experiences, and question messages about Black girlhood and Africa. Black girls of West African immigrant descent's ability to critique popular culture (Hall, 2011; Morrell, 2014; Skinner, 2007), interrogate how media representations impact their lived experiences (Gainer, 2010; McArthur, 2016), and challenge hidden and overt messages about their identity (Jacob,

2016; Kelly, 2016; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015) is enhanced through CML. Black girls are experts of their own lived experiences, and critical media literacy pedagogy supports Black girls in creating content that highlights our multilayered identities.

Multimodal Literacies

Multimodal literacies combine several communication forms, including print, digital, audio, visual, gestural, musical, and spatial forms, to communicate ideas and experiences (NCTE, 2005). Multimodal literacy practices enhance the learning and literacy potential of marginalized students by increasing student agency (Hall, 2011; Wissman, Costello, & Hamilton, 2012; Vasudevan, 2006), promoting positive identity construction, and challenging power structures and controlling images (Burke, 2013; Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Price-Dennis, 2016). Traditional literacy notions do not recognize or acknowledge multiple ways of reading, writing, and conveying messages. Multimodal literacies shift traditional literacy notions as a teacher-centered, print-based activity and allow youth to make critical decisions about how they will respond to texts. Promoting youth choice through multimodal literacies shifts teaching and learning from a teacher-centered endeavor to a student-driven approach. Black girls of West African immigrant descent are rarely extended opportunities to express their lived experiences in nuanced, individualized ways that center their voices, choices, and multimodal literacy provides an avenue for this shift in literacy pedagogy. While multimodal literacies offer girls of Black West African descent opportunities to express themselves and speak back to misrepresentations, multimodal literacies are not often enacted with Black girls. Moreover, the racial, gender, and ethnic identities of Black West African girls can be amplified through collaborative multimodal literacy practices. This study calls for a closer look at how multimodal literacies can leverage and

promote literacy practices and identity development with Black girls of West African immigrant descent.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to (1) examine how adolescent girls of West African descent understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities in the context of representations of Black women and girls and (2) explore how adolescent girls of West African descent use multimodal literacies to speak back to representations and develop self-identity. This study focused on how girls of Black West African descent depicted their understandings of self-identity and representation through multimodal literacy practices. The central research questions that frame this study included:

1. How do Black West African immigrant girls understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities when analyzing representations of Africa and Black girlhood?
2. How do Black West African immigrant girls (re)create their own identities through multimodal literacies?

The use of the prefix (re) is integral to this study because it connects to Dillard's (2012) exploration of how African feminist scholars work to pursue the collective memory of Africa within teaching and learning by "honoring the complexities of memories" (p. 10). Engaging in critical media literacy pedagogy and multimodal literacy practices provided the necessary tools to assist Black girls of West African immigrant descent in speaking back to distorted representations. They created their models of Black girlhood through literacy.

Definition of Terms

Black West African Immigrant Descent

This study's targeted population was Black adolescent girls of West African immigrant descent, aged 11-17 years old. West African immigrants comprise the largest group of African immigrants. They include people from the nations of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, the island of Saint Helena, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome, and Principe, and Togo. For this study, the youth identified as Black, African American, African, or a mixture of their ethnic identity (Liberian-American). The participants fit into one of the following groups: 1.5 generation, 2nd generation, or 2.5-generation immigrant. For further clarification, 1.5 generation immigrants are those who moved to the United States before the age of 12, 2nd generation immigrants were born in the United States, but their parents were born outside of the United States, and 2.5 generation immigrants were born in the United States, and only one of their parents was born in the U.S (Rumbaut, Massey, & Bean, 2006).

Identity

Identity development entails an individual understanding how they are like others, how they are different from others, and how they match their affinity groups' beliefs. Identity development begins at a young age, when children start to 'read' the world around them, including the messages they receive from family members, community members, and the media. These messages may align or clash with prior messages received.

Racial Identity

Within this research, race is biological and physical traits, most often used for social identification such as skin color/tone, hair color, and hair textures. Within this research

framework, the participants identified as Black or African American. I will use the terms Black West African immigrant and Black American to delineate the differences in immediate ethnic origins as both populations have African ancestry. Within this context, Black West African immigrants will identify as 1st, 1.5, or 2nd generation Americans with closer, more direct ties to a nation in West Africa. Black Americans' racial identity (within the context) of this research is arguably more distant from Africa due to enslavement. Therefore, this distance denotes a different cultural understanding as Black Americans have a strong history and lineage of African American ancestry (in the United States). Black people in America (whether self-identified or socially identified as Black American, Black African, Black Caribbean, and Afro-Latinx) are often lumped into the racial category of Black and experience similar issues of racism and prejudice in the United States (Adjepong, 2018).

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity refers to a group that shares a common culture, language, or geographic affiliation. Ethnic identity can be interrelated or interconnected with racial identity, but the two identities are not necessarily synonymous. For example, Black West African immigrants may identify as a hybrid of their African and American identities, such as Liberian-American. Mensah and Williams (2015) complicate the notion of ethnic identity by asserting that Black immigrants may not be able to assimilate seamlessly into host cultures due to "the denigration of Blackness" in Western countries, which leads to hyper visibility and marginalization for Black immigrants due to systemic racism. Ethnic identity is vital within the context of this work because it will explore how adolescent girls of West African immigrant descent understand what it means to be Black (racial identity) and West African (ethnic identity) in the United States. There are several instances where individuals can share the same ethnic identity (including

customs, culture, and languages) without sharing the same racial identity (i.e., Black South Africans and White South Africans or Afro-Latinos and White Latinos from the Dominican Republic).

Gender Identity

This research relies on two aspects of Egan and Perry's (2001) gender identity theory. They define the most salient characteristics of gender identity as (1) self-identification and (2) pressure for gender conformity. Self-identification refers to the individual personally acknowledging and identifying with a particular gender expression. Pressure for gender conformity is the degree to which the individual feels pressure from others to conform to gender stereotypes set by a specific culture. These two factors of Egan and Perry's theory are most salient within this research inquiry because the youth who participated in the study self-identified as girls. The research explored Black West African immigrant girls' explicit connections with media and textual representations of Black womanhood through the lens of gender conformity. Mass media representations of Black femininity are often misaligned or based on negative stereotypes, opposite to depictions of white womanhood, which is upheld as virtuous womanhood. Exploring gender conformity through the lens of media representations fostered discourse around what it means to be a woman, depictions of Black womanhood, and definitions of girlhood relative to media representations.

Media Representation

Media encompasses television broadcasting, newspaper publishing, and Internet-based communication forums such as websites, streaming services, and social media. Media influences how individuals learn, communicate, and interact with the world(s) in which they live. Today's children and adolescents have grown up with more exposure to the internet, television, social

networking, and other media forms than past generations (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, and Stevenson, 2014). In this study, youth examined representations of Black women, Black African women, and Blackness in popular culture. *Representation* refers to the description and portrayals of a particular group (Black West African girls) in a distinct, recognizable way or acting in a specific nature.

Literacy

Kellner and Share (2007) define literacy as "the gaining of skills and knowledge to read, interpret, produce texts and artifacts, and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to participate in one's culture fully and society" (p. 5). Literacies are collectively constructed within communities and cultures but are still controlled by the dominant culture's norms. The traditional notions of literacies include reading, writing, and print, but technological advances have enhanced the need to adopt a multiliteracies stance.

Critical Media Literacy

Traditional media education depicts adolescents as passive receptors of media, popular culture, and curriculum (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Gainer, 2010). Media literacy focuses on investigating the trends of popular culture media sources and reflecting on these media sources. While critical media literacy does encompass the facets above of reflecting on the pleasures derived from mass media and choosing selectively among widespread culture phenomena, there is more to the “critical” part of critical media literacy. Critical media literacy brings forth a new focus on how ideology, domination, and power relationships shape mass media messages, how producers create these mass media messages, and how various audiences interpret these messages (Kellner and Share, 2007a). Critical media literacy encourages students to analyze

power relationships and social hierarchies in media artifacts and urges students to explore their understandings by producing multimodal writing as a response.

Multimodal Literacies

In this study, multimodal literacies refer to any combination of print, digital, audio, visual, performance-based, or artistic representations of self. Multimodal literacy includes combining several communication forms, including print, digital, audio, visual, gestural, musical, and spatial forms, to communicate ideas and experiences. Multimodal literacy allows varied opportunities for students to expand their knowledge of other literary forms, collaborate and learn with peers, make connections with global audiences, build upon their funds of knowledge, and critically analyze societal conditions (Mills and Levido, 2011). Most importantly, multimodal literacy forefronts "issues of student identity and positioning" by empowering creators to pursue their interests or explore topics from their viewpoint and lived experiences (Loerts and Heydon, 2017, p. 491).

Significance of the Study

According to the Migration Policy Institute's 2019 report, "Sub-Saharan African Immigrants in the United States," over 2 million sub-Saharan African immigrants live in the United States. Members of the sub-Saharan African diaspora differ in origin, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, generational status in the United States, and cultural practices (Awokoya & Clark, 2008). West African immigrants comprise the largest group of sub-Saharan African immigrants (896,000 people and roughly 84% of African immigrants in the U.S.) and include people from countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone, among other countries. Sub-Saharan African immigrants live in large metropolitan areas such as New

York City, Washington, D.C./ DMV area, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Houston, Dallas, Boston, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

The population of sub-Saharan African immigrants in the United States has doubled every decade since 1980 (Migration Policy Institute, 2019; Zong & Batalova, 2017). The Migration Policy Institute's 2019 report states that "the population of sub-Saharan African immigrants grew by 52% between 2010-2018 and significantly outpaced the 12% growth rate for the overall foreign-born population" during this period. There are approximately 3.3 million members of the sub-Saharan African diaspora living in the United States, including people born in Sub-Saharan Africa and those with ancestral ties (1.5, 2nd, and 2.5 generation sub-Saharan Africans). In addition to considering foreign-born African immigrants' experiences, it is essential to note that their children, whether born in the U.S. or abroad, are a part of the larger sub-Saharan African diaspora. Although there has been and will continue to be a significant number of members of sub-Saharan Africa diaspora in the United States, there is little attention paid to the educational experiences and challenges of Black African immigrant youth within U.S. schools (Agyepong, 2017; George Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Rong & Preissle, 2009).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

This study made assumptions about the lived experiences of adolescent girls of Black West African immigrant descent by presuming that they engaged with popular culture through television, social media, and the internet. There are also significant limitations to this study. I focused primarily on girls, aged from 11-17, and did not focus on young girls or young adult women's experiences. Secondly, this study only focused on how these specific adolescent girls of Black West African descent understood their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities when they

analyzed representations of Black women and girls and (re)created their own identities through multimodal literacies. I shared the representations and multimodal platforms with the girls, so they were limited or regional in scope. How each participant engaged with popular culture significantly varied, depending on the girl. The participants were not a representative sample of the population. The delimitations of this study included only being able to host workshop sessions in a virtual environment due to Covid-19. At the time of the study, participants had been engaging in virtual learning since March 2020 and expected to continue until at least February 2021. The participants attended various schools and, therefore, had multiple experiences that impacted the research study. The purpose of this study was to examine further how youth understood representations in popular culture and used multimodal literacies to communicate messages about identity.

Conclusion

Black African immigrant girls' distinct cultures and histories shape how they create and understand their racial and ethnic identity (Showers, 2015). This study explored what it means to be a girl who is both African and American in the face of anti-Blackness and xenophobia. King (2006) clarifies,

> The way Africa and Black experience and culture are normally taught institutionalizes a dangerously incomplete conception of what it means to be African and what it means to be human, which obstructs Black students' opportunities to identify with their heritage (p. 343).

There is neither a monolithic Black girl experience nor a monolithic Black West African immigrant experience. Intragroup differences do affect the educational experiences and literate identities of Black West African girls.

Understanding how girls of Black West African immigrant descent understand, navigate, and speak back to sexism, racism, and xenophobia through multimodal literacy is the central purpose of this research. This research aimed to illuminate the experiences and understandings of how adolescent Black West African girls interpreted and interrogated media representations of Black womanhood and Africa through multimodal literacy practices. This goal was supported by the hope that the participants shared their experiences and understandings through the lens of multimodal literacies that provided further insight into how the girls utilized composition tools to create messages for specific audiences in an out of school space.

There are several potential implications for this work as it relates to the literacy education field. First, this work explored the experiences of an understudied group of youth, raising awareness of these girls' experiences with literacy educators. Their stories and experiences should impact how educators design curriculum and select texts that move beyond viewing Blackness as a monolithic identity, with origins that begin in enslavement only. Secondly, this work has important implications for understanding how adolescent girls utilize multimodal literacies to create messages and texts that speak back to representations. Shining light on these processes can help educators know how to better implement multimodal literacy within their classrooms and how adolescent girls leverage these tools to define their self-identity and communicate with diverse audiences.

This dissertation includes five chapters, including this chapter. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to how Black girls develop their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities through

literacy practices, mainstream media representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa, critical media literacy practices, and multimodal literacy practices. In Chapter 3, I discuss the conceptual framework and research methodology that framed this qualitative study. Chapter 4 explores the study's findings. In Chapter 5, I discuss the conclusion and suggestions for future research. This study could potentially serve to fill an important gap in the literature surrounding Black girl literacies and adolescent literacies in general by focusing on an understudied group, Black West African immigrant girls.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of the study was to (1) understand how Black West African immigrant girls made sense of their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities concerning representations of Africa and Black girlhood and (2) to explore how they used multimodal literacies to speak back to those representations and develop identity. This chapter reviews literature related to Black West African girls' literacy practices and identity development, media representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa, critical media literacy practices, and multimodal literacy practices.

Black West African girls develop their racial, gender, and ethnic identities despite social and academic silencing and damaging misrepresentations by critiquing power hierarchies, reclaiming and reframing deficit narratives through creative writing, and creating communities that serve to affirm positive self-identity. Media representations about Black girlhood/ womanhood rely on negative, controlling tropes of Black womanhood, shape how Black girls see themselves, and impact Black girls' lived experiences in society. Media representations about Africa rely on primitive, primal, and exoticized images of Africa. Africa is underrepresented in American history due to anti-immigrant discourse, White hegemony, and colonialism.

Critical media literacy (CML) is a tool that Black girls of West African descent can use to speak back to media misrepresentations. CML pedagogy provides youth with an opportunity to critique popular culture, interrogate how media representations impact their lived experiences and challenge hidden and overt messages about their identity. Incorporating multimodal literacies as a response to media misrepresentations can strengthen CML pedagogy by encouraging youth to increase their agency, develop positive identities, and challenge and shift power hierarchies.

Methodology

I engaged in several searches using Google Scholar, EBSCO, and JSTOR databases to locate theoretical and empirical studies related to these topics. I searched for several terms, including Black girl literacies, African girl literacies, Black girl multimodal literacies, Black girls writing, multimodal literacies, critical media literacies, critical media literacy with Black girls, and multimodal literacy with Black girls. These searches populated approximately 200 studies that I used to read the references, select more related studies, and research heavily cited scholars. I reviewed over 150 studies total and focused on approximately 100 studies relevant to my research inquiry. When I searched the term “African girls”, the results included articles about sexual risk, fashion, migration, depression, and sexual violence. When I searched the term “African girl literacies,” I was rerouted to studies focused on Black (American) girls. Because of the dearth of research surrounding Black West African girls, I broadened my searches to include “immigrant girls” and “immigrant youth”. This minor incident highlights the need for more research surrounding the experiences of Black West African immigrant girls. I focused on the most relevant studies to my research inquiry on the literacy experiences of Black West African immigrant girls.

After reviewing over 100 articles, I categorized the studies into separate categories: Black girls' identities and literacy practices, immigrant youth identities and literacy practices, media representations of Black girls/women, media representations of Africa, critical media literacy practices with adolescent youth, and multimodal literacy practices with adolescent youth. After developing these broader categories, I analyzed my reading notes and noted which studies overlapped in multiple categories. From there, I made decisions about how to organize the studies for the review of the literature. If a study had categorical overlap, I placed it in the

category within which its findings represented the category's facets. The final categories that I used to organize my literature review included (1) the intersection of identity development and literacy practices for Black girls using the Black girl literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016), (2) media representations (of Black girls/women and Africa), (3) critical media literacy, and (4) multimodal literacy.

The Intersection of Identity Development & Literacy Practices

The literacy practices of Black West African immigrant girls must be considered from a racialized, ethnicized, and gendered standpoint because women and men inhabit distinctive spaces in society that link to their literacy practices "through the mediation of social systems, cultural values, ideologies, and power relations" (Dávila, 2015, p. 642). The literacy practices of Black West African adolescent girls are shaped by systemic factors such as curriculum designed for and selected by people who do not understand the lived experiences of Black youth, cultural factors such as hegemonic patriarchy, and racist/xenophobic ideologies that shape how Black African girls are perceived (or ignored) within the public eye. Adolescent girls experience life differently from adolescent boys, and these differences are exacerbated by ethnicity, race, and other identity components. Understanding Black African immigrant girls and women's social and geographical locations is imperative to comprehend how their multilayered identities are shaped through independent and communal factors (Isoke, 2014).

Adolescent Identity Formation

Identity development and conception heighten during the later adolescent and young adult years, as racial, ethnic, and gender identity becomes even more primary in understanding lived experiences (Del Toro, & Way, 2017; Erikson, 1968; Hughes, Whaley, 2016). Racial and

ethnic markers can serve as pivotal markers of individuals' lived experiences and impact individuals' access to opportunity and resources. As youth shift from childhood to adolescence to young adulthood, understandings of racial and ethnic identity shape the types of knowledge children and adolescents develop and are exposed to within varied learning environments (including their school, home, community, city, state). Self-identity emerges as individuals examine their self-image in conjunction with the images of the people, media, and cultures around them. The funds of knowledge that children and adolescents possess build upon their lived experiences and membership in certain groups related to their identity development (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Cultural funds of knowledge help strengthen self-identity while providing strategies to help students with minoritized ethnic-racial identities navigate their daily experiences amidst racial-ethnic prejudice, gender bias, misrepresentations within the media, and societal oppression (Gallo, 2016).

Identity formation of Black Girls of West African Immigrant Descent

Identity development is entangled with cultural and historical experiences, as well as hierarchies of power. Black girls in the United States, whether identified as a Black immigrant or Black American, are rarely extended academic opportunities to conceptualize healthy, holistic positive identities and challenge distorted representations of themselves (Muhammad, 2012). In the next section, I examine how identity development is intertwined with the literacy practices of Black West African girls.

Black West African girls' histories are powerful and familial experiences of migration and acculturation impact their educative experiences in U.S. schools (Imoagene, 2015). Black West African girls' literacy development is shaped by their social and lived experiences within U.S. schools. Black West African girls engage in "co-construction of knowledge with the world

and with other Black girls" as they negotiate how their race, gender, and ethnicity shape their schooling experiences (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Black girls' literacies are undoubtedly political and critical as they are often forced to interrogate issues of power, stereotypes, and social justice issues in the wake of negative depictions of what it means to be a girl who is dually African and Black in America (Ojo-Ade, 2001). Black girls make sense of their racial, gendered, and ethnic identities using literacy practices.

Black Girls' Literacies Framework

This section of the literature review connects to the Black girls' literacies framework developed by Muhammad and Haddix (2016). The authors posit that Black girls' literacies are "multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, intellectual, political and critical" (p. 325). Within this section focused on Black West African girls' literacy practices and identity development, I draw strong connections with each facet of this framework. The literacies of Black African girls in the United States are multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, political, and critical. As children of African immigrants, Black West African girls engage in various modes of literacy to make meaning of the texts around them. The studies included in this section explore the experiences of Black American girls and immigrant youth in literacy spaces through the lens of the Black girls' literacies framework. The studies discussed include participants of various ethnic and racial backgrounds who identify as Black girls, immigrants, or the child[ren] of immigrants in the United States. All of the reviewed studies connect with the pressing issues surrounding the literacy experiences and identity development of Black African immigrant girls through the lens of the Black girl Literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Again, I am reviewing the following studies within the context of deepening understanding of how Black West African girls' identities and literacy practices are intertwined.

Literacies are Multiple and Tied to Identities

Black African girls' identities are salient and multilayered, as these girls must develop and negotiate bicultural identity formation within the context of life in the United States as a Black girl of foreign descent (Showers, 2015). Dávila's (2015) study focused on the experiences of two Black African immigrant girls (from Somalia and Congo, respectively) who were newcomers to the United States. The researcher explored how these students developed their multiliteracies and remained connected to their home cultures within the study. Dávila (2015) employs a sociocultural and diasporic literacy framework to uncover how these Black African immigrant girls constructed and understood texts from "indigenous and multilingual perspectives" that involve social practices to make sense of how readers see the world (p. 642).

The study's findings highlighted the participants' multilayered literacy uses, such as school-sanctioned academic literacy within the ESL classroom, literacy as a gatekeeper to mobility (written driving tests), and literacy as a tool to connect with relatives and friends in their home nation. Most importantly, this study reinforces the significant nature of how gender impacted the girls' identities, dually as immigrants and literate beings. Dávila (2015) posits, "diaspora literacies must be understood from a gendered lens because of the different spaces men and women occupy in society, and because gender is directly linked to reading practices through the mediation of social systems, cultural values, ideologies, and power relations" (p. 642). An important implication of this study is the need for Black African immigrant girls to be given space and autonomy to select texts that reflect, challenge, and connects their identities to diaspora literacies and language practices in transnational spaces.

Immigrant youth in the United States, whether identified as 1st, 1.5, or 2nd generation immigrants (Rumbaut, Massey, & Bean, 2006), face a cultural and linguistic mismatch between

their home and school cultures. Their home cultures may emphasize and value certain funds of knowledge that American school culture does not. Youth navigating these two worlds daily experience school in very different ways from students whose families have long histories in the United States. The following study explored how immigrant youth navigate their American schooling experiences and develop new cultural connections in the United States while remaining connected to their home cultures.

Ghiso and Low's (2012) study examined how immigrant students in the United States used multimodal literacies to share their immigration narratives and develop their nationalistic identities. The authors foreground the deficit perceptions and difficulties that immigrant students face in U.S. schools because immigrant students must constantly "negotiate their identities along with a preconceived model of what it means to be American, including the message that success requires shedding their ethnic identities and smoothing over their struggles" (Ghiso & Low, 2012, p. 26). The participants in this study were mixed gender and hailed from Latin American, West African, Caribbean, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries. The study occurred at a five-week English Language Learning summer program. The students' language proficiencies varied greatly, and the study included Spanish, Bengali, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Chinese, Urdu, Arabic, and French speakers. The researchers facilitated a literacy program that focused on how students developed their multimodal literacies in an environment that valued their cultural and linguistic funds of knowledge. The first author utilized her immigration narrative as a strategy to demonstrate the power of creating agency through narratives. The study's data included visual representatives of immigration narratives in the form of comic panels. Students visually represented their literal and metaphorical immigration narratives through drawings and graphic novels shared with other participants and the research facilitators.

The findings suggest that the struggles that immigrant students face as they navigate varied cultural spaces "give them privileged insights about the world we share" (Ghiso & Low, 2012, p. 31). This study's implications are salient for Black African immigrant girls because the authors suggest literacy educators must create curricular spaces that welcome multiple perspectives, encourage multimodal literacies, and support divergent expressions of national identity instead of silencing their voices.

The notion of silencing is pervasive in the literature surrounding how Black girls use literacy to speak about their racial and gendered identities. The impact of silencing Black girls is multilayered and highlights the intersectionality of racial and gender politics. Henry's (1998) study zooms in on the experiences of 10-11-year-old Black girls enrolled in an African-centered school. The participants in the study explore facets of their identity through writing in dialogue journals and interviews. Their dialogue journals and interviews highlighted two major themes: (1) school as an unstable terrain of gendered/sexual politics and (2) the multilayered nature of their identities. Some of the girls expressed concern about sexual harassment and peer pressure from peers. Although the study took place at an African-centered school focused on developing positive racial identity, there were several instances in which the participants' gendered identities were ignored or undervalued. The participants were shy, disengaged, and/or quiet in larger class discussions but were very vocal within the research study's all-girl spaces. They expressed feelings, thoughts, and understandings about their schools' gender politics within the safe space of their girl groups and their dialogue journals. This study reinforced the importance of listening to the voices and experiences of Black West African girls and creating programming that promotes youth and educators to analyze how gender politics impact the learning experiences of Black girls.

Similar to how African immigrants are often left out of immigrant research, which tends to focus solely on the youth of Hispanic/Latino descent, research focused on Muslim adolescents' experiences typically centers on those of immigrant descent. This gap ignores the experiences of African American Muslim girls. Muhammad's (2015) research addresses this gap and centers on the literacy practices of African American teenage Muslim girls in a reading and writing group focused on social change. The term "African American" was used by Muhammad (2015) and will, therefore, be used in my review of the study. The term "African American" is important to maintain within the context of this study because it relates to girls of African American descent, as opposed to immigrant descent. This study is related to the need to expand the theory of double consciousness developed by DuBois (1903). While my work focuses on the triple consciousness of Black West African girls, Muhammad's work focuses on the triple consciousness that African American Muslim girls experience daily. The study's purpose was to understand what social issues African American Muslim girls wrote about using broadside poetry and how these social issues related to their own identities. The study was grounded in Qur'anic principles that shaped how "literacy was defined, the purpose of their pens, and how Muslims are directed to respond to oppression in society" (Muhammad, 2015, p. 294). This particular framing helped to promote writing as an intellectual and sociocultural tool to advance the participants' literacy skills and promote their ability to analyze the hierarchical power structures that impact their lives. The participants expressed a deep understanding of how gendered politics impact Black women who were victims of war, violence, and mistreatment and called for awareness for the victims. This study is important because it focuses on the triple consciousness of African American Muslim girls and effectively works to end the silencing of African American Muslim girls in the research surrounding African American girls and Muslim youth. Black girls' literacies are multiple and

tied to identities. In this way, the studies reviewed in this section point directly to the importance of acknowledging the ways in which Black West African girls' identities are potentially silenced or stifled in academic and social spaces.

Literacies are Historical and Collaborative

Black African girls' histories are powerful and familial stories of migration and acculturation impact their educational experiences in U.S. schools (Imoagene, 2015). Their social and lived experiences shape the collaborative nature of Black African girls' literacy development within U.S. schools. Black African girls engage in "multiple acts of literacy in socially (and often critically) constructed spaces" as they negotiate how their race, class, gender, and ethnicity shape their schooling experiences (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016, p. 314).

Bigelow & King's (2015) study focused on youth aged 14-21 who were newcomer Somali students in an ESL classroom. The study's participants were mixed in gender and had limited schooling experiences in Somalia. Within the ESL class, there were various immigrant students, and the languages spoken in the classroom included Somali, Oromo, Amharic, Vietnamese, Lao, French, Hmong, and Nepalese. The site of study, Franken International, was a Minnesota school catered to newly immigrated adolescents and young adults. This print literacy study indicated that although the Somali students were fluent in spoken Somali, they were not formally educated on how to write in Somali. This knowledge gap led to more intricate and complicated ESL instruction as the students "had an unresolved and evolving relationship within their ethnic heritage and language" particularly because they "may not have had the opportunity to become literate in their home language" (Bigelow & King, 2015, p. 5). Transnationalism was a pervasive theme within this study as the Somali youth presented dialect diversity through their

intense contact with non-Somali speakers. This contact led to new forms of Somali-English being born within this Minnesota community.

Bigelow & King’s (2015) study is most important to Black African immigrant girls’ literacy education experiences because it emphasizes the importance of recognizing and honoring students’ home languages, as their languages are tied to “national history and identity, processes of resettlement and how individuals relate with their co-ethnic community” (p. 5). Writing immigration narratives that explore the complicated relationships and experiences of immigration (such as war or refugee status) can shed light on how to understand better and serve Black West African girls' needs. The implications there are power hierarchies within every classroom, even those portrayed as a “safe space” because of perceived racial and ethnic homogenization. These power hierarchies can reproduce national patterns of marginalization for Black African immigrant girls inside literacy classrooms.

The collaborative nature of spaces focused on Black girls’ literacies can help to combat power hierarchies and increase the opportunity for Black West African girls’ voices to be heard. Henry's (2001) study focused on girls' literacy experiences from the Caribbean struggling to verbally engage in reading, writing, and discussion group in an ESL classroom. The researchers were interested in uncovering the reasons for the girls' silence and wanted to encourage the girls to participate more in the class's literacy activities. Henry (2001) posited that because the girls "went through their school days unable to 'read' themselves in the school curriculum and name issues relevant to their lives," they were viewed as deficit members of their learning communities (p. 185). Participants in the study already possessed literacy and linguistic skills, yet those skills did not match the expectations or culture of their academic placement. During the literacy workshop, the participants read texts centered on adolescent female protagonists of the

Caribbean and African American descent. The participants expanded their capacity for self-expression, drew strong connections about their lived experiences as Caribbean girls, and examined how the women around them (mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, grandmothers) shaped their own lives. The girls in the study engaged in critical conversations about gender norms, societal pressures, and the complexity of their experiences as girls betwixt and between two cultures (Winn, 2010). The study participants had been characterized as linguistically deficient and effectively marginalized by their school's literacy programming. This study's findings connect to my research inquiry by highlighting the need for Black West African girls to be engaged with a collaborative curriculum that highlights their sociocultural, gendered experiences and interests.

The participants in Muhammad's (2012) study critically examined societal perceptions of Black womanhood and responded to these perceptions in powerful ways. The summer literacy institute supported the "identity, resiliency, solidarity, and advocacy" of Black adolescent girls (p. 204). The institute was deeply connected to Black women's literary society's historical literacy practices and emphasized how Black women have used their voices to speak out against injustices and misrepresentations. The literacy institute focused on four historical literacy goals: 1) advancing literacy skills, 2) developing intellectual capacity, 3) developing positive self-identity, and 4) engaging in critical analysis to understand societal hierarchies and power structures. Within the institute, the participants engaged in several multimodal readings of texts written by Black women and responded to these texts' themes by composing their writing. The study's findings elucidate the importance of creating space for Black adolescent girls to "construct meanings of themselves and resist misrepresentations" (Muhammad, 2012, p. 206). Like the historical Black literary societies of the past, Black girls use literacy to build

community, respond to falsehoods about Black girlhood, and affirm and strengthen their identities. Drawing on the historical practices of Black people can strengthen and affirm the inherent excellence that Black West African girls possess.

Literacies are Political and Critical

Black African girls' literacies are undoubtedly political and critical. They are often forced to interrogate issues of power, stereotypes, and social justice issues in the wake of negative depictions of what it means to be a woman who is both African and Black in America (Ojo-Ade, 2001).

Stewart's (2013) study focused on how immigration status shaped one immigrant girl's literacy education experiences as a new immigrant in the United States. Valeria, the study's sole participant, was of El Salvadoran descent. Her experiences reflect and connect to Black African immigrant girls because she grappled with issues of language, economic status, agency, and national identity, similar to the experiences of Black African immigrant girls. This study is similar to Dávila's (2015) study in that Valeria maintained a digital presence using multimodal literacies to stay connected with people from her home country. The author Stewart highlighted the themes of L1 literacy (Spanish, survival), L2 literacy (English), digital escape, and aspirations. The most important implications to this study surround the concerns of "language, economic circumstances, and legal status, which leads some immigrant students to lose their sense of agency" (Stewart, 2013, p. 48). The implications of this study suggest that literacy educators must make a targeted approach to increase immigrant students' agency by making space for students to read and write about their lived experiences. Stewart (2013) suggests, "immigrant students who read literature that mirrors their experiences become more engaged readers, gain cultural confidence as they identify with literary events, and learn to negotiate their

transnational identities" (p. 48). This suggestion directly connects with the Black Girls Literacies Framework because it encourages educators to provide multiple opportunities for girls to speak back in political and critical ways that increase their agency in educational spaces.

Park's (2016) study focused on the experiences of six immigrant and refugee girls who were new arrivals to the United States. The girls participated in an after-school ESL literacy program designed to use graphic novels to understand how these girls understood critical multicultural citizenship. The study's participants were from various countries, including China, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Nigeria, Mali, and Jordan. Graphic novels were selected as the primary text genre for the after-school literacy program because it provided opportunities for students to engage with multimodal texts by reading images and print. Park (2016) posits, "immigrant youth need opportunities to engage in dialogue where they grapple with what it means to belong to and lead powerful lives in, their new country" (p. 127). Park and her female co-facilitator, an ESL teacher, designed this program because of their "own gender identity and observations that immigrant girls were often positioned as silent in the school" (Park, 2016, p. 129). The participants grappled with what it meant to be American and how their gender identity influenced their educative experiences. This study's findings suggest that the girls utilized graphic novels as a tool to incorporate their personal beliefs about critical multicultural citizenship. The salient themes that emerged from the interview and focus group data focused on challenging government structures, analyzing the United States' entanglement within the world, and discussing their struggles in the United States. This study's implications directly connect to the experiences of Black African immigrant girls' literacy education experiences because it suggests that literacy educators should include more multimodal texts to diversify school-sanctioned curriculum that present deficit or incomplete viewpoints. Literacy educators should

strive to develop classroom environments where students can collaborate and discuss issues from diverse worldviews.

Enciso's (2011) study focused on analyzing the storytelling practices and cultural funds of knowledge of immigrant and non-immigrant youth within one middle grades classroom. This study utilized critical literacy pedagogy to make sense of how students "name what matters to them, to speculate about what is possible in their lives, and to unravel contradictions" (Enciso, 2011, p. 21). Storytelling is emphasized as a powerful literacy education activity because it provides space for students to expound upon their lived experiences, emotions, and understanding of their cultural and historical backgrounds. The researcher gathered data from audiotaping classroom dialogue and analyzed the data using discourse analysis methodology. The classroom was heterogeneous and mixed-gender and included immigrant and non-immigrant youth. This factor was important because many immigrant youths felt threatened by anti-immigrant discourse, in the form of ethnic slurs from their non-immigrant classmates "who challenged their right to belong in the school, their neighborhood, and nation" (Enciso, 2011, p. 22). These two groups of students were rarely given space within academic settings to discuss or learn about the other groups' lived experiences. An important implication of this study is the need for more dialogue between non-immigrant and immigrant youth to learn more about similar and different lived experiences. Black African immigrant girls would benefit from this practice because dialogue with non-immigrant and immigrant students alike can help these girls to make sense of their identities and the identities of others around them (who may or may not identify as the same race) and learn how their relationships can strengthen the learning environment. Fostering dialogue where youth can compare and contrast their experiences will lead to increased cultural understandings and unity. Although students may share racial similarities, students with

ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences are often structurally divided or segregated within school environments (Enciso, 2011). Educators play an important role in this dialogue. They must come to their cultural understanding by exploring personal prejudices and biases and doing the internal work to push back against systemic racism. This internal awareness will help educators be intentionally antiracist and become more effective in making space for Black African immigrant girls' stories to be told *and* heard.

Black Girls' Literacies Framework Embodied

In summation, the studies reviewed draw strong connections to the connection of identity development and literacy practices for Black West African girls through the lens of Black Girls' Literacies Framework. Black West African girls grapple with bicultural identity negotiation and racialized and gendered silencing within academic and social spaces. The multiple literacies of these girls are tied to their intersectional identities as Black, African, and girl. Examining the historical relevance of literary traditions and engaging in collaborative literacy groups provides an avenue for Black West African girls to affirm a positive self-identity and analyze their identities' intersectionality. It was evident throughout the studies reviewed that Black West African girls' literacies are political and critical. These youth can increase their agency by critiquing their lived experiences regarding media representations and challenging misperceptions in the public sphere. Black West African girls can develop a tri-lens of consciousness to conceptualize fuller, more complete self-image images amidst negative misrepresentations of Black girlhood and Africa in the media through literacy practices.

Representations of Africa and Africans

Black African immigrant girls must also contend with negative myths about Africa and myths about Black girlhood and womanhood. Black immigrant women and girls face various

intersecting oppressions based upon their African heritage, identity as a Black girl, and immigrant legacy within an anti-immigrant, White hegemonic society. Exploring Black African immigrant youth's experiences, particularly Black African immigrant girls, is important because of the multiple borderlands these youth negotiate. Black African immigrant girls' experiences are heavily shaped by their race, ethnicity, and gender, among other factors such as socioeconomic status and skin color.

Black African immigrant girls constantly navigate their multilayered identities of what it means to be a girl who is Black and African in the United States. To be clear, Black African immigrant girls must push back against falsehoods and stereotypes about Africanness, Blackness (in America), Black African girlhood, and Black American girlhood in addition to other facets of their identities such as language, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Kebede, 2019; Showers, 2015; Traoré, 2004/2006).

Primitive, Impoverished, and Primal Representations

Black African immigrant youth often face negative, primitive stereotypes and limited portrayals of Africanness in popular culture and academic curriculum. These limited portrayals of Africa and consequently, Africans, encourage and promote deficit narratives of Africans as victimized, primal, disease-ridden, and impoverished (Dokotum, 2020; Kebede, 2019; Showers; 2015; Watson & Knight, 2017). Black African immigrant women and girls are often stratified on the lowest social hierarchy's lowest rungs due to their race, class, and gender. Exoticized and hyper sexualized media portrayals of topless African women and desolate African communities diminish Black African women's cultural and intellectual accomplishments. There is a lack of research interrogating how these misrepresentations of Africa and Africans impact intra-racial relationships between Black Americans and African immigrants (Kebede, 2019).

Systemic Erasure of Africa from American Education

Many Americans are uninformed and uneducated about Black American history and even more unfamiliar with Africa's rich cultures, histories, and geographical boundaries. Identity markers such as language, accents, and non-American names have served as obstacles for some Black African immigrants. These differences are used to characterize Black African immigrants as deficit and inferior. Traoré (2004) draws strong connections between the systemic underrepresentation and misrepresentation of African culture to the long-standing, adverse effects of colonialism. Traoré (2004) notes, "Euromerican education continues to distort, misappropriate, and misinterpret many African people's lives and experiences" (p. 348). The systemic erasure of African history and Black history before enslavement has contributed to gross cultural misunderstandings, historical stigmatization (Awokoya, 2012; Chacko, 2019; Traoré, 2004), and missed opportunities to engage Black African immigrant girls critically.

Thus, Black African immigrant youth are frequently judged, harassed, and ridiculed within public schools due to these negative stereotypes. When they are young, some students may even seek to distance themselves from their African heritage to "pass" as Black American to avoid the negative bullying, harassment, and teasing that may occur (Imoagene, 2017; Sall, 2019). These experiences reflect the historical stigmatization of Africans in the United States as deficient (Awokoya, 2012). Africa is represented as one-dimensional, poverty-stricken, and dysfunctional in the media. These singles stories are perpetuated by the lack of knowledge American people possess about Africa's diversity, beauty, and realities (Adichie, 2009). American curricula in K-12 settings propagate these falsehoods by continually presenting inaccurate, incomplete representations of the African continent.

White Hegemony and Anti-Immigrant Discourse

Black African immigrants must also face the reality of living within a nation that promotes White hegemony and anti-immigrant discourse. Allen et al. (2012) purport, "the current climate of anti-immigrant discourse often positions immigrants as a threat to our country's national and economic security" (p. 2). This anti-immigrant discourse seems to target Black African immigrants who must also face the reality of living within a nation that promotes White hegemony and anti-immigrant discourse. The United States is a racialized nation, and race is often discussed primarily within a White/Black dichotomy.

Moreover, "racialization is particularly detrimental for Black, as opposed to non-Black, immigrants because Blackness in the U.S. is linked to negative social stigmas" (Awokoya, 2012, p. 257). Black African immigrant girls must push back against deficit perspectives of what it means to be Black in the United States (Ukpokodu, 2019). Systemic and institutionalized racism continues to negatively impact the lived experiences of Black people in America (Banks, 2009).

Model Minority Myth Debunked

While there is growing research about African immigrants' postsecondary experiences, there is a significant dearth of research related to the experiences and achievements of K-12 African immigrant students. There has been some discourse around African immigrants becoming the newest "model minority," a term historically used to describe the ways in which Asian immigrants and Asian Americans excelled academically in U.S. schools. At the outset, a designation like "model minority" sounds positive and marks a clear shift between the typical ways in which Black students' educational experiences are described in U.S. K-12 classrooms. However, this myth of the new "model minority" does not have substantial data to support the claim. The academic achievement data of K-12 African immigrant students is typically subsumed under the racial subgroup of Black/African Americans on a local, state, and federal

level. Even in instances when racial subgroup data is disaggregated by immigrant status and non-immigrant status, there is still little detail about which subgroup of Black immigrant students (African, Caribbean, Afro-Latinx) make up the actual disaggregated data (Kebede, 2019; Ukpokodu, 2019).

The "model minority" myth is extremely dangerous and detrimental to African immigrant students in U.S. schools because it "implies that African immigrant students can easily negotiate the school system and achieve high-level academic success" (Ukpokodu, 2019, p. 84). African immigrant students are not a monolithic group, and there are various factors, such as socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, and immigration status, that impact a student's ability to succeed (Ludwig, 2019; Sall, 2019; Ukpokodu, 2018). The model minority label "exacerbates the cultural divide and intra-ethnic tensions and conflicts" between African immigrants and native-born African Americans" (Ukpokodu, 2018, p. 88). However, many K-12 African immigrant students are underperforming as they must also navigate the same racist structures that plague Black American students (Chacko, 2019). Researchers must zoom in and include African immigrant students in future research to better understand their lived experiences inside and outside of school, and best provide an equitable and excellent education.

No Monolithic African Experience

As mentioned in the previous section, African immigrant students' achievement data are typically subsumed under the racial subgroup of African American/ Black. There is not a monolithic African experience. African immigrants differ in ethnic/national identities, religious affiliations, languages, socioeconomic status, and migration status (Ludwig, 2019; Ukpokodu, 2018; Zong and Batalova, 2017). Migration status refers to whether the African immigrants more closely identify as voluntary or involuntary immigrants. Voluntary African immigrants are

described as "originating from countries with relative stability" who are assumed to be "educated and have the tools to navigate" life in the U.S. (Ukpokodu, 2018, 72). In contrast, involuntary African immigrants are described as originating from "disproportionately war-torn and conflict-ridden countries" who are "less likely to be educated and have the skills needed" to successfully navigate life in the U.S. (Ukpokodu, 2018, 72). Ludwig's (2019) study explores the experiences of 1.5 and 2nd-generation Liberian American youth. The families in the studies immigrated to the U.S. as Liberian refugees, were economically disadvantaged, lived in an ethnic enclave neighborhood of Staten Island (Kebede, 2019; Watson and Knight-Manuel, 2017), and had low levels of educational attainment. Again, it is monumentally important to note that even African immigrant students with connections to the same country may have drastically different lived experiences based on their family's socioeconomic status, migration status, and level of educational attainment. 1.5 and 2nd-generation African immigrant youth must negotiate all aspects of their African identity while concurrently navigating how they identify as Black/African American in the U.S. (Adjepong, 2018; Imoagene, 2017; Kebede, 2019).

Bicultural Identity Development

Implicit and explicit messages, informed by media representations, about Africans and immigration, shape how immigrant youth experience schooling and develop racial-ethnic identity. Moreover, there is not a monolithic Black or African immigrant experience. Black African immigrants experience immigration and transnationalism differently based upon their skin color, ethnic affiliations, religion, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment, among other factors.

Parental Influence on Identity Development

Understanding the migration status and stories of African immigrant students' families can enrich understanding of how African immigrant students make sense of their bicultural identity. African immigrant youths' perception of their ethnic identity is shaped by their parents' relationship with their ancestral homeland (Chacko, 2019). Many 1.5 and 2nd-generation African youth grow up in transnational U.S. households that reproduce the norms, values, and traditions of their ancestral homeland, such as an emphasized focus on higher education attainment, respect for elders, and tightly connected family and ethnic group relationships (Asante et al., 2016; Chacko, 2019; Habecker, 2017; Kebede, 2019). Kebede (2019) suggests that transnational viewpoints:

> add several nuances to understanding the second generation. First, it gives attention to the intersecting realities at play in immigrant families' lives, particularly the ways that continuing interactions between migrants and their homelands affect the second generation. Second, it takes into account the ways the second generation have increasingly found themselves part of social fields that tie them to complex relations between one place and another. (p. 124)

The idea of double consciousness (Dubois, 1903; Mensah & Williams, 2015; Somé-Guiébré; 2019**;** Winn, 2010) is even more complicated when we begin to theorize about the triple consciousness that Black West African girls must develop concerning their race, ethnicity, and gender.

Negotiation of African American Identity and African Identity in the U.S.

African immigrant youth must balance "their cultural backgrounds reinforced at home and the values in their new cultural and social environment" (Somé-Guiébré, 2019, p. 41). This bicultural identity development process requires a unique juggling of their ethnic identity and

their racial identity in K-12 academic spaces. African immigrant youth experience intraracial and interracial tensions as they negotiate what it means to be Black, African American, or African. Sall's (2019) study explored how Black American and West African immigrant students understood their intraracial connections. The findings of Sall's study suggested that Black youth and West African immigrant youth see themselves as part of the same racial group, with distinct ethnic cultures. These findings connect directly to the complicated process of bicultural identity and exploration that Black African immigrant youth face as they navigate and develop a historical understanding of how Black Americans were historically marginalized in the United States (Chacko, 2019). These Black African immigrant youth experience the impact of systemic and institutional racism daily as racism, and especially anti-Blackness, persists in the United States today.

Black African immigrant youth adopt a hybrid identity to make sense of their African immigrant heritage and their lived experiences as Black people in the United States. Chacko's (2019) study explored how 1.5 and 2nd generation African immigrant college students make sense of their racial and ethnic identity. The findings suggest that these young adults move fluidly between "highlighting their ethnonational identity and Black or African American identity depending on the context" (Chacko, 2019, p. 232). In addition to these findings, the study also elucidated the phenomenon of the "not being African enough and not being American enough" (Chacko, 2019; Sasso, 2015), which is also explored in detail in Sasso's (2015) documentary about the boundaries of bicultural identity for 1.5 and 2nd generation West African immigrant women in the United States. African immigrant youth and young adults may be seen as American in the company of 1st generation Africans and as Africans around their Black American peers (Chacko, 2019; Sasso, 2015; Somé-Guiébré, 2019). In addition to being between

two ethnic cultures as West African immigrant youth (Mensah & Williams, 2015), they must also navigate marginalization as a Black student in Eurocentric K-12 schools who promote incomplete representations of Africa in curriculum and the media.

Triple Consciousness of Black West African Girls of Immigrant Descent

Black African immigrant girls must also push back against deficit perspectives of what it means to be Black in the United States (Wong & Rowley, 2001). Systemic and institutionalized racism in the U.S. negatively impacts Black people's lived experiences, and Black African immigrants are not exempt from anti-Black racism (Adjepong, 2018). Furthermore, Black African immigrant girls must also contend with negative stereotypes about Black girlhood/womanhood that attempt to characterize the group as loud, aggressive, sexually promiscuous, and economically dependent (Brown, 2013; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Myths about Black womanhood promote and produce harmful, controlling tropes such as the jezebel, sapphire, mammy, gold digger, welfare mother, independent Black woman, and angry Black woman in modern media representations (Coleman et al., 2016; Stephen & Phillips, 2003). These representations shape how Black women and girls are perceived and received in academic spaces and can affect how Black girls learn within the U.S. school system (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Furthermore, these controlling tropes shape how Black girls develop their self-identity through literacy and reify or resist them.

Black girlhood is often underrepresented or misrepresented in popular culture. These misrepresentations tend to focus on Black girls' physical traits or the promotion of the same controlling tropes projected onto Black women (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). These myths about Black womanhood are perpetuated by the media Black West African girls use literacy practices in nuanced and powerful ways to make sense of their racialized, ethnicized, and

gendered identities. While Black girls' silencing is pervasive in media representations and society at large, Black girls are pushing back against this silence with their words.

Black African immigrant girls must also contend with damaging myths about Africa and myths about Black womanhood. Africa and Africans are often depicted as primitive, primal, and impoverished in U.S. media representations of Africa (Dokotum, 2020). The systemic erasure of African history (before and after enslavement) from American curriculum promotes White hegemony and anti-immigrant discourse (Traoré, 2004). K-12 African immigrant students suffer from the "model minority" myth and are underserved in K-12 settings (Ukpokodu, 2019). Black immigrant women and girls face various intersecting oppressions based upon their African heritage in an anti-immigrant society, their gender expression in a patriarchal society, and their Black skin in a country that centers Whiteness. Furthermore, focusing on ethnic, gender, and race-based stereotypes about Black girls of West African immigrant girls diminishes teachers and scholars' ability to research, call upon and highlight the knowledge, resilience, and lived experiences that Black girls of West African immigrant descent possess and rely upon to make sense of their identities.

Critical Media Literacy as a Response

Critical media literacy pedagogy (CML) is vital to this research because it serves as a tool for girls of Black West African immigrant descent to analyze and speak back to the deficit and incomplete representations of their racialized, ethnicized, and gendered identity in popular culture. Rarely are Black girls afforded opportunities within K-12 academic spaces in which their ideas "are centralized, and their complicated understandings of and interactions with popular media images are critically examined" (Patterson et al., 2016). CML pedagogy encourages

teachers and youth to share power as they (1) analyze popular media, (2) challenge stereotypes and question power hierarchies within the media, and (3) collaboratively produce digital media in response to media representations. Kellner and Share (2007b) assert CML practices should encourage participants to "enhance their critical analytical processes to explore audience receptions, learn to critically read media texts, and aim at social justice, as well as grasping the political, economic, historical, and social contexts within which all messages are written and read" (p. 67). CML studies require participants to analyze power and relationships between audiences and consumers and engage in media production that speaks back to popular culture to elevate the voices of marginalized or underrepresented groups (Patterson et al., 2016).

Burnett and Merchant (2011) describe CML as an "act of resistance or at least an inoculation against media domination" (p. 44). While enacting CML as a tool for empowerment, groups marginalized or underrepresented in the media can use media production to speak back to false representations or invisibility in mass media (Morrell, 2014). CML transforms reading popular culture from a passive activity to an engaged action that requires transaction with the text to generate new knowledge and engage in the sociopolitical commentary (Song, 2017).

Critical race media literacy

Critical race media literacy (CRML) is an offshoot of CML. It is crucial to the research related to Black West African immigrant girls because it encourages youth to investigate the impact of media misrepresentations of racial groups (Dowie-Chin & Worlds, 2020; Hawkman & Shear, 2020; Yosso, 2002/2020). Yosso (2002) posits, "CRML calls educators to engage students of/with media to examine problematic representations of race/ism and people of color" (as cited by Hawkman & Shear, 2020). This approach to analyzing media will be included in the CML review, as race is often a salient factor in identity development and youth expression (cite).

Several of the articles reviewed focused on Critical Race Media Literacy highlighted racial or ethnic group affiliations without examining the intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender. Therefore, I will discuss CRML under the broader umbrella of CML.

Multiliteracies and Critical Media Literacy

CML connects to the broader definition of literacy in multiple ways. Kellner and Share (2007a) define literacy as "the gaining of skills and knowledge to read, interpret, produce texts and artifacts, and to gain the intellectual tools and capacities to fully participate in one's culture and society (p. 5). Communities and cultures collectively construct literacies (Heath, 1983). However, they are still controlled by the dominant culture's norms, including reading print and writing in linear ways that do not engage multiliteracies. Multiliteracies encompass "media literacy, computer literacy, and multimedia literacies, thus cultivating 'multiple literacies' in the restructuring of education" (Kellner and Share, 2007a, p. 5). Drawing on students' multiliteracies is considered a best practice because research has shown that adolescents construct and engage multiple literacies in their lives, within and outside of school, to achieve personal, social, civic, and other goals (Alvermann & Hinchman, 2011; Skerrett, 2012). Enacting a multiple literacies stance while teaching literature to secondary students helps understand how literacy practices shift, change, and grow across sociocultural contexts. Adolescents' multiple identities of race, ethnicity, age, gender, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, sexual orientation, and language serve as multiple, intersecting facets that shape lived experiences and ways of knowing.

CML involves expanding traditional academic literacy practices to examine new technologies' intersectionality, mass communication, and popular culture. Furthermore, CML practices encourage and require students to analytically interrogate the media's messages, with particular attention to power relationships and privilege (Scharrer, 2015). Brown & Schwarz

(2007) posit that youth must develop critical analysis skills to break down the constant, pervasive nature of media messages disseminated through the internet, television, and social media.

Popular Culture and Critical Media Literacy

CML studies hinge upon interaction with popular culture. Popular culture is vital to this study because it allows participants to focus on the localized and personalized media that is most salient in their lives. By analyzing popular culture forms relevant and essential to youth, youth are more engaged and motivated to make strong connections between these out of school texts and in-school literacy practices (Morrell, 2014). Traditional literacy education focuses on teaching youth how to decipher and decode literary and informational texts and respond in print-based formats, such as essays. CML extends this endeavor by teaching youth how to critically decipher and decode popular culture in television, movies, and social media. CML pushes students to respond to these popular culture texts in digital ways such as blogs, websites, films, and other nonlinear formats.

Students should learn how to use digital tools and critically analyze how representations of popular culture in various multimodal formats, and how to break down the messages built into these forms (Hawkman & Shear, 2020). CML is a two-fold practice that requires students to analyze popular culture media and compose responses to these messages representing nuanced views of understanding. Youth who engage in CML in academic spaces are more apt to connect the sociopolitical contexts in which academic texts exist and how popular culture shapes cultural artifacts such as academic texts (Song, 2017). Making connections between popular culture artifacts and academic texts helps students develop critical and creative thinking skills and engage in media production that extends their creativity to visual modes and addresses power and control issues in their reimagining of media representations.

Outcomes of Enacting Critical Media Literacy Pedagogy

Enacting CML pedagogy can lead to increased positive outcomes for Black West African immigrant girls. The following sections explore critiquing popular culture and media representations, how media representations impact youths' lived experiences, and how CML can be leveraged to challenge hidden and overt messages about Black girlhood.

Critiquing Popular Culture and Media Representations

Skinner's (2007) study uncovered how adolescent girls understood messages about girlhood and economic class within popular culture texts and how they spoke back to these messages with their writing. During the study, the participants analyzed magazine advertisements, television, and movies to understand how these artifacts appealed to specific audiences based on age, race, gender, ethnicity, and language. Skinner (2007) found the participants were very talented at critiquing how these artifacts represented girlhood and highlighted or ignored their lived experiences as girls from working-class environments. The participants made intertextual connections between various popular culture media, critiquing how these media artifacts relied on generalized and stereotyped ideals to attract specific demographics. The findings of this study highlight the writings of Racquel, a participant. Racquel chose to reimagine a popular teen movie focused on affluent, white adolescents in a suburban neighborhood. Her text reimagined a similar storyline in a community that looked more like her own and interrogated ideas about social class and social popularity. This study is essential to understanding CML because it highlights how youth understand media representations and reframe these deficit perspectives through writing.

Youth can also engage CML practices to bring their understandings of popular culture into the social studies classroom to make meaning of academic texts. Hall (2011) explored how

sixth graders used popular culture to discuss social studies topics within the social studies classroom. The participants used their understandings of popular culture works to silence, resist, or argue about explanations of the social studies texts that they disagreed with. The implications of this study suggest that students place high trust in popular culture texts without critically interpreting the messages, messengers, and purposes of said message. The study also suggests that educators must work diligently to increase their knowledge of popular culture and CML to teach students how to become more critical of popular culture. Becoming critical of popular culture does not diminish the value of the genre or promote academic texts' value. Instead, it serves as a middle ground for students and teachers to meet. The popular culture references used in this study were not approached from a critical standpoint. Therefore students made surface-level connections to academic texts without critically questioning the popular culture artifacts. This study is significant to CML studies because it explores some of the difficulties faced when students enact media literacy without the 'critical' framework to analyze the presented messages comprehensively.

Youth Interrogating How Media Representations Impact Their Lived Experiences

CML, within the context of Gainer's (2010) study, examines how students "engage in viewing and discussing media; learning tools of media production, such as camera techniques, storyboarding, and editing; and creating media projects collaboratively" (p. 366). The study concentrates on CML skills taught during an after-school literacy club and engaged adolescents in analyzing youth and schools' depictions in popular culture. Participants watched films that depicted students in underserved communities, deconstructed the media elements through class discussion, and then created their documentaries related to schooling in underserved communities. The study illuminated interesting findings because although the students were

highly engaged in debating and deconstructing media images, they were hesitant to "reimagine dominant narratives of urban students" (Gainer, 2010, p. 371). In one incident, students engaged in critiquing a short film made by students to represent their school and used the same phrases to describe their school that they had deemed racist when viewing the popular culture artifacts. This study highlights that youth may recognize negative stereotypes but consciously or unconsciously internalize deficit media representations. The internalization of deficit or incomplete stereotypes caused the participants to reify those stereotypes within their own media production. Enacting CML pedagogy requires educators to challenge youth to question tacit and explicit messages about marginalized communities.

Stanton et al.'s (2020) study focused on how Indigenous youth partnered with non-Indigenous students from a local PWI "to explore ways student-led digital story work" amplified teaching and learning about "cultural protocol, oral histories, and multimodal research methods, [to] advance pedagogical and methodological understandings of CRML" (p. 47). This study is critical to discuss because it explored how youth who are a part of a historically marginalized community can leverage technology and critical analysis to disrupt mainstream misrepresentations of their ethnic culture. The researchers situate this study in the broader scope of disrupting incomplete representations of Indigenous culture and communities, which has led to erasure in K-12 U.S. curriculum.

The participants in this study were from two communities - the Apsaalooke and the Piikani. In the Apsaalooke context, 12 Indigenous youth (from the middle school and high school) were members of an after-school club that developed short films based on community research. These youth worked closely with community elders, tribal leaders, and educators throughout the project. Like the Apsaalooke participants, 7 Pikaani youth (from the high school

and tribal college) participated in the study with guidance from community elders and tribal leaders. The PWI student partners for both groups served as technical assistants but were not the creative process's decision-makers. That responsibility was purposefully limited to the Apsaalooke participants, with deference to the cultural elders and tribal leaders. The participants interviewed elders and teachers, analyzed social media posts and digital artifacts from their workshops, and researched notes to create and edit their digital story work. An essential finding of this study was the "challenges of balancing authentic representations with positive, respectful, and strengths-based messages" (Stanton et al., 2020, p.56). This challenge is not unique to Indigenous communities and is also prevalent in supporting Black girls with a critical inquiry of media representation.

Gainer's (2010) study and Stanton et al.'s (2020) study both leveraged the use of critical analysis and documentary making to explore the benefits of CML/CRML pedagogy, respectively. These studies differed in that Gainer's study focused on participants analyzing representations of underserved communities with which they did not identify, while Stanton et al.'s focused on how Indigenous students partnered with Indigenous community leaders and non-Indigenous PWI students to create media that accurately represented their community. Rarely are marginalized youth offered sustainable opportunities in K-12 educational spaces to critically analyze media representations and speak back to these misrepresentations using literacy practices. More specifically, Black girls are "experts of knowledge-making inside classrooms and throughout the world," and media misrepresentations impact their lived experiences (Patterson et al., 2016, p. 45).

Challenging Hidden and Overt Messages about Black Girlhood in the Media

Few studies examine the power of using CML to interrogate and illuminate Black women and girls' experiences and media representations. McArthur (2016) and Patterson et al. (2016) highlighted the possibilities of using CML to raise Black women and girls' voices and enhance social justice. Kelly's (2016) study explored the ways girls who identified with hip-hop "developed and constructed their identities in relation to media representations of Blackness and femininity in hip-hop music and culture" (p. 530). Dowie-Chin and Worlds (2020) analyzed the film and novel versions of *The Hate U Give* to explore how the film's changes distorted the text's original meaning.

Kelly (2016) employed a case study methodology to closely examine Sonya's experiences, the only Black girl within her participant group, to learn about CML practices that impacted her engagement with the course. Throughout the study, Sonya developed racial literacy and critical reflection skills as she read and analyzed hip-hop texts. These individual and collaborative dialogues led to critical reflections of how social and cultural norms are invisibly embedded within popular culture artifacts. As Sonya engaged deeper into CML practices, she began to "articulate her process of deconstruction" and be honest about how "these sexualized and gendered identities of her childhood were normalized and widespread to a point where she did not mention them" until reaching high school (Kelly, 2016, p. 535). Engaging in CML helped Sonya uncover the tacit messages she had internalized about her gendered identity as a young Black woman and provided a space for her to analyze how these messages shaped how she viewed herself critically.

Deconstructing hidden and overt messages in hip-hop texts is a routine activity in other studies that zoom in on Black girls and CML pedagogy. Jacob's (2016) study focused on understanding how adolescent Black girls interpreted media representations of Black girls and

women by watching video clips from television shows, music videos, news shows, and other media types. The curriculum required students to think critically about the changes they wanted to see in their school in response to the negative experiences in school due to their racial and gendered identities. The findings suggest that the participants focused on maintaining self-confidence while developing a group consciousness that encourages all Black women and girls to push back against media and societal misrepresentations and leverage Black girls' power to produce their media to present varied images of Black womanhood. A significant limitation of this study was that the girls only brainstormed ideas for fuller media representations of Black girls and women but never actually created any new media to counteract negative representations of Black women.

Muhammad and McArthur's (2015) study zoomed in on Black adolescent girls speaking misrepresentations of Black girlhood/womanhood through writing. The participants challenged historical, stereotypical representations of Black women, connected to contemporary representations in popular culture, and reimagined their own identity with their own words. The girls worked with the researchers to decode meanings about how power relationships are reified through media representations and thought critically about how to counteract the damaging misrepresentations of Black women on television. This study is vital to CML studies because it connects a historicized approach to interrogating current media representations with speaking back to these representations through writing. This study is unique because it juxtaposes historical misrepresentations with contemporary popular culture to explore how pervasive and long-standing media representations can be and calls for sustained resistance and writing that challenge these images. As mentioned earlier, the three studies augment the importance of enacting CML pedagogy when working with Black girls of West African descent.

Dowie-Chin and Worlds (2020) engaged in critical analysis of the novel and film versions of *The Hate U Give* to identify how the changes made in the film "work to distort and whitewash, a sort of cultural bleaching, the original message of the text" (p. 133). Angie Thomas, the author of The Hate U Give, wrote her novel to serve as an intersectional counternarrative about a high-schooled-age Black girl's experience. Starr, the protagonist, deals with the aftermath of the police-sanctioned murder of a close friend. Her counternarrative novel reflects the reality of campaigns like #SayHerName, highlighting how Black women and girls are also negatively impacted by police brutality. Implicit and explicit changes made to the movie script and casting serve to promote incomplete representations of Black mothers and reify colorist notions of Black beauty.

The first change discussed in the critical analysis was the decision to erase Lisa Carter, Starr's mother, from the film, although she was "central to Starr's life and upbringing" in the novel (Dowie-Chin and Worlds, 2020, p. 134). This erasure diminishes Lisa's positive impact on the family. It was a missed opportunity to negate common stereotypes portrayed about Black women in the media, such as mammies, welfare mothers, and jezebels (Stephen & Phillips, 2003). Another meaningful change to the film was casting a lighter-skinned Black actress, even though the author depicted Starr as medium Brown-skinned throughout the text and the novel's cover art. Dowie-Chin and Worlds (2020) explored the potential impact of this casting decision,

> The prevalence of light-skin actresses being cast for roles in which the descriptions of the characters indicate a darker skin tone is a pernicious form of anti-Black racism, manifesting itself as colorism and pitting the Black community against itself in a battle for representation in the media (p. 136).

This study is critical to include Black West African immigrant girls because it raises the concern over how Black women and girls are represented (or consequently erased) from media representations, promoted as 'positive' counternarratives about Black youth's experiences. This study's potential future implication could be engaging Black girls in using CRML to make sense of these changes in the novel vs. movie adaptation. CML and CRML pedagogy provides a structure for Black girls to critique negative or incomplete representations of Black girlhood and reframe distorted narratives through literacy practices (Jacob, 2016: Kelly, 2016; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015).

Enacting CML with Black Girls of West African Immigrant Descent

CML and CRML provide discourse and media production tools for Black girls of West African descent to develop their narratives in response to negative media portrayals and Black girls' underrepresentation in the media. This pedagogy provides the "opportunity to develop the language to identify, deconstruct, and problematize the complexity of power operating in media and negotiate visibility by counter narrating racist, sexist, and classist media narrative with authentic stories of Black girlhood" (McArthur, 2016, 362). Patterson et al. (2016) reinforce the importance of CML for Black girls because the media has pervasively controlled how Black women and girls are portrayed in popular culture, leading to gross misrepresentations. Engaging in CML enhances Black girls of West African immigrant descent's ability to critique popular culture, interrogate how media representations impact their lived experiences, and challenge hidden and overt messages about their identity (Dowie-Chins, 2020; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Yosso highlights the importance of future research in the following three areas:

> (a) the intentionality of racial imagery, and recognition of media as pedagogy; (b) the role of history and the continuities of racial scripts applied against different groups; and (c) contestations of majoritarian narratives across generations. (p.8).

CML pedagogy recognizes Black girls as experts of their own lived experiences. It provides the tools to question dominant discourses and create multimodal messages that speak to their lived experiences and multifaceted identities.

Multimodal Literacies

Finally, I reviewed multimodal literacies to connect to how adolescent youth leverage multimodal literacies to convey identity and representation messages. Multimodal literacies include any combination of print, digital, audio, visual, gestural, musical, and spatial modes of communication to express ideas and experiences. Multimodal literacies vary from traditional notions of print-based literacies in several distinct ways and "arise from the integration of out-of-school multimodal literacy practices" (Loerts & Heydon, 2017, p. 491). Multimodal literacies disrupt the notion of teacher as the sole holder of knowledge and reposition students as expert communicators by relying upon their funds of knowledge and selected mode of composing to disseminate information (Mills and Levido, 2011). Multimodal literacy allows varied opportunities for students to expand their knowledge of other literary forms, collaborate and learn with peers, make connections with global audiences, build upon their funds of knowledge, and critically analyze societal conditions (Kennedy et al., 2019; Omerbašić, 2015; Price-Dennis et al., 2016). Multimodal literacies center the lived experiences of students and provide space for students to critically analyze societal conditions while using their voice to represent their

viewpoint and lived experiences (Ajayi, 2015; Kelly, 2018; Loerts and Heydon, 2017; Omerbašić, 2015; Price-Dennis et al., 2016; Pytash et al., 2017).

NCTE's (2005) position on multimodal literacies defines multimodal literacies as “interplay of meaning-making systems" that results in original, student-driven discourse. This definition of multimodal literacies is further developed in NCTE's (2015) position on writing as it acknowledges "the ways digital environments have added new modalities while constantly creating new publics, audiences, purposes, and invitations to compose." Digital environments have completely shifted how youth receive and share information about the world around them, engage with popular culture, and represent their self-identities through multimodal, digital writing (Alvermann, 2000; Price-Dennis, 2016; Vasudevan, 2006). Multimodal reading and writing practices are often considered an "add-on" in academic spaces, and there is a great need for research and teacher professional learning to support a more integrated approach to incorporating multimodal literacy in the classroom (Alvermann, 2017; Loerts & Heydon, 2017).

Digital Environments

Digital environments encompass tools such as social media applications, websites, blogs, internet communities, podcasting, and digital presentation mediums (such as Google Drive and Prezi). How youth use these multimodal, digital tools to compose messages and interact with communities is important to examine when understanding how adolescent youth develop self-identity (Kim, 2015). "Adolescents' fascination with self-created online content" has dramatically impacted their engagement with multimodal compositions (Alvermann, 2008, p. 10). Enacting multimodal literacy pedagogy cultivates learning environments that privilege student voices and experiences, often ignored or overlooked in school.

Benefits of Multimodal Literacy Pedagogy

When girls of Black West African immigrant descent engage with multimodal literacy practices, classrooms can transform into "liberatory spaces that move toward diverse ways of knowing and creating" (Hall, 2011, p. 17). Multimodal literacy practices are essential to this research because Black African immigrant girls' voices are elevated when they analyze media representations and communicate their ideas about self-identity through varied multimodal writing modes to express their lived experiences.

Student Agency. Agency is the state or action of exerting power. Multimodal literacy practices encourage and sustain students' ability to exert power over their learning environment, methods, and products. Highlighting student agency is an essential facet of multimodal literacy because it respects youth knowledge and experiences with multiple communication modes. Student agency was explored within Wissman, Costello, and Hamilton's (2012) study focused on one adolescent male student's multimodal literacy experiences as he engaged with the text, *The Outsiders.* The study focused on how George resisted traditional notions of print-based literacies but flourished using multimodal composition skills to develop a digital comic book program. The student's writing process included traditional notions of scriptwriting, coupled with multimodal composing, as he brought his script to life through the digital comic book creation. The study illuminated how structural roadblocks such as internet censor blocks and under-resourced classrooms (such as George's remedial reading class) played a part in the multimodal composition process. Despite these roadblocks, George's engagement with traditional literacy practices increased when exerting his agency and creating a digital comic book. Wissman et al. (2012) posit that multimodal literacies position teachers and students as co-constructors of knowledge, working with each to promote "student autonomy and choice" (p. 336). Student agency is key to increasing students' engagement in literacy learning environments.

Similarly, Vasudevan's (2006) study focuses on how a male student, Angel, labeled as "low literate" enacted student agency through multimodal literacy practices. The student who was mandated to participate in a court-sanctioned education program by his probation requirements was initially reluctant to participate in the class's literacy activities. By making connections to his out of school interests and providing opportunities for him to utilize his agency in making decisions about how to interact with the text, the student made connections with texts in new and divergent ways. Promoting multimodal literacy practices, such as Internet image searching and drawing to capture responses, allowed the researcher and participant to engage in more visual literacy practices that fit Angel's preferred mode of communication. Angel used images as text to make connections to print texts and incorporate voice dictation to record his literature responses. The variety of modalities offered to Angel (digital production, drawing, and voice narration) expanded his abilities to respond to traditional print-based texts in meaningful ways.

Stanton et al.'s (2020) study was discussed in the previous section on CML and is important to include here. The adolescent and young adult Indigenous students in the study used multimodal research methods to create documentaries that highlighted their Apsaalooke and Piikani communities' cultural traditions, respectively. By juxtaposing videotaped interviews, traditional music, and reverent imagery, the students produced original documentaries representing their cultures. Their creative process also included continuous member checking with tribal elders and community leaders to confirm the documentary's content, disrupt mainstream misrepresentations of their ethnic culture, and keep ceremonial traditions sacred. The multimodal artifacts were created in after-school spaces and provided an avenue for them to increase their agency and co-construct counternarratives.

Loerts and Heydon's (2017) study zoomed on the multimodal literacy learning opportunities present in a sixth grade English Language Arts classroom in Ontario, Canada. The focal participants for this manuscript were four sixth-grade students, two girls and two boys. They were selected purposefully by the researchers to include "equal gender representation, a mix of academic abilities, and where the students were physically positioned in the classroom" (Loerts & Heydon, 2017, p. 493). A limitation of this study is that there was no explicit mention of the class's racial and ethnic makeup as a whole or of the focal participants. The study's findings suggest that the focal teacher in this study struggled to incorporate authentic opportunities for multimodal literacy learning due to national and local stressors related to print-centric standardized test preparation. Loerts & Heydon (2017) made clear that when there were opportunities for students to make meaning using dialogic practices, incorporate artistic representations of their ideas, and connect their interests to the writing topics, "these opportunities also allowed students to be agentive, engaged, and excited to learn" (p. 500). Incorporating multimodal literacy learning consistently into the ELA curriculum can support an acceleration of student learning while engaging all students, especially those whose voices have been culturally and historically underrepresented or misrepresented in Eurocentric curricula.

Promoting student agency is incredibly important to multimodal literacy because it emphasizes the importance of student choice and voice. Acknowledging and listening to students' voices in the literacy classroom helps promote positive self-identity and incorporate historically marginalized youths' lived experiences into literacy practices (Taylor & Leung, 2020). These studies' findings are significant because they emphasize student agency, coupled with multimodal literacies, to engage disengaged learners and provide multiple entry points for youth to interact and make meaning with text. Developing and encouraging student agency is

important to this body of work because it will give Black West African immigrant girls space and opportunity to explore their own experiences in ways that traditional literacy classrooms cannot.

Identity Construction. Identity construction is an essential aspect of multimodal literacy, and many Black African immigrant girls' multilayered identities are ignored in school settings. Home literacies and out of school technology practices shape youth identity and perceptions about self. Educators must engage the home literacies and technology practices to augment academic learning, facilitate collaboration, and support personal growth. The cultural and digital proficiencies that many students bring into school are completely disregarded or overlooked. These proficiencies are forms of social and cultural capital, which may not be promoted or respected in formal school environments (Bourdieu, 1991). However, these social and cultural capitals are being enacted in multimodal, digital spaces by youth to explore their own identities and build community with peers.

Burke's (2013) study focused on how two adolescents identified as English language learners used multimodal digital composing to make sense of their ethnic and geographic identities. The youth were labeled as deficit academic English speakers but were very skillful with social networking and gaming sites. These multimodal digital forms provided the youth with sustained opportunities to build and enact cultural capital, in contrast to their positioning as a deficit in the literacy classroom. Although the research participants differed in gender and ethnic identity, they both used multimodal digital practices to express their self-identity, connect with their home cultures, and build new communities within digital spaces. This study is critical to highlight because it reinforces how multimodal literacy practices help students who may feel cultural or linguistic isolation in the traditional literacy classroom to express their varied

strengths and proficiencies as digital natives in online spaces. The study also promoted the importance of building upon students' funds of knowledge and family literacies to increase cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

Kennedy et al.'s (2019) study explored two ten-year-old girls' multimodal literacy practices, identified as Chin refugees from western Burma, who participated in a pullout ESL program before school. The focal participants differed in several ways. Most notably, they spoke different Chin dialects, had different English proficiency levels, and were tracked into different academic groupings (advanced vs. remedial). The researchers aimed to examine how the participants leveraged multimodality and dialogism through their self-found poems to make sense of their bicultural identity. Salient themes in their writings were nationalism, stereotypical representations of Whiteness as American phenotype, and monolingualism. The findings make clear that the participants navigated a third space to make sense of their developing bicultural and multilingual identities "while navigating dominant social, cultural, and linguistic interactions" (Kennedy et al., 2019, p. 66). Engaging in multimodal literacy practices allows youth to explore and access their social and cultural capital while deepening their identity as literate individuals.

Pytash et al.'s (2017) study focused on how high school students at a STEM school used multimodal literacy to create memoirs. The researchers were interested in understanding how STEM students developed multimodal memoirs in an elective course to support "identity construction and reconstruction" (Pytash et al., 2017, p. 164). While the broader study focused on 12 students (eight girls and four boys), the focal participant was a 16-year-old White girl. The findings suggest that the focal participant leveraged multimodal texts such as music, images, video, and text overlay in a digital format to push back against misconceptions about STEM

students. Multimodal literacies provided the focal participant with more tools to represent her lived experiences and best leverage multimodality to convey a specific message.

Omerbašić's (2015) study examined the ways nine teenage girls, resettled from the Thailand/ Burma border, leveraged multimodal literacies to "negotiate their ways of knowing and being through multimodal literacy practices in translocal digital spaces" within an after-school program in the United States (p. 473). The researcher chose to focus on female participants to add to the dearth of research surrounding refugee women and girls' experiences. It is important to note that the participants were all resettled from the Thailand/Burma border but differed in ethnic groups, religious affiliation, and language use. The participants used multimodal literacy practices, such as overlaying music with visual imagery and writing on digital platforms to make meaning of their multilayered identities within a global context. This study's findings suggest that it is detrimental to relegate "out of school" literacies as antithetical to academic learning. Increasing historically marginalized students' access to authentic content that "students identify as meaningful, interesting, or relevant in ways that support learning and writing activities while reflecting the translocality of students' lives" (Omerbašić, 2015, p. 480). Teachers and school leaders should engage in continuous learning about their students' intersectional identities and historical contexts to better design learning experiences that support a complete representation of their identities. Literacy practices are not exempt from power relationships and social hierarchy, as certain communication forms, languages, and voices are more privileged over others.

Price et al.'s (2016) study examined how fifth-grade students enacted multimodal literacies while discussing issues of equity, race, and racism within their ELA instructional block. The participants were sixty fifth-grade students, about evenly split between male and

female students. The school's demographics consisted of Latinx students being the largest subgroup at 51% of the population. The study highlighted an interdisciplinary unit, curated by the researchers and classroom teacher, which focused on the impact of racism on U.S. culture. The participants engaged in various multimodal literacy activities, including print-based texts, digital platforms, audio recordings, and collaborative meaning making. This study's findings are unique because multimodal literacy activities are typically reserved for out-of-school spaces, whereas this teacher had the autonomy to incorporate multimodal literacy into her daily classroom instruction. Students were highly engaged and agentive in their English Language Arts learning because they were afforded multiple opportunities to critically read about, write about, and discuss issues related to "race, power, and access" in ways that "positioned them as public intellectuals who were contributing to the discourse on race in American society" (Price-Dennis et al., 2016, p. 332). The students reflected upon their lived experiences and dialogic conversations to make meaning and increase their literacy achievement.

Multimodal Literacy and Black Girls. Enacting multimodal literacies is a collaborative process that can shift the power structure in academic settings. The adult is not the sole expert as youth are highly proficient in multimodal communication methods. Collaboration models include adults working alongside youth, and youth working alongside other youth can encourage youth and adults to make meaning, increase student autonomy, and extend their understanding of communication forms (Wissman, Costello, & Hamilton, 2012). As we move to an increasingly diverse and networked global society, the importance of communicating with diverse audiences effectively is a key part of literacy. Enacting a multimodal literacy pedagogy promotes collaboration before, during, and after the composing process and illuminates how different, lived experiences shape the ways we understand and communicate ideas. There is a greater need

for researchers to understand how the intersections of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender impact students' engagement with digital literacy and multimodality. Multimodal literacy practices allow youth to negotiate their own identities in spaces they choose, to establish their own authentic identity.

Few studies highlighted how multimodal literacy can help Black girls enact their agency, develop positive identity construction, and shift power hierarchies. Price-Dennis's (2016) study, Muhammad & Womack's (2015) study, and Ajayi's (2015) study focused on the multimodal literacy practices of Black girls and zoomed in on the full capabilities of multimodal literacy to transform literacy practices. While referencing the Black Girls' Literacies conceptual framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016), Price-Dennis(2016) posits that "Black girls' literacies that occur in digital spaces have the potential to be transformative and helpful in constructing a model for being fully human in the world and working to make conditions for others more humane" (p. 341). Incorporating digital and multimodal literacies create opportunities for Black girls' experiences to be highlighted and their voices to be heard as they (re)shape the worlds' in which they live (Garcia et al., 2020; Kelly, 2018).

Price-Dennis's (2016) study was situated in a fifth-grade classroom with coed students but focused on how the Black girls used various modalities to enact Black girls' literacies. The research examined how various modal platforms, including YouTube, Newsela, Google forms, Twitter, and Garage Band, shaped the participants' compositional decision making. The traditional classroom space in this study did not promote or encourage conversations about race, gender, or intersectionality; however, the girls addressed these themes in their conversations with the researchers.

Muhammad & Womack's (2015) study focused on how Black girls make sense of media representations of Black girlhood through "penning and pinning," which included traditional notions of literacy and multimodal notions of literacy such as Prezi and Pinterest (p. 9). Enacting a multiliteracies stance helped the researchers to understand how literacy practices shifted, changed, and grew across sociocultural contexts. The overarching themes that the girls focused on through their writing included false representations of Black women and girls' physical beauty, sexual objectification, and education attainment. The participants' multilayered "cultural, ethnic, gendered, community, economic, intellectual, kinship, personal, and sexual" identities were represented through various writing modes to respond to negative media representations and social perceptions of Black womanhood girlhood (Muhammad & Womack, 2015, p. 18). Although their modes of writing varied from print-based composition to multimodal composition, their process of analyzing, critiquing, and discussing media representations helped the participants to make sense of their own identities and challenge misrepresentations by expressing fuller visions of Black girlhood. In both studies, multimodal literacy practices helped the girls make sense of and respond to media representations in nuanced ways while further developing their voice to shift power hierarchies and (re)shape Black girlhood representations.

Ajayi's (2015) study explored three Nigerian high school girls' experiences as they enacted critical multimodal literacy practices in their English class. It is important to note that this study, unlike the others reviewed, was situated in Nigeria at a public, all-girls school. The curriculum within the school was heavily focused on skills (Muhammad, 2020). It was implemented "without much consideration to how biases against females are reproduced or how the students draw on their knowledge and identities as resources to shape literacy" (Ajayi, 2015, p. 217). The study's purpose was to embed critical multimodal literacy practices in the daily

English classroom so the girls could critique the academic texts presented throughout the curriculum. Their multimodal literacy practices included a critical reading of texts to analyze gender bias in texts and write multimodal responses. Incorporating these practices within the daily English Language Arts instructional block increased student engagement as the girls "rewrote themselves by using critical multimodal literacies as a source of empowerment to question the social production of gender"(Ajayi, 2015, p. 238). This study highlights the interconnectedness of Black girls' experiences across the African Diaspora. It reinforces educators' responsibility to provide consistent and authentic opportunities to engage in multimodal literacy for Black girls.

The findings of the reviewed studies point to the importance of exploring issues and conversations that impact the lives of Black girls, actively creating space for Black girls to critique representations, and promoting multiple opportunities for Black girls to engage in multimodal composition creatively. Understanding how the participants identify, understand, and represent their "multiple, political/critical, historical, intellectual, collaborative, and identity-laden literacies" (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) through multimodal composition was key to understanding how to engage my participants in this research. Incorporating multimodal literacy practices as a response to the deficit and incomplete media representations and beliefs about Black womanhood/girlhood can help youth increase their agency, develop positive identities, and consciously shift power hierarchies in academic spaces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I reviewed four major literature bodies: the intersection(s) of identity development and literacy practices through the Black girls' literacies framework, media

representations of Black girlhood and Africa, critical media literacy, and multimodal literacy. Collectively, Black girls develop their racial, gendered, and ethnic identities despite negative media representations and social silencing through varied literacy practices such as challenging power hierarchies, reframing incomplete narratives about Black girlhood, and creating communities that sustain and promote positive self-image. Media representations about Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa are overwhelmingly negative and pervasive. These representations rely on historical controlling tropes of Black womanhood and incomplete, stereotypical myths about Africa that promote White hegemony. CML pedagogy has emerged as a framework to push back against media representations while challenging media messages and exploring how media impacts real life. Multimodal literacy pedagogy serves as a tool to support youths' engagement in CML by increasing student agency, developing positive identities, and shifting power hierarchies. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology for the study.

3 METHODOLOGY

I took up case study and narrative inquiry methodologies to (1) examine how adolescent girls of West African descent understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities concerning textual and media representations of Black women and girls and (2) explore how adolescent girls of West African descent use multimodal literacies to speak back to representations and develop self-identity. Black girls of West African immigrant descent develop a triple consciousness to understand their lived experiences through the lens of what it means to be a girl, of West African immigrant descent, with Black skin in America. Media misrepresentations of Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa permeate popular culture and shape how girls of Black West African immigrant descent develop their self-identity. Furthermore, negative and incomplete media portrayals that promotes racist, sexist, and xenophobic ideals frame their lived experiences and threaten to impact academic and social experiences and outcomes. Utilizing Critical Media Literacy pedagogy helps Black girls of West African immigrant descent in critiquing media and text representations and interrogating how they impact their lived experiences. Multimodal literacy pedagogy increases Black West African immigrant girls' ability to develop agency, construct positive self-identity, and shift power hierarchies that threaten their existence and potential. Engaging in CML pedagogy and multimodal literacy practices will provide the necessary tools to assist Black girls of West African immigrant descent in speaking back to distorted representations. They create their representations of Black girlhood through literacy.

Constructivist Underpinnings

A constructivist philosophy framed this research. Constructivist philosophy focuses on the belief that learning is shaped and influenced by one's perspective and lived experiences (Au, 1998). Constructivism in literacy research involves "active engagement in processes of meaning-

making, text comprehension as a window on these processes, and the varied nature of knowledge, especially knowledge developed as a consequence of membership in a given social group" (Au, 1998, p. 299). Special attention to a "given social group" is particularly relevant to this research inquiry as this study focuses on how girls of Black West African descent understand media representations and speak back to these representations with multimodal literacies. Spivey (1997) highlights the importance of agency in constructivist inquiries because constructivism focuses on how individuals, small groups, and communities make sense of experiences from personal perspectives. Constructivist philosophy focuses on a deep inquiry into the perspectives and meaning-making processes of research participants. Constructivist philosophy undergirds case study methodology because the case study focuses on in-depth study and analysis of a bounded system, which requires researchers to investigate participants' meaning-making processes. Additionally, constructivist philosophy supports narrative inquiry methodology because narrative inquiry focuses on researchers coming alongside participants to make sense of personal experiences and perspectives. In the current study, I took up case study and narrative inquiry methods to explore the research questions.

Case Study

A case study is an in-depth study and analysis of a bounded system. A bounded system includes a social unit such as an individual, group, community, or activity, or a combination of these units (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Case study design is notably different from other methodologies because cases are "constructed, not found, as researchers make decisions about how to angle their vision on places overflowing with potential stories of human experiences" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 2). Literacy researchers must define and identify their case within

the context of an issue in our field to decide how to angle and design their case study. Research questions should be flexible enough to address and accommodate the "case" in its real-world context (Yin, 2014).

Understanding the real-world context of how girls of Black West African immigrant descent make sense of their identities through multimodal literacy practices required a contextualized understanding of the way their race, gender, and ethnic identities interplay with their self-composed representations of self. While an essential characteristic of case study is the boundedness of the case, Merriam (1998) also defines four other elements of case study design: (1) particularistic: research should be centered on a particular, specific event, phenomenon, program, or individual, (2) descriptive: thick, rich information surrounding the bounded case in study, (3) heuristic: research should increase the reader's understanding of case in study, and (4) inductive: data collected should drive the understandings and analysis that emerge. Collectively, these four elements framed how my study was developed and enacted with my participants.

Description of the Case in the Study

This research study is particularistic in that it focused specifically on how Black West African immigrant girls interpreted textual and media representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa. Case study was selected because this methodology promotes "collecting data from people and institutions in their everyday situations, not within the controlled confines of a laboratory, the sanctity of a library, or the structured limitations of a survey questionnaire" (Yin, 2014, p. 88). Analyzing media and textual representations constitutes "everyday situations" because texts, media, and popular culture shape and frame the contextual lives of Black West African immigrant girls. The data gathered from the research was thick and rich as it descriptively projected the voices of the participants through analysis of their

multimodal writings. This inquiry was heuristic because it increased understanding about the experiences, perspectives, and multimodal literacy composing processes of Black West African girls, an understudied population within adolescent literacy research. This case study was also inductive, because the data collected through student writing artifacts, interviews, and focus groups drove the theoretical analysis of the study's findings.

Narrative Inquiry

Montero and Washington (2011) define narrative inquiry as "research that relies on human stories as data, narratives in data analysis, and/or narrative as data representation" (p. 337). Narrative inquiry focuses exclusively on the "stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry does not just consist of participants telling stories to researchers, but instead extends and complicates the researcher's notion of coming alongside participants for qualitative inquiry (Gordon, Council, Dukes, & Muhammad, 2019). There is a distinct difference between 'telling' narrative inquiry and 'living' narrative inquiry. "Telling" narrative inquiries highlight the stories of participants' lives as they are told through autobiographies, memoirs, biographies, and oral histories. "Living" narrative inquiries differ from "telling" narrative inquiries because these stories transcend isolated, fragmented stories and are situated within "larger social, cultural, historical, and political contexts" (Montero and Washington, 2011, p. 340). In this research study, the participants and I engaged in a 'living' narrative inquiry. The participants and researcher's stories and experiences were considered and analyzed within the larger frame of textual and media representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa within popular culture. My statement of positionality is embedded later in this chapter.

Description of Narrative Inquiry in ihe Proposed Study

The three most essential narrative inquiry methodology elements are temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin, 2013). Temporality involves comprehending a person, event, or object with respect to the past, present, and future. Temporality suggests that people, events, and objects are composed of past, present, and [eventually] future occurrences. The experiences of the participants were considered with attention to how familial history of immigration has played a role in their understanding of their own identity and popular culture representations of their racialized, gendered, and ethnic identities. Sociality is understanding the personal and social conditions. Personal conditions include personal "feelings, hopes and desires" while social conditions include the contextual environment in which people's life experiences develop (Clandinin, 2013, p. 40). This research study explored sociality by examining how the participants represented their lived experiences through interviews and multimodal artifacts. This exploration deepened understanding of their beliefs about identity and how they are impacted by representations. Place involves assessing the geophysical location that the inquiry takes place in. Place will be necessary for this research study because it is focused on understanding how textual and media representations of Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa vary based upon geographical location. This study was situated in a large, urban, southeastern city with a diverse population that includes various immigrant communities. Therefore, the participants' experiences may have differed from other youth who do not live in cities of this size with diverse immigrant populations. In summary, narrative inquiry requires qualitative researchers to understand their participants' lived experiences through the eyes and voices of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research Questions

Researchers make informed decisions about how to design their case study by analyzing their own interest in the topic and the particularities of the case. Case studies are best suited for research inquiries that begin with how or why and may be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. This particular methodology was crucial to this study because case studies move from solely describing a particular group or individual's practices to uncovering the participants' understanding of the practice's cultural implications (Gordon, Council, Dukes, & Muhammad, 2019). Cultural implications of case study are evident in the labels and descriptors researchers use to describe and define their case because they are "infused with certain ideologies or assumptions about how the world works" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 11). I evaluated how textual and media representations are socially developed and experienced within a bounded case.

The most suited questions to narrative inquiry research are questions that lead to a deeper understanding of human experiences and how these experiences shape "past, present, and future experiences of participants and researchers" (Montero and Washington, 2011, p. 334). Narrative inquiry emphasizes the importance of completely listening to research participants' instead of just listening to the narrative's parts that fit the researcher's preconceived notions. In addition to this premise, narrative inquiry is often described as 'messy' by scholars who engage in this type of work because it does not always present specific answers but rather complicates previously held beliefs. Research questions that are best suited for narrative inquiry focus on illuminating common, everyday experiences and offer space for interpretative analysis of social, cultural, historical, and political contexts.

This research inquiry was a narrative case study because I strived to move from solely describing the multimodal literacy practices of girls of Black West African immigrant descent to uncovering the girls' understanding of the cultural implications of how media and textual representations of Black girlhood and Africa shape their understandings of self-identity. I also pursued a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black West African immigrant girls and how these experiences fit into sociohistorical, cultural, and political representations of Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa to shape past, present, and future conceptions of self-identity. The central research questions that framed this narrative inquiry case study were:

1. How do Black West African immigrant girls understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities when analyzing representations of Africa and Black girlhood?
2. How do Black West African immigrant girls (re)create their own identities through multimodal literacies?

Understanding these core questions will contribute to the extant literature on Black and African girls' literacies and identities.

Conceptual Framework

This study is directly connected to the Black girls' literacies framework developed by Muhammad and Haddix (2016). The authors posit that Black girls' literacies are "multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, intellectual, political and critical" (p. 325). Within this study, I drew strong connections with each facet of this framework. The literacies of Black African girls in the United States are multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, political, and critical. As children of African immigrants, Black girls of West African immigrant descent engage in various literacy modes to make meaning of the texts around them. Black

African girls' identities are salient and multilayered. They must develop and negotiate bicultural identity formation within the context of life in the United States as a Black adolescent girl of West African descent (Showers, 2015). The data collected within the study were analyzed with this framework in mind and zoomed in on how Black girls of West African immigrant descent write about their multiple identities and triple consciousness of being Black African girls in the United States.

Theoretical Frameworks

Black African immigrant youth adopt a hybrid identity that makes sense of their African immigrant heritage and their lived experiences as Black people in the United States. Black West African immigrant girls experience complicated forms of oppression, including sexism, racism, and xenophobia. As a result, they must develop sustainable resilience practices individually and collectively (Evans-Winter, 2005). Black immigrant women and girls face various intersecting oppressions based upon their African heritage in an anti-immigrant society, their gender expression in a patriarchal society, and their Black skin in a country that centers Whiteness. Therefore, I used a combination of Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and Transnationalism theories to conceptualize this study.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) builds upon Critical Race Theory and is imperative to consider when exploring the experiences of Black West African girls in the United States. Critical Race Theory has five principles that help us understand the phenomenon of racialization in the United States: (1) Race is an ordinary fixture of American life; (2) Efforts to eradicate racism are usually aligned with self-serving goals for Whites (a phenomenon frequently referred to as "interest convergence"); (3) Race is socially, not biologically, constructed; (4) Racism often

works in tandem with other forms of oppression, so the assessment of intersectional identities is imperative; (5) The unique narratives of people of color are valid and valuable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). Racial identity supersedes all other facets of identity in the United States (Hughes, 1945). Many Black West African immigrants migrate from their ancestral homelands, where they were a part of the racial majority, to the United States. They are immediately marginalized due to inherent racism in the United States (Adjepong, 2018; Asante et al., 2016).

CRF holds that racism is a fundamental part of United States society. People of color (in this case, Black girls of West African immigrant descent) have a distinctive voice when it comes to describing their experiences of their intersecting gender and racial oppression. Moreover, CRF emphasizes that women of color experience "multiple consciousnesses", raising their "awareness of oppression they face based simultaneously on their race/ethnicity and gender" (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016, p. 99). Critical Race Feminism aligns with studies of empowerment and is best suited to research focused on change, emancipation, and empowerment. It is also important to capture the impact the intersection of existing in a historically marginalized race, gender, and ethnicity can have on how a student engages with popular culture and texts. The combination of feminist perspectives and critical race theory, known as critical race feminism, must be included to explore how Black African immigrant girls use multimodal literacies to speak back to representations and develop self-identity. Moreover, while CRF is useful, it does not thoroughly interrogate ethnicity and immigration status for Black West African immigrant girls in the United States.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is used to further understand the experiences of Black West African immigrant girls in the United States. First, second, and 2.5-generation Black West African immigrants are entangled in complex relationships with their ancestral homelands and the United States. Kebede (2019) explains, "African immigrants pre-immigration experiences and their ongoing transnational connections powerfully shape their sense of self and group membership" (p. 129). Thus, it is crucial to explore how Black West African girls develop their identities in light of their intersecting racial, gender, and ethnic identities (Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, & Peralta, 2014).

Transnational identities are socially constructed, as immigrants maintain connections to their ancestral homelands while simultaneously developing new networks in their new country. Black West African immigrants build community in the United States by maintaining cultural traditions such as developing or engaging with religious organizations, supporting higher education attainment, preparing traditional foods, and staying connected with other Black West African immigrants through ethnic enclaves (Adjepong, 2018; Asante et al., 2016; Chacko, 2019; Habecker, 2017; Kebede, 2019). Developing Black transnational identities in the United States is complicated because of the pervasiveness of myths about monolithic Blackness in the United States. Black West African immigrants hail from multiple countries with various languages, educational attainment levels, cultures, and ethnic groups, so the assignment of a Black homogenous identity does not capture the fullness of their experiences (Chacko, 2019; Kebede, 2019). In addition to these factors, political factors such as the relationships between their home country and the United States and immigration laws that impact citizenship status play a role in developing a transnational identity.

For example, President Trump issued a memorandum to end the Deferred Enforcement Departure (DED) in 2018, a program enacted in 1999 for over 4,000 Liberian civil war refugees (Solis, 2018). This program allowed Liberian immigrants to live and work in the United States legally. President Trump declared that since the country is beginning to rebuild and armed conflicts have ceased, Liberians should return to Liberia, under this act. With the abrupt end to the program, Liberians who have not received full citizenship yet (but may have been here for up to 20 years) had one year to leave the United States or faced deportation. The implications of this unexpected mandate challenged families who have had children here during their time and forces individuals who may have practically grown up in the United States to return to a country that they no longer know or have family in. The President eventually authorized an extension of the Deferred Enforcement Departure (DED) through March 2020 to allow a slower “wind-down” for Liberians living in the U.S. under this program.

Transnationalism addresses the duality of identity development that occurs for Black West African immigrants in the United States. Black West African immigrant youth in the United States must also negotiate their identities as Black and African because race, ethnicity, and skin color are such prominent factors. African immigrant youth may be categorized as American in the company of 1st generation Africans and as Africans around their Black American peers (Chacko, 2019; Sasso, 2015; Somé-Guiébré, 2019). African immigrant youth experience intraracial and interracial tensions as they negotiate what it means to be Black and African in the United States.

Utilizing Critical Race Feminism and Transnationalism theoretical frameworks to approach this research inquiry is important to frame the research in ways that highlight Black West African immigrant girls’ multilayered identities. The inclusion of these two theoretical

frameworks is equally essential to understanding how race, gender, and ethnic identity shape the participants' literacy experiences.

Methods

This research study was designed as a literacy institute for adolescent girls of Black West African descent. A literacy institute is an intimate, collaborative cadre that enhances the participants' literacy, personal, and social growth (Polleck, 2010). The focus was on multimodal literacies. The youth participated in a multimodal literacies institute held virtually via video conferencing due to the Covid-19 global pandemic constraints. The literacy institute sessions were held virtually on Saturday mornings during August - October 2020 in a large urban, southeastern city. The multimodal literacies institute focused on collaboratively interpreting representations of Black girlhood/womanhood and Africa in popular culture media artifacts and texts. The media artifacts and texts were selected were based upon data collected through the pre-interviews and focus group sessions. Throughout the study, the participants and I engaged in media and text-based discussions and multimedia composing processes that allowed them to reflect on their wonderings, questions, and connections to representations. My goal was to investigate how girls of Black West African descent understood representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa and responded to these representations through multimodal literacies such as video production, artistic representations, and creative writing (Price-Dennis, 2016). In the next sections, I will break down each part of the study.

Research Site

The research site was originally slated to be conducted at a literacy clinic at a large, public university in a southeastern urban city. Due to the global pandemic Covid-19, the study

was conducted 100% virtual using the Zoom platform. Participants logged in from their device at home. The materials needed to conduct this research study included a laptop computer with a webcam, internet access, and a Gmail account. All of the participants chose to engage with the literacy institute in their private bedrooms with the door closed, without any family members or siblings in the room. The consent process will be discussed later in this chapter.

During the first literacy workshop, the participants co-developed three norms to support our group in communicating effectively. The norms were:

- Make it fun! This is our space to be our true selves.
- Listen to others for understanding, not just to respond.
- Always work together as a team to support each other.

The participants believed that there would be several positive outcomes from our work together as a group. When asked during Focus Group #1, they named potential benefits such as increasing their social skills, developing more teamwork skills, and making new friends. Each literacy workshop session began with a connecting circle, facilitated by me. The connecting circle focused on opening our space with the spirit of community building in mind. The participants were engaged in 100% virtual learning at the time of the study and did not often get opportunities to socialize with peers outside of teacher-facilitated virtual learning. The connecting circle prompts ranged from reflections on their successes and growth areas over the week to creative icebreaker games. After the connecting circle, I presented the workshop's focal mentor text to the group and taught a mini-lesson focused on genre and historical context. We engaged in multiple close reads of the text and discussion around the themes in the text. Then participants were given time to compose multimodal literacy responses to the texts we read. Participants engaged in varied multimodal literacy practices including creative writing, video

production, and visual art representation. Exemplars of the aforementioned multimodal texts were shared with the youth, and I supported the youth with the writing process. The participants wrote within collaborative breakout rooms or individually, depending on the task. At the end of the writing time, I facilitated a structured way for the participants to share all or a part of their writing with the group and provide feedback on the multimodal tools used. We closed each literacy workshop with a closing connecting circle to reflect upon their personal writing process.

The literacy institute took place on Saturday mornings from 10:00 AM-12:00 PM. The institute ran from August - October and included ten literacy sessions and two individual interviews per participant. The total time commitment for each participant was approximately 20 hours over three months. The literacy institute sessions lasted approximately 2 hours per session, as all of the participants were engaged in 100% online schooling (30-40 hours weekly) due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The total time devoted to the collaborative literacy institute sessions was 22 hours total (ten 2-hour sessions and two individual interviews). During these sessions, two thirty-minute audio-recorded focus groups were held over the duration of the study during the live video workshops.

Particpant Sampling Methods

Purposeful sampling was used to select four adolescent girls of Black West African immigrant descent to participate in the study. There was a fifth girl who expressed interest in the study but chose not to apply once she learned the study was 100% virtual. The constraints of 100% virtual school during the week led her to decline participating. Engaging four participants allowed me to discover a broad range of knowledge from participants while also providing the depth of data for each participant. According to Patton (2002), “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244). He continues in saying, “Because each qualitative study is

unique, the analytical approach used will be unique" (Patton, 2002, p. 433). Purposeful sampling was most beneficial to use in this study because it allowed me opportunity to find sufficient participants who met the predefined selection requirements (aged 11-17, identify as a girl, and have at least one parent of Black West African immigrant descent), were willing to participate in the study, and could provide information-rich narrative and written data for analysis (Patterson, 2002: Stake, 2005).

Although purposeful sampling was the primary sampling technique used, snowball sampling was also used to recruit one of the four participants who fit the predefined selection requirements (Emerson, 2015). Snowball sampling is practical when working with hidden or marginalized populations because cultural insiders or community members will have increased lines of communication with community members. The interested participants were not strangers to me, and I knew their parents through the closeness of the Liberian community in this large southeastern city. This helped to establish trust within the literacy institute.

Potential Participant Benefits and Risks

There were no foreseeable risks for the participants. The participants gained intangible benefits from participating in this research. The participants engaged in discussions and multimodal literacy activities centered on media and textual representations. As an intangible potential benefit, the participants engaged in multimodal literacy activities that fostered a more profound sense of self-identity, community awareness, and confidence. The participants advanced their literacy skills as they engaged in extracurricular literacy activities.

Recruitment Plan

Participants were recruited using various methods. I visited virtual community town hall meetings populated by West African immigrants in the local areas. According to data collected

by the Migration Policy Institute, the approximate number of West African immigrants in this large, southeastern city and metropolitan area was about 85,000 between 2014-2018 (MPI, 2019). During these virtual visits, I shared digital copies of the recruitment flyer with parents. I also shared the recruitment flyer widely throughout the local community through the university's Urban Literacy Clinic and Collaborative email listserv. The recruitment flyer was also disseminated through social media platforms and messaging applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Interested participants knew other adolescent girls of Black West African descent, thus spreading the word about the research. I held a virtual information session to provide additional information and the consent/assent forms to the girls and their families.

Information session. An information session was held virtually on Zoom to provide additional information to parents and youth interested in participating in the study. Four interested girls and their parents attended. This information session took place following IRB approval. To protect the youth's rights and welfare involved in this study, I ensured that participants and their parents were provided consent and assent forms. I read both forms aloud to the group. I explained the forms thoroughly to parents and their daughters and provided clear communication about how participant's anonymity will be maintained in all reports, publications, or presentations that will follow. The information session provided full disclosure of the nature of the activities involved in the study. After this portion of the information session, the floor was open for questions from parents and youth. The participants and their parents had three days (72 hours) to complete the application and consent/assent forms. All of the participants submitted their forms digitally within 72 hours. The study application gathered demographic data about the youth and required a writing sample about what it is like to be a Black girl. The study application is included in the Appendix B.

Participants

The participants identified as Black West African immigrant descent and were between the ages of 11-17 at the time of the study. Also, the participants had at least one parent of West African descent (1.5/ 2nd/ 2.5 generation). For further clarification, 1.5 generation immigrants are those who moved to the United States before the age of 12, 2nd generation immigrants were born in the United States, but their parents were born outside of the United States, and 2.5 generation immigrants were born in the United States and only one parent was born in the United States. Because this research inquiry centered on how girls of Black West African immigrant descent interpret and speak back to representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa in popular culture media, I focused on recruiting youth who fit into this category.

Four participants were recruited to ensure equitable and detailed interactions with the participants and the researcher. I originally planned for five participants but my fifth potential participant did not want to participate in a 100% virtual study. Limiting the number of participants to four girls allowed me to build deeper relationships with the participants and efficiently manage time and resources during the research study. The participants differed in their age, grade, and school setting (see table 1). At the time of the study, the mean age of the participants was 13. The participants did not receive any incentives for participating.

Table 1: Demographic of Participants

Participant	Age	Grade	Parent's Country of Origin	Writing interest) (self-reported)	Reading proficiency (self-reported)	School setting
Alaya	11	6	Liberia	High	Struggling	Performing Arts School/suburban
Sienna	13	8	Liberia and Sierra Leone	Medium	Proficient	Public middle school/suburban

Kayden	13	9	Liberia	Medium	Advanced	Public early college high school/ suburban
Zaire	16	10	Liberia and Ivory Coast	Medium	Advanced	Public vocational high school/ suburban

Alaya (pseudonym) Alaya was an 11-year old, sixth-grade student attending a small, public magnet school for elementary and middle grade students in an urban district. Her school's population consisted of 92.7% Black students, 3.5% White students, 1.7% Hispanic students, 1.7% Multiracial students, and 0.4% Pacific Islander students. She was accepted into the magnet school as a first grader through the district's lottery system for enrollment. At the time of the study, she majored in visual arts and minored in photography. She self-identified as a struggling reader with a high interest in writing. Alaya openly discussed her love for writing poetry and entering in school-wide poetry competitions during her first interview. She also shared that her apprehension with reading stemmed from frequent round-robin reading done in her classes.

Alaya was the youngest participant in the study and described herself as shy and funny. She was often soft-spoken during the institute at the beginning of the institute. She began to express herself more verbally as the institute continued. Alaya has medium-dark brown skin and short, natural Black hair. Alaya is a skilled visual artist and identified her creativity as her favorite part about herself. She described her art during Interview #1 as "unique pictures that show people the world as I see it". In her sample writing about what it's like to be a Black girl, she wrote:

> Black is beautiful!
>
> We speak up
>
> When something is not right,

We have a voice!

Black is beautiful!

Alaya's writing sample augments her belief that her perspective and voice as a Black girl is essential. The phrases "we speak up" and "we have a voice" signal Alaya's belief that expressing herself is a vital part of Black girlhood. She included an image of a girl with two afro puffs and superimposed the Liberian flag in the puffs. When asked during her first interview what being a Black, West African girl meant to her, Alaya responded that they "may not have all the privileges that others may have" and that Black girls "have differences and are different." Alaya chose to participate in the study because she felt Black girls' voices need to be heard from their different perspectives, not other people speaking for them. Alaya hoped to learn more about other Black, West African immigrant girls' perspectives and experiences.

Sienna (pseudonym) Sienna is a thirteen-year-old eighth-grader at the time of the study. She attended a large sized middle school in a suburban school district. The school's racial demographics were 55.9% Black, 19.0% White, 14.6 % Hispanic, 4.7% Multiracial, and 0.5 American Indian/Alaskan native. She self-identified as a proficient reader who enjoyed science fiction and historical fiction. Sienna has a medium interest in writing and shared that she regularly entered essay competitions at her school.

Sienna described herself as funny, overdramatic, and easy to talk to. Sienna was verbose and gregarious during the institute, and this was reflected in the clarity of her voice in her writing. She did not hesitate to add her perspective to our weekly discussions. Sienna has dark brown skin and short, natural Black hair. In her pre-interview, she described being a Black, African girl as "lit[fun] but also a struggle because some people try to underestimate what we can do." I also asked her to describe a time when she felt hyper-aware of her identity as an

African. She described being bullied at her elementary school during the Ebola pandemic. She recounts being left out of playground games like tag because some of her white peers were scared to touch her. These experiences were painful and confusing for her as an elementary student. In her sample writing about what it means to be a Black girl, she wrote:

> To be a Black girl means you are a part of wonderful society.
>
> To be a Black girl means some people judge you for your color before getting to know you.
>
> To be a Black girl means you have a wonderful background.
>
> To be a Black girl there is sometimes struggle.
>
> To be a Black girl you are wonderfully and beautifully made.

Sienna's writing sample depicts Sienna's pride in being a Black girl. She used the word "wonderful" to describe her background and community. Sienna juxtaposes this pride with the struggle Black girls face as they navigate oppression when "people judge you for your color." Sienna shared during Interview #1 that she joined the literacy institute because she likes to write and connect with "other Black girls with West African parents."

Kayden (pseudonym) Kayden is a thirteen-year-old ninth-grader attending a small, elite public high school in an urban school district focused on early college access. Kayden had to apply for the school by submitting standardized test scores, writing application essays, and interviewing with a panel. Her school was 87.0% Black, 4.5% Hispanic, 4.2% Asian, 2.6% White, and 1.6% Multiracial. Kayden rated herself as an advanced reader with a medium interest in writing. Kayden loves to read suspenseful novels and write in her journal.

Kayden described herself as friendly, easy to talk to, and dependable. Kayden has medium brown skin and medium length, natural Black hair. As one of the two high schoolers in

the literacy institute, Kayden encouraged all participants to share their truth through her cheerful demeanor. In her writing sample, she wrote a fourteen-line poem. I have included an excerpt below:

> Black girls are brave
>
> Black girls are talented
>
> Black girls are confident
>
> Black girls are intelligent
>
> Black girls are breathtaking
>
> Black girls are courageous
>
> Black girls are enough
>
> Black girls are ambitious

This sample explores how some of Kayden's attributes represented what it meant to be a Black girl. When asked what it meant to be Black, African, and a girl during the first interview, Kayden shared, "a lot of people will try to put you down and tell you that you cannot do, but that is more of a reason to do what you know you can and more." Kayden has developed a positive identity despite harmful myths and actions perpetrated by others. Kayden chose to join the literacy group because she felt it was important to express herself in a venue that others could hear her. She hoped to bond with other girls with a similar background like her own.

Zaire (pseudonym) Zaire is sixteen years old and in the tenth grade at the study time. She attended a public vocational high school in a suburban area. The school had 41.4% Black students, 35.6% White students, 19.9 Hispanic students,1.6% Asian students, 1.4% American Indian students, and 0.1% Pacific Islander students. Zaire identified as an advanced reader with a

medium interest in writing. She felt that she was a stronger speaker than writer and preferred to articulate her thoughts verbally when given an option.

Zaire described herself as outgoing, funny, and smart. She has light brown skin and medium-length Black hair that she wore straightened for the duration of the study. Zaire was the oldest participant in the study. When I asked Zaire what it means to be Black, African, and a girl during Interview #1, she felt that those identities had “shaped her challenges, like women do not have the same rights as men.” She continued by saying, “people look at girls as less than boys, Blacks as less than whites, and Africans as less than Americans.” Zaire communicated a nuanced understanding of the tri-lens of race, gender, and ethnicity by contrasting her experiences with others in perceived dominance. Her response illuminates the power dynamics that she has experienced as a daughter, sister, and high school student. In her writing sample about what it is like to be a Black girl, she wrote:

> Shine, Black girl, shine
> Don’t let anyone dim your light
> Your beauty is divine
> Your ancestors prepared you for this fight
> Your melanin and mind make you unique
> Being a Black girl is not for the weak

In this sample, Zaire describes the struggle she feels Black girls face to preserve their confidence with the phrase “don’t let anyone dim your light.” She then makes a historical connection to this struggle by acknowledging that her ancestors have prepared her to overcome struggles. She chose to participate because she is a Black girl who has experienced racism and wants to advocate for other youth.

Researcher Positionality

Growing up as a Black girl of West African descent in a majority Black community in the southeastern United States required me to navigate and assimilate into three different spaces: Liberian cultural norms and values at home, Southern Black cultural norms and values at school with my peers, and Eurocentric White American values and norms within my school environment and the society at large.

These three cultures bumped heads repeatedly, as each culture has its own set of cultural norms and values. For example, my Liberian family has always celebrated my dark brown skin and thick, kinky hair. However, as a young child in school, my dark skin and my "weird name" and large lips, led to taunting from my Black American peers. The taunt that always sticks out to me is "African booty scratcher," because this taunt perpetuated the myth that Africanness is unequivocally connected to unattractiveness, poor hygiene, and primitive behavior (Adjepong, 2018; Traoré, 2006). As a child, I could not understand why some of my peers, who looked just like me, would tease me about my skin color and African features. Instead of calling me Maima (pronounced My-ma), my peers would call me 'Mama' or make references to Aunt Jemima. Kids would make fun of my last name (Chea) by singing the famous commercial jingle for Chia pet plants. "Ch-Ch-Ch-Chia!" I became so embarrassed about my Liberian identity that I begged my parents not to wear traditional Liberian attire to my fifth-grade graduation. I did not want to stand out any more than I already did. I now understand that the devaluation of dark Black skin is colorism that stems from the United States' sordid history of the enslavement and dehumanization of Black people in colonized spaces (Traoré, 2004). The kids who taunted me were bullies and victims themselves; Eurocentric attitudes about beauty norms were forced upon us all and manifested itself in many ways.

As an adolescent, my struggles to fit into three different worlds continued. I was often teased by peers for 'acting/talking White' and making straight A's. I tried my hardest to hide my use of Liberian dialect words at school while also hiding my Southern slang use at home. At school, I felt the need to learn more slang words to better assimilate with my Black American peers. Chacko (2019) defines this phenomenon as "yearning to fit into undifferentiated Black or African-American groups during [the] middle and high school years" (p. 240). Within the Liberian community that my family was a part of, I often encountered people who thought I was too 'Americanized' (Chacko, 2019; Sasso, 2015; Somé-Guiébré, 2019).

Although I attended majority-Black K-12 schools, our texts and curricula were not culturally relevant to our identities as Black youth growing up in the Deep South. As I reflect upon my English Language Arts classes throughout those years, I do not recall ever reading any African American literature, besides *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Nor did I ever learn anything about Africa or African literature within my formal academic schooling. My parents provided my sisters and I with cultural knowledge by sharing traditional African fables, Liberian history, and other texts at home. My teachers never addressed my identity as a Black African immigrant girl; however, I excelled academically throughout my K-12 years.

When I matriculated into college at a predominately White institution, my world was flipped upside down yet again. This was my first time being in the racial minority in a school setting, as I had always attended majority Black schools. I experienced blatant racism from my White peers and professors, many of whom had never had classes or interactions with Black students. It was there (at a predominately white institution ironically) that I was exposed to a variety of African diasporic literature in a formal academic setting. I immersed myself in African American literature courses, African studies courses, and comparative literature courses focused

on diasporic texts, in addition to canonical English and English Education courses. These texts helped me explore and develop my identity as a Black African immigrant woman born and raised in the American South. During my undergraduate experience, I developed a new sense of self as I embraced the small yet tight-knit Black community, which made up only 8% of the college's population at the time. My friends included sisters of Black American, Black African, Black Caribbean, Latinx, Asian, and multiracial descent. I learned more about my friends' cultures, and we often learned how we were similar and different. We were unified as the minority in a hyper-racialized space and depended on each other to make sense of our experiences.

I have encountered (and continue to encounter) racial microaggressions and blatant racism due to my identity as a Black woman with a 'weird' name, which serves as a marker of my racialized ethnic identity. My perceived youth only compounds the tacit microaggressions and sometimes-overt racism experienced as a woman in professional settings. Frequently, people of various races will ask me, "What are you?" in an attempt to decipher my ethnicity based upon my name or refer to Africa as a country. My journey between the three worlds of Liberian culture, Black American culture, and Eurocentric American culture continues today. My triple consciousness has helped me develop an identity that I can be proud of, as I grow to embrace and understand who I am. My lived experiences as a 2nd generation, Black Liberian-American woman, who was born and raised in the American South, shape my worldviews, wonderings, and experiences within the various communities I traverse. As stated by James Banks (2000), my biographical journey as a researcher "greatly influences my values, research questions, and the knowledge I construct" (p. 4).

Positionality within Narrative Inquiry

Engaging in a narrative inquiry case study alongside the participants is particularly powerful and impactful because researchers' identities and positionality are constantly shifting alongside the participants and the research team. On a practical level, narrative inquiry highlights individual narratives as contextual factors for shifting or transforming professional teacher education practices. On a social and theoretical level, narrative inquiry promotes the inclusion of real people's stories and their need to be included and understood within the context of larger social, cultural, political, and historical structures. Narrative inquiry research is particularly appealing to researchers who have an interest in criticality and social justice because it "creates a space to listen to the voices of the unheard and to learn from them in a representation of their voice" (Montero and Washington, 2011). Elevating marginalized communities' voices through the documentation of their lived experiences can be transformative and celebratory if narrative inquiry is done in a restorative manner.

I selected narrative inquiry because this methodology uses stories, narratives, conversations, interviews, and other artifacts to deconstruct and build new meaning surrounding experiences in people's lives. Narrative inquiry is equally appropriate because it allows the researcher to come alongside the participants, create meaning, and share stories. As the researcher, my job was to elevate the participants' stories and experiences while examining my own identity formation within the context of their experiences. As I worked to understand the participants' experiences and perspectives, my own experiences and perspectives as a former Black girl of West African immigrant descent shaped how I interacted with the participants and data collected.

Positionality within Case Study

When negotiating researcher roles in case study methodology, it is important to remember that "age, gender, race, and language all matter" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, 53). In addition to these factors, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability/disability status, sexual orientation, and education attainment all matter and impact how data are viewed, collected, and analyzed. The researcher's role is also complicated by Merriam's (2009) emic/etic dilemma. Researchers may view themselves from the emic approach because shared identity components may lead them to view themselves as 'insiders' on the topic. However, my identity from the etic approach is also complicated because of my perceived authorial status of adult, parent, researcher, and doctoral student.

My research role was complicated and authentic, as I am an insider and outsider with this group. My social location as a woman and mother of Black West African immigrant descent played a critical role in my interaction with the participants and my analysis of the data. As a doctoral student, my identity muddles my unique position as a member of two groups: Black West African woman, and doctoral student/researcher. This split in identity required me to reflect critically on my positionality, privilege, and intersubjectivity during the research process. Utilizing case study and narrative inquiry methodology helped me to make sense of this split in identity as I conducted research, analyzed the data, and synthesized my findings. I was the primary data collection instrument; therefore, I acknowledge that my behavior, assumptions, perspectives, and experiences played a part in what I observed and analyzed throughout the research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Lesson Plans and Texts from the Literacy Institute

The literacy institute's lessons were developed using the Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy model established by Dr. Gholnecsar Muhammad. Muhammad's (2020)

work builds upon the rich historical significance of African American literary societies. The Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy model pushes educators to develop learning experiences that support their students' histories, identities, literacies, and liberation. The framework has four components: identity, skills, intellect, and criticality (Muhammad, 2020). Identity comprises how individuals see themselves and how others see them. Identity can include but is not limited to markers such as race, ethnicity, gender, ability, cultural, and sexual affiliations. Identities are fluid and intersectional. Skills relate to the discrete proficiencies that students are expected to attain, such as the Common Core State Standards. The state and federal government typically identify these skills. Intellect refers to knowledge about a topic or subject area. Criticality pushes students to examine and critique issues of power, privilege, and access within their learning and the world.

The lesson plans were developed before the beginning of the first literacy workshop and were revised or adjusted as needed to match the participants' interests and constraints of 100% virtual implementation (see Appendix E). I also connected each week's lesson to a text or text set. The mentor texts were exemplars and were used as artifacts during my mini-lessons to teach about the genre. Muhammad's (2015) study posits that sharing mentor texts with youth, specifically Black girls, can help them shape and frame their self-authored texts. I used mentor texts by Lupita Nyongo, Sandra Cisneros, George Ella Lyon, Jamaica Kincaid, and Matthew Cherry, among other authors. I selected texts that would support a deeper understanding of the particular genre while also connecting to representations of race, gender, or ethnicity.

Table 2: Central Mentor Texts Read

Week(s)	Author	Text	Type of Writing	Year Published	Race, ethnicity, and or gender focus

1	Introductions, Development of group norms, Focus group interview				
2-3	George Ella Lyon	Where I'm From Poem	Video poem	1993	Race, ethnicity
4-5	Jamaica Kincaid	Girl	Creative Writing	1978	Gender, ethnicity, race
6-7	Sandra Cisneros	My Name	Name Poem	1983	ethnicity
8-9	Lupita Nyongo, Matthew Cherry	Sulwe, Hair Love	Children's poster, video	2019, 2019	Race, gender
10	Chimamanda Adichie	The Danger of a Single Story	Open Letter	2009	Gender, ethnicity, race
	Focus group interview also occurred.				

a. Introductions/ Focus Group Interview: Week 1 During the first week of the study, we engaged in introductory activities to get to know each other. We co-constructed group norms for communication and engagement. In addition to this, the participants completed a focus group interview. The focus group questions focused on public perceptions of Blackness, girlhood, and Africa in society. The interview questions also garnered information about the participants' literate identities and preferences for media, music, and social media.

b. Where I'm From Digital Poem: Week 2-3 During weeks two and three, the participants read the mentor text, "Where I'm From," read student exemplar poems, and viewed multimodal poems on YouTube. After engaging with the mentor text, I led a brief mini-lesson on the genre of the poem. Participants engaged in pre-writing and gathered feedback from other participants. During week three, I shared an exemplar multimodal *Where I'm From* video that I created. Participants then gathered digital family photos and published their poems using a photo collage video on Animoto. Animoto is a free, cloud-based video editing website that allows for photo,

video, and music collages. They made stylistic decisions about color choices, background music, and filters while composing their multimodal collage poems.

c. Creative Writing or Personal Narrative (Girl): Week 4-5 In weeks four and five, we focused on creative writing. In week four, we read "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid. I began by playing a YouTube video of the author reading the narrative. Then, I reread the narrative, pausing to engage the participants in questions to deepen their understanding and connection to the text. I taught a mini-lesson on the point of view, tone, and cultural context. The participants then worked in pairs to answer reader response questions. During week five, the participants worked in pairs to collaboratively compose a creative writing piece in the same style as the mentor text. Pairs then shared a snippet of their writing with the group to conclude the workshop.

d. Name Poems: Week 6-7 During week six, we read "My Name" by Sandra Cisneros. I began by playing a YouTube reading of the text. We then engaged in a second reading of the text where I reread the narrative, pausing to engage the participants in questions to deepen their understanding and connection to the text. I taught a mini-lesson on figurative language and descriptive language and provided more contextual information about the novel *House on Mango Street*, from which the text was excerpted. The participants then engaged in brainstorming and exploratory writing about the history of their name. After brainstorming, the participants wrote name poems or name narratives. After writing their poems on Google Docs, I shared an exemplar of me reciting my narrative on a Flipgrid video. They then used Flipgrid to record themselves sharing their responses. They made stylistic decisions about filters and backgrounds to use while recording.

e. Children's Video Collage/Poster: Week 8-9 During weeks eight and nine, we focused on notions of beauty. We watched Lupita Nyong'o read her children's book, *Sulwe*, via Netflix. We also watched the *Hair Love* short film on YouTube. The participants then responded to reflective questions and made personal connections to notions of colorism and hair discrimination. The participants then began to plan a visual representation of a public service announcement to highlight Black girls' inner and outer beauty. The participants chose to make a video collage with music using the Funimate app or to create a poster. During week 9, the participants continued to discuss what notions of beauty permeated their families and in popular culture. They worked on their visual PSAs for younger Black girls and shared their work at the end of the session.

f. Open Letters/Focus Group Interview: Week 10 For the final week of the study, the participants watched selected excerpts of "The Danger of a Single Story." We then engaged in a conversation about myths and stereotypes permeated about Africa. Participants penned collaborative open letters about what it means to be a Black West African immigrant girl in today's world using Google Slides. We concluded the session with the focus group interview.

Data Sources

Data was collected through digital multimodal artifacts, field notes, audio-recorded semi-structured interviews and focus groups, video-recorded group sessions, transcriptions of interviews, group literacy sessions, and researcher memos. Multimodal artifacts were collected throughout the study. These artifacts represented how the participants use their voice to (re)conceptualize their identity.

Semi-structured Interviews. Interviewing is a reality-constructing, meaning-making process for both participant and researcher (Mishler, 1986). Semi-structured interview questions were developed because the questions are deliberately connected to the research topic while remaining open-ended and flexible. Galletta (2012) states semi-structured interview questions "create space for participants to narrate their experiences" (p. 47) and "elicit data grounded in the experiences of the participants" (p. 45). For this study, semi-structured interviews uncovered understandings about racial, gender, and ethnic identity through the lens of popular culture and representation. Each participant participated in two audio-recorded semi-structured interviews before and after the conclusion of the research project. The interview questions were written before the interviews. Each audio-recorded interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and took place on Zoom in a private room. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed shortly after the interview, while the content was fresh and current in my mind for accuracy.

The initial pre-interview helped me to develop a baseline understanding of the participant's interests, experiences, and perspectives related to textual and media representations. This helped to build a more culturally and historically responsive literacy curriculum. The final interview occurred after the study. The final interview explored representation themes in the participants' multimodal writings and solicited narratives about how their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities were shaped through representation. The final interview also focused on the participants' overall experience within the literacy institute.

Focus Groups. Audio and video recorded focus groups occurred twice during the research process. The focus groups occurred on Zoom during the workshop sessions. Focus groups were essential to this research study because they allowed the research participants to respond to a series of open-ended questions in a collaborative conversation structure. Kitzinger

(1995) notes that focus groups "encourage research participants to explore the issues of importance to them, in their own vocabulary, generating their own questions and pursuing their own priorities" (p. 299). The group sessions' audio and video recordings helped capture participant dialogue, gestures, and conversation during the research process to help develop more understanding of the participants' meaning-making processes. I engaged in detailed transcription of the audio and video recordings of the personal interviews, focus groups, and group writing sessions to capture the participants' verbal and nonverbal communications. Field notes and researcher memos triangulated nonverbal and contextualized observations made through group sessions, personal interviews, and focus groups.

The participants participated in two focus groups over the 10-session literacy institute's duration. The group-based interviews played a large role in shaping the research study's trajectory and focusing more on dialogue than the question-and-answer format of interviews (Winslow, Simm, Marvell, and Schaaf, 2013). Focus groups "tap students' social energies and foster the dynamics possible in a group setting by allowing participants to hear and to respond to one another rather than only to the researcher's questions" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 373). The semi-structured nature of the dialogue promoted a natural, logical flow of conversation and encouraged multiple perspectives. Participating in focus groups provided space for the participants to learn more about their co-participants' experiences and perspectives. During the focus group sessions, power relations came into play because participants with quieter personalities did not volunteer to speak as often as more verbose participants. This issue was negotiated by me serving as a moderator to monitor group participation and encouraging all participants to speak during the focus group. Video recording the session helped, as the moderator and researcher, to entirely focus on moderating the session. The focus groups were

video and audio-recorded to capture nonverbal and verbal gestures (Cameron, 2000). The audio recordings were transcribed for further clarity, and the video recordings were further analyzed to match nonverbal gestures with the transcribed audio.

Multimodal Artifacts

Participants composed multimodal literacy artifacts throughout the institute, which included creative writing, visual art representations, and video production. The artifacts created by the participants were:

1. "Where I'm From" Animoto video poem
2. "Girl" creative writing
3. "My Name" Flipgrid video response
4. Children's poster or Funimate collage video
5. "The Danger of a Single Story" open letter

The study's participants received multimodal writing instruction framed around representation and identity. This writing instruction took place in an environment that encouraged creativity, free-thinking, and student voice, which contrasts with many Black girls' literacy environments within formal school environments (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). After the pre-interviews, popular culture and literary texts were selected to ensure that the researcher curated writing experiences that were relevant and familiar to the participants. Participants were encouraged to select popular culture and literary texts to share with the literacy institute group.

Field Notes and Researcher Memos

During the duration of the research study, I compiled reflexive notes and the video and audio recordings of the literacy institute sessions. Reflexive notes were developed during interviews, focus groups, and during the literacy institute sessions. The notes served as

contextual tools to help fill any gaps in the audio transcriptions and describe body language and other nonverbal gestures that contextualize the participants' experiences within the research study. My notes were analyzed and reviewed after each literacy institute session and triangulated with the transcription of the audio-recordings to write more in-depth research memos. I wrote researcher memos as I analyzed the data to track my wonderings and questions throughout the data analysis process.

Data Analysis: Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA)

The data collected throughout the research process (interviews, focus groups, transcripts, field notes, and student artifacts) were analyzed using Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Constant comparative analysis generates ideas and poses questions about how girls of Black West African immigrant descent understand and speak back to representations of Black womanhood/girlhood and Africa. The data were analyzed in an ongoing, iterative process throughout the study, not just at the end of the data collection. Using CCA as a data analysis method helped engage in a "process whereby the data gradually evolves into a core of emerging theory" (Merriam, 1998, p. 191). I began coding the data by analyzing the data with attention to the representation of the social identities of race, gender, and ethnicity. Special attention was paid to the overlapping or intentional separation of these identities in the participants' responses. These three categories led the analysis initially and helped to identify emerging themes.

Since this research is a narrative case study, it was essential to understand the bounded case while analyzing the data (Merriam, 1998). Case study researchers are "situated on the edge of local action, and they slowly but deliberately amass information about the configuration of

time and space, of people, and activity in their physical sites" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 19). The process of data analysis requires researchers to deepen understandings of data by analyzing participants' nonverbal, verbal, and written communication and "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said" (Yin, 2014, p. 76).

Based upon Stake's (1995) suggestion, I looked for patterns that emerged from the participants' communication, behaviors, and contexts through constant analysis, reflection, and triangulation. Triangulation of student artifacts, interviews, focus groups, and field notes helped me recognize and analyze patterns emerging from the data. Saldana (2013) wrote of the following six coding methods: In Vivo, Process, Initial, Focused, Axial, and Theoretical coding. In this study, I primarily used Initial, Axial, and Theoretical coding.

Phase 1: Coding within CCA

I uploaded the semi-structured interview data, focus group data, multimodal artifacts, field notes, and researcher memos to the Atlas.ti qualitative data software. I began first by coding the semi-structured individual interviews, then the focus group interviews, and concluded by coding the multimodal artifacts. This was an intentional decision in order to note any wonderings across common data sources to explore further along during the coding process. Next, I break down the cycles of coding that I used to analyze both research questions.

The first cycle of coding, according to Saldana (2013) includes Initial Coding. Initial Coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 61). Initial Coding helped me to immerse myself in the data and make visibly clear decisions about how to proceed with coding. The Initial Coding process was precise and straightforward to develop overarching categories that drove more in-depth analysis (Charmaz, 1990). As shown in Appendix F, there were 87 Initial Codes. Some of

these codes included activism, parents, reflection piece, culture, girlhood, and express yourself. The first step was to evaluate repetitious codes. Glaser (1965) suggests reviewing each phrase for as many categories as possible to generate theoretical properties. Phrases were reviewed and assigned multiple codes if the data could be categorized in various ways. When coding, I compared each phrase with prior phrases recorded in the category. I stopped to record researcher memos while the thoughts were fresh and grounded in data (Glaser, 1965). After Initial Coding, I engaged in the second cycle of coding.

I used Axial and Theoretical Coding specifically for the second cycle. Axial Coding requires researchers to make connections between existing categories of coding by defining relationships of the codes. Axial Coding helps researchers understand the case as a coherent whole and understand contexts and conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial Coding, according to Saldana (2013), "describes a category's properties and dimensions and explores how the categories and subcategories relate to each other" (p. 209). Integrating categories and their properties was the second step in coding. As coding continued, I shifted from comparing phrases with other phrases in the same category to identifying each category's properties. This led to a deeper understanding of the category's properties. Glaser (1965) posits, "theory develops as different categories, and their properties tend to become integrated through constant comparison which forces the analyst to make some related theoretical sense of each comparison" (p. 440). Writing researcher memos as I integrated the categories helped me streamline the categories and build deeper theoretical understandings about my study.

Theoretical Coding was then used to "compare, reorganize, or focus the codes into categories" (Saldana, 2013, pp. 51-52). Theoretical Coding expands upon the relationships uncovered through Axial Coding and is the first step in moving from data to theory. Coding was

a constant process that drove the research study's direction by forcing me to stay immersed in the data and allowed the themes to emerge naturally. Determining the boundaries of the theory helped to manage the task of analyzing data. The boundaries of the theory were refined by comparing new data for logical clarity and reducing jargon. Eliminating non-relevant category properties built a "higher level, smaller set of concepts" that helped to generalize theory (Glaser, 1965, p. 441). After I engaged in coding for an extended period, I became quicker at understanding how each phrase related to other phrases. Once theoretical saturation was reached, I closely examined new phrases to determine if they should be included in data analysis. If the phrase added a new aspect to the category, then it was coded and compared to previous phrases. The final step in the coding process was developing the theoretical codes. The final theoretical codes included Misrepresentations, Confidence and Counternarratives, Collaboration and Relationship Building, Multimodal Composition, and Counternarratives and Critiques to Stereotypes of Black Girlhood and Africa.

During the coding process, I engaged in memo writing to make sense of the data. The memos reflected my thoughts as I grounded myself in data and served to capture important theoretical notions along the way. The memos provided insight into the categories, which contributed to the significant building blocks of the theory. I reflected upon the context of the stories and experiences of the girls, while also considering how my lived experiences impacted my relationship and understanding of the data. Narrative inquiry calls for researchers to make sense of isolated incidents through within the context of social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. This process was reiterated as I engaged in Initial, Axial, and Theoretical Coding to develop the categories and make sense of the data.

Credibility. To demonstrate the credibility of my coding process for data analysis, I used tables that visually depict the coding categories and properties. These tables were created and revised throughout the coding process and helped me keep track of my ideas and theoretical wanderings. An external reviewer reviewed the Axial and Theoretical codes for inter-rater reliability to confirm the validity of coding. The Theoretical Codes table can be found in Appendix H and includes a definition of each theoretical code with examples from interview excerpts, multimodal artifacts, and researcher memos or field notes.

Phase 2: Member Checking

After transcribing the pre-interviews and post-interviews, I shared copies of the transcripts with the participants. I asked the participants to review the transcripts and confirm that the transcribed data represented their words accurately. Three of the four participants responded to the request for member checking and confirmed the transcripts' accuracy. One participant did not respond to the request for member checking. I engaged in member checking with the study participants to ensure they were accurately represented within the research (Barone, 2011; Creswell, 2007).

Phase3: Triangulation

Triangulation was used to assess multiple data sources to compare result findings and ensure that data is accurately interpreted (Denzin, 2000; Patton, 1999). Using multiple data sources ensured rich, thick data collection and challenged me to interpret data from different theoretical lenses to answer the core questions. Emerging themes were identified by listening for participants' repetitive language and analyzing student artifacts for recurring motifs that described or explained their lived experiences and understandings of representations. Triangulating the data sources helped to examine the validity and clarity of emerging themes

from the research. Triangulation involved analyzing participants' interviews, focus group comments, and artifacts to zoom in on more nuanced understandings of the participants' responses.

Study Limitations

A limitation of this case study was that it was hard to draw generalizable conclusions from data collected because the case study focused on a minimal number of girls. Findings from case studies are more specific to the bounded unit due to the situation's contextual factors. This limitation is standard for qualitative research inquiries and cannot be avoided. It is essential to focus on how this study will add to the scant research surrounding the literacy experiences of girls of Black West African immigrant descent.

Because girls of Black West African immigrant descent are often invisible within academic research, it was necessary to amplify their voices and lived experiences during this research study. One limitation of narrative inquiry is that representation and voice are at stake when the research involves the crossing of socio-cultural boundaries (Montero and Washington, 2011). Another limitation of this study is that narrative inquiry is more commonly enacted with research teams, not individual students. Multiple researchers are more beneficial than individual researchers in narrative inquiry because it allows researchers to engage profoundly and remain faithful to the process (Clandinin, 2013). It could have been potentially tricky as a solo researcher to co-construct multiple narratives with multiple participants simultaneously without losing the depth and intimacy needed for the methodology. This issue was addressed by recruiting a smaller number of participants (4 girls) to ensure appropriate time management for individual interviews.

Another significant limitation of this study was the 100% virtual environment due to Covid-19. All four of the participants were also engaged in 100% virtual schooling during the school week. I was concerned about the possibility of Zoom fatigue (McWhirter, 2020; Nadler, 2020) and therefore aimed to make the sessions a mix of on-camera and off-camera synchronous work time. We began each session with cameras and kept the cameras on as we discussed the multimodal texts and writing process. I encouraged the participants to cut off their camera during individual writing time to feel a sense of autonomy and privacy as they wrote.

In conclusion, I designed a constructivist qualitative study that employed case study and narrative inquiry methodology. Two theoretical perspectives, Critical Race Feminism and Transnationalism, framed my research. The Initial, Axial, and Theoretical Codes were directly related to race, gender, and ethnicity. The phrases were examined through the lens of Critical Race Feminism to interrogate how the girls spoke and wrote about their often-interwined racial and gendered identity. The phrases were also examined through Transnationalism as the girls spoke and wrote about the permanence of their ethnic identities and the impact that had on their lived experiences.

Data was collected in the form of participant interviews, focus groups, multimodal artifacts, field notes, and researcher memos. The qualitative data gathered throughout this study was coded using Atlas.ti software. I engaged in two rounds of coding. During the first round, I used Initial Coding to make sense of the thick, rich data. I used Axial and Theoretical Coding during the second round of analysis. I made connections between existing categories of coding by defining relationships of the codes with Axial Coding. Then, I used Theoretical Coding to more clearly define the existing categories and subcategories in a reiterative process. The 87 Initial Codes that emerged after analyzing the data are listed in Appendix F. The 38 Axial and 5

Theoretical Codes are listed in Appendix G. A detailed explanation of the Theoretical codes is listed in Appendix H. In the next chapter, I will discuss the findings of the study.

4 RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the findings. In this study, the Black West African immigrant girls exhibited a nuanced understanding of how their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities were presented within media and textual representations. The participants were acutely aware of pervasive representations but did not prescribe to them. They had internalized positive self-images, which allowed them to reject damaging misrepresentations and create counternarratives. The participants used multimodal literacies to write back to these misrepresentations. The collaborative literacy group structure, coupled with multimodal writing processes, led to increased confidence as they wrote counternarratives and critiques of damaging myths.

The 10-week institute process, as described in Chapter 3, provided intriguing results. In the following sections, I explore how the participants understood racial, ethnic, and gendered stereotypes about Africa and Black girlhood and how they (re)created their identities through multimodal literacies. The participants selected pseudonyms as a means of anonymity, and those pseudonyms are used in this chapter.

Research Question 1

How do Black West African immigrant girls understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities when analyzing media and textual representations of Africa and Black girlhood?

Figure 1 below presents a visual representation of the themes for Research Question 1. The figure represents the misrepresentations that Black West African girls face and how they use confidence and counternarratives to push back against these misrepresentations. The participants were aware of the pervasiveness of negative misrepresentations of Black girlhood and Africa.

These misrepresentations led to experiences with micro incidents of stereotypes, colorism, and bullying. These stereotypes also contributed to macro experiences with a lack of media representation and had negative political implications. Interview data, focus group data, and workshop transcripts were analyzed to answer Research Question 1.

RQ 1: How do Black West African immigrants understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities when analyzing media and textual representations of Africa and Black girlhood?

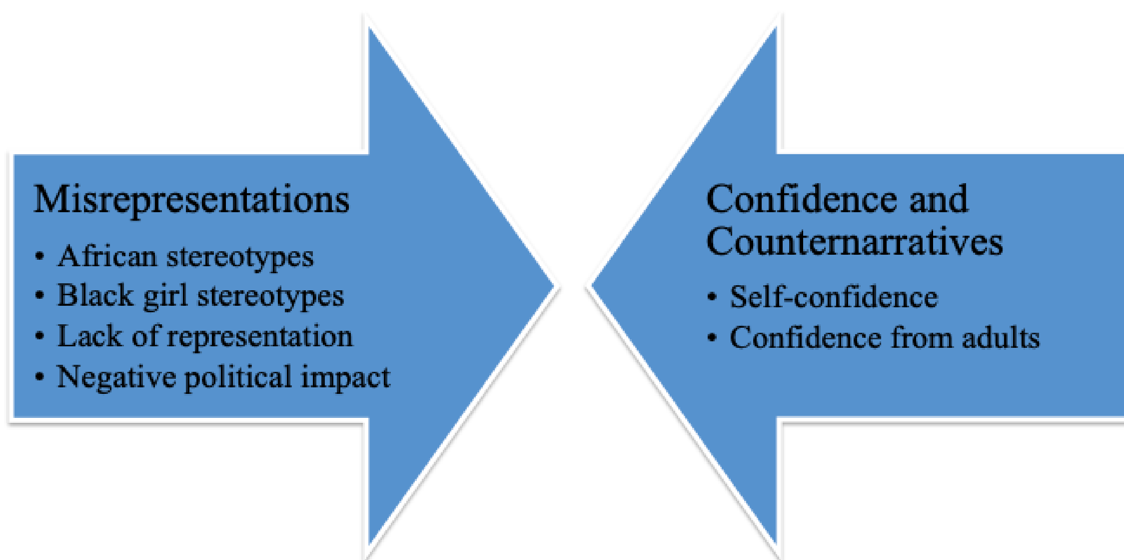

Figure 1: Findings for Research Question 1

Misrepresentations

The participants in this study spoke openly and often about the impact of misrepresentations on their lived experiences as youth. They discussed the impact of stereotypes about Africa and how those stereotypes lead to them experiencing bullying. They also discussed the impact of stereotypes about Black girls and their experiences with colorism. Stereotypes also had a significant impact on the lack of positive representation of Black girls in the media. Politicians also weaponize stereotypes, which leads to a negative political impact on Black people in the media.

African Stereotypes

All of the participants were 2nd generation Americans, born in the United States to West African immigrant parents. Their parents moved to the U.S. as a youth (1.5 generation) or adults (1st generation). Their identities were uniquely African and American as they navigated West African culture in their homes and Black American and White culture in their school settings. The participants spoke extensively about how African stereotypes were a part of their school experience with peers.

Bullying and Isolation at School. During the first focus group, all of the participants referenced their school peers, who often referred to Africa as a "poor," "dirty," under-resourced, and disease-stricken (Ebola) continent. They shared that their peers believed that Africa lacked water, food, and shelter. In addition to these misrepresentations, their school peers connected the misrepresentations of poverty to a lack of knowledge and success for African people in the United States. In Zaire's first interview, she discussed that her peers at school referred to Africans as "poor, can't read, never went to school, and dirty." Throughout the interviews and focus groups, all four of the participants referenced personal experiences with their peers using the slur "African booty scratcher" as a taunt towards them or their family members.

In Interview #1, Zaire interpreted her peers' negative beliefs about Africa and Africans directly compared to the United States. She stated, "Americans feel as though Africa doesn't have the new things they have, like technology." These misrepresentations of Africa and Africans greatly impacted her interactions with her peers, and she experienced bullying at school due to her mother's accent. In Interview #2, she recounted peers saying, "she can't talk right, she can't pronounce any words." Zaire responded to these criticisms by stating that she clearly understood her mother's accent and therefore did not internalize these comments.

Sienna's school experiences also reflected the impact of negative African stereotypes. In Interview #1, she believed that most of her peers believed "Africa is struggling right now." Once her peers found out her parents were West African immigrants, they made assumptions about her lived experiences:

> Well, when people first find out that you're from African descendants or your parents are African from Africa, they assume that you're not a citizen of the United States, and then they'd always ask you weird questions like, "What is it like in Africa?", "What did you do when you were born in Africa?" and I wasn't born in Africa, and I haven't been there before, so I don't know how to answer those questions.

Her classmates questioned her about life in Africa, even though she was born in the United States and had not yet traveled to West Africa. In addition to these assumptions, Sienna also experienced bullying in elementary school during the Ebola pandemic. In Interview #1, she recounted that her peers would be afraid to tag her in playground games because she was African, and they erroneously assumed they could catch Ebola from touching a person of West African descent.

During the literacy institute, Kayden referenced generalized comments made by her peers about colorism, specifically disparaging comments about darker-skinned Africans. Although Kayden has medium Brown skin, she understood that those comments were demeaning to all Black African immigrants, regardless of their skin color. During Interview #2, she spoke of the negative impact these comments had on her identity as a younger child by saying,

> I used to not talk about my identity because in elementary school, in the beginning, during middle school, it was when everybody was just talking about how... They were just joking around about being African, and they were just making all these stereotypes

> that Africans were all dark and that they all sounded the same and looked the same, so I didn't really talk about it because I don't want people to start talking about me, because at that point I didn't know anybody, so I was kind of a new person, but now, I'm not afraid to talk about my identity because I'm proud of it and it's me.

This quote illustrates the impact that negative African stereotypes had on Kayden as a younger adolescent as she navigated building relationships with her peers. She contemplated hiding parts of her African identity to better fit in with her peers at school. As she grew older, she became less afraid to talk about her identity and expressed pride in her African identity.

Alaya, the youngest participant in the study, also experienced negative African stereotypes with her peers. During Interview #1, Alaya recalled introducing herself to her class during a get to know you activity and sharing aspects of her ethnicity:

> When I was in fourth grade, we had to introduce ourselves, and I was introducing myself, and I said that my family was African, and we came from a small part of Africa. And then, this boy, he was like, "Oh, my gosh. She's an African booty scratcher." And I guess that kind of made me feel sad because it was kind of mean, and I didn't really like that people were saying that. And then, people started saying that.

Alaya's bullying experience does not include any reference to how her teacher responded to this behavior during a class-sanctioned activity. When her Black American peers used the slur 'African booty scratcher,' it reinforced the perceived cultural difference between Black American and Black African youth. In addition to her localized experiences with African stereotypes and bullying, Alaya discussed during Focus Group #1 that she also viewed bullying on Instagram when people wrote on African immigrant influencers' comments to "go back to their own country" or "go to another country." The incident above is an isolated example of

xenophobic language perpetuated by negative stereotypes and immigrants' misrepresentations in the United States.

Negative stereotypes and misrepresentations of Africa impacted the participants' experiences with their peers. They highlighted how they were perceived as different from their peers due to their ethnic origins. The participants were acutely aware at an early age of how they were ostracized in some social settings due to their African background.

Black Girl Stereotypes

The participants in this study also articulated the complex understandings of their racialized gendered identities amid negative myths about Blackness and Black girlhood. Their commentary ranged from discussion of physical and personality stereotypes to the lack of representation of Black show writers for adolescent networks and how stereotypes impact Black people's lived experience and physical safety. The youth understood the magnification of Black stereotypes in media representations. Sienna declared in her writing sample on her study application, "Some people judge you for your color before getting to know you." Similarly, Alaya noted in Interview #1, "I mean not all people but some people, they like to give negative names, and they say negative stuff about us. Sometimes they will even be rude." It is clear that the participants understood the weight and pervasiveness of harmful myths and controlling tropes about Blackness within their lived experiences.

Sienna spoke about the common stereotype that Black people do not and cannot swim during Focus Group #2. While Sienna did not reference the racialized history of segregation within this particular interview, which included swimming pools, in the late 19th and early 20th century, Zaire made connections to the historical relevance of stereotypes. Zaire spoke to this

understanding in Interview #1 by connecting Black people's experiences in the United States to historical tropes promoted by enslavement and Jim Crow.

Maima: How do you think black women and girls are portrayed in society?

Zaire: Ghetto, loud, and rowdy.

Maima: Do you think that they're portrayed like that in music, TV, the Internet, all those types of places too?

Zaire: Yes, it's everywhere you look, including social media sometimes.

Maima: Why do you think these representations exist?

Zaire: I think they exist from slavery, and sometimes how black women carry themselves sometimes on reality television. You know like fighting and acting ghetto. So people think of that, the stereotype. They think of all Black women to be like that, but not all Black women are like that.

The participants realized that there were several negative stereotypes about Black peoples' intelligence. Zaire's analysis of the impact of reality television presents an interesting perspective into her understanding of the power of representation. Because of the pervasiveness of negative images of Black women in the media, misrepresentations and stereotypical tropes of Black women as aggressive and sassy are further promoted through the media we consume. These misrepresentations have a direct impact on how Black women and girls on television are viewed by Black women and girls, in addition to other people. Sienna shared in Interview #1, "Some people think that you're not smart, so you have to work harder to show them that you can

do stuff that other people can do." Alaya expressed in Focus Group #2 that many people may believe that Black people are "weak-minded and not important." In building and maintaining relationships, the participants vocalized many negative stereotypes they have heard or seen related to that topic. For example, Alaya declared in Focus Group #1 that many people assume Black girls are sassy, while Kayden added on to that assumption with the myth that Black girls are also described as mean and bossy. During Focus Group #1, Sienna and Zaire also built upon that idea of Black girls being depicted as sassy and mean in the media, with the juxtaposition of Black people, specifically Black women, described as verbally and physically fighting in the media. The stereotypes of Black women and girls being sassy and mean were reinforced by multiple media representations of Black women engaging in physically or verbally violent behavior. The participants wrote counternarratives to this stereotype and emphasized the importance of relationship building and collaboration through their multimodal artifacts, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Lack of Representation in Media

A stereotype about Black peoples' physical characteristics and a hyper-focus on skin color was a common theme. All participants spoke candidly about how their skin color and hair texture was often not valued or celebrated within popular culture and sometimes within their school communities. Kayden expressed in Interview #1 that lighter-skinned women get praised more and darker women get looked down on and talked about "as dirty and ugly." Alaya also declared during a literacy workshop conversation after reading *Sulwe* that "lighter-skinned is more often seen as beautiful" in popular culture.

Sienna was keenly aware of how a lack of representation in creative content impacted Black girls' representation in media. Sienna spoke passionately about her interests in Disney

sitcoms and the Broadway play *Hamilton* throughout the institute during Interview #1. When asked if her favorite shows presented positive representations of Black girls, she reflected on the inclusion of stereotypical tropes:

> I was watching "Sofia the First," and then I realized there weren't very many Black people in that show. Yeah, there's like one person. And then they showed her as poor. I think it's because of the writers because there are barely any African and Black writers on the show. They're all white. When we finally saw a Black person, they made her seem to be overly interested in becoming the best and stuff like that and giving into stereotypes.

Sienna's observation of the limited portrayal of the singular Black girl character on Sofia the First highlighted her awareness of how Black girls are often left out of mainstream media representations. She also spoke candidly about the need for more diverse and inclusive show writers to push past single stories of what it means to be a Black girl. While the limited representation of Black girls did not keep Sienna from watching and enjoying Sofia the First, she made it clear that she did not feel represented within this popular culture text. Sienna's critical commentary about this popular culture text illustrates her nuanced understanding of her identity as a Black girl amid misrepresentations and underrepresentation of Black girls in popular culture.

Political Impact of Stereotypes

Kayden theorized about how police officers viewed Black bodies and how their view of Black people led to dangerous situations and oppression for Black people. She stated during Interview #1,

> I know that other people that are not our color, like White people, and some other ethnicities, they oppress Black people and harass them just because of the color of their

> skin. And I do not think that's right. And it's happened a lot, coming from White police officers. They were just harassing people. They even killed some people that were Black just because of the color of their skin. They all have this stereotype in their mind that all Black people are bad. All Black people are loud and they steal and all that stuff, and that's not true. And they just make assumptions without actually knowing just because of our color.

Kayden also expressed a deep interest in the 2020 presidential election and understood how myths about Black people impacted public narratives. Kayden was acutely aware of how Donald Trump characterized Black people protesting as criminal activity, whereas he promoted white people protesting as their civic duty. In her opinion, Trump's political rhetoric reinforced negative and erroneous stereotypes of Black people expressing their civic duty to protest. She spoke candidly about the presidential election during Focus Group #2 and surmised,

> I think it was earlier in the election thing, when the rioting and stuff that was going on, and Trump, he referred to Black people as thugs and thieves and all that stuff. When he was talking about white people, he talked about them as protectors, and good people trying to make a change and all that stuff.

These excerpts demonstrate how Kayden connected the permanence of negative Black stereotypes in media to the tangible mistreatment and misrepresentation of Black people. Her awareness of these controlling tropes and their impact on the lived experiences of Black people provide insight into how she understood her racialized identity as a Black girl.

The participants had a profound awareness of how racial, ethnic, and gendered stereotypes shaped how others saw and interacted with them. The girls navigated misrepresentations and bullying fueled by stereotypes in their daily lives. They also analyzed

how harmful myths led to a lack of positive representation of Blackness and Africa in the media. Politicians and law enforcement weaponized these incomplete representations and perpetuated the oppression of marginalized groups. The participants responded to these stereotypes by maintaining positive self-identities and sought support from trusted adults and peers in their community.

Confidence

The participants were fully aware of Black girlhood and Africa's negative misrepresentations perpetuated by limited representations. However, the participants did not internalize those harmful myths, nor did they use the negative stereotypes to describe themselves. Alaya, Kayden, Sienna, and Zaire expressed strong confidence in their self-identities. They expressed a strong sense of self-awareness about how their racial, gender, and ethnic identities intersected and interplayed with their daily lives.

Self-confidence in Their Racial and Gender Identities

During Interview #1, Zaire discussed how gender impacted her lived experiences when she shared,

> [Gender] shapes challenges and women don't have the same rights and opportunities as men. They look at you as smaller that you can't do what men can ... I mean, that's what they think, but in reality, you really can do anything.

This quote illustrates Zaire's understanding of girlhood deficit perceptions while pushing back against this deficit view. She described herself as outgoing, strong, and meaningful. Zaire believed that girls could achieve goals, regardless of how others viewed the capabilities of girls.

Similarly, Alaya spoke about her belief and refusal to internalize negative stereotypes about Black African girls. She described Black girls as sophisticated and classy during Focus Group #1. She elaborated during Focus Group #1 and encouraged other girls to resist identifying with these damaging myths by explaining,

> It means that you kind of have to prove to others that the stereotypes that they put on you are not true and that you can be more than what they think that you have in you. You can do more.

Alaya did not internalize negative stereotypes about her identity and described herself as kind, patient, and good at art during Interview #1. She believed in her abilities to overcome challenges. Sienna also spoke candidly about her direct approach to building a positive self-identity and described herself as happy, determined, laid back, and smart during Interview #1. At the conclusion of the study during Focus Group #2, Sienna said she made a conscious decision to focus on “how I see myself instead of how other people see me."

Similarly, Kayden spoke extensively during Interview #1 about how she understood and overcame negative stereotypes by saying:

> Being a Black African girl means a lot of people will try to put you down and tell you that you can’t do this or that, but that’s just more of a reason to do what you know you can and more.

Her quote illustrates her resilient nature and ability to overcome low expectations and incomplete representations. She delved further into this belief during Focus Group #2 by stating,

> I feel like what it means to be a Black African girl is you have to learn that everybody's not going to empower you. Some people are going to be against you and that's okay because it's not for everybody. You have to realize at the end of the day, you're your own

> person and you can really do whatever you want to do and prove whatever you want to people.

She did not look to her peers or teachers for social approval and felt empowered to achieve any goal that she set out to accomplish. Kayden described herself as funny, friendly, and creative during Interview #1. She also explained during Interview #2 that a multi-ethnic, multiracial literacy group similar to this study would allow other people to share “how they get through stereotypes placed on their group and how they embrace them." In Focus Group #2, Kayden believed it was important for people to “embrace their culture, not the stereotypes." Her nuanced understanding of stereotypes as a limited representation of a group of people, whether she was an insider or outsider in the group, reflected her highly developed resiliency and confidence throughout the study.

Self-confidence in Their Ethnic Identity

Counternarratives about Africa helped the girls to develop confidence in their ethnic identities. Sienna referred to the multifaceted African experience, which contrasts the myth that Africa is a monolithic continent. She noted during Interview #1, “not everywhere in Africa is struggling; there are places like Egypt, South Africa, and Ghana that are booming." Sienna called to attention the variety of experiences of Africans in Africa and across the United States. Alaya highlighted the creative contributions of Africans, such as Afrobeats music, art, and dance forms during Interview #1. During Interview #1, Alaya also shared she felt Africans were negatively portrayed in American media and that American people used their lived experiences to belittle by “judging the way [Africans] do things and the way they do different stuff than they do." Alaya reflected on how detrimental a Euro American viewpoint can be when considering other cultures’ traditions and experiences.

Kayden spoke extensively about her experiences being bullied due to her African identity. She recalled during Interview #1 feeling “ashamed and embarrassed of being African” in elementary school because of the taunting. Negative stereotypes about Africa impacted the way that her peers treated her at school. Kayden began to develop a more positive ethnic identity in middle school and shared during Focus Group #1 she “realized that Black and African is who I am, and I can’t change anything about it, so I choose to love it." Kayden’s reflection elucidates the personal growth that she engaged in as she matured to become more confident about her African identity amid negative interactions with her peers.

Although Zaire experienced bullying and name-calling due to her African identity, she rejected her peers’ negative comments about her mom’s accent. She reported during Interview #1, “It didn't really faze me because my mom could talk right to me. Just because you can't understand her doesn't mean I can't understand her.” Zaire embraced her mother’s accent and did not internalize negative beliefs about her African identity. She shared during Focus Group #2 her belief that African parents were “hardworking, persistent, and would stay on you to get the stuff that you need to get done. They're hard-working, and a lot of good things come out of being hard-working." Zaire developed a positive self-identity and viewed her West African identity as an asset, not a deficit. The participants expressed deeply embedded positive beliefs about themselves, which serve as counternarratives to negative stereotypes about Black girlhood and Africa.

Peer Interactions

The participants spoke a lot about how their American peers reinforced negative stereotypes about Africa, through bullying and slurs such as ‘African booty scratcher’ throughout the individual interviews and focus group interviews. They did not talk extensively about their

American peers supporting misrepresentations about Black girlhood. Interestingly, the participants were aware that many of their Black American peers struggled to develop positive self-identity amid negative stereotypes. Sienna spoke explicitly about her Black girl peers during Interview #2,

> Well, I think some Black girls this age, they struggle with self-confidence, because you either have the girl who's really self-confident, like the middle ground, or then you have someone who has no confidence or whatever.

Sienna was mindful of her peers' struggles to develop self-confidence. Kayden revealed her understanding of the need for more spaces for Black girls to develop positive self-identity through shared learning during Interview #2. She wanted to create a youth group specifically for this need at her after school program,

> I saw a lot of the younger girls doing things that I wouldn't do at their age, but things that were a little, I guess, mature for their age. So, I just wanted to start a club and talk to them about how that stuff can affect you based on me and my friends' experience.

Kayden realized that she could be a change agent within her peer group and create a safe space for younger Black girls. She had prior experience working with other Black girls in two different clubs focused on social change and developed positive relationships through this club. She shared these experiences during Focus Group #2,

> At my old school, we had this club. It's called Young Ranger Station, and it was like the Girl Scouts. We learned cooking but we also made fundraisers for different things. I got to work with other Black girls and we were the highest fundraisers in the school. We were mainly in charge of most of the stuff we planned, and we planned a lot, and we got closer through that. I made good friends through that. So, that was quite an experience

> because there were other Black girls and we were just helping plan stuff to help our school be better…One of my favorite clubs that happened at my after school program was run by this girl, she came in, she was just all about confidence and we were writing... We made baskets for girls who were in the orphanage, I think, but they wouldn't let us go in. But, we just dropped them off. And, we made cards for them. Just inspiring cards, telling them how they can be courageous and how they can get through whatever they're going through and that they're loved.

It is evident from Kayden's reflections that there are several benefits to creating spaces for Black girls to come together with each other and Black women. She spoke about building relationships, developing positive self-identity, and helping other youth. The participants in this study made a direct connection to their positive self-images and the impact of their relationships with trusted adults in their lives.

Confidence from the Adults in Their Lives

The participants explored the impact and importance of relationships with adults in their lives. Their parents and family members were identified as significant influences in all of the girls' lives. The support and influence of their parents was a direct contrast to how the participants viewed their teachers. Other adults, such as afterschool teachers, were also identified as positive supports.

Parents

The participants spoke fondly of their parents and had positive, loving relationships with them. All of the participants lived in two-parent households with their siblings. All of the participants' parents identified as 1st generation or 1.5 generation Africans and were married. None of the participants were only children. Sienna and Kayden were the oldest of three

daughters. Alaya was the middle child in a family of three daughters. Zaire was the only daughter in her household and had one sibling, a younger brother.

The participants portrayed well-developed self-images and were confident in their identities. Alaya mentioned during Interview #2 her parents have always told her, “you are beautiful just the way you are and you don’t have to change anything. We love you and you’re unique in your own way." Zaire had a nuanced understanding of how her upbringing and home culture differed from her Black American peers because of her ethnic identity. She expressed during Interview #1,

> I want people to know how it's like growing up with African parents. Like, when you see how people raise their kids in America it’s different, because when you have African parents, they're harder, strict on you to do better than what they did because Africa is a hard place for some people to grow up in.

She understood that her parents had high expectations for her and ultimately wanted her to be successful, as she grew older. She attributed the differences in upbringing to her parents’ experiences growing up in West Africa, which was starkly different than her current environment and experiences in the United States.

Kayden and Sienna both shared how their parents promoted a strong family bond with their extended family members. Sienna spoke about her mother’s close relationships with her sisters (Sienna’s aunts) and how she spent a lot of time with her aunts during Interview #2. In talking about her aunts, she said:

> My aunts always check in on me. They ask me how I’m doing. My mom wants me to have the same kinda closeness with my sisters. My mom makes time for us to do sister activities for fun, like we do a movie night together when it’s time to braid our hair.

Sienna has experienced positive relationship building with her parents and her aunts. She shared happy memories of the time spent as a family braiding their natural hair, promoting a healthy hair identity.

Kayden spoke candidly about her relationship with her parents and extended family. Kayden shared that she did not use to eat traditional Liberian food often, even though it was cooked at home. Her parents continued to offer it to her but did not force her to eat it. She shared during Focus Group #2 that this led to a shift,

> I really didn't start eating Liberian food until a few years ago, when me and my cousins, we used to always buy palm butter from the lady who sells in our church. I don't know, I just started eating it from then. Because, before I hadn't really liked it... I wouldn't say I didn't like it, but I wasn't really proud of saying that I like the foods that were Liberian. So, it was kind of like, I was normalizing only eating American food or only showing off that I eat American food. But, now that I know that it's like... Nobody really cares about whether you like it or not, because it's your choice to like it. Now I help my parents when they cook it at home.

Kayden grew to appreciate Liberian food and consequently developed more confidence in her West African Liberian identity. Before, she didn’t feel proud about eating cultural foods and wanted to hide that aspect of herself.

The girls’ parents helped foster positive self-identity and confidence through conversations about their ethnic cultures, interconnected and loving familial relationships, and reaffirming messages about their unique identities as Black West African immigrant girls. These factors helped the girls present confidence in the face of stereotypes and misrepresentations they experienced outside of their home.

Adults outside of their families

Adults at school seemed to play a large role in the daily lives of the participants. School was a critical component of the girls' experiences in understanding their racial, ethnic, and gender identities. While school was vital to their personal and academic development, the girls did not describe their teachers as influencers of their identities. The participants did explore the challenges of building relationships with their teachers and introducing their ethnic culture to their classes. Conversely, positive relationships with adults during afterschool programs helped to bolster Kayden's confidence in particular and she referenced their influence often throughout her interviews.

School Faculty

Kayden, Alaya, and Sienna shared narratives about how their teachers struggled to pronounce their names during their second individual interviews. Kayden, who was a ninth-grader at the time of the study, shared that she did not use to correct her teachers when they mispronounced her name in elementary and early middle school. She recounted during Interview #2,

> I gave up before, but now I'm more vocal about it. So this year, most of my teachers learned my name. My biology teacher, I still correct her a lot, though. But she is trying.

After years of enduring teachers mispronouncing her name, Kayden chose to advocate for herself by speaking up to her teachers and, ultimately, teaching them how to pronounce her name correctly. Sienna stated during Focus Group #2 that some of her teachers "did not care to try or learn how to pronounce your name." This perceived indifference towards learning her name led her to a more complicated relationship building with some of her teachers. Sienna vocalized during Interview #2 that the teacher-student relationship building began with learning students'

names and felt “some teachers want to talk to you, but most teachers are just like ‘you’re in my class to learn and that’s it." The discussion around their teachers learning how to say their names correctly is a bare minimum expectation when thinking about relationship building, even amongst adults. It is clear that Kayden and Sienna valued the idea of building relationships with all of their teachers, but there did not seem to be a mutual interest conveyed by the teachers who struggled to learn how to pronounce their names.

Zaire and Alaya both recounted incidences of being called African booty scratchers by their peers during teacher-sanctioned introductory activities. Zaire thought back to fourth grade during Focus Group #1,

> Someone called me an African booty scratcher, because I said I was from Africa, that my parents were from Africa and all of that. I guess from fourth grade to sixth grade, I was not ashamed but embarrassed of being African.

What is interesting about this account is that Zaire does not remember what her teacher did during this incident. Similarly, Alaya shared during Focus Group #1, she also dealt with her peers calling her African booty scratcher during an introduction activity that required her to speak in front of class. She also did not mention what, if any, reaction her teacher had to the bullying she experienced. I call attention to the lack of discussion surrounding their teachers’ responses to their bullying because it is compelling to consider how their teachers did not speak in these moments.

Kayden recalled positive experiences with her elementary school librarian, who affirmed her interest and skill with literacy. She expressed her love of reading early and used to frequent her school library. She reflected during Interview #1, stating,

> I like to read a lot and, I guess, at a point of my life, I was reading very big vocabulary words. The librarians were like, oh, my gosh. You're reading on a high school level in elementary school.

Kayden's memory of this event illustrates the transformative power of positive adult relationships and feedback to youth as they develop their literate identities. Kayden did not talk about how her teachers or librarians contributed to her love of reading, but, significantly, she remembers being praised for her reading skills at a young age.

Adults in afterschool programs

In contrast to the teacher-student interactions (or lack thereof) presented in the previous section, Kayden discussed her experiences with her after school club leaders. Although she ended up having to leave her after school club of five years due to a change in zoning when she went to ninth grade, her after school club's experiences greatly increased her confidence. Kayden recalled during Interview #2,

> At one point, the leader of Boys and Girls Club wanted me to start a club for younger girls, but I didn't really stay long enough to get to do that, because we were still in the planning section. I was planning on what we would do and all that stuff. But, by that time we could start, it was time for me to go to a different club since I was going to a different school.

Her after school leaders believed that she had the will, skill, and capacity to be a leader for younger girls. Kayden referenced her experiences at the after-school club on multiple occasions during the study, and it is evident that her peers and adult leaders helped to increase her positive identity. The participants paid particular attention to the ways adults within their schools and after school programs interacted with them, whether positive or negative. Moreover, the

participants were aware of these adults' beliefs about their literacy and leadership skills within these spaces.

Conclusion for Research Question 1

In conclusion, this study participants understood the impact of racial, ethnic, and gender stereotypes on their lived experiences. These misrepresentations, fueled by stereotypes led to the participants' heightened experiences with colorism and bullying. These negative stereotypes also perpetuated a lack of complete representations in the media, which had a tangible political and social impact on Black people's lives in the United States. The girls developed self-confidence and counternarratives to speak back to these misrepresentations. It increased their capacity to evaluate how they could support their peers in developing positive self-identities. Their self-confidence was fostered through positive relationships with trusted adults, especially their parents and family members.

Research Question 2

How do Black West African immigrant girls (re)create their identities through multimodal literacies?

Figure 2 below presents a visual representation of the findings for Research Question 2. The participants engaged in collaboration and relationship building, employed multimodal composition tools and techniques, and developed counternarratives and critiques of stereotypes to (re)create their identities within this study. I analyzed interview data, focus group data, and their multimodal artifacts.

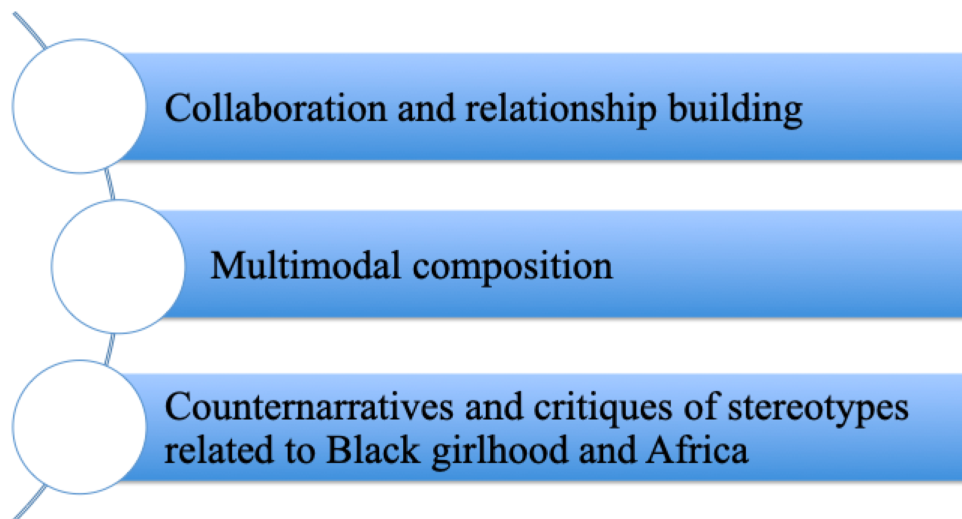

Figure 2: Findings for Research Question 2

Collaboration and Community: Relationship Building

The participants worked collaboratively before, during, and after the literacy activities resulting in the girls building relationships with each other during the study. As their relationships developed, the girls understood how they were similar and different to the other girls in the literacy group. Each literacy workshop began with a connecting circle where the participants and I engaged in icebreakers and discussion prompts to learn more about each other and check in on each other's week. After our connecting circle, the mini-lessons for genre and historical context occurred. As we read the mentor texts, we engaged in shared and individual reading, watched audiovisual representations of the texts, and held discussions about text. During the writing process, participants were encouraged to seek feedback from myself and the other girls as needed. We ended each literacy workshop with a sharing of the texts we wrote. Participants were given the option to share a snippet or their entire text.

Sharing a common identity of being a Black African immigrant girl provided ample opportunity for the girls to share their lived experiences in a space where they would not be questioned or bullied. Zaire shared in Interview #1,

> It's fun and it's good to know that people with Black African parents are kinda the same and they teach some of the same things to their daughters. We had more things to relate on, and I feel like there's not a lot of people that can relate to what goes on as a Black African girl.

Zaire delves further into the power of relationships in her open letter at the end of the workshop. She used Google Slides to compose her open letter. On the right side of the slide, the text of her open letter appears. On the left side of the slide, she inserted an image. She juxtaposed an image of Black women holding hands with crowns on their heads. The header on the photo was Sisterhood of Queens. She told me she found the image after writing her open letter. She googled the words "sister circle" and immediately connected with the image because it represented the sentiments of her poem. I have included a screenshot of her Google slide below.

My name is Zoey which means life in the Greek culture.

I am happy and determined.

I bring life to every room I enter

My spirit is infectious

Named after my grandmother, a strong woman

Who made a strong woman, who made me

I wouldn't change who I am for anyone.

I am a excellent black girl, nobody can take that away from me.

I am surrounded by sisters and friends who hold me up when I am down.

Our bond is unbreakable, our circle can not be weakened.

We carry our joy through our struggles together, we are the bright spots on our worst days.

When I look at my sisters in this group, I think of how they've lifted my spirits. This type of energy is what we all need - a space, a place for love, positivity, and good vibes all around.

Figure 3: Zaire's Open Letter

Zaire wrote about the importance of friendships with other girls at the end of her open letter. At the end of her letter, she writes,

> I am surrounded by sisters and friends who hold me up when I am down.
>
> Our bond is unbreakable, our circle can not be weakened.
>
> We carry our joy through our struggles together, we are the bright spots on our worst days.
>
> When I look at my sisters in this group, I think of how they've lifted my spirits.
>
> This type of energy is what we all need – a space, a place for love, positivity and good vibes all around.

Zaire describes the bond that she feels with her sisters and friends as "unbreakable" and "can not be weakened". She juxtaposes her ability to celebrate and struggle alongside other girls when she says, "We carry our joy through our struggles together, we are the bright spots on our worst days". Zaire goes on to describe how the literacy group has "lifted [her] spirits", which illustrates

the relationships and bonding that occurred throughout the workshops. She described the literacy workshop as a “space, a place for love, positivity and good vibes around” and felt everyone could benefit from this type of collaboration and relationship building.

Similarly, Kayden reflected on her experiences in the literacy workshop during Interview #2. When I asked her to reflect on what it was like to work with other girls of Black West African immigrant descent, Kayden responded,

> It was good because I could get to know other people who are like me and get their opinion on how they feel about being of West African descent. Because, that's what we all are. It was interesting to see how the others look at the world and how they think.

In her open letter penned via Google Docs, Kayden explored her identity as a Black Liberian girl. She speaks from a historical lens, acknowledging the power and presence of her ancestors as an influence in her life. She also explores public perceptions of Black girls and her lived experiences as a Black girl. Kayden spoke about her friendship with other Black girls in the second section of her open letter,

> Some people think Black girls are mean and petty. That’s not true. We are friendly and we look out for each other. We write together, draw together, sing together and love to make each other laugh. We make lemonade out of lemons. When people hate on us, we prove them wrong.
>
> Don’t believe the lies - Black girls are leaders and trendsetters. Instead of ignoring us, listen to us. Learn from us. Celebrate us!

Kayden described Black girls as “friendly” and communal as they “look out for each other” in her letter. She named some of the activities she has engaged in with other Black girls such as writing, drawing, singing, and laughing. Throughout the workshop, the participants wrote

together every week. Kayden uses the word ‘us’ to reify her shared identity as a Black girl when she talks about negative interactions Black girls may have with others who devalue their identities.

During weeks 4-5 of the literacy workshop, the creative writing task required the participants to write collaboratively as a pair. While both pairs talked about the collaborative writing process in follow up interviews, Zaire and Kayden’s writing artifact directly references relationship building and conflict resolution explicitly. In their narrative from father to daughter, they describe how they envision their fathers speaking to them,

> This is how to give someone space when you need to cool off. This is how to resolve problems without violence. This is how you build good relationships with family and friends for the future.

Kayden and Zaire both acknowledged the importance of conflict resolution and building strong relationships with friends and family. They connected their strong relationships with their fathers to their ability to work well with others, knowing when to “give someone space to cool off” and “how to resolve problems without violence”. Kayden and Zaire’s shared belief in the power of problem solving and conflict resolution underscore their emphasis on the power of relationship building throughout their other writings.

Alaya and Sienna were also partnered for the creative writing task during Weeks 4-5. They both expressed appreciation for a space where they could work closely with other Black African immigrant girls. Alaya shared during Interview #2 that the literacy workshop was beneficial because she could “express feelings in front of people that have the same problems with you." Sienna connected the group’s shared identity of increased comfort with collaborative work during Focus Group #2, stating,

> When you're writing with other people it can be really awkward, but when you're working with people who share the same background as you, it becomes less awkward.

All of the participants named discussed the benefits of communing with other Black African immigrant girls who shared similar life experiences.

Although the girls relished their shared experiences, they also realized that they could learn a lot from each other's different perspectives. Zaire enjoyed the partner writing activities and shared during Interview #2 she learned "different opinions from two sides and new ideas to help her gain more knowledge." During Focus Group #2, Alaya discussed her enjoyment of the partner writing stating it pushed her to "work together to write in someone else's perspective." Sienna and Kayden appreciated reading and viewing the other participants' multimodal compositions. During Interview #1 prior to the workshops beginning, Sienna noted she looked forward to reading "other people's perspectives". During Interview #2, Kayden felt their compositions pushed her writing and "made [her] think of stuff that [she] wouldn't have thought of, if [she] were just writing by [her]self." The participants made the most of their opportunity to work together in this collaborative literacy group by making sense of how they were similar and unique.

Multimodal Composition

The participants engaged in multimodal composition throughout the study, including poems, open letters, videos, photo collages, and drawings. The mentor texts were presented through audio and visual representations. After engaging with the mentor texts through close reading, the participants and I engaged in collaborative discussions. During these discussions, I explored the genre's concepts and facilitated critical conversations about the text's content with

the girls. The girls then worked independently or collaboratively on their multimodal compositions. The girls used digital apps such as Funimate, Animoto, Flipgrid, and Google Docs to create their multimodal compositions. The participants spoke extensively about their multimodal processes during the interviews, focus groups, and literacy workshops. Their reflections on multimodal composition are explored within this section.

Visual arts and photo integration. Alaya infused several visual art representations within her multimodal compositions. She incorporated visual art drawings for her application piece, in addition to her Black girl poster. She is a skilled visual artist and wrote in her open letter, “I tell a story with my art - stories about how I overcame negativity." She described her process for drawing her Black girl beauty poster in-depth and noted, “ I was thinking that a little girl having her natural hair out would be good to show and thought of an idea that I would do for my painting."

Figure 4: Alaya’s Visual Art Drawing Examples

Alaya thought critically about each artistic decision she made during the study. The inclusion of digital texts and composition tools provided more options for engagement. She also preferred viewing the audiovisual versions of the texts,

> I think that it was a good thing to watch a YouTube video of the stories, because sometimes the stories didn't like …, I mean, they did matter, but they weren't as powerful as the videos.

Using digital tools allowed for greater flexibility in design, process, and engagement for the participants. The use of photos juxtaposed with texts provided more insight into how they understood their racial, gender, and ethnic identities. Kayden reflected during Interview #2,

> My Animoto video showed who I am because, all the pictures, there was something that I either really liked or that was very common in my life. So, I feel like if you look at those pictures, then you get kind of like a better feel of what I like, food wise, and that my family means a lot to me. So, I feel like the pictures that I put in there, they were all stuff that I liked. It wasn't talking about what anybody else liked, but me.

Similarly, Alaya said during Interview #2 she enjoyed Animoto because she wrote her poem, "while picking designs and putting all these pictures to make it more fun and stuff." Sienna described her process of selecting photos for her Animoto video during Interview #2. She outlined her composition process by

> thinking carefully about what I wanted to add to my poem, and then find a way to write it down and write it out. Then after I found the pictures, I had to add the pictures that I wanted to go with it and match them to show what I really meant in my poem.

She also critiqued the process for uploading into Animoto and noted it was her least favorite part of the literacy workshops,

> Animoto, I felt like that website was hard, because you had to download pictures to your computer. I don't have pictures on my computer. I had to email them from my phone to my email. Then we downloaded it to Animoto, then we put it on the slides, then we submit it in to you.

She felt the picture uploading process of Animoto was clunky and slowed her down. Consequently, Kayden and Sienna used Funimate for the Black girl beauty photo collages/posters because they were experts with this app and it felt more user-friendly. Sienna's feedback about Animoto was helpful to consider for future weeks of the workshop because it highlighted a distinct difference between computer-based apps and phone-based apps. Phone-based apps were easier for the participants to include pictures because they were more likely to have photos saved on their phones. The Funimate app was new to me, but served the girls' aesthetic and creative purposes. Using apps that were more familiar to the participants' increased their creativity and led to more detailed and nuanced compositions.

Below, I have included still shots of Sienna's Funimate video collage. She collaged over 20 photos of influential Black women who she sees as role models, juxtaposed with photos of herself with the song, "Scars to You're Beautiful" by Alessia Cara. The video began with the lyrics, "You should know you're beautiful just the way you are. And you don't have to change a thing, the world could change its heart." Sienna reflected during Interview #2 that the lyrics were a "good message for Black girls everywhere" because "we need to see positive role models of black girls right now, instead of the negative ones."

Figure 5: Sienna's Funimate Video Collage Example

During Interview #2, Sienna discussed her the importance of self-confidence for Black girls her age,

> Sienna: Yeah. Well, I think some kids this age, they struggle with self-confidence, because you either have the girl who's really self-confident, like the middle ground, or then you have someone who has no confidence or whatever. And then you see people like Zendaya or Lupita Nyong'o, making lots of money, because of their confidence.
>
> Maima: Wow. And for you as a black girl, how does that make you feel about your confidence when you see people, these role models who have that type of confidence?
>
> Sienna: It makes me really happy. It makes me confident that I can be successful too.

Similarly, Kayden leveraged photos with the Funimate app to provide an uplifting message to Black girls about self-confidence. She used 15 photos for her collage. Below, I have included selected still shots from her video.

Figure 6: Kayden's Funimate Video Collage Examples

She included several different photos of Black women and girls of different skin tones. When asked how she chose the images for her Funimate video, Kayden explained,

> Okay, so how I chose images. I used different... different shades of black girls. I felt like albinism, I think that's how we say it, albinism, being albino, is not really talked about a lot, and sometimes it's looked down. There was this little girl who I used to go to school with, in, I think, it was seventh grade. There was this little girl, she was albino. People used to make fun of her because of her eyes. So, a lot of people made fun of her for that. She was a really nice girl, she was only in second grade. She was really nice to other people. I had never seen her get angry. But, a lot of the older kids my age, in my grade, were talking about her and saying that she was weird. Just being really mean to her. I feel like there's more people out there who probably go through the same thing that she was going through, even as an adult. People think that it's something bad. More people have been being confident about their skin color and just what they're going through. They're being more vocal and they're uplifting other girls who look like them. For the other

> pictures, I included pictures of darker shaded woman and lighter shaded woman because a lot of times the lighter shades of women, they get praised more and darker woman get looked down on and talked about, and people say they're dirty, ugly.

Kayden made specific and intentional decisions about her multimodal compositions, while thinking critically about her race, gender, and ethnicity. She wanted to depict representation for girls that she felt should have more positive representation in her community and in the media.

Decision Making. The girls engaged in decision-making as they decided what to write and how to represent their viewpoints creatively. Making aesthetic decisions was an integral part of the writing process. The girls made decisions about what types of images and colors to include in their compositions. In addition, the juxtaposition of images and text also convey intentional moves that communicate meaning. For example, Kayden's Funimate video (Figure 6) included a combination of gold font on a dark grey background or dark grey font on a gold background. Each image had gold accents, either highlighted through the makeup used or lighting effects. The color gold traditionally represents wealth, luxury, and success. Kayden's words explore how Black is beautiful by juxtaposing different images of Black girls and women, with distinctly different skin color and characteristics. The images combined with the words written in gold and dark grey convey an image of pride and confidence.

Engaging in revision and learning about the digital tools' technical aspects was an opportunity for growth and a source of frustration at some points. For the name poem activity, the participants created videos reading or reciting their poems on Flipgrid. They made decisions about what, if any, filters to use and how to present their material.

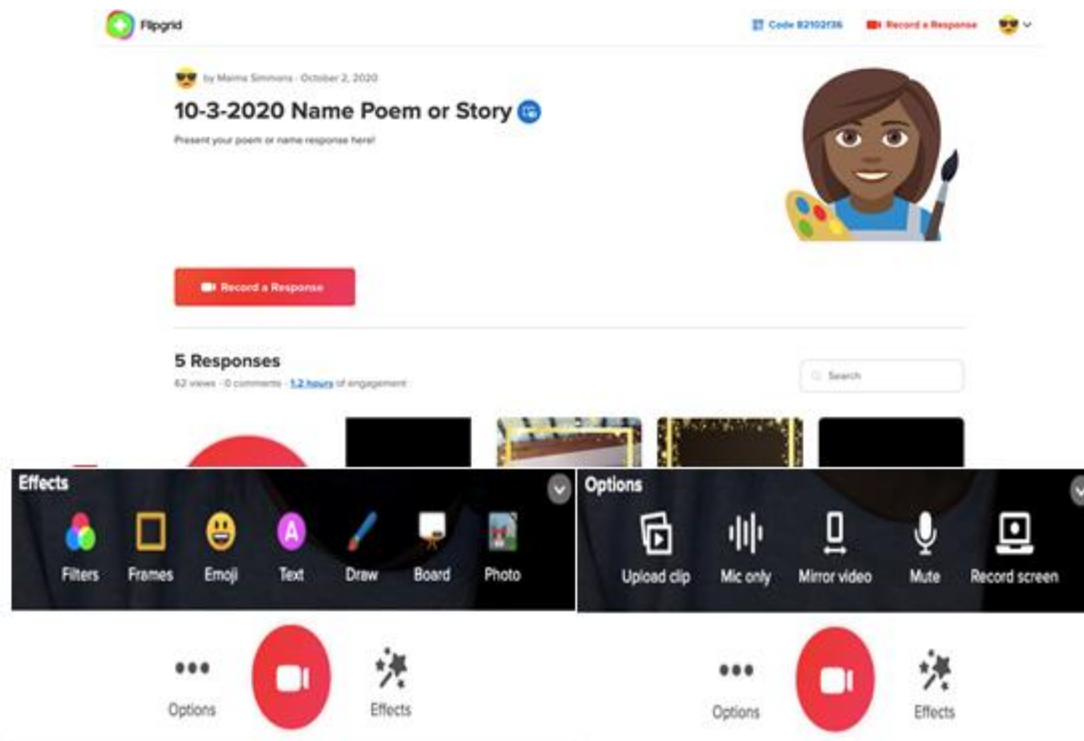

Figure 7: Flipgrid Examples

During Interview #1, Zaire declared she felt more confident in her abilities to speak than to write,

> I feel like I can talk more. Like, I can get my point out better talking than writing. If I have the option to like do speech, like say your speech or write your speech, I will probably say my speech.

Zaire shared at the end of the week seven workshop that she liked that she could "delete videos from Flipgrid if [she] didn't like how [she] said something" and that the group "could express ourselves on video too." Alaya felt frustrated with recording multiple versions of her Flipgrid videos due to errors, but ultimately believed "voice is powerful than the writing" when reflecting on her Flipgrid video at the end of the literacy workshop during week 7. Sienna shared her experience using Flipgrid at school during Week 7 and enjoyed experimenting with filters as she

recorded her name piece. Kayden thoroughly explained her experiences with Flipgrid prior to and during the study,

> I enjoy using it. I like that you could delete the videos before you publish it, because before I started using Flipgrid, I saw all these videos online about people saying that they submitted one of their, I guess, draft videos of them, talking about what the assignment was on Flipgrid. A lot of people were just saying that you can't delete the video once you record it. The first time I used Flipgrid, I was scared, because if I didn't get it right the first time, and it just published by itself, I don't want to have to make multiple videos, and all that stuff. It obviously wasn't true. I like using Flipgrid and I like the fact that you can put different words on it, and you can use the note feature to write what you have to say on there. So, you don't really forget it and you don't have to be on a different tab.

The participants enjoyed incorporating multimodal tools and collaborative processes. Their sentiments can be summed up with Sienna's comment during Interview #2,

> I think it was more fun to do it this way, because in our literacy English class at school right now, we're just, well; right now it's cool. But we usually would do informational writing, like essays on people and you wouldn't really get to express yourself that way like we did in the group.

The range of multimodal texts and tools that we used supported the participants' representations of their racial, gender, and ethnic identities in their multimodal compositions.

Counternarratives and Critiques

The girls pushed back against negative misrepresentations of Black girlhood and Africa in their multimodal compositions. They used language and images to question gender norms,

advocate for themselves, and develop positive counternarratives to stereotypes and incomplete representations,

Black Girlhood

After reading *Girl* by Jamaica Kincaid and watching a YouTube video of the Jamaica Kincaid reading her short story to a live audience, the participants and I engaged in discussion about the context of which the narrative was written. Then, the pairs worked together to answer discussion questions and engage in brainstorming for their creative writing task.

Table 3: Sienna and Alaya's Discussion Questions

1. Discussion questions

a. What do you notice about the point of view? What is the effect?	The point of view is her Mom. She is trying to tell her daughter how to behave. It 's one sided we don't hear alot about how the girl really feels.
b. How would you read "Girl" differently if it were titled "Mother"?	If the story was titled differently from "Girl" to "Mother" You might think that it is the daughter trying to tell her mother the stuff she should not do.
c. If the girl in "Girl" were a boy, what would the mother be telling him?	The mother would be telling him to have manors and, dress properly, and act nice when they are around other people.
d. What if the father were talking instead?	If the father was talking to the daughter instead the story would be, from how men think, and it won't be that long, because the father doesn't have that much expedition from the daughter cause he was never a girl, so he would not know what its like to be one.

In their discussion responses, they reference the lack of voice they feel the daughter in the short story has when they say, "It's one sided we don't hear a lot about how the girl really feels." Sienna and Alaya critically reflect on the shared experience of girlhood they assume that mothers have with their daughters, which explains why the mother is "trying to tell the daughter how to behave." Their understanding of the gendered differences in growing up is evident. When asked to think about how this text could be different if the father was speaking to the daughter instead of the mother, they responded the narrative wouldn't be "that long, because the father doesn't have that much expedition [sic] from the daughter because he was never a girl, so he would not know what it's like to be one." When I asked them to clarify what they meant by expedition at the end of Workshop 5, Alaya noted they meant the word "experience" as in a father would not know what it is like to be a girl.

Instead of writing from parent to daughter in their creative writing task, they chose to write from teacher to middle school girl student. They began by completing the brainstorming prompts that I created to aid in the composition process.

Table 4: Sienna and Alaya's Brainstorming Prompts

Think about the advice that would be relevant in each of these social relationships.

Who is the speaker?	**Teacher**
Who is being spoken to?	**Middle school girl**
What are the activities that the person being spoken to will need to learn how to do?	**Turn there work on time** **Stay focus** **Show respect**
What, if any, rules does this person need to be aware of?	**Try your best on everything you do** **No talking during instruction** **Not to wear revealing things to school**
What behaviors are allowed or disallowed in your chosen setting?	**Ask questions if you need help** **Raise your hand before speaking** **Wear appropriate clothes** *But I do wear school appropriate clothes* **Sit up straight when I am talking** **Don't eat in class** **Don't talk back to the teacher**
What pieces of advice can the speaker provide?	**How you behave will reflect your future**

In their narrative, they explored teacher student relationships. They wrote via Google Docs,

To pass my class there are a few rules to follow.

Don't eat in my class

Don't talk back to me

Show respect to me and I'll show it to you

I'm the teacher and this is my classroom

Stay focused

No talking while I'm talking

Raise your hand before speaking

Wear school appropriate clothing *But I do wear school appropriate clothes* Not your shoulders showing

Girls NO talking *But I'm not talking* You are now

Turn your work in on time

Try your best on everything you do

Ask questions when you need help *I have a question* I'm not taking questions right now

The teacher described in their creative writing is instructing students on how to behave within their classroom. The directions are transactional and provide very direct rules to follow in the classroom. Lines #3 and #4 explore communication and interpersonal relationship when they wrote, "Don't talk back to me" and "Show me respect and I'll show it to you". Line #4 is particularly interestingly in the context of students writing this as teachers because it denotes that they have encountered teachers who feel respect is earned through compliant behavior, as opposed to respect being a universal right for all students. Moreover, in Line #5, Alaya and Sienna describe their fictional teacher's ownership of the classroom space when they wrote, "I am the teacher and this is my classroom". Their use of the words "my classroom" in reference to the teacher illustrates an insider/outsider relationship with schools, where teachers are insiders and students are outsiders. In Line #9, the teacher addresses dress code by saying, "Wear school appropriate clothing" and the middle school girl responds, "But I do wear school appropriate clothing." The teacher then responds, "Not with your shoulders showing." Before this point in the task, the directions from teacher to student appear to be neutral. Reference to the middle school girl's shoulders displays Alaya and Sienna's interpretation of the intersection of dress code and gender. In Line #10, the teacher speaks directly to the girls when reminding them of "NO talking." When the middle school girl responds that she was not talking, the teacher snaps back with "You are now." This exchange does not describe a friendly, warm or communal classroom space. The teacher and student seem to be at odds, instead of two people working

towards the same goal of academic growth. The narrative concludes with Line #13, which prompts students to “ask questions when [they] need help”, however when the middle school responds, the teacher immediately responds that they “are not taking questions right now”. During Interview #2, Sienna expounded upon their motivation to write this piece. She felt that were significant differences in how dress code was enforced for girls and boys,

> Well, for the part where the teacher said, "Dress school appropriately", and then we say, "I am dressed school appropriately." And then when the teacher says, "Not your shoulders showing", because from elementary school to middle school, the dress code for girls is different for boys. They get away with more things than we can.

Similarly, Alaya discussed the difference in dress code enforcement between girls and boys during her second interview. Alaya felt that teachers enforced the dress code because “I think they don't want us to get hurt or stuff like that.” When I asked her what she meant by “get hurt or stuff,” she said “girls get bullied by boys sometimes for their clothes so they are trying to maybe protect girls.” Sienna and Alaya both spoke about the differences in treatment from teachers based on their gender. Sienna also discussed building relationships with teachers during Interview #2,

> Maima: Wow. And do you feel like there are times at school when that's how teachers may interact with their students?
>
> Sienna: Yeah. We have some teachers who want to talk to you, and then you have other teachers who are just like you're in my class to learn and that's it.
>
> Maima: And which teachers do you think you learned from the most?

Sienna: The ones who want to get to know you.

Interviewer: Okay. Why do you think that is?

Sienna: Oh, because you like their class more and want to try harder.

Alaya responded during Interview #2 that she wished her teachers "were a little more soft and not into arguing so much". She noted they should "have rules to run their class but still try to listen to the kids". Both Sienna and Alaya felt their gender impacted their school experiences, yet they remained optimistic about relationship building with their teachers could lead to more positive experiences within their school environment.

Kayden and Zaire were paired together for the Girl creative writing task. They began by completing the discussion questions together after several close readings and viewings of the text.

Table 5: Kayden and Zaire's Discussion Questions

1. Discussion questions

Question	Response
a. What do you notice about the point of view? What is the effect?	it's the Mom point of view and the effect is the mom is really bossy. We get to see how she thinks girls should act. She doesn't want her daughter to be one of those type of girls with a bad reputation
b. How would you read "Girl" differently if it were titled "Mother"?	I would think the girl is talking about how her mother gives her advice and makes her feel every day. The girl doesn't get to say anything so she would probably want to really say a lot to her mom about her feelings.
c. If the girl in "Girl" were a boy, what would the mother be telling him?	"focus on sports " or she wouldn't she be so hard and strict on him. She would tell him to have fun and make the most of every moment. She wouldn't be worried about his reputation or what other people say about him.
d. What if the father were talking instead?	the father would be more on the protective side as with the mother she was on the more intense and harsh side. The father would be the daughter's shield.

Throughout their discussion responses, they explore the differences in mother/daughter and father/daughter relationships and their perceptions of how sons are treated in relation to daughters.

When thinking about the effect of the mother's point of view throughout the text, Zaire and Kayden note that the text focuses on how the fictional mother "thinks girls should act" and the danger of the daughter developing a "bad reputation." Zaire and Kayden believe that the text would take on a completely different tone if the girl in the text were actually a boy. They believed the mother would encourage the son to "focus on sports." They continue by writing,

> she wouldn't she be so hard and strict on him. She would tell him to have fun and make the most of every moment. She wouldn't be worried about his reputation or what other people say about him.

In contrast to the fictional mother being worried about the daughter's reputation, they felt the same mother would not "be worried about his reputation or what other people say." They describe the fictional mother as wanting her son to explore life and "make the most of every moment," whereas the daughter is described as stifled and unable to express herself to her mother. In discussion prompt b, they believe the fictional daughter "doesn't get to say anything so she would probably want to really say a lot to her mom about her feelings." Their assessment of how this text would differ if the daughter were a son highlighted stark differences in their perceptions of gendered treatment.

For their creative writing task, Kayden and Zaire chose to write from the perspective of a father to daughter.

Table 6: Kayden and Zaire's Brainstorming Prompts

Think about the advice that would be relevant in each of these social relationships.

Who is the speaker?	The speaker is the father
Who is being spoken to?	The daughter
What are the activities that the person being spoken to will need to learn how to do?	Cook rice, learn to clean up, garden, listen to higher authorities, do laundry, take care of others
What, if any, rules does this person need to be aware of?	Don't walk around at night without protection, No dating until you're 16, I have to approve of who you date, don't show your body
What behaviors are allowed or disallowed in your chosen setting?	Be lady-like, don't belch out loud, be respectful, no revealing clothes, no boys over the house
What pieces of advice can the speaker provide?	Reassurance that she is more than enough, Always stay focused

Their narrative heavily explored gender norms, relationship building, and parental relationships. Their narrative, typed in Google Docs, follows the format of the mentor text as a stream of consciousness from speaker to listener.

> This is how you wash the rice before putting it in the rice cooker. This is how often to check the rice. This is how you cook Liberian spinach. This is how you season your food to have a good flavor. This is how to paint your own room. This is how to take care of something without paying someone else to do it. This is how to give someone space when you need to cool off. This is how to resolve problems without violence. This is how you build good relationships with family for the future. This is how you earn your parents' trust. This is how to be able to go to your friend's house after school. This is how you lose your parents' trust. Don't be the type of girl to sneak out. Don't be the type of girl that doesn't confide in her parents. Always be lady like. Don't belch in public. This is how to shop for clothes that your mom will approve of. Don't wear clothes that are above your midriff until you're out of the house. Always be respectful. Don't pick a boy that is

> not a good influence. Don't change your life for a boy. If you go out, be home before 11. *Please just give us 30 more minutes;* That is too late for a girl your age to be out at night. Make sure you love yourself before you love others. You are more than what anyone makes you to be. Just know that no matter what you do I'll still love you. *Forever?* Forever.

Zaire and Kayden's begin their piece with the father instructing the daughter on how to wash rice, check rice, cook Liberian spinach, and season food. The juxtaposition of the father teaching the daughter these practices provides interesting insights into traditional norms of mothers being the primary meal preparers in the home. By learning these things from the father, it reinforces equitable homemaking responsibilities and independence for different genders. Zaire and Kayden continued by discussing independence in more detail, "this is how to paint your room" and "this is how to take care of something without paying someone to do it." Their inclusion of these statements supports the idea of empowering girls to develop independence. They explore gender norms throughout several lines towards the middle of their narrative,

> Don't be the type of girl to sneak out. Don't be the type of girl that doesn't confide in her parents. Always be lady like. Don't belch in public. This is how to shop for clothes that your mom will approve of. Don't wear clothes that are above your midriff until you're out of the house. Always be respectful. Don't pick a boy that is not a good influence. Don't change your life for a boy. If you go out, be home before 11. *Please just give us 30 more minutes;* That is too late for a girl your age to be out at night.

Kayden and Zaire wrote about the expectations they believed fathers would have for their daughters' behavior. This included urging daughters not to sneak out and to confide in their parents. They continue with the directive of "always be lady like," which was followed with a

reference to belching and clothing. Kayden and Zaire position the fictional mother as the person who would need to approve of the clothes the daughter shopped for, which connects to the original speaker's tone in the mentor text, *Girl*. The mother's opinion of the daughter is presented as more intricately intertwined with strict expectations. The narrative continues with a discussion of dating preferences and advice, warning the daughter not to "pick a boy that is not a good influence" and not to "change your life for a boy." The use of the word influence from father to daughter indicates that there is a greater chance a boy would influence a girl within a dating relationship, alluding to a heteronormative hierarchy of control between boys and girls. Their narrative concludes with a reaffirming message,

> Make sure you love yourself before you love others. You are more than what anyone makes you to be. Just know that no matter what you do I'll still love you. *Forever?* Forever.

The father tells his daughter, "You are more than what anyone makes you to be." When reading this, the nondescript 'anyone' could be understood to be others in their community, school, or even the society at large. The father's affirmation of the daughter's identity at the conclusion of the narrative directly connects to the heavy influence all of the participants noted their parents had on their positive identity development in Research Question #1.

Kayden and Zaire's creative writing narrative delved into their understanding of gender norms, independence, and parental relationships. Kayden spoke extensively during Interview #2 about the inclusion of the discussion about clothing in the narrative,

> This is how to shop for clothes that your mom will approve of. Don't wear clothes that are above your midriff until you're out of the house. Always be respectful.

She felt strongly that policing of girls' bodies at home and at school is detrimental to girls' perceptions of self and others.

> Kayden: But, I feel like more people that are in my grade level or age group, they want to wear more the tank top, crop tops. I think they're really cute, but I know if I asked my mom if I could get it, she would not let me get it at all. She would make me stick to T-shirts. Yeah. I think the expectation that parents hold for girls to dress is, if you're wearing a skirt, they don't want it to be too short, it can't be above your fingertips. If you're wearing a shirt, it can't expose too much of your stomach because it could be distracting to people. The same with shoulders, they don't want your shoulders to be exposed, because, also, it distracts people.
>
> Maima: When you say distracts people, what do you mean by that?
>
> Kayden: I don't know, it's just something that's been said a lot in school for girls. It's something that teachers say a lot. The boys will get distracted by a shoulder. I don't really understand how that works, distracted by a shoulder. But, I guess, they feel like they're trying to protect us, which I do get, because there are people that are weird like that. They get distracted by a shoulder, but they feel like they're protecting us from men, I guess. I think, in reality, from hearing what others have said, or seeing other people's experience, it just makes women scared of men, because now they can't wear anything without saying that they're distracting a man.

Kayden mentions the same notion of protection that Alaya refers to during her second interview in reference to dress code policies. Kayden questions how and why a body part (shoulder) is distracting and how the responsibility of not distracting boys/men is placed solely upon girls/women. In conclusion, the participants wrote about their gendered identities in very distinct

ways. They questioned gender norms, explored parental relationships, and identified how they develop their identities as Black girls through multimodal writing.

Bicultural Identity

The participants expressed pride in their West African identities and often wrote about their bicultural identity development. Zaire, Alaya, and Sienna referenced their African lineage and a sense of pride in their ancestors in their open letters. Sienna wrote in her open letter, “Africa is my ancestry and I am proud to be African. Kings and queens are my lineage." Alaya posited in her letter, “My African ancestors were strong and I am strong. That’s how we survived slavery." Zaire wrote about her grandmother and generational relationships in her open letter when she said, “Named after my grandmother, a strong African woman who made a strong woman, who made me." Kayden expressed pride in her West African identity within her name narrative. She declared, “No, my name is not too exotic; my name is not too hard, it is not too African." The girls honored their African identities and explored their bicultural experiences through their compositions.

Navigating what it meant to be African and American was an integral part of the study. When discussing their bicultural identities, the girls juxtaposed tangible examples of their identities by discussing cultural foods and traditions in their Where I’m From poems. Sienna wrote in her Where I’m From poem, “I came from picking potato greens and braiding hair and from sunchips and palava sauce.”

Figure 8: Sienna's Where I'm From Example

Picking potato greens, as referenced in her Where I'm From poem, is a cultural activity common to West African families in preparation to cook potato greens. The meal is served with meat cooked with the potato greens and served over rice. Braiding hair is a common cultural practice within Black diasporic families. Sienna also included references to two of her other favorite foods, Sun Chips and palava sauce, a traditional West African stew dish served with rice. Sienna explained the motivation behind her Where I'm From poem during Interview #2,

> I just write Liberian culture and American culture, because I'm from both, my parents are Liberian and I was raised and in America. So I get both, I know both sides, so that's why I chose to add both.

Alaya also discussed the prevalence of her bicultural identity when she shared a similar revelation during Interview #2. She "decided to write about those two cultures because they're where I'm from." Alaya wrote in her Where I'm From poem, "I am from cassava leaf, pizza and barbecue wings. And from Ludo and Uno." Cassava leaf is a traditional West African dish, made

from the leaves of the cassava plant, cooked as a stew with meat and seasonings over rice. She juxtaposed the Cassava leaf with BBQ wings and pizza, two of her foods that are culturally identifiable as American foods. She also displays her favorite games, Ludo, a popular Liberian board game, and UNO, a popular card game in the United States.

Figure 9: Alaya’s Where I’m From Example

In Kayden’s Where I’m From Poem, she also wrote about her family cultural foods and board games stating, “I am from palm butter and hot wings and ranch. And from Monopoly and Ludo." It is important to note that she did not include text on her board game slide, even though she wrote her full poem in Google Docs before moving to Animoto to create her video.

Figure 10: Kayden's Where I'm From Example

Later in her poem, Kayden juxtaposes a picture of her grandfather holding her as a toddler with the words "I am from hearing plantain and cassava frying downstairs." Plantain and cassava are staple foods in Black West African culture. The proximity of a picture of her with a grandparent as she names Black West African foods reaffirms the interconnectedness of the influence of her family and her bicultural identity formation.

In contrast to the other participants, Zaire focused more on her Black West African identity through her Where I'm From poem,

> I am from hot pepper soup stewed
>
> From beautiful African attire
>
> I am from hot fish in the fryer
>
> I am from tasty palm butter
>
> And from waist beads which have a beautiful color
>
> I am from Ivory Coast and Liberia.

For her first slide, she included a photo of hot pepper soup stewed with fufu. Hot pepper soup is a cultural food commonly eaten by Black West Africans. It is typically served with fufu, a starch made from pounded plantain, yam, or cassava. Later in her poem, she references “hot fish in the fryer” and adds a photo of a whole fried fish on top of a bed of rice. Her version of “hot fish in the fryer” is representative of a Liberian food dish called dried rice. Her image brings more meaning to her words because it is clear her version of fried hot fish differs from the traditional notion of fried fish more common to Black American communities in the United States.

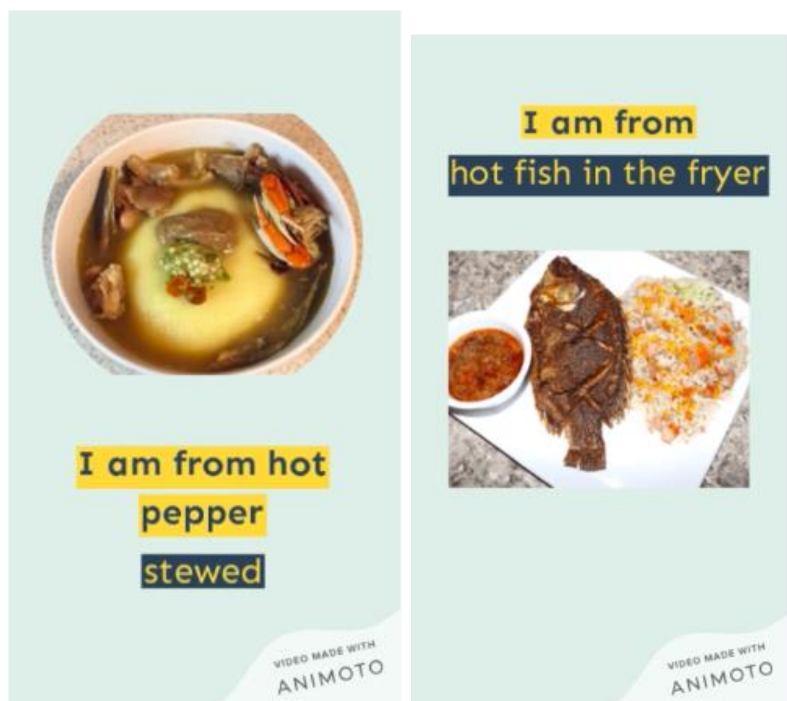

Figure 11: Zaire’s Where I’m From Example

When she referenced “beautiful African attire,” she included a photo of her mother in traditional West African attire, complete with a matching headwrap. She concludes her poem by naming waist beads and including a photo of black waist beads with an Africa charm attached to them. Her final slide does not include text. It is a visual representation of the Liberian flag and Ivorian flag together. Again, it is important to note that the participants drafted their poems in Google docs before moving into Animoto, so I referenced their original Google docs as I analyzed their

Animoto videos. Her last slide represents the final line in her poem, “I am from Ivory Coast and Liberia”. Zaire approached the Where I’m From poem from a different lens than the other participants. She chose to highlight different aspects of her Black West African identity that were salient to her identity development.

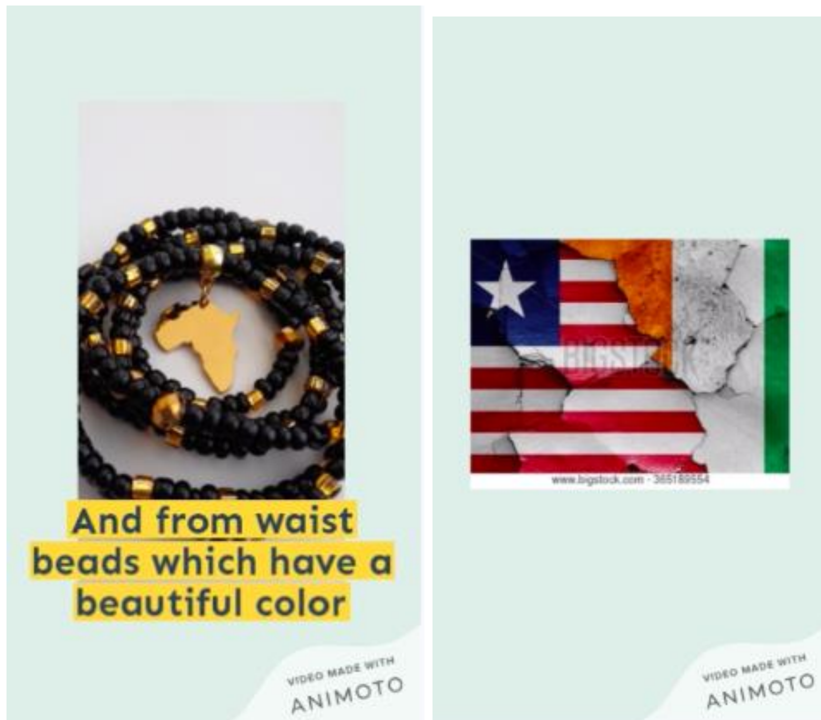

Figure 12: Zaire’s Where I’m From Example

The girls’ compositions highlighted the importance of understanding how cultural traditions inform their identity development. Kayden connected to the *Danger of a Single Story* TED talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), one of the multimodal mentor texts. She stated during Focus Group #2, “I think the TED talk was really good, because she was talking about how Black Americans and White American people see Africans and how they cast the stereotype on them based off of what other people say.” This comment illustrates the nuanced understanding of how her identity as a Black African immigrant girl was multilayered and informed by her African and American identities.

Tri-Lens of Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Their Writings

The participants expressed a strong sense of pride in their identity as Black West African girls throughout their compositions. The participants were asked to write letters expressing what they wanted the world to know about their identities as Black West African girls. I have included screenshots of the open letters written by Sienna, Kayden, and Zaire in the following sections. Alaya's open letter included a close-up picture of her mother and sisters; therefore it could not be included to retain confidentiality of the participants. Alaya's open letter focused in on her intersectional identity as an artist and Black girl,

> I am an artist. What you see is not all that you get. Do not talk down on me because of my age or my skin color. I am more than what you see, I am a Black girl with African roots. I am a work of art. I tell a story with my art - stories about how I overcame negativity. Don't underestimate me - I have a lot to say.

In her letter, she urges her audience to look beyond her age and skin color because she is "more than what you see." Alaya forefronts her identity as a Black girl, with African roots. She references art in several different instances across her open letter, "I am an artist," "I am a work of art," and "I tell a story with my art." Art is a vehicle for Alaya to communicate with the world. Alaya reminds her readers not to diminish her abilities or potential because of her age and race. She used the phrases, "Do not talk down on me" and "Don't underestimate me" to reinforce the notion that Black girls are often thought to be lesser than. She ends her letter by a simple, yet powerful statement – "I have a lot to say." Her art is the vehicle through which Alaya feels most heard. Her words, contrasted with an image of her mother and sisters demonstrates the potential she feels has, coupled with the support she receives from her family.

Sienna’s open letter reflected on her journey coming of age as a young woman. She wrote confidently about her growth and held optimism in what the future held. Her open letter read,

> Believing in myself no matter what
>
> Loving the skin i’m in
>
> Africa is my ancestry and I am proud to be African
>
> Celebrating the uniqueness of my life
>
> Kings and queens are my lineage
>
> Growing into becoming a woman who loves my flaws and all
>
> Independent, free thinker
>
> Racism won’t silence us any longer because BLM!
>
> Leading the next generation into a better world for everyone
>
> Smart and confident is who we are

Figure 13:Sienna’s Open Letter Example

Sienna’s open letter is typed below an animated photo of a Black girl with curly, purple hair and pink and blue headphones. She appears to be smiling and winking one eye. The picture complements Sienna’s first two lines of her letter, which denote a confident self-identity. She

wrote, "Believing in myself no matter what" and "Loving the skin I'm in." Later in her open letter, she proclaims she is "growing into becoming a woman who loves her flaws and all." She also considers her African ethnicity a source of pride that sets her apart from others, citing "kings and queens are my lineage." Sienna talks about leadership throughout her open letter, describing herself as an "independent, free thinker" and a leader for the next generation who won't be silenced by racism. Sienna intricately weaves her racial, gender, and ethnic identities into her open letter. She is confident in her identities and knows that she has a lot to offer the world as a leader for the next generations.

Kayden's open letter explores her connection to her African ancestors and her relationships with other Black girls as a source of strength. Kayden expressed pride in her identity as a Black girl through her open letter,

> I am a Black West African girl. The world tries to tell us one thing, but believe me I know the truth. I am magic. We are magic. I am smart. We are smart. My African ancestors were strong and I am strong. That's how we survived slavery.
>
> Some people think Black girls are mean and petty. That's not true. We are friendly and we look out for each other. We write together, draw together, sing together and love to make each other laugh. We make lemonade out of lemons. When people hate on us, we prove them wrong. Don't believe the hype - Black girls are leaders and trendsetters. Instead of ignoring us, listen to us. Learn from us. Celebrate us!

Kayden

I am a Black West African girl. The world tries to tell us one thing, but believe me I know the truth. I am magic. We are magic. I am smart. We are smart. My African ancestors were strong and I am strong. That's how we survived slavery.

Some people think Black girls are mean and petty. That's not true. We are friendly and we look out for each other. We write together, draw together, sing together and love to make each other laugh. We make lemonade out of lemons. When people hate on us, we prove them wrong. Don't believe the hype - Black girls are leaders and trendsetters. Instead of ignoring us, listen to us. Learn from us. Celebrate us!

Figure 14: Kayden's Open Letter Example

Kayden juxtaposed her open letter with a picture of five Black girls with natural hair dressed in African kente cloth outfits. She spoke in her second line of the poem about messaging from outside influences that try to "tell us one thing" that are not the truths of her lived experiences as a Black West African girl. She then describes positive qualities she believes she and other Black girls possess, such as magic, intellect, and strength. She connects the idea of strength to the strength of her African ancestors who endured enslavement. Kayden discusses public perception of Black girls as "mean and petty," with her account of how Black girls defy those stereotypes. She describes Black girls as "friendly" and lists some of the activities she engages in with other Black girls, which includes writing, singing, and laughing. Kayden makes several references to Black girls being able to make the most of negative situations, as displayed with the phrase, "We make lemonade out of lemons." She ends her open letter by aligning Black girls as "leaders and trendsetters," people that should be listened to, learned from, and celebrated. Her open letter emphasizes the importance of community and identity for Black girls as a source of confidence in the midst of negative representations.

Zaire's open letter illustrated the power of relationship building, which was explored earlier in this chapter. The image Zaire selected to accompany her open letter depicts five Black

girls, dressed in black dresses with purple accents, holding hands. There are crowns transposed over their heads and they are holding hands. The image reinforces the connectedness of Black girls and the power of relationships.

My name is Zoey which means life in the Greek culture.

I am happy and determined.

I bring life to every room I enter

My spirit is infectious

Named after my grandmother, a strong woman

Who made a strong woman, who made me

I wouldn't change who I am for anyone.

I am a excellent black girl, nobody can take that away from me.

I am surrounded by sisters and friends who hold me up when I am down.

Our bond is unbreakable, our circle can not be weakened.

We carry our joy through our struggles together, we are the bright spots on our worst days.

When I look at my sisters in this group, I think of how they've lifted my spirits. This type of energy is what we all need - a space, a place for love, positivity, and good vibes all around.

Figure 15: Zaire's Open Letter Example

She also wrote about the influence of maternal family figures and how her self-confidence as protective factors,

> My name is Zaire which means life in the Greek culture.
>
> I am happy and determined.
>
> I bring life to every room I enter
>
> My spirit is infectious
>
> Named after my grandmother, a strong woman
>
> Who made a strong woman, who made me
>
> I wouldn't change who I am for anyone.

I am an excellent black girl, nobody can take that away from me.

I am surrounded by sisters and friends who hold me up when I am down.

Our bond is unbreakable, our circle can not be weakened.

We carry our joy through our struggles together, we are the bright spots on our worst days.

When I look at my sisters in this group, I think of how they've lifted my spirits. This type of energy is what we all need - a space, a place for love, positivity, and good vibes all around.

In the first half of Zaire's open letter, she describes the meaning of her name and how her personality is embodied through this meaning. She describes herself as "someone who brings life to every room they enter," with an infectious spirit. Zaire writes about her interconnectedness with her grandmother, for whom she is named after. She describes her grandmother as a "strong woman, who made a strong woman, who made me." This line explores the power of intergenerational relationships for Black women and girls. Zaire is confident in her identity and describes herself as "an excellent Black girl," a quality that "nobody can take away from [her]." Zaire's open letter calls attention to the power of relationship building and intergenerational bonds and their influence on Black girls' positive self-identity.

Conclusion

To reiterate, the Black West African immigrant girls in this study explored and discussed their identities through multimodal literacies. They were aware of misrepresentations fueled by

stereotypes but did not internalize these myths. The girls exhibited confidence positive identity development, which was supported by familial relationships. During the study, the participants engaged in collaborative workshops that promoted relationship building. The multimodal techniques and tools used incorporated visual imagery and creative decision making to communicate more effectively. The multimodal compositions provided an avenue for the girls to critique power structures, provide a deeper understanding into their experiences with the adults in their lives, and create counternarratives that speak back to misrepresentations of Black girlhood and Africa.

5 DISCUSSION

"Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity."

-Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2009

In the quote above, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks about the interconnectedness of stereotypes and power. More specifically during her 2009 TEDtalk, Adichie elaborates on how single stories about different ethnic groups are perpetuated by the media. These single stories are often treated as truth and impact the daily experiences of marginalized communities. Adichie reflected candidly on her experiences immigrating to the United States from Nigeria, as she navigated her peers' stereotypical beliefs about her life in Nigeria. I share this quote because it highlights the importance of realizing that language is power and those stereotypes; whether implicit or explicit, impact how we see the world and how others see us. The stories and writings shared by the girls in this study were a reflection of how they empowered themselves in the midst of stereotypes that threatened to suppress and diminish their personhood.

The girls were aware of how stereotypes about Black girlhood and Africa threatened to silence their voices, and which had the potential to consequently diminish their power. The girls sought to tell their own stories using their own voices to command power over their own identities. As I reflected on the findings of this study, I metaphorically compared my participants to drivers. Their worldview could be compared to a windshield. Inclement weather like rain, snow, or hail could be likened to the misrepresentations that they encountered on a daily basis. Misrepresentations of Black girlhood and Africa threatened their vision of themselves and their

futures, similar to how one may choose to pull over during a storm or take a detour to travel on safer roads. If the driver is stopped or derailed by too many detours, they risk not arriving at their destination safely. Similarly, internalizing negative misrepresentations could have stopped the girls in this study from reaching their full potential. The counternarratives and critiques that the girls composed served as their windshield wipers, effectively pushing away the negative misrepresentations. Their rearview mirrors represent the importance of intergenerational relationships and historical context, giving them a different perspective and reminding them of the ancestral homelands from where their families came from. Their confidence was their GPS navigation system. Their beliefs about themselves, reaffirmed by trusting adults, helped them to successfully navigate adolescence and develop a positive self-identity.

Research Findings

This research study explored two questions: (1) How do Black West African immigrant girls understand their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities when analyzing media and textual representations of Africa and Black girlhood and (2) How do Black West African immigrant girls (re)create their own identities through multimodal literacies?

In response to Research Question 1, the girls in this study had a deep understanding of misrepresentations assigned to Black girlhood and Africa. In their experiences, these negative stereotypes led to bullying, a lack of representation in popular culture, and negative political impact. These stereotypes' pervasiveness led to a lack of complete representations of Black girlhood and Africa in the media. The participants did not internalize these negative stereotypes and rejected them as representatives of their identities. They exhibited a strong sense of pride in their racial, ethnic, and gender identities and displayed confidence when speaking about their

identities. In addition to their own self-confidence, the girls' parents and other trusted adults provided support and reaffirmation of their identities. The participants were keenly aware of how vital peer relationships were for affirming positive self-identity. The girls shared narratives about their experiences and expressed how their experiences led to nuanced understandings of their racial, gender, and ethnic identities. In line with narrative inquiry, I examined their experiences and narratives beyond the personal, local, and immediate in order to make sense of their cultural identities within a sociohistorical lens.

In the participants' experiences, Black girls were misrepresented as sassy, confrontational, mean, and physically unattractive in popular culture and society at large (Brown, 2013; Muhammad & McArthur, 2015; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Structural racism furthers the pervasiveness of historical misrepresentations of Black women and girls as stereotypical tropes are promoted within mass media. One of the theoretical frameworks used to guide this study, Critical Race Feminism, explores how racism intersects with other forms of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billing and Tate, 1995). The participants' racial and gender identities were inextricably intertwined as they discussed how they were positioned as different from girls of other races and boys in general. They did not separate their race from their gender as they analyzed their lived experiences as Black girls of West African immigrant descent. The girls had a distinctive perspective about the intersection of their race and gender, which influenced how they spoke and wrote for change and empowerment. The girls examined racism from a personal, local, and immediate lens while making meaning about their identity.

The girls did not only speak and write about their race and gender, but also explored the permanence of their ethnic identities as Black West African immigrant girls. They spoke candidly about how Africans were overwhelmingly portrayed as impoverished, disease-stricken,

and uneducated within media and by their peers at school, (Dokotum, 2020; Kebede, 2019; Showers; 2015; Watson & Knight, 2017) throughout their interviews, focus groups, and literacy workshops. The participants experienced bullying and isolation at school due to misrepresentations of Africa. In line with transnational perspectives, the girls identified personally and collectively with their ancestral homelands and developed counternarratives to push back against the single stories purported by the media and regurgitated by their peers. Supported by deep relationships with their parents, the girls developed ties to their ancestral homelands through positive interactions with their extended family members, exposure to traditional cultural foods, and community bonds with other Black West African immigrants through ethnic enclaves (Adjepong, 2018; Asante et al., 2016; Chacko, 2019; Habecker, 2017; Kebede, 2019). The participants expressed their transnational identities within their interviews and multimodal artifacts and reflected upon their intergenerational connection to their ancestral homelands.

In response to Research Question 2, the girls explored and reaffirmed their identities through multimodal composition. The girls' multimodal artifacts explored how they made sense of their racial, ethnic, and gendered identities and produced counternarratives to push back against negative and incomplete representations. Using Muhammad and Haddix's (2016) Black girl literacies framework, I conceptualized the girls' artifacts in several different ways. The literacies of Black African girls in the United States are multiple, tied to identities, historical, collaborative, political, and critical. The participants in this study expressed their multiple identities through frequent references to their race, gender, and ethnic identities across their artifacts. Not only did they write about their racial, ethnic, and gender identities, they also used different digital applications, images, and art to augment their perspectives and represent

themselves. The girls made decisions about which images, fonts, and color schemes to use to represent their identities. It was evident that these decisions were intentional and added an additional layer of complexity to the girls' multimodal compositions. In addition to the tri-lens of race, gender, and ethnicity, the participants also saw themselves as readers, writers, leaders, artists, and advocates for other Black West African girls. The importance of historical influences were evident in the multimodal artifacts as the girls considered the importance of intergenerational relationships and the impact of historicized stereotypical tropes on their lived experiences. The girls' literacies were collaborative in nature as they worked together during the study to make meaning together during partner writing. Their shared experiences and unique perspectives allowed them to develop relationships with each other and with me. The influence of political factors was evident in the girls' writing as they considered the impact of negative misrepresentations and silencing in their own writing. They were critical of power structures, gender norms, and incomplete representations throughout their compositions. The girls' multimodal artifacts represented their counternarratives to misrepresentations. Their perspectives were valued and their voices were heard.

Researcher Reflection

I identify as a Black West African woman, 2nd generation immigrant, mother, and researcher, therefore my positionality within this research was extremely complicated. I was an insider and an outsider within this inquiry. I was an outsider because of my identity as an adult, mother, and researcher. I am significantly older than the participants, and therefore experienced girlhood at a different time with different access to social media and technology. I am also aware of how my position as a researcher and mother impacted the way that I approached this work. I

embarked upon this work with the intent of elevating the voices of the girls in my study. My positionality as a Black West African immigrant researcher and mother studying the experiences of Black West African girls meant that I wanted to present the fullest representation of their experiences.

I identified as an insider because I shared the same racial, ethnic, and gender identities with the participants. My participants and I shared the common identity of 2nd generation Black West African immigrants. Narrative inquiry methodology focuses on the ways in which researchers come alongside participants to create meaning and share stories. As the girls shared stories about bullying and isolation due to their ethnic identity, I immediately connected to similar instances in my youth. I wrote researcher memos reflecting on these experiences throughout the study to further examine how these isolated incidents contributed to larger social, cultural, and historical frameworks of what it means to be a Black girl of West African immigrant descent. I still experience differences in treatment by other adults to this day because of my nontraditional first name. Like the participants, my parents taught me about my ethnic identity and affirmed me as a Black girl. These connections helped me to build deep relationships with the participants and relate to them. I understood their positionality and valued their perspectives. I did not question the validity of their experiences and let their thoughts shine. The participants trusted me and shared their perspectives candidly. My shared identity as a former Black West African girl made it more difficult to separate my position as researcher and group insider. I did not hesitate to share my experiences of navigating what it means to be a Black African woman with the girls. However, I had to be conscientious about how I framed questions to be certain that I was not projecting my experiences and beliefs onto my participants. This process of constant self-checking helped me to be aware of my own biases and blind spots,

in addition to being aware of how the participants' experiences differed from my own. This meant that there were times when the girls voiced opinions that did not consider the impact of structural racism or lack of representation of Black women in mass media to promote fuller representations of Black girl/womanhood. When this happened, I listened carefully for how the youth interrogated each other's beliefs and made a note to bring these statements up through a connection to our literature.

My difference in age from the participants contributed to my outsider status. The participants were adolescents between the ages of 11-15 at the time of the study and grew up in a world full of smartphones, internet, and social media. Several of the participants had a personal cell phone and several social media accounts such as Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and Pinterest. I recall getting my first cell phone in the ninth grade and my first social media accounts in the tenth grade. I did not use my cell phone during the school day and only used social media on the weekends. I communicated with friends primarily through telephone calls on a landline and in person communication at extracurricular events. My relationship with technology and social media differs from my participants because I experienced a substantial part of my adolescence without social media and a cell phone. While I shared a lot of similar experiences with my participants, I was vividly aware of the ways that our experiences differed. My role as an insider and outsider within this narrative inquiry case study pushed me to constantly consider how my behavior, assumptions, perspectives, and experiences shaped my relationship with the participants and the data analysis process.

This study has changed me in ways that I could not have predicted. The participants in my study inspired me and educated me with their brilliance, wisdom, and openness. The girls were acutely aware of misrepresentations, but did not internalize or accept those

misrepresentations as truth. They were unashamedly confident in their identities as Black West African girls. I was not as confident in my identity as a Black West African girl during adolescence and sought to hide my African identity during elementary, middle, and high school. Outside of my family, I did not see many Black West African role models in the media that I viewed, nor did I associate with affinity groups within my limited social media networks. The girls in this study grappled with gender norms and had nuanced understandings about how girls (and their bodies) are positioned in relationship to boys.

As an educator, I have been pushed to continue my work to amplify the voices of Black girls in K-12 classrooms. As a parent, I am excited to imagine the future of my child and the children in my family as the leaders of the next generation. As a Black West African woman, I am emboldened to continue to embrace all aspects of my identity unapologetically.

Weaknesses in the Development of the Study

It is important to note that a global pandemic, COVID-19, occurred during this study. This impacted the learning environment of the study, as it was initially conceptualized to be in person for a three-hour duration once a week. Because the participants were also engaged in 100% virtual learning at the time of the study, I decreased the duration of the workshops to two hours per week. The study was also 100% virtual due to social distancing restrictions and may have led to increased Zoom fatigue for the participants (McWhirter, 2020). As a result, I did not require the camera to be on during the entire workshop session to allow for flexibility and autonomy.

Strengths of the Study

This study was student centered and highlighted the voices of the Black West African girls who participated. The multimodal writing activities were open for interpretation on how to respond. The participants had autonomy to use the exemplar as a model text or to create their own form. Their responses were not graded for adherence to the genre or for conventions. While the prompts were designed to spark their thinking about race, gender, and ethnicity, the participants were free to respond to the components that were most salient for them. The girls talked about their race, gender, and ethnicity in many ways, sometimes focusing on their intersecting identities. Other times, they chose to focus solely on one component whether it was race, gender, or ethnicity in their responses. This flexibility also extended to which digital tools could be used when making their multimodal compositions.

The participants were highly engaged in the study. They willingly and openly responded to interview and focus group questions. They felt comfortable talking candidly about their lived experiences with the group and individually. The participants found value in working collaboratively with other Black West African girls because this was different from groups they interacted with at school. Our discussions and multimodal writing prompts differed drastically than what the participants did in school and therefore led to increased interest in participating in the literacy collaborative.

The literacy process was responsive and dialogic, and the girls were engaged as knowledge holders. This differs from traditional school settings where teachers are positioned as the sole holders of knowledge in the classroom, which creates a unique power relationship between student and teacher. Differences in content, product, process, and the learning environment contributed to engagement and academic confidence for the participants. Zaire

appreciated the range of multimodal texts read throughout the study. She denoted at the end of Workshop #5 that *Girl*, by Jamaica Kincaid, was one of her favorite texts to read because,

> It was made at a different time, so it's not that modern [and] we get a feel of how girls were projected on how to act in that era.

Because the texts focused on different aspects of racial, ethnic, and gender identity, it differed from standard canonical English Language Arts texts presented to students. Alaya experienced limited opportunities to share her identity in school-sanctioned literacy experiences, citing that they were typically only asked to share during the first week of school as a part of introductions. Still, the activities did not extend beyond that time frame. She stated during Interview #2,

> In the beginning of school, we usually do an All About Me project. That's how we get to know each other and how we communicate. I only do that when I'm new to something and they don't know about me. We don't do stuff like that after that first time.

This study provided multiple opportunities for the girls to explore their racial, gender, and ethnic identities. Sienna also enjoyed expressing herself during the study and found great contrast to her school experience during Interview #2,

> I think it was more fun to do it this way, because in our English class at school right now, we're just, well, right now it's cool. But we usually would do informational writing, like essays on people and you wouldn't really get to express yourself.

She added during Interview #2 "we wouldn't do this at school so I really enjoyed it." Sienna realized the differences in how literacy learning is approached in her school environment compared to the literacy workshops. She did not often get opportunities to express herself when writing.

Zaire also noted a difference in collaboration between her English class at school and the literacy group during Interview #2. She had not been offered any opportunity to collaborate with her classmates during virtual learning at the time of study because they "weren't allowed to do that." Collaboration before, during, and after the writing process was an integral part of this study.

The girls also expressed an increased sense of confidence in their literacy skills as a result of this study. Sienna spoke candidly about her teachers' low expectations during Interview #2,

> [Teachers] think that we're bad at writing, but they could see that I do like writing. I learned to write about myself on a different level and how to use different genres and words.

Similarly, Kayden also reported an increased sense of confidence and improved writing skills as a result of the study. She articulated during Interview #2,

> I feel like [the literacy group] helped me be more creative about writing things in my classes, because we do have to write narrative endings to most of the pieces that we read in class, so it's helped me.

Kayden immediately used her experiences and skills developed in the literacy group to augment her expression on school assignments. Alaya reflected on her experiences with the literacy group during Interview #2,

> It was a big impact on my writing because it had me think about different styles and how it can affect your writing.

She was proud of the multimodal pieces she produced during the study and appreciated the opportunity to integrate visual arts into several of her works. Zaire felt the literacy group increased her confidence with discussion and verbally expressing her opinions. She revealed

during Focus Group #2, “I feel like I can talk more. Like, I can get my point out better now." Alaya echoed this sentiment during Focus Group #2 when she said, “My voice is more powerful than I thought” due to engaging in the collaborative literacy group. The participants reaffirmed their identities and increased their confidence in their literacy skills as a result of this study.

I was intentional in how I structured the literacy workshops in order to cultivate an experience of joy for my participants. I used the Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy Framework (Muhammad, 2020) to design the literacy workshop sessions. Each workshop session focused on the four facets of the framework: identity, skills, intellectualism, and criticality (see Appendix D). I selected texts that spoke to different perspectives of their racial, gender, and ethnic identities. I carefully considered how to promote learning within our weekend workshops, while still centering joy and camaraderie. Dunn and Love (2020) posit,

> Centering Black joy within antiracist pedagogies allows Black people to be more than their struggles and setbacks, and to see Black folx creativity, imagination, healing, and ingenuity as a vital part of antiracism (Love, 2019). Black joy is the radical imagination of collective memories of resistance, trauma, survival, love, and cultural modes of expression, which push and expand antiracist pedagogies (Love, 2019). Language arts education must be a space where students write their future of resistance and joy. (Dunn & Love, p. 191).

It was essential that the participants were not only engaged about misrepresentations, but also given multiple opportunities to express creativity, confidence, and joy within this study. This study was successful in elevating the voices of Black West African immigrant girls as confident, passionate, and smart.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that all four girls shared Liberian immigrant backgrounds, whether it was one parent or both parents. Due to the difficulty of recruiting youth during Covid-19 for a completely virtual study, snowball sampling led to referrals. Covid-19 guidelines called for strict social distancing, limiting my ability to make connections with broader audiences outside of my network. Another limitation of this study is that there were only four participants. Their perspectives and experiences should not be diminished due to this fact. However, their views present their localized lived experiences and cannot be generalized to other Black West African immigrant girls. Also, because the study was completed in an out-of-school space, I had more autonomy to design the literacy workshop sessions. The participants were able to express themselves freely through discussion and writing without the pressure of grades or rigid structures. This particular design would be hard to replicate in a traditional English Language Arts (ELA) classroom with 20-30 students. It would be interesting to reconceptualize a literacy workshop with similar goals for a traditional, secondary ELA classroom.

Implications

Teachers

This study provides insight into how Black West African girls understand misrepresentations, reject negative stereotypes, and express their identities through multimodal compositions. The findings from this study highlight the need for more teacher training in the area of culturally and historically responsive pedagogy and relationship building. The participants did not reference their teachers as positive influences on their identity development. Often times, their teachers were depicted as silent bystanders when the participants experienced

bullying. Teachers could benefit from sustained training that focuses on better understanding their students' lived experiences, their own internal biases, and how to best engage their students' intersectional identities best. This type of training would help educators to grow as equitable educators and impact students' learning experiences in school. Critical media literacy training is also pertinent to support educators in critically examining representations of race, gender, and ethnicity in the media. This training would foster educators' examination of their relationship with media and how media impacts their lived experiences.

Incorporating texts that decenter Whiteness and draw upon the lived experiences of marginalized groups, especially Black women and girls, should be an instructional priority for K-12 educators. When diverse texts are incorporated into curricula, they tend to focus on the Black experience as one solely of struggle and pain. There is not a monolithic Black experience, and it is critical to include representations of Black joy, excellence, and creativity (Dunn & Love, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). In addition to this, teachers should make explicit connections to their work as equitable educators through direct communication with parents to express their students' identities within learning activities.

School District Leaders

District leaders can support Black West African girls' academic achievement by allocating resources, funding, and human capacity to support Black West African girls. Evaluating curricular materials for equity, diversity, and inclusiveness before adopting them for district-wide use can support teachers by providing access to equitable instructional materials. In addition to evaluating curricular materials for positive representations of Black girlhood and Africa, district leaders should also invest in appropriate culturally and historically responsive training for teachers, school leaders, and district leaders. Teachers and instructional leaders need

sustained support with uncovering biases and implementing equitable and joyful learning experiences for all students. District leaders should allocate appropriate funding to support schools and instructional leaders. This funding can be used to diversify school text sets, plan programming (such as an after school club) to support the development of Black West African immigrant girls, and hire additional personnel. This funding can also actively recruit more Black women in classroom and leadership roles within schools. Other personnel could also serve in a dedicated role focused on the achievement of underrepresented students, specifically Black girls, and analyze achievement data to determine what other supports can be put in place to accelerate the academic and personal growth of Black girls.

State and Federal Education Leaders

State and federal leaders should explicitly hire and support Black women leaders to provide a more diverse and inclusive perspective. Additionally, state and national leaders should closely evaluate existing learning standards for racism, sexism, and xenophobia. Updating learning standards to be culturally and historically responsive, anti-racist, and inclusive will provide a more robust instructional framework for local school districts to build upon. Moreover, state and federal leaders should allot additional funding for districts to further their initiatives for equitable outcomes for historically marginalized students, specifically, Black girls.

Parents

There are also practical implications for Black West African immigrant parents as a result of this study. Black West African immigrant parents could engage or increase engagement with teachers and schools to learn more about the texts and learning activities included within the curriculum. In addition to learning more about the school-sanctioned curriculum, Black West African immigrant parents can use their voice to advocate for texts that are more representative

and inclusive of their daughters' racial, ethnic, and gender identities. It is also apparent that the girls in this study benefited from strong relationships with their parents that affirmed their intersectional identities. It would be pertinent for parents of Black West African girls to foster close, nurturing relationships with their daughters through conversation and bonding to affirm their identities. Parents can also support positive identity development by exposing their daughters to culturally and historically responsive texts such as books, films, and television shows that highlight positive representations of Black girlhood and Africa.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a lack of research surrounding Black West African immigrant girls' experiences in K-12 education spaces. The possibilities for future research are broad and exciting. Critical media literacy education is vital to the ongoing development of an equitable worldview. There is great benefit to everyone, not just youth, in critically analyzing the types of media they consume, whose voice is highlighted and who is silenced, and how that media perpetuates stereotypes. Society at large should always be closely examining their worldviews, in relation to media, stereotypes, and misrepresentations.

Parents

A possible future study could focus on how Black West African immigrant parents teach their children about their racial, ethnic, and gender identities. The participants in my study spoke extensively about the positive ways their parents affirmed their identities and boosted their confidence. In this study, the parents were 1st generation (born in their country of origin and moved to the United States as an adult) and 1.5 generation (born in their country of origin and moved to the U.S. as a youth) immigrants. It would be interesting to consider how their

experiences of being born and living in their ancestral homeland and immigrating to the United States impacted their understanding of the intersection of race, gender, and ethnicity. It would also be imperative to consider the perspectives of 2nd generation (born in the United States) parents as they may relate to their ancestral homeland in distinctly different ways from 1st generation and 1.5 generation immigrants. Exploring the experiences and beliefs of 1st generation, 1.5 generation, and 2nd generation Black West African immigrant parents can illuminate more contextual information about how Black West African immigrant girls develop their racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

Another possible study should more closely examine the relationships that Black West African immigrant girls have with their parents. This study should explore how Black West African immigrant parents successfully prepare their children with tools to counteract negative stereotypes. This particular demographic of parents navigates bicultural identity development and may have been raised in their ancestral homeland. They must skillfully navigate training, mentoring, and coaching their daughters to develop a positive racial, ethnic, and gender identity. Variables to consider include the parents' immigration status, length of time living in the United States, age, religion, occupation, and household routines. It would be interesting to survey how the parents view social media, cell-phone usage, and popular culture. Researchers could also examine what activities and texts the parents use to support their teaching of positive self-identity with their Black West African immigrant daughters.

Another exciting opportunity for empirical research could study the home cultures of Black West African immigrant parents. The parents have navigated bicultural identity development for themselves and are now supporting their daughters in the journey. Do the parents model their households based on American cultural norms, West African cultural norms,

or a hybrid of the two cultures? It would be important to consider how the parents perceive similarities and differences between the two cultures and how they make decisions on what to emphasize as it relates to identity development for their Black West African immigrant daughters.

Teachers

Another recommendation for future research is to examine how English Language Arts teachers talk about the ways in which they engage the racial, ethnic, and gender identities of Black West African immigrant girls through literacy. This research could explore the instructional decisions teachers make when developing curriculum and engaging with girls of Black West African immigrant descent. Understanding how teachers interpret the intersectionality of their students' racial, ethnic, and gender identities and how they use this knowledge could help to improve the educational experiences of Black West African immigrant girls.

It would also be interesting to delve deeper into what teachers know about their Black West African immigrant girls' home cultures. Future research could explore how teachers engage Black West African immigrant parents as partners for their students' academic growth. I am most interested in the types of communication and how this impacts Black West African immigrant girls' in-school experiences. Unpacking the underlying beliefs that Black West African immigrant parents and teachers hold about the racial, ethnic, and gender identities of Black West African immigrant girls is critical because these two groups of adults have a lot of influence in their lives.

Youth Studies

Another promising area of future research would be to investigate how Black African, Black Caribbean, Afro-Latina, and Black American girls learn and work together in literacy workshops focused on race, gender, and ethnicity. This workshop would provide a space for Black girls of different ethnic and ancestral backgrounds to make meaning collaboratively. It would be interesting to investigate how these youth characterize what it means to be a Black girl, how they develop relationships with each other, and how they represent their intersectional identities through writing.

Out of school spaces are important for the academic, social, and emotional development of youth, and specifically Black girls. Future research should explore how out of school spaces, such as the Boys and Girls Club, promote positive identity development in Black girls. Understanding more about the structures and programming in place to support identity development can provide valuable learning for teachers and school leaders. Out of school spaces have more freedom in programming in comparison to traditional schools but are an essential facet of a lot of youth's lives and therefore should be investigated more.

Conclusion

Moving beyond teacher-centered literacy practices can open youth up to literacy that can "solve problems, identify issues, construct questions, or reconsider something one has already figured out" (NCTE, 2015a). Literacy practices (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are active ways to examine hierarchical power relationships within society and can provide insight into the power differentials at play in classrooms, schools, and communities. Out of school spaces can provide a safe environment where youth do not have to worry about how their writing form or language will be received or critiqued. Literacy as a form of creative expression opens

up youth to express themselves in varied, multilayered ways that cannot always be fully explored using the most traditional forms of writing assessment. Student-centered, collaborative writing groups are especially beneficial for youth who share similar lived experiences. Instead of solely writing for standardized assessments or teacher grading, literacy can be reintroduced and reimagined as a space of freedom, not imprisonment. Creating space for Black West African immigrant girls to explore their identities through literacy promotes collaborative exploration of self-identity, critical analysis of the world around them, and insight into the ways in which multimodal production differs from traditional print-based literacies.

Enacting culturally and historically responsive literacy practices allows Black African immigrant girls to have meaningful dialogue about their unique positions as racial insiders within the African American community and racial outsiders as Black African immigrants within a U.S. context that diminishes African heritage and privileges White hegemony. It was essential that this study provided space for Black West African immigrant girls to speak freely about their understanding of misrepresentations and the impact on their lives, while pushing back on these misrepresentations through multimodal composition. The participants in this study were not defined by misrepresentations and chose to define their own identities through counternarratives and confidence. They believed in their ability to define their experiences and rejected incomplete representations that threatened to diminish their excellence and joy.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - IRB application and approval

Expedited/Full Study (Version 1.4)

1.0 General Information

*Please enter the full title of your study:

Adolescent Girls of Black West African Descent Writing About Self-Identity

*Please enter a short title for your own personal reference.

Identities and Multimodal Writing Fall 2019
* This field allows you to enter an abbreviated version of the Study Title to quickly identify this study.

2.0 Add Department(s)

2.1 Your department is listed below; click "add" to add an additional department, or select the check box next to the department and select "remove" to remove it. PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE "GSU - Georgia State University" AS YOUR PRIMARY DEPARTMENT.:

Primary Dept?	Department Name
(•)	**GSU** - Middle & Secondary Education

3.0 Assign Study Personnel

3.1 *Please add a Principal Investigator for the study:

Muhammad, Gholnecsar

3.2 If applicable, please select the Research Staff personnel (If you are adding a GSU student or faculty member and their name does not appear in the list of personnel, ask that person to log-in to iRIS with his/her campus ID and password which will populate their name in the list. If you are adding personnel from outside GSU and their name does not appear in the link they can be added with the form available at http://ursa.research.gsu.edu/working-with-individuals-outside-of-gsu/.):

A) Additional Investigators

Simmons, Maima W
Student PI

B) Research Support Staff

3.3 *Please add a Study Contact:

Muhammad, Gholnecsar
Simmons, Maima W

The Study Contact(s) will receive all important system notifications along with the Principal Investigator. (e.g. The project contact(s) are typically either the Study Coordinator or the Principal Investigator themselves).

4.0 Additional Personnel Information

4.1 * **Human Subjects Training is a requirement for approval. Have you and your research team members completed Human Subjects Training?**

For step-by-step directions on checking research team members' training, please click here.

(•) Yes ( ) No

4.2 * **Below is the PI you selected. Please confirm that the PI listed on the study is a current Georgia State University faculty member. Students or people outside of the University cannot serve as the PI on the study.**

Gholnecsar Muhammad

Is the PI listed a faculty member at Georgia State University?

(•) Yes ( ) No

4.3 * **Below is the department you selected. Please confirm that the department listed is the correct department for the study. GSU - Georgia State University can NOT be listed as the department.**

GSU - Middle &Secondary Education

Is this the correct department?

(•) Yes ( ) No

5.0 General Research Information

5.1 * **Describe in lay terms the purpose of the research including the research question and what you hope to gain.**

The purpose of the study is to understand how girls of Black West African immigrant descent write about representations of themselves in their writings. The PI wants to understand the ways girls write across their identities in their writings. The research questions are (1) How do adolescent girls of West African descent understand their racial, ethnic and
gendered identities when they analyze media representations of Black women and girls?
(2) How do adolescent girls of West African descent (re)create their own identities
through multimodal literacies? Understanding how girls of Black West African immigrant descent write about their lives may help educators to design better pedagogy for Black girls.

5.2 * **Describe how human subjects will be involved. If there is interaction with participants, describe the proposed procedures for research.**

If you are using secondary data the Secondary Data Analysis application can be used. If you would like to continue with this application, describe the content of the data, the source, and clarify if all data are currently existing at this time.

Do not describe recruitment information, informed consent procedures, or confidentiality information in this section. That information is requested elsewhere in the application.

A case study (within and across participants) will be conducted with girls of Black West African immigrant descent who will participate in a writing institute. The institute is being done solely for research purposes. Participants who participate in the writing institute must consent to the study. Participants will be recruited to write several writing artifacts throughout the duration of the writing institute. The girls will decide what types of pieces they want to write. Each will also be asked to participate in two audio recorded semi-structured interviews to discuss themes of representation in her writings. The participants will also be asked to participate in two audio-recorded focus groups.

5.3 * **State who will be conducting each of the procedures detailed above. If there are multiple procedures or populations, be sure to state who will be conducting each procedure or working with each population.**

The PI and Student PI will conduct the recruitment, facilitate the institute, and conduct the interviews and focus groups. The Student PI will transcribe the interviews and focus groups.

5.4 * **Is the Study a clinical trial? Clinical trial means a research study in which one or more human subjects are prospectively assigned to one or more interventions (which may include placebo or other control) to evaluate the effects of interventions on *biomedical* or *behavioral* health-related outcomes.**

○ Yes ◉ No

5.5 * **Will the study involve interaction with participants?**

Interaction includes any contact with people including, but not limited to, online interaction, survey distribution, or hiring a company or third person that will interact with people.

◉ Yes ○ No

6.0 Funding, Dissertation, or Protocol

6.1 * **Will the research be funded?**

○ Yes ◉ No

6.2 * **Is this study or any part of this study contributing to a dissertation or thesis?**

◉ Yes ○ No

Please be sure to upload the **thesis, dissertation, or prospectus** in the study document section at the **END** of the submission packet.

7.0 Study Information

7.1 * Will this study be submitted to another IRB for review and approval?

○ Yes ◉ No

7.2 * Does your study involve the use of Protected Health Information (PHI), as such term is defined by HIPAA, obtained from a Covered Entity? For more information on the definitions of PHI and Covered Entity or other terms related to HIPAA, please click here.

○ Yes ◉ No

7.3 * Will the study involve the use or possible exposure to infectious or potentially infectious material? (e.g. blood, bodily fluids, mucosal swabs, tissue samples, etc.)

○ Yes ◉ No

7.4 * Does the study involve the use of non-human animals? (e.g. dogs, mice, non-human primates, etc.)

○ Yes ◉ No

7.7 * Will your study involve data from student education records (e.g. class work, grades, attendance records, communications, projects, classroom tests, standardized tests, journals, SAT/ACT scores, etc.)? This list is not exhaustive. Please see section 1.6 of the IRB manual for more information on FERPA records.

○ Yes ◉ No

8.0 Location

8.1 * Will the study be conducted outside of the United States?

○ Yes ◉ No

8.2 * Is there a research location located outside of Georgia State University?

○ Yes ◉ No

9.0 Investigational Information

9.1 * Will the study involve the use of FDA approved drugs?
Please note: GSU's IRB can only review studies that use FDA approved drugs for approved uses. Please contact the IRB office if you are using a drug not approved by the FDA.

○ Yes ◉ No

9.2 * Will the study involve an investigational device?

○ Yes ◉ No

9.3 * Will the study involve Radiation or Lasers?

○ Yes ◉ No

10.0 Additional Information

10.1 * Will the study involve deception or concealment of any information?

○ Yes ◉ No

10.2 * If you are using a survey that will be administered at Georgia State University, does it need to go through the Survey Coordinating Committee? This committee is independent of the IRB. Information on the committee can be found on their website.

○ Yes
○ No
◉ N/A

10.3 Do any research personnel need special certifications, training, or special qualifications to conduct the research procedures? If so the individual's name and qualifications should be listed along with any certification or licensure number and dates of qualification. This includes studies that utilize venipuncture, EKGs, direct patient care, CPR, EEGs, and studies involving clinical psychologists, physicians, nurses, physical therapists, and others.

○ Yes
◉ No
○ N/A

11.0 Vulnerable Populations

11.1 * If you are including women, are you recruiting pregnant women because they are pregnant or are you including any procedures that could be more than minimal risk for a pregnant woman or fetus?

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No, I am including women of childbearing age, but the study includes no procedures that are more than minimal risk for the participant or fetus.
- ○ No, I am excluding women of childbearing age (a study specific justification must be provided elsewhere in the application).
- ○ No, I am excluding pregnant women (a study specific justification and procedures for the exclusion must be included in the application)

11.2 * Are you including any students or trainees in your research?

- ○ Yes, participants are the students or trainees of a researcher.
- ◉ Participants may be students or trainees, but they are not the students or trainees of anyone on the research team.

11.3 * Are you including any employees or subordinates?

- ○ Yes, participants are the employees or subordinates of someone on the research team.
- ◉ Participants may be employees or subordinates, but they are not the employees or subordinates of anyone on the research team.

11.4 * Are you using any patients in your research?

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No

11.5 * Are you using prisoners in your study?

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No

11.6 * Are you using children (ages 0-17 in Georgia) in your research?

- ◉ Yes
- ○ No

11.7 * Are you including any adults that may be cognitively or decisionally impaired?

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No

11.8 * **Describe steps that will be taken to ensure additional protection of the rights and welfare of the children.**

To protect the rights and welfare of the youth involved in this study, we will ensure that participants and their parents are provided consent, we will provide full disclosure of the nature of the activities involved in the study, and we will maintain participant's anonymity in any and all reports, publications, or presentations that will follow.

11.9 * **Describe how assent and parental permission will be obtained (more information will be required in the informed consent section of the application).**

Permission must be obtained from a parent or a legal guardian. If an adult is not a legal guardian, he/she cannot provide permission for research.

Immediately following IRB approval and recruitment of the potential participants, the PI will ask the parents and their daughters to meet at Georgia State University in the College of Education (room 650) for an informational meeting to learn more about the research study and to read the consent and assent forms. The PI will explain the forms thoroughly to parents and their daughters. If the parents have any questions about the consent forms, they may ask right away or take the forms home for further consideration. The PI will answer all inquiries about the research study. The female participants and her parents/guardians will have three days (72 hours) to complete the consent and assent forms. They may be completed on the day they are given to the parents and the potential participants, or mailed or brought to Georgia State University within the 72 hour period.

11.10 * **Does the study involve more than minimal risk to the children? Provide justification.**

○ Yes ◉ No

11.11 * **Does the study present the prospect of direct benefit to the child? Provide justification.**

◉ Yes ○ No

The writing institute is being done solely for the research study. The issue of representation is one of importance for Black girls because of the heterogeneity that exists and because negative representations have defined Black girls singularly. I define representation as the description, depiction, portrayal or characterization of the self or someone else in a particular way. It is also a form of action of speaking or standing up for self (self-representation) or for someone else. Whether or not it includes factual information, representation typically attempts to allude towards some type of truth. The focus on representation and writing are central topics because Black women have a unique history of having others speak on their behalf and representing who they are as they have simultaneously written to resist certain portrayals. They have specifically written to self-define and represent their lives, resist hegemony, and write for social change (Royster, 2000). Black girls of West African immigrant descent today may use their pens in similar ways as Black women have before them and write their own interpretations of themselves. If educators are informed of their writings and who Black girls are through their own words, it may help them design pedagogy that is inclusive to Black girls' lives.

11.12 * Does the study involve children that are wards of the state? If so, please describe how the requirements in 45 CFR 46.409 are met.

○ Yes ◉ No

12.0 Population Data

12.1 * Will enrollment be limited to a specific ethnic, social, or gender group? If so, describe and justify.

◉ Yes ○ No

Participants must be a girl of Black West African immigrant descent. The PI is examining how Black girls of West African immigrant descent represent themselves in writing. Therefore only girls who are of Black West African immigrant descent and between the ages will be
considered for participation. This is important because an examination of how Black girls represent themselves in writing is absent from the research literature therefore this study aims to
contribute to the scant research in this area.

12.2 * Total number of participants
(You cannot enroll more than the total number of participants without an amendment.)

10

12.3 * Total number of participants per a year

10.00

12.4 * Justification for the number of participants

Five (5) to ten (10) African-American females will be allowed to participate in the study. As there will be two investigators, a ratio of 5 girls per investigator is reasonable.

12.5 * What will be the age range(s) of the participants?

☑ 0-17
☐ 18-89
☐ 90 and above

12.6 * What is the age range of the participants age 0-17?

11-17

12.7 * What is the time commitment for each participant? If you are using multiple populations, provide the time commitment required for a participant in each population. (e.g., "Participation will take 2 hours of time, one day a week, for 9 weeks for a total of 18 hours over 9 weeks.")

The writing institute will be held over fourteen weeks during the months of September, October, November, and December 2019. The institute will meet for ten sessions from 9am-12pm on Saturdays for a total time commitment of 30 hours. During these sessions, participants will engage in 2 focus groups. In addition to the literacy sessions, the participants will engage in two audio recorded interviews. The time commitment for the audio recorded interviews will last for approximately 40-minutes per interview. The total time commitment of the study will be 31 hours and 20 minutes.

12.8 * **Describe where the procedures will take place and how privacy will be maintained while conducting procedures. If you are conducting multiple procedures or using multiple populations, be sure to describe where each interaction will take place. Please Note: If research is to be conducted off site and not at a public location, you MUST submit the approval letter from the site stating that the research may be conducted there.**

The writing institute will take place at Georgia State University in the Urban Literacy Collaborative and Clinic (room 100) in Dahlberg Hall. The interviews will take place in the private office of the PI in the College of Education.

12.9 * **Federal regulations require that you include minors (e.g. participants aged 0 - 17) in your research unless you can justify their exclusion. Are you including minors? If not, check the appropriate box and provide a justification specific to this study in the text box.**

- ○ No, inappropriate due to lack of safety data in studies conducted in adults
- ○ No, inappropriate with respect to the purpose of the research
- ○ Other
- ◉ Yes, minors are included

12.10 * **Federal regulations require that you include minorities (i.e. minority ethnic, racial, gender groups, etc.) in your research unless you can justify their exclusion. Are you including minorities? If not, describe and provide a justification specific to this study**

- ○ No, minorities are not included
- ◉ Yes, minorities are included

13.0 Recruitment

13.1 * **Describe in detail the recruitment plan. Who will be recruited and how (i.e. will the study use a subject pool, announcements, recruitment ads, email, etc.?) If materials such as flyers, emails, advertisements, screen shots from websites, or any other recruitment material is used, it must be uploaded with this application.**

Do not use the terms 'word of mouth' or 'snowball sampling'. Instead, describe what you will be doing to let people know about the study and how you will invite them to participate.

The PI and Student PI will email local schools, educational organizations, and community centers. Potential participants will be recruited by email correspondence sent to local schools, educational organizations, and community centers. These emails are already on the GSU ULCC listserv from other programs provided through the ULCC. The leaders of these organizations will be asked to forward the recruitment information to staff and youth. Other emails will be obtained by googling the school or organization. An email will be sent out explaining the overview of the research project and will contain contact information for anyone (parents, educators, school leaders, community youth advocate) who knows of any students who may be interested. Participants will be recruited following the approval of the IRB.

13.2 * **Describe the inclusion and exclusion criteria. State how the inclusion/exclusion criteria will be determined.**

The inclusion criteria for participants of the study is that they must self identify as an English speaking girl of Black West African descent between the ages of 11-17 years old at the time of the current study. Those who do not fall within inclusion criteria are excluded from the study.

13.3 * **Will participants be compensated or incur any costs for their participation? If so, provide details of the compensation (i.e. what the compensation is, the total amount, etc.). Compensation might include money, gifts, food, class credit, or extra credit provided for participation. Any costs to the subjects that may result from participation in the research should also be described. Detail what compensation participants will be given if they do not complete the study. If extra credit is given, describe the assignment of equal difficulty and length that will be provided for the same amount of credit if students wish to not participate in the research. If a lottery or drawing will be used, specific information must be provided to ensure it meets requirements in GSU policy and state law.**

○ Yes ◉ No

14.0 Benefits & Risks

14.1 * Describe the benefits, if any, to the participants and to society from the proposed research. Compensation is not a benefit of participating in research.

Please note: The benefits and risks described in the application must match the benefits and risks described in the informed consent form.

The girls may learn more about themselves as writers and how to self-express themselves through writing. There may be benefits to society by teaching girls about their identities, they may be able to use this knowledge to benefit them personally in society.

14.2 * Describe the risks or discomforts, if any, to the participants, whether physical, psychological, or social, and the means proposed to minimize them. If participants may become upset or require medical or psychological attention as a result of the research procedures, a means of addressing attention to these concerns should be described in this section. A participant is at risk in research if he or she may be exposed to a possibility of harm that is greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life or during routine examinations or tests. Each investigator should make a conscientious assessment of possible harms and disclose them to the IRB.

No anticipated risks beyond what would be experienced in a normal day of life.

15.0 Participant Data

15.1 * Will information that personally links the participants to the research be collected?

(•) Yes ( ) No

If **Yes**, state what identifying information will be collected. Identifying information includes (but is not limited to) name, social security or student ID number, date of birth, contact information including email address or phone number, photographs, and audio or video recordings.

Name of Participant
Audio Recordings
Phone Number and Email Address of parents
Writing Samples

15.2 * Will photographs, audio recordings, or video recordings be used?

(•) Yes ( ) No

If **Yes**, describe and provide information how any special precautions used to protect photographs, audio or video recordings.

The audio recordings will be stored in a locked file in the student PI's work office separate from the rest of study data. The recordings will be destroyed after transcription.
The audio recordings will not contain additional identifying information. Any audio recordings that contain identifiable information will be automatically destroyed before transcription.

15.3 * State where and how any data will be collected, stored, and transported; who will have access to the data and what will be done with it after the study is over; protections for storing or sharing hard-copy and electronic data (flash drive, cloud storage, Drop Box, etc.)
If a code sheet will be used to separate identifying information from the participant data describe the means of protecting this document.
If identifiable data are inadvertently collected, please state how it will be managed.

The participant's names or other identifying characteristics will
not be requested or shared in the audios. The PI will assign a pseudonym to the participants. The interview data will
be transcribed by the student PI and immediately destroyed following transcription. The audio recordings will be stored in a locked file in the student PI's work office separate from the rest of study data.
The audio recordings will not contain additional identifying information. Any audio recordings that contain identifiable information will be immediately destroyed before transcription.

Other forms of participants' data will be stored in a locked cabinet (hard copies) in the PI's office and electronically on the PI's work computer that also requires a code to view. Only the PI will have the code to view.
This data will be destroyed one-year after the research has been conducted. If any identifiable data is inadvertently collected, it
will be immediately destroyed.

16.0 Review Categories

16.1 Review Categories

Select Category	Description
☐ Full Board Review	More than minimal risk/does not meet other categories' requirements
☐ Expedited - Category 1	Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.) (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared /approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

☐ Expedited - Category 2	Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, nonpregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
☐ Expedited - Category 3	Collection of biological specimens by noninvasive means. Examples are: (a) hair and nail clipplings; (b) teeth routinely shed or extracted; (c) excreta and external secretions; (d) uncannulated saliva; (e) placenta removed after delivery; (f) amniotic fluid collected in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques; (h) mucosal or skin cells collected by scraping, skin swab, or mouth washing; (i) sputum collected after saline mist nebulization
☐ Expedited - Category 4	Collection of data through noninvasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.) Examples: (a) physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy;

	(e) moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
☐ Expedited - Category 5	Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis). (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)
☑ Expedited - Category 6	Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
☑ Expedited - Category 7	Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

17.0 Informed Consent

17.1 * Directions: Check all applicable consent procedures. These procedures must be approved by the IRB.

Name	Description
☑ Signed Consent Required	Signed consent will be sought from the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative.
☐ Waiver of Consent or Waiver/Alteration of the required elements of consent	Per 45CFR46.116 (d) an IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth in this section, or waive the requirements to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that: (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects; (2) the waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects; (3) the research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; (4) whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information; and (5) the research is not FDA-regulated

		OR Waiver of Consent Process-Demonstration Project (1)The research is conducted by or subject to the approval of state or local government officials (2)The research or demonstration protocol is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: - Public benefit or service programs. - Procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs. - Possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures. - Possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs. (3)The research cannot practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration. (4)The research is not FDA-regulated
	☐ Waiver of Documentation of Consent	Per 45CFR46.117(c) an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject's wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

17.4 * Are all participants able to give consent (i.e., no children or decisionally impaired adults)?

○ Yes
◉ No

17.5 Describe how and by whom permission or consent will be granted. For children, permission must be obtained from the child's parent or legal guardian unless a waiver of consent is approved to waive the parental permission.

Both youth participants and their parents will give assent/consent to participate in the study and use the results for reporting, publication, and/or presentation. For the 11-17 year olds, written assent must be obtained by the PI.

17.6 * Provide a description of the informed consent procedures. Include who will obtain consent, where, when, and how. Include steps taken to minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence, the language that will be used by those obtaining consent, how you will ensure the language is understood by the prospective participant or the legally authorized representative, and any information that will be communicated to the prospective participant or the legally authorized representative. Also state if there will be any waiting period between informing the prospective participant and obtaining consent.

Immediately following IRB approval and recruitment of the potential participants, the PI will ask the parents and their daughters to meet at Georgia State University in room 650 of the College of Education

building for an informational meeting to learn more about the research study and to read the consent and assent forms. The PI will explain the forms thoroughly to parents and their daughters. If the parents have any questions about the consent forms, they may ask right away or take the forms home for further consideration. The PI will answer all inquiries about the research study. The female participants and her parents/guardians will have three days (72 hours) to complete the consent and assent forms. They may be completed on the day they are given to the parents and the potential participants, or mailed or brought to Georgia State University within the 72 hour period.

17.7 * **What is the estimated lowest reading level of each population?**

The estimated lowest reading level for parents is 8th grade and for participants is 5th grade.

17.8 * **What is the reading level of your informed consent document? The reading level of the consent form must be at the lowest estimated reading level for the population. Keep in mind that half of all adult Americans read at or below the 8th grade reading level. To check the readability of your consent form please see Obtaining Grade Level Information.**

The reading level for the parent permission form is 8.4 and the minor assent form is 4.9.

17.9 * **Does the population include participants that are non-English speaking?**

- ○ Yes
- ◉ No

18.0 Conflict of Interest

18.1 * **Does the PI, Co-Investigators, or other research staff including their spouse and dependents have a significant financial conflict of interest defined as:**

- An equity interest that, when aggregated for the Investigator or research staff and their spouse or dependents meets all of the following tests: Exceed $5,000 in value as determined through reference to public prices or other reasonable measures of fair market value, represents more than a 5% ownership interest in any single entity, and value is affected by the outcome of the research; or

- Salary, royalties or other payments that, when aggregated for the Investigator or research staff and their spouse and dependents over the next 12 months, are expected to exceed $5,000 and value is affected by the outcome of the research.

○ Yes ◉ No

18.2 * **Does the PI, Co-Investigators, or other research staff including their spouse and dependents have:**
- A board or executive relationship related to the research regardless of compensation.
- Proprietary interest related to the research including by not limited to a patent, trademark, copyright, or licensing agreement.

○ Yes ◉ No

19.0 Endorsement

19.1 * Please affirm the following endorsement statements:

- I will not begin this research study before receiving a formal letter of IRB approval;
- I will document informed consent according to my approved procedure;
- I will report to the IRB in a timely manner any unanticipated events to participants;
- I will renew my IRB application before expiration (if applicable), submit a status check form, or submit a study closure form;
- I will gain IRB approval before altering the research study and/or consent forms;
- I will notify the IRB if there are any changes in my contact information.

◉ I agree

Georgia State University
Assent Form

Title: Adolescent Girls of Black West African Descent Writing About Self-Identity
Principal Investigator: Dr. G. Muhammad
Student Principal Investigator: Maima Chea

Introduction and Key Information

We would like for you to participate in a research study. The study will happen between September - December 2019. We want to learn how you write about yourself.

You will be asked to:

- share some of your writing with us so we can learn about you
- talk in a focus group twice (we will record these with an audio-recorder)
- be interviewed twice (we will record these with an audio-recorder)
- work with the research team and other girls in the writing group

Risks
In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day.

Benefits
Taking part in this study may help you. You may learn more about yourself as a writer and how to express yourself through the things you write. .

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
You can refuse to be in the study, and your parents/legal guardians cannot force you. No one will be mad or upset with you if you decide not to be in the study. Even if you start the study, you can change your mind and leave at any time.

Contact Information
Contact Dr. G. Muhammad and Maima Chea at (678) 464-0791 and mchea2@student.gsu.edu

- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

GSU APPROVED IRB NUMBER: H19613
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 07/12/2019

Assent

We will give you a copy of this form to keep.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please sign below.

____

Printed Name of Participant

____ __________________

Signature of Participant Date

____ __________________

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Assent Date

Georgia State University
Parental Permission Form

Title: Adolescent Girls of Black West African Descent Writing About Self-Identity
Principal Investigator: Dr. G. Muhammad
Student Principal Investigator: Maima Chea Simmons

Introduction and Key Information

Your child is invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you want your child to participate.

The purpose of this study is to learn how your child writes about who they are.
If you agree, your child will spend 31 hours and 20 minutes over a 14-week period from September 7, 2019 - December 7, 2019.

Your child will be asked to do the following:

- take part in a writing group study about how Black girls of West African immigrant descent write about themselves.
- have their writings studied by the research team.
- take part in two thirty (30) minute focus groups held during the writing group at the beginning and end of the study (we will audio-record these conversations).
- take part in two forty (40) minute individual interviews at Georgia State University in a private office before and after the last group sessions (we will audio-record these conversations).
- interact with the research team, Dr. Muhammad and Maima Chea, in addition to other girls in the writing group.

Taking part in this study will not expose your child to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day.

This study is designed to benefit your child. Children may learn more about themselves as writers and how to express their self through writing. We hope to gain information about the benefits of teaching girls about their identities.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to study how your child writes about who they are.
Your child is invited to participate because they :

- are a Black girl of West African immigrant descent
- speak English

- are between the ages of 11-17.

A total of five (5) to ten (10) people will be invited to take part in this study.

Future Research

Researchers will remove information that may identify your child and may use your child's data for future research. If we are interested in doing this, we will not ask for any additional consent from you before any future studies.

Risks

In this study, your child will not have any more risks than they would in a normal day of life. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe your child has been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury that may occur.

Benefits

This study is designed to benefit your child. Children may learn more about themselves as writers and how to express their self through writing. We hope to gain information about the benefits of teaching girls about their identities.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in the study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Your child does not have to be in this study. If your child decides to be in the study and changes her mind, she has the right to drop out at any time. Your child may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever your child decides, she will not lose any benefits to which she is otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality

We will keep your child's records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people will have access to the information you provide:

- Dr. Muhammad and Maima Chea Simmons
- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use fake names rather than your child's name on study records. The information your child provides will be stored in a safe place. Your child's data, such as writing samples and paper records of audio records, will be locked in the researcher's office. The audio records will be locked in the student PI's office. The audio records will not have any trackable information. If it does, it will be destroyed. Your child's name and other facts that might point to them will not

appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form so that no one will be able to figure out the specific participants. All original data will be destroyed after one year.

Study members will be asked not to reveal what was discussed within group discussion. Participants should also be warned that the researchers do not have complete control over the privacy of the data. The research team will instruct participants not to talk about anything from group discussion. But, we cannot promise that participants will keep everything said during group discussion private.

Contact Information

Contact Dr. G. Muhammad and Maima Chea Simmons at (678) 464-0791 and mchea2@student.gsu.edu

- If you have questions about the study or your child's part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone other than Dr. Muhammad or Maima. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your child's rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

Consent

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer your child for this research, please sign below.

____

Printed Name of Participant

____ ________________

Signature of Parent/ Legal Guardian Date

____ ________________

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

GSU APPROVED IRB NUMBER: H19613
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 07/12/2019

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999
Phone: 404/413-3500

In Person: 3rd Floor
58 Edgewood
FWA: 00000129

July 16, 2019

Principal Investigator: Gholnecsar Muhammad

Key Personnel: Muhammad, Gholnecsar; Simmons, Maima W

Study Department: Middle & Secondary Education

Study Title: Adolescent Girls of Black West African Descent Writing About Self-Identity

Review Type: Expedited Category 6, 7

IRB Number: H19613

Reference Number: 354976

Approval Date: 07/12/2019

Status Check Due By: 07/11/2022

The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111. The IRB has reviewed and approved the study and any informed consent forms, recruitment materials, and other research materials that are marked as approved in the application. The approval period is listed above. Research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the Institution.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. For any changes to the study (except to protect the safety of participants), an Amendment Application must be submitted to the IRB. The Amendment Application must be reviewed and approved before any changes can take place.

2. Any unanticipated problems occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Unanticipated Problem Form.

3. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is properly documented in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.

   - The Informed Consent Form (ICF) used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB with the approval dates stamped on each page.

4. A Status Check must be submitted three years from the approval date indicated above.

5. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.

All of the above referenced forms are available online at http://protocol.gsu.edu. Please do not hesitate to contact the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Catherine Chang, IRB Member

Appendix B – Study Application

(Re)claiming and (Re)framing:
A Literacy Group for West African Girls
Application

Applicant's Name

Applicant's Age

Applicant's Home Address

City **Zip Code**

Applicant's School

Applicant's Grade for School Year 20-21

Applicant's Email Contact

Name of Parents/ Guardians

Parent/ Guardians' Cell Phone

Parent/Guardians' Email Contact

Please list the West African country(ies) that one or both parents/guardians are from:

For Applicant Only:
How do you feel about writing about community issues with other Black girls?

Please submit one (1) writing sample (in any genre or form of choice) about what it's like being a Black girl. There is no length requirement or expected form or structure. Please email your writing sample to mchea2@student.gsu.edu.

Appendix C - Semi-structured interview questions

Interview Protocol #1

1. Why did you decide to participate in the literacy institute?
2. What do you think it will be like working with other girls of Black West African immigrant descent?
3. How would you describe yourself to someone who didn't know you?
   (what does being Black American, African immigrant and female mean to you?)
4. What topics do you like to write about?
5. Where do you write about these topics?
6. Have you written about yourself in your writings? If so, talk about these writings.
7. What topics do you like to read about?
8. Have you read about yourself or girls similar to yourself in these texts? If so, talk about these texts.
9. Have you read about yourself or girls similar to yourself in these texts? If so, talk about these texts.
10. What types of media do you like to watch?
11. What type of music do you like to listen to?
12. What types of social media forums do you engage with?
13. How do you think Black women and/or girls are portrayed in society?
14. How are Black women and girls portrayed in media such as music, television, and Internet?

15. Why do you think these representations exist?
16. How do you think Africa and Africans are portrayed in society?
17. How are African and Africa portrayed in media such as music, television, Internet, magazines, and radio?
18. Can you recall an incident that made you super aware of your identity as African immigrant, Black, or female (or a combination of the three)?
19. Are there any issues you experience as a BWA girl?
20. What do you expect to gain from the literacy institute?
21. Is there anything else you want to share as you prepare to participate in the literacy institute?
22. How did you feel about reading and your reading ability prior to today? Would you consider yourself a high/medium/low reader?
23. How did you feel about writing and your writing ability prior to today? Would you consider yourself a high/medium/low writer?
24. What is your understanding of the Black Lives Matter movement?
25. Name one quality you find beautiful in yourself.

Interview Protocol #2

1. What did you like best about participating in the literacy institute?
2. What did you like least about participating in the literacy institute?
3. What was it like writing and viewing media with other girls of Black West African immigrant descent?

4. How did writing with other girls of Black West African immigrant descent impact your writing?
5. What do you think about the writings you produced during the institute?
6. What do you think about the text read (literature, videos, and images)?
7. Discuss the process of creating your first multimodal piece.
8. Talk about how you wrote about who you are in multimodal piece #1 and why you chose to write about __________________(themes found).
9. Discuss the process of creating your second multimodal piece.
10. Talk about how you wrote about who you are in multimodal piece #2 and why you chose to write about __________________(themes found).
11. Discuss the process of creating your third multimodal piece.
12. Talk about how you wrote about who you are in multimodal piece #3 and why you chose to write about __________________(themes found).
13. Discuss the process of creating your fourth multimodal piece.
14. Talk about how you wrote about who you are in multimodal piece #4 and why you chose to write about __________________(themes found).
15. Why is writing important to you?
16. Why is media important to you?
17. How do you think your writings can help others know who you are?
18. In what specific ways (if any) did the literacy institute help you to be a better reader and/or writer?
19. How did the literacy institute compare with literacy experiences you have had in your classrooms at school?

20. How do your writings represent facets of your identity (how is being Black American, African immigrant and female reflected in these pieces?)
21. Is there anything else you want to share about the literacy institute experience?

Appendix D - Focus group interview questions

(The same questions were used for both focus groups.)

1. What ‘single stories’ have people told about Black girls? Africans?
2. What has it been like working with other girls of Black West African immigrant descent?
3. Do you have opportunities to write with other girls in school?
4. Do you talk about your identity in school assignments or with teachers? If so, how? If not, why do you think that is?
5. What does being Black American, African immigrant and female mean to you?
6. How are Black girls portrayed in society?
7. How are Black women and girls portrayed in media such as music, television, internet, magazines, and radio?
8. How do you think Africa and Africans are portrayed in society?
9. How are African and Africa portrayed in media such as music, television, internet, magazines, and radio?
10. What types of media do you like to watch?
11. What type of music do you like to listen to?
12. What types of social media forums do you engage with?
13. Can you recall an incident that made you super aware of your identity as African immigrant, Black, or female (or a combination of the three)?

Appendix E – Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy Lesson Plan Framework

Workshop	Tentative topic
Workshop #1	Introductions, Development of group norms, Focus group interviews
Workshops #2-3	Composition: Where I'm From Poem on Animoto Identity: Participants will evaluate how their experiences are shaped by their bicultural identities. Skill: Participants will become better at writing using imagery and sensory details. Intellect: Participants will become smarter about how their family and home culture have shaped their identity. Criticality: Participants will examine the influence of their family and community culture on their identities.
Workshops #4 -5	Composition: Creative Partner Writing on Google Docs Identity: Participants will reflect upon their own identity as Black West African girls and make meaning of how cultural norms have contributed to their home and school culture. Skill: Participants will become better at creative writing. Intellect: Participants will become smarter about how different social and cultural experiences impact identity development. Criticality: Participants will question and critique how gender and cultural norms differ for people who do not identify as a girl/woman.
Workshops #6-7	Composition: Name Poem on FlipGrid Identity: Students will reflect upon the origin and/or story behind their name and develop confidence. Skill: Students will learn how to use figurative and descriptive language in their writing. Intellect: Students will become smarter about Criticality: Students will critique how names 'other' or 'race' people
Workshops #8-9	Composition: Children's Poster or Video (Participant Choice) Identity: Participants will reflect upon how beauty norms have impacted their lived experiences

	Skill: Participants will become better at communicating written and visual messages to younger audiences. Intellect: Students will become smarter about the impact of beauty norms and the effect of positive role models. Criticality: Participants will challenge perceptions of beauty within their own communities
Workshop #10	Focus group interview Composition: Open Letter (Participant Choice) Perceptions of Africa: "Danger of a Single Story" - Ted Talk Identity: Participants will consider how single stories shape how they see themselves and how others see them. Skill: Participants will become better at developing their authentic writing voice. Intellect: Participants will become smarter about the impact of single stories for people who share different and similar backgrounds. Criticality: Participants will reflect on how single stories in the media impact their lived experiences.

Appendix F - Initial Codes (87)

activism	Black Lives Matter	confidence	friendship	independence	parents	racism	success
adult-confidence	BLM black people are treated badly	control	gender and ethnicity	interests	peer-confidence	reflection piece	“Sulwe”
Africa	BLM struggling in society	cultural difference	“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid	journal	personal perspectives	relationship building	TED talk
African stereotypes	boundaries	culture	girlhood	literate identities	personality	representation	tri-lens
American	boys	distraction	Google docs	media	pictures	resilience	trouble
Animoto	brave	emotion	growth	multimodal comp	pride	role model	trust
artifact	bullying	enjoyment	hair	music	Privacy	scared	unique
assignment process	choice	express yourself	“Hair Love”	name	process	school	Until BLM matter, nothing really matters
because of my age	colorism	family	history	Negative representations of Black women and girls	protection	self-confidence	West African
benefits	community	fight	hyper-aware of race	oppression	race and ethnicity entangled	skin color	
Black stereotypes	compare/contrast	Flipgrid	identity	other perspectives	race and gender	social media	

Appendix G - Axial and Theoretical Codes

Theme: Misrepresentations	Number of Instances	Theoretical Framework
Axial Code: Media	29	Critical Race Feminism, Transnationalism
Axial Code: African Stereotypes	24	Transnationalism
Axial Code: Name	20	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Black Stereotypes	17	CRF
Axial Code: Negative Representations of Black Women and Girls	17	CRF
Axial Code: History	11	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: School	76	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Bullying	10	Transnationalism

Theme: Confidence & Counternarratives	Number of Instances	Theoretical Framework
Axial Code: Confidence	92	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Unique	19	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Positive Representations of Black Women and Girls	15	CRF
Axial Code: School	76	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Self Confidence	78	Transnationalism
Axial Code: Peer Confidence	15	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Adult Confidence	8	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Parents	35	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: West African	35	Transnationalism
Axial Code: Girlhood	63	CRF, Transnationalism

Theme: Collaboration & Relationship Building	Number of Instances	Theoretical Framework
Axial Code: Community	20	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Express Yourself	12	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Relationship Building	50	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Personal Perspectives	13	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Other Perspectives	25	Transnationalism

Theme: Multimodal Composition	Number of Instances
Axial Code: Multimodal Composition	45
Axial Code: Process	42
Axial Code: Trouble	9
Axial Code: Emotion	13
Axial Code: Assignment Process	12
Axial Code: Compare Contrast	16

Theme: Counternarratives & Critiques to Stereotypes of Black girlhood and Africa	Number of Instances	Theoretical Framework
Axial Code: Literate Identities	81	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Reflection Piece	18	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Identity	35	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Pride	14	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Self Confidence	78	CRF, Transnationalism

Axial Code: Race and ethnicity entangled	17	Transnationalism
Axial Code: Race and gender entangled	14	CRF
Axial Code: School	76	CRF, Transnationalism
Axial Code: Girlhood	63	CRF

Appendix H - Theoretical Codes

Theoretical Code	**Interview Excerpt – These are direct quotations.**	**Multimodal Artifact Excerpt**	**Memo Excerpt**
Misrepresentations - Narrow and stereotypical representations of a particular group, often negative in nature that present minoritized communities as inferior (Ross, 2019).	I've experienced people calling my mom, African booty scratcher, dirty. She can't talk right. She can't pronounce right and all this. Interview #1, Zaire	“Some people judge you for your color before getting to know you” Application Poem, Sienna	It brings up childhood feelings of embarrassment hearing the girls talk about being called an African booty scratcher. I experienced the same bullying as a kid. Researcher Memo
Confidence - a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or of reliance on one's circumstances (Merriam-Webster)	[My parents] say that you are beautiful just the way you are and you don't have to change anything. We love you and you're unique in your own way. Interview #2, Alaya	The world tries to tell us one thing, but believe me I know the truth. Open Letter, Kayden	Hearing the participants talk about how they feel their writing improved since the workshop began brings me joy. Sienna’s comments about her teacher’s beliefs about her writing skills really pushed me to reflect on how I built my students’ confidence when I was a teacher. Did I do enough? What could I have done differently? Researcher Memo
Collaboration and Relationship Building - To work with others towards an intellectual goal while developing social connections and deepening bonds. (Merriam-Webster)	When you're writing with other people it can be really awkward, but when you're working with people who share the same background as you, it becomes less awkward. Focus Group #2, Sienna	This is how to give someone space when you need to cool off. This is how to resolve problems without violence. This is how you build good relationships with family and friends for the future. Girl Creative Writing, Zaire and Kayden	During today’s partner writing activity, I noticed the girls thrived while discussing the text with their partner. This was the first time their writing prompt was more open-ended. They could decide what direction to take their creative writing response. I’m thinking about how it was so important for me to maintain structure through predefined lessons and how these workshops truly compare and contrast to a regular day at school. Field Note
Multimodal Composition - Combines several communication forms, including print, digital, audio, visual, gestural,	I think that it was a good thing to watch a YouTube video of the stories, because sometimes the stories didn’t like … , I	N/A	Two of the girls do not enjoy using Animoto. I think I underestimated how involved the photo uploading process could

musical, and spatial forms, to communicate ideas and experiences. (NCTE, 2005)	mean, they did matter, but they weren't as powerful as the videos. Interview #2, Alaya		be. I did not prep them as well as I could by having them email themselves the pictures they wanted to include in their Animoto video. I think next week will go smoother since we spent some time today getting our photos uploaded to the site. Field Note
Counternarratives & Critiques to Stereotypes of Black girlhood and Africa – "Counterstories or counternarrative production as representative of the intentional use of narratives to resist and counter white, middle-class practices, actions, and ways of being that get imposed onto others" (Kinloch et al., 2020, p. 384)	Well, when I did the writing, I usually put the Black girls in a positive light, and I focus on how I'm able to see myself instead of how others see me. Focus Group #2, Sienna	The world tries to tell us one thing, but believe me I know the truth. Open Letter, Kayden	Kayden's experiences with her afterschool leaders have played a huge role in her identity development. They nurture her leadership skills every chance that they get. I wonder about how being outside of a traditional school space impacts their relationships. What can we learn from her afterschool teachers about positive identity development? Researcher Memo