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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, BEYOND THE SCREEN: AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK GIRLS' SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT AS DIALOGUE, by LATASHA T. MOSLEY, 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 Chairpersons, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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LATASHA T. MOSLEY

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2022 Georgia State University Provost’s Dissertation Fellowship (\$6,000)

**BEYOND THE SCREEN: AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK GIRLS' SOCIAL MEDIA  
CONTENT AS DIALOGUE**

by

**LATASHA T. MOSLEY**

Under the Direction of Dr. Michelle Zoss and Dr. Gholnecsar Muhammad

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the ways in which Black girls between the ages of 13 and 18 leveraged social media to address sociopolitical issues relevant to their lives within a digital literacy collaborative. This study drew upon Black feminist-womanism theories to unpack how the girls' digital content creating on social media shifted during their time in the program, how they addressed sociopolitical issues through their content, and the composing processes instrumental to their digital content creating via social media. As forerunners in digital content creating, it appears that Black youth, particularly Black girls are drawing upon social media as a public platform to engage in sociopolitical transformation and that their literary practices appear to bear resemblance to Black women writers of the past. In order to learn more about adolescent Black girls' digital content creating, I hosted a digital literacy collaborative where each session served as a space to learn about the importance of digital content creating to the girls' lives. Data sources from these sessions included pre-program

and post-program interviews, participants' digital content, screen recordings, and think alouds which were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings from this study revealed that throughout the digital literacy collaborative, the girls in this study gradually saw their social media platforms as an additional space for their sociopolitical engagement. Their sociopolitical engagement on social media consisted of bring awareness to the issues of importance to them and fostering conversations amongst their viewers. As the girls created content, their composing process was recursive. This study has the potential to assist literacy scholars, educators, and others to better understand the literacies Black girls draw upon during this specific social time to articulate their epistemologies, ideologies, and visions of the future.

**INDEX WORDS:** Case study, Black girls, Black feminist-womanism theory, literary practices, social media, digital content creating, literacy collaborative, digital literacy



BEYOND THE SCREEN: AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK GIRLS' SOCIAL MEDIA  
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by

LATASHA T. MOSLEY

A Dissertation

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

The Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

The College of Education and Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2023

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to Black girl creatives of all ages.

Your ideas matter.

Your stories matter.

Your perspective matters.

Your wildest dreams are obtainable.

Continue to dream. Continue to create. Continue to share your creative brilliance with the world.

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Thank you, God for your faithfulness. Obtaining this goal has tested me in ways that only you know. But God! Thank you for keeping me. It is only by your grace that I have made it! And by faith, I believe that the best is yet to come.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

African American females' language and literacy practices reflect their socialization in a racialized, genderized, sexualized, and classed world in which they employ their language and literacy practices to protect and advance themselves. Working from this rhetorical situation, the Black female develops creative strategies to overcome her situation, to “make a way outa no way.” (Richardson, 2002, p. 680)

Black women and girls have adopted literacy practices as outlets for their activist engagement and visionary crafting. Inheriting a rich legacy of intellectual thought, creative expression, and joy-giving pursuits required Black women and girls to locate and develop means to express themselves and their distinctive ways of being, doing, and knowing. Literacy pursuits provided and continues to provide one means of which Black women and girls continue these traditions. Historically, Black women and girls have turned to their literacies as tools for surviving and thriving here in the United States (Cooper, 1892; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Richardson, 2002; Brown, 2014; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Arguably, Black women and girls leveraging literacy as a tool for their survival and prosperity is a practice brought across the seas and sustained through the *Zamani*. *Zamani* is a Kiswahili term originating within African philosophy to conceptualize contemporary practices through the practices of the past (Mbiti, 1969). In the case of African American women and girls' literacy practices, the *Zamani* helps to explain how their literacies today are unconsciously influenced by the past practices of their ancestors, African and African American women historically (Royster, 2000). For Black women and girls across space and time, their literacy practices have been one means for which they

make visible to the public their distinctive epistemologies while bringing about necessary changes to the social conditions.

Here in the United States, Black women and girls' perspectives are often neglected under the assumption that their experiences mirror Black men because of their shared racial identity and/or white women because of their gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Muhammad & Dixson, 2008). However, Black women and girls live at distinct intersections of race, gender, class, and other overlapping identities which make their realities, knowledge claims, beliefs, and means of expressions different from that of white women and Black men. In the quote above, Richardson (2002) argues that Black women and girls are socialized through their interactions directly and indirectly with other Black women and girls to utilize literacy to agentively propel themselves towards the futures and lives they desire. Black women and girls also learn to arm themselves with language and literacy practices as protection against the unavoidable psychological harm and spirit murdering faced throughout one's life (Williams, 1987). This reveals that Black women and girls have come to view literacy as a response to both the joys and pains of life. They also know firsthand that centering their joy is also a form of resistance (Lorde, 1978). Recognizing the power of their literacy practices as agentive tools, Black women and girls utilize their literacies to strategically craft creative solutions to navigate life and publicly resist the various inequalities they face in society by using their voices and pens to mold the future into the ways in which they desire.

The need for Black women and girls to develop creative solutions to the pressing issues in their lives rest in the fact that traditional means of expressing oneself and addressing pertinent issues of the social times were inadequate for their purposes. Therefore, Black women and girls created their own means of expression. These creative solutions were not always new approaches

to literacy but often stemmed from a traditional literacy practice which African American women and girls reconstructed to fit their particular needs. To accomplish this transfiguration, these women and girls analyzed and mastered the inner workings of literacy practices or means of expression including understanding its grammar, rhetorical effects, and the social conditions which informed how their performance of the literacy practice would be perceived by their audience (Royster, 2000; Griffin, 2020). With this insight, they brilliantly took up these hybrid literacy practices, utilizing them to achieve their distinctive goals. Looking at the literacy practices of Frances Watkins Harper, an abolitionist, poet, and orator provides a brilliant example of Black women and girls' creative solutions in action.

Engrossed in the antislavery movement, Watkins Harper utilized her poetry and speeches to make public her personal beliefs. Women during the antebellum era in which Watkins Harper lived were expected to remain in the domestic sphere which included not engaging in public debate or commenting on social issues. However, Watkins Harper refused to limit her voice to the confines of the home because she knew the importance of her perspective and how publicly articulating her viewpoint could change the hearts and minds of her audience. As a surveyor of the social times, she utilized her knowledge of the social context and expertise of contemporary poetic expression to shatter the perceived boundaries between the public and private sphere for women (Peterson, 1995). By veiling her perspectives through the actions of her characters, Watkins Harper utilized the technologies accessible to her to challenge the systemic injustices African Americans faced as a result of slavery and capitalism. The purpose of her engagement in this literacy practice was for her words to develop the character of her audiences and encourage them to engage in similar pursuits of social justice. Today, it appears that Black girls are boldly revealing the sociopolitical issues of importance to them or the motivations behind their literacy

practices by sharing their perspectives of the world and desires for the future much like Watkins Harper through their contemporary technologies of digital content creation through various social media platforms.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Literacy research over the last two decades have increasingly focused on adolescents' digital literacies or 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies where they create and view layered multimodal texts such as videos, images, blogs, and social media posts in the digital space (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009). This increase in research on multimodal literacy practices signals a necessary shift to viewing literacy for its expansive nature including the multiple ways in which individuals communicate and make meaning of their world (New London Group, 2006). A particular area of interest in the digital space includes adolescents' participation in social media. Social media or social network sites (SNS) are internet-based websites where individuals create their own digital identity through their uniquely identified profile. A defining feature of these sites is the content uploaded by users and third-party sites. In these spaces, individuals often connect with others creating a social network through following or "friending" persons of interests, explicitly or indirectly. As member of these respective websites, users can view the content or published work of persons they follow, others' content shared by persons they follow, and public pages open to all (boyd & Ellison, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2013). The existing research on adolescents' social media participation has focused on youth's presentation of self, identity exploration and development, privacy and risks, and relationship building, both romantic and platonic (Stornaiuolo, Higgs, & Hull, 2014). However, there is room in the field of literacy research for further exploration of the texts youth are creating within social networking sites. As leaders in social media usage, Black youth are not only overwhelmingly viewing content but are creating

transformative digital texts within these spaces (APNORC, 2017). However, there is scant research in the field which explores the social media content created by culturally and linguistically diverse youth. As forerunners in digital content creating, it appears that Black youth particularly Black girls are drawing upon social media as a public platform to engage in sociopolitical transformation (Haddix & Sealey Ruiz, 2012; Johnson, Bass & Hicks, 2014; McArthur, 2016). However, there is limited information on how Black adolescent girls agentively utilize their digital literacies via social media as a continuation of the literary traditions of Black women and girls before them (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Price-Dennis, 2016; Mosley & Muhammad, 2021). Understanding why Black girls are increasingly gravitating toward digital literacies as their medium of choice for the protection and advancement of their lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires tracing the history of Black women and girls' literacy practices over time starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the potentially connections between Black women and girls' literacy practices over time, prior to discussing the purpose of the research, in the next sections I examine the literacy practices of Black women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **Black Women's Literacy Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The years from 1890 to 1910 were marked 'the Black Woman's Era' by literary historians because Black women such as Frances Ellen Walker Harper, author of *Forest Leaves* (1846), published more works of fiction than Black men had published in the previous half century (Gates, 1988). This is important to note as Black women were excluded from many literary spaces (McHenry, 1996). As a poet, author, and lecturer, Frances Watkins Harper is recognized as the first published Black woman in the United States for her collection of poems, *Forest Leaves* (1846) where she writes about religion, her abolitionist sentiments, and love. If we look in-depth at Black women's literacy productions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century overall, we find that

these women wrote across various literary genres including poetry, short stories, and non-fiction and engaged in multiple literacy practices such as oration, writing, and debating. Through these various literacy practices, Black women aimed to achieve two central goals: (1) disseminating their perspectives to the public and (2) engaging in sociopolitical activism (Peterson, 1995; Royster, 2002). Black women taking hold of the increased opportunity for publication to share their messages with the world might have attributed to this uptick in fictional texts written by Black women in this era. Whatever the motivation, the 19<sup>th</sup> century signaled a shift for Black women where literacy was deliberately utilized for its agentive potential.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Black women during the 19<sup>th</sup> century engaged in literacy practices despite genre with two central goals in mind: 1) broadcasting their perspectives to the world via public dialogue and (2) participating in sociopolitical participation. One written genre Black women found particularly useful to achieving these two goals was essay. Bear in mind that essay writing was not the only literacy practice Black women used to achieve these two goals, however, when looking specifically at how Black women leveraged essay writing as a genre, the purposes of Black women and girls' literacy practices across time regardless of the literacy practice become clearer. As a genre, essays provided a distinct pathway to intellectually engage with the public. Unlike fictional accounts, essay writing allowed Black women to speak directly to their readers in comparison to speaking through a character. Through essays, Black women asserted themselves as intellectuals, theorists, and critics of the world in which they lived. Their aim as writers was not to simply inform their readers about their lives but included actively advocating for their needs as Black people, generally and Black women, specifically. Anna Julia Cooper is a prime exemplar of a Black women who used her platform as an essayist and educator to advocate for investment in the education of Black women and girls.

In her first and only published book, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* (1892), Cooper purposely uses the pages of her texts to assert the necessity of educating Black women and girls to a readership of mostly elite African American men whose conservative views often clouded their judgement on the brilliance of their Black women and girl counterparts. In one section of her book, Cooper speaks directly to her intended audience by stating,

Let us insist then on special encouragement for the education of our women and special care in their training. Let our girls feel that we expect some thing more of them than that they merely look pretty and appear well in society. Teach them that there is a race with special needs which they and only they can help; that the world needs and is already asking for their trained, efficient forces. (Cooper, 1892, pp. 78-79)

In this excerpt, Cooper calls for financial investment in the education of Black women and girls knowing that the world desperately needs their brilliance and distinctive perspective considering the social times. She argues that by educating Black women and girls, the world will gain insight that only this group can provide. Cooper knew firsthand the affordance of education and that increasing the number of Black women and girls who attended formal schooling would not only advance these women personally, but the impact of this investment would be felt by their individual communities and the Black community at-large for generations to come. By penning this essay, Cooper provides succinct reasoning for the education of Black women and girls and asserts her identity as an intellectual capable of engaging in public dialogue relevant to the time.

When examining the literacy practices of Black women in 19<sup>th</sup> century, the emergence of a historical lineage of Black women and girls leveraging their various literacy practices to prosper despite hostile conditions or “make a way outa no way” becomes apparent.



Understanding the motivations behind Black women's literacy practices during this period requires contextualizing the conditions in which they navigated. For majority of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 1800 to 1865, most of the country remained under the tyranny of slavery. In *de jure* free states, areas in the northern region of the United States (U.S.), African Americans who were deemed free often encountered the brunt of racial discrimination due to the ubiquity of racism in this country. Salient discrimination African Americans in the northern regions of the U.S. faced included federal and statewide laws created and enforced to restrict their access to social locations such as schools and valued practices in this society such as voting (Fisher, 2008). One of the most significant practices African Americans were prohibited from engaging in was learning to read and write. By restricting African Americans' access to these places and practices, racist lawmakers further perpetuated injustices against Black people and used their lack of formal education as rationalization for their harsh treatment. Historically and through a colonized perspective, formal education and literacies were the only forms of learning honored within society and arguably this remains the case (Fisher, 2008). However, African Americans have always had literacies and utilized them in agentive ways. The literacies that they possessed were simply discredited by upholders of white supremacy and racists who intentionally ignored African Americans' brilliance. Black women particularly understood that the conditions they faced necessitated that they not only continue developing their literacies but utilize the host of literacies available to them to positively transform these social conditions.

Black women's motivation to use their literacies to disseminate their messages to the public while bringing about social change guided the ways which they engaged in various literacy practices to advance their lives. Sojourner Truth, as an example, was a scholar of the social conditions African Americans faced in the United States. Through her reading of society's

treatment of Black people generally and Black woman specifically, she unearthed society's hypocrisies and brought them to the forefront through her words. For example, Truth found the literacy practice of oration crucial to her engagement in the sociopolitical arena. Known for her passion-filled speeches and call-and-response engagement with her audience, Truth traveled across the nation, giving riveting speeches, and appealing to the hearts and minds of her audience as an advocate for the abolishment of slavery and equitable treatment of Black women (Peterson, 1995). In one public address she gave in 1853 to the members of the National Woman's Rights Convention in New York City, Truth recalls the biblical story of Esther and how Esther dared to approach the king of her region with her grievances (Stanton, Anthony, Gage, & Harper, 1881). Marginalized because of her womanhood and social status, Esther risked her life to express her unjust treatment to the king who in turn surprisingly looked passed her socially ascribed marginalized identities and listened to her. By recalling a story familiar to her audience, Truth draws upon her biblical knowledge and reveals her astute ability to analyze texts. Surprisingly, Truth's brilliant engagement in intricate literacy practices were not viewed as literacy according to colonized notions of literacy. However, Truth skillfully draws connections between two seemingly different social times based on a biblical story she might have only had read or recited to her which is pure genius. By eliciting this text, she also challenged her audience to extend similar grace as the king in the story and further, encourages "the king of the United States" or president to extent the same grace to women and arguable, Black women. She goes on to state, "Now, women do not ask half a kingdom, but their rights, and they don't get 'em. When she comes to demand 'em, don't you hear how sons hiss their mothers like snakes, because they ask for their rights; and can they ask for anything less?" (Stanton, Anthony, Gage, & Harper, 1881).

In this address, Truth argues that women desiring rights as citizens of this country is not an attempt to ask for a grand gesture. However, they are nevertheless ignored. She further challenges her audience to consider if women should have to ask for anything less than their rights as this request simply scratches the surface of their demands for equity potentially alluding to the call for equitable treatment of all women including Black women in her well-known speech “Ain’t I woman” (Truth, 1851). As evident in this speech, Truth, like countless Black women during the time, took hold of various literacy practices by leveraging the fullness of their rhetorical effects to make known their views of society’s injustices and craft solutions to these inequities. Truth’s public address is just one example of Black women’s literacy engagement during the time as the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a momentous historical era for their literacy practices.

It should come as no surprise that Black women in the 1800s picked up their pens in pursuit of equity and justice. Black women aimed to actively engage in the sociopolitical movements of the time including the anti-slavery, education equity, voting rights, and women’s rights social movements (Michener, Dilts, & Cohen, 2012). They found that literacy practices validated their engagement in these social movement by revealing their intellectual capabilities which were often doubted or seen as unfitting for women. As evident in the examples provided above, sociopolitical participation grounded Black women’s literacy practices. These sociopolitical issues potentially have continued to inspire generations of Black women and girls as they engage in literacy practices embodying the cross-generational socialization Richardson (2002) alluded to two decades ago.

### **Sociopolitical Purposes of Black Women and Black Girls**

Sociopolitical purposes help to conceptualize the reasons for Black women and girls engaging in literacy practices. Black women have had multiple reasons for engaging in literacy

practices including representing themselves in a world which often misrepresented and misinterpreted them, disrupting and resisting forms of oppression, and advocating for themselves in pursuit of transforming their lives and their communities (Royster, 2000). Muhammad (2013) termed these intentions behind one's literacy practice specifically when writing as writing platforms where she draws from Tatum's (2009) research on the writing practices of Black boys. I use the term, "sociopolitical purposes" in this dissertation to both show the continuation of the literary traditions of Black men and women as well as an attempt to encompass the vast literacy practices Black girls leverage including writing, content creating, and protesting to engage in sociopolitical transformation. In the next section, I will detail how Black women continue to leverage their literacy practices for sociopolitical participation and public dialogue by looking at Black women's literacy practices in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Black Women's Literacy Practices in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Black women continued to draw upon their texts as sources of sociopolitical participation and self-sustainability well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much like the previous century, the 20<sup>th</sup> century was ripe with fuel for Black women's literacy expressions including the civil rights and women's rights movements. Like their foremothers, Black women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century viewed their expansive literacy expressions of poems, short stories, novels, plays, etc. as fertile ground for engaging in these social movements. Sociopolitical concerns were the focus of Black women because African Americans continue to face injustices within society. Specifically for Black women, their sociopolitical concerns remained at the forefront of their minds because despite the concerns of the greater Black community drawing increased national attention with the plea for civil rights for African Americans, Black women's distinctive challenges faced within this society as both Black and woman continue to be ignored, silenced, and misinterpreted

(Combahee River Collective, 1977). Consequently, they saw a need to articulate their own sociopolitical concerns and desired actions. Such concerns included the racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia they experienced due to the intersectionality of oppression. One of their solutions included theorizing and conceptualizing Black women's distinctive epistemologies and ideologies which flourished since the 1960s with the introduction of theories on Black women and girls' lives including womanism (Walker, 1982), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990), and endarkened feminism (Dillard, 2000). Trusting the traditions built by their foremothers, they continued to draw on their literacy engagement as a mean to engage in public dialogue relevant to the social times and generate societal change. As an example, Toni Morrison published her first novel, *A Bluest Eye* (1970) to represent the diversity and nuances of Black girlhood. Morrison felt compelled as a Black woman to bring to light the issues in which she felt were being overlooked at the time including life before the Black Power Movement and Black girls as protagonists in novels (Visionary Project, 2010). Morrison's unapologetic centering of Black women and girls and their issues created space for Black women and girls after her to continue to draw upon their experiences and knowledge to highlight pertinent issues in their lives through their literary engagement.

Viewing the literary engagements of Black women since the 19<sup>th</sup> century reveals the intertwining of Black women and girl's lives, literacies, and agentive pursuits. Throughout generations, their literacy practices have extended beyond aesthetics by fostering social change within the world through their pens, voices, and actions. Literacy has provided in a medium in which Black women and girls craft inspiring and transformative content influential for generations yet to come. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it appears that Black women and girls are leveraging

their literacy practices similarly to their foremothers, however, the medium in which they are increasingly gravitating toward is synonymous with the social times.

### **The Literacy Expressions of Black Women and Girls in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century signaled the introduction of new technologies to the catalogues of communication tools including computers, smartphones, and the Internet which dramatically altered the ways in which people connect with one another. Not only have literacy practices become increasingly digital during this century, but literacy practices broadly have progressively become well-known for their expansiveness in purpose and nature.

In the 1990s, the New London Group, a collective of literacy researchers coined the term, multiliteracies as a revised approach to literacy pedagogy. As a theory, multiliteracies aims to account for the salience of cultural and linguistic diversity within society and the emerging changes in communication afforded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (New London Group, 1996).

Multiliteracies scholars argue that the rapid speed in which communication changed, obliged educators to no longer view print or written texts as the only form of meaning making but broaden their understanding to include other modes vital to communication including visual, aural, linguistic, spatial, and gestural (New London Group, 1996). Furthermore, traditional literacy practices of reading and writing could no longer be viewed as the only forms of literacies but needed to encompass multiple forms of meaning making including newer forms such as vlogging, social media posting, podcasting, etc. Scholars who employ this theoretical understanding argue that multimodalities and multiliteracies have been used for generation including the literacy practices highlighted above by Black women since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This understanding of literacy as multiple acknowledges our increased reliance on the overlapping of

literacies and the various means of creating and sharing knowledge which individuals employ according to their cultural identities and contexts.

As technological advances become increasingly accessible to the broader public, users of these tools gain instant access to a worldwide audience accessible with the click of a button. Creators of all forms of texts are no longer obligated to scout a willing publishing house or travel the world to broadcast their texts to the nation. With only a smartphone and source of internet, one can disperse their texts to the public within seconds. Black woman and girls have particularly found the ease of access to the public invaluable to their literacy pursuits. Specifically, Black women and girls today have taken up these new technologies and literacy practices while also keeping to the century-long literacy traditions of Black women and girls.

One of the most influential social movements of the times, The Black Lives Matter movement was developed through the creative genius of three Black women, Opal Tometi, Alicia Garza, and Patrisse Collars. These women crafted persuasive social media posts to advocate for the eradication of police brutality which has disproportionately affected African Americans across generations (Lett, Asabor, Corbin, & Boatright, 2021). Using social media as an educative site, Tometi, Garza, and Collars helped interested viewers increase their knowledge about this systemic injustice and provided frameworks for dismantling these sources of oppression (Garza, 2020). Another highly popularized hashtag across social media platforms is #BlackGirlMagic which was coined by Cashawn Thompson on Twitter to celebrate the brilliance and beauty of Black women and girls (Ali, 2016). Drawing upon the literacy traditions of Black women, Thompson created her hashtag to increase access to positive representations of Black girls and women in the media space by highlighting the beauty, brilliance, and boldness of Black women and girls. Her actions embody resistance by creating a space within the digital arena

often limitedly available in society for Black women and girls to affirm their Blackness and girlhood/womanhood while encouraged others to view Black women and girls within their own communities as the magical beings they are. Not surprisingly, we also see younger Black girls publicly articulating their sociopolitical perspectives to the world while fostering social change through their digital texts.

Younger generations of Black girls have heeded to the call for societal change and have found their digital literacies particularly useful as they engage in these efforts. Frustrated with the lack of texts in her school's library of positive Black women and girl protagonists, Marley Dias at the age of 11 started the social media movement #1000BlackGirlBooks in 2016 with the initial goal of obtaining 1,000 donated Black girl books (Kickham, 2016). Bringing this issue into the public dialogue, Dias surpassed this target and since has used her digital platform to collect thousands of Black girl books to donate across the globe. Another lesser-known social media movement was curated in 2014 by then sixteen-year-old Jada who was sexually assaulted after attending a house party with friends. After the party, photos surfaced on the Internet of her bare body with the hashtag, #JadaPose. Jada fought against these negative depictions like her foremothers by crafting her own content affixed with the hashtag, #IamJada, as a counternarrative to these negative images. Her counterimage was replicated by thousands of individuals across various social media platforms who stood in solidarity with Jada. Through Jada's brave actions and bold post, she brought awareness to cyber bullying and sexual assault, encouraging conversations about these prevalent issues amongst teens and adults alike (Stewart, 2014). From these two examples, it is clear that Black girls such as Marley and Jada are using their social media platforms for sociopolitical aims. Considering the potentially similarities between the ways in which Black girls are leveraging their digital literacies via social media and



the literacy practices of Black women historically, this study aimed to unpack the digital content of Black girls which guided the purpose of this study.

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this study was to highlight and celebrate the cultural shifting work self-identified Black or African American adolescent girls between the ages of 13 and 18 are engaging in through their digital content creating which has and continues to shape how society engages in digital literacy practices daily (Kelly, 2020; Griffin, 2020). It also was my hope that this research would reveal the out-of-school literacies Black girls draw upon in our current social times to assist literacy scholars, educators, and others working with Black girls to better understand their epistemologies, ideologies, and visions of the future which should guide how we engage with them (Price-Dennis, 2016).

Black girls increased reliance on their digital literacies to navigate the world and mold society into a more accurate representation of the future they desire warrant additional consideration from literacy scholars. Overall, there is limited research on Black girls' digital literacy practices (Ajayi, 2015, Gibbs Gray & Stanbrough, 2019; Hall, 2011; Henry, 2001; Kelly, 2018; Kelly, 2020; McDavid & Beucher, 2018; Price Dennis, 2016; Troutman & Jiménez, 2016; Turner and Griffin, 2020; Griffin, 2021). What is left to be fully explored is what motivates Black girls' creation of digital texts particularly those shared via social media, and asking such questions as, *how do Black girls engage in the composing process of digital content, and if Black girls' digital content allow them to use literacy to address sociopolitical issues comparable to the ways in which Black women have before them?* Considering both the potential pedagogical and sociocultural implications of Black girls' digital content, this research study is timely and warranted.

The following research questions guided my research:

1. How do adolescent Black girls' engagement in sociopolitical participation via social media shift within a digital literacy collaborative?
2. How are adolescent Black girls addressing sociopolitical issues in their digital content?
3. What are the composing processes of adolescent Black girls as they create digital content related to sociopolitical issues?

Specifically, I wished to unpack the digital content creating processes of self-identified African American or Black girls between the ages of 13 and 18 through analyzing how engaging a digital literacy collaborative centered on the sociopolitical engagement of Black women and girls impact their sociopolitical participation, how they addressed sociopolitical issues through their digital content, and the creative processes they engaged in as they create their content. Digital content in this dissertation is defined as the texts the girls created through digital means to be viewed by their intended audience. The digital platforms are the social media platforms used by the content creator to create their digital content. This may include Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, etc. Sociopolitical issues are the various issues related to society and politics which motivate the girls to create their content. The creative processes or composing process are the steps in which the girls engaged to shape the digital content they published for the world to see. Gaining insight into Black girls' literacies specifically the agentive nature of their social media posts required research where Black girls detail their compositional processes, reveal their aims in their own words, and researchers observe firsthand the nature of Black girls' literacy practices in action.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Narrow views of literacy which solely value academic literacies fail to capture the fullness in which literacy is leverage within society especially by culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Within these communities, literacy practices vary and serve a multiplicity of functions beyond academic and professional which expands the ways in which literacy is traditionally conceptualized within society. This is especially the case for the Black community which has historically perceived literacy as developing one's skills such as reading and writing while simultaneously developing one's identity or sense of self, ability to engage in intellectual thought, and consider issues of equity, power, and oppression within society (Tatum, 2009; Muhammad, 2020). Knowing firsthand the transformative potential of literacy and its enabled ability to permit shapeshifting despite the social conditions has influenced Black people's literacy practices across generations (Fisher, 2008; Muhammad, 2012; Ladson Billings, 2016).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Black people's literacy traditions potentially continues through Black girls' digital content creating. As Black girls engaged in various literacy practices, their literacies have been found to be intimately tied with their identities, historically relevant and informed, collaborative, intellectually stimulating to develop both the writer's and reader's knowledge and connected to political and critical critiques of society despite modality (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). While studies have increasingly explored the digital literacy practices of Black girls in our progressively, technologically saturated world for the expansive ways in which Black girls are using literacy though 21<sup>st</sup> century digital technologies, few studies have explored Black girls' 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies particularly their social media content as potential continuation of the literacy traditions of Black women in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through a communicative tool

synonymous with the time (Price Dennis, 2016; McArthur, 2016; Troutman & Jiménez, 2016; Griffin, 2020).

Previous studies have explored how Black girls use their written texts such as essays and poems to engage in similar literacy traditions as their foremothers (Wissman, 2011; Muhammad, 2012). This study extended this work by exploring the digital content creating of adolescent self-identified African American or Black girls between the ages 13-18. Through this exploration, this study compared the literacy practices of today's Black girl content creators with those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This study reveals the possibilities of what cultural and historical responsiveness learning experiences can look like in digital learning spaces. Additionally, this study offers exemplars for how discussion can be fostered within learning spaces to learn more about youth's epistemologies, ideologies, and visions of the future and how we can be support them. In the next chapter, I will present a review of pertinent research on the digital literacy practices of adolescences broadly and Black girls' specific digital literacy practices.

## 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I explore the literature on Black girls' digital literacy practices specifically through the lens of Black girls' sociopolitical purposes. From the research and personally witnessing Black girls' influence on the digital arena via social media, it appears that Black girls are continuing to leverage their literacies in agentive ways, much like their foremothers, specifically using their digital literacy practices as means of reclamation and resistance (Price-Dennis, 2017; Griffin, 2020). One goal of this literature review is to reveal the sociopolitical purposes of Black girls. Highlighting the motivations for Black girls' digital literacy practices may aid in tracing the sociopolitical purposes of Black women and girls from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to now. Therefore, this literature review is a response to the following question, *what are the sociopolitical purposes or motivations informing Black girls' digital literacy practices?*

Because digital content creating via social media is increasingly becoming a platform in which Black girls are using to engage in literacy practices contemporarily, a secondary aim of this review is to understand why adolescent Black or African Americans girls are particularly attracted to social media platforms for their literacy pursuits. Therefore, this literature review also specifically looks at the digital literacy practices of Black girls via social media specifically asking the question, *what social media platforms (i.e., Snapchat, Instagram, etc.) do Black girls drawing upon to meet their sociopolitical purposes?* Bearing in mind the sparse research on Black girls' particular use of social media, prior to examining Black girls' digital literacy practices, I also review early literature on adolescents' digital literacy practices and their participation via social media to understand how their literacy practices serve as a means of youth sociopolitical participation (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006; Jenkins, 2016; Garcia,

Fernandez, & Jackson, 2020), an aim that appears closely related to the ways in which Black girls are leveraging social media platforms.

The final section of this chapter looks at research on adolescents' composing processes when creating digital content. Traditionally research on composing has focused on one form of literacy, written compositions. However, the advent of digital literacies requires relevant approaches to understanding the nuances of compositional processes such as digital content creating for social media platforms. Therefore, the final section of this chapter will review the literature on adolescents' composing processes of digital content to see the potential influence of the composition processes on one's digital content and the purpose of their content influence on their composing processes.

### **Methodology of the Review**

To collect literature for this review, I sought empirical studies on the digital literacy practices of Black girls in studies conducted within schools and in out-of-school settings. Studies include all or primarily self-identified adolescent African American or Black girls between the ages of 13-18. I aimed to locate articles where the girls either created content analyzed by scholars or reflected on their digital literacy practices. I relied on several electronic databases such as ERIC, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ProQuest to obtain publications. The terms "Black girls", "African American girls", "girls" "literacy", "reading", "writing", "multimodal", "media", and "digital" were used to solicit results. In addition to the search terms, I included empirical studies within the field of education primarily because such researchers are often looking to uncover how Black girls' literacies can be leveraged to advance their literacy development. I excluded articles that, although centered on Black girls, focused on disciplinary specific use such as science or math. Studies were selected if they were empirical, and peer reviewed. In an

attempt to gain a thorough understanding of the research conducted thus far related to my topic of interest, I located additional empirical research articles from the reference sections of articles read.

Considering the novelty of research specifically related to Black girls' digital literacy practices via social media, I also conducted an additional review on the social media participation of adolescents (ages 13-18) more broadly. The search terms "teens", "adolescents", "youth", "social media", "YouTube", "Twitter", "Instagram", "Facebook", "Myspace", and "Vine" were used to locate articles. Although there may be additional empirical studies on adolescences' digital literacy practices via social media that are not included in this literature review, I present here a variety of studies that serve as a good representation of the research conducted on this topic related to their sociopolitical participation.

To locate relevant articles on the composing processes of adolescents as they create digital content, I used Google Scholar and searched using the phrase "digital composing processes" looking for articles which focused on adolescents', children between the ages of 13-18, composing processes when creating digital content. As before, I located additional empirical articles outside of the results from my initial search by reviewing the reference section of each article. In the next section, I present a review of relevant research on the digital literacy practices of adolescents, children between the ages of 13 and 18.

### **Adolescents' Digital Literacy Practices**

Adolescents' digital literacy practices offer insight into their perspectives regarding their motivations behind their literacy practices. Early research on digital literacies found that youth particularly adolescents are engaging in complex literacy practices especially with the advent of digital technologies (Alvermann, 2008). These digital tools afford them multiple modalities to

express themselves and provide them various lenses for which they can view the world in nuanced ways. These technological advances caught the attention of researchers who aimed to uncover the evolving literacy practices of youth.

A pioneer in the field on digital literacies, Donna Alvermann and her colleagues (2001) engaged 30 youth in grades 7-9 in an afterschool media club where they were encouraged to make meaning of various media literacy practices over the course of fifteen weeks. They found that when granted media relevant to their interests, students were engaged, and all consumed in reading these texts to meet their specific interests and needs. One student, Grady initially vocalized his disinterest in reading and was even unwilling to participate in the club's media literacy activities. However, this quickly changed when Grady's interests were piqued. The researchers found that Grady's initial interest in one video game or media texts had changed since the inception of the club and his new texts of interest, *Pokémon* motivated him to become better at the game with a trainer's manual. Once accessed, he readily read the manual at length and achieved his purpose of successfully dominating as a *Pokémon* trainer. Alvermann and her colleagues' work reveals that all students read various texts. They point to the importance of researchers and educators keeping up to date with popular culture and acknowledging students' out-of-school literacies and the multimodal texts they read including popular culture.

Vasudevan (2006) worked alongside five African American boys, between the ages of 11-13, in digitally documenting and storying their neighborhood. By equipping them with digital tools such as a video and film camera, she found that one particular participant, Romeo shined with the camera in his hands. Known by his teachers for his quiet demeanor, Romeo exuded confident with his camera in tow directing his peers as they visually documented their community and effortlessly used the camera to experiment and capture complex stories through



his own lens. Vasudevan found that Romeo's multimodal composing via video and images amplified his thoughts and words.

Working with adolescents in a literacy lab, O'Brien (2012) found that the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students' display of their multiple literacy skills was most apparent when given the opportunity to read and create multimodal texts related to their interests. These students were identified by adults in their school community as "at-risk" and were enrolled in this "elective course" as an attempt to use media as a means to improve their reading achievement according to school-based standards. O'Brien's work underscores the notion that all students regardless of the labels placed on them are more than capable of reading, interpreting, and creating texts of various modalities for various purposes and are increasingly required to do so with the advent of multimedia technology. As an example, two of the participants, Denise and Lynn developed a love for mystery games after playing a CD-based mystery game when finished with the activities assigned for the class. Inspired by their investigational quests, the girls went on to create their own mystery game. O'Brien found that their creation required elaborate skills such as choosing characters and creating a convincing storyline based on their acquired knowledge of criminal investigations. These skills also could be leveraged in their traditional reading classrooms.

Researchers' early findings on adolescents' digital literacy practices opened the door for subsequent researchers to explore adolescents varied and ever-evolving literacy practices mediated through various digital genres and social media platforms. This led to research on zines or self-published teen magazines (Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2011), exploration of cyber communities or affinity groups developed by youth based on their shared identities (Black, 2005; Davies, 2006), research on gaming communities (Gee, 2008), blogging (Vasudevan, 2010) and literacy practices developed as a result of youth's engagement in the digital space (Yi, 2008). Through

this line of research, we began to see an interest in the online platforms increasingly frequented by youth notably social networking sites or social media platforms such as Myspace and Facebook where youth have revolutionized in the new millennium and are increasingly using for the purpose of sociopolitical participation.

### **Adolescents' Social Media Participation**

Vasudevan (2010) analyzed the social media practices and multimodal texts of court-involved youth from an alternative to incarceration program (ATIP). One of the participants, Joey captivated her attention with his frequent use of a PlayStation Portable (PSP). During the course of his participation in the digital media workshop, he revealed his sophisticated layering of multiple modalities and remixing of the traditional use of a PSP for his own compositional purposes of documenting his life and self-expression which he shared on his Myspace page. Another one of the participants, EJ was known for typing away on the QUERTY keyboard of his SideKick. Conversing with EJ, Vasudevan found that when inspiration struck him, he picked up his SideKick to jot his thoughts down before they faded. During EJ's participation in the ATIP theater project, Vasudevan created a blog for him via WordPress.com where he could practice writing in a space only accessible to him and her. Through blogging, EJ began to have an appreciation for authoring texts for multiple audiences. This led to him taking a leading role as a main contributor to a second blog. As he continued to blog, EJ began to see himself through the identities of an ethnographer and writer. His experiences through the program encouraged him to participate in new discursive communities such as the blogging community where he could express himself and create work meaningful to individuals outside of his immediate community.

In these examples above, we see that when youth are motivated for their own literary purposes, they draw upon social media platforms such as Myspace, WordPress.com, and

Facebook to experiment with digital literacies and multimodalities and craft content which meets their goals. In this experimentation during their composing process, they began to see themselves differently regarding their identities from that of only a learner or viewer to that of a digital content creator. One particularly intriguing purpose for youth's posts on social media platforms contemporarily are increasingly using the digital arena as a site for youth participation.

### **Adolescents' Sociopolitical Participation via the Digital Arena**

The digital arena is increasingly becoming a site for youth to engage in sociopolitical participation or youth participation. I draw upon Checkoway & Gutierrez (2006) definition of youth participation as they define this partaking as “a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives”. Rather than label this participation as civic engagement, I use a broader term and definition to highlight the diverse forms of participation youth are participating in to address issues most pressing in their life which include sociopolitical participation via social media (Kickham, 2016) and spreading joy through choreographed dancing (Lorenz, 2020). As an example, Jenkins and colleagues (2016) spent six years unpacking through interviews, participant observation, and media content analysis, examples of participatory cultures youth have created to promote social change within the U.S. Jenkins describes participatory culture as “a diverse set of shared activities and social engagements... which people collectively carve out a space for expression and learning” (Jenkins, 2016, p. 40). Participatory cultures are often launchpads of youth expression and learning related to civic engagement. In their work, Jenkins et. al (2016) highlight five organizations to reveal the diverse ways in which these youth use multiple media outlets to participate in public dialogue relevant to their lives both locally and nationally. Using both digital literacy practices of social media participation and more traditional approaches such as lobbying, these youth were actively

seeking to bring about change through any literacy means necessary. Although Jenkins et al.'s (2016) research brings to light the cultural shifting work youth are engaging through non-traditional means of sociopolitical participation via the digital arena, a limitation of this research is that it only focuses on collectives of youth. Not all youth are participating or creating with organizations around their interests and passions but nevertheless the digital content they are creating during their own time are bringing critical issues to the forefront, relevant amongst broader communities other than themselves.

Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2019) reveal the impact of individual's posts on the collective by examining how young people used social media platforms' affordances and political hashtags via musical.ly, its successor TikTok, to politically participate in the 2016 election. Most of users on this social media platform were between the ages of 13-21. They found that the youth's social media participation on this platform allowed them to engage in collective political expression by publishing content which connecting them to a larger group of individuals with shared beliefs. Through their social media postings, they used the affordances of the platform, musical.ly such as overlaying their recorded videos with pop culture music and strategically chosen hashtags to convey a political message which they believed would resonate with their imagined audience.

Wright (2021) also proves insight into the everyday or daily agentive practices of youth within the digital space by analyzing viral TikTok content created by adolescents. One example he highlights is a viral trend called #callingteachersbytherefirstname[sic]. During this act, students are filmed calling their teacher by their first name to witness their reaction. Wright (2021) argues that these teen digital content creators are using their platforms as a way to counter discourses of schooling. He goes on to state that youth are challenging us to expand our notions

of sociopolitical participation based on their digital content. One limitation of Wright's and Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik's work is that we are not able to directly hear from youth regarding the motivations behind these viral posts especially from the originator of the viral content on whether or not these posts are playful acts or their attempt to find "...countless, investible allies with which to secretly resist" (Wright, 2021, p. 66). Additionally, by focusing on one particular social media platform, we miss an opportunity to engage in a nuanced analyses of youths' selection of particular social media platforms for specific sociopolitical purposes. Further, we must question the ways in which the identities of youth such as race, gender, class, etc. influences the ways in which they take up social media as a means of sociopolitical participation. Considerations of digital content creators' identities are warranted considering that African Americans have been found to have high rates of political-interest online participation and the highest interest-driven online participation (Kahne, Lee, & Feezell, 2012). Also, Black teen are the most active users of social media platforms (The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2017). Research conducted on Black girls' digital literacy practices may offer insight around how one's identities factor into their digital content creating. Additionally, hearing from individual content creators may offer some insight into their selection of social media platforms or particular moves made during their digital composing process to align with the purpose of their content. Therefore, in the next section, I will review the existing literature on Black girls' digital literacy practices.

### **Sociopolitical Purposes of Adolescent Black Girls in the Digital Arena**

Despite the evolution of technologies utilized to engage in literacy practices, the purposes of Black women and girls' literacy practices remain grounded in their mission of positively transforming society. As McArthur (2016) states there is a "rich lineage of Black women

activists who used their voices and literacy practices for social change” (p. 364). This lineage may be continuing with adolescent Black girls who are mastering digital literacies practices in pursuit of equity and social justice. Unveiling the purposes behind Black girls’ posts today may help reveal their particular gravitation towards social media platforms as a means to achieve their sociopolitical purposes. Therefore, in this next section, I examine the literature conducted thus far on adolescent Black girls’ digital literacy practices to reveal some of the primary purposes of their digital content creating although these purposes often intersect.

### **Black Girls’ Shaping their Representations in Media and Society**

When free to craft literacy responses unrestricted by curricular mandates and writing prompts, Black girls utilized their digital literacies to reconfigure the ways in which they are portrayed within the media and society. The particular modalities that they selected provided avenues for the girls to layer modalities which fit their particular sociopolitical purposes. Leading a summer writing course with middle schoolers across two summers as a teacher researcher, Hall (2011) developed a culturally responsive writing course to host as part of a preparatory summer program for middle school students. Throughout this course, students used a critical lens to examine language and literacy practices used in society, studied historical and contemporary African American literature, and created their own digital texts as a response to their learning experiences. The highlighted students in Hall’s (2011) summer programming were three Black girls who decided to respond to the texts they read by developing a public service announcement (PSA). Utilizing a critical literacy and Black feminist lenses, Hall examined the narrative scripts of the girls and conducted observations throughout their content creation process. In the highlighted PSA, Hall found that the girls used their PSA to shine a light on Black girlhood as supportive and encouraging as one of the characters battled with depression. In our

society which privileges individualism, the characters were determined to use their collective strength to help their friend overcome her challenges. Within the script, the girls contested the idea that this struggle was a problem residing in the central character's individual psyche alone. Instead, they saw her battle as a confluence of multiple sociocultural ills, in this case, emotionally shouldering her family's financial burdens and experiencing the physical manifestations of stress triggered as the result of living within a society which ignores these problems and instead resorts to victim blaming.

Considering the importance of Black girls shaping their own narratives around their lives, researchers have worked with them to unpack issues most pressing to their lives and provided space for them to respond with digital technologies. The young girls in Womack's study utilized their digital texts to counter narrow view of Black girlhood. Facilitating two adolescent Black girls in an out-of-school autoethnography over a two-year period, Womack met with the girls at the local library to read, write, and speak about their realities as young, Black girls and engage in critical discussions about Black girlhood and womanhood broadly (Muhammad & Womack, 2015). In line with Black women and girls' literary traditions, the girls were encouraged to create autoethnographies on topics of their choosing using the digital platforms, Prezi and Pinterest because these social media platforms incorporated multiple modalities such as image, texts, and video. After which, the girls were encouraged to share their content with family and friends, their knowledge of these narrow perspectives, and how they reshaped them through their own content. This creative process of creating Pinterest and Prezi posts provided space for the girls to speak back against narrow views of their lives while also fostering a therapeutic experience where the girls learned more about themselves and felt empowered to change their immediate social conditions.

Similarly creating a space for Black girls to construct their own narratives in the digital arena, Griffin (2020) tasked the nine high school aged Black girls in her study to create a digital product which embodied their journey towards self-love. After participating in a program created by Griffin where the girls fellowshiped with each other, read the words of Black women authors and poets, listened to musical playlists of Black women artists, and learned from Black women in their community, the girls were tasked with creating a digital project to share what they had learned during their time together and create digital content which could be shared with other Black girls who aimed to embark on the self-love journey. Conducting an analysis of the girls' website using critical and Black Girlhood frameworks, Griffin found that the girls used their website to publicly redefine and celebrate their Black girlhood identities by referring to past tensions around beauty for Black women and girls and challenging authoritative structures such as their school experiences which did not celebrate or acknowledge their multiple identities as young girls. Their keen selection of different design features such as images, text colors, text sizes, quotes, etc. during their composing process helped them achieve these goals as they crafted their digital content.

When encourage to participate in future crafting, Black girls saw reshaping societal ideas about Black women and girls as central to their present and future work. Drawing on case study methodologies, Turner and Griffin (2020) analyze the career dream drawings, digital career boards, and individual and focus group interview transcripts from two sisters who participated in a university-sponsored reading program in 2012 when they were 9-years-old and 2018 when they were 15-years-old. Completing a multimodal analysis of the girls' multimodal representations of themselves, Turner and Griffin found that as the girls aged, they continuously viewed race and gender as instrumental to their future career goals and were developing the confidence necessary



to become successful young, Black woman in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) fields. Collectively, the girls viewed their dream boards as opportunities to critique the underrepresentation of Black career women in the digital space. Skillfully weaving images, music, and drawings, these young visionaries created digital dream boards articulating their future career aspirations and critiquing the ways in which Black career women are positioned in the media. Through this program, the girls were disrupting the illiterate futures projected onto Black girls in American society using their multiliteracies.

In Stornaiuolo and Thomas's (2018) ethnographic study of two high school students, Sara, a Black Muslim girl and Gabriel, an Afro-Latino boy, they reveal the creative process of a Black girl while composing a digital film inspired by their humanities unit on world religion. Although assigned to write an essay, Sara asked her teachers if she could make a film. Film provided an array of modalities necessary to meet the young filmmakers' goals. This is important as the film served as a narrative of self, historicizing the discrimination faced by Muslim Black girls and connecting Sara's individual story with the numerous experiences of Muslims in America especially young Muslim women. As researchers, Stornaiuolo and Thomas viewed this film as an extension of Black women writers' historical use of counternarratives which aided in their understanding of Sara and Gabriel's creative processes and sociopolitical purposes.

Even when surveyed, Black girls indicated the importance of youth participation through both traditional means such as participating in local government and through newer forms of participation via digital platforms to create the change urgently needed within their communities. Garcia, Fernández, and Jackson (2020) analyzed the online applications of 390 self-identified Black teenage girls where they responded to eight open-ended questions regarding their motivation for participating in a conference, their experience with leadership activities, and their

future aspirations and goals. They found that the girls currently used technology and other youth participation acts such as leading their church's praise dance team as resistance. Further, these girls viewed their present participation as a part of their trajectory towards achieving their future goals. The studies highlighted above reveal the creative possibilities for the future as youth participate in various forms of sociopolitical participation based on the needs of their community. One limitation of these studies with the exception of Hall (2011), Stornaiuolo & Thomas (2018), Garcia, Fernández, and Jackson (2020), and Griffin (2020) is that the girls were limited to the digital technologies or platforms selected by the researcher. We are left to question, *what does reshaping narratives look like for Black girls choosing which social media platforms is most relevant to meeting their sociopolitical purposes in their daily digital literacy practices?*

When asked to reflect on their daily digital literacy practices, shaping and crafting how they were portrayed were central to these practices. Wade (2019) developed an elective course called Digital Expressions where 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade girls were encouraged to talk about various issues related to digital media such as how people use digital tools to create things relevant to society using examples from their social media profiles. The program evolved to focusing on the girls' developing ideas around what they would include in a digital archive of photos and video which represented them and their values. In the end, the digital archive was not created but the individual and group discussions with the girls revealed that family influenced their digital composing processes. The girls often posed pictures of their family online to affirm their familial identities. They also used technology to create content for and about their families where their families often influenced their creative processes. They established boundaries around who saw what on their social media profiles by strategically using two social media platforms, one

primarily for family consumption and the other reserved for friends. Social media became a sort of hush harbor where they developed shared, coded language used both in the digital world and in-person which allowed them control over who accessed their space and ultimately, determined how they self-represented (Kynard, 2010). This study provides a brief snapshot into Black girls' social media participation and the ways in which they utilize their digital literacies unrestricted by curricular goals, however the researcher's focus on digital kinship overshadowed the purposes of the girls' posts within these spaces.

In another study where Black girls were asked to discuss their social media usage, Gibbs Grey and Jones Stanbrough (2019) found that adolescent Black girls in their studies used the digital arena as a means of agency to engage with their community. Additionally, as the girls saw their efforts manifest into transformation within their communities, their beliefs about their writing capacities increased. Gibbs Grey and Jones Stanbrough also found that the girls' use of the internet specifically their social media posting was intentional and strategic. They carefully crafted posts to display how they wished to be perceived which often contrasted how others including their family members displayed them on their respective social media profiles. These studies provide insight into some of the ways in which Black girls craft their own narratives around their lives and Black girlhood more broadly through the content they post on social media platforms. However, in these studies we are not able to view the processes including the decision-making Black girls engage in as they digitally compose which resulted in their everyday transformative digital content. As Takayoshi (2018), a scholar committed to studying the composing processes of digital content states, "...understanding what writers do when they actually compose is crucial to understanding how writing happens in the twenty-first century." (p. 563).

## **Black Girls' Developing their Sociopolitical Participation**

Understanding the digital content created by Black girls requires peeling back the processes which led to the content in which we observe as viewers. Attended a school where oppressive conditions were the daily norms for Black students tasked the high school adolescent girls in Kelly's study (2018; 2020) to resist these conditions. Social media provided space for these young digital content creators to develop their sociopolitical participation while engaging in these educative spaces. Through their social media participation, the girls collaborated and learned from other content creators with similar topics of interests which helped develop the digital content they produced and shared with the world. This expertise was readily used in times of crisis at their school. By hosting semi-structured focus groups and interviews, Kelly found that the Black girls' lure to social media was because it provided a safer space to discuss the racial intolerance they faced each day they entered the school building. With this refined consciousness, the girls published their own resistance texts on the social media platform, Snapchat. Snapchat may have particularly been beneficial to the girls' sociopolitical purposes because this social media platform allows one to publish their content but is only visible to viewers for twenty-four hours. However, we are left to wonder why Snapchat was selected by the girls versus that of another social media platform due to this not being the primary objective of the research.

By conducting multiple individual interviews and analyzing two Black girls' digital texts and artifacts from their social networking accounts in a yearlong ethnographic study, McLean (2012) also revealed the transformative nature of social media for two sisters who recently immigrated to the United States. These girls used social media to purposefully cultivate relationships around issues pertinent to their lives (McLean, 2012). The older sister, Sade (17)

found blogging helped her reclaim her voice which she had once silenced. Through the digital arena, she also was able to take her sociopolitical participation online with others from diverse backgrounds. Blogging allowed her to advocate for herself as she attempted to find her place in this new setting. Conscious of the way in which her physical presentation influenced how she was treated in school, the younger sister, Kai (15) manipulated her fashion choices and Facebook status to purposefully position herself in a way which at first glance appeared as an attempt to subscribe to gender norms. However, this virtual move allowed her to stand firm in her beliefs while accessing vital social networks within her school. This study provides insight into some of the overlooked ways in which Black girls utilize their digital content via social media. However, due to the lack of observation or interviews as they created these texts, we are only left with snippets of the girls' content creation process mentioned during the interviews and no mention of why blogging and Facebook best aligned with the girls' sociopolitical purposes.

Ajayi (2015) led high school aged girls in pedagogical practices aimed to develop their critical multimodal literacies. By observing their literacy practices both in school and at home, he found that these young content creators utilized both digital and print texts to develop their talents of leveraging both social media and traditional print to critique curriculum developers who portrayed women stereotypically. Creating a Facebook account specifically for the girls to posts their reflections of their in-class assignments, Ajayi was able to directly view the content created by the girls. Moved by their conscious reading of the school's texts and co-created lessons with the teacher and researcher, the girls used their social media posts to reconstruct hierarchies, positioning themselves as knowledgeable agents who challenge gender inequalities. Their posts were informed by both their acquired school knowledge and musings on their lived experiences which did not align up with the limited notions of femininity pervading their

textbooks. Viewing the girls' social media responses provided Ajayi privileged access to how the girls leveraged their social media posts for sociopolitical participation and critique. However, we may lose some of the richness of their strategic decisions regarding their posts due to the lack of observation and interviews with the girls as they created their texts.

Similarly engaging in critical literacy instruction followed by posting to the class's blog, the young girl in Troutman and Jiménez's (2016) study utilized bell hooks' texts as mentor texts which inspired her feminism pursuits. Troutman and Jiménez found that the high school junior highlighted in their case study was influenced by hooks' work and used her posts on the class blog to engage in critical thought through her critiques of the paradoxical hypervisibility and invisibility of Black women and girls within our society. Her blogs also addressed multiple sociopolitical issues such as the limitations Black girls have in claiming their sexuality and the lack of awareness around Black women and girls' encounters with state-sanctioned violence. As the research reveals, the impetuses for Black girls' digital content are multiple but provide rich insight into the motivations behind their digital literacy practices.

### **Black Girls' Examining Sociopolitical Issues**

Another finding related to Black girls' digital sociopolitical purposes is that the development of their digital literacies has provided tools for Black girls to have a clearer view of sociopolitical issues. Kendrick, Early, and Chemjor (2019) observed 32 aspiring journalists in Kenya as they developed their use of multimodal tools in their high school's journalism club. Through observing and interviewing the girls, the researchers witnessed a transformation in the girls as they engaged in their journalistic pursuits from openly exploring the affordances of digital multimodal tools to leveraging them as activists. Learning how to skillfully use a digital camera and employ interviewing techniques equipped them to thoroughly examine perceived

injustices within their local and national communities. As these student journalists became more confident with the camera, they begin to access spaces unafforded to them without their camera to address pressing issues in their lives as they realized the importance of their platforms as journalists. Developing their multimodal compositional skills also allowed them to create digital content which served as pedagogical resources for future students within their school.

Seeking to design a curriculum with multiple opportunities for Black girls to develop their critical literacies within the digital arena, Price-Dennis (2016) worked alongside a fifth-grade teacher to show her students how to leverage the use of multiple 21<sup>st</sup> century tools such as digital storytelling, digital applications and platforms, podcasts, and tablets. Using multiple data sources including interviews, observations, and document analysis, Price-Dennis found that by using lessons focused on social issues relevant to the current social times, she found these tools permitted them to think differently about social justice, power, and activism and their role in these pursuits. The Black girls in the class not only used these tools to demonstrate their academic literacies, but they saw themselves as content creators who used images, video, written texts, and poetry across various platforms to challenge stereotypes placed upon Black women and girls which were often invisible or perhaps ignored by their peers.

McDavid Schmidt and Beucher (2018) completed a multimodal and critical discourse analysis of three fifth-grade, Black girls' processes of using digital, multimodal tools to highlight a predominant theme throughout their class's reading of Jacqueline Woodson's literature. They found that the girls' reading of the literature was informed by their racial identity which equipped them to engage in critical dialogue regarding their chosen theme of unity by reflecting on the existence of racial segregation within the text and the contemporary manifestation of racial segregation with school choice policies. By collecting data throughout their composing

process, the researchers were able to discover that the girls' final project represented a more color-blind portrayal of unity. By observing the girls as they composed through an embodied lens, the researchers were able to note occurrences which resulted in the shift from a more critically conscious literature response to one that was more palpable based on dominant narratives. It is clear from this research that the digital composing processes of youth are influenced by their sociopolitical purposes and the compositional moves they make including selecting which social media platforms is most appropriate for their goals. Reviewing the literature on youth's composing of digital content helps reveal the layered decision-making youth engage in as they create digital content.

### **Adolescents' Composing Processes as They Create Digital Content**

Ranker (2008) completed a qualitative case study of the composing processes of two 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 12-year-old boys, Alex and William as they learned how to produce digital video and researched their topic of interest using the Internet in their language art class. This pair's class consisted of eight students who were determined by the adults in their schools as struggling in literacy achievement in relationship to their peers according to standardized test scores and their teachers' observation. Photocopies of students' writing and research notebooks, screenshots of video recording as they produced their digital video, audio recordings and transcriptions of their collaborative reading and writing events, video recording their webpages, and fieldnotes from the researcher revealed that their composing process was not linear. As they created their video, the boys often realized they needed additional references which led them to conduct additional research and as they began to view their video, they also were signaled that they needed to seek additional sources to achieve the purposes of their content. Ranker also found that the visual



resources afforded by the video making platform shaped the boys' composing processes guiding what elements of the project they aimed to work on next.

Also focusing on the composing processes of youth as they created videos, Bruce (2009) observed 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students as they created a music video and mini documentary for their high school media literacy class. Collecting data through a baseline survey of their attitudes and knowledge towards written and video compositions, a teacher researcher journal, think aloud and retrospective protocols, student interviews, and videotapes of classroom events, Bruce found that although their composing process included the common stages of writing such as brainstorming, composing, and editing, these stages were not approached in a linear fashion. As they composed their videos, they moved recursively back and forth between the stages based on their goals and their needs at the time.

Vasudevan, Schultz, and Bateman (2010) worked alongside a 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom teacher to create lessons which encouraged the students to compose multimodal texts documenting their neighborhoods and stories about themselves. The researcher gathered data on their composing processes by taking detailed field notes, recording audio and video tapes of the whole class and small group discussions in the classroom and outside of the school, conducting interviews, collecting artifacts from the students, and writing teacher memos. They found that an African American boy, Michael was greatly influenced by his move from home to his community to school. By breaking the boundaries where composing could occur, the researchers found that Michael created rich texts using multiple literacies and modalities such as family photographs, music, and voiceovers to craft his narratives. By expanding the knowledge and resources in which Michael could draw upon, he took on new identities during his composing process from simply that of a learner to a skilled composer, family historian, and scholar of his environment.

Similarly, Saima, was motivated by the project to bring the fullness of herself and her identities into her digital work. As a proud hijab-wearing, Bangladesh girl who recently immigrated to the U.S., multimodal composing helped Saima grow comfortable sharing her identities and work with her peers and teacher. Initially, her work seemed detached from her identities as if Saima felt that the norms of the classroom required such detachment. However, when invited to tell a story using the architecture within her community, she created a multimodal story lush with images of her Bengali culture, traditional music, and own voice to tell her stories with her own words and in her own ways. Through her multimodal text, Saima envisioned her audiences as more than her teachers and parents but the greater public.

When observing the digital composing of three upper secondary students in a five-week video-making project in Norway as they created a film, Gilje (2011) found that the affordances of the technological tools the students crafted with influenced their process. The three 17-year-olds, Lisbeth, Sara, and Ida aimed to create a film which told the story of a girl who falls in love with a boy but realized that the boy is gay and in love with her brother. As these adolescent girls crafted their story with editing software, they experienced both frustration and satisfaction navigating the new terrain of editing software as amateur filmmakers. Gilje discovered that at two different points of their editing process they could not achieve the desired effects in their film which led to them becoming frustrated and giving up on their desired creative vision. Gilje concluded that as adolescents compose, they are restricted in achieving the goals of their content based on the affordances of the digital technologies they use and their knowledge regarding the technology of choice.

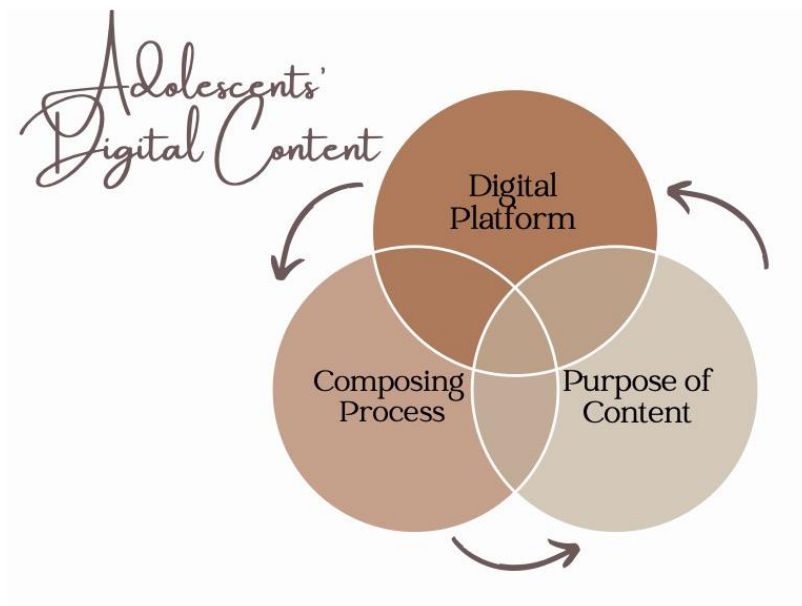
Smith (2017) focused on the multimodal composing of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students as they collaboratively composed three multimodal projects when responding and analyzing literature in

their Advanced Placement Literature and Composition course. Collecting data through computer screen recording, observations, workshop debriefings, interviews after their product was created, and analyzing students' artifacts and materials, Smith found that the students moved between and amongst different modalities throughout the composing of their project. These moves of online searching, creating, editing, and reviewing media was based on their specific goals. He also found that each group preferred a specific mode of composing such as textual and visual which guided their composing process and final project. Finally, when restricted to create a particular type of multimodal composition, they adapted their composing process based on the requirements of the assignment.

By looking at the composing processes of adolescents at the moment of composing, we are able to view the complex decision-making processes youth undergo during their composing of digital content. Using the affordances of data collection tools such as think aloud protocols where participants verbally articulate their decision-making processes, screencast videos where a recording is made of the participants' entire computer screen during their composing, video camera recordings of the computer screen, and still images of screen captures, researchers have obtained rich insight on the composing processes of adolescents as they are engaging in these often-quick decision making. So far, researchers have found that the purposes of youth's content are foundational to the technology they use and guide their process, composing is a non-linear process for youth, and the affordance of the digital technology influences their creative decisions. Considering the evolving nature of digital technologies, more is yet to be uncovered regarding youth's composing of digital content especially those mediated through social media platforms.

**Figure 1**

*Visual Representation of the Components of Adolescents' Digital Content*



Out of all of the reviewed studies on the composing processes of adolescences who create digital content, none had a specific emphasis on composing via social media platforms. Youth are increasingly composing multimodal texts via social media practically daily. The content they are creating on their social media platforms incorporate video, images, texts, sound, movement, etc. Just as we, literacy scholars and educators, need an understanding of the composing processes of video crafting, we also need a thorough understanding of adolescents' composing processes via social media platforms. As indicated in Figure 1, youth's purposes of their content are intertwined with the platforms they use to compose and their composing processes. Understanding the purposes of their content can only be accomplished if we also have an awareness about the platforms they select to compose, how they use these digital platforms, and their compositional processes.

### Summary of Reviewed Research

Collectively, the extant literature on Black girls' digital literacy practices and adolescents broadly have contributed to our understanding of youth's digital literacy practices as expressions of their desires for the world. Within each study, researchers have come closer to envisioning the world in which youth are dreaming of and crafting through their sophisticated leveraging of multiple modalities. Methodologically, these studies provide rich qualitative insight on the purposes, practices, and digital composing processes of African American adolescent girls specifically and youth broadly. What is left out of the extant research is a historical orientation to Black girls' digital content creating via social media to see if Black girls' approach to youth participation via social media is a contemporary ode to the historical literacy traditions of Black women and girls before them. This dissertation responds to this gap by situating 21<sup>st</sup> century Black girls' digital content creating in the larger conversation regarding Black women and girls' language and literacy practices broadly. Additionally, Black girls' increased reliance on social media platforms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to achieve their sociopolitical purposes as a mean of youth participation in the digital arena warrant particular attention. As Price Dennis (2016) argues, social media can particularly be beneficial in aiding Black girls' agendas as it may allow the girls to "capitalize on Black girls' literacies so that they can [sic] learn how to engage in online spaces as public intellectuals and figure out how argumentative writing could function in a digital space." (p. 353). This dissertation responds to this need by looking at the intersections of Black girls' literacies, youth participation via social media, and digital literacies.

### 3 CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

A combination of Yin's (2018) and Merriam's (2018) understanding of case study methodology grounded this qualitative study. Qualitative case studies aid in explaining the "how" and "why" questions surrounding a phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2018). This study was bounded around a group of girls at a particular moment in time while participating in a literacy collaborative. In particular, the study involved self-identified Black or African American girls between the ages of 13 and 18 who considered themselves digital content creators or viewers and were recruited to participate in a digital literacy collaborative. A qualitative case study was beneficial to understand how Black girls engage in digital content creating and why they are motivated to create their digital posts. Additionally, by using this methodology, I was able to focus on the particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic of Black girls' digital content creating on social media platforms (Merriam, 1998). The particularistic focuses on characteristics of the phenomenon which, in the case of Black girl literacies, I focused specifically on their digital literacy practices of digital content creating for social media platforms. Gathering rich, thick accounts of Black girls' composing of digital content provided descriptive data on their digital content creating (Geertz, 1973). This was accomplished using observations, interviews, and collection and analysis of participant-created artifacts. The final characteristic is heuristic which helps the readers of the scholarship better understand the phenomenon under study. Through my findings, I hope to inspire other scholars to continue unpacking the creative genius of Black girls' digital literacy practices via social media in subsequent studies. Additionally, I trust the findings and implications of my study will encourage educators and others working with Black girls to use the knowledge Black girls reveal to us through their digital content as inspiration for how we engage with them in the classroom and beyond.

A qualitative case study was selected because afforded opportunities to explore how Black girls use their selected *digital platforms* when composing within a digital literacy collaborative, which *sociopolitical purposes* motivate their creation of digital content, and how Black girls engage in the *process* of composing digital content which requires rich descriptive data obtainable through qualitative research designs. Qualitative research methodologies afford researchers space to explore the influence of contextual factors on Black girls' composing (Wissman, 2011; Muhammad, 2015). Researchers are also able to understand how and why Black girls within their studies engaged in digital literacy practices because of their strategic selection of small groups of Black girls (Muhammad & Womack, 2015; Griffin, 2020). These qualitative studies conducted thus far have shed light on an underexplored aspect of Black girls' literacy practices, offering new directions of literacy, learning, and technology in our increasingly technologically driven world which I hoped to continue with this research study.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to highlight and celebrate the cultural shifting work Black girls are engaging in through their digital content creating which has and continues to shape how society engages in digital literacy practices daily (Kelly, 2020; Griffin, 202). It was also my hope to assist literacy scholars, educators, and others working with Black girls to better understand the literacies Black girls draw upon during this specific social time to articulate their epistemologies, ideologies, and visions of the future (Price-Dennis, 2017). Therefore, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do adolescent Black girls' engagement in sociopolitical participation via social media shift within this a digital literacy collaborative?
2. How are adolescent Black girls addressing sociopolitical issues in their digital content?

3. What are the composing processes of adolescent Black girls as they create digital content related to sociopolitical issues?

### **Black Feminist-Womanism Theories**

In this study, I drew upon both Black feminism and womanism theories to engage in research practices which aligned with adolescent Black girls' ways of being, doing, and knowing. Working with and alongside Black girls required utilizing theoretical frameworks and methodologies that centered Black girls' realities and life-navigational tools. Essentially, I sought out theoretical frameworks and methodologies developed with Black girls in mind (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010). Additionally, because it appears that everyday Black girls are creating digital content to engage in social transformation, I sought a theoretical framework which was developed to take into consideration the everyday efforts Black girls make to better themselves and their communities. Combining these theories provided a more comprehensive understanding of Black girls' digital content creating on social media.

Black feminist-womanism theories highlight Black women and girls' distinct epistemologies and ideologies and how they utilize their often silenced and/or ignored standpoints and lived experiences to actively resist taken-for-granted knowledge claims and beliefs within society (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2000; Henry, 2005; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Black feminist-womanism theories have historically aided Black women and girls in conceptualizing and legitimizing their positionality within society through probing the contextual factors which influence Black women and girls' lives. As theoretical frameworks, Black feminist-womanism theories center Black women and girls' experiences living at the intersections of multiple identities and encompass the wealth of knowledge Black women and girls utilize to navigate society.



Although Black feminism and womanism are often conflated terms, these two theoretical frameworks have distinctive premises. Black feminist theories encourage researchers to draw on both the everyday and academic knowledge of Black women and girls by viewing them as experts of their experiences entitled to interpret and define their realities (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Researchers are encouraged to practice Black feminism in their research by 1) utilizing dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; (2) encouraging participants to express themselves through their individuality; (3) taking personal accountability and encouraging participants to engage in similar practices during the research process; (4) viewing concrete experience as criterion of meaning; and (5) practicing the ethic of care (Collins, 1990). While womanism privileges speaking from one's social location (Taylor, 1998). As a social change methodology, womanism values the daily experiences of Black women and girls and the means in which they solve practical problems. The goals of womanism include uplifting everyday people to solve problems, ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring balance between people and nature, and reconnecting humans with the spirit realm (Taylor, 1998). By utilizing Black feminist-womanism theories as a theoretical framework, I aimed to engage in research practices that aligned with Black girls' literacy practices, centered care and compassion in the research process, and revealed the agentive ways in which Black girls use their digital content.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual frameworks which guided this study were the Black Girls' Literacies Framework (BGLF), Youth Participation, and Black Feminist Digital Literacies. Considering the intersectional identities of Black girls and how their identities shape their literacy practices, I drew on the BGLF to acknowledge the ways in which Black girls' identities, epistemologies, and values shape their literacy practices and subsequently, their purposes of their literacy practices.

Additionally, comprehending Black girls' strategic use of social media platforms to engage in public sociopolitical dialogue required a conceptual framework to understand the motivations behind their actions and decisions to engage in the sociopolitical arena through the digital sphere. Therefore, I also drew upon youth participation to appreciate and celebrate the diverse literacy practices youth engage in as strategies to shed light on issues most pertinent to their lives and their communities. Lastly, the way in which Black girls are particularly engaging in digital literacy pursuits necessitated a framework to understand their specific practices via the digital sphere, therefore, I turned to Black Feminist Digital Literacies.

### **Black Girls' Literacies Framework**

Muhammad and Haddix (2016) conceptualized the Black Girls' Literacies Framework (BGLF) after analyzing the ways in which researchers and practitioners engaged with Black girls in English education settings. Based upon Haddix and Muhammad's literature review of empirical studies with Black girls across grades K-12, they found that Black girls articulate their epistemologies and values through their literacies in six distinctive ways. Black girls often use *multiple* literacies and theoretical orientations simultaneously. Their reading and writing are always connected to their *identities* as Black girls and the many other intersectional identities they hold. Their literacy pursuits connect *historically* to the ways in which Black women readers, thinkers, and writers have engaged with texts. They use literacy pursuits as an opportunity to *collaborate* with their sisters. They are eager to *gain new knowledge* about different topics and areas of interests. Finally, they use their pursuits to engage in *political* critiques of power, oppression, and inequality. As both a pedagogical and theoretical framework, the BGLF distinctively centers' Black girls' epistemologies and literacies which is crucial when working with them as both educators and researchers. These six components of Black girls' literacies

provide a historically and culturally relevant research framework for examining Black girls' literacies and developing curricula aligned with their literacy practices. I used the Black Girls' Literacies Framework as a guide for how I crafted the digital literacy collaborative sessions for the girls to ensure my pedagogical practices aligned with Black girls' epistemologies and values. The BGLF also helped me understand the content the girls created in the collaborative, their sociopolitical purposes of their content, and composing processes.

### **Youth Participation**

The agentic nature of Black adolescent girls' digital content required additional insight on these practices of youth which is why I drew upon the theory of youth participation (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006) as it appears closely related to the ways in which Black girls are leveraging their social media platforms. Youth participation describes the various innovative ways in which youth are leveraging their talents and expertise to address issues most pressing to their lives. Not surprisingly, the digital arena is increasingly becoming a site for youth to engage in sociopolitical participation or youth participation. Checkoway & Gutierrez (2006) defines youth participation as "a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives". The ways in which this culture is created amongst youth and continued is through the culture of youth participation where there are...

1. relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. strong support for creating and sharing creations with others,
3. some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experience is passed along to novice
4. members who believe that their contributions matter, and

5. members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created) (Jenkins, 2009, pp. 5-6).

Rather than label this participation as civic engagement, I used this broader term and definitions to highlight the diverse forms of sociopolitical participation youth including Black girls are participating in through their digital content published on social media platforms (Kickham, 2016) including their spreading of contagious joy through choreographed dancing (Lorenz, 2020). It is within this participatory culture that youth develop their means of expression while participating in peer-based learning which may serve as a launchpad for civic engagement.

In order to encourage this youth participation culture within the digital literacy collaborative, I aimed to remove barriers to girls interested in expression and civic engagement by recruiting participants who considered themselves either digital content creators or viewers who were open to exploring their artistic expression and sociopolitical participation within a community where we would show care and compassion towards one another. I wished to nurture an online environment where we could support one another as we created and shared our content. Girls who identify themselves as content creators or content viewers had an opportunity within this collaborative to learn from each other by drawing on each other's expertise and experiences. Through this collaborative, I wanted the girls to know that their content is important regardless of viral status. Finally, through the collaborative, I hoped to build a community where the girls felt comfortable and connected with one another.

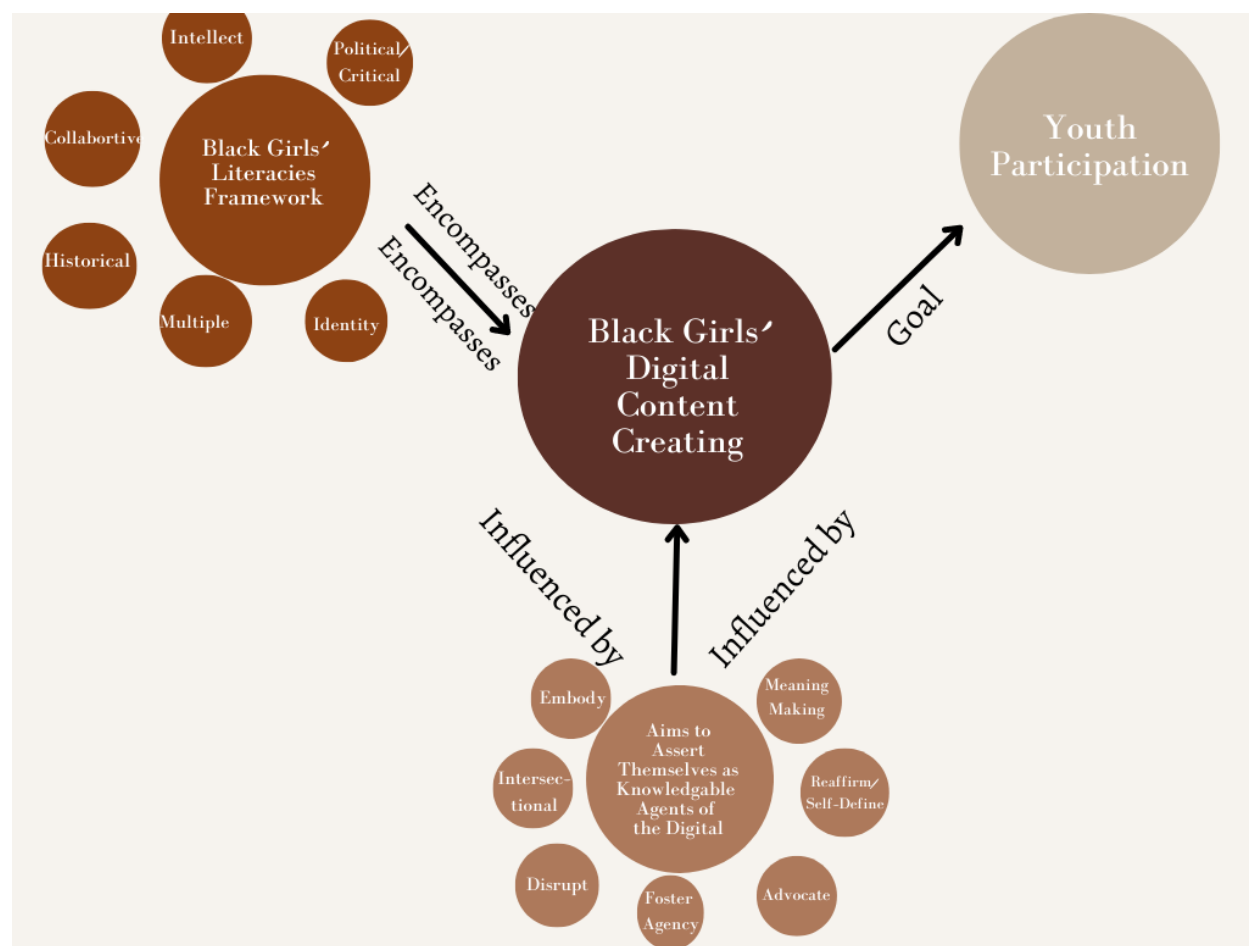
### **Black Feminist Digital Literacies**

I also drew upon Lewis Ellison's (2018) framework, Black Feminist Digital Literacies because she uses this framework to conceptualize how Black women and girls use their contemporary literacy practices in the digital arena to assert themselves as *knowledgeable agents*

*of the digital* and how their digital practices are one way in which Black women and girls have historically engaged in efforts to humanize and validate their lived experiences. Lewis Ellison argues that Black women and girls engage in seven practices to assert themselves as *knowledgeable agents of the digital*. Black women and girls use digital and non-digital texts and tools to *embody* themselves or represent their true selves. Black girls use these multimodal spaces to *disrupt oppression, inequalities, and injustices* faced by Black women and girls. Within this space, they are *agentive* and use the *power within themselves to advocate* for issues important to them. Black girls as knowledgeable agents of the digital are able to *make meaning of their lived experiences*. They create *intersectional* settings which consider their identities such as race, gender, and class. They *foster agency* to redefine and remake themselves amongst the false and incomplete narratives which permeates society and the media. Lastly, Black girls *reaffirm and self-define* their roles through their digital compositions. The framework of Black Feminist Digital Literacies helped me understand the sociopolitical purposes of participants as they created their digital content and guided me as I selected Black women and girl content creators to highlight during the collaborative to ensure their literacy pursuits aligned with the ways in which Black girls today use their digital content. Merging these three frameworks were intentional as Black girls' digital content creating encompasses the six Black girl literacies Muhammad and Haddix's (2018) found in their study, their content creating is a way in which they assert themselves as knowledgeable agents of the digital (Lewis Ellison, 2018), and through their digital content motivated by sociopolitical purposes, Black girls reveal their means of youth participation (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006). Through the merging of these three distinct yet applicable frameworks, I believe we are best able to conceptualize Black girls' digital content creating via social media (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Visual Representation of Merging Frameworks that Grounded this Study*



## Methods

Historically grounded in the literary traditions of African Americans and their creation of literary societies, literacy collaboratives are learning environments where learners of varying identities, experiences, and literacy abilities come together to discuss texts and engage in meaning-making around shared aims or goals (Tatum, 2009). These groups typically consisted of between 6 and 16 members with 9 being the average number of participants in a collaborative (e.g., book clubs, writing/reading discussion groups) for studies with African American adolescent girls (Henry, 2001; Sutherland, 2005; Wissman, 2011; Muhammad, 2015a;

Muhammad, 2015b; Gibson, 2016; Greene, 2016; Player, 2019; Ellison, Robinson, & Tairan, 2020; Toliver, 2020; Griffin, 2020). Using the compositions of Black women as mentor texts, researchers have informed girls of the literary traditions of Black women writers which served as launchpads to uncover the literacy practices of Black girls contemporarily (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008; Wissman, 2011; Dillard, 2012; Gibson, 2016; Greene, 2016; Muhammad, 2015a; Player, 2019). Through engagement with the texts and their peers, literacy collaboratives often afford Black girls similar advantages as literary societies for Black women such as providing them mentor texts and peers to collaborate with whose strengths in specific literacy practices can serve as scaffolds for other members to learn from and emulate (Bacon & McClish, 2000).

In previous studies where literacy collaboratives were utilized with Black girls, the collaborative nature of these spaces permitted girls the ability to engage in social constructions of knowledge (Wissman, 2011; Muhammad, 2015a; Ellison, Robinson, & Tairan, 2020; Griffin, 2020). Utilizing literacy collaboratives as a method to explore Black girls' literacy practices, the collaboratives helped facilitate girls in discussions of complex topics relevant to lives. These informative dialogues allowed members to voice their unique perspectives and carefully critique their peers' which resulted in enhanced understanding amongst the group. After engaging in discussion, the girls were often tasked with creating their own written and digital content reflecting the knowledge they gained throughout the course of the collaborative and their enhanced sociopolitical awareness (Wissman, 2011; Muhammad, 2015a; Griffin, 2020). Therefore, this study drew on the historical use of literacy societies within the Black community and research with Black girls to create a digital literacy collaborative where the girls could learn

from one another while growing in their own position as Black girls' who use their digital content for sociopolitical participation.

### **Research Site**

The digital literacy collaborative was conducted 100% virtually via Zoom for a total of eight sessions during the fall of 2022 and early 2023. I decided to conduct the literacy collaborative completely virtually because such a research site could permit a wider reach of Black girls not particularly confined to a specific region and could reveal a broader understanding of the sociopolitical issues most pertinent to Black girls. In the end, all of the participants were from the same region, but their diverse identities brought various perspectives to our digital literacy collaborative. Additionally, the reality is we are still navigating living during a pandemic. Therefore, to eliminate the need to consider seating arrangements, social distancing, or transitioning online if there was a potential exposure, virtual provided the most suitable option.

Sessions occurred according to an agreed upon day selected by participants who were surveyed prior to the study on their preferred day(s) and availability. I chose to select the session dates according to the participants' availability because teenagers are busy people, which proved to be the case with this group, who were balancing athletics, part-time jobs, and other extra-curricular activities. Therefore, allowing them to indicate the days and times which worked best for them allowed for consistent participation during the eight-session collaborative. This flexible approach to scheduling our sessions provided beneficial as participants were extremely busy and at times, sessions had to occur outside of our typical session day or were abbreviated to accommodate participants' schedules. The digital literacy collaborative ran from November 2022 to January 2023 and included eight sessions and two individual pre-program and post-program



interviews. Each session was approximately two hours long. The total time devoted to the digital literacy collaborative for participants was 18 hours total (eight 2-hour sessions and two, one-hour individual interviews).

### **Participant Sampling Methods**

In order to recruit participants, I shared recruitment flyers via social media to locate self-identified African American or Black girls between the ages of 13-18 who considered themselves digital content creators or viewers. I decided to recruit both content creators and viewers because I believed that as a viewer of digital content, one knows what is aesthetically pleasing and persuasive. These viewers could use this insight to create their own content and provide critical eye to support their peers as they compose. Content creators offered expertise and experience potentially beneficial to assist their peers with less experience creating their own content. Additionally, this practice of having more experienced and less experienced individuals work together embodied the informal mentorship of youth participation and the emulation found within Black women literacy societies. Through this use of purposeful sampling, I selected a small but diverse group of Black girl digital content creators and viewers who were ready to reveal their creative genius through their digital content.

### **Recruitment**

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit self-identified Black or African American adolescent girls who were between the ages of 13 and 18 and who identified as either digital content creators or digital content viewers (Creswell, 2012). By utilizing purposeful sampling in this study, I hoped to learn more about Black girls' digital content creating via social media and how their participating in a digital literacy collaborative might influence their digital content creating on social media. I aimed to recruit potential participants by sharing the research study

flyer on my social media profiles (via Instagram and Facebook) with the hope that the communities I had within these spaces would grant me access to interested girls who meet the selection criteria. Additionally, I also reached out to my former students who also met the selection criteria through direct messaging to gauge their interests in participating in the study.

In the end, sharing my recruitment flyer on social media did not yield as much interest as anticipated. I believe this was due to my posts of my research flyer not reaching my intended audience of Black girls. The traditional research study flyer is very one-dimensional and may not captivate youth. Unfortunately, I have yet to master the skill of creating captivating posts which are widely shared and reposted across social media platforms. Additionally, my social network on social media does not consist of young Black girls which may have reduced the reach of my posts to my intended audience, Black girls. However, my amazing community of peers aided me in recruiting each of my participants by recommended the program to their respective communities.

My goal was to recruit between 4-6 girls, 6 being the lowest number of participants in literacy collaboratives with Black girls. Going into the study, I chose to include six or fewer participants because of the large amount of data that would be collected from each girl to gauge their composing process via screen recording and think aloud. In the end, four girls applied to the program. Of the two applicants who did not participate in the study, one applicant failed to respond to my correspondences and the other applicant did not meet the eligibility requirements. Two girls were successfully recruited and participated in the study.

### **Participants**

Two adolescent Black girls were recruited and participated in the study. Although I had originally planned for 4-6 participants, when the recruitment process started students had already

started the school year and potentially had selected their extracurricular activities for the year which may have limited the number of applicants and subsequently the number of participants. The participants differed in age, grade, and literacy proficiency (see Table 1). At the time of the study, the mean age of participants was 15.5. The participants did not receive any incentives for participation in the study other than copies some of the texts we read.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Participants*

| Participant | Age | Writing Proficiency (Self-Reported) | Reading Proficiency (Self-Reported) |
|-------------|-----|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Roxanne     | 13  | High                                | High                                |
| Jaye        | 18  | Low                                 | Mid to High                         |

**Roxanne**

Roxanne was thirteen years old at the time of the study and in the eighth grade. When asked to describe herself, Roxanne defined herself as a shy, outgoing at times, unique, and humorous trilingual. During our first session, Roxanne initially took a little encouragement to share her thoughts with the community but once warmed up, she openly shared her ideas and opinions. As a self-identified digital content creator and viewer, Roxanne viewed and created content on YouTube, TikTok, and Pinterest. She enjoyed viewing diverse digital content including cosplay, fashion-based content, and dance videos. Roxanne posted music and art content on YouTube without using her face. She also created TikTok video where she made dancing videos.

Prior to the program, Roxanne was a little hesitate to use her social media platforms to engage in sociopolitical conversations. However, she had experience using her platforms to bring awareness to issues of important to her and her community. Roxanne decided to participate in the

program because she was looking for a new experience and saw the program as an opportunity to better the world through her posts. During the course of the program, she hoped to learn from other participants and how they managed and grew their social media platforms.

### **Jaye**

Jaye was eighteen years old at the time of the study and preparing to enter her freshman year of college. Jaye described herself as calm but humorous. Jaye took a leading role in the community where she was often the first to respond to questions and lead discussions. Regarding content creating, Jaye viewed herself as more of a viewer of digital content. Her social media platforms of choice to view included YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest. Although a self-identified viewer of digital content, Jaye did post content on Instagram including her own poetry.

When posting content, Jaye was not afraid to share her thoughts on sociopolitical issues as she saw it as an opportunity to have conversations with her followers and learn others' perspective. Jaye decided to participate in the program because she saw it as an opportunity to show up for other Black girls in her community. Through her participation in the program, she hoped to gather inspiration and tools to grow as a creator. Jaye unfortunately was unable to attend our final session of content creating. Operating with an ethics of care encouraged by Black Feminism, I encouraged Jaye to take care of herself and listened when she expressed her inability to finish the final project due to her limited capacity.

### **Application and Pre-Program Interview**

Baseline data was collected from all prospective participants through an online application and semi-structured pre-interviews to gauge the girls' prior experience with digital platforms and their digital and non-digital content of interest. Prior to selecting participants, the girls and their

parent/guardian completed an application where they indicated whether they considered themselves digital content creators or viewers, the digital platforms they created with, and the types of digital content they viewed. I conducted semi-structured, pre-interviews online with the participants prior to the beginning of the literacy collaborative to allow space for the girls to discuss their responses to the questions in the recruitment application including how they have utilized their digital content (See Appendix B for pre-program interview protocol). During the approximately, one-hour interview, the girls were asked questions about their ideas around their content creating and/or viewing to serve as a baseline for whether or not their purposes for creating and using digital content shifted between the beginning and the end of the program. These pre-interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of participants' responses.

### **Pedagogical Routine**

The digital literacy collaborative was approximately eight weeks and consisted of eight sessions. Each session was held via Zoom and was recorded using the recording feature on Zoom to allow for transcription of exchanges between the girls and myself. I recorded each session to determine the ways in which the interactions between myself, their participants, and the Black women and girl content creators highlighted influenced the content the girls created throughout the collaborative and their final cumulative project. Because I aimed to create space where the girls felt comfortable, prior to pressing the record button before each session, I asked the girls if they would like to keep their video on or off. I also set the expectation that we are all human and sometimes need to or desire to keep our videos off. However, to facilitate more natural interactions amongst all of us and because facial and body expressions are also literacies, I encouraged the girls to use our time to remain fully present by unmuting themselves,

interacting with each other, and keeping their videos on to try to remove the physical distance that exist when communicating via screen.

During the course of the eight sessions, participants learned about Black women and Black girl content creators (writers, orators, digital content creators, etc.) who used their content, both digital and non-digital, to entertain, inspire, and inform. Rooted in the historical traditions of literacy collaboratives including literary societies, throughout the program participants engaged in discussions around the platforms(s) used by the content creators, motivation(s) behind their content, meaning-making modalities used, and other literary techniques. Each week, the girls produced content based on the focal Black woman or girl content creator we studied which served as participant-created artifacts to be analyzed.

Each session, we started off with girls reciting their peer-created preamble, modeled after the practices of Black literary societies (McHenry, 1996; Muhammad, 2012). Preambles were created by literary society members as a reminder of the purpose of their literacy pursuits as they engage with their fellow members. After which, we learned about the focal Black woman or Black girl content creator and their content, analyzed their content for the creator's strategic multimodal moves, and engaged in discussion around the content creator's sociopolitical purpose(s). After which, the girls were given time to create their own content based on the highlighted platform of the day, digital and non-digital, to allow the girls to develop or enhance their content creating skills.

During the course of the study, I provided exemplars of texts for the girls to emulate. I encouraged and supported the girls in sharing their composing processes with their peers during the sessions because I truly believe that youth are experts on their own culture and as digital content creators and viewers, they were likely more experienced in creating digital content than

myself. Content creating occurred both individually and collaboratively depending on the task. After the content creating time, I facilitated group discussion where they shared their content and we learned how to provide constructive feedback on the content creators' literacy purposes, strategic use of multimodalities, and perceptions on improving one's content. At the end of the sessions, we closed out with reflection on what interested the girls about the content creators highlighted for the day and their goals moving forward regarding creating similar digital and non-digital content. Since the goal of the study was to learn more about the digital content creating of adolescent Black girls, the cumulative project for the digital literacy collaborative consisted of the girls creating their own digital content for a social media platform of their choice such as an Instagram post, TikTok, YouTube video, meme etc. In addition to collecting rich insight on the digital content creating of these Black girls, my goal was for these young Black girls to realize the importance of the digital content they create by learning more about other Black women and girls who have used their content in similar ways.

### **Lesson Plans and Texts from the Literacy Institute**

The literacy collaborative's lessons and text selection were developed using the Black Girls Literacies Framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). As both a pedagogical and theoretical framework, the BGLF distinctively centers Black girls' epistemologies and literacies and reveals the elements of literacy engagement that are critical for Black girls as they partake in literacy practices. By drawing upon the Black Girls' Literacies Framework, I strived to incorporate the six elements found in Muhammad and Haddix's review of the literature through the lesson plans created and texts selected. When creating the weekly lessons, I sought to highlighted one Black girl and Black women who used their digital and non-digital content for similar sociopolitical purposes. The list of highlighted content creatives began with Marley Dias and Jalaiah Harmon who were near the age of the participants when their content went viral and

who have used their content for sociopolitical purposes (see Table 2). When selecting the remaining creators, I allowed the younger Black girl digital creative guide me to a Black woman creative who used their content for similar purposes. This included looking for Black girl creatives near the same age as the participants who addressed sociopolitical issues in their content. The lesson plans were developed before the beginning of the first session to encompass the expansive ways Black girls engage in literacy practices and were revised or adjusted as needed to match the girls' specific interests based on the pre-program interviews, application data, and discussions throughout the program.



**Table 2***Focal Content Creators by Week*

|                  | <b>Highlighted Content Creator</b>  | <b>Type of Content</b> | <b>Sociopolitical Purpose</b>      | <b>Time Period</b> |
|------------------|---|------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Session 1</b> | Marley Dias   | Hashtag                | Representation in Books/Curriculum | 2015               |
|                  | Anna Julia Cooper   | Essays                 | Education Equity for Black Girls   | 1900s              |
| <b>Session 2</b> | Jalaiah Harmon  | TikTok Dance           | Black Girl Joy                     | 2019               |
|                  | Katherine Dunham  | Dance                  | Representation in Dance Community  | Mid 1900s          |
| <b>Session 3</b> | Isra Hirsi  | Protest and Organizing | Environmental Justice              | 2019               |
|                  | Venice Miller<br>Travis   | Organizing             | Environmental Justice              | 1988               |
| <b>Session 4</b> | Toni Morrison   | Novels                 | Social Commentary                  | Late 1900s         |
|                  | Lynae Vanee<br>@_lyneezy  | Instagram              | Social Commentary                  | 2020               |
| <b>Session 5</b> | Makeba L. Ross  | Film                   | Natural Hair Celebration 2020      |                    |
|                  | Kathleen Cleaver  | Speech                 | Natural Hair Celebration 1968      |                    |
| <b>Session 6</b> | Participants Lead Mini Lessons on “How-to” Create Content on their Platform of Choice |                        |                                    |                    |
|                  | Cumulative Digital Project  |                        |                                    |                    |
| <b>Session 7</b> | Cumulative Digital Project (Planning/ Drafting)                                       |                        |                                    |                    |
| <b>Session 8</b> | Cumulative Digital Project (Refining/Presenting)                                      |                        |                                    |                    |

**Session One** For the first session of the program, we began by introducing ourselves and sharing what we hoped to gain from participating in the program. I also introduced the participants to Black literary societies and how we aimed to create a similar space with our program. Modeled after the practices of Black literary societies, we co-created a preamble which

was read aloud each week to remind us of our purpose for joining together and what we aimed to accomplish in this space. We co-created the preamble by the girls responding to questions I posed to them regarding how they used their social media platforms and how they aimed to use their digital tools within the larger world. After which, we learned about our highlighted content creators, Marley Dias and Anna Julia Cooper by watching videos which discussed their motivation for creating their content, what they aimed to achieve with this content, and we discussed the similarities and differences amongst the creators and their content. Central to our discussion of the content created by our highlighted creatives, we named the top three creative moves which stuck out to the participants when viewing the content. Since one of our highlighted content creators coined a hashtag, we also discussed the history of hashtags on social media and their purposes on various social media platforms. We ended the session with the girls brainstorming and creating two hashtags in addition to sharing the motivation and purpose of these hashtags.

**Session Two** During session two, we learned about two different creators, Jalaiah Harmon and Katherine Dunham and viewed their infamous choreography. For Jalaiah, we watched an interview found on YouTube, a free video sharing social media site, of her discussing the motivation behind her creating her viral choreography and her experiences since her content went viral. For Katherine, we watched an interview where she discussed how she used her platform as a dancer to stand up against the racial injustices she witnessed in the very halls she took center stage. Since Jalaiah's content was created on Musical.ly which later became TikTok, we discussed the social media platform, TikTok and some of its benefits and disadvantages. We ended the session with the participants creating examples of their hashtags from session one in real application which the girls choose to create via Instagram.

**Session Three** For session three, we began the session defining the act of protesting, discussing if the participants had protested, their reasons for choosing to protest or not, and some issues they have or are interested in protesting. This activity was followed by the participants conducting mini-research projects on our highlighted content creators, Isra Hirsi and Vernice Miller Travis, two environmental justice activists. I created a Padlet, a free website where one can create and view virtual stick notes which can be shared with others. This Padlet contained prompting questions to guide the girls' research and resources for them to learn more about each highlighted creative. After conducting this research, the girls were tasked with sharing their new knowledge about these content creators in an innovative way. The girls decided to share their knowledge via Instagram posts.

**Session Four** During week four, we learned about Lynae Vane, a digital content creator who creates weekly content on social issues affecting the Black community and Toni Morrison, a Black woman author. We watched an episode of Lynae's well-known series, 'Parking Lot Pimpin'' and listened to an interview with Morrison where she discussed the inspiration behind her first novel. Since Lynae's content is based within Instagram, we ended the session by discussing the social media platform and some of the appeals and drawbacks of the digital platform.

**Session Five-Six** For session five, we learned about Makeba L. Ross and Kathleen Cleaver by viewing interviews with them found on YouTube. These two content creators both used hair as a form of protest. After viewing their content, we discussed other examples the girls had viewed of fashion being used as a form of protest. The participants were also asked to note three creative moves made by the content creator which made their content stand out. During these sessions, the participants were also asked to create a social media post using a

social media platform of their choosing to tell us more about themselves. We viewed these posts and also noted the top three creatives moved noticeable in their content. To encourage the girls to share their expertise around content creating, they were asked to teach us how to create a post using their social media platform of choice. Each participant demonstrated how to create a post using their platform of choice. We concluded these sessions with practicing creating using the expert knowledge shared by participants.

**Session Seven-Eight** For our final two session, the participants were presented with the final project of thinking about an issue that impacts their community and urgently needs to be addressed. During session seven, they were given exemplars to draw upon, if necessary, and were tasked with brainstorming and drafting how they could use their preferred social media platforms to address this issue. I also asked the participants to engage in screen recording and think aloud as they created their final project. I demonstrated how to record their think alouds. During session eight, they were asked to create their final project and share this final project with the group.

**Post-Program Interviews** After the program, the girls participated in individual, one-hour semi-structured, post-program interviews online via Zoom to discuss the content they created throughout the program, their cumulative digital project, the sociopolitical purposes of their final project, and their composing processes (See Appendix C for post-program interview protocol). The average time for post-program interview was 46.5 minutes. Prior to completing the post-program interview, I also completed a preliminary analysis of the girls' final project and composing processes to use the post-program interview as a member check to ensure accuracy of my interpretations and analysis of their digital content, sociopolitical purposes, and digital composing processes. Additionally, I asked the girls questions about their perceptions of digital

content creating to see if participating in this program changed their perspectives on digital content creating and viewing. Like the pre-program interviews, post-program interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The public nature of social media participation is potentially why Black girls draw upon it as a means to make known their epistemologies and ideologies to the world. However, this public space can be difficult to control in studies where participants' identities and well-being must be protected (Hennell, Limmer, & Piacentini, 2020). Therefore, to mitigate unnecessarily exposing the girls to experiences outside of their daily lives that can come from social media participation, I recruited girls who currently used social media platforms and whose parents knew of their social media participation. Additionally, the content that they created during the program was curated on a private page only accessible by myself and the girls which I avoided allowing individuals to subscribe to including the participants as an attempt to avoid publicly connecting them to the research project. The girls' identities were concealed on their social media posts through the use of pseudonyms to protect their privacy although such protections do not always exist within the digital landscape of social media.

Additionally, because the girls were encouraged to create content most important to their lives, this experience had the potential to yield personally sensitive information about the girls and discussion of sensitive topics. Therefore, to protect their privacy and how they are represented in the public, I screened all content as it was shared to our social media pages. I also reviewed and edited recorded observations to remove any sensitive information or topics before publishing any documents that may come from this research to ensure the girls are represented with care and compassion. I checked in with the girls during the member checking process to

ensure they were comfortable with me sharing the content they have created during my dissertation defense and subsequent publications. The goal of these ethical practices was to allow the girls to fully express themselves without fear of judgment during this generative experience where the girls were trying out various forms of content creating to see which platforms best spoke to their needs and interests.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I approached this research as a self-identified Black woman once Black girl who is an avid viewer of digital content. My interest in the digital literacy practices of Black girls comes from my own viewership of content created by Black women and girls beginning with the natural hair movement. In the early 2010s, I began watching videos on YouTube as a means to locate other Black women and girls like me who were letting go of their relaxed strands and transitioning back to their natural hair texture. Viewing the physically and mental transformation that Black women and girls experienced, inspired me to educate myself about this transition and embark on this transformation to let go of my chemically processed hair. Years later, I have turned to YouTube and other social media platforms for personal interests such as fashion inspiration and as a means of solidarity amongst other Black woman and girls with similar interests. Throughout my viewership, I have increasingly seen Black girls created their own lane in the digital arena through their bold posts which cleverly bring to light issues pertinent to their lives. At their age or even now, I have been too afraid of potential misinterpretation of my content and strived for unrealistic goals of perfectionism which led to my fear of posting content via social media. Therefore, I am in awe of Black girls whose bold posts are changing the world. Thus, this research was a means for me learn more about the brave and creative pursuits of Black

girls and how encouraging Black girl viewers of digital content to create their own content may influence their openness to create such inspiring posts as well.

## **Data Sources**

### **Digital Content Artifacts**

The girls' digital content they created during the program and other artifacts used to brainstorm or communicate with one another including Zoom chat logs from each session were documented and analyzed. My aim of collecting these sources of digital content was to understand how or if the discussions and interactions the participants had during the sessions showed up in their digital content, their cumulative project, and the ways in which they engaged in digital composing.

### **Research Journal**

Throughout the research process, I used a journal to capture my thoughts of the research process and observations made during the sessions with the girls. Research journals or memos help one to make sense of the data obtained (Charmaz, 2014). They also allow for space to reflect on any methodological issues encountered, personal reactions from the field, and emerging ideas that arise as one iteratively engages in data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to capture these rich ideas, I engaged in journaling immediately after each session to jot down any interesting observations, personal revelations, and other reflections of the session which I crossed reference as I reviewed the transcriptions and video data. By participating in journaling throughout the research process, I aimed to learn about not only what Black girls are telling us through their digital content, but I also believe that I have transformed during the research process as well which is reflected in my journaling (Womack, 2013). Considering the importance of field notes to the data analysis process, I also spent a significant

time after each session writing field notes on my experiences, initial thoughts guided by the research questions, and interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Screen Recording and Think Aloud**

Since the program was conducted entirely online due to the nature of the research and the evolving global pandemic, I used the video conference website, Zoom to facilitate the sessions with the girls. Zoom has been found to be an effective platform to engage in qualitative research as it allows for one to connect with participants within a space, they are most comfortable and connect individuals who are separated by long distances (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, & Cook, 2020). Because my aim was understanding the composing processes of the girls as they created their digital content for their final project, I used screen recording to reveal, in real-time, the digital composing processes of Black girls. I originally desired for the girls to use Camtasia to collect data on their composing processes while creating their cumulative project. Camtasia is an application that can be downloaded to one's phone or computer device to capture what one does on their device during composing as well as their audio of what they say as they compose. Previously, researchers have used this platform to document the digital composing processes of youth and have found that it provides rich data on the non-linear nature of their digital composing, how the digital platform influences adolescents' content creating, and how the purposes of their content motivates their compositional decisions (Ranker, 2008; Bruce, 2009; Vasudevan, Schultz, & Bateman, 2010; Gilje, 2011; Smith, 2017). However, obtaining this software required a yearly subscription which was not economically feasible due to the limited number of users and usage of the software. Therefore, I asked the girls if they were familiar with using the screen recording feature on their cellphones which also would allow them to capture both video of them creating on their screens and audio from their microphones. This decision



also proved beneficial as their cellphones were their primary means of content creating for social media platforms.

As the girls created their cumulative project, I also asked them to dictate their composing process or provide step-by-step instructions on what they were doing as they created their content and why they were choosing to make these specific compositional moves. Think aloud processes allowed participants to reveal, in the moment, their composing moves which have proved beneficial for researchers in understanding how the participants aimed to reveal their identities, emotions, and the motives through their content which may not be clear to the viewer if they only analyzed the final product (Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007). Additionally, Zoom recordings and transcriptions of the girls' conversations were also collected to analyze the participants' body language and interactions with each other which might have been missed during our engagement as supplementary data to the screen recordings collected.

### **Data Management**

The data sources were stored on an external hard drive to permit the researcher to separate her personal files from the files accumulated during this research study. Additionally, to ensure the data was stored in more than one location, the data was automatically backed up to a cloud, a web-based internet server to securely store the data.

### **Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis**

The data collected throughout this research study (pre-program and post-program interviews, digital content artifacts, researcher journal entries, and screen recording/ think alouds) were analyzed using thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Thematic analysis allows one to analyze their data using their theoretical framework as a guide to look for patterns across the data. I began coding the data by looking for the similarities and differences in

the ways in which the girls leveraged their digital platforms and why these platforms were vital for their purpose of their digital content. I also looked for similarities and differences related to their “why” or motivations for creating their digital content based on the sociopolitical issue they aimed to address. Lastly, I looked at the composing processes of the participants to look for potentially connections or dissimilarities between their processes. Because I approached the data from an inductive approach, I aimed to analyze the data from an open perspective to learn more about what this under researched area of Black girls’ literacy practices revealed.

### **Data Analysis Phases**

Three phases were used to analyze, interpret, and crystallize the data. Each phase of analysis and interpretation helped to understand how the participants used the digital platforms in their digital content, the sociopolitical purposes which motivated their creation of their digital content, and the composing processes of the participants.

#### ***Phase 1: Thematic Analysis Coding***

Upon obtaining participants’ digital content, observational data, interview transcripts, and research memos, I uploaded the data to Quirkos, a qualitative data analysis and research software. Coding was facilitated through completing initial coding, focus coding, and finally theme building through axial coding when the data reached a level of saturation (Charmaz, 2014). I began by coding the pre-program interviews, then the Zoom recordings, followed by participants’ digital content created throughout the program, next participants’ digital content and observations via screen recordings from the final project, and concluding with the post-program interviews. I decided to use this order because I believed that tracing the girls’ digital content from ideation to actualization would allow me to note intriguing compositional moves,

discussions, and content which I could explore further as I continued the coding process. Next, I will detail the coding process used to answer the research questions.

I began coding the data using initial coding (Saldana, 2013). Initial coding allows the researcher to approach the data with an open stance to see what the data says which guides subsequent directions in the coding process (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Specifically, this included completing a first read of the transcripts using a descriptive approach or line-by-line approach with the goal of identifying gerunds or phrases suitable to describe themes present in the data and list any additional questions warranting returning to the data to address (Saldana, 2016). As I engaged in this initial coding of the transcripts, video, and digital content, I used a combination of my own words and phrases to summarize the data as well as in-vivo coding to code using participant-generated terms to highlight words, gerunds, or phrases that stood out in the data. Coding using participants' language helped me honor their knowledge as expert digital content creators and viewers and aided me as I followed up with them regarding my findings during the member checking process. Initial coding allowed me to ask questions of the data and follow-up with these questions in subsequent coding and during the post-program interviews.

During my initial coding process, I created 310 codes such as "LaTasha's Perception of Personality", "Inspiration for Content Creating", and "Digital Content Viewed". When I began the initial coding process, I created sub-codes within the main codes for topics that appeared related. As an example, in the session transcripts where the girls discussed their desires in the program, each desire mentioned by the participant became a subcode of the overarching code of "Desires for Time in Program" (See Table 3). My data analysis resulted in a total of 78 codes with 116 subcodes.

**Table 3**

*Example of Codes for 'Desires for Time in Program'*

---

| <b>Desires for Time in Program</b>  |
|-------------------------------------|
| Better Self                         |
| Better Digital Creativity           |
| Create Community                    |
| Inspired One Another                |
| Learn from One Another              |
| See How Others Manage/Grow Platform |
| Tips on Content Creating            |

---

Because each session had a central theme or topic, grouping similar codes by the central topics discussed aided the coding process. As an example, session #3 focused on protesting. Therefore, when coding these sessions, I created codes about protest and added them to the codebook (see Figure 3). As I progressed through coding and the topic of protesting coding was referenced, I could easily add protest related codes to the section already created. Grouping codes while coding allowed for a slight cleaning of the codebook as I coded.

### Figure 3

#### *Example from Code Grouping of Transcript Related to 'Protests'*

**LaTasha Mosley 04:48**  
Yas! Every time I read that, its like so good. Alrighty. So today we're going to really have...we 'll probably have enough time to learn about to central protesters. And so I wanted to gauge your insight on like, how would you define protesting based on what you saw on social media, what you've experienced yourself? How would you define protesting?

**Roxanne 05:22**  
Standing up for what you believe in.

**Jaye 05:27**  
Yeah. Standing up for what you believe in, you know, like Sort coming to politics or really anything and going out in the public space and voicing your opinion.

**LaTasha Mosley 05:47**  
Umm hmm. So, based off your experience, have you all like ever protested?

**Jaye 05:55**  
I did during quarantine, when the Black Lives Matter movement had started. I went to that protest downtown Atlanta. And then I also did one for abortion rights.

**LaTasha Mosley 06:14**  
What about you, Roxanne?

**Roxanne 06:16**  
I haven't been in one, but there was one in my middle school. And they students, it was student-started and student -Held, and students were participating in it. And it was also about abortion rights. But unfortunately, the boys that came to it weren't basically they were skipping class to like, do that instead of actually going to class. They didn't really care about it, though. So.

**LaTasha Mosley 06:49**  
Okay. So I have there ever been any, like things that may have discouraged you, people, things that may have discouraged you from protesting?

**Jaye 07:04**  
Um, there was protest at my school, when... I don't remember exactly if it was little law or something. But they're basically saying that, like trans and transgender students, teachers could only call them by their birth names and not their actual names. And a bunch of people in my school had put together a protest. And I really wanted to do it. But I was a senior, and they were saying that, you know, anybody that did it would, you know, pretty much be expelled. And I was like, I can't risk that. And it's not that our principal was against it. He was completely for it, and us having the protests, but that's just something that you know, that you can't really do. That's taking away from class time and disrupting others, you know?

**LaTasha Mosley 07:55**  
And Roxanne you said umm...

**41: Definitions of Protest**  
Definitions of Protest by LaTasha Mosley  
Reply

**42: Standing up for what you believe in**  
Standing up for what you believe in by LaTasha Mosley  
Reply

**43: Going out in public space and voicing opinion**  
Going out in public space and voicing opinion by LaTasha Mosley  
Reply

**44: Barriers to Protest Participation**  
Barriers to Protest Participation by LaTasha Mosley  
Reply

Prior to completing the second round of coding, I engaged in code mapping by creating a coding book where I defined my tentative codes. This helped to ensure that as I coded, I was consistently applying the codes and helped me group my codes after the second cycle of coding. During my second cycle of the data, I engaged in focus coding to begin grouping similar gerunds or phrases into categories such as similarities in the sociopolitical issues the girls were aiming to address versus that of the highlighted creatives and created sub-codes to further codify my codes.

I also began to further group similar codes by moving codes that were related together and labeling them based on an overarching code I believed they described. Table 4 provides an example of the groups of related codes generated during the analysis of sessions #3 and #4. Here I used the category of *Generational Differences in Content Creating* to help sort through codes and subcodes for *Gen Z* and *Millennial* approaches to creating digital content as identified by the girls.

**Table 4**

*Example of Codes Generated During Focused Coding*

| <b>Generational Differences in Content Creating</b> |   |
|---|---|
| <i>Code</i>   | <i>Subcode</i>  |
| Gen Z Approach to Content Creating                  | Creating Personal Style<br>Intentional Use of Lowercasing<br>Intentional Angling of Content<br>Laughing in Middle of Joke<br>Lightheartedness |
| Millennial Approach to Content Creating             | Aggressive  |

The final round of coding of the data included axial coding. The goal of axial coding is “to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones ... [and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed, and the best representative codes are selected” (Boeije, 2010, p. 109). Using the codebook created during initial coding, I engaged in a second iteration of code mapping to group the dominant codes. I looked at the group of codes previously created and attempted to make meaning of the overarching codes by creating categories. During this round of coding, I attempted to go through each group of codes and describe what I believed these codes meant based on the data, my memos, and code descriptions. I used Saldana’s (2016) encouragement to begin developing themes or arguments based off of the data by expanding the codes into longer

phrases by adding the verb “is” or “means” to the codes. For example, I created the category *Sociopolitical Purposes are the Overarching Motivating Forces Behind the Participants' Creating Digital Content* to show what issues the girls attempted to address in their content (see Table 5 for this category and all of the codes and subcodes within it). With these themes in mind, I reviewed my researcher memos, interview data, and observations to see if these themes remained firm and if any additional categories needed to be identified, defined, or collapsed.

**Table 5**

*Example of Grouping and Collapsed Codes During Axial Coding*

| <b>Sociopolitical Purposes are the Overarching Motivating Forces Behind the Participants' Creating Digital Content</b> |   |
|--|---|
| <i>Code</i>  | <i>Subcode</i>  |
| Aimed to Show Things of Importance to Her  |   |
| Black Girls Expressing Their Interest  |   |
| Black Girls' Recognition in Social Media   |   |
| Bring Awareness  |   |
| Creating People in Posts   |   |
| Help Express Interests   |   |
| Issues Working Against   | Ignorance of Others<br>Misogyny<br>Racism<br>Sexuality<br>Stereotypes |
| Role of Black Women & Girl Content Creators  | Help Others Through Content Created                                   |
| Sociopolitical Issues  | Black Girls' Interests<br>Missed Revenue Opportunities                |

During this phase in coding, I also attempted to shorten the code names to one to two words to see if this would help with further collapsing codes and categories. Table 6 offers an example of how I collapsed the codes for the experiences the girls had.

**Table 6***Collapsing Codes for Experience*

| <b>Experience</b>       |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Code                    | Subcode  |
| Experience as Viewers   | Aesthetic<br>Challenges<br>Desires<br>Gen Z Creatives<br>In Real Time<br>Making Meaning<br>Millennial Creatives<br>Overlapping Experiences |
| Experience as Creatives | Challenges<br>Hashtags<br>Intended Audience<br>Purposes  |

As visible in the first section of Table 6, I realized as I attempted to collapse codes that “experience” seemed to be a central aspect of these codes. As I looked at these codes and my codebook, I realized what I was describing was the participants’ experience as digital content creatives and experience as digital content viewer. Therefore, I categorized the codes accordingly.

Next in my coding process, I referred back to my research questions and looked to see which group of categories fit under the research questions and what I believed the data was saying based on these findings. When I created categories, I also looked across them to see if there was potential to further collapse these categories and create overarching themes. After looking at my research question of “How are adolescent Black girls addressing sociopolitical issues in their digital content?” I realized I needed to see which sociopolitical issues the girls were creating their content around and discussed during our sessions. Therefore, the codes referred to in *Figure 3* became the overarching theme of sociopolitical purposes. Throughout the



coding process, I engaged in memo writing immediately following an iteration of coding when I was closest to the data and my thoughts were fresh. The final codes, categories, and themes developed from the data can be found below in Table 7.

**Table 7***Themes, Categories, and Codes Created*

| <b>Theme</b>                   | <b>Category</b><br>Codes   |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Creative Moves</b>          | <b>Digital Moves</b><br>Acknowledge Problem<br>Anticipate Viewers<br>Cite External Sources<br>Desire<br>Examples<br>Hashtags<br><b>Ethics</b><br>Credit<br>Restricting Viewers   |
| <b>Experience</b>              | <b>Experience as Creatives</b><br>Ethical Considerations<br>Intended Audience<br>Interest<br>Restricting Access to Content<br><b>Experience as Viewers</b><br>Aesthetic<br>Desires<br>In Real Time<br>Making Meaning<br>Overlapping Experience<br><b>Experience as Viewers and Creatives</b><br>Affordances<br>Challenges<br>Drawbacks<br>Specific Platforms for Specific Purposes |
| <b>Interests</b>               | Art<br>Factoring Interests<br>Hobbies  |
| <b>Process</b>                 | <b>Selecting Best Fit</b><br>Brainstorming<br>Layering Modalities<br>Research<br><b>Social Media Platforms</b><br>Affordances<br>Drawbacks   |
| <b>Sociopolitical Purposes</b> | <b>Aesthetic</b><br>Beauty Standards<br>Fashion<br>Natural Hair Movement<br><b>Protest</b><br>Activism<br>Black Girl Interest<br>Both  |

Gaps  
In-Person  
Representation  
Social Media  
Urgent  
**Representation**

---

Not all codes and categories created were used for this dissertation but will be extremely valuable as I continue this work of highlighting and celebrating the cultural shifting work Black girls are engaging in through their digital content creating and assisting literacy scholars, educators, and others working with Black girls to better understand the literacies Black girls draw upon during this specific social time.

***Phase 2: Member Check***

I conducted post-program interviews with each participant to serve as member checks after completing the thematic analysis. During the post-program interviews, I asked participants to discuss their digital content. I also asked the girls about the purposes which motivated their content, why they choose to compose using their digital platform, and what they hoped their content would accomplish. After which, I asked them if my interpretations of their digital content coincided with the way they intended their work to be interpreted. The data obtained through the member checking process were cross compared with my initial analysis from phase one to ensure I obtained rich description of this complex compositional process.

***Phase 3: Crystallization of the Data***

In the third phase, I compared the digital content, interviews, observations via screen recording and think aloud, field notes, and memos as an additional means to crystallize the data. Crystallization contrasts the idea that there are solely three ways of viewing data. By using crystallization, I adhered to the idea that multiple points in data “may converge, diverge, reflect, refract, bounce, etc.” which is vital to gaining rich and deeper insight into their case(s) under

study (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Crystallization also requires researchers to acknowledge that knowledge is constructed and reified socially. As a researcher, the “knowledge” you gain from your research must be viewed as influenced by your social environments and perspective of the world and thus your research is only one reflection of your phenomenon of study. As an attempt to show the various facets of Black girls’ digital content creating via social media, I used Ellington’s (2008) principles of crystallization to guide my project which include:

- Offer deep, thickly described, complexly rendered interpretations of meaning about a phenomena or group
- Represent ways of producing knowledge across multiple points of the qualitative continuum [of research]
- Utilize more than one genre of writing and/or medium
- Include a significant degree of reflexive consideration of the researcher’s self and roles in the process of research design, data collection, and representation
- Eschew positivist claims that objectivity and singular, discoverable Truth in favor of embracing knowledge as situated, partial, constricted, multiple, embodied, and enmeshed in power relations (p. 10)

Through analyzing transcripts, screen recording, think alouds, and observation data, I was able to gain thick description of participants’ content creating. I used interviews, observation, data analysis, content analysis, and discussion as multiple ways to gain knowledge of the participants’ creating process, what sociopolitical issues they aimed to address, and how they addressed this issue in their content. Using Muhammad and Haddix’s Black Girl Literacy Framework (2015), I encouraged the girls to utilize more than one genre of texts and represented their multiple genres

of texts in the findings. I also engaged in reflection throughout the research process from the creation of the study, data collection, data analysis, and write-up using memos collected in my physical and digital research journals. Finally, I understand the limitless possibilities of this work and its interpretation which is reflection in my implications for researchers, persons working with Black girls, and Black girls themselves. By engaging in crystallization throughout the research process, I hoped to better understand the complex processes in which Black girls engage in as they create digital content via social media.

### **Delimitations**

Black girls are a complex group of individuals who live at various intersections of identity with varied lived experiences. Therefore, representing the fullness and nuances of their lives and literacies through the limited lens of research is not truly possible. Therefore, despite attempts to recruit Black girls of diverse backgrounds, the participants in this study are not fully representative of all adolescent Black girls and their digital literacy practices. Additionally, as a researcher ideologically aligned with Black feminism and womanism research, I value individuality while also believing that the Black girls in this study reveal the collective experiences and literacies of other Black girls within their local communities and Black girls more broadly which is necessary as we research with and teach Black girls.

Developing a literacy collaborative informed by previous research with Black girls required a smaller sample size of participants. Smaller sample sizes permit researchers to engage in meaningful programming with the girls and yield rich data on their experiences through the qualitative methods used. These groups typically consisted of between 6-16 members with 9 being the average number of participants in a collaborative (e.g., book clubs, writing/reading discussion groups) for studies with African American adolescent girls (Ellison, Robinson, & Tairan, 2020;

Gibson, 2016; Greene, 2016; Henry, 2011; Muhammad, 2015a; Muhammad, 2015b; Player, 2019; Sutherland, 2005; Toliver, 2020; Wissman, 2011). However, considering the large amount of data obtained from each participant during the composing process of their final projects, I aimed to recruit between 4 and 6 participants. In the end, I recruited two participants which afforded me the opportunity to thoroughly analyze the participants' content created through the program as well as the discussions fostered in our sessions. Considering my interest in understanding the phenomenon of adolescent Black girls' digital content creating, the small number of participants allowed me to learn more about an understudied area of research and offered rich insight for future studies. It is my hope that the girls in this study shed light on the transformative work Black girls are engaging in mediated through social media and hopefully inspire additional scholars and educators to continue unpacking Black girls' digital literacies specifically their content creating in future research and beyond the academy.

In conclusion, I designed a qualitative case study that utilized Black Feminist-Womanism Theories to bring to light the sociopolitical purposes and composing processes of adolescent, Black girls creating content on social media platforms of their choosing. Utilizing the conceptual frameworks of the Black Girls' Literacies Framework, Youth Participation, and Black Feminist Digital Literacies, I developed a digital literacy collaborative to create an environment in which Black girls learned about other Black women and girls who have used their literacy practices to engage in sociopolitical dialogue. I also created this collaborative to encourage these Black girls to leverage a familiar medium, social media, to insert their voices into sociopolitical conversations on matters of utmost importance to them.

Data was collected using participant interview, digital content artifacts, research journaling, and screen recording and think alouds. This qualitative data was coded using Quirkos

software using three rounds of coding. During the first round, I engaged in initial coding to gain an overarching understanding of what was being said throughout the data. In the second round, I engaged in focus coding to begin grouping codes into categories. Finally, during the last round of axial coding, I began refining the codes and categories to develop themes most prominent in the data. By utilizing three rounds of coding, initial, focus, and axial coding and crystalizing the data with interviews, observations, and thematic analysis, I hoped to highlight and celebrate the cultural shifting work Black girls are engaging in through their digital content creating and assist literacy scholars, educators, and others working with Black girls to better understand the literacies Black girls are drawing upon during this specific social time to articulate their epistemologies, ideologies, and visions of the future.

## 4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study which explored how two Black girls between the ages of 13 and 18 leveraged social media to address sociopolitical issues relevant to their lives within a digital literacy collaborative. Throughout this chapter, I used the term “sociopolitical participation” drawing on Checkoway & Gutierrez’s (2006) youth participation to describe how participants in this study engaged in larger sociopolitical conversations through their actions on social media and beyond. Prior to the program, participants had various levels of sociopolitical participation especially on social media, however, throughout the program they increasingly used social media platforms as means of engagement in the larger, public sociopolitical dialogue. Engaging in sociopolitical dialogue through their social media content primarily included bring awareness to issue of importance to them and fostering conversations with and amongst their viewers. Participating in this digital literacy collaborative also offered both myself and the girls an opportunity to be in conversation with Black women and girls throughout time who have used their content for various sociopolitical purposes. The composing processes of these Black girls as they created digital content consisted of participants recursively moving from pondering potential ideas to selecting best fit elements to trying these elements out until they determined the composing process of their digital content was completed. Finally, centering their identities in their content was central to the girls’ composing process.

In the following sections, I explore how participating in this digital literacy collaborative equipped the girls to use various social media platforms to publicly engage in sociopolitical dialogue, how they addressed sociopolitical issues in the digital content they created, and the processes engaged in to create their digital content. Pseudonyms are utilized throughout this chapter which participants self-selected to maintain their anonymity.



### **New Possibilities for Digital Content Creating**

Throughout the course of the digital literacy collaborative, the two participants, Roxanne and Jaye, found new possibilities for their digital content creating on social media as a means of sociopolitical participation. In order to understand how the adolescent Black girls in this study engagement in sociopolitical participation shifted within the digital literacy collaborative, it is important to understand their levels of sociopolitical participation prior to, during, and at the conclusion of the collaborative to note any similarities and differences.

### **Sociopolitical Participation on Social Media Prior to the Digital Literacy Collaborative**

When discussing how the participants leveraged their platforms to engage in the sociopolitical dialogue prior to the study, no particular social media platforms appeared to be favored by the adolescent Black girls to best meet their needs. However, digital platforms broadly provided an avenue in which these girls could insert their voices into sociopolitical conversations. During session # 3 prior to learned about our two highlighted creatives, Isra Hirsi and Vernice Miller Travis, I facilitated a conversation amongst the girls to learn more about how they defined protesting and their prior protest participation. The goals of this exchange were to both gain an understanding around their definition of protesting and involvement in protests. When asked about how they defined protesting, participants provided the following responses.

**LaTasha Mosley:** And so, I wanted to gauge your insight on how would you define protesting based on what you saw on social media? What you've experienced yourself? How would you define protesting?

**Roxanne:** Standing up for what you believe in.

**Jaye:** Yeah. Standing up for what you believe in, you know, like pertaining to politics or really anything and going out in the public space and voicing your opinion.

Both participants viewed protesting as metaphorically standing up for what one believes in, and Jaye specifically added that protesting included going into public spaces and sharing these opinions with others. When discussing their prior protest participation, the girls' level of engagement varied.

### ***Protesting In Real Life (IRL) and Virtually***

As an older adolescent, Jaye previously participated in more traditional public protesting specifically in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement in her local downtown area. While discussing her previous engagement in protests, she realized that her level of participation in protesting was broader than she initially thought when she considered how she also used social media to, in the words of the girls, "voice her opinions".

Yeah. I feel like the ones that I have protested for are the main ones that I would want to. Everything else are things that, you know, I would speak out about on social media and stuff like that. So, I guess that is a form of protesting. But just through media.

Through her preferred social media platform, Instagram, Jaye was able to engage in global social movements such as the call for more media attention regarding Brittany Griner's arrest in Russia, the ban on abortion rights, and the cruelty against the Iranian protestors opposing the death of Mahsa Amini while in police custody which all occurred in 2022. Through using her social media platform, Jaye was able to actively listen to the opinions of her peers and engage in meaningful conversations as a means to educate herself on various perspectives regarding these complex issues. Through these conversations, she gained additional insight and could potentially broaden her perspective regarding these issues.

...I do like having conversation. Sometimes I would rather not, because people can be kind of annoying sometimes. But I, especially with my peers, mostly, I do enjoy talking about it. And I also just like hearing other people's opinions and views on things because I can only understand my view and understanding other people's views gives me an even broader opinion.

It is worth noting that Jaye's primary intended audience when posting on social media were her family and friends, "I feel more comfortable just posting myself knowing that only my friends and my family are seeing it." Through these conversations with individuals she knew, Jaye felt comfortable to have tough conversations around challenging issues.

Protesting via social media potentially provided a sort of barrier to more traditional forms of protests such as sit-ins and rallies as being associated with these in-person protests, at times, posed a threat of punishment for participants. As an example, Jaye desired to participate in a protest at her school led by her peers. This student-led protest intended to serve as a place for students to speaking out against the violation of rights for the transgender community within her school and school district. However, Jaye ultimately decided against participating for fear of not being able to graduate if she partook in the protest.

There was a protest at my school, when... I don't remember exactly if it was a little law or something. But they're basically saying that transgender students, teachers could only call them by their birth names and not their actual names. And a bunch of people in my school had put together a protest. And I really wanted to do it. But I was a senior and they were saying that anybody that did it would pretty much would be expelled. And I was like, I can't risk that. And it's not that our principal was against it. He was completely for

it and us having the protests, but that's just something that you know, that you can't really do. That's taking away from class time and disrupting others.

Despite her principal's personal belief in the intentions behind the students protesting, ultimately students who dared to participate ran the risk of facing expulsion and/or not being able to graduate.

### ***Hesitation to Engage in Sociopolitical Conversations Online***

The youngest participant, Roxanne had limited experience voicing her perspectives in the public dialogue. Although Roxanne used multiple social media platforms including YouTube, TikTok, and Pinterest when talking about protesting she seemed to be a little hesitate about using her platforms to engage in such sociopolitical conversations.

I don't really have much social media, I have YouTube, but I get kind of anxious when it comes to protesting because there are so many times when protesting has gone like, wrong, like, so wrong so fast. So, I really don't. I try not to, but if it's something really big, like abortion rights that may affect like my future, then I may look at it and say something about it on YouTube.

Based on her pre-interview data, Roxanne actually posts on more social media platforms than Jaye. However, when discussing social media as a means to address sociopolitical issues, Roxanne appeared to distance herself from her social media platforms. This reluctance and anxiety about engaging in such outward protest might have been warranted for Roxanne as she had witnessed negative experiences related to protests. Like many of us, Roxanne watched the violent storming of the Capitol in 2021 and her only other reference for protesting was the protests that she learned about in schools. In an era of book banning and restrictions around teaching content related to race and the history of America, this limited view of protesting may

only worsen for generations of students to come. When an opportunity to protest an issue that aligned with topics of importance to her, Roxanne witnessed some of the protest participants using the demonstration as an excuse to skip class.

I haven't been in one, but there was one in my middle school...it was student-started and student-held and students were participating in it. And it was also about abortion rights.

But unfortunately, the boys that came to it...basically they were skipping class to do that instead of actually going to class. They didn't really care about it, though.

Although the protest was in response to an important matter and created by her peers, the actions of a few, faux participants seemed to diminish the intentions and impact of the protest which appeared to leave a negative connotation of protesting with Roxanne.

### ***Risks of Protesting for Adolescent Black Girls***

Prior to participating in the program, participants engaged in various levels of sociopolitical dialogue, at times in-person while others were solely online. With in-person protests, there were risks involved included being associated with an activity that was not taken seriously by all of its participants and being categorized as using the protest as opportunity for selfish motives. Additionally, there were potentially more harsh consequences such as being expelled or not being able to participate in graduation activities. Through their discussion of their participation in protests, the girls highlighted some of the ways in which they used their social media platforms including gaining insight on different perspectives regarding the sociopolitical issues they were interested in. For participants who were slightly hesitant to speak about such issues on their platforms, this hesitation may potentially reveal the need for a broader understanding of how one can voice their opinions in the sociopolitical dialogue as the

terminology of “protest” may carry a negative connotation masking the acts of voicing one’s opinions that youth do partake in.

### **Sociopolitical Participation on Social Media Within the Digital Literacy Collaborative**

Participants’ experience in the program also revealed their transition to viewing social media as a medium to engage in various forms of sociopolitical dialogue. Throughout the program, the girls viewed both digital and non-digital content created by Black women and girls related to various sociopolitical issues. As part the program, the participants were asked to create content on social media platforms. Through viewing their content creating throughout the program, it appears that the girls were using the creating portion of our sessions to try out potential ways in which they could create digital content to serve their sociopolitical needs.

During session #1, we created our preamble which was modeled after the preambles created by Black literacy societies (McHenry, 1996; Muhammad, 2012). In this preamble, which was read by participants each session, they boldly asserted their aims during their time in the program which served as a reminder as we began each session. The following prompts were used to support the girls in creating the community’s preamble.

Prompts:

- What are some ways you use your digital platforms?
- What do you aim to do within this space?
- What motivated you to participate in this space?
- What do you aim to do with the tools you have create within this space within the larger world?

Based on their responses to the above-mentioned prompts, the following preamble was created.

We, sister creatives, gather together to learn from others, join in community to inspire one another and our larger world, and create tools to enhance our digital creativity and ourselves. Through our posts, we hope to diminish the ignorance of others who wrongly judge us based on our race, gender, age, aesthetic, sexuality, and #BlackGirlMagic. We aim to create platforms for people with similar interests, to encourage others to pursue their creative dreams, and uplift the Black girls around the world.

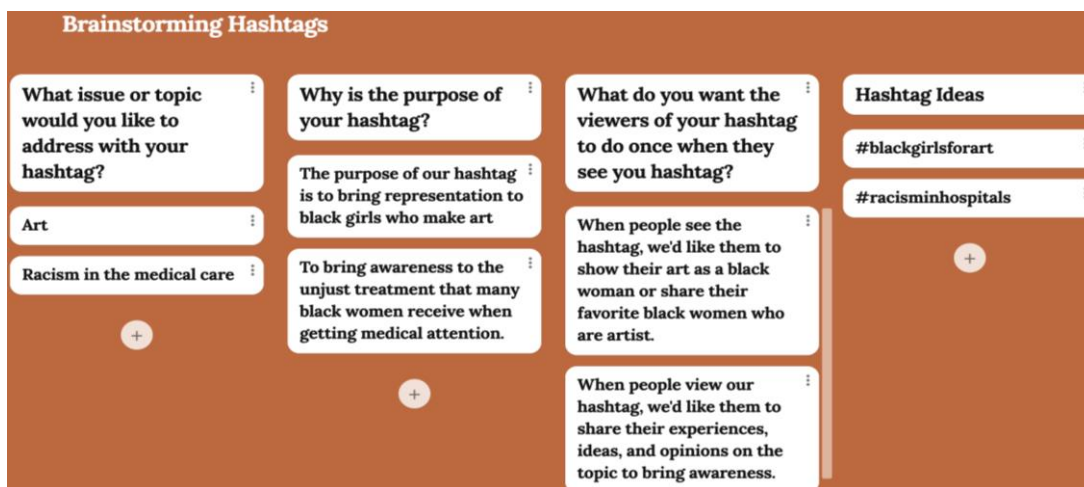
Here in the preamble, the participants asserted that through their posts created on digital platforms, they hoped to reduce the stereotypes associated with their multiple identities as young, Black girls. They also aimed to use their social media platforms as a communal space for others who shared their interests, a source of encouragement to pursue one's dreams, and a place where Black girlhood of all forms was celebrated. Based on these purposeful expectations, it should come as no surprise that for their first assignment when asked to think of a hashtag and its purpose, the girls created the following hashtags, #BlackGirlsForArt and #RacismInHospitals.

***Positioning Black Women and Girls at the Center, #BlackGirlsForArt and #RacismInHospitals***

Within this digital literacy collaborative, consisting of #BlackGirlMagic of all forms, the girls were able to unapologetically center the experience of Black women and girls through their content which resulted in their creation of the #BlackGirlForArt and #RacismInHospitals hashtags. Prompted to create a hashtag related to any purpose of their choosing, these adolescent Black girls chose to create content where Black women and girls were at the forefront in both the naming of their hashtags and its purpose (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Padlet Used by Participants to Create Their Hashtags During Session #1*



In addition to creating the hashtag, the girls were asked to develop a post using one of their hashtags during session #3. Figure 5 and Figure 6 are the Instagram posts created by Roxanne and Jaye individually. Each post contained multiple pieces of artwork by a Black women artist they individually decided to locate and highlight. Their posts also included individual example of the girls using the hashtag “in action” or how the hashtag would be used by others who hoped to highlight or locate #BlackGirlsForArt.



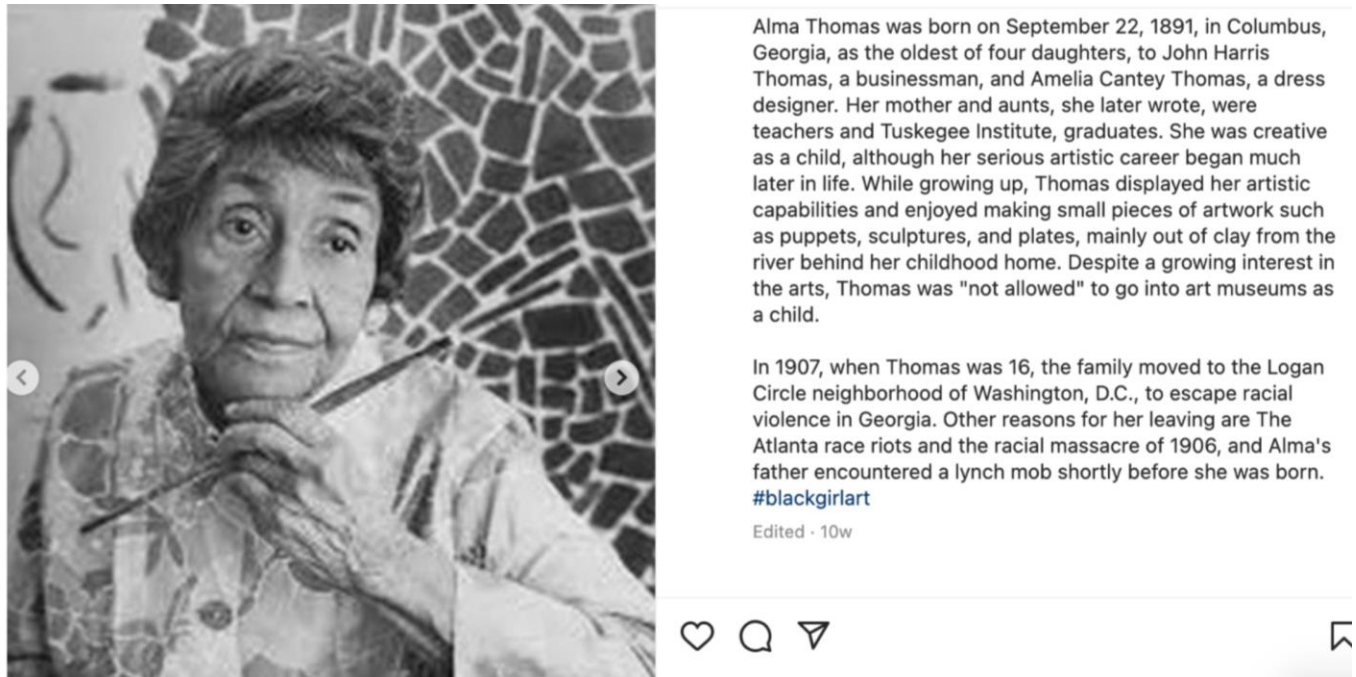
Figure 5

Jaye's Instagram Post for the #BlackGirlsForArt Hashtag



Figure 6

Roxanne's Instagram Post for the #BlackGirlsForArt Hashtag



As displayed in the posts above, despite not being prompted to create a hashtag related to a sociopolitical issue and potentially motivated by their preamble, the participants created a hashtag aligned with their shared interests while addressing an important issue impacting Black women and girls. During the same creating session, the participants created a second hashtag focused specifically on the medical neglect of Black women.

**Jaye:** And the second one, maybe we should do like an issue this time so we can have like one issue and one topic.

**Roxanne:** Oh, I feel like a problem that's been happening a lot more recently is Black women and pregnancies. In the hospitals when they've been giving birth, they've been denied treatment and some of them have been passing away because the doctor...\*crosstalk

**Jaye:** Like medical negligence?

**Roxanne:** Yeah.

**Jaye:** Okay. Okay. Okay, the issue can be racism and the medical field?

**Jaye:** Okay. What's the purpose of the hashtag? To address the issue of...\*crosstalk

**Roxanne:** To bring awareness to it and try to stop it, maybe?

**Jaye:** Okay. To bring awareness to the unjust treatment that Black...that many Black women receive when getting medical attention.

In this example above, Roxanne took the lead on deciding what issue they wanted to create a hashtag for. They decided to focus on the mistreatment of Black women by the medical field especially related to Black women birthing. The resulting hashtag of #RacismInHospitals aimed to bring awareness to this issue and encourage those who have experienced such #RacismInHospitals to share these stories with others. By amplifying these stories of

#RacismInHospital, the participants hoped to end such mistreatment of Black women by those in the medical field.

When asked why these two issues were of importance to them, Jaye stated the following in her post-program interview that ...

Yeah. I think the hospital thing is something really important. I don't see a lot of people talking about it. So, when it is talked about, I think it needs to be very straightforward....

So, I think that was actually one of my favorite sessions that we did. Just because that's something that I'm kind of really passionate about. The healthcare system is already not that great. And it's even worse for minorities.

Jaye mentioned that the medical mistreatment of Black women needed to be addressed directly. Calling this mistreatment for what it is #RACISMinhospitals. Through their hashtag they called this issue into question and could increase the awareness of racism being one of the driving forces influencing the mistreatment Black women receive by some in the medical field.

### **Sociopolitical Participation on Social Media at the End of the Digital Literacy**

#### **Collaborative**

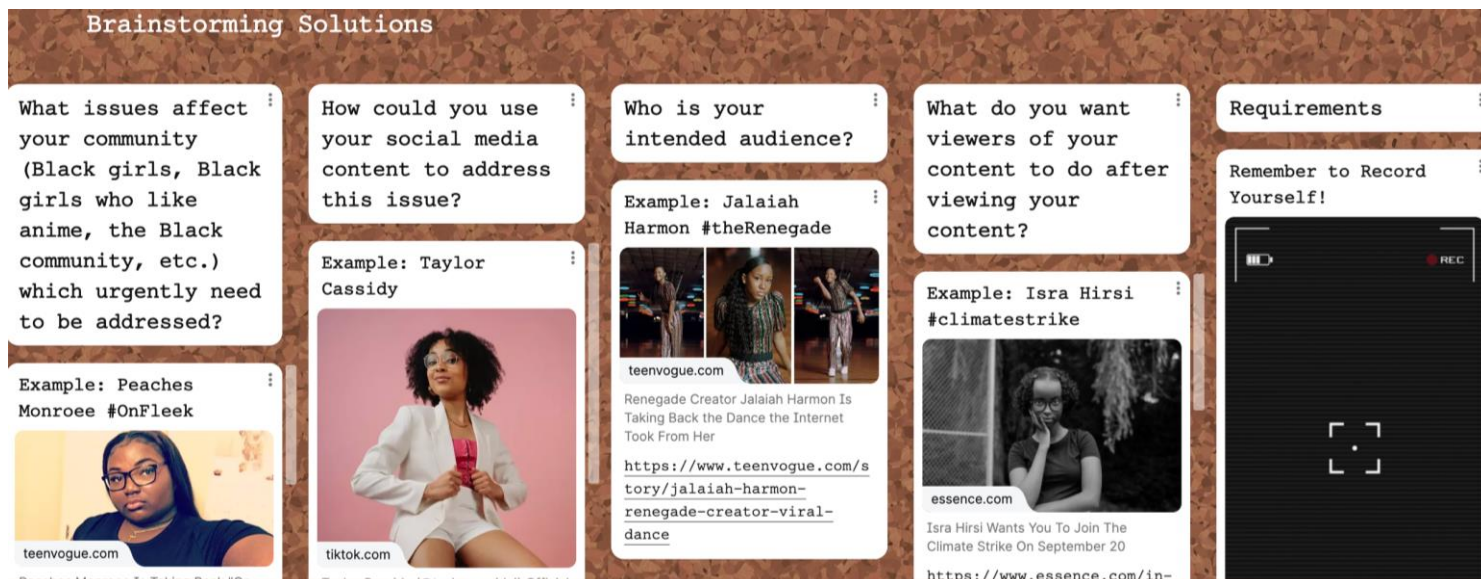
By the end of the program, when the girls were explicitly asked to create posts related to issues impacting their community which urgently needed to be addressed, the girls readily identified issues of importance to them including Black girls unapologetically expressing their interests, representation in TV and media, and the impact of social media on the Black community. Considering Jaye's previous use of social media for sociopolitical engagement, I was interested in seeing how or if Jaye's approach to engaging in the sociopolitical dialogue via social media shifted throughout her time in the program. However, as mentioned previously, Jaye unfortunately was not able to complete the final project due to an unforeseeable

circumstance. However, she discussed the intentions of her final project in her post-program interview which I highlight below. Both Roxanne's and Jaye's final projects illustrate that these adolescent Black girls fully embraced engaging in sociopolitical participation through their social media posts created within this digital literacy collaborative.

***Roxanne's Final Project.*** Initially anxious about using her digital platform for sociopolitical purposes, Roxanne decided to create a video on YouTube, a platform where she was primarily a content creator, to address an issue of great importance to her. This issue was aiding Black girls in expressing their interests. To help the girls think about what issue(s) they hoped to address in their final project and how they aimed to use social media to address this issue, I created the following resource on Padlet (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7**

*Brainstorming Padlet for Their Final Projects*



Roxanne used the prompts found on the Padlet to guide her in identifying an issue of importance to her and how she hoped to use YouTube as the platform of her choice to achieve the goals (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

*Document Created by Roxanne on Our Shared Google Drive*

**What issues affect your community (Black girls, Black girls who like anime, the Black community, etc.) which urgently need to be addressed?** Black girls expressing their interests.

**How could you use your social media content to address this issue?** I can use it to bring awareness to the situation.

**Who is your intended audience?** Black girls, and everyone.

**What do you want viewers of your content to do after viewing your content?** I can only raise awareness so much. So, if they see my content, I would like for them to continue helping me raise awareness, that way, more and more people will see it!

**What social media platform are you using?** I will be using YouTube and I will be making a video giving information.

*Black Girls Unapologetically Expressing Their Interests.* Roxanne’s interests in supporting Black girls in expressing their interests aligned with some of the motivating factors she identified during our creation of the preamble. During session #1 when developing our preamble, Roxanne mentioned she wanted to use her platform to inspire those with creative interests to boldly pursue those dreams. She shared that she created her YouTube channel with hopes that “maybe that would encourage someone else to start a YouTube channel...which they’ve been dreaming of but didn’t have the courage to do”. Roxanne’s example resulted in us adding the line, “We aim to create platforms for people with similar interests, to encourage others to pursue their creative dreams, and uplift the Black girls around the world” to our

preamble. Roxanne's constant referral to aiding Black girls specifically in finding their passions and interests reveal her strong desire to address this issue especially through social media.

When asked about the inspiration behind her final project, Roxanne shared that she saw the need for a space where Black girls could have all of their interest valued especially within the realm of social media, "I don't really see many Black girls expressing their interest in art... I do see a little bit of Black girls expressing that they're interested in like sneakers, or dresses, or clothes...but not as much as I probably should be seeing." Roxanne shared that curating this space was especially important considering previous invalidations of her interests.

I like anime, and a couple of my friends were like, oh Roxanne, you like anime. That's kind of weird. Anime is weird. Anime is for little kids. It's actually not most of the times, there's usually a lot of cursing and lot of reasons why little kids should not watch it. But if I liked cartoons, then that's something I like, but I like anime. So, I kind of get told what I like if that makes sense. Like I like anime. But people are like, no, you just watch cartoons. There's a very big difference."

In response to her own experience being told what she should or could find interest in, Roxanne explicitly mentioned in her content that this issue is important because "If we don't [encourage Black girls to express their interests], then Black girls around the world will not aspire to do things that they would like to do; only things society tells them to do."

Roxanne's shift to seeing her social media content as a space to address urgent needs within her community was a result of her experience in the program. Viewing content by other Black women and girls inspired and helped her to see the possibilities of her creative endeavors, "It inspired me. It gave me more ideas that I can create. Like it expanded my horizons." Prior to her participating in the program, Roxanne created content on her YouTube and even artwork that

was more abstract, “I usually make things that are like that are not very related to like any race or like, gender, they're just very abstract.” However, within this digital literacy collaborative where she was encouraged to create content outside of her norm, she was inspired and considered creating more educational videos in the future.

As a creator on YouTube, it was her platform of choice to address this sociopolitical issue because of her comfortability creating on this platform. She also saw it as the ideal space to bring awareness to this issue because of the breath of content on YouTube, “it’s such a huge app, there’s like a little bit of everything on there” and she also enjoyed the platform because of the ways in which it “getting people to look at things is a lot better than what I’ve seen on Instagram and TikTok.”

### ***Jaye’s Final Project***

Although she previously posted content related to sociopolitical issues on Instagram, Jaye was inspired by “the different kinds of creation that people were doing” in the content we viewed by the highlighted creatives. When asked about the issues she hoped to address through her content, Jaye was still deciding between two potential topics, (1) the importance of Black representation in media and book for young children, and (2) the effects of social media on the Black community. Choosing between these topics was difficult because “there’s a lot of issues” alluding to multiple social ills that we witnessed in 2022 alone. However, Jaye desired to make a final decision based on which one meant the most to her. When asked about the inspiration behind selecting these issues, Jaye stated that her inspiration was her childhood. She asked herself, “what could have made me love myself as a Black girl more?”. Thus, resulting in her first sociopolitical dialogue of interest.

*Conversations with my Younger Self.* When asked about her first topic, Jaye stated that representation of Black people in the media and books is important because ...

Every kid should be represented because when you're a kid, your self-identity isn't really there. So, you're getting a lot of your inspiration from outside factors. Or if you're not seeing people that look like you, you're not hearing people that look like you, you're not getting representation.

Jaye recognized the importance of children growing up seeing themselves positively represented in the content they view. She went on to say that when this is not the case for children specifically Black children, they are likely to develop a negative self-identity which can be damaging both in the short and long term. Jaye stated that this negative self-identity can be "a little confusing and cause a lot of self-harm". Thus, she desired to create a YouTube video where she could discuss her thoughts on this issue and provide examples to bring awareness of this issue to her viewers.

*Cyclical Traumatization of the Black Community on Social Media.* The second issue Jaye was interested in discussing for her final project was social media's effect on the Black community. She stated that our experience in the world as Black people is different from other communities and this different world perspective also exists for the Black community within social media. When prompted to discuss this topic more, Jaye stated, "I feel like even on social media, Black people still kind of have their own community, you know like Black Twitter". Potentially referring to our conversation during session # 2 about Black Twitter's calling for the acknowledgment of the contributions of Black creatives to society including one of our highlighted creatives, Jalaiah Harmon. This different experience according to Jaye also unfortunately has a negative side as, "A lot of people go around and post videos of these police



brutalities, and police killings and just a lot of violence in the community”. Here she stated her sociopolitical issue of the recirculation of videos detailing the police brutality faced by the Black community. Although people often post these videos with well intentions of “spreading awareness”, Jaye recognized the trauma involved for Black people. “But you’re also traumatizing thousands of Black people because they’re seeing themselves get killed every day”. Here she acknowledged that well-intentions are not enough because there is really trauma involved in seeing people like you killed again and again while scrolling your social media feed. Jaye saw the negative effects not only on others but felt them personally,

...it has definitely had an effect on me. I remember during quarantine when everything was just crazy. I completely got off social media because of all the riots and everything that was happening was just really, really hard to watch. And it was no way I could escape it.

Despite the benefits of increased awareness of these police brutalities, viewing these murders on loop forced Jaye to remove herself from the social media realm in order to protect her sanity. Jaye had not had the chance to flesh out the details of how she would create this content, but she desired to create a video on YouTube where she could talk about these issues and use examples to engage her viewers in dialogue. Her decision to posts the content on YouTube was after considering the various affordances and drawbacks of other social media platforms.

Yeah, I didn’t want to use TikTok because I felt like TikTok videos are...I only have like, what, what is it? 60 seconds or a minute. And I wanted to at least have five [minutes] so I was like, TikTok, that’s a no. Instagram, it would have been just a very long caption with a picture, and I didn’t really want to do that.

Additionally creating a video on YouTube, one of the platforms demonstrated by Roxanne during session # 6, was also an opportunity for Jaye to create on a new platform that she had never created on before.

Through her participation in the program, Jaye was inspired not only to use her social media for sociopolitical purposes, but through her experience she was motivated to continue her poetry writing as she "...realized that words are powerful. And imagery and video are powerful, too. But words can say a lot."

### **Why Social Media?**

The participants viewed social media as an opportune sight for sociopolitical engagement because of its vastness. Jaye believed that social media was a "really good way to get what you want to say across". She recognized that getting your opinions out to masses is easier on social media because "social media is huge, and everybody is using it". Additionally, Roxanne saw social media as a space to share your opinions to persons of various ages, all one needs is cell phone. She also saw it as a way to "bring things to a lot more people's attention" versus that of traditional forms of sharing news and ideas through printed texts.

As a creator, Roxanne found it vital to consider which platform to posts on depending upon the topic. She understood each platform was used by viewers for different purposes. Thus, posting content on the "wrong" platform might influence how one's content is received. As an example, she mentioned that TikTok wasn't an app that was meant for videos with educational purposes, TikTok "is [not] really an app to be taken seriously...if you want to put something serious on there...it would be appropriate to put it on Instagram."

Jaye additionally found it important to view social media as an additional resource that could be leveraged to make impactful change in the world because "social media is definitely a

resource. If you have millions of followers, that's even more of an advantage because people, more people will see. More people will listen." She particularly believed that persons with high social statuses and impact, should use their social media as a resource to make a positive impact on the world because, "...as much as it sucks, the higher you are in this world, the more you get listened to. So, building that, that brand for yourself, I think is a resource that can be utilized."

It's worth noting that the participants revealed that popularity was not a requirement to use social media to make impactful changes on the world. All of our posts were created on private pages only visible to our community. However, the impact of their posts extended beyond our small group as creating these posts on issues they were passionate about also inspired the girls to discuss what they learned in our sessions with their community. Jaye mentioned that ...

Since I was learning so much throughout all these sessions, I was definitely going to like my friends and other people and talking about it. So it, it definitely it got to the outside factors and outside people. They heard about it. I talked about it.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Black Girls' New Possibilities for Digital Content Creating**

By looking at the participants' content created throughout the program, discussions from sessions, and post-program interview data, I found that the girls publicly engaged in the sociopolitical conversations in diverse ways and across various sociopolitical issues including the Black Lives Matter movement, abortion rights, transgender persons rights, and human rights prior the program. However, within this digital literacy collaborative centered on Black women and girls using their content to insert their voices into the public dialogue, the girls gradually began to see social media as an additional space to serve their sociopolitical needs. For some, that included growing confidence to assert their voice in sociopolitical conversation while others found a space of validity of their existing work and an opportunity to explore additional means to

engage in these conversations on social media. The adolescent Black girls in this study revealed their flexibility in using various digital platforms to address sociopolitical issues of importance to them. Although, she primarily created on Instagram, Jaye was willing to try creating the content for her final project on YouTube because it offered her advantages such as longer lengths of video which she felt was necessary given the importance of her topics. Although Roxanne, created her final project on YouTube, a platform she frequently created on, throughout the program she became familiar with other social media platforms and the affordances they offered which could be beneficial as she continues to create content in her future.

### **#HowWeDoIt**

The participants in this study revealed the nuanced ways adolescent Black girls publicly in participate in sociopolitical conversations. One of the primary ways the girls addressed issues of importance to them was through bring awareness to their issue. Additionally, participants often sought to encourage continued conversations around their issues through their content. These approaches to content creating often mirrored the ways in which the highlighted Black women and girl creatives addressed sociopolitical issues through their content.

### **Bringing Awareness Through Content**

As the girls created content throughout the program, they were intentional about enlightening their potential viewers about the issues of importance to them. Jaye shared that Session #1 was one of her favorite sessions because “that’s something [the mistreatment of Black women by those in healthcare] that I’m really passionate about.” While creating their hashtags during Session #1, the participants were tasked with identifying the purpose of their hashtag. When creating these hashtags, the participants desired their hashtag to serve as a means to bring awareness to the issue. For the second hashtag created during session #1, #RacismInMedicine,

Jaye stated that the hashtag would serve to bring “the unjust treatment many Black women receive when getting medical attention” to the forefront. The inspiration behind Roxanne offering this topic as a potential hashtag was after viewing posts on YouTube about this issue and watching a television broadcast with her mom which brought the importance of this problem to her attention, “I was watching a show with my mom and I saw that [increased maternal mortality rate of Black women], and thought well that something that I didn’t know about it before the TV show that I was watching brought that up.” With this new insight, Roxanne aimed to pass on this knowledge to others who might be also uninformed like her about this issue impacting Black women through their hashtag. By creating and sharing this hashtag, Roxanne stated that their goal was twofold, to “bringing awareness to it and trying and stop the issue”.

When discussing the #BlackGirlsForArt hashtag and the accommodating posts she created for the hashtag, Jaye mentioned that highlighting less known Black women artists was one of her goals. She stated that “there are many Black artists out there but there are even more that aren’t spoken of”. When discussing her specific Black girl artists of interests, she chose Elizabeth Columbia because “I don’t really see Black women painted in the Renaissance era.” Through her posts she not only highlighted a lesser known #BlackGirlForArt but she also highlighted a less represented art form.

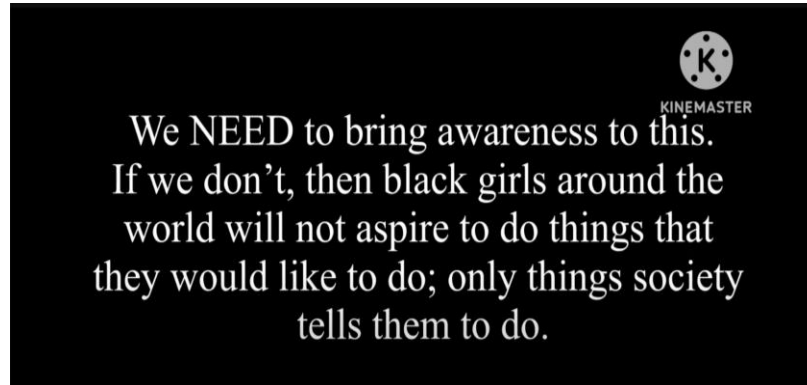
Similarly, when creating her final project which aimed to aid Black girls in expressing their interests, Roxanne mentioned in her brainstorming document that the purpose of her content was “bringing awareness to the situation...and help them [Black girls] express what they’re interest in.” When looking at a screen captures of her content, the first clip in Roxanne’s content, we are able to see how Roxanne fulfilled these purposes.

**Figure 9**

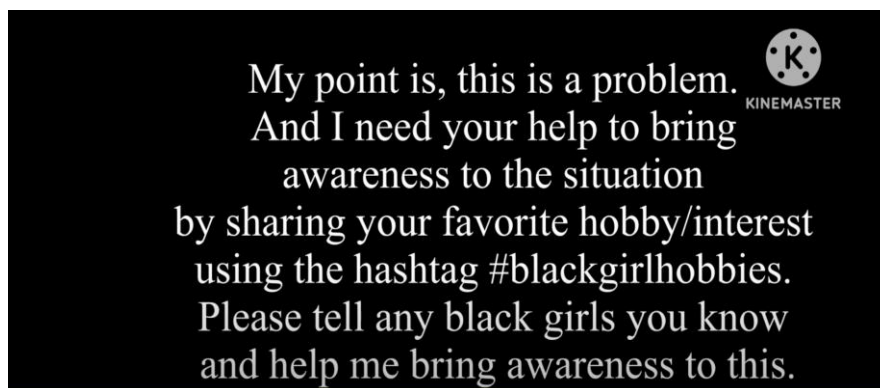
*Clip # 1 from Roxanne's Final Project*



In this first clip, we learn why this issue is of importance to Roxanne as she mentioned that Black girls expressing interests is not commonly talked about (See Figure 9). Through her YouTube video, she hoped to make this issue the epicenter of the public dialogue as social media provides a unique space to get issues of importance on people's radars. Through bring awareness to issues via social media, she could help ensure the issue "gets enough recognition". In the next clip, the second clip of the video, Roxanne explicitly states that not only would she bring attention to this issue but that a collective we "NEED" to bring awareness around this issue. Here she included her viewers in this call to action specially stating that if we fail to address this issue, Black girls will be relegated to doing "only things society tells them to do" potentially alluding to her experience with others telling her what her interests are and not trusting her ability to define her interests for herself.

**Figure 10***Clip # 6 from R's Final Project*

In this final image, the second to last clip in her project, Roxanne issues one final plea for her viewers to help “bring awareness to this issue” by participating with her hashtag, #BlackGirlHobbies (see Figure 10). By using the hashtag, viewers could help her further spread the reach of her message and hopefully broaden their knowledge and their community’s knowledge about the issue at hand.

**Figure 11***Clip # 7 from R's Final Project*

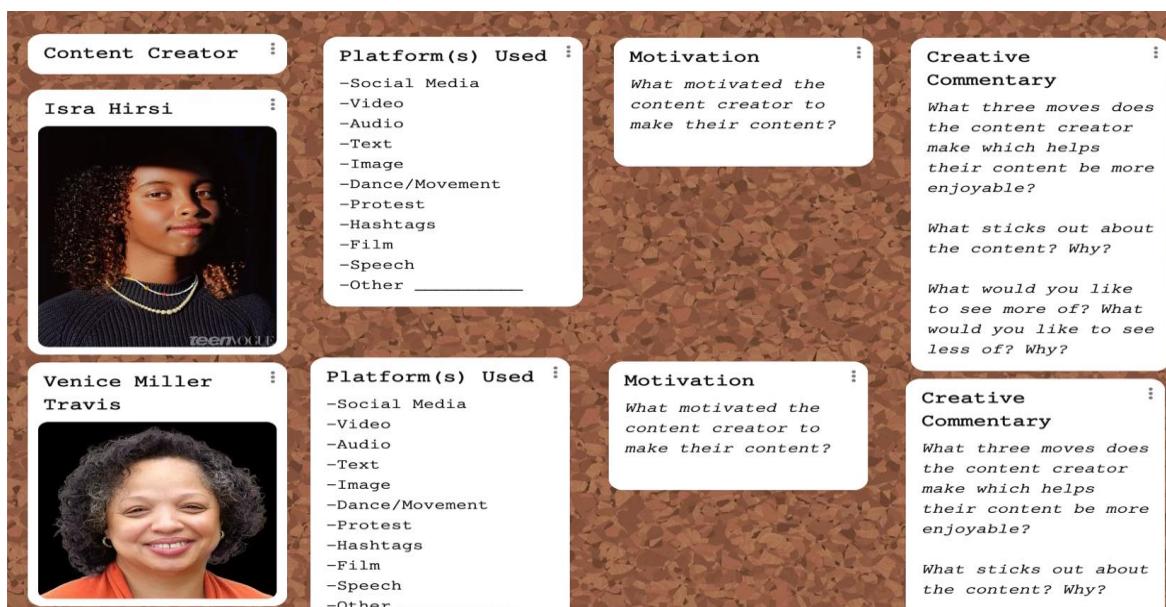
The clips above highlight the importance of awareness as a potential key element of engaging in public dialogue via social media for Black girls and a central way that the adolescent Black girls in this study used their socio-politically-inspired, digital content (See Figure 11).

### Bringing Awareness in the Highlighted Creatives' Content

It is worth noting that when viewing the content of our highlighted creatives, outlined in chapter three, that one of the most mentioned aspects that stood out to participants when viewing the creatives' content was their motivation to enlighten their viewer about their sociopolitical issue. In Sessions #3 and #4, the girls were asked to research our two highlighted creatives, Isra Hirsi and Vernice Miller Travis using resources that I pulled together and listed on a Padlet (see Figure 12). Using the knowledge, they gained from learning more about the creative, I encouraged the girls to develop a social media post to inform others about what they learned about the highlighted creatives.

### Figure 12

*Padlet for Researching Isra Hirsi and Vernice Miller Travis*

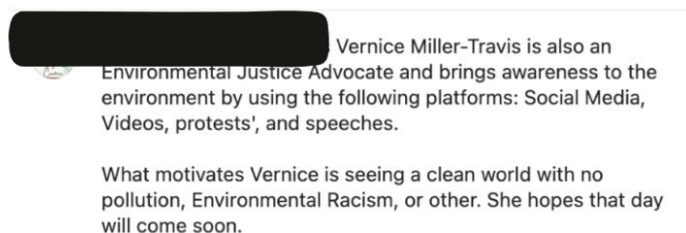




When asked to present her Instagram post to share what she learned about Vernice, Roxanne's described Vernice as "an environmental justice advocate" and "she brings awareness to the environmental issues by using social media videos, protests, speeches" (see Figure 13).

**Figure 13**

*Roxanne's Instagram Caption for Her Posts on Vernice Miller-Travis*



Roxanne also created a post about Vernice and used it as an opportunity share more about Vernice's activist work to a younger audience who might not have learned about her otherwise. Roxanne mentioned that her peers were familiar with "Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth" as those are Black women are often celebrated for their contributions within schools and society. However, she recognized Vernice as equally important to get to know because Black women such Vernice are the "foundation for us younger Black women". Apart of her making meaning of Vernice's activism included Roxanne conducting additional internet searches to locate the social media platforms used by Vernice and examine how she utilized these platforms.

I looked online, and she uses Twitter. I went to her Twitter, and she reposts a lot of things that need to be brought to attention. One of the reposts, retweets I guess you'd call it, she reposted a meeting but there were no colored women... She brings awareness to things like that. She brings awareness to environmental justice. But environmental racism also.

What Roxanne found was how Vernice brought awareness to sociopolitical issues through her posts on social media.

Similarly, when we learned about our highlighted creatives, Anna Julia Cooper, and Marley Dias during session #1, both Jaye and Roxanne mentioned how Marley's content helped to bring to light that there needed to be intentional inclusion of books with Black people as the main characters in schools and beyond. When asked about Marley Dias' hashtag, Roxanne believed that Marley's hashtag was intriguing because "... I think most people don't really think about oh, books don't really have mainly Black people as main characters. So, they're like, 'Oh, there's a book with a Black girl main character!'". Through viewing content found when searching the #1000BlackGirlBook hashtag, Roxanne believed that the hashtags and subsequently posts of Black women and girls with their Black girl books would show to those uninformed about Black girl books that these books do in fact exist. Jaye shared that viewing the #1000BlackGirlBooks posts could subsequently encourage viewers to purchase Black girl books themselves and post their photo with their Black Girl Book using the hashtag which would continue the social media-mediated conversation, "or they might see that book and be like, oh, my kid might be interested in that and then they buy that book and post it and it goes on and on."

These conversations with participants revealed that when creating content, the girls desired for their viewer to be equipped with new knowledge after viewing their content. This included using their content as a learning medium to aid their viewers in becoming more informed about the sociopolitical issue of importance to them and spreading this awareness to others in their community. Although it was not my intention when creating these lessons to encourage participants to leverage their social media posts in similar ways as the highlighted

creatives, it is intriguing to see the participants use their digital content in comparable ways to that of the highlighted Black women and girls included in this study.

### **Fostering Conversations**

The participants in this study also aimed to address sociopolitical issues through their posts by fostering conversation with and amongst their viewers. As they were creating posts for social media, the girls used the social aspect of social media platforms to encourage their viewers to engage in conversations in response to their posts and used their posts as a way to speak with their anticipated viewers. Particularly, the girls used creative elements such as hashtags, tagging, and explicitly asking their viewers to engage in such conversations beyond their posts. As previously discussed, during session #3, Jaye stated that she used her social media to gain rich insight on the various social ills which plague society. Through these conversations she created a space for vital dialogue with her viewers which appear to be another important aspect of publicly dialoguing about sociopolitical issues.

#### ***Fostering Conversation with Intended Audience Through Posts***

Fostering conversations proved important as the girls created throughout the program as well. For her final project, Roxanne created a hashtag, #BlackGirlHobbies. In her YouTube video, she encouraged her viewers to use this hashtag to share their hobbies or interests (See Figure 11). By creating this hashtag, she encouraged her viewers to engage in a sort of back-and-forth conversation mediated through social media around their hobbies and interests as Black girls and women. These additional posts might be mentioned by another viewer encouraging conversations about the viewers' commonalities of interests. Additionally, if a viewer were to post a hobby or interest not common amongst the viewers, their use of the hashtag might inspire additional discussions about these unique interests amongst her audience. She also saw the

#BlackGirlHobbies hashtag as a way to encourage viewers to share the hashtag with their online communities and thus continuing this conversation amongst various viewer communities.

I would have hoped for them to be like, 'Oh, wow, that's really interesting'. And maybe make like a post about it. Like, 'Hey, guys, I just watched this video on Black girls and their interest. You guys should go check it out and help me bring awareness to this topic'.

### *Conversing Through the Creative Elements*

Fostering conversations also included using the creative features of social media platforms. During session # 6, I encouraged the girls to teach the group how to create using a social media platform of their choosing. As an Instagram user, Jaye showed us how to create an Instagram post. When describing how to create a post, Jaye mentioned the necessary step of tagging other people in the post or tagging your location. When asked why we should do this as we created, Jaye stated that tagging is a way “to give them credit” responding to the rhetorical questions potential viewers may have of “Who took this picture?” or “Who are these people in the photo?”. Additionally, when asked about tagging your location, Jaye stated that this is a means to “... show other people where they could go or to show where you were, or to even give credit to that place. Because the more you use their location, the more followers, and viewers they get.” Thus, responding to the question “Where were/are you?” and for locations tagged, these tags could serve as a way to say, “I was there, too!” or “You should visit here!”.

These more subtitle conversations might seem unimportant but are extremely necessary especially considered the Black creators are far too often not credited for the content they create (Ile, 2022). When discussing Jalaiah Harmon’s content, the creator of the viral dance #TheRenegade, Jaye mentioned...

I just remember when it was happening. And I remember like when the dance first came out, and I didn't know that it was hers, either. I thought that was something that Charlie [D'Amelio] had made up, but I saw a video about how nobody was actually tagging her... I feel like they hopped on to that really quickly. And like, made sure she got her credit. So that was nice to see.

Having experienced seeing a Black girl of her same age robbed of her intellectual property in real time, giving credit to other creators was a way for Jaye to ensure she fostered an expectation of respect and adoration for creatives through her posts and she encouraged others to do the same.

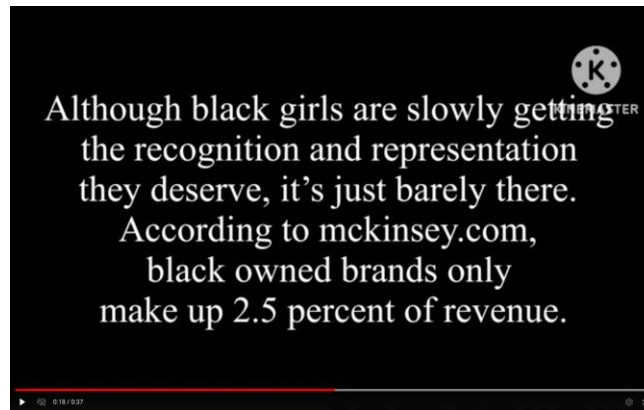
### ***Conversing with Black Women and Girls, Past and Present***

By engaging in the sociopolitical dialogue, these adolescent girls were putting themselves in conversation with Black women and girls who have used their content in similar ways historically and contemporarily. In Roxanne's final post, she created a clip sharing that "Black girls are slowing getting the recognition and representation they deserve, it's just barely there" (see Figure 14). When asked to elaborate on the meaning behind her assertion, she stated that the inspiration behind this statement was learning more about Peaches Monroe (#OnFleek) and Jalaiah Harmon (#TheRenegade), two of the creatives offered as example in the Brainstorming Padlet (Figure 7) whose creative contributions were appropriated and profited by companies and persons who failed to acknowledge these Black creatives' intellectual property. As she stated, "the girl who made #TheRenegade, she didn't really get the recognition she deserved. Everyone just assumed the white girl made the dance and not the Black girl." This clip appeared to be a way for Roxanne to acknowledge these Black girls' interests in choreography and aesthetics. It

also served as a means to say, “I see you, sis!” and the immense contributions you made to the culture.

### Figure 14

Clip # 5 from Roxanne’s Final Project



Even when looking at Jaye’s final project ideas, her interests in discussing the importance of representation in books and media seem to be in conversation with Marley Dias, another one of our highlighted creatives who also discussed the need for Black girl books through her #1000BlackGirlBooks social media campaign. Although we were not able to directly speak with the highlighted creatives, through viewing their content and the posts the girls created, the participants were able to converse with Black women and girl across space and time which mirrors Bakhtin’s heteroglossia (Bahktin, 1981). The conversations within this collective and fostered as a result of it reflect the continuation of Black women and girls’ sociopolitical dialogue. As Gordon (2018) states “the present conditions, but also the past conditions of voices throughout history come to bear during dialogic engagement” (p. 33). Within the girls’ sociopolitical dialogue mediated through social media and the dialogue we witnessed through viewing the content of the highlighted Black women and girl creatives, the girls’ conversations surpassed the confines of our collective and entered into the broader conversations put forth by

Black women writers, thinkers, and speakers before them and the conversations of Black women and girls yet to occur. Jaye stated it perfectly in her post-program interview when asked if participating in the program helped to draw her closer to her goal of showing up for Black girls in the community...

It {the digital literacy collaborative} definitely helped me come closer, just because I was able to do it with you guys. This isn't something that people get to do like all the time. So even though it's just the three of us, I still feel like I was able to connect with other Black girls.

### **Concluding Thoughts on #HowWeDoIt**

Viewing the content created by participants, discussions during our sessions, and post-program interviews revealed that participants in this study primarily engaged in sociopolitical dialogue in two ways: bringing awareness to the issue(s) they aimed to address and fostering conversations with and amongst their viewers. By voicing their perspectives to the world through their social media posts, the participants placed themselves in conversations with Black women and girls past and present who have used their voices in similar ways, expanding the possibilities of sociopolitical dialogue beyond the present but also to the past and future.

### **Black Girls' Intentionality as Content Creators**

As they created content within the digital literacy collaborative, the girls were making strategic decisions throughout their creating process which served as building blocks for the final posts they created on our social media platforms. The composing processes of participants consisted of three primary elements: pondering potential ideas, selecting best fit options based on the goal(s) of the post, and connecting their content to self. These steps were not conducted linearly but instead recursively throughout their composing processes.

### **Pondering Potential Ideas**

One of the first moves made by participants when tasked with creating content both collaboratively and individually was thinking deeply about the topic they aimed to address with their content and how they wished to address it. During this phase of the composing process which I termed, “pondering potential ideas”, the girls often sought to select a topic for which they could create their content around. For session #1, which was also the first time the girls meet one another, Jaye aimed to identify a topic for their hashtag by asking Roxanne “Is there a specific topic or issue that you're really passionate about?” When Roxanne replied, “Not really.”, Jaye proceeded to ask a follow up question of “...Do you have like a favorite hobby or something?” Roxanne replied “Drawing.” which led them to creating the hashtag, #BlackGirlsForArt. During session #2, when the girls were asked to create a post using this hashtag. The pondering process included decided on how they aimed to show #BlackGirlsForArt.

**Roxanne:** Are we just doing artists like drawing artists or are we doing like fashion because I have a couple of African American creators that I follow that do not just draw art?

**Jaye:** I guess it can be anything. I mean art is a pretty broad term so I think that could be anything. Actually, let me... I'm gonna put my artist's name in the chat. And then you guys can look them up. She's a contemporary artist. She's a French painter and she paints Black people in like historic settings like Renaissance and stuff like that.

In the dialogue above, the girls were collaboratively deciding on how they wished to show #BlackGirlsForArt. Roxanne posed a question of if there was a specific aspect of art they wished to highlight or if they were using the term “art” broadly. Jaye stated that they could apply the



term in its broad sense, and she even offered the artist's name who she intended to post as a source of inspiration for Roxanne. The girls ultimately both highlighted visual artists which reveal the pondering process as a potential influence on this decision.

When discussing their final project ideas, Jaye and Roxanne both used questioning as a way to ponder potential ideas. As she sought to locate an issue to address for her final project, Jaye asked herself the rhetorical question of "what could have happened in my childhood, that would have made me love myself as a Black girl, more?" Through thinking about her childhood as a Black girl, she was inspired to create content around representation in media and books. Pondering also helped Roxanne think about new directions for her content even when the questions originated from others. During her post-program interview, I was interested in learning more about if Roxanne had an age restriction in mind when she discussed the need for Black girls to express their interests or if she saw Black girlhood extending beyond one's age. The following conversation ensued...

**LaTasha Mosley:** When you said Black women expressing their interest, was there an age restriction?

**Roxanne:** So, yes. And no, now that you're asking, I'm thinking about the fact that I don't really see many Black older women...older women expressing their interest. I do see more in young Black girls. But I guess, like now that you're bringing it to my attention.

Yes. I guess it could be aimed at older Black women, instead of the entire age range.

My goal when asking this question was not for Roxanne to choose an age group as I wanted to see how she defined Black girlhood. In the process of discussing her initial ideas for her content, she began pondering the potentially need for a broaden understanding of Black girlhood, representing all ages and their need to freely express their interests.

Pondering provided vital again during session #6 after the girls shared how to create a post using the social media platform of their choosing. After learning about how to create a YouTube video and Instagram post, the girls were encouraged to try creating a post using the knowledge gained from the session. During the creating time allotted, Roxanne used the time to carefully think through a video idea she hoped to create in the future.

...I was thinking about doing a video on some of my anime characters that I had made up. And I was thinking about making like a storyline with them. I was trying to figure out what the storyline would be.

Thinking about potential content to create was part of her composing process as a content creator. In her pre-program interview, Roxanne shared that she had other anime storylines waiting to be written, "I actually have a storyline. It's sitting in my notes also just waiting to be finished." Also, during her pre-program interview when discussing the TikTok content she created, Roxanne shared that she "...tried creating my own [Roxanne's own] trends, they didn't really work. I actually have a note in my phone and Notes and it's a bunch of dances and songs, different songs that I may or may not play on TikTok."

Carefully pondering and drafting ideas appear to set the foundation for the content participants created. This was especially important when creating content collaboratively as it helped them develop a clear view on what they aimed to showcase in their content and how they hoped to accomplish this goal. Additionally, pondering potential ideas at times did not always yield a final product immediately but laid the foundation for additional content that could be picked up at a later time.

### Selecting Best Fit Elements

During the composing of their digital content, the girls were also deliberate when selecting which elements were best fit for their posts. This process of selecting the best fit options included choosing between different choices offered by their digital platform. For Session #5, the girls were asked to create a post outside of our sessions which revealed more about themselves. Jaye decided to create a TikTok post where she had the option to either select what was termed “video mode” using pictures or “photo mode” which allowed the posts to scroll through automatically like a slideshow presentation. She decided on the “photo mode” because it permitted her to insert photos into the posts and include texts on those photos. Through her post, Jaye hoped to “talk about things that I like or things that like were important to me that I thought you guys should know.” In her post, she shared some of the things she enjoyed such as doing her makeup, going to raves, and spending times in her city (see Figure 15).

#### Figure 15

*Clip from Jaye’s ‘About Me’ post*



Selecting which texts to include and how to display the text was also part of Jaye’s best fit process as she hoped to create a post that was friendly by using emojis and exclamation points.

When asked about which creative moves stood out when viewing Jaye's content, Roxanne shared the following admiration...

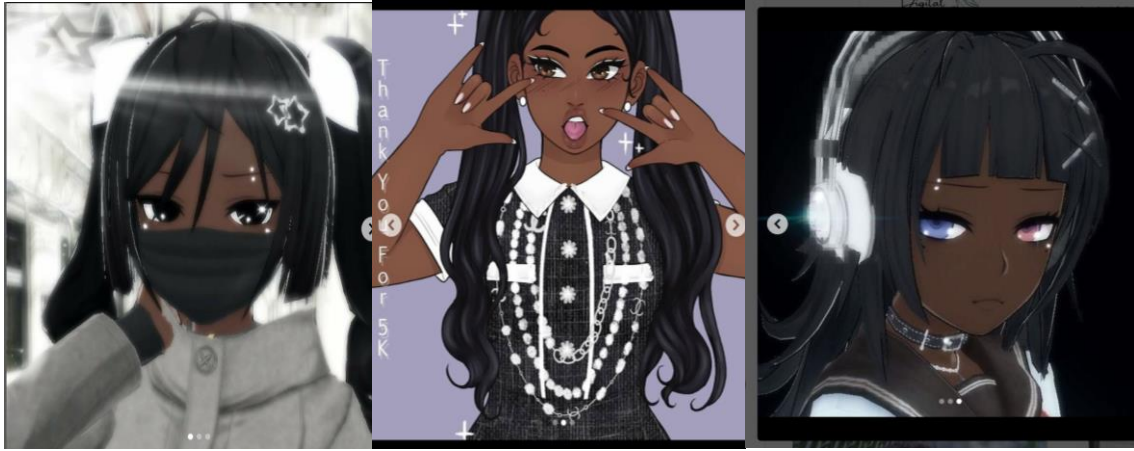
She gave pictures of herself. For example, that she likes doing her makeup, she gave a picture of herself in makeup. She gave like more things about herself like her zodiac sign. She, oh, she gave a video or a song she put a song to the video that also shows her personality, and she also shows her personality through text.

In the quote above, Roxanne listed off some of the things she noticed in Jaye's content which revealed more about Jaye but also provided insight into how carefully selecting certain elements in one's content over others can help one achieve the objective(s) of the posts.

Roxanne similarly engaged in such process of selecting best fit aspects when creating her "About Me" post. As a creator, Roxanne did not use her own images in her content. Therefore, in order to exemplify who she is, Roxanne included three images in her post (see Figure 16). When asked about her selection of these images, she stated that, "those are some of my favorite Black girl drawings. And I don't know, that first one I just kind of I love that first one." When asked about her aims when creating her posts, she further stated that "I wanted my images to reflect my interests and my hobbies". When selecting elements, at times the girls could not always put into words what they were looking for in a specific element. However, when the element that best fits their posts "spoke to them", they listened and allowed their gravitation to these elements to guide them in creating posts with layered creative elements which meet their expectations as they created.

## Figure 16

*Images Selected by Roxanne's "About Me" Post.*



When creating her final project, best fit seemed to be front of mind for Roxanne as she engaged in song selection for her video. Roxanne took approximately three minutes to select a song for her YouTube video. This included looking through different genres of music as offered by the Kinemaster, the platform she used to create her YouTube video, and listening intently to each song option until one stuck. When asked her song selection process, Roxanne shared the importance of selecting the best fit song based on the seriousness of the content. Therefore, including a song in her content was vital because...

...I feel like that would make it a little bit more lighthearted. So that is a comfortable topic to talk about, and you're not uncomfortable watching the video. You're not just sitting there like, 'Okay, why doesn't this video have any sound? That's creepy? That's weird'. And you're focusing more on the fact that the video doesn't have any sound, than what the video was talking about.

Choosing which specific song she selected was also important for Roxanne to consider as she created her post.

Choosing the song is also just as important as... you have to really take the song into consideration. Because if it's a bop, if it's too boppy, then they're [her intended viewers] gonna be paying attention to the song and if it's not boppy enough and it's like, somber, then the people, the audience isn't gonna want to watch it. If it's in the middle, then they're probably going to want to watch it. So, you definitely have to take everything into consideration.

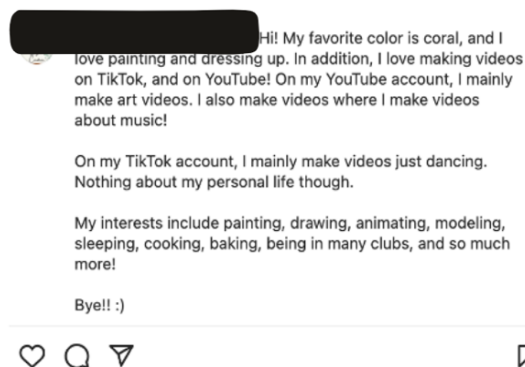
Roxanne was meticulous about selecting each aspect of her content as she wanted to make sure her audiences' viewing experience was enjoyable. One way in which she accomplished this was by putting herself in the minds of her potential viewers and considering if she would like the content she created if she were a viewer, "...that's usually what I go off of when I'm making thumbnails or videos. I think would I click this? Would I?"

### Centering Self in Content

Across the content created by the girls, each facet allowed them to reveal aspects of their identities through their posts. When creating her "About Me" posts, Roxanne aimed to show her interest in art through both her caption and the above-mentioned images (Figure 17)

### Figure 17

*Caption from Roxanne's "About Me" Instagram Post*



In her post, Roxanne revealed her interest in creating social media content and the type of content she created. She also used her posts to guide her viewers through the type of content she enjoyed posting. These hobbies and things that Roxanne spent most of her time doing were of great importance to her and when asked to create a post revealing more about herself, she listed her interests in depth, peeling back her layers of self to reveal the fullness of her identities as a busy middle schooler.

In Jaye's "About Me" TikTok video, she used the clips to share her interests as well which included attending raves, trying new hairstyles, and exploring her city. Through her use of images and texts, Jaye revealed aspects of herself which helped us to learn more about her and these elements also served as a means for her to assert her identities and interests as a Black girl. In the pre-interview, Jaye mentioned ...

So, I've definitely had a bit of issues with people just thinking that Black girls are just one category, but we're so many other things. We're so many different things. There's so many different Black girls out here. So, I've definitely experienced a little bit of just rudeness, you know, people thinking that because I'm a Black girl, I can't be into different things and stuff...

Thus, her posts served as a way to reveal the nuances of Black girlhood and the limitless expressions of who Black girls can be and become.

Outside of creating these posts where the girls were explicitly asked to show who they are, discussing their shared interests and more about their identities proved helpful when creating content collaboratively. Through their shared identities as artists, the girls created the #BlackGirlsForArt hashtag and subsequent posts during sessions #1 and # 2. However, they zoomed in on their preferred style of art as they created their individual posts. When selecting

her Black women artists to highlight, Jaye decided on Elizabeth Colombia, “So I’ve actually known of her for a while now because I used to really like her art a couple of years ago.”

Selecting an artist whom she revered seem to ease the creating process for Jaye as she offered Elizabeth Colombia as an example when the participants were pondering their ideas about how they wished to create their posts. When deciding on her artists, Roxanne spoke passionately about her artist, Gwendolyn Claire Knight.

I thought her art was really abstract. And I really like abstract art. I think it's compared to like more planned out and designed work. I think it's very, it's out of the box. It's very creative, and I really liked that about it. Especially her art it's very... it shows a lot of emotion.

When selecting Gwendolyn to highlight, Roxanna was also looked to highlight a Black woman artist to whom she could relate to their style of artistry.

I wanted to do someone who does mixed media art not just, just painting or not just drawing or not just mixed media...but all of the art if that makes sense. So, when you brought up this project, I went to Google and I Googled Black female artists who do mixed media art and I found Alma Woodsey Thomas. She does lots of sewing art. And I don't know her art, just kinda like all the pictures of her just kind of stood out to me in her artwork, like, like especially like the detail, because it was kind of like mosaic-y.

Roxanne showed her vast knowledge of art as a fellow artist who enjoyed detailed artwork which resemble a more mosaic style. Like Jaye, through her selection of an artist, Roxanne revealed more about herself as an artist and art enthusiast. Through these few examples, the participants reveal that when creating content, it is essential that their identities as Black girls who are light



whippers, artists, and models are centered in their work which helped them select what to post and how they wished to share their content.

### **Recursiveness of the Creative Process**

The composing process of participants was not linear. When analyzing the screen recordings and think aloud created by Roxanne as she composed her final project, it appeared that composing was a more recursive process. This process involved movement from pondering ideas to selecting best fit elements to reviewing the content as a whole and revisiting step in the process until the content met her expectations. Roxanne's composing process of creating her YouTube video entitled "Black Women's Interest" began with an idea cultivated during her pondering process during session #7. However, throughout her composing process, her ideas evolved and dictated which elements she included in her content based on her intended goal. As an example, when creating she decided to create a hashtag and positioned it at the end of her video which served as a sort of call to action for her viewers. When asked about her hashtag, Roxanne shared the following remarks, "I feel that, that hashtag was kind of just made on a whim...Because I feel like it was made in a way that like, I didn't put that much thought into it as much." Considering that the composing process is recursive and subject to be revisited, when discussing this hashtag Roxanne realized that this creative element could be improved upon as she considered its potential to obtain trending status.

As much as I should have. I feel like I put that into it to make it known, but not to make it like oh, this is a trending hashtag. This is a hashtag that could potentially be trendy or trending.

What seemed to help facilitate this recursive composing process was that as she created clips for her YouTube video produced using the platform, KineMaster, she played each clip after

she created it. This reviewing of her content as it was being produced, allowed her to adjust or add additional information to best fit her intended goal of helping Black women and girls to confidently take hold and share the interests with the world. One way she found a best fit element was by searching for statistics related to Black women who “openly and without being embarrassed” express their interests with the world. This statistic was not readily available as she conducted her Google search, but she found the following statistic that Black-owned businesses only make up 2.5% of revenue and she stated, she “didn't really find a straight answer, but I found something good enough” (Baboolall, Burns, Weaver, & Zegeye, 2022). Roxanne showed her viewers that doing what you love not only can bring you joy but has the potential of financial reward. This statistic allowed her to add an element that she did not often see in videos by her peers and added additional detail to why this issue must urgently be addressed (see Figure 14).

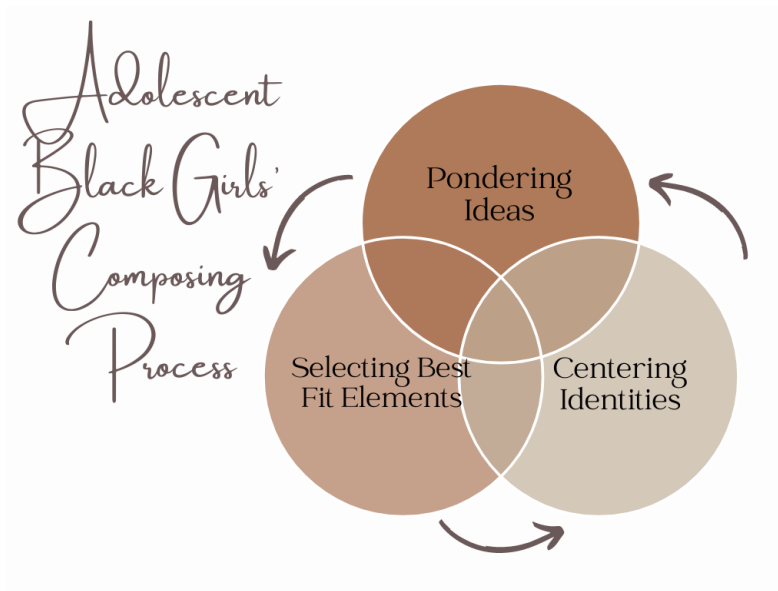
### **Concluding Thoughts on Black Girls’ Intentionality as Content Creators**

Viewing the participants’ composing process as they created digital content for social media platforms revealed the nuanced decision-making processes the girls engaged in. Their composing process included pondering ideas which was especially important as they created content collaboratively and factoring in their interests and identities to support them in selecting the best creative elements to include in the content. Pondering helped them finetune what they aimed to share with their viewers, but they were also flexible to allow for changes as needed. When creating content individually, they wished to show their viewers who they are through centering their identities and interests in their content in overt and subtle ways only noticeable when asked about their decision-making process. Their content creating process was also not linear as composing digital content which addressed issues of importance to them required move

recursively throughout their composing process from pondering ideas, trying out elements, connecting the content to their identities and adjusting, as necessary (see Figure 18).

### Figure 18

*Visual Representation of Participants' Composing Process*



### Conclusion for Findings

The adolescent Black girls in this study which explored the digital content they created within a fully virtual, digital literacy collaborative gradually used social media as a site for their sociopolitical participation. Their sociopolitical participation consisted of engaging in the public dialogue around sociopolitical issues through their content created on social media platforms. They participated in this public dialogue by bring awareness to important issues impacting their communities and fostering conversation amongst their viewers to expand the reach of their content beyond the confines of our group. Through viewing content created by Black women and girls who also created content around similar issues, they were able to use their social media content as dialogue with Black women and girls across space and time. Finally, when viewing their content created on social media it is equally important to understand how they created these

thought-provoking posts which was revealed by examining their composing processes. By recursively pondering ideas for their content, selecting elements based on which best fit the goals of their content, and centering their identities in their work, they created brilliant posts representing the social issues that adolescent Black girls are aiming to address one posts at a time.

## 5 DISCUSSION

This study was my attempt to highlight and celebrate the brilliance that adolescent Black girls bring to social media through their digital content creating and reveal the out-of-school literacies Black girls are drawing upon in our current social times. The findings from this research study highlight the multifaceted creative process of adolescent Black girls as they engage in digital content creating on social media by answering the following three research questions: (1) *How do adolescent Black girls' engagement in sociopolitical participation via social media shift within a digital literacy collaborative?* (2) *How are adolescent Black girls addressing sociopolitical issues in their digital content?* (3) *What are the digital composing processes of adolescent Black girls who create digital content?* These questions were posed due to the need for a historical orientation to Black girls' digital content creating via social media to see if Black girls' approach to youth participation via social media is a contemporary ode to the historical literacy traditions of Black women and girls before them. This study situated 21<sup>st</sup> century Black girls' digital content creating in the larger conversation regarding Black women and girls' language and literacy practices broadly.

Using qualitative case study methodology, I explored the sociopolitical purposes, methods via social media, and composing processes of two adolescent Black girls between the ages of 13 and 18 as they created digital content. This included hosting the girls in an eight-session digital literacy collaborative where they learned about Black women and girls who have used digital and non-digital content for sociopolitical purposes and creating space for them to produce their own content to reveal their sociopolitical purposes. The theoretical frameworks of Black Feminism and Womanism and conceptual frameworks of the Black Girl Literacy Framework, Black Girl Digital Feminism, and Youth Participation helped me to shape this

digital literacy collaborative to be both culturally and historically responsive to the needs of Black girls. Additional data sources for this study included pre-program and post-program interviews, participants' digital content, screen recordings, and think alouds which were analyzed using thematic analysis. This thematic analysis was facilitated through three stages: initial, focused, and axial coding. The findings were determined through crystallization of the data.

The findings from this study reveal that within a digital literacy collaborative modeled after Black literary societies (McHenry, 1996; Muhammad, 2012) and centered around the content of Black women and girls (Wissman, 2011; Muhammad, 2012), the participants in this study began to view social media as a space to engage in the sociopolitical conversation. Initially hesitate about engaging in protesting on social media, Roxanne began to see the possibilities of social media as a space to develop her sociopolitical engagement. Although not unfamiliar with using social media to participate in the sociopolitical arena, Jaye saw new opportunities to use her posts to continue her sociopolitical conversations and even her non-digital content as an additional genre to voice her perspectives. Additionally, the adolescent Black girls in this study used their social media posts to bring awareness to issues of importance to them, foster conversations amongst viewers of their content, and in turn added their say to the historical conversation put forth by Black women since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, the findings reveal that the composing process of these adolescent Black girls as they created digital content was recursive consisting of pondering ideas, choosing best fit elements, and factoring in their identities. I found that though inspired by the highlighted Black women and girls' content, the participants ultimately created content connected to their identities and interests which at times mirrored those of the highlighted creatives. Although I embarked on this study aiming to answer these three research questions, I am left with immense admiration of the content created by Black

girls and even more eagerness to continue learning about the additional sociopolitical purposes of adolescent Black girls and how persons working with Black girls can continue to support them in these endeavors.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of this study. Next, I will discuss the implications for research, theory, policy, and practice. After which, I will highlight the boundaries of the study and offer my reflections as a researcher. I will conclude by discussing the possibilities of where I believe this research should go next.

### **Research Findings**

This study explored three research questions (1) *How do adolescent Black girls' engagement in sociopolitical participation via social media shift within a digital literacy collaborative?* (2) *How are adolescent Black girls addressing sociopolitical issues in their digital content?* (3) *What are the digital composing processes of adolescent Black girls who create digital content?*

The findings from this study revealed that within the digital literacy collaborative, the two adolescent Black girls began to see new possibilities for the digital content created on social media, the girls addressed sociopolitical issues of importance to them by bring awareness to these issues and fostering conversations, and as they created digital content, they intentionally engaged in creative moves.

### **Digital Literacy Collaborative as a Rehearsal for Sociopolitical Participation**

Through participating in the digital literacy collaborative, the girls gradually viewed their social media platforms as vital spaces to participate in sociopolitical engagement. Prior to the study, the girls actively viewed and created on Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, and Twitter. Specifically related to their sociopolitical participation prior to the study, one participant had experiences leveraging her social media platform, Instagram, to converse with her immediate

audiences about sociopolitical issues of importance to her such as the Black Lives Matter Movement and abortion rights. Throughout the course of the program, the girls were able to experiment using Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to publicly engage in the sociopolitical discourse. Their flexibility in using these different social media platforms stemmed from understanding the affordances of different platforms and how certain platforms could best meet their needs based on the goal of their content (Gilje, 2011; Smith, 2017). These social media platforms allowed them to address sociopolitical concerns such as how Black girls are represented in the media and society by revealing the diversity of Black girl identities and interests (Griffin, 2020; Turner & Griffin, 2020). Participating in the program allowed them to develop their sociopolitical participation as each session was an opportunity to practice engaging in the sociopolitical dialogue through their digital content and learn from the highlighted Black women and girl creatives who have used their content similarly (Ajayi, 2015; Kelly 2018; McLean, 2012; Troutman & Jiménez, 2016). Finally, participating in the digital literacy collaborative centered around the content of Black women and girl creatives allowed them to examine sociopolitical issues as they discussed the highlighted creatives' content and pondered topics to address in their content created throughout the program (Kendrick, Early, & Chemjor, 2019; McDavid Schmidt & Beucher, 2018; Price-Dennis, 2016).

### **Black Girls as Experts on Leveraging the Affordances of Social Media**

The girls addressed sociopolitical issues through their digital content by bringing awareness to these issues of interest (Griffin, 2020; Hall, 2011; Stronaiuolo & Thomas, 2018). Through the hashtags they created, the participants brought awareness to unrepresented Black women and girl artists and the increased mortality rates of Black women birthing. Through their final projects, they hoped to shed light on the need for Black women and girls' freedom to share



their interests with the world, the need for representation of Black girls in TV and media, and the traumatization of the Black community via social media. Their content also allowed them to foster conversations with their intended audience (Kelly, 2018; 2020; Kendrick, Early, & Chemjor, 2019). When creating their digital content, the girls strategically used features of social media such as hashtags and tagging to fostering conversation amongst their intended audience. Through these conversations about sociopolitical issues, the participants were able to converse with Black women and girls across space and time who have used their content in similar ways historically (Griffin, 2021; Muhammad, 2015; Wissman, 2011).

### **Centering of Self in Digital Content**

Finally, this study affirms previous research regarding the recursiveness of adolescents' composing processes of digital content (Bruce, 2009; Ranker, 2008; Smith, 2017). As the girls engaged in creating their digital content, they moved back and forth between pondering ideas, selecting best fit elements, and centering their identities until their content was to their liking. This study extends this line of research by expanding upon previous studies which show how centering one's identities was a central part of the composing process for culturally and linguistically diverse youth (Griffin, 2020; McDavid Schmidt & Beucher, 2018). As Black girls who stand at various intersections of identity such as race, gender, and sexuality, the participants centered these diverse aspects of themselves in their content and their identities shaped what they decided to post and what they hoped to accomplish through their posts.

### **Components of Adolescents' Digital Content**

This research also affirms the existing literature which state that the purposes of youth's content are foundational to the technology they use and guide their creative process (Griffin, 2020; Ranker, 2008; Smith, 2017; Vasudevan, Schultz, and Bateman, 2010), their composing in

recursive ( Bruce, 2009; Ranker, 2008; Smith, 2017), and the affordances of the digital platform they use influences their creative decisions (Gilje, 2011; Griffin, 2020; Kendrick, Early, and Chemjor, 2019; Stornaiuolo and Thomas, 2018). This study extends the literature by revealing the need for culturally and linguistically diverse youth to center themselves in their content (Griffin, 2020; McDavid Schmidt & Beucher, 2018). In this study, the girls' identities as Black girls who like anime, Black girl artists, and Black girl activists were equally important to them as they created their digital content. In their final projects, Jaye desired to create an informational video which revealed her experience as Black girl who desired to see herself in the content she viewed. As a Black girl with multiple interests, Roxanne hoped to empower other Black women and girls to share their interests with the world. Essentially, the girls wanted their digital content to embody who they were and who they desire to be (Lewis Ellison, 2018; Muhammad & Haddix, 2015).

### **Implications for Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice**

#### **Implications for Research**

This study reveals the need to look at the present literacy practices of youth from a culturally and historically responsive perspective. While studies have drawn upon historical literacy practices to create contemporary literacy instruction (Griffin, 2020; Muhammad, 2015; Wissman, 2011), more research is necessary. Future studies should turn to such theoretical and conceptual frameworks to aid youth in creating the world in which they desire by helping them to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to accomplish these goals.

#### ***Grounding Studies in Culturally and Historically Responsive Frameworks***

By situating adolescent Black girls' contemporary content in conversation with historical and culturally aligned frameworks such as Muhammad & Haddix's (2015) Black Girl Literacy

Framework and Lewis Ellison's (2018) Black Feminist Digital Literacies Framework, I was able to better understand why Black girls use their digital content to bring awareness to sociopolitical issues and create spaces to discuss these issues. Using these frameworks can also help us to understand how youth's literacy practices were used by their communities across time which can also aid us in gauging any continuations of literacy practices and new possibilities of these communities' literacy practices which ultimately will support us in continuing to learn more about the multiple ways in which culturally and linguistically diverse communities engage in literacy practices.

Using culturally and historical frameworks to ground our research is also an opportunity to create more equitable and humanizing research experiences. By using Black Feminism and Womanism as my theoretical frameworks, I approached the research from a space of care and compassion. In addition to challenging us to value the individuals we work with during our research and their means of navigating life, these culturally and historically responsive theories encourage researchers to center grace, kindness, and joy in our research (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Taylor, 1998). When one of my research participants was not able to complete the final project, I was able to refer back to the tenets of these frameworks to ensure I put the participants' humanity first and demonstrated the care and compassion required during research especially with marginalized community who have historically been mistreated by the research community.

### ***In-Depth Discussions with Highlighted Black Women and Girl Creatives***

Working with Black girls as we viewed content by Black women and girl creatives and engaged in their creative process revealed how the girls were able to emulate the content put forth by the creatives as well as use the wisdom gained from one another to create content aligned with their specific sociopolitical purposes (Bacon & McClish, 2000). The girls in this

study learned from the highlighted Black women and girl creatives and from each other as they created collaboratively. I am left to wonder what future studies would look like if there were more in-depth analysis of the highlighted creatives' content such as reading passages of Toni Morrison's *A Bluest Eye* followed up with viewing Morrison's interview on the inspiration behind her writing this novel. Additionally, what if the girls viewed the content of Black girl creatives such as Marley Dias or Jalaiah Harmon and were able to speak with them directly to discuss their experience having their content go viral. I believe this would enrich Black girls' experience in future studies, but also reveal deeper insight into implementing historical literacy practices from literacy societies such as emulation and collaboration in both in-school and out-of-school spaces (McHenry, 1996; Muhammad, 2012).

### ***Composing at the Center of Studies on Youth's Digital Content Creating***

Although research has encouraged girls to discuss their creative decisions after creating their content, few have observed Black girls creating their content in real time or asked them to dictate why they made their strategic choices as they created (McDavid Schmidt & Beucher, 2018; Turner & Griffin, 2020; Wade, 2019). In this study, similar to Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen (2007), I asked the girls to engage in screen recording and think alouds of their composing process to learn more about their creative decisions and followed up on these decisions during the post-program interviews which revealed the girls' strategic decision-making processes. As an example, I wondered why Roxanne used a simple Black background with white text to create her final project. She stated that this decision was intentional as it allowed her to convey the seriousness of these issue and not distract her viewers from the issues she aimed to highlight. In order to learn more about the strategic decisions youth, particularly Black girls, are engaging in as they create digital content, future studies should continue to take up methods such

as screen recording and think alouds to detail the composing and decision-making processes of youth in real time.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study affirms previous theories on the digital literacy practices of Black girls. It also encourages researchers to look for ways in which their research findings on Black girls' digital content creating can serve as models for curriculum and instruction. Finally, it encourages researchers to use culturally aligned theories as guiding their decision-making during the research process.

### ***From Theory to Practice***

Viewing the content of the girls throughout the digital literacy collaborative reveal how Black girls articulate their epistemologies and values in the six ways highlighted by Muhammad and Haddix (2006). For example, the girls in this study used *multiple* literacies when they created their posts where they utilized texts, visuals, and at time, audio to captivate their audience. As displayed in the findings, centering the *identities* as well as interests was central to their creative process. Their use of social media for sociopolitical purposes connected with the ways in which Black women have used their literacies *historically* including choosing to create content *collaboratively*. Throughout the collaborative, they were eager to *learn more* about creatives they were not familiar with and *educate others* through their content. Through their content they were able to make compelling *political critiques* of power, oppression, and inequality.

Additionally, the girls' expertise as digital content creators and viewers reveal their efforts to assert them *as knowledgeable agents of the digital* whose content embodied their true selves. Through their content they resisted and disrupted oppression, advocated for themselves and others and made meaning of their lives. They also engaged in these practices agentively

which allowed them to reaffirm and self-define their roles as Black girl creators/viewers (Lewis Ellison, 2018). Through their digital content, they showcased an additional view of youth participation as they used their social media content to address pressing issues in their lives (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006).

Considering the extent of knowledge, the girls were able to demonstrate in these eight sessions, do youth have opportunities within classrooms or other learning spaces for their distinctive literacies to be honored and drawn upon? How are we as researchers making our insights accessible to educators so that they can support youth in their addressing important issues in their lives? Using the Black Feminist Digital Literacies framework (Lewis Ellison, 2018) as an exemplar, how are we inviting youth to demonstrate their *knowledge as agents of the digital*? How can we create a safe space for them to *embody themselves* or represent their true selves through the assignments? How do they *make meaning* of their lived experiences? Is it through abstract art, digital content, poems, or photos? Muhammad's (2020) Histories, Identities, Literacies, and Liberation (HILL) model and Hammond's (2015) Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain are just two examples of how research has been translated into actionable frameworks educators can draw upon to translate research into practice. Researchers especially literacy scholars must look for ways to propel their knowledge beyond the academy to impact both research and practice.

### ***Theories Guiding Decision-Making Process***

Utilizing Black feminist-womanism theories guided my decision-making throughout the research process. Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990; 2000) encouraged me to intentionally provide space for the girls to be experts on their realities. This included using dialogue to understand their epistemologies. Each session we engaged in discussions around their thoughts

on social media platforms and perspectives on the highlighted creatives and content we viewed. I often used questioning to clarify discussions where my understanding lacked. This was especially the case when we discussed Gen Z content creating. I wanted to know what they meant by lightheartedness and why they thought their generation used this creative move as they created content. I also encouraged the girls to express themselves and their individuality by encouraging them to use our tasks as opportunities to reveal more about themselves and what was important to them. Taking personal accountability during the study included acknowledging when my questions may have influenced their answers such as when I asked Roxanne which age group she was referring to when she stated 'Black girls' in her final project and if she had an age-limit in mind. I wanted her to know that I did not intend for her to change her response but wanted to gauge her honest thoughts. The girls' experience in the world was central to understanding their content and even though their experience as Black girls was different than my own, considering I grew up in a different city during a different time, I valued their lived experiences as Black girls. Practicing an ethics of care was central to our interactions. At times, we had to adjust the length of our sessions due to their other responsibilities and we did not meet during the winter break time so that they could enjoy this time with their families. Through these deliberate decisions, I hoped to create a more enjoyable experience for them and learn from them as expert Black girl creators and viewers.

Considering that this research was centered on learning more about how Black girls used their social media as a means of sociopolitical engagement, I also drew upon womanism as a way to acknowledge the girls' experiences in the world as Black girls and how they solved practical problems in their lives. Jaye saw a need for her to gain rich insight on different sociopolitical issues occurring in the world which led her to use her Instagram posts as a forum

for these discussions. Womanism also allowed to reconnect the girls to the spiritual realm. By viewing and discussing the content of Black women from past, the girls were able to tap into the *Zamani* or use their contemporary literacies in ways similar to the past practices of their ancestors (Mbiti, 1969). Viewing the content of Black women such as Anna Julia Cooper, Katherine Dunham, and Toni Morrison allowed the girls to dialogue with these ancestors to share their perspectives on these issues and hear their ancestors' voices. Using Black feminist-womanism theories encouraged me to consider the steps that I took within my study to ensure that my research practices had Black girls in mind (Evans-Winter & Esposito, 2010). I would encourage future researchers to use theories which center the unique experiences of their research participants. Also, I would encourage researchers to ground their research in theories that encourage them to make deliberate research decisions that align with their research participants' ways of being, doing, and knowing. One way of accomplishing this alignment is to remind yourself of your theories' tenets each day by posting them on a board near your working space and referring to them through the research process. By grounding our research within these critical theories, our work can better embody the experiences and expertise of our research participants.

### **Implications for Policy**

Considering the social times when book bans and restrictions on what can be discussed within the classroom are increasingly becoming the norm, there is a need for policies put in place to protect students and educators' rights to discuss the history of this country and how its history has impacted generations of culturally and linguistically diverse people. The common adage applies, if we fail to learn about our history, we are bound to repeat it. Thus, if younger generations are not taught the full history of this country and given opportunities to learn from



the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, they may fall victim to believing a single story about these communities and continuing cycles of oppression. As Adiche warned us in 2009, there is grave danger in a single story (Adiche, 2009). The girls in the study revealed that receiving only one side of the story can be especially harmful for Black girls who run the risk of only learning about a limited number of impactful Black women leaders in their schools' textbooks and recommended readings and not the numerous Black women and girls contemporarily and historically who have positively impacted the world. The participants in this study also shared that receiving media from limited perspectives may impact their self-identity as they may not be afforded an opportunity to see limitless possibilities of Black girlhood. Unfortunately, if we fail to protect the rights of youth to learn from various perspectives, we risk creating a false narrative which will only further perpetuate stereotypes and oppression within our society.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study reveals Black girls' desires for the programming and curriculum we used while working with them. In this digital literacy collaborative, I drew on Muhammad & Haddix's (2015) Black Girl Literacy Framework and Lewis Ellison's (2018) Black Feminist Digital Literacies to craft lessons which encouraged the girls to use their everyday practices of creating on social media to solve problems within their lives. By utilizing these frameworks, I encouraged the girls to use their authentic means of engaging in literacy practices in our sessions.

### ***Culturally and Historically Responsive Curriculum***

This study calls for educators and other working with Black girls to create curriculum and activities which are culturally and historically responsive. In this study, I was intentional about creating space for the girls to collaboratively create content. I also encouraged them to center

their multiple identities in their content. Allowing them to bring their full selves into our sessions together and reveal who they are through their content, encouraging them to bravely use their posts for sociopolitical purposes. As educators and those working with Black girls, we can create opportunities for Black girls to share their identities and interests with others and use the knowledge that they share with us as we craft lessons and activities for them. We can also create opportunities for Black girls to engage in meaningful conversations around issue of importance to them. Consider how you can facilitate these discussions or bring a trusted Black woman and/or girl from the community to help facilitate these discussions. As we continue to understand how culturally and linguistically diverse youth utilize their literacy practices, we must create space within our classrooms and other organizations for them to authentically engage in such literacy practices which will enable us to better understand their epistemologies, ideologies, and visions of the future.

### ***Incorporating Digital Literacy Practices into Instruction***

Hosting this digital literacy collaborative where the girls used social media platforms and expressed their out-of-school literacy practices reveal the need for educators and other persons working with Black girls to create space for them to authentically share their perspectives and gather responses through means that aligns with their ways of knowing and communicating. It is not essentially to bring these social media platforms into classrooms as youth often times use social media platforms as space to cultivate communities of their own (Wright, 2021). Instead, think about the essences of these social media platforms and how aspects of these platforms can be incorporated into your lessons or activities. As an example, Padlet is an educational platform which essentially allows users to create posts which can be created individually or collaboratively. These posts can be viewed by others and commented on with subsequent posts

or comments left by others. Researchers have shown that incorporating educational digital platforms into the classroom can enable youth to learn more about the affordances of different platforms and how they might use them for their specific sociopolitical purposes (Price Dennis, 2016). By drawing on youth's out-of-school literacy practices, we are acknowledging the brilliance youth demonstrate everyday through their means of connecting with the world and bridging their in-school and out-of-school literacies (Alvermann, 2008; O'Brien, 2012; Vasudevan, 2006: 2010).

### ***Letting Black Girls Lead***

When I created the curriculum for this digital literacy collaborative, I started with the Black girl content creatives, Jalaiah Harmon, and Marley Dias who I allowed to lead me to other Black women and girls who have used their content similarly resulting in the selection of the highlighted Black women and girl creatives listed in Table 2. During literacy collaborative, I also created space for the girls to lead lessons on how to create content based on their preferred social media platform. Within our sessions, I facilitated the discussions by posing question and offering content as launchpads for our discussion. However, ultimately, I let the girls lead and reveal their knowledge as experts on social media usage which gave me rich insights on their perspectives of content creating and engagement on social media generally. In classrooms or other spaces for Black girls, this approach to instruction might consist of taking a more dialogic approach to teaching. As an example, educators or other working with youth can review their curricular standards and work alongside their students to identify topics of interests to them and jointly develop means for youth to demonstrate their understanding of this content. This can also include creating opportunities for discussions where students can share their identities, experiences, and expertise. Through using such approaches, educators can create meaningful

interactions with youth and learn more about their perspectives. Youth may have the opportunity to move from solely receiving knowledge from adults to jointly constructing knowledge alongside adults and youth alike. Creating such a learning environment allows for knowledge to be constructed collaboratively which creates richer learning experiences for adults and youth alike (Gordon, 2018).

### **Possibilities**

This study was conducted during the middle of the school year which might have reduced the availability of youth to participate. Adolescents often engaged in multiple extracurricular activities and work. In the middle of the school year, adolescents' work and activities schedules are mainly set for the school year. Therefore, I encourage scholars or other looking to work with adolescents to host their programs either in the summer or at the beginning of the school year to identified interested youth before their schedules are booked. Additionally, if researchers desire to gain interests from Black girls online, it might be beneficial to contract a Black girl to create social media posts for their study to share online. Black girls ultimately know what others like them are interested in and what aspects of content attract Black girls. Therefore, paying a small stipend to a Black girl creative to create posts advertising your research study may yield more interests from Black girls directly.

This study was also conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, I decided to host the program solely online. It would be interesting to see the potential results of a study if youth were from different states or if the program was hosted in-person rather than online. Considering that the girls lived in the same state, their perspectives share some similarities, but they also offer diverse perspectives of the digital content creating of adolescent Black girls

because Black girls are not a monolith. Black girls even from the same state have vastly different identities and interests which was demonstrated in this study.

Considering that this study was conducted in an out-of-school setting, I was not restricted to align the sessions with curricular standards, nor did I have limitations around the discussion topics. Thus, it might be difficult to replicate such experience in the traditional middle or high school classroom especially considering the current social time where there are increased restrictions around what can be taught. I would encourage educators and other working with youth to explore resources such as the National Center for the Teaching of English's Rationale Database to help them defend why they should teach from certain textbooks (National Council of Teachers of English, n.d.). Also, the current social climate may encourage educators to partner with out-of-school organizations to offer a similar experience as this digital literacy collaborative in an afterschool setting or beyond the school walls to see what such an experience might offer them as educators and their students.

### **Reflections**

When I began this study, I had expectations around how the girls would address sociopolitical issues and their sociopolitical purposes, but I was open to the new possibilities that the Black girls in this study would reveal to me through their content. As an attempt to delineate my personal reflections from the findings, I kept a researcher's journal to note my feelings throughout the research process and how might those perspectives influence my interpretation of the data. I also used crystallization throughout the study as a means of credibility. It should be noted that I do not claim that my perspective did not influence my findings in any way. As an example, I found myself disappointed at times when the girls weren't as "radical" as I expected them to be. However, I found ease in knowing that the issues at the forefront of their minds were

vitaly important to their lives as Black girls and needed to be addressed which was demonstrated through their content. Using Womanism as a grounding framework and drawing back to Audre Lorde's belief that caring for oneself is indeed a radical act reminded me to use this dissertation as a means to uplift these daily practices that Black girls engaged in to solve problems in their lives including Black girls creating space for themselves to just be.

Another aim of mine during the research process was to dismantle some of the power structures which can be prevalent throughout research by constantly reminding the girls that I may have created the space for us to be work together, but I was there to learn from them as experts of their own experiences. I also aimed to foster a sense of reciprocity in the research by compensating them for participating in the study with books authored by some of our highlighted creatives and offering them my phone number and email address for them to contact me beyond the study.

Ultimately, this dissertation has challenged me to reconsider how I use my content for sociopolitical purposes. I entered the study initially afraid to insert my voice into the digital sociopolitical arena for fear of judgement. However, working with these young Black girls as they tried out different social media platforms and courageously created content for the public to hear their perspectives has inspired to do the same. This dissertation is one step in which I reclaim my voice as a Black woman who despite fear or judgement is ready to use my pen, my posts, my actions to bring about the necessary changes urgently needed in this world.

### **Recommendations**

There remains a need for further exploration into Black girls' digital content creating on social media. Therefore, the possibilities for future research and practice are abundant.

### **Cross-generational Digital Content Creating**

As we viewed the content of the highlighted Black women and girl digital creators, one of the discussions that ensued amongst me, and the girls were the generation differences between these creatives. One possible future study would create a space where Black women and girl digital content creators are able to create social media posts together. Participants noticed that Gen Z content creators such as our highlighted creative, Isra Hirsi's (U.S. Youth Climate Strike) approach to creating was more approachable from a viewer perspective than that of Millennial content creators such as our highlighted creative, Lynae Vane (#ParkingLotPimpin'). The girls found that Gen Z creatives were more lighthearted in their approach to content creating which was often discredited by millennials. If there was an opportunity for Millennials and Gen Z Black women and girl creatives to work together to create content, it would be interesting to learn what they would take from these experiences. By analyzing their content created individually, it might be interesting to see how adolescent Black girls address sociopolitical issues differently or similarly to Black women. Also, if they were to record their composing processes, how might their composing processes differ or align. Researcher could also see what these creatives can learn from creating together by having them work together and conducting focus groups or interviews to gauge their knowledge gained from creating digital content across generations.

### **Black Girls' Desires from Social Media Platforms**

Another intriguing study could examine what elements of social media platforms do Black girls value and desire from social media platforms. The girls in this study understood the affordances and drawbacks of each social media platform they used during this study, but overall, they saw social media platforms as generally the same. Researchers could conduct focus

groups with Black girls and pose the following question, “If you could create your own social media platforms, what aspects would you include in your platform?”. Also, what rules or expectations would they require within this space to make it more hospitable to their creative pursuits.

Asking what Black girls desire from social media platforms should also be a task for all of the major social media platforms. None of the major social media platforms, Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube were created by Black women or girls, yet Black youth are some of the most active users of these social media platforms (The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2017). Are leaders of these social media platforms creating space for Black youth to have a seat at their decision-making tables to guide the directions of these platforms or voice their opinions of these experiences on these platforms? Black youth can serve as paid consultants especially as platforms prepare to launch new features or paid liaisons to discuss some of the challenges they experience as Black youth navigating these social media arenas. Black youth are creating revenue streams for these platforms and deserve to have a say on the future directions of these platforms.

### **Caring for Black Girls as They Navigate Social Media**

As discussed by Jaye in her final project, social media has real implications on youth especially Black youth who are constantly witnessing the brutal treatment of Black people each time they scroll their social media feeds. As educators and those working with Black girls, how can we support them to discuss these sources of trauma that they are viewing every day? How can we foster trauma-informed spaces within our schools or buildings which allow youth to unpack these tough issues in a safe space? How can we equip them with self-care, self-preservation practices to know when they should log off or curate their feed to provide some



sense of protection against this trauma? Youth need our support in learning how to navigate these media outlets.

### **Bring Contemporary Persons into Our Classrooms**

One of my intentional practices when curating the list of highlighted Black women and girl creatives was to find Black girls who were the same ages as the girls in my study to show them their possibilities. How often are youth given the opportunity to learn about youth like them who are making history/herstory/ their-story in this current social times? We are living through so many monumental times, Black girls like Alena Analeigh Wicker who in 2024 will become the youngest Black medical student in the history of the United States or Taylor Cassidy who at 19-years-old uses their platform of over 2.2 million followers to share Black historical facts through their captivating posts. Youth should not have to wait until they are adults to hear about how people in their generation are changing the world. By bring in contemporary issues and persons into our lessons and activities, we are able to celebrate the impact that youth are making in this world today and encourage them to continue this necessary work for generations to come.

### **Conclusion**

“...the history of African American women’s literacy is a story of visionaries, of women using sociocognitive ability to re-create themselves and to reimagine their worlds. Being fully aware of the material conditions of their lives and equally aware of the public discourses swirling around them, the first generation of African American women in the eighteenth century (and, in larger numbers in the nineteenth century), acquired literacy within an environment of activism, advocacy, and action...In their hands, literacy became a tool for inserting themselves directly and indirectly into arenas for action and for doing

whatever they could to mediate and manage the critical process of change. “(Jones Royster, 2000, p. 110)

In the quote above, Jones Royster argues that Black women since the 18<sup>th</sup> century have used their literacy practices to publicly engage in the sociopolitical dialogue as a means to reimagine the world and cultivate the conditions necessary to create the one in which they desire. This study helps to provide research on how Black girls today are continuing these visionary pursuits through their digital content creating on social media. By cultivating a space where adolescent Black girls were able to unapologetically bring their vast literacy practices and identities to the table to share and learn with other Black women and girls, this study reveals how Black girls are using their digital literacy practices as tool for social change. Motivated by the social time when activism, advocacy, and action is desperately needed, Black girls are using their digital content on social media to transcend beyond the screen and engage in larger dialogues started by Black women generations before them. Through their literacy practice of creating digital content on social media, they are able to bring about necessary changes to the world that they desire for themselves and the generations of Black women and girls yet to come.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A- Pre-Interview Protocol

#### Pre-Interview Protocol

##### Background Questions

1. How would you describe yourself to someone who does not know you?
  - a. What does it mean to be an African American or Black girl (use identities that participant mentioned to probe) according to you?
  - b. Are there any issues you experience as an African American or Black girl (use identities that participant mentioned to probe)?
2. How did you find out about the program?
3. Why did you decide to participate in the program?

##### Digital Content Creating and Viewing

4. In your application, you said that you consider yourself a (digital content creator, digital content viewer, or both).
  - a. What does it mean to be a digital content creator?
  - b. What does it mean to be a digital content viewer?
  - c. What does it mean to be both a digital content creator and viewer?
5. What social media websites do you use?
6. What types of social media posts do you enjoy watching?
7. Do you only view content on these social media websites, or do you post on these websites as well?
8. What's a trending or viral challenge or content on social media that you are watching now?
  - a. Have you participated in any of these challenges or trends? If so, talk about them.
  - b. If not, are there anything that is hindering you from participating in these trends? If so, talk about them.

##### Questions for Digital Content Creators

9. What types of social media posts do you create?
10. Where do you create this content or view?
11. What inspires you to create content?
12. Who inspires you to create content?
13. Do you create content or view with others? Who?
  - a. If not, have you consider creating social media content with others? Why or why not?

##### Interest in Other Literacies

14. What do you enjoy listening to, watching, or reading?
15. What types of writing do you engage in?
16. What do you enjoy writing about?
17. How did you feel about reading and your reading ability prior to today?
  - a. Would you consider yourself a high/medium/low reader?
18. How did you feel about writing and your writing ability prior to today?
  - a. Would you consider yourself a high/medium/low writer?

##### Program Expectations

19. What do you expect to gain from the program?
20. Is there anything else you want to share as you prepare to participate in the literacy collaborative?

## Appendix B- Post-Interview Protocol

### Post-Interview Protocol

#### Program Experience

1. What did you like best about participating in the program?
2. What did you like least about participating in the program?
3. What was it like creating and viewing content with other Black girls?
4. How did creating and viewing content with other Black girls impact the content you created?
5. What do you think about the content you creating during the program?
6. What do you think about the content we viewed during the program?
7. In what ways, if any, did viewing content by other Black women and girls impact the content you created?

#### Content Created During the Program

8. Discuss the process of creating the hashtag, #BlackGirlArt and #RacismInHospitals
  - a. Talk about why you chose to create such hashtags about being awareness to Black women and girl artists and Black women experiencing racism when receiving care at hospital particularly those who are or have given birth?
  - b. After creating the hashtags, you all were tasked to show the hashtag in action. Can you tell me more about your decision to create examples for #BlackGirlArt (vs. that of #RacismInHospitals)?
  - c. Can you talk a little more about your decision to highlight your selected Black girl artists?
9. Discuss the process of creating your **post on** Isra Hirsi and Vernice Miller-Travis?
  - a. Talk about why you chose to create an IG post about \_\_\_\_\_ (themes found).
10. Discuss the process of creating your **'About Me'**.
  - a. Talk about why you chose to create a (insert social media post) about your various interests.
11. Discuss the process of creating your **final project**.
  - a. Talk about why you chose to post about \_\_\_\_\_ (themes found).
    - Tell me more about the content you created.
    - What motivated the creation of this content?
    - Why did you choose this or these specific platform (s) to create your content?
    - What did you hope to accomplish with this content?

#### Perceptions of Digital Content Creating

12. In your application, you said that you consider yourself a (digital content creator, digital content viewer, or both).
  - a. What does it mean to be a digital content viewer?
  - b. What does it mean to be a digital content creator?
  - c. What does it mean to be both a digital content creator and viewer?
13. In what ways, if any, did the program influence what you post or view on social media.
14. At the beginning of the program you discussed wanting to (insert goals), how did your time in the program help you achieve this goal or come closer to it?
14. In what specific ways did the program help you to be a better reader and/or writer?

15. How did the program compare with literacy experiences you have had in your classrooms at school?

16. Is there anything else you want to share about your experience in the program?

## Appendix C- Parent/Guardian Permission Form

Georgia State University  
Parent/Guardian Permission Form

Title: A Case Study of Adolescent Black Girls' Digital Content Creating via Social Media  
Principle Investigator: Dr. M. Zoss  
Student Principal Investigator: LaTasha Mosley

### **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 about how your child uses social media. If you agree, your child will take part in the study 26 hours over an eight-week period from September 2022 to November 2022.

Your child will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a survey application about themselves.
- Take part in an online writing group about how and why Black girls create social media posts.
- Have their writings and social media posts studied by the research team.
- Take part in two one-hour individual interviews on Zoom, a video conferencing site before and after the last group session (we will record these conversations).
- Interact with the research team, Dr. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley, in addition to other girls in the online writing group.
- Record themselves (video and audio) creating a social media post.

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

This study is designed to benefit your child. Your child may learn about themselves as a person who posts on social media and what motivates you to create posts for social media. We hope to gain information about the girls' reasons for posting on social media. This study will assist society especially those working with Black girls on the importance of social media posts to their lives.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to learn about how your child create social media posts and other writings.

Your child is invited to participate because they:

- are a Black girl.
- are between the ages of 13-18.

- see themselves as someone who views social media posts and/or create social media posts.

A total of **six** girls will be invited to take part in this study.

### **Procedures**

If you and your child decide to take part in the study, your child will take part in the study for 26 hours over an eight-week period from September 2022 to November 2022. During this eight-week period, your child will...

- Complete an online survey application about themselves.
- Take part in an eight-week online writing group about how and why Black girls create social media posts on Zoom, a video conferencing site (each session will be 3 hours).
- Take part in two one-hour individual interviews on Zoom before and after the last group session (we will record these conversations).

### **Future Research**

Researchers will remove information that may identify your child and may your 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 risk 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. Your child may learn more about yourself as a person who posts on social media and what motivates you to create post for social media. We hope to gain information about the girls' reasons for posting on social media.

### **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 end allowed by law. The following people will have access to the information your child provides:

- Dr. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley
- Georgia State University's 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, social media posts, 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.

Your child will be asked not to reveal what was discussed within group discussion. We cannot promise that participants will keep everything said during the group discussion private.

### **Contact Information**

Contact Dr. M. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley at ([lmosley13@student.gsu.edu](mailto:lmosley13@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. Zoss or LaTasha. 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](mailto:irb@gsu.edu).

### **Parental Permission**

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

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Parent/Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Parental Permission

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix D- Consent Form**

Georgia State University  
Consent Form

Title: A Case Study of Adolescent Black Girls' Digital Content Creating via Social Media

Principle Investigator: Dr. M. Zoss

Student Principal Investigator: LaTasha Mosley

### **Introduction and Key Introduction**

We would like you to take part in a research study to learn about how you use social media. This study will start in September 2022 and end in November 2022. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in this study. The purpose of this study is to learn about how you use social media. If you agree, you will take part in the study 26 hours over an eight-week period from September 2022 to November 2022. Participating in this study will not expose you to any more risks than you would experience in a typical day. This study may benefit you. You may learn more about yourself. You may also learn about what inspires you to create post for social media. Overall, we hope to gain information about the social media content Black girls create.

You will be asked to:

- Complete an application.
- Share some of your social media posts and other writings with us. We want to learn more about you.
- Be interviewed twice on Zoom. We will record the interviews.
- Work with the research team, Dr. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley, in addition to other girls in an online writing group.
- Record yourself creating a social media post.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study is to learn about you child create social media posts and other writings.

You will have been invited to participate because:

- you are a Black girl.
- you are between the ages of 13-18.
- you see yourself as someone who views social media posts and/or create social media posts.

A total of **six** girls will be invited to take part in this study.

### **Procedures**

If you decide to take part in the study, you will take part in the study for 26 hours over an eight-week period from September 2022 to November 2022. During this eight-week period, you will...

- Complete an online survey application about yourself.
- Take part in an eight-week online writing group about how and why Black girls create social media posts on Zoom, a video conferencing site (each session will be 3 hours).



- Take part in two one-hour individual interviews on Zoom before and after the last group session (we will record these conversations).

### **Future Research**

The researchers will remove information that may identify you or your personal information 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**

No risk or injury is expected from this study, but you believe you have 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.

### **Benefits**

Taking part in this study may help you. You may learn more about yourself. You may also learn about what inspires you to create post for social media. This study will assist society especially those working with Black girls on the importance of social media posts to your life.

### **Alternatives**

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

### **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal**

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you can drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

### **Confidentiality**

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

- Dr. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley
- Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use fake names rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored in a safe place. Your data, such as writing samples, social media posts, 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 name and other facts that might point to you 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.

You will be asked not to reveal what was discussed within group discussion. We cannot promise that participants will keep everything said during the group discussion private.

**Contact Information**

Contact Dr. M. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley at [Imosley13@student.gsu.edu](mailto:Imosley13@student.gsu.edu).

- If you have questions about the study
- 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. Zoss or LaTasha. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or [irb@gsu.edu](mailto:irb@gsu.edu).

**Consent**

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

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

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Printed Name of Participant

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Signature of Participant

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Date

---

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

---

Date

## Appendix E- Assent Form

Georgia State University  
Assent Form

Title: A Case Study of Adolescent Black Girls' Digital Content Creating via Social Media

Principal Investigator: Dr. M. Zoss

Student Principal Investigator: LaTasha Mosley

### **Key Info.**

We would like for you to be part of a research study. This study will start in September 2022 and end in November 2022. We want to learn how you use social media.

You will be asked to:

- Complete an application.
- Share some of your social media posts and other writings with us. We want to learn more about you.
- Be interviewed twice on Zoom. We will record the interviews.
- Work with the research team and other girls in an online writing group.
- Record yourself creating a social media post.

### **Risks**

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

### **Benefits**

Taking part in this study may help you. You may learn more about yourself. You may also learn about what inspires you to create post for social media.

### **Your Choice to Participate**

You can choose not to be in the study. Your parents/legal guardians cannot force you to be in the study. 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. M. Zoss and LaTasha Mosley at [mosley13@student.gsu.edu](mailto:mosley13@student.gsu.edu), if you have any questions, worries, or complaints about the study.

### **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