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**IMMIGRANT GIRLS FROM THE CARIBBEAN: IDENTITIES, LITERACIES, AND THE
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELVES**

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by
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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary dissertation focuses on the literate lives and lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean. It unpacks the ways in which they construct academic and social identities through literacies, and the implication of those identities on their lived experiences. The purpose of this study is to make visible these girls whose identities have been subsumed within that of a homogenous population. This project aims to bring their experiences front and center, and to understand the nuances of Black girlhood and Black girls' literate lives. The question that guides this research is: *what can the literacies of immigrant girls from the Caribbean tell us about the types of academic and social identities they are constructing?* Using *new literacies* and critical *Black feminism* as frameworks, this dissertation looks at the ways in which immigrant girls from the Caribbean are making sense of their life-worlds from a cultural, racial, ethnic, gendered positionality. These frameworks are situated within the context of *memory work*—a feminist methodology that contends that our histories, experiences, and memories are all valid sources of knowledge. Embodied within this methodology is the potential for women's liberation. Memory work as a methodology is collective, it is non-hierarchical, and it allows for the theorizing of experiences amongst marginalized communities of women and girls. Using memory work, critical Black feminism, and new literacies, I spent one year with adolescent immigrant girls from the Caribbean in a large northeastern city researching their literate lives to understand what those lives could tell me about who they are and the factors that shape their perceptions of self. A significant implication of my study revealed that the literacies of immigrant girls from the Caribbean are enacted in multiple literate spaces and through a variety of practices. Each individual space is strategically selected based on the academic need for recognition, validation, and community, as well as the desire for self-determination and self-definition. This dissertation also aims to highlight the interconnectedness of local and global communities and to consider

that, embodied within each individual, is the collective knowledge of their lived experiences and the experience of those who came before them. It is my hope that, by studying their literacies, scholars and educators can all gain insight into the nuances of the experiences of Black girlhood. Future research in this area might focus on ways to create a critical curriculum that addresses the specific needs of immigrant girls from across the diaspora and Black girls more generally. For example, schools can consider implementing texts that challenge stereotypical representations of Black girlhood, immigrant girls, and Black people more generally. They might also consider ways to expose teachers to critical scholarship about race, gender, sexuality, and belonging. Additionally, schools can work to foster discussions about local and global communities in order to better situate teachers to understand the nuances of their students' lived experiences.

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Chapter 1

Introduction/Literature Review: Centering the Caribbean and Black Women's Literacies

Dear Non-American Black, when you make the choice to come to America you become Black. Stop arguing. Stop saying I'm Jamaican or I'm Ghanaian. America doesn't care. So, what if you weren't 'Black' in your country? You are in America now... And admit it—you say 'I'm not Black' only because you know Black is at the bottom of America's race ladder. And you want none of that. Don't deny now. What if being Black had all the privileges of being white? Would you still say 'Don't call me Black, I'm from Trinidad'? I don't think so. So you're Black, Baby. (Adichie, 2013, p. 273)

I was born in Jamaica and immigrated to the United States in the early 1990s. As an immigrant from the Caribbean, I have always questioned the position I occupy within the United States. Questions about my own identity development, and that of other immigrant girls from the Caribbean, have occupied space in my heart and mind. The desire to understand where one is rooted and what factors inform academic and social identity construction has led me to this research. When Adichie (2013) declared in her novel *Americanah* that upon coming to America we in essence lose our former identities and become Black, she recognizes that a sort of identity crisis occurs for the immigrant. This crisis is at the center of this dissertation.

Consequently, as an adult I had a great desire to reconcile my identities and I assumed my participation in a genealogy project would allow me to do this. I contributed my DNA and waited six weeks for the results. When I finally received the outcome, I wasn't surprised to learn that I was 89% African. The surprise was the resistance some of my family members showed to our association to certain African countries. They were unwilling to accept that we were from regions in Africa that they deemed undesirable. I was also surprised that some didn't even care that I had located me/them on the mother continent. Some declared that they were just Jamaican,

while others took moments to talk about the Caucasian lineage that they had heard about from other family member throughout the decades. It was a complete dismissal of their Blackness, of their connection to Africa (my initial reaction). This moment, I believe, represents an important reminder about the consequences of colonialism and its ideological impact on the colonized (Hall, 1995, 1992). Here I was nostalgic and proud of my lineage, experiencing a moment that I believed carried a great degree of significance, and yet for some the revelation/discovery was a moment of disappointment. I wanted to understand the phenomenon of identity construction. I needed to make sense of why Caribbean Blacks perceive identities in such nuanced ways.

I embarked upon this journey out of curiosity. I thought it would answer questions about my lineage, my ancestry, or my background. I even romanticized the idea that I would be able to trace my DNA all the way back to some small village in Africa (this test does exist). I equate this to a child who had been given up for adoption, to a person who was in search of home, or to any displaced person/people. However, all the test did was demonstrate the complex political, economic, emotional, and controversial power that identities embody. The test further demonstrates why some identities matter and why others don't. Raven Simone, a former cast member of *The Cosby Show* (and a visibly Black woman born in the United States) who won viewers over in the 1980s in her role as Olivia, is a great example of this. When asked by Oprah about her identity for her popular, *Where Are They Now* show (2014), Simone declared (in)famously that she is not African American. The transcript follows:

"I'm tired of being labeled," she said. "I'm an American. I'm not an African American; I'm an American." Oprah warns, "Oh, girl, don't set up Twitter on fire...Oh, my lord. What did you just say?" Simone continued, "I mean, I don't know where my roots go to, I don't know how far back they go...I don't know what country in Africa I'm from, but I do know that my roots are in Louisiana. I'm an American. And that's a colorless person....", "I don't label myself. I have darker skin. I have a nice, interesting grade of hair. I connect with Caucasian. I connect with Asian. I connect with Black. I connect with Indian. I connect with each culture." "You are a melting pot in one body," replied Oprah. "Aren't we all?" Raven replied. "Isn't that what America's supposed to be?" (*Oprah: Where Are They Now*, 2014)

Simone, like my family, has declined to affiliate herself with a historically marginalized group (African Americans in this case). Implied in her response and in Oprah's response to her is a deep-seated rejection of her African American identity. Oprah clearly points out that there is an audience listening to Simone, and that she won't get away with saying she isn't African American.

Identity in this sense isn't only what Simone thinks she is, but what/who others think she is as well. One could come to a few different assumptions based on Simone's response to Oprah. One could assume that, because she is a member of a few historically oppressed groups (Black woman, lesbian, and African American), it might be easier to not allow the struggles of these groups to define her. Consequently, being a member of these groups can either serve to empower or disempower her if she is not emotionally prepared to deal with the consequences of what it means to be a member. Adams (1999) has attributed the trauma of slavery, and a history of discrimination and the subordination of Black people, to centuries of oppression. He posits that,

The historical record of the last four hundred and fifty years is one of trauma and pain brought about by ethnic cleansing, forced migrations, exploitation of labor, constrictions on the development of personhood and the propagation of ideologies that favored the few over the many. (p. 1)

This trauma and pain that Adams refers to could be at the heart of Simone's rejection of her African American identity. One might also assume that if she declares to Oprah that she is in fact African American she would be relegated to the bottom of the spectrum of identity as it relates to social capital (Bourdieu, 2011). Such consequences of specific group affiliations can be the source of psychological, emotional, and economical tensions. This paper examines this very idea. I share the examples above neither to shame my family nor to pass judgment on Simone, but rather as a way to demonstrate that to be Black is an extremely complex, nuanced existence, where there dwells a spectrum of values, beliefs, and even consequences. Embedded within Simone's words, and within the responses of my family to my DNA results, are systems of beliefs

that have been (and continue to be) systematically entrenched in their hearts and minds. Over time they've come to own them. What's even more revealing is that, when confronted with scientific evidence of their being, they still find ways to resist the very truth of their relationship to people who are characteristically similar to them. It has been important for me to share a part of who I am with my family, but that doesn't happen without a great degree of conflict. Before taking this test, I knew I was of African descent. My dark skin, kinky hair, and other telltale characteristics linked me to the continent long before this DNA test did. However, the specificity of certain places on the continent complicates and problematizes my identities, and the identities of my family members. Because of this test, I occupy a more globalized location, and the difficulty has been deciding what it all means.

In this dissertation I use my current position as a place of departure and I examine the notion of identity for Caribbean immigrants. I look primarily at adolescent immigrants because of their strategic positions as young people existing in the United States, attending predominantly African American schools, and having first generation immigrant parents. This population provides rich material for understanding how students negotiate and construct identities in predominantly African American schools. For this inquiry, I ask *in what ways are the academic and social identities of immigrants from the Caribbean shaped by their literate lives and lived experiences?* I explore the ways in which identities can be understood through literacies, and what this can tell us about the lived experiences of Caribbean immigrants in schools.

Section I

Place: Not just a depoliticized location

The apprehension of my family to recognize themselves as nationals of some African countries, of me trying to locate myself geographically in Africa, and of Simone's refusal to position herself as African American is important for a few different reasons. One of these reasons has to do with the relationship between identity and place. By place I mean where we locate ourselves both ideologically and physically; I also mean our way of being in the world (Cresswell, 2004). For each of us, our relationship to our identities is not without consequence. Hall (1995) posits that,

Identity is not only a story, or a narrative that we tell ourselves about ourselves, it is stories that change with historical circumstances. And identities shift with the way in which we think and hear them and experience them. Far from only coming from the still small point of truth inside us, identities actually come from outside. They are the way in which we are recognized and then come to step into the place of the recognitions which others give us. Without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition. (p. 6)

Hall's discussion here is essential to understanding why Simone prefers to be just an American, and not African American. Throughout the centuries, African Americans have been designated as economically, socially, and politically disadvantaged, and oppressed. As a consequence, they have suffered discrimination based on their social positions and their racial characteristics. Consequentially, when an individual says, "I am African American," the claim might mean that "I am oppressed, disadvantaged, and incapable." While these designations /narratives are socially constructed and decontextualized, each person who accepts and owns these identities is faced with the consequences of being/ belonging to these groups. Similarly, when I tell my family that we are from certain places in Africa, this might mean that our ancestors were poor, backwards,

uneducated, and so on (even if the premise of these arguments is illogical). The fact is that centuries of propaganda and colonialism has left these stories etched in the minds and sub-consciousnesses of the vast majority of people. Subsequently, when they think of Africa and African Americans, they think of the negative connotations attached to these groups.

I think what's important about the denial and the refusal to be linked to certain places and peoples is that we are still intricately bound to them whether we like it or not. The identities we select for ourselves are deliberate and intentional, while the ones chosen for us often clash with our understandings of self. However, that doesn't mean that we can easily separate ourselves from the identities others have projected onto us. This is precisely why people were outraged when Simone declared that she wasn't African American. People belonging to that group essentially challenged Simone's claim that she wasn't also a member. They wanted to hold her accountable even if she distanced herself from them. The allegations that Simone was a hypocrite, a traitor, and a sellout all seemed to be responses to her statement to Oprah. What makes these responses important and note worth is that they demonstrate the complexity of identity and even the policing of it. Davies and Harré (1990) note that,

We do struggle with the diversity of experience to produce a story of ourselves that is unitary and consistent. If we don't, others demand of us that we do. We also discursively produce ourselves as separate from the social world and are thus not aware of the way in which the taking up of one discursive practice or another (not originating in ourselves) shapes the knowing or telling we can do. Thus, we experience these selves as if they were entirely our own production. We take on the discursive practices and story lines as if they were our own and make sense of them in terms of our own particular experiences. (59)

The idea that a visibly Black woman born in the United States to Black parents can deny that she is African American seems absurd to many. If we follow the argument of Davies & Harré we can also see that it's likely that Simone has discursively produced herself apart from the social world, that is, the world of racial affiliation and identification. She is in essence—colorblind! Rather than root herself with a historically marginalized group, she has chosen to link her identity with being 'just American.' This seems to carry for her a greater degree of strength and power than the

group she has rejected. To say she is American means that she is a member of a superpower, she lives in the most powerful country in the world, she is free, and she has the world at her disposal. Although these ideas are not entirely true, they happen to be entangled with the discourse of what it means to be American. This is a direct contrast to belonging to one of the most disadvantaged groups within that very country.

Weil (1993) suggests that individuals have innate desires to feel rooted to places. This idea goes deeper than patriotism or nationalism. She posits that rootedness is an especially important desire of human beings. She argues that this need carries with it desires and expectations that are essential to each individual. She writes,

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active, and natural participation in the life of a community, which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.
(p. 84)

Therefore, rootedness is intimately connected with our understandings of our identities, meaning who we are and how we socially construct ourselves in relation to the social world. Rootedness doesn't only have to do with being physically tied to a geographical location; it has to do with our connections to struggles, to movements, to ideologies, to specific communities, and to each other. As an immigrant from the Caribbean, my own connections to Jamaica have in many ways informed my ontological and epistemological understandings of the social world (Stanley & Wise, 2002). Consequently, I am interested in how the identities of other Caribbean Immigrant girls have been shaped by their relationships to the social world. To investigate this I will explore their literacies. I believe that the literate lives of Caribbean adolescent girl will provide spaces where we can understand how their lived experiences as immigrants' shape who they are.

The Caribbean: A Contextualization

...My race began as the sea began, with no nouns, and with no horizon, with pebbles under my tongue, with a different fix on the stars./ But now my race is here, in the sad oil of Levantine eyes, in the flags of Indian fields./ I began with no memory, I began with no future, but I looked for that moment when the mind was halved by a horizon./ I have never found that moment when the mind was halved by a horizon... (Walcott, 1975)

The Caribbean and its Place in my Research

The Caribbean is a place of complexities. It is a region that can be examined in a plethora of ways and through various lenses. Such ways might include (but are not limited to): Racial, ethnic, religious, or even a lens that shines light on the colonial legacy that continues to impact and define so much of how we have come to understand this region. As a critical Black feminist scholar and a first-generation immigrant from Jamaica, I contend that the Caribbean is a place of great intricacy. While we can define it in ideological, geographical, or even social terms, Black feminism demands that we give voice to those who are from the Caribbean to define it in ways that are meaningful to them. This is through an act Patricia Hill Collins (2008) calls self-definition. I further contend that what it means to be Caribbean is entangled in the cultural memories of those who live there, and those who immigrate across the Black diaspora to places such as the United States. Since my work focuses on the literacies of Caribbean immigrant girls, below I will interrogate the nuances of a *Caribbean identity* (if such an identity exists) and the role memories can play in creating a contextualized image of the Caribbean that extends beyond geography, class, race, or politics. In what follows I will examine the term *Caribbean* in both

abstract and concrete terms to determine the role of memory in the construction of a possible Caribbean identity.

To use the term “Caribbean” one must understand the implications behind the use of the word. For example, many scholars have argued that the Caribbean might be better understood if the politics of the region were examined (K. A. Mitchell, 2016; Sutton, 2000). The scope of politics in particular is so complex and diverse that this approach can be used to gain greater insight into the people, the countries and the issues that define daily life and existence in the context of specific nations. Sutton (2000) has noted that, due to the relationships with both European countries and North America, politics within the region is extremely fragile and can also lend itself to a divisiveness that is based on either democracy or other forms of governing. He also posits that,

[There is a] “pervasiveness of insularity that causes each island to assert its differences from its neighbors; this is true even of countries that are conventionally grouped together, such as the Commonwealth Caribbean (all former or existing colonies of Britain). The difficulty is further exacerbated by the strength of the metropolitan connection which causes the countries to look outward rather than inward, placing more emphasis on cooperation with Europe and North America than cooperation among themselves. (Sutton, 2000, p. 78-79)

Consequently, this picture of the Caribbean is one that is diverse and multifaceted. While politics might be a central force that may come to define how we understand the region, it alone is not sufficient in demonstrating the nuances of the Caribbean and the people who occupy that territory.

K. A. Mitchell (2016) has noted that the politics of the Caribbean embody various intersecting issues such as class and race. Trinidad & Tobago is one example of this; it is a country with multiple racial and ethnic groups (Chinese, Portuguese, East Indian, and Black), however, while racial conflict is present there, issues of class that impact politics more directly. The demographics and the tensions that are present in Trinidad & Tobago cannot be easily understood outside the context of globalization, class, and racial representation (K. A. Mitchell, 2016). While

in Jamaica the politics emerged out of a response to whiteness and the rejection of racist ideologies, that doesn't mean that racial tensions don't exist on the island. Robinson (2011) has posited that,

Light skin color sits within a space of privilege. While this has global significance and relevance, it is particularly true in Jamaica, a former British colony. The majority of the population is of African descent, yet there is an elevation of Eurocentric values and a denigration of Afrocentric values in many facets of life, specifically in the promotion of light skin as an indicator of beauty and social status. (p. iii)

Consequently, while Jamaica is a predominantly Black country, the colonial legacy of racism still sits in the psyche of Jamaicans. Race, therefore, is less about discrimination from whites and more about ideologies, self-perception, and identity (Coleman-King, 2014; Hall, 1995; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Reuel R Rogers, 2006; Waters, 1999). This is an important reason why, in examining the Caribbean, we have to look deeper into how these factors can come to shape and impact the experiences of people who live there, and the experiences of those who eventually migrate to the United States.

The Politics of Race in the Caribbean

With this scholarship in mind, one might ask, *is there a singular Caribbean identity, and if there is, then what might that look like?* Waters (1999) has suggested that definitions of the Caribbean and the West Indies are “fuzzy” since some scholars have excluded places that are not geographically in the Caribbean, while others have suggested that these countries share a common West Indian history. She also theorizes that the language distinctions that are present (English, French, Spanish, and the patois associated with each) are not enough to suggest differences in terms of colonial legacy and history (Waters, 1999). Working within the confines of such intricacy, Waters’ research focuses on three specific commonalities that make the Caribbean a socially constructed location (Waters, 1996, 1999; Waters, Kasinitz, & Asad, 2014).

These forces include, “the legacies of European colonialism, the legacies of slavery, and the domination of the Island economies and cultures in recent times by the United States” (p. 10). Therefore, when we consider what makes the Caribbean and immigrants from this region a category, we have to consider how each of these forces inform the identities they come to construct in the context of the Caribbean and later as immigrants to the United States.

This question of a *Caribbean identity* is not only debated by scholars on the outside, it is also debated within the context of the Caribbean by leaders of various countries. In 1973, 15 former British colonies seeking economic independence from Britain formed the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) (Roberts, 2015). While CARICOM was formed out of an interest in independence for the Caribbean, countries like Belize, Guyana, and Suriname are also members of this collective. Their inclusion demonstrates that even geography isn’t enough to define the boundaries of the Caribbean and its interests. Later, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) formed with the goal of working collectively to further the interest of all Caribbean countries. According to Sutton (2000),

The newer ACS is open to all Caribbean countries (independent, “associated” and “dependent”), plus mainland countries in Central America and countries with coastlines in South America. It is therefore a wider grouping than that usually seen in the Caribbean, and this has led to problems in its operations. It has been impossible to agree upon a political programme or agenda, and the most successful areas of action have been those where easily defined interests coincide—for example, tourism, transport, disaster management, and communication and information networks. (pp. 80-81)

It’s clear that there is no simple way to characterize a true Caribbean identity. For individuals who live outside and within the Caribbean it is easy to see the ways in which globalization has impacted the people and the region. It is also easy to prescribe the Caribbean in geographic terms. However, for those of us who are first and second-generation immigrants, the Caribbean has deeper spiritual, cultural, and emotional meanings. Those meanings are not owned by the region, but by the people. Throughout my study, it is these individuals who will tell me what meaning

this place has for them, and how those meanings continue to inform who they are and how they come to see themselves in the U.S. and in U.S. schools.

While we can argue that the Caribbean is not generalizable, many scholars have created generalizations that have informed our perceptions of what it means to be from the Caribbean in terms of race and ethnicity. Moreover, this scholarship has led to many misconceptions about people who are from the region. Ogbu (2002), for example, has argued that Caribbean immigrants and immigrants from Africa (voluntary immigrants) are not concerned with issues of race in the context of the United States since they do not see whiteness as a threat. He argues that Caribbean immigrants do not let the stigma of race define their experiences in the U.S. since race is not central to their experiences in their home countries. Such ideas have led to the belief that race does not impact Caribbean immigrants in the way that it does African Americans. Ogbu (2002) notes that Caribbean immigrants,

Rarely question the authority and intentions of the schools or teachers; they do not complain that school curriculum and teaching methods are “Eurocentric” or are instruments of subordination. After all, they came to the United States to be taught the public-school curriculum and in the teaching style of the public school. To them whatever is in the curriculum is learnable. (p. 23)

This idea had led to misconceptions about what it means to be a Caribbean immigrant. Reid (1938), Ogbu (1998), and Rogers (2006) have each presented the Caribbean as a place where issues of class trump issues of race. However, the legacy of colonialism and slavery has left an indelible mark on the people of the Caribbean, and on the region. Ogbu (Ogbu, 1978, 2002, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998) has written extensively on the idea that, unlike African Americans, Caribbean immigrants do not allow race to cripple them and undermine their paths to success in America and in American schools. Such fallacies have led many to believe that race is an American problem, without considering deeply how issues of race and racism may manifest in people from countries within the Caribbean. Consequently, in the context of race as it pertains to the Caribbean, it should be noted that, while the majority of immigrants from the West Indies are

predominantly of African Ancestry, that doesn't mean that they all identify as Black. Vaughn (2005) notes that,

Here in the U.S. African Americans understand color distinctions like blue black, red bone, high yellow, and honey brown, but our main distinction is between black and white. In Cuba these terms—blanco y negro—are joined by others like mulato, jabao, trigueZo, and moro, as well as a plethora of distinctions within and in-between these descriptions. Much more colorful and expressive than the quadroons and octoroons that live in the history of North American racial talk, revealing a mathematical conception of color and ethnicity, the Cuban terms rely on appearance, temperament, and intention (of the speaker) as well as express a clear hierarchy in which white is right and black...ya tú sabes/you know the rest. (p. 1)

These distinctions make it even more challenging to define the Caribbean in simple terms, or in terms of language, culture, race, class, or specific ethnicities.

Blood Calling out to Blood

For this research, I would like the reader to consider the Caribbean in terms of pluralities. It isn't one thing, and there isn't one particular way to define it, but many. I would like us to consider the Caribbean as a socially constructed place of memories and experiences that come to define each individual from that region. Embodied within those memories are history, ideology(ies), and culture. These attributes are not fixed; they don't belong to the region but to the people. I would like the reader to position the Caribbean as a place where experiences and ideologies are informed by cultural memory. According to Rodriguez and Fortier (2009), cultural memory moves, changes, and shifts with time and place, and it belongs to historically marginalized peoples. Cultural memory is a form of resistance; it is necessary for the survival of people from the Caribbean since their existence is constantly under threat from dominant cultures and dominant ideologies. Cultural memory aims to disrupt and challenge ideologies intent on destroying it. This is also an important principle of the methodology of memory work (a

methodology aimed at collective analysis and theorizing around memories), which I discuss later in greater detail.

The expression *blood calling out to blood* (Rodriguez & Fortier, 2009) is at the heart of cultural memory. It is a concept used interchangeably with cultural memory since the essential tenets of cultural memory include biology, ideology, and the reproduction of cultural survival. When the expression *blood for blood* is used, it is to demonstrate the idea that such memories are not just a part of the psyche, but that they flow through us much like our DNA. These memories are not just about the past, present or future, they are the building blocks of who we are. They shape us, change us, and help us to resist, cope, and challenge. I introduce this term since I believe that such memories are embodied within historically marginalized peoples from the Caribbean. According to Rodriguez and Fortier (2009), these memories are transmitted through celebrations, through oral accounts, and through writing. Bal (1999) has also noted that,

Cultural memory, for better or worse links the past to the present and future...The memorial presence of the past takes many forms and serves many purposes, ranging from conscious recall to unreflected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what is lost to polemic use of the past that is what the stuff of cultural memory is, however, the product of collective agency rather than the result of physic or historical incident. (p. xiv)

It is this concept that drives my research on Caribbean immigrant girls. As girls they have been historically marginalized in the context of the Caribbean, and also in the United States.

Consequently, my study validates their cultural memories and works to understand how such memories can be analyzed through a process of memory work. Ultimately, this research seeks possibilities for solidarity between them and African American girls in schools.

Caribbean Immigrants in the United States

Caribbean immigrants began migrating to the United States in large numbers at the onset of the 20th century (Ira de A. Reid, 1938; Thomas, 2012). This large-scale migration began as a result of economic progress and agricultural opportunities in the United States. My own grandfather came to the U.S. from Jamaica as an agricultural worker in the 1940s. This initial mass immigration was later followed by another mass wave during the 1960s; this second wave was due in part to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. This legislation opened doors to family-based migration, which boosted the population of Caribbean immigrants dramatically in the United States (Fragomen, 1980; R. Rogers, 2001; Thomas, 2012). Thomas (2012) notes that,

Today the majority of Caribbean immigrants who come as US permanent residents are admitted based on family ties. The 1.7 million Caribbean-born Black immigrants in the United States represent just over half of all Black immigrants in the country; most come from Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic. (p. 2)

The third wave of migration for Caribbean immigrants took place during the 1980s and 90s. It was during this wave that the largest number of immigrants arrived in the U.S. from the Caribbean. According to Thomas (2012), “Between 1981 and 1990, an estimated 1.2 million Caribbean immigrants arrived in the United States; this number is about 1,000 percent larger than the number of arrivals between 1921 and 1930” (p. 3). The twentieth century therefore represents an important time for Caribbean immigrants. As a result of changing policies in the United Kingdom that restricted their movements and their abilities to migrate with their families, the number of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants increased significantly in the United States (Thomas, 2012). Therefore, this increase has contributed to a changing context, where the demographics of the United States are shifting in the direction of increased numbers of Caribbean immigrants. This shift isn’t just represented numerically, but culturally, socially and economically in many major cities throughout the country. That is, the increase in immigrants is apparent in

local events, holidays, the openings of businesses, and even the political issues that are at the heart of Caribbean communities.

To understand how the presence of Caribbean immigrants has altered the social and political infrastructure of the United States, one must consider the relationship between African Americans and Caribbean immigrants since their mass arrivals in the early part of the 20th century. Scholars often speak about the tensions that exist between these two groups as an ongoing struggle. This is due in part to limited access to resources for Black people more generally, and to the idea that immigrants are benefiting from resources that are designated for African Americans. Also, tensions are deeply rooted in the need for African Americans to be recognized as equals among their white peers/counterparts, and the needs of immigrants to be fiscal equals to their white peers (Butterfield, 2004; Coleman-King, 2014; Ira de A. Reid, 1938; Ogbu, 2002, 2008; Rogers, 2001; Waters, 1996, 1999, 2014). These tensions have manifested themselves in a few different ways. For example, scholars have argued that Caribbean immigrants have undermined the fight for racial equality in the United States by not joining forces with African Americans to combat segregation and discrimination (Ira de A. Reid, 1938; Waters et al., 2014). In her work, Waters (2014) also notes that, “most would agree that immigrant progress has often come, at least in part, at the expense of African Americans” (p. 370). These ideas and others have contributed significantly to how these groups perceive each other and how they come to perceive themselves.

Reid (1938) posits that when Caribbean immigrants began migrating to the United States in the early part of the 20th century, many considered this group “utterly unassimilable” (p. 411). This was due to their strong cultural identities, and their ties to the societies they were coming from. Hall and others (Coleman-King, 2014; Hall, 1995; Ira de A. Reid, 1938; Ogbu, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Warner, 2012; Waters, 1999) also note that Caribbean immigrants had enjoyed their majority status in the Caribbean before migrating to the United States and therefore would

not give up that status so easily to join with African Americans who were engaged in the struggle for racial equality. Caribbean immigrants did not see this as their fight. Instead, they saw the fight for economic progress and stability as a major concern, especially since they were also responsible for growing the economies of their home countries and supporting their families back home.

Reid (1938, 1969) notes that, “The immigrant moving from an area where he was the racial, if not economic, dominant majority adjusts less easily to the fish net-like separation of the races in the United States” (p. 414). This serves as the foundation for the struggle for recognition among Caribbean immigrants in the U.S. during a time when African Americans were seeking an end to Jim Crow and segregation. Rogers (2001) posits that, “Early first generation Afro-Caribbean immigrants feared that identification and interaction with African Americans would lead to status reduction and redound, as well, into diminished socioeconomic returns” (p. 85). Consequently, the early relationship between African Americans and Caribbean immigrants was riddled with social, economic, and political struggles for recognition and acceptance into the dominant society. Another catalyst that contributed to the tensions between these groups was white business owners who wanted to exploit cheap labor and therefore hired immigrant Blacks rather than African Americans, leading to the notion that Caribbean immigrants are model minorities and African Americans are lazy. Rather than joining in solidarity with African Americans, these immigrants often took advantage of these economic opportunities, further exacerbating the strain between the two groups (Rogers, 2001).

While over a century has elapsed since the arrival of the first mass wave of Caribbean immigrants to the United States, the same tensions continue to be an undercurrent in the relationship between these two groups. One particular place where the ideas concerning Caribbean immigrant and African American identities continue to play out is the public-school system. Caribbean immigrants represent one of the largest groups of Black immigrants in the

country, so it's important to not overlook the importance of schools as sites of struggle, resistance, acceptance, and solidarity (Coleman-King, 2014; Cheryl Ann McLean, 2008; Ogbu, 1978, 2002; Roediger, 2006; Waters, 1996, 1999; Waters et al., 2014). It is in these settings where ideas are produced, reproduced and even contested. Although schools are institutional structures that are regulated and controlled by states and national standards, they are also very porous and highly influenced by the bodies that exist within them. Massey (1994) argues that,

If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places. Moreover, such multiple identities can either be a source of richness or a source of conflict, or both. ...Instead of thinking of places as areas within boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings, are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as a place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. (p. 153-154)

The idea that schools can be sites where identities are embodied presents us with a rich site for understanding how Caribbean immigrants are constructing identities within these spaces.

To further expound on the idea that schools can do the work of offering insight into the development of identities among immigrants, I look to a 2004 *New York Times* article concerning the overrepresentation of Black immigrants at Harvard University. When it was found (by graduate student researchers) that a significant number of Black alumni were Black immigrants, this drew concern from many Black faculty within the Harvard community since the findings meant that many African Americans were not getting the opportunities due to them at this institution. Caribbean immigrants in this sense were taking their place at Harvard, and again this was seen as problematic since the admission process makes no distinction between African Americans and Black immigrants. This policy has even led to African American students categorizing themselves as 'the descendants' in order to distinguish themselves from Black immigrants (Rimer & Arenson, 2004). However, Harvard University makes no distinction between these groups. For them, Black is Black, whether you are from across the Black diaspora

or if you are African American. For many this generalization can be viewed as problematic, and for others it may be viewed as progress. However, in spite of how we understand the phenomenon, this situation has the potential to contribute tension to an already tense relationship between Black immigrants and African Americans.

The *New York Times* article also notes that Black immigrants made up approximately two thirds of the Black undergraduate student body at the university, further drawing concern as to why this was taking place (Rimer & Arenson, 2004). The authors and others interviewed all speculated as to the reason for this overrepresentation. They posit, "Since they come from majority-black countries, they are less psychologically handicapped by the stigma of race. In addition, many arrive with higher levels of education and professional experience. And at first, they encounter less discrimination" (June, 2004). When interviewed about the matter, Professor Henry Louis Gates noted that,

"This is about the kids of recent arrivals beating out the black indigenous middle-class kids," said Professor Gates, who plans to assemble a study group on the subject. "We need to learn what the immigrants' kids have so we can bottle it and sell it, because many members of the African-American community, particularly among the chronically poor, have lost that sense of purpose and values which produced our generation." (June, 2004)

Consequently, even though over a century has elapsed since the first wave of Caribbean immigration, there still remains room for understanding and analyzing Caribbean immigrants as a distinct group from African Americans. This analysis is concerned with the ways differences from and similarities with African Americans shape Caribbean immigrants academically and socially.

Section II

Literacies/ Identities and the Caribbean Immigrant Adolescent Experience in Schools

There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, specifically White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place. Americans assume that everyone will get their tribalism. (Adichie, 2014, p. 227)

When Adichie (2014) engages us in a conversation about the complexity of belonging as an immigrant (and the complexity of being African American), it is clear that the topic of identity for the immigrant is as salient today as it was over a century ago. Adichie's novel *Americanah* problematizes the relationship between immigrant Blacks and African Americans while staying true to the idea that to be Black in America is to be on the margins of society. This, of course, speaks to the discussion above concerning the decision of individuals to identify in ways that often contradict the identities that society might assign to them. For example, Adichie (2014) suggests that Black immigrants find it difficult to always identify with their African American peers because they do not want to be burdened with the heaviness that is racism. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly necessary for scholars to grapple with what this means for the relationship between these groups, and what this might mean in terms of the identities they construct.

With the demographics of Caribbean immigrants continually on an upward incline in the United States, we can no longer operate as the administration at Harvard University has when they declared that they do not collect data on who their Black students are (Rimer & Arenson, 2004). We should know, and we should care. According to Thomas (2012), "Collectively, Caribbean countries account for the majority of the Black immigrant population in the United States" and this trend continues: "In 2009, one in every two Black immigrants was from a

Caribbean-origin country (p. 3). Understanding who our students are is central to understanding how to address their needs as learners and citizens. With this knowledge we can determine why the nuances of race among Black people can lead to specific social, political, and even economic outcomes, such as who goes to Harvard and who doesn't. While my inquiry is concerned with the phenomenon of identity construction among Caribbean immigrant girls, it is also concerned with how those identities are constructed in spaces that they share with their African American peers.

I argue that in order for us to learn about the types of identities that are constructed among Caribbean immigrants, we must look to their literacies. This includes (but is not limited to), what they read, who they read, what they write, what they create, who they are in digital spaces, what they perform, and what such performances tell us about their identities. Stewart (2012) posits, for example, that providing culturally relevant texts to adolescent immigrant girls can make a significant difference in strong identity development and self-esteem. She notes,

Adolescent immigrant girls should not be excluded from the literature in our classrooms, nor should the only representations of them be stereotypical. Like all students, they need and deserve to read books in which they see themselves and their experiences. (Stewart, 2012, p. 22)

Arguments such as these are common among scholars who believe that positive representations of immigrants in literature can lead to positive outward expressions of self. However, while literature presents one avenue of understanding, we must consider the various influences in the lives of students and how they all come to shape their academic and social identities. Lam (2006) speaks to this idea when she argues that younger immigrant generations are looking to the use of emails, chatting, blogs and other resources to maintain connections to diasporic communities for various purposes. By connecting with these students, and using various tools/methods to analyze their literacies, we can begin to understand how the aforementioned resources are shaping their identities.

Black Immigrant Identities and Self-awareness

Being an immigrant from Jamaica and arriving during the third wave of Caribbean migration to the United States places me in a strategic location. As a critical Black feminist scholar, I have found my own identity entangled with the undercurrent of what it means to be Black, immigrant, and woman. During my adolescent years this position had me torn and often conflicted. Living in a largely Caribbean community (Flatbush Brooklyn) and attending predominately African American schools presented moments of uncertainty, and sometimes conflict. I had so much in common with my African American peers and yet I was always reminded that I/we are not like them. It's also important to state that they also didn't believe they were like us. These sentiments ran rampant through the Caribbean and African American community where I grew up and attended school. I belonged to multiple communities, but, while I didn't often see the difference between my peers and myself, I was always reminded that there were differences. Much of the rhetoric that shaped my understanding of what it means to be African American or a Caribbean immigrant came from within those communities and had significant implications for the development of the identities I constructed. I often found that I had to make decisions about who I wanted to be at different stages of my development. At one point or another I have identified as African American, Jamaican, West Indian, or Black. Accepting any one identity has always meant rejecting another or having to explain my choices to others. There is always pressure to decide, to pledge my allegiance, or to remain on the margins. Rogers has argued that, unlike other immigrants in the United States, Caribbean immigrants are indistinguishable from African Americans in terms of racial characteristics and histories of enslavement and racial discrimination (Rogers, 2006). While these similarities are important and can serve as the foundation for solidarity between these groups, their differences are also

significant in helping us to understand relationships between identities, cultures, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. Rogers posits,

Afro-Caribbeans are voluntary immigrants who claim a distinctive ethnic identity and hail from countries with very different racial dynamics than the United States'. They migrate from regions of the world where the population is predominantly Black. They are accustomed to living as part of the majority and seeing people who look like them in control of political and economic power. (p. 9)

Understanding the ideological position of Caribbean immigrants is essential in understanding how they construct identity and how they position themselves in American society. Being from a place where you have economic, social, and political strength, and then arriving to a place where you are perceived as powerless conflicts with one's ontology.

The questions of who we are in the world and how we come to accept those positions are central to my work. The concepts of belonging, allegiance, and my commitments to various communities had concrete consequences for who I was and who I am in this moment. I was what Lorick-Wilmon (2014) refers to as an in-betweeners, an individual who is not fully a member of any particular community. In time I have come to understand that the history and politics that are central to my Caribbean community in Brooklyn, my home country of Jamaica, and the African American communities in which I had membership are all entangled in the global politics of what it means to be categorically and characteristically Black. And at the heart of these politics is neoliberalism and globalization (see Giroux, 2004; Harvey, 2005; Porfilio, 2008).

The Elephant in the Room: Model Minority?

Critics have suggested that Caribbean immigrants who see themselves as distinctly different from African Americans are, in a sense, ungrateful. This ungratefulness is ascribed to them because they are perceived as benefiting from the fruits of African Americans' labor (V. Brown, 2015). However, the vast majority of scholars who write about the achievements of

Caribbean immigrants regard their abilities to distance themselves politically, socially, economically, and even ideologically as strengths (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Ogbu, 2008, 1978, 2002; Coleman-King, 2014; Rogers, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Rogers, 2006). For example, Ogbu has long argued that all African Americans have to do in order to boost achievement in (and outside of) schools is to look to their Black Caribbean peers (Ogbu, 2002). He posits that,

Black students, in the inner city and in the suburbs, lack the "effort optimism" or "norm of maximum individual effort" in schoolwork characteristic of several immigrant minorities. It is time for them to develop the norm of maximum academic effort as a part of their cultural heritage. Besides, Black children must learn to follow school rules of behavior and respond to public school pedagogy like other minority students who are more academically successful for doing so. (p. 28)

This argument implies to many that Ogbu and others are not proponents for the solidarity of these groups, but rather for conformity. Rather than propose that African Americans and Black immigrants form a coalition against a system used to divide them, Ogbu opts to accept the status quo. This and arguments like it have led to the idea that Black immigrants are better than African Americans, and are higher achievers. Ogbu and scholars who hold similar views miss the point that at the heart of the success of one group is the undermining of movements that benefit both. What I would like to consider below is what the literacies of Caribbean immigrants can tell us about their own understandings of self. Is Ogbu right when he suggests that race is not a factor that affects Black immigrants in schools? Is he correct in implying that the success of Black immigrants lies in their ability to ignore their social world, and their experiences within it? In order to know, I intend to look to their literacies. Olsen (2008) has suggested that, since schools are places where both immigrant and non-immigrant students engage in sustained interaction, they represent a site for understanding how identities are negotiated. The Migration Policy Institute (2011) also reports that,

In 2009, about 1.2 million children under the age of 18 resided in a household with at least one immigrant parent born in the Caribbean. Children in Caribbean immigrant families accounted for 7.8 percent of all children living in immigrant families. (April, 2016)

Consequently, with such large numbers of adolescents (either first or second generation) having Caribbean roots, school represents an important site for the study of how they construct identities.

Mapping the Literacy Debate: Historical Context and Present-Day Implications

When Goody and Watt (1963) asserts that there are distinct differences between literate and non-literate societies, implicit in their position is the argument that societies that are unable to read are uncivilized, and those that can are civil and progressive. They allege that the difference between literate and non-literate societies lies in their ability to capture the past and learn from it. The best way to do this, according to them, is to have a writing system that allows us to learn from our predecessors. They assert that,

Writing provides an alternative source for the transmission of cultural orientations it favors awareness of inconsistency. One aspect of this is a sense of change and of cultural lag; another is the notion that the cultural inheritance as a whole is composed of two very different kinds of material; fiction, error and superstition on the one hand; and on the other, elements of truth which can provide the basis for some more reliable and coherent explanation of the gods, the human past and the physical world. (Goody & Watt, 1963)

This statement and others throughout their work has sparked what has been called the Great Divide or The Literacy Debate between those who agree with these suppositions and those who challenge and oppose them. The idea that reading and writing are the main representations of a civil society seems limited and inadequate especially when we consider the implications for non-European cultures.

Another important element of Goody and Watt's work that cannot be overlooked is their implicit Eurocentric patriarchal position that asserts that only Western cultures (due to their writing systems) retain, remember, and change their trajectories based on their literate abilities. They argue that cultures from the East have mythological representations of their past because

they relied on symbols rather than words to capture collective memory (Goody & Watt, 1963).

They note that in such cultures,

There can be no reference to "dictionary definitions", nor can words accumulate the successive layers of historically validated meanings which they acquire in a literate culture. Instead the meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations, accompanied by vocal inflexions and physical gestures, all of which combine to particularize both its specific denotation and its accepted connotative usages. (p. 306)

This argument suggests that without the skill of writing these societies have to rely on the inconsistency of memories and face-to-face conversations in order to pass knowledge from one generation to the next. As a consequence, only important cultural details are maintained while unimportant, inconsequential details and memories are lost over time (Goody & Watt, 1963).

What Goody and Watt's work has unintentionally done is draw attention to the fact that White European culture is often viewed as superior to that of other cultures (insofar as literacy is concerned). Their ground-breaking work, although controversial, provides a space where we can begin to consider the relationship between identity and literate lives/experiences. If we take their findings at face value, then that means we accept that individuals from non-European or non-literate societies (according to their definition) are inherently inferior to their literate peers. We also accept that to be literate means that we are able to read, write, and decode alphabetic text.

This idea is directly challenged by Collins and Blot (2003) who argue that the meaning of literacy is intricately connected to power structures within society. They posit that, "We still lack an account of power-in-literacy which captures the intricate ways in which power, knowledge, and forms of subjectivity are interconnected with 'uses of literacy' in modern national, colonial, and postcolonial settings" (p. 66). Essentially, they argue that we have to take a closer look at who defines what it means to be literate and how that might affect marginalized communities/places.

Street (1993), a leading figure in the field of literacy studies, argues that how we define literacy has specific implications for diverse communities. He posits that since the emergence of the Literacy Thesis (Goody & Watt, 1963) anthropologists have challenged the idea of what it means

to be literate and the concrete implications behind these meanings. He notes that, “Relativist anthropologists have argued that absence of literacy, whether for individuals or for societies, did not necessarily mean lack of critical thinking” (p. 11). He suggests that what we need is a richer understanding of literacy that utilizes ethnographic approaches, which will allow for a more complex understanding of the relationships among culture, power, and literacy. Street provides a compelling argument for a more holistic approach to the study of literacy in a field that has been deemed “The New Literacy Studies” (NLS). NLS is concerned with literacy as a social practice, and not with literacy as just a set of skills (Street, 2006). He further pushes scholars to reject what he calls an autonomous model of literacy¹ for an ideological model² that is socially situated and is concerned with culture and its relationship to identities.

The very idea that literacy should be situated within a social context is a direct response to Goody and Watt (1963) who imply that what we understand as literacy and what it means to be literate have direct roots in European culture. Consequently, their definition of literacy is directly based upon European society/culture and standards. Since the emergence of the Literacy Debate, many scholars (J. Collins & Blot, 2003; Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Street, 1993, 2006; Gee, 2012) have joined the conversation around literacy and its relationship to cognitive skills. One seminal work in particular that challenged the relationship between cognition and literacy is Scribner and Cole’s (1981) work with the Vai people of Liberia during the 1970s. Using Ethnography and tools from the field of Psychology, they organized a study that examined the relationship between school-based literacy and literacy that takes place outside of school. They contend that scholars

¹ “The autonomous approach is simply imposing western conceptions of literacy on to other cultures or within a country those of one class or cultural group onto others” (Street, 2006, p. 2)

² [The] ideological model of literacy offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model- it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological practices” (Street, 2006, p. 2).

have noted the differences between literate and non-literate societies but they offer no proof of these differences. They argue that, “It is striking that the scholars who offer these claims for specific changes in psychological processes present no direct evidence that individuals in literate societies do, in fact, process information about the world differently from those in societies without literacy” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 7). This lack of proof prompted their important study. Scribner and Cole’s findings provide the groundwork for re-conceptualizing and rethinking what constitutes literacy and what it means to be literate.

The findings from this study were significant in that they refuted the idea that there is a direct correlation between literacy and cognitive skills. Scribner and Cole found few differences between Vai people who were and were not able to read Vai script on a cognitive measure (Scribner & Cole, 1981a, 1981b). What they did find was that schooled individuals were better able to explain processes and reason but there was no evidence that those who could and could not read had cognitive differences. I list four of their findings below because I believe they are important in demonstrating that diverse communities and peoples have a great deal to offer in terms of helping us to rethink how we understand literacy and literacies.

- We found no evidence of a direct relationship between modernity and cognitive performance; performances on modernity attitude questions and on cognitive tasks were predictable by various combinations of past experience, of which education was a major variable in common, but they were not predictive of each other. (p. 130)
- It is clear from the evidence we reviewed that non schooled literacy, as we found and tested it among the Vai, does not produce general cognitive effects as we have defined them...At best we can say that there are several localized literacy-specific effects on certain task specific skills...There is no evidence in these data to support the construct of a general “literacy phenomenon.” (p. 132)

- Although many writers discuss literacy and its social and psychological implications as though literacy entails the same knowledge and skills whenever people read and write, our experimental outcomes support our social analysis in demonstrating that literacies are highly differentiated. (p.132)
- Discrepancies between effects of these literacies and schooling challenged the hypothesis that schooling affects thinking by equipping children, in Greenfield's terms with a "written language." (p. 132-133)

If we take nothing away from Scribner and Cole's study, we should carry with us the understanding that individuals are equipped with multiple literacies and what that looks like varies by setting. We can also walk away with the understanding that, while schools are important in providing us with tools to explain processes and offer rationales for choices, formal education does not account for how literacies are embodied and practiced by individuals.

Section III

New Literacies and the Promise of Critical Black Feminism in the Study of Black Girls

As a response to the autonomous model of literacy, many scholars have pushed for a rethinking of literacy towards the embodiment of what they call literacies (Scribner & Cole, 1981a; Gee, 2012; Street, 2007; Street, 1993, 2006). According to Knobel & Lankshear (2007), "Literacies call us to generate and communicate meaning and to invite others to make meaning from our texts in turn" (p. 4). As highly interpretive, malleable tools, literacies can be great sources for understanding individuals, phenomena, ideas, and identities. Focusing on literacy

events³, practices, and the specific contexts in which these events and practices take place can be key in offering us an understanding of how students develop identities. Following Street's ideological model, we can also consider the role of culture and power in the ways literacies are understood and enacted.

Since its emergence, the field of NLS has been instrumental in widening the repertoire of what can be considered literacies and who can be considered literate. Through NLS, scholars have argued that literacies are not just what takes place outside of the individual, but what is inscribed upon the body (Gee, 2012; Bruce, 2003; Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). This inscription allows for a deeper reading of the individual since it allows us multiple ways of knowing. Bruce (2003) has suggested that by analyzing the writings of girls we can understand beliefs and identities, and even give voice to diversity. We can also look to the ways in which writing happens on the body. She writes,

The purpose of writing on and through the body is transformation of compulsory cultural (i.e., gender) and institutional (i.e., public school) systems that privilege one sex and one gender (and one race and one class) over other(s). Writing on and through the body works to revise inescapable systems that punish those who cannot or will not comply. (p. 45)

This example of how the scope of literacies is continually widening doesn't just stop with the body, but also extends to artifacts as representations of literacies. Artifacts become another way for literacies scholars to access what cannot be accessed by reading words on a page. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) discuss this very idea in their work. They posit that,

Artifacts smell; they can be felt, heard, listened to, and looked at. Paying attention to meaning through artifacts involves recognizing embodied understandings as responses. Objects carry emotional resonance, and these infuse stories. Objects uncover people and epistemologies. Not having respect for an object undermines a way of understanding the world, cutting off an important line of inquiry. (p. 10)

³ "New literacies events are the things that we make when we enact literacy practices. They are, in effect, texts, that manifest as talk and writings/print. Audio-visual and dramatic productions also count as new literacies events" (Staples, 2015, p. 44).

These varying ways of knowing are merely examples of the ways in which the field of NLS has and is continually transforming both research and practice.

While NLS changes how literacies are researched, it also changes the way we think about literacies from a sociocultural perspective. In his work, Gee (2008) discusses language/discourses⁴ as a central way of knowing/understanding individuals from diverse backgrounds, and the role of language in informing identities. He suggests that literacy/literacies are highly political and require a deeper analysis of meaning, which can be useful in addressing the nuances of language in a wide array of texts. Gee argues that meaning can be made when we understand the discourses in which language is embedded. This theoretical and practical contribution to NLS is significant because of its implications for diverse communities.

Discourses are important and central to NLS since researchers have to determine meaning and significance insofar as literacy practices, events, artifacts, and also the reading of the body are concerned. Discourses are important also, since, according to Gee (2008), they are “Intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structures in society, which is why they are always and everywhere ideological” (p. 162). Furthermore, “Control over certain discourses can lead to the acquisition of goods (money, power, status) in society” (p. 162).

Gee’s straightforward approach to addressing diverse perspectives in the research on literacies makes him an important figure in NLS. By not shying away from the realities of bias, prejudice, and misrepresentation in the study of diverse communities, he opens the door for a more critical approach to studying literacies. Analyzing power, privilege, race, class, and how the intersections of these issues shape our lived experiences is central to literacies and the lives of adolescents.

⁴ “A Discourse with a capital “D” is composed of distinctive ways of speaking/ listening and often, too, writing/reading coupled with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities.” (Gee, 2012, p. 155)

Section IV

Contributions of Black Feminist Scholars

Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating "women's experience" or "the Black experience" into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140)

Above, I provided a discussion of literacy and literacies that began with the assertion that non-Western cultures did not have the capacity to be civil due to their orality and their lack of ability to decode alphabetic text (Goody & Watt, 1963). I also provided responses to this position, which engaged us in what is deemed the Great Divide, or the Literacy Debate. Born out of the struggle to resist the notion that an autonomous model of literacy is acceptable, NLS became the field that allows scholars to expand the definition of literacy to include multiple ways of knowing. The NLS is important to the field of literacies since it affords scholars the ability to understand epistemologies and ontologies using a sociocultural framework. This means that we take into consideration the ways in which power impacts how we are read, and how we read the world. While NLS represents a powerful ideological model for research on literacies, it does not go far enough. The field has been dominated by white male and white female voices (Goody & Watt, 1963; Gee, 2012, 2014; B. Street, 2007; B. V. Street, 1993, 2006; Freire & Macedo, 1987; J. Collins & Blot, 2003; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). Absent from the debate are the voices of Black and brown scholars who can offer greater insights into diverse communities since the very communities they write about are the same ones they are from. I present a section from Crenshaw (1989) on intersectionality (above) because I believe we need the voices of Black women scholars to study the intersections of race, gender, class, Black girlhood/womanhood, and immigration.

Without discounting the contributions of the aforementioned researchers, I acknowledged that while they can discuss the circumstances of diverse communities, they might not fully understand the intersecting factors, and nuances of what it means to be Black, woman, immigrant, Black girl, or Black Caribbean girl. All of these categories require diverse communities of voices to fill gaps in the scholarship where literacies often come to be defined through Western patriarchal conceptions of what it means to know and be in the world.

Crenshaw (2015) has led the way in shaping how we look at and understand marginalized communities. Since introducing the idea of intersectional research (1989), she continues to push us to consider how intersectionality can work in uncovering and dismantling white supremacy, racism, classism, and ableism in research. She posits,

Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power...Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion. (Crenshaw, 2015, para. 6)

Crenshaw's words are noteworthy here since she has paved the way for critical Black feminist scholars like myself, and others. Research on literacies requires voices like those of Crenshaw and other Black women who can continue to push NLS in a direction of inclusiveness and can oppose white supremacist patriarchal epistemological positioning.

Three Black feminist scholars who have been on the forefront of this work are Staples (2015), Fisher (2009), and Richardson (2003). These African American Black feminist scholars have led the way in reshaping what we know about African American women and girls and their literacies. They have taken up the challenge of intersectionality and have used their scholarship to tackle racism, sexism, ableism, and classism, all at the intersections of Black

girlhood/womanhood. Below I will discuss their work and contributions to the scholarship on literacies and how their research is reshaping and reframing the scholarship on NLS.

Fisher: Black Literate Lives

Fisher begins her book (2009), with the reminder that Black people across the diaspora have been contributing to and using literacy as a tool for centuries. She touches on the activism that is inherently embedded in the works of African American poets and artists as a response to an unjust society. This reminder is important since it often seems that the literate lives of black people are controlled by white supremacist institutions and policies. This response to such dominant ideas demonstrates the literate struggle in which Black people have been historically engaged. Fisher's work outlines the agency of Black people in controlling and resisting white supremacist patriarchy.

One example of such resistance is the formation/work of independent Black Institutions (IBI) that Fisher argues were central, and continue to be central, to the survival of Black people. Since public schools were not meeting the emotional, social, and ideological needs of Black families, IBIs stepped in to fill this need. According to Fisher, these institutions afforded agency to families to be active in the construction of the knowledge of their children. She notes, "Black men, women, and children were challenged to name and define their purpose for learning and building literate lives as well as their commitment to strengthen their communities" (p. 65). Ironically when my brother and I arrived in the United States in 1991, my mother placed us in one of these institutions. My mother was told by a friend that it would be useful for my brother and I to go to what I would call a Black liberation school on Saturdays to prepare us for the schools we were going to attend. This was the place where I was introduced to Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, Kwanza, and the underground Black museums in Bedford Stuyvesant Brooklyn.

My brother and I remember this school fondly. We felt a great sense of support with homework and academics, but the school supported more than just schoolwork. Even though it meant little to us then, this was the only school where we learned to feel positive about Black culture and Black identity.

Fisher suggests that through Black newspapers, Black cultural nationalism, and Black power movements, Black people have been able to use literacy as a political tool. They have been able to look at the ways movement leaders enacted their literacies as acts of political struggle. Fisher presents an image of Black people's literate lives as agentic, political, ideological, and powerful. All of these representations are possible when examined through the work and lives of Black people. She notes, "Black literate practices demonstrate a dialectic relationship between the word—both spoken and written—with forms of social protest and literacy activism" (p. 25-26). The NLS benefits from scholars like Fisher because she engages the scholarship on literacies with examples of African American literate experiences even during times when they were denied access to traditional (Western) autonomous models of literacies.

Richardson: African American Literacies

Richardson's (2003) work also represents a powerful contribution to the study of African American Literacies. She examines the ways in which African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been demonized and subsumed under a more standard variety of English. She argues that this is due to white supremacist patriarchal structures of power that continue to discriminate and underestimate African American peoples' capacities for survival through language. She posits that "A major aspect of the Black literacy tradition is its rewriting of Anglo European conceptions of Black people" (p. 38). For Richardson, it is important to challenge racist

epistemologies, but it is also important for AAVE to be accepted as a respectable alternative discourse that can stand side by side with diverse varieties of English.

As an African American literacies scholar, Richardson's position represents Black women scholars who are at the forefront of challenging Western epistemologies and ontologies, or ways of knowing and being in the world. She taps into her personal experiences for a variety of reasons, one of which is to share the ways in which she has used Hip-hop as a tool in her teaching. Hip-hop for Richardson is a representation of AAVE that is relevant and accessible for communities, students, and for teaching. Her work with the African American community is indispensable in a world where power is entangled with discourse. Richardson's text is critical and political, and it engages the debate of what constitutes literacy and who decides. She notes,

For people of African descent, literacy is the ability to accurately read their experiences of being in the world with others and to act on the knowledge in a manner beneficial for self-preservation, economic, spiritual, and cultural uplift. African American literacies are ways of knowing and being in the world with others. (p. 35)

Being able to feel a sense of belonging in the world means that one has to be able to see oneself in varying ways throughout society. There has to be a counter-narrative that is not controlled by a white supremacist agenda. For Richardson, African Americans have to feel that what they know, and how they speak, can afford the same power and privilege as the ways of knowing and speaking that come from more privileged backgrounds.

Staples: The Revelations of Asher: Toward Supreme Love in Self (An Endarkened, Feminist New Literacies Event)

Another important Black feminist literacies scholar is Staples (2015). Staples has pushed the field of NLS in a way that challenges us to rethink all we understand and know about literacies and what they can tell us about Black women's literate lives. This occurs in a stage that

she refers to as the third wave of NLS (Staples, 2015). Working at the intersection of race, class, gender, and terror, Staples is able to demonstrate how Black women are able to use their literacies to resist, confront, empathize, and transform their very existences. By paying close attention to her data, Staples discovered that voices were emerging. These voices did not belong to any one participant, but they were entangled in each of her co-researchers. It is through these fragmented voices that she is able to challenge, resist, and explicate an identity that promises to change the lives of those who come to embody it.

In her study conducted with Black middle-class women, Staples (2015) engaged this group to further aid in the resistance of dominant conceptions of what and who Black women are. This text serves/functions in multiple ways. It is liberatory, literary, and academic all at once. This text also speaks to how solidarity can enable women across contexts to begin to challenge what Staples refers to as “terrors.” Terrors in this study refer not to big terrors, like acts of terrorism, but small ones which occur in our daily lives, like an end to a relationship (Staples, 2015). Such agentic practice serves as an example of how literacies can be transformational on local, personal, and global scales.

This endarkened feminist new literacies event is not only useful for Staples’ participants but it also changes the ways that NLS scholars can conduct research and make sense of their data through literacies. Methodologically and epistemologically, Staples’s research pushes back on any notion that Black women’s and girls’ lives can be easily categorized and named through a framework of white supremacist patriarchy. The power embedded in this text lies in the discovery of the supreme lover identity⁵, an identity that holds the power to be transformational for mind, body, and soul. Staples outlines a healing identity that Black women (and anyone else) can access in an effort to transform their lived experiences and literate lives.

⁵ “A lover identity is a person’s entire relational ideology and being.” (Staples, 2015, p. 13)

Black Feminism, New Literacies, Caribbean Immigrants: Toward a Vision of Solidarity

Understanding the nuances of what it means to be Black woman, Caribbean immigrant, African American, and Black girl requires a great deal of attention to detail. Each of these identities is entangled in spaces that are highly political. Literacies represent sites where researchers can inquire into these identities. In their analysis of second generation immigrants, Portes and Rumbaut (2001a) find that it is through the discourses of their participants where they are able to see the complexity of self-identification. Each participant's identity has concrete consequences. For example, one of their adolescent participants who was born in American to Trinidadian parents often identified as Trinidadian since she wanted to avoid the stigma of being African American. Portes and Rumbaut further posit that,

People whose ethnic, racial, or other social markers place them in a minority status in their group or community are more likely to be self-conscious of those characteristics. Youths may cope with the psychological pressure produced by such differences by seeking to reduce conflict and to assimilate within the relevant social context. (p. 151)

The complexity of identity and the nuance of self-identification are central to my work. Using a NLS framework and looking to Black feminism, I intend to continually push for an approach that centers on diversity. Much like Staples, Richardson, and Fisher, I also want to contribute to the scholarship on Black girls' literacies. My focus, however, will be Caribbean immigrant girls, since their experiences are often distinct from those of their African American counterparts/peers. Such research demands an insider-outsider approach (Emerson, Rachel I., & Linda L., 2011).

The Caribbean, as described above, is a rich locale and it has a great deal to offer NLS scholars in the study of Caribbean immigrant identities. Drawing on Black feminism and using frameworks that draw on Black feminist epistemologies can be the foundation for developing solidarity and bridging a gap between the two diasporic communities. Brandt and Clinton (2002)

have theorized local and global literacies, suggesting that researchers cannot focus so much on the local that they forget that global ideologies might also be playing a role in the literate lives of students. This is significant since immigrant students (even second-generation immigrants), bring with them knowledge, ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs from home/diasporic communities. They posit,

The result of local-global encounters around literacy is always a new rather than a single essentialized version of either. It is these hybrid literacy practices that NLS focuses upon rather than either romanticizing the local or conceding the dominant privileging of the supposed “global,” (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 7)

I contend that bridging communities through literacies has the potential to open doors to a wealth of knowledge that may seem inaccessible without NLS. Focusing on just the local or just the global and not examining the intersection of both can limit research. A consideration of the role these factors play in the literate lives of students can expand and open possibilities for solidarity among these groups.

Conclusion

Above, I reviewed the literature on Caribbean immigrants and new literacies. I presented a historical context of the Caribbean that I believe is central in understanding the lived experiences of Caribbean immigrants in the United States. This mapping demonstrated that the Caribbean is a political, social, economic, and ideological place, and those people coming from that site embody specific characteristics that inform their identities. This project also outlines the tensions between the African American and Caribbean communities, and how these tensions continue to shape and inform relations between these two groups. Understanding these nuances is essential in examining and understanding the roles literacies play in the identity development of

Caribbean immigrants. This clarity and knowledge is also important in expanding the range of voices committed to the work within diverse communities.

Another central aim of this paper is to flesh out the white supremacist position embedded in earlier conceptions of literacies. I provided a contextualization of NLS by beginning with the Great Divide in literacy research. This context allows readers to understand the importance of NLS in shifting how literacy is defined, but even more important is the understanding that the voices of Black women are missing from this scholarship. It is my hope that by drawing attention to this deficit my work can begin to fill the void in the scholarship on the literacies of Caribbean immigrants.

Chapter 2

Storying Identities: The Literate Lives of Caribbean Immigrant Girls from the Caribbean

Girls know they are losing themselves. One girl said, "Everything good in me died in junior high." Wholeness is shattered by the chaos of adolescence. Girls become fragmented, their selves split into mysterious contradictions. They are sensitive and tenderhearted, mean and competitive, superficial and idealistic. They are confident in the morning and overwhelmed with anxiety by nightfall. They rush through their days with wild energy and then collapse into lethargy. They try on new roles every week, this week the good student, next week the delinquent and the next, the artist. And they expect their families to keep up with these changes. (Pipher, 2005, p. 20)

Mary Pipher (2005) has documented the experiences of hundreds of adolescent girls throughout her career. She finds that a girl's adolescent years might be some of the most tumultuous in her life. During this time her body is changing, her brain is developing, and her emotional sense of self is at odds with the world as she sees it. She feuds with her mother and her friends, and craves validation from those around her (Pipher, 2005). But what impact do the experiences of one's adolescent years have on one's identity formation? What factors can we examine to understand how selves are constructed during this time? In her study, Pipher conducts research with girls from various backgrounds. She works at the intersection of class, race, and gender, yet it is not clear from her work how these particular factors inform specific identities beyond that of the unstable adolescent.

Therefore, it seems imperative to ask, how do one's background and lived experiences inform one's identities, and how do we understand this information? In what follows, I interrogate these questions and ask: *How can the lived experiences of Caribbean adolescent immigrant girls be used to understand their academic and social identity formation?* While Pipher's work remains an important contribution to the study of adolescent girls, it is not enough to understand the nuances of race and ethnicity as they pertain to identity formation. What cannot

be ignored are the roles of race, class, culture, and ethnicity as they pertain to Black girlhood or the lived experiences of Caribbean immigrant girls.

I have organized this chapter into four sections. In section one, I state the problem and outline the tensions concerning Caribbean immigrant girls in schools. I also put forth a theoretical framework that will enable the reader to understand how my position as a Black feminist scholar has shaped my understanding of and relationship to this research. In section two, I define girlhood. I aim to examine how factors such as race, class, and gender impact how we understand Black girls and their lived experiences. I later discuss issues of solidarity, and how a Black feminist epistemology helps us to rethink solidarity as it pertains to the relationship between African Americans and Caribbean immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean. I assess the ways in which both groups have been represented historically, and how such representations have come to shape our understandings of them and their understandings of each other. In section three, I delve into the studies that have been conducted with girls in schools, looking both at findings and implications. Specifically, I look at four studies, each of which contributes important insights into issues of race, gender, place, and ethnic representation. I discuss each study and ask: *How can they help us to understand Caribbean immigrant girls' identity formation, and the purposes of the identities they construct both socially and academically?* These studies will help to highlight the gaps present in the study of Caribbean immigrant girls' constructions of identities through literacies. In section four, I close with a discussion of the research findings and implications for moving forward. I also discuss the connections between current theory and practice and their applications for researching the lives of Caribbean immigrant girls and their identity formations.

Section I

Problem

I have reviewed the literature on Caribbean immigrant girls and their presence in American schools, and I have found that there is a dearth in the research. While representations of white and African American girls are prevalent, the presence of Caribbean immigrant girls is very limited if they do appear at all. Below, I include studies that offer us insights into my questions about Caribbean immigrant girls' identity constructions through literacies. While these studies are informative, interesting, and important, they do not present a full picture of how these girls are making sense of their identities in racialized, ethnic, gendered, collective, and historically contextualized ways, or through the use of literacies. My work aims to fill this gap. Writing as a critical Black feminist scholar from the so-called Third World, I am responding to calls from Black women researchers (P. Collins, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2011; hooks, 2014), who have argued that more complex, nuanced representations of Black girls are necessary, especially from the standpoint of women from across the diaspora.

Another important position that I assume in this research is one that takes a stance for solidarity. I draw on the work of Mohanty (2003), who writes:

I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interest as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. (p. 7)

I use this same definition throughout this study to discuss the importance of community and the collective in the struggle against racist, sexist, and classist ideologies. Consequently, I find that the literature on immigrants from the Caribbean and their African American counterparts presents these two groups as adversaries. Often, Caribbean immigrants are presented as model minorities,

while African Americans are represented as low achievers (Ogbu, 1978, 2002; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). What this has done over time is impede the progress of challenging white supremacist patriarchy by creating the perception that their problems lie in each other, and not in an unjust system. It has also worked to create economic, social, and ideological divisions between African Americans and Caribbean immigrants. My work aims to challenge this intra-racial tension. Rather than working from a standpoint that says that Caribbean immigrant girls need to be recognized for their individuality, I argue that studying how and why they construct specific identities can help us to understand how we can push the work of solidarity forward. Dean (2016) argues that:

The intensification of capitalism amplifies pressures on and for the individual. These pressures are political: The individual is called on to express her opinion, speak for herself, get involved. She is told that she, all by herself, can make a difference. Her response to ubiquitous demands for feedback take the place of collective action, rendered as either impossible or too repressive to constitute a real alternative. (p. 55)

Consequently, if I take a stance that argues for solidarity, I also have to consider how institutionalized structures prevent us from advancing such an agenda.

While I argue that solidarity is key, I also believe that in order to achieve this we need to first know what the historical tensions are and the purposes these tensions serve, or who these tensions serve. What is important to note is that the oppression and marginalization of women and girls of color have long since served the needs of a white supremacist patriarchy. hooks (2013) uses the term “patriarchy” regularly in her work, “to describe the interlocking political systems that are the foundation of our nation’s politics” (p. 1). She expands this definition by noting that:

Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence. (hooks, 2013, p. 2)

White supremacist patriarchy therefore could be characterized as male dominance, insistent on the alienation of Black women’s voices. It includes a persistent disregard for race, class, and gendered representations from a feminist standpoint (hooks, 1982).

Subsequently, such systems have exacerbated tensions between and amongst sub-groups in this category, each fighting for recognition, rather than recognizing that unification, camaraderie, and solidarity are key to the cause of egalitarianism. My work focuses on the Caribbean immigrant girl from the Caribbean because she and her African American sister have been on the margins of society and also on the margins of research. Mohanty (2003) argues:

Claiming universality of gender oppression is not the same as arguing for the universal rights of women based on particularities of our experiences. I argue that the challenges posed by Black and Third World feminist can point the way toward more precise, transformative feminist politics, based on the specificity of our historical and cultural locations and common contexts of struggle. (p. 107)

Evans-Winters (2011), continues that line of argument and contends, “White women have visibly dominated the women’s movement, which means their research is conducted on themselves or white female adolescents... Researchers tend to assume that white females and Black females have similar socialization processes” (p. 13). Therefore, my work is in direct contrast to scholars such as Ogbu (2002) who argue that African Americans need to adopt the practices of Black immigrants so that they too can achieve success in America. I argue that success for one group is an individualist position, and it prevents us from moving the cause for solidarity forward. Dean (2016) notes that:

[When] Making individual difference the basis of our politics, we fail to distinguish between ... capitalism and emancipatory egalitarian politics. Even worse, we strengthen the ideology that impedes the cultivation of politically powerful collectivities. To call on people to ground their politics in the personal experiences that differentiate from others is to reinforce capitalist dynamics of individuation. (p. 35)

These ideas are at the heart of my scholarship and are the focal point of this paper. While I agree with Dean that an individualistic position will not help us to make progress as a collective, I do believe that we have to work with individuals to understand how they are impacted and how they impact the societies they inhabit. This is one way for us to be informed and to know what to challenge, insofar as schools and society are concerned, as we move towards a more egalitarian society. I struggle through these tensions as I work to understand how the academic and social

identities of Caribbean immigrant girls can help us to advance the research into their development and success.

Black Feminist Epistemology: Towards a Methodology of Solidarity

Throughout this research I employ a critical Black feminist approach as a methodological framing for my work. I draw on Collins (2008) and her call to women from across the diaspora to be in charge of Black feminist thought. I also draw on this methodology, because Collins recognizes that women from the first and Third Worlds need to join forces in order to transform the societies in which they live. She posits that,

Placing U.S. Black feminism without the context of global gendered apartheid provides new insights into U.S. Black feminist practices and thought. Expanding the process of self-definition...beyond individual and group identity for African American women suggests that the transnational context would greatly aid U.S. Black women's struggles for group survival and institutional transformation. Self-defined Black diasporic feminisms require links among U.S. Black feminism and feminisms expressed by women of African descent as well as ties with transnational women's rights activism. (p. 255)

My work responds to this call. I believe that Black feminist thought allows for agency, self-empowerment, movement building, and solidarity. Using this theoretical framework will enable me to call into question the dominant structures that position Black women and girls at the margins of our society. Harding (2004) argues that, "Black feminist thought consists of ideas produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint for Black women" (p. 105). I take up this methodological framing and use it throughout this paper to question, assert, and to push back on ideas that aim to divide, disempower, and alienate diasporic women. Collins (2008) also asserts that one of the most important aspects of Black feminist thought is that it allows for self-definition. She argues that Black women must be able to name the world for themselves. This agency is necessary in order to transform the lives and realities of Black women. By defining our

worlds, we prevent others from naming it for us, and consequently, these definitions allow us to regain our dignity, our self-respect, and our voices.

The notion of self-definition is extremely important throughout my research as I work to define myself and my relationship to this study. I believe self-definition helps me to demonstrate to the reader how my own literacies have allowed for a greater understanding of self and a deeper reflection on my relationship to the social world. I also do the work of bringing Black immigrant girls from the margins to the center, to join their Black American sisters in the struggle for solidarity.

Trouble at the Intersections:

The struggle to unify Black women⁶ and girls from across the diaspora in an effort to challenge white supremacist patriarchy represents a difficult endeavor. The obstacles to this goal lie at the intersections, and they cannot be ignored. Crenshaw (1991) posits that, “Ignoring differences within groups contributes to tensions among groups” (p. 1242). Therefore, this research cannot overlook intersectionality. I make arguments throughout this paper that intra-group needs, or the needs of the individual, have to be sacrificed for the greater good of the collective. For example, Black Caribbean middle-class parents, who are typically represented as conservative in their positions, would have to cooperate with working class Black parents for the needs of all Black children. Such intersecting values aim to disrupt the movement towards

⁶ I often bring up women and, at times, use women/woman rather than girl(s) since many of the same issues that impact Black women also affect adolescent Black and immigrant girls. Also, a large amount of scholarship that has focused on Black women holds significant implications for Black girls.

There are overlapping and mutually reinforcing similarities between the ideologies surrounding young people, the practices enacted to control them, and the ideologies used to monitor and contain the lives of Blacks (especially Black women) through codes of respectability and boundaries of exclusion. (Cox, 2015, p. 9)

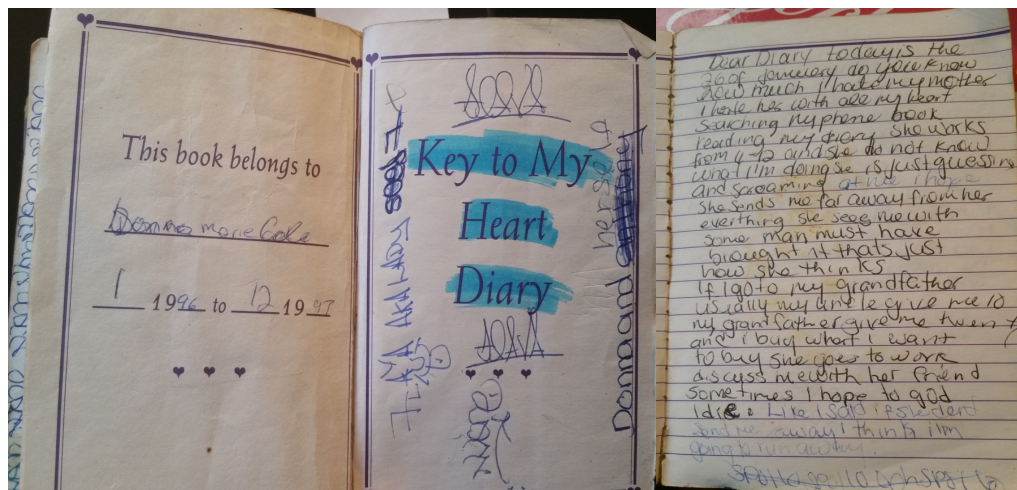
solidarity since one group uses their difference to advance their children/cause, forgetting often that some short-term benefits yield long-term consequences. However, in understanding how to challenge and disrupt such obstacles we have to look to the literacies of Black adolescent girls. By working with and relying on their relationships with their parents, the larger school community, and the social world, we can begin to tease out potential answers/starting points of resistance. Crenshaw (1991) also argues that,

Although collective opposition to racist practice has been and continues to be crucially important in protecting Black interests, an empowered Black feminist sensibility would require that the terms of unity no longer reflect priorities premised upon the continued marginalization of Black women. (p. 1295)

This is another important point as we consider what *Black Interests* are as they pertain to the future of Black girls in America. Examining the common interests of Black girls and women is crucial in preventing further marginalization of the group. If Black women are not at the center of resisting and pushing back on dominant ideologies, then we make possible the reproduction of the subordination of Black women and girls. It is also possible that if we do not work to resist, then we are allowing patriarchy to thrive (Crenshaw, 1991). All of these ideas are important to my work because intersecting values within groups often threaten to trump the needs of the larger collective. This recognition is necessary as I interrogate the literature, the experiences of Black girls, and my relationship to it all.

Researcher Positioning

Figure 2- 1



Diary Entry 1/26/1996

Dear Diary, today is the 26th of January. Do you know how much I hate my mother? I hate her with all my heart. Searching my phone book, reading my diary. She works from 4-12 and she does not know what I'm doing. She's just questioning, and screaming at me. I hope she sends me far away from her. Everything she sees me with, some man must've bought. That's just how she thinks. If I go to see my grandfather, usually my uncle (who lives with him) gives me \$10 and my grandfather gives me \$20, and I buy what I want to buy. She goes to work, discusses me with her friends, sometimes I hope to God I die...

(Donna-Marie's Personal Diary, January, 1996)

I wrote the above diary entry in the winter of 1996. I was fourteen years old at the time. It had been four years since my brother and I emigrated from Jamaica to New York City. My mother was single, working full time, and raising two teenagers alone. We barely saw her during the week and on the weekends, she worked a job that kept her away. As a first-generation immigrant, she relied on my grandfather and uncle to help her with my brother and I since they were the only family we had in the United States at the time. As I sifted through a box of memories last summer, I encountered pictures, letters, and symbolic memorabilia (pins, lyrics to songs I adored, posters), and finally I encountered the diary. I wanted to ignore it because of the memories it would trigger. Also, when I had read the diary in the past, it seemed that someone who I did not

know, and who I did not care to remember wrote it. This girl was irrational and angry. Scribbled throughout her diary are the names of people she used to know before emigrating and people she would soon forget. If I were to be asked about who I was during those years, I would say: I was responsible, honest, mature, hardworking, happy—but my diary suggests something different. Even as I read the words on the pages, I realized that I had deliberately left out details, truths only known to me. Maybe it was because I knew I could not escape the written word, or maybe it was the fear that my mother would find this book and find out things that I did not want her to know. Either way, the diary is a representation of my adolescent self—a self that is so far removed from the one I know at this very moment.

In her study of Victorian girls and their uses of diaries in constructions of identities, Hunter (2010) finds that the diary is a tool that contributes to adolescent girls' greater self-understanding. She posits that, "The diary initiated a discourse about the self rather than establishing a definition of what the self was or ought to be" (p. 243). My diary did exactly that. For over six months I wrote relentlessly about what I was feeling, what I felt about others, and what others felt about me. My gaze always seemed to be pointing inward. The themes of my adolescent years were of anger, happiness, frustration, love, death, and loneliness. I introduce my diary as an artifact, a memory, and a living representation of the many identities I embodied during those years. In 1996, it was one of the tools that I chose for an outward expression of self. Today's diary often takes the form of a blog, a social media page, or a Snapchat with friends. The choices and outlets available to today's adolescents far outnumber the ones that were available to me just a generation before. My literate practices during my adolescent years demonstrate the complexity of my identities, and they also demonstrate a need for friendship, love, and family. According to McCarthy and Moje (2002), "A person's identity is not necessarily incoherent and contradictory... But identity can be hybrid, it can be complex, and it can be fluid and shifting as a person moves from space to space and relationship to relationship" (p. 231).

The fluidity of my identities strikes me as I consider the words of McCarthey & Moje (2002). The notion of a fixed identity has also been challenged in the work of Staples (2011; 2016) as she writes about the fragmented selves of a group of African American women after 9/11. Her data reveal dominant voices that emerged from her group members. These voices were not specific to any woman, but rather each voice performed a particular emotive center and had a specific identity of its own, irrespective of the women's overall identities. Staples refers to these voices as fragmented selves (2016), and I believe that this is another example of the complexity of identity formation and how new literacies scholars are pushing the boundaries of how identities can be studied and understood.

The above definitions and conceptions of identities are helpful for me as I reflect on my adolescent years. For example, in January of 1996 I hated my mother, was angry at life, and felt frustrated at her for not understanding me (or what I was experiencing). Then, there were moments when she was my comfort, my link between the world I left behind and the new one I occupied. My adult self tells me a story now that is different from the one I told myself as an adolescent girl. With time and distance, I now understand that my mother had also left behind a life in the Caribbean to start over in America—a rather difficult transition for an adult. She was also alone, single, living in New York City with two adolescent children. I empathize with her today, but back then she was the enemy, the villain—the one thing standing between me and the rest of my life.

My mother was a central theme throughout my diary; she was both adversary and ally. Her guidance and love kept me grounded, even as I resisted and fought for my independence. Scholars have found in their research with Black girls that mothers are essential parts of their identities, influencing ideologies and providing the grounding that girls need to navigate the period of adolescence (Coleman-King, 2014; Collins, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2011; McLean,

2010). Collins (2008), specifically, argues that the Black family is an essential force in the survival of the Black girl/woman in a racially charged context.

As a first-generation immigrant in New York City, I found myself at the intersection of two worlds. In one I was trying to be American, in the ways that I had imagined an American to be. I practiced my “American twang” daily. I would ask my mother, “Should I still call you Mummy, or should I call you Mom (the title that would signify my assimilation)?” I had to be able to use “ain’t” in a sentence (this was something that I deliberately practiced). Things that now seem insignificant and trivial had so much meaning in those days. Waters (1999) argues that the Caribbean immigrants she interviewed for her study “saw their futures as tied to the United States; they mostly wanted to be seen as Americans and understood America to be a land of freedom and opportunity above all else” (p. 93). This is an important finding in Waters’ study, mainly because much of the scholarship on immigrants from the Caribbean suggests that Caribbean immigrants are mainly concerned with maintaining separate ethnic identities in America. One of the factors responsible for this is the racial tension that continues to be pervasive in American society. Waters (1999) also found that the reason many of her participants maintained such strong ethnic identities was to create buffers against racism and other forms of discrimination directed toward people of color and those who are poor in America.

Consequently, my narrative of girlhood demonstrates the nuances of identity construction for an immigrant girl. It further demonstrates the many factors that are at the heart of one’s identity. Family is central to this, since they bring with them attitudes and beliefs that are inevitably pass down to their children. hooks (2014) has argued that, “Many third world nationals bring to this country the same contempt and disrespect for blackness that is most frequently associated with western imperialism” (p. 93). While this is true, and can be supported by evidence (Rogers, 2006; Rogers, 2001; Ogbu, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Coleman-King, 2014), it needs to be contextualized. When my mother would tell me not to be like my African American girl

friends at school, and “not to follow those Americans,” what she was essentially saying was that we were somehow better than African Americans, and in order to maintain our status as *superior* (illogical as this might seem) we had to remain separate. Such rhetoric is important to a white supremacist patriarchal system. This is because if we believe that we are better, different, or even more advantaged than our African American peers we won’t care about issues like institutional racism or discrimination. Instead, we will attribute those to African Americans and look at those issues as separate and distinct from our experiences. When groups are separated, they can be controlled, influenced, and pitted against each other, not to further the cause of their communities, but to maintain structures of injustice and inequality (hooks, 1982; Collins, 2008; Fisher, 2009; Mohanty, 2003).

What’s important to recognize is that these were messages that my mother brought with her from Jamaica to America. She knew long before she had met an African American person that they were “inferior” in terms of work ethic, education, and ambition. A system of colonization had long planted seeds of division throughout the Black diaspora, resulting in intragroup conflict in spite of where these groups are located globally. Hall (1995) notes that, “No cultural identity is produced out of thin air. It is produced out of those historical experiences, those cultural traditions, those lost and marginal languages, those marginalized experiences, those peoples and histories which remain unwritten” (p. 14). Thus, my mother’s rhetoric was not of her own creation, but was part of a larger historical movement to conquer and divide. Anti-solidarity movements rely on such ideas to maintain divisions among groups and to halt progressive movements.

Subsequently, as my mother held steadfast to her beliefs, I rebelled. I sought comfort and camaraderie amongst both my Caribbean and African American friends. What I was not able to find in individuals, I sought in books. My literate life presented me with opportunities to make sense of what I had been experiencing. It was during this time that I found *Annie John* (Kincaid,

1997), *Lucy* (Kincaid, 1990), *The Autobiography of my Mother* (Kincaid, 1996), *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (Danticat 1998), and *The Friends* (Guy 1974). I found girls like me in these texts. The protagonists in these novels were all adolescent girls. They were all from the Caribbean, and they were all puzzling out what it meant to be an immigrant, a girl, and an outsider. They were immigrants in a new country trying to find their way, trying to make sense of their duality. While hooks (2014) would argue that African Americans and Third World nationals are often at odds ideologically, I believe that through literary texts we are able to see these differences reconciled. The reconciliation happens through a process of awareness, of engagement with communities. This consciousness happens through interaction with friends and through the bonds we develop with our African American peers. Throughout these texts, I see awareness, whether explicit or implicit, that division among groups who share a common interest is problematic and divisive. Stewart (2012) argues that even though Caribbean immigrant girls in literature face complex issues with identity, “we should not view this population solely through the lens of immigrant youth because they are also teenage girls who are authoring their own coming-of-age experience” (p. 21). Being able to see the issues that bound us even in girlhood can be central to resisting propagandas that center on our differences. Often it is hard to name injustice. Through the examination of literacies and other forms of representations, we can identify and dismantle these anti-progressive ideologies.

The collage consists of three distinct images. On the left is a color photograph of three young people, two men and one woman, standing outdoors in front of a green lawn and trees. They are all wearing blue graduation caps and gowns. The man on the left has his arm around the woman in the center. In the top right is a photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The note is written in black ink and includes the name 'To: Danna', a date '11/25/91', and a message about a school trip. On the right side of this note, there is a small drawing of a person and some additional handwritten text. In the bottom right is a photograph of another handwritten note on lined paper. This note is titled 'A Soul' and contains several paragraphs of text written in black ink, discussing themes of love, loss, and personal growth.

In trying to make sense of my girlhood, I looked to my diary, to pictures, to music, to memories, and to family. I needed to understand how my background as a Caribbean immigrant girl, and my lived experiences, impacted my identity formation. Understanding my identities is not just about me trying to know who I am. It is also about me working to understand how my story fits into a larger context/narrative. It is about understanding why Caribbean girls use their agency to form certain identities and what purpose those identities serve in a white supremacist patriarchal society. The understanding of these identities can be useful for teachers, researchers, practitioners, and communities in building stronger and more unified schools, communities, and peoples.

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identity as both reader and writer. Through my poetry, diary, pictures, and other artifacts I was able to develop an identity as an independent, strong, assertive, rebellious adolescent girl and student. My academic and social identities were fluid and malleable, changing with age, time, support, lack of support, love, resentment, and friendship.

Consequently, to make sense of myself as a piece of a larger puzzle, I turned to the idea of disordered coherence (Staples, 2011a). Disordered coherence is a method described by Staples as a way individuals cohere literacy practices in order to understand selves (Staples, 2013; 2011b; 2012). The artifacts I include in Figure 2-2 are some examples of texts that I examined to make sense of my identity as a Caribbean immigrant girl. On the upper left is a picture of my friends and I taken the year that I graduated middle school. I was thirteen at the time. On the right are some of the messages my friends wrote in my yearbook that same year. My yearbook demonstrated the unity among our group of friends and the need for us to remain in contact, to be connected. Finders (1997) posits,

The yearbook provided a pictorial history, freezing moments of friendship, of athletic prowess, of academic endeavors. It provided, too, a unique opportunity to blur the boundaries between school-sanctioned literacies and literate underlife: Sanctioned time in the school context given over to leisure, word written publicly yet secretly and quite literally written across the faces of authority while under the watchful gaze of those in authority. (p. 45)

This yearbook represented another space where solidarity is fostered even amongst adolescent girls both from the Caribbean and America. It is a space to speak, to be vulnerable, to be honest and uninhibited. It is a space controlled by us girls (and sometimes boys)—an important space in learning the importance of community.

The two bottom figures are poems I authored while in high school. One is titled “Innocence,” and the other, “A Soul.” In the artifacts that I examined, and through discussions with friends and family, I find a picture of myself that exhibited a duality. I was Black, but not African American. I was Jamaican, but not Jamaican like my mother. I had no Jamaican friends

in school, I rarely spoke patois, and my family back home accused me of being a *Yankee*. These contradictions made it difficult to situate myself. It prevented me from developing a unified identity, a coherent way to present myself to others (that was important for me as an adolescent). For example, I was never able to say, *I'm Jamaican*, and ever feel honest in this representation. In many ways I do not fully know what it means to be Jamaican or what would denote a true Jamaican identity. I also found it very difficult to say, *I'm African American*. Adichie (2013), touches on this complexity in her novel *Americanah*. She presents a character who is an immigrant from Nigeria who struggles to fit into American society. Her protagonist does not want to be African American; she rejects this identity. She embraces her Nigerian self and sees it as an asset in a society where Blackness has been pathologized.

In an interview about her book held at Penn State University, I asked Adichie about the complexity of self-representation in her novel. She explained that, although her main character Ifemelu rejects an African American identity, she now understands why this is so. Adichie commented that African Americans have been so negatively portrayed globally, so she also had a particular image of them in her mind that prevented her from ever adopting this identity. However, with education Adichie realized the richness and powerful history of African Americans in this country. She said that this has pushed her to identify as Black, and not just Nigerian. The term Black in this sense seems to encompass multiple representations of self. It is not just about one group of people in America, but the entire racial group, despite ethnicity. I also agree with Adichie and have come to identify as Black in my adulthood. I embrace that term as unifying and encompassing. I see it as one that allows for solidarity and alliances. It's clear that while Adichie and I have found comfort in identifying as Black women, in the sense that we are not just our ethnicities or nationalities, there were significant factors that prevented us from adopting African American identities. This reality was extremely tangible for my adolescent self. To be African American wasn't desirable, and this was an important part of my identity

development as a girl growing up in Flatbush, Brooklyn during the 1990s. In her study on the lives of adolescent girls, Forman-Brunell (2001) notes that:

Black girls sought to create strong identities in a world that saw them in blatantly stereotyped terms. Foremost in the dominant culture were images of the mammy, the maid, the temptress, and, for young girls, the pickaninny. Black women in films, on the stage, in books, and on the radio were either asexual servants or hypersexual women of loose morals. Against these images, black girls had the weapons of family, community, and education. For all too many, these were not enough. (p. 27)

Consequently, what it means to be an immigrant girl, an African American girl, or even a girl who identifies racially or ethnically, all have concrete implications. These implications can include the ways girls are positioned by others and the ways they choose to position themselves.

Section II

Defining Adolescent Girlhood

Figure 2- 3



My brother, my grandmother, and I in Jamaica in the 1980s

The autobiographical representation I present above centers on my experiences during the years between when I first arrived in America and when I began high school. Those years seemed

to me the most pivotal in terms of my intellectual and social development. Even as an adult I am still immensely fascinated with the ways in which specific identities we choose for ourselves, and the ones that we have been offered, can shape who we are and who we become. The factors that can play an important role in this development include age and gender. My mother moved to America when I was six years old and I saw her again when I was nine years old. In those years I was more an adolescent than I was a child. I had the responsibility of caring for myself in ways that now seem unreasonable. I learned to cook, to iron, to clean, to wash (always by hand), to go to bush (my grandmother's farm), and to be my grandmother's right hand. I longed for my mother then, and, since I wasn't fully convinced she would return, I adjusted to life without her. My family would argue that they did not know of anyone who cried like I did back then. Soto (2010) documents similar experiences among Mexican immigrant girls whose mothers had left them behind to start new lives in the United States. She discusses the challenges when these girls are reunited with their mothers, and also their refusals to join them since they had grown distant in the years after their departures. Danticat (1998), also writes about this in her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Her protagonist, Sophie, was left behind in Haiti by her mother for twelve years. By the time Sophie was able to join her, she regarded her mother as a stranger. Consequently, what it means to be an adolescent girl is contingent upon multiple factors, such as location, circumstances, socio-economic status, and dominant messages about Black femininity.

The World Health Organization (2016) defines adolescence as:

The period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19.... the duration and defining characteristics of this period may vary across time, cultures, and socioeconomic situations. This period has seen many changes over the past century namely the earlier onset of puberty, later age of marriage, urbanization, global communication, and changing sexual attitudes and behaviors. (WHO, 2016)

This definition considers a wide range of dynamics. Pipher (2005) similarly defines adolescence as, "a border between adulthood and childhood." (p. 52). (C. Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2008), have

defined adolescent girlhood as, “age 13 or 14 up to 16 or 17, and so on” (p. 20). In their work, they are clear to distinguish between the stages that precede adolescence, such as the tween years, “from the age of 6 or 7 to 12 or 13” (p. 20) and the years before that. Another way we can conceptualize adolescence is by considering that adolescence isn’t characterized by any particular age group, but rather by a process. Driscoll (2002), posits that:

Adolescence is not a clear denotation of any age, body, behavior, or identity, because it has always meant the process of developing a self (though that has meant very different things in different sociohistorical contexts) rather than any definition of that self. (p. 6)

This classification leaves open the possibility that as a researcher I will not solely be responsible for defining for my participants what adolescence means for them, but how they would like to define and make meaning of their own experiences as adolescents. I believe allowing my participants to enact agency in my study will allow for deeper reflections into who they are and who they are becoming, based on their own definitions. It is especially important for Black immigrant girls to document the factors that shape their adolescent experiences and how those experiences contribute to their academic and social identities (Cox, 2015) (these terms will be defined below).

The Black and immigrant girl

The category of adolescence, like those of race and gender, is essential to defining and limiting citizenship. Black girls are, therefore, forced to confront their supposed inferiority and deviance on multiple intersecting and continually shifting social planes. Adolescence being one of the critical places of intersection. (Cox, 2015, p. 12)

As I explore meanings of adolescence, it’s also important for me to examine the experiences of girls of color and the nuances of this category. While the work of Pipher (2005) focuses on a more homogeneous conception of what is meant by adolescent girl, many scholars have argued that the experiences of Black girls differ dramatically from white girls and girls from

other racial and ethnic groups (P. Collins, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2011; hooks, 2014; E.

Richardson, 2013; Cox, 2015; Morris, 2016). Evans-Winters (2011), for example, posits that:

In social and educational research, African American female adolescents' experiences, in particular, have been left out, whited out (subsumed under white girls' experience), blacked out (generalized within Black Male experience), or simply pathologized. The history of the study of Black girls has a cyclical pattern of excluding her experiences or simply suppressing her story within (white) feminist Afrocentric led studies. (p. 13)

Based on this analysis, it's important that I interrogate the differences between the experiences of African American girls and Caribbean Black girls in the context of American schools. The social construction of Black girls historically has offered us a narrative that is intimately connected with slavery, sexualization, poverty, and inferiority (P. Collins, 2008; E. Richardson, 2013; Cox, 2015; Morris, 2016). Collins (2008) has discussed this pathologizing of Black girls and women as deliberate and consistent with historical oppression and institutionalized racism. hooks (1982) has argued that it is a part of a white supremacist patriarchy designed to alienate and further marginalize Black women.

I raise these points in order to demonstrate that a particular understanding of a Black adolescent girl is pervasive and dominant within mainstream society. She is often the teenage mother, the unruly teen, the insubordinate student, or the over-sexualized adolescent. It is important for scholars to understand how Black girls are constructing academic and social identities in light of such images and messages dominating mainstream consciousness. I ask: *How are Black girls resisting these messages of inferiority?*

I grew up being very aware of the tensions within my community and among people with whom I interacted. These tensions are not internally constructed, but socially constructed. I am uncertain that there is a place globally where Black and brown people are shielded from white patriarchal ideologies. Richardson (2013), has noted that,

The system of brutal patriarchy and chattel slavery has been reduced and metamorphosed into present day forms of structural racism, sexism, and cultural hegemony and still

powerfully influences the lives and futures of Black females, their families, and people around the world. (p. 329)

It is important that I raise these points as we examine how these messages might impact identity formation among Black adolescent girls. In her study on Black girls' resiliency, Evans-Winters (2011), finds that Black girls are not perceived as intellectually competent, and their academic achievement is rarely praised in schools. However, the opposite is true for their white female counterparts. It is as if schools expect academic excellence from white adolescent girls, and expect good behavior from Black girls. These tensions speak to the point that while gender is an important factor that allows us to interrogate girls as a homogenous group, race is an even more important factor in understanding the nuances and textures of their identity formations. At the intersections of race and gender, it is clear that Black girls are at a disadvantage. Black girls are often perceived as combative, defiant and reactive. Such perceptions impact how they are treated and understood by those outside of their communities/worlds. Morris (2016) notes that:

Black girls need teachers, administrators, and school policies that do not see their Black identity as inferior or something to fear. Their Black femininity must not be exploited, ignored, and punished. Their words need not be exploited, ignored, and punished. Their words need not be problematic, and their questions need not be seen as inherently defiant. (p. 178)

This makes clear the necessity of distinctly examining their lived experiences in order to challenge and resist their marginal conditions.

Another important reason why the study of Black immigrant girls is necessary is that the lived experiences of African American girls differ from those of girls from the Caribbean living in the United States. I raise this point because, while I am pushing for a movement toward solidarity, I cannot ignore the tensions and distinct historical struggles that have been at the heart of African American and Caribbean communities in the United States. In her study of West Indian immigrants in New York City, Waters (1999) finds that Caribbean immigrants struggle to develop identities in America that are consistent with those that are familiar to them in their home

countries. For example, while race is a salient element in the identity of Black people living in America, it is not such a dominant part of the structures of daily life in the Caribbean.

Consequently, when Caribbean immigrants come to America and attend American schools they are tasked to reconcile their understandings of their own societies and the new ones they occupy.

Waters (1999) writes:

Blacks are the majority in the Caribbean and not in the United States; class and race are intertwined in ways that are subtle and fluid in the Caribbean, whereas race has been an overriding status in the United States; Blacks have political, if not economic, power in the Caribbean because of their numerical majority. In the United States the “one-drop rule” has defined anyone with any Black ancestors as Black...conflict in the Caribbean that is seemingly about race is often one where race is better understood as a marker of socioeconomic inequalities. (p. 40)

This analysis shows how the identities that immigrants bring with them from the Caribbean intersect with those available to them in the United States to create tension and conflict. This conflict is further exacerbated by the fact that, historically, United States has viewed Blackness negatively and stereotypically. Based on this, many researchers find that Caribbean Blacks are inclined to believe they are superior to their native Black counterparts (Waters, 1999).

Ironically, while these perspective remain dominant within research, studies have found that Black Caribbean girls embrace both their ethnic identities and also their American identities (Cheryl A. McLean, 2010). Caribbean immigrants create identities that are a blend of their Caribbean culture and American culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waters, 1999; Cheryl A. McLean, 2010; Cheryl Ann McLean, 2008). McLean’s (2010) work in particular challenges the notion that the identities constructed by Caribbean adolescent immigrant girls are dichotomous in nature. In fact, Feliciano (2009) notes of Caribbean and Latin American immigrants that, “Nearly 75 percent changed identities at one point or another” (p. 144). Feliciano’s longitudinal study of these immigrant groups provides further evidence that the identities of these groups are always in flux, with immigrants changing identities from their entries into the United States until their times in college. She also finds that, after completing higher education, her participants were more

likely to identify with their home countries and the United States rather than racially or pan-ethnically. She writes,

Higher education (particularly graduate school) significantly predicts change in identity to hyphenated terms. These findings suggest that something about the higher education experience, particularly for those who are involved in higher education for long periods of time, causes individuals to think differently about how they define themselves. (p. 150)

This evidence demonstrates that the key to resisting divisive ideologies is education. However, to achieve this we shouldn't have to wait for adolescent girls to go to university. The challenge of these ideologies can happen before that, during their time in primary and secondary school.

On and From the Margins: Caribbean Immigrant identities

Above, I interrogated the idea that the oppression and marginalization of Black girls (and Black people) is a global phenomenon. However, messages and reminders of inferiority regarding one's race, class, and gender are pervasive and inescapable in the United States. These messages are so ingrained in the consciousness of Black people across the diaspora that we each react to it differently. Waters (1999) documents extensively the ways in which messages of inferiority have impacted identity formation among first and second-generation immigrants from the Caribbean. She posits that class plays an important role in how Caribbean immigrants identify, and the types of identities they construct. For example, while poorer Blacks from the Caribbean are more inclined to adopt American identities or hyphenated identities, the middle-class first- and second-generation Blacks in Waters' study almost always identified ethnically. This is important because the study demonstrates that solidarity is more possible when individuals believe they share a common cause/interest with another group. Class, specifically an upper-middle class identity, changes this. Waters (1999) writes:

The ethnic-identified respondents agree with their parents and report seeing a strong difference between themselves and Black Americans, stressing that being Black is not

synonymous with being Black American. They accept their parents' and the wider society's negative portrayals of poor Blacks and want to avoid any chance that they will be identified with them. They describe the culture and values of lower-class Black Americans as including a lack of discipline, lack of a work ethic, laziness, bad child-rearing practices, and lack of respect for education. They contrast this with their parents' values, which include education, strict discipline for children, a strong work ethic, and social mobility. (p. 290)

Waters posits that such identification among this group of immigrants is due, in part, to negative messages regarding Blackness. More importantly, it demonstrates that class represents an element that leads some individuals to believe they are better than, or superior to others. Waters (1990) further posits that:

Because every young person is aware of the negative images held by whites and the wider society of Black Americans, the acceptance of an American Black identity also means the acceptance of the oppositional character of that identity... The lives of these youngsters basically lead them to reject the immigrant dream of their parents of individual social mobility and to accept their peers' analysis of the United States as a place with blocked social mobility where they will not be able to move very far. (p. 307)

This analysis, which is shared by other scholars (Ogbu, 1978, 2002, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998), suggests that there are concrete implications for the kinds of identities that are selected by adolescents. However, these notions need to be troubled. By creating a study that allows for deeper insights into the lived experiences of girls, I will be able to gain a better understanding of this problem. For example, three very notable studies (Cox, 2015; Morris, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2011) demonstrate the complexity of Black girls' lived experiences. Each proves that Black girls who are given the tools necessary to combat a white supremacist ideology are then able to recreate images of themselves that are more consistent with a strong resolute Black identity.

Social and academic identity development and girlhood

One way to understand the identities girls construct is to look at their social and academic literate practices, and how those lead to specific identities. Social identities are characterized by one's relationship to the many social aspects of day-to-day life. Dweck and Anderson (2007) note that, "each of us possesses multiple social identities. For example, our sex, age, race, social class, religion, political beliefs, and professions are all potential social identities" (p. 115). Social identity formation, therefore, is characterized by understandings of and attitudes toward these social categories. It is my position that understanding varying aspects of social identity construction among adolescent girls from the Caribbean can be useful in deciphering the processes and purposes behind the types of social identities they construct. Hourigan (2009) posits that, "how a person feels about his or her value to a group can directly affect his or her self-worth and self-identity" (p. 35). I introduce social identity formation as a key factor in my work because I believe that the development of certain social identities has implications for how we view the world and how we position ourselves within it.

Beauchamp & Dunlop (2014) argue that,

A key tenet of social identity theory is that, when people are either allocated to, or self-select membership in, specific social groups they not only look to differentiate themselves from other groups but also identify and create ways of demonstrating the superiority of their own group...The underlying intent in displaying positive distinctiveness is to bolster feelings of self-worth. (p. 290)

While it is important for individuals to foster strong group identities, it is also imperative that they do not use these identities to position themselves as superior to other groups.

Understanding the kinds of social identities that Caribbean immigrant girls develop can help to construct various approaches to solidarity. It is important to know that one can have self-worth and strong group values, while still working with other groups towards a common cause, rather than treating these things as mutually exclusive. Studying the creation or fostering of

specific identities is necessary in literacy research because it allows for a deeper understanding of students as learners, teachers and social citizens. For example, Finders (1997) provides insight into how identity formation revealed itself in her study with adolescent girls. She refers to this as sanctioned and unsanctioned literacies. She defines “sanctioned literacies” as “Those literacies that are recognized, circulated, and sanctioned by adults in authority” (p. 24). Unsanctioned literacies were more social in nature. This distinction provided her with a deeper understanding of her adolescent participants. She recalls,

Ask them if they read and they will say no. They’ll tell you they don’t like to write, but volumes of notes they have written to each other remained cherished, stuffed in shoeboxes under their beds. None of this was what they were supposed to be doing in school, and the passion they exhibited for these tasks was never evident in the sanctioned literate tasks. (Finders 1997, p. 79)

This important finding speaks to the importance of connecting with adolescent girls to make sense of their definitions of what it means to be literate. Furthermore, it compels me to question the value of the letter/notes these girls have shared with each other. I explore this in greater depth below, and I ask, *what types of identities are important to solidarity movements and why are they especially important to Black girls as they are constructing their identities?*

Academic Identities

Academic and social identities are extremely important in my research. They each serve to provide multiple ways of understanding Black Caribbean girls. We can understand them by interrogating their relationships to, and their understandings of, the social worlds they inhabit. Another effective way to know how and why girls construct specific identities is to look to their academic practices. Academic identities refer to what students do with literacies in schools. They also refer to how students understand themselves academically and the factors that influence these beliefs and perspectives. Academic identities can be useful in helping researchers to

understand how students' relationships to institutional structures, such as schools, shape their understandings of self. According to Quigley (2011), "academic identity is complex and is composed of many competing influences. At best one can describe academic identity as a constantly shifting target, which differs for each individual academic" (p. 21). While one's academic identity can be about just the individual, a great deal of scholarship has been dedicated to how collective academic achievement can be consequential to groups (Ogbu, 1978, 2002, 2008; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

This work raises the question of what promise a strong academic identity holds for a Black girl? Research has found that Black girls have been positioned as less academically capable than their white adolescent counterparts (Evans-Winters, 2011; Cox, 2015; Morris, 2016; E. B. Richardson, 2003; Fisher, 2009). They are perceived as behavioral problems, rather than scholars and high achievers (Coleman-King, 2014; Evans-Winters, 2011). Such perceptions have concrete consequences, such as low self-esteem and low self-worth related to academic achievement (Crenshaw, 2015, 1991, 1989). The development of a strong academic identity can only happen when girls are given the necessary tools to unpack, and flesh out the nuances of what it means to be a Black girl in the context of the United States. Critical Black feminism, is central to the awareness, and unpacking of these realities.

As an adolescent, I identified as a writer. If someone asked me what I wanted to do as an adult, I immediately thought, "I want to write." I wrote poetry and short stories; I kept a diary; I even wrote graffiti. These literate practices all took place outside the boundaries of school; they were what Finders (1997) refer to as a literate underlife. She defines these literacy practices:

Those practices that refuse in some way to accept the official view, practices designed and enacted to challenge and disrupt the official expectations. ...Literate underlife created a space for girls to secure roles, to present a selfless controlled by adults in authority. (p. 24)

During my spare time I had notebooks filled with poetry, diaries filled to capacity, and short stories that I shared with family. I did not enact these practices in schools because when I first arrived to the United States I had been singled out as a poor reader. My accent and unwillingness to be vocal contributed to this label. It took many years for me to break away from that identity and again share my work with my teachers. In her study with adolescent girls, Finders (1997) documents their understandings of their academic identities. She writes:

Beyond the school setting, the tough cookies used literacy for playing, escaping from domestic chores, and capturing experiences in print. Within schools setting, the cookies used literacy in a traditional sense that matched the school's construction of literacy learning, using literacy to acquire information, display competence, and discover meaning. The cookies envisioned for themselves a specific, concrete plan for success. On numerous occasions, I heard comments such as this one: "If you get good grades, you can get a college scholarship." They read and wrote to succeed in school, which led, they believed, to success in the larger culture. All of this was built on their unfaltering faith in the opportunity structure of schooling. (p. 90)

The participants in Finders' study were white adolescent girls from working class families. Her research finds that they believe that possibilities exist for them if they are able to be academically successful. However, for Black girls, academic identities are linked to a collective struggle for recognition, since schools often label them as underachievers and behavioral problems (Evans-Winters, 2011).

To further demonstrate my earlier argument regarding solidarity, collectivity, and the importance of a Black feminist perspective in the study of girls. I look to a recent Supreme Court case—*Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*. In this case a white woman (Fisher) filed a lawsuit against the university, stating that she should have been accepted because as an applicant she had a better academic standing than Black candidates who were accepted to that institution. This case brings attention to policies of *affirmative action*, since Fisher believed that she was a victim of *reverse racism*. The importance of this case isn't that Fisher challenged the policies of the University of Texas at Austin. This, of course, wouldn't be the first time someone tried to challenge policies of affirmative action. Rather, the importance of the case lies in former Justice

Antonin Scalia's comments to the court regarding Black people and academic achievement. Court transcripts record his comments:

10 JUSTICE SCALIA: There are there are
11 those who contend that it does not benefit
12 African Americans to to get them into the University
13 of Texas where they do not do well, as opposed to having
14 them go to a less advanced school, a less a
15 Slower track school where they do well. One of one
16 of the briefs pointed out that that most of the
17 most of the Black scientists in this country don't come
18 from schools like the University of Texas.

19 MR. GARRE: So this Court

20 JUSTICE SCALIA: They come from lesser
21 schools where they do not feel that they're that
22 they're being pushed ahead in in classes that are
23 too too fast for them.

24 MR. GARRE: This Court

25 JUSTICE SCALIA: I'm just not impressed by
1 the fact that that the University of Texas may have
2 fewer. Maybe it ought to have fewer. And maybe some
3 you know, when you take more, the number of Blacks,
4 really competent Blacks admitted to lesser schools,
5 turns out to be less. And and I I don't think
6 it it it stands to reason that it's a good thing

7 for the University of Texas to admit as many Blacks as
8 possible. I just don't think

(Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin, 2015)

I include this extended quotation because it demonstrates two points. First, Scalia's statement demonstrates the need to challenge a white supremacist patriarchy (the patriarchy here being the supreme court demonstrating its power and full authority over Black lives and the future of Black students at top universities). Second, the statement demonstrates the need to understand how cases like this, and the words of a significant figure like Scalia, can impact the academic identities of adolescent Black students in schools. However, challenging such ideologies cannot be done on an individual basis; it requires solidarity among all Black people.

Section III

Qualitative Research Studies on Girls

In this third section I intend to briefly lay out for the reader four studies on Black students, girls, and literacies that have been conducted in schools. Each of these studies offers an important contribution to scholarly understanding of how and why girls use literacies in academic and social identity construction. I will discuss each study in terms of methodology—the theoretical framing that informs the work of these scholars. I will look at the methods, the implications, and also the findings. After presenting each study, I will discuss how it informs my work and the shift from theory to practice.

The first study took place with adolescent girls in a Junior high school. For one year, Margaret Finders conducted an ethnographic project where she followed five girls from a rural

Midwestern town. She notes that the school they attended was “perceived as serving a homogeneous population, almost exclusively Euro-American and quite affluent” (Finders, 1997, p. 6). This study is important because it examines the literacies of girls and it also focuses on the ways their school performances are linked to sociopolitical struggles. Finders drew on a sociocultural framework to discuss the relationship these girls had to their social worlds. She also used this framework to focus on the girls’ relationships to literacy. She notes, “against a sociocultural backdrop, ‘literacy’, as it is used throughout this study retains the traditional definition and will refer exclusively to print sources” (p. 10). Finders relied heavily on the writings the girls produced as sources of information for her study. In addition to written artifacts, she worked with the girls in schools, in their communities, and at home. Her findings suggest that class was a significant factor in the construction of identities among her adolescent female participants. Her findings also suggest that families play an extremely important role in the kinds of identities that girls develop and embody. Another important finding that she reports is that group identities are important to girls. Her subjects rarely wanted to be interviewed without the presence of their girlfriends and maintained strong allegiances with their mothers. She also notes that literacy presented spaces where her participants were agentic. Finders contends:

Girls use literacy to control, moderate, and measure their growth into adulthood. I would argue that a new independence is afforded to adolescent females through literacy. It might be argued further that the recognition of their literacies signifies a reintegration into society and their acceptance as adults by adults. In other words, literacies served as a visible rite of passage, as a cultural practice to mark oneself as in control, as powerful. (p. 18-19)

These conclusions are all important and relevant as we consider the ways in which adolescents have been represented and understood. Finders’s study demonstrates the power of literacy in understanding selves and relationships to social and academic spaces.

Although Finders’s (1997) study centers around the lived experiences of white adolescent girls, I find her methods and methodology useful for the study of Caribbean immigrant girls.

Through her sociocultural framework, and the understanding that communities, families, and culture are at the heart of identity development, I found this approach useful to consider for my own work. I also appreciated her ability to flesh out the different types of literacies enacted by her participants. Articulating these literacies (school sanctioned literacies, and participants literate underlife) made clear how students were either benefiting, rejection or embodying specific literate experiences. One of my main critiques of Finders's work is that while she relied on artifacts to help her understand her participant literacies, these artifacts were all print sources. This doesn't go far enough in terms of my own positionality and definition of texts.

The second study that I examined was an ethnographic study conducted in Harlem (Kinloch, 2010). This study lasted about three years. Kinloch followed her participants from high school until their first year in college. Although she conducted a few in-depth interviews with girls, the two adolescent boys were her main sources of information. This study doesn't focus on girls exclusively, but it focuses on the ways in which a particular location and a movement towards gentrification can influence ideologies and spark activism among Black adolescents. Race and community are salient factors in this study and are another important element throughout this ethnography. I selected Kinloch's study for three reasons. First, it focuses on Black youth identity construction by centering on the ways community, schools, and literacies can help us to understand identity construction. The second reason I selected this study is because the theme of resistance was important throughout her analysis. Participants used their literacies to disrupt dominant conceptions of Blackness, and stereotypical conceptions of self.

Finally, I find this study especially important because it demonstrates that students are agentic; they are not passive in their construction of their identities. They rely on their communities, their school, and their families to help them navigate racism, classism, and structural injustices. Kinloch (2010) shares this important moment from her study:

Khaleeq was interested in history and he always asked detailed questions about historical events. He wanted to know about the struggles of African Americans prior to the 1970s and, as he learned more, he made connections between historical events and contemporary struggles. Yet it was hard for him to face the reality that African Americans throughout the diaspora were depicted in such exaggerated ways. He often remarked: “This is bad”; “Really, they thought of us like that”; “We don’t look nothing like that”; and “How racist.” (p. 46)

This same sentiment was also expressed by two of the girls Kinloch interviewed. It was clear that both her adolescent male and female participants were having a hard time with issues of gentrification and racism, but it was not clear how the identities of the female participants were shaped by these factors. I also look to this study because Kinloch seems concerned with inclusivity. During her research she talked to people from within Harlem about gentrification, but she also reached out to students from neighboring communities. In fact, one of her main participants was not even from Harlem. This is significant since our commitments to specific issues and causes transcend borders. She notes,

[The NCTE] insists that literacies, particularly in the 21st-century contexts, can encourage people to have experiences with technology and multimedia texts, be connected to local and/or global communities, and work collaboratively with others to address defined problems. (p. 9)

I find this inclusivity, and approach to solidarity and community building, an important element of this study. I also found this study extremely relevant in that it demonstrated the importance of the community in the lives of students. Since my own work will take place in a large urban city, it is helpful to consider the role the community will play in the lives of my participants and how school and community shape their the academic and social identities.

The third study I examined is the work of Coleman-King (2014). This study is relevant for my work because it takes place in the same region as my own study. This study is also an ethnographic study with 10 participants who were either born in the Caribbean or who had both parents born in the (English-speaking) Caribbean. Coleman-King’s inclusive research relied heavily on the participation of parents to gain an understanding of her adolescent participants.

This particular study focuses both on male and female participation and contributions. Some of the methods that Coleman-King employed for this study included participant observations, questionnaires, artifacts, and participant narratives. Class is an extremely important element in this study. All of her participants came from two parent households, and they were middle class. Her findings revealed that class plays an extremely important role in how students position themselves and how their teachers and school community position them. What I find interesting is her observation that first-generation middle-class Caribbean parents contribute significantly to the rhetoric of Caribbean superiority and African American inferiority. These ideologies are greatly influenced by racism and structural injustices taking place in the schools and within communities.

Subsequently, while Caribbean Black students experienced their Caribbean identities as buffers against racism, they understood the implications of race, racism, and institutional injustices very early on. Coleman-King notes:

Caribbean American students in the study were rarely subject to disciplinary sanctions at school. Despite the academic challenges some of the students faced, most teachers described Caribbean American students as “well behaved” or “nice” kids. However, the perception of Caribbean American youth as well behaved did not preclude them from observing, analyzing, and internalizing institutionally racist practices in the form of disciplinary disparities between Black and white students. (p. 152-153)

I believe that such findings can be stepping-stones to consciousness raising among Black Caribbean youth who, instead of standing alongside their Black American counterparts, use their status to separate and ignore injustices. Coleman-King relied on a methodology that centers on Caribbean Heritage throughout her study. While she presents interesting findings, I believe her work also contributes to dichotomous narratives regarding Black Americans and Caribbean Blacks. For example, she writes:

Caribbean American youth learned the values of community and interdependence and embedded them into their schematic understanding of the world. Because their parents taught these values through a framework of Caribbean heritage and legacy, they enabled

Caribbean American youth to perceive themselves as potentially—if not actually—distinctly different from many Americans. (p. 103)

This suggests that African Americans do not embody these values, or that these values cannot be shared through a framework of solidarity. Although I found this study divisive (in terms of the movement towards solidarity), I did find that there is a great degree of hope for a movement against white supremacist patriarchy. Coleman-King finds that Caribbean American youth are much more flexible and their identities are not static in any way, leaving open the possibility that they can move away from the ideologies of their parents and towards more revolutionary attitudes.

The last study that I will discuss focuses exclusively on Black girls' resiliency in the face of racism, sexism, and other structural injustices in schools and beyond. In this three-year ethnographic study, Evans-Winters (2011) worked with five adolescent female participants, examining how the community, the school, and the family all contributed to their resiliency. Using a Black feminist/postmodern framework, Evans-Winters discusses the ways in which her position as a Black woman places her in a strategic location to examine the notion of resiliency among Black girls. She uses this framework also to reveal white racist assumptions about Black girls and their identities. Her focus is specifically African American girls from a Midwestern urban community. Evans-Winters employed methods that included interviews, personal narratives, participant observations (from the perspective of Black woman observer), storytelling, formal and informal conversations, walking, eating together, cooking, and the examination of artifacts.

I find this study especially important to my work because of her framework and her focus on Black girls. Evans-Winters finds that in order to build positive/strong identities among adolescent girls, one has to look not only to the girls' understanding of self, but also to their communities, their families, and their schools. Although this study does not focus on Black

immigrant girls, it has strong implications for how solidarity can be built if the focus is shifted from an individual concept of self to a more collective reflection of self. Another important assessment is that relationships are extremely important to girls. Evans-Winters' subjects relied on each other for support and strength, underscoring the notion that there is strength and power in numbers. What makes the study of girls distinct in this ethnography is the fact that the challenges faced by Black adolescent boys are extremely different from those faced by girls. While mothers worry about the safety and longevity of their sons, they offer sons and daughters different tools for coping with the social world. These tools each influence the formation of different identities among these groups.

In summary, each of the studies I presented above represent important contributions to the study of Black immigrant girls from the Caribbean. Although they do not necessarily focus on Caribbean girls (Coleman-King being the exception), they each contribute important elements that can help us to understand how the construction of specific identities can translate to a framework of solidarity through a Black feminist lens. Finders' (1997), for example, examines white girls from an affluent Midwestern town, and it is clear from her study that the issues facing white girls are very different from those affecting Black girls. For instance, all of her participants understood that if they worked hard in school, success was achievable. For Black girls, this is not always true. White supremacist patriarchal society (the example of Justice Scalia being case and point), creates many obstacles that they would have to overcome in order for them to feel as entitled as the white participants in Finders's study.

Second, the other two studies (Evans-Winters, 2011; Kinloch, 2010) center on Black adolescents and demonstrate that issues/factors facing Black adolescent boys and Black girls are different in terms of how they process conflict, injustice, and inequities in society. Girls, for instance, rely on their mothers, their communities, and their friends as sources of support. Participants in Kinloch's and Coleman-King's studies needed different tools to face racial

injustice and to confront the dangers facing the Black male body in America. These four studies are merely a sample of the various studies that focus on girls, Black adolescents, the literacies of adolescents, and identity construction. They demonstrate that there is a need for additional research that deals primarily with Black adolescent girls academic and social identities. It also demonstrates that the goals of each of these studies centers on a more individualistic understanding of their participants, not a deeper understanding of the implications of their findings for a movement of solidarity that challenges a white supremacist patriarchy.

Section IV

From Theory to Practice

In this section I will discuss the connections between my methodology and my research and lay out for the reader the connection between the two. I also intend to discuss the ways my study might intersect with or diverge from previous studies. Using feminist research methods, I will outline a plan that will demonstrate a commitment to solidarity, collectivity, and social change. The methodological framework that centers this study is Black feminism. Drawing on the work of Collins (2008), I discuss Black feminist thought as a grounding for my research, and I extend that scholarly conversation by looking to memory work both as a methodology and a method for the study of women and their collective voices (Crawford, 1992; Fraser & Michell, 2015; Haug, 2008; Onyx & Small, 2001; Haug, 1987a; Lapadat et al., 2010; J. M. Staples, 2016, 2011a). Other methods will be discussed as well.

Memory Work: The Method

I agree with Collins (2008) that Black women should control Black feminist thought. For many of the reasons presented above, I strongly believe that marginalized groups, such as Black women, must find their voices and assert themselves in research and beyond. It is especially important for us to know that the struggles and tensions we face as women (and the ones faced by adolescent girls) are a collective. Collins is absolutely correct when she says that a system of racism, sexism, and racial injustice must be challenged and resisted. However, I would argue that a focus on the self as a dominant characteristic of Black feminist thought has to be re-conceptualized to some extent. While the singular *self* is an extremely important aspect of the work on identity, it does not allow us to go far enough. It does not push us to understand how our individual stories are inextricably linked to the stories of other women who face the same oppression and marginalization in a white supremacist patriarchy. Collins (2008) writes:

No matter how oppressed a woman may be, the power to save the self lies within the self. Other Black women may assist a Black Woman in this journey towards personal empowerment, but the ultimate responsibility for self-definitions and self-valuations lies within the individual woman herself. (p. 130)

I would like to argue that the problem with the notion of the self, as a stand-alone term, is that women who lack the critical consciousness to understand how their identities are impacted by social structures run the risk of understanding themselves through those lenses. They run the risk of reproducing ideas that are not entirely their own while believing that those ideas come from within. The self, therefore, needs to be filtered through a critical framework of resistance—one that is concerned with the liberation of women, and one concerned with solidarity.

I use memory work as a method in my research because I think it is useful for extending and building on the work of Collins and other feminists who aim to disrupt and challenge social

injustices facing women and girls. Developed by Haug (1987), memory work is a framework and a method that is concerned with the liberation of women. Haug (1987) posits:

The very notion that our own past experiences may offer some insight into the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing relations, thereby themselves reproducing a social formation, itself contains an implicit argument for a particular methodology. If we refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures, or to the social relations within which we have formed us, if we search instead for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our own past experience, then the usual mode of social-scientific research, in which individuals figure exclusively as objects of the process of research, has to be abandoned. (p. 35)

This is an important point in that it challenges existing notions of research that focus solely on individual conceptions of self, while pushing us to look at the ways the self is intimately tied to the social world. Another reason I have selected memory work is because it is a method that centers on the notion of the collective. Women meet in groups and they focus on a particular memory from childhood, or their adolescent years, and they examine those memories as a collective. Researchers also participate in this process, allowing them to operate on equal playing fields with participants. The important thing to understand about memory work is that it is not concerned with truth. In fact, truth is not the focus of the method; rather, memory work focuses on the way in which specific memories have shaped or informed specific identities.

My goal is to employ memory work as a central method and methodology in my study of adolescent girls. Memory work is a tool that allows girls to know that they are not alone in any particular experience; moreover, it allows for the confrontation of hegemonic ideas and beliefs that are dangers to the development of strong academic and social identities. When Staples documents her meeting with women after 9/11 to discuss the ways in which they had been affected by different forms of terror in love, she was in fact employing memory work in her research. The women shared stories, used literacy as a tool to document their narratives, came together to make sense of their experiences, and resisted the terrors they had experienced in love. Staples was not only a researcher in her project, but also shared her voice alongside the women as

a participant. This disrupted the notion of hierarchy within her study. What she was able to accomplish in this study demonstrates the effectiveness of feminist research methods that are deliberate and built on a movement towards solidarity. Consequently, pairing a Black feminist theoretical framing with memory work can prove transformative.

Conclusion

As an immigrant from Jamaica I lived in one of the largest Caribbean communities in the United States. Growing up and attending schools in Brooklyn, New York demonstrated to me that my identities are not just tied to my home country, but to the history of African Americans and the Caribbean immigrants who had occupied those spaces before I arrived. My identities are also intricately linked to other women and girls. The problem is that I never understood that during my adolescent years. My diary reflects the loneliness I felt and the resentment I had for my social world. I had not understood my solitude at the time. I did not realize that I was not alone in my quest for a deeper understanding of self. A Black feminist lens has allowed me to understand how a white supremacist patriarchy works to perpetuate feelings of isolation among Black girls and women, and other marginalized peoples of color. I also understand that it is through solidarity and a move towards a collective consciousness that we can begin to raise awareness and challenge systems of oppression in schools and society.

My diary, my pictures, my memories, and the emotions I embodied as an adolescent girl were as much a part of me as they were a part of the society I lived in. To understand me fully, then, is to understand Brooklyn in the early 1990s. It is to understand my school, my friends, and even my mother. I was not a singular entity that could be understood out of the context of Jamaica, Brooklyn, and even the United States as a whole. Consequently, to understand the lives of Caribbean immigrant girls, I have to immerse myself in their world. Even though I see so

much of myself in them, a lot has changed and continues to change in terms of Black girl identity, culture, belonging, and even the shifting demographics of the communities they live in. My work aims to interrogate these nuances to understand the academic and social identities of the girls.

Above, I have presented the reader with a perspective on the challenges facing Caribbean immigrants and Black American girls in schools and communities in the United States. I have introduced a Black feminist thought as a methodology that can enable women and girls to challenge existing social structures. I have also presented my own story as an example of how the literacies of adolescent girls can help us to understand how they are making sense of specific social and academic identities. I focus on the importance of both academic and social identities and the concrete implications each of these can have in a white supremacist patriarchal society in order to provide the reader with insight into the challenges adolescents face. I have also discussed four studies. Each study demonstrates that there is a dearth of research concerning solidarity, immigrant girls' academic and social identity construction, and the methods that can disrupt negative conceptualizations of Black girlhood. I end with an introduction to memory work as a feminist method that can be an effective tool for challenging these ideological representations. I believe that once we understand that the challenges facing our communities cannot be dealt with on an individual basis, we can then begin the work towards transformation and solidarity.

Chapter 3

A Methodology of Memory, Critical Black Feminism and New Literacies

In North America, my Black body speaks a language of its own, it cheats me, it ritualizes me, where I become a condensed moment of historicity, an inscribed repetition of convention. (Ibrahim, 2004)

Introduction

In his article titled, “One is not Born Black: Becoming and the Phenomenon(ology) of Race,” Ibrahim (2004) discusses what he calls the *politics of ultra-visibility*. He posits that, “It is when the unmarked is marked and made visible. This marking takes place in and through language and is felt on the surface of the body” (p. 79). Ibrahim’s article speaks to the purpose of this chapter. The notion of visibility for immigrant girls from the Caribbean is central to my work. Ibrahim proposes that Black immigrants have experiences in North America that make them aware of their race and their position within that society, in a process which he calls *becoming Black* (Ibrahim, 2004). For the immigrant girl from the Caribbean, her experiences are often subsumed within the African American experience. Consequently, the intersectional methodology that I discuss in this chapter will address the notion of visibility and what it means for the immigrant girl from the Caribbean. This methodology is informed by critical Black feminism and memory work and is analyzed through a new literacies framework. The questions that guide this study are:

- How has the use of NLS as a framework, paired with critical Black feminism and memory work, impacted the direction and outcomes of this study?

- How has my position as a critical Black feminist scholar from the so-called Third World contributed to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean and their literacies?
- What methods informed the organization and execution of this study?
- What is the analytic process for this study?

These questions will be explored in greater depth below. I begin by providing a basis for my methodology and frameworks and how they inform the overall research, followed by an in-depth discussion of the methods used for this study. Finally, I discuss the strategies for analysis.

In this chapter, I argue that the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean are often overlooked and conflated within the multilayered, complex, diverse experiences of African American girls in schools, making it difficult for their voices to be heard or recognized, and their experiences validated. While there is a great deal of similarity between these groups, there is a dearth of scholarship that examines the phenomena of academic and social identity construction among immigrant girls from the Caribbean as separate and distinct from their African American peers.

Using critical Black feminism as a framework, and memory work as a methodological grounding for my research, I focus on the notion of self-definition (Collins, 2008) to explore the scope of visibility and invisibility. This means that my work centers on presenting spaces for my participants to name for themselves the experiences and ideologies that inform their world view. As a critical Black feminist scholar from the so-called⁷ Third World, my voice and positionality is also an important element of this research, since embodied within me are memories and experiences that will impact this research—whether explicitly or implicitly. Therefore, the concept of

⁷ I use the term so-called in reference to the third world since the use of Third World is so often contested. The term Third World has become synonymous with poverty, underdevelopment, and inferiority. I employ the term “so-called” as a way to problematize this relationship.

reflexivity is essential to this work since it allows me to not only reflect, but to question myself each step of the way in order to understand how my own ideas, attitudes, and beliefs have shaped the outcome of this study. This is especially important since a significant portion of the scholarship on Black girls and Black adolescents is often written by African American women scholars (Evans-Winters, 2011; Morris, 2016; Cox, 2015; Staples, 2016; Kinloch, 2010; Brown, 2009), or scholars who are not a part of the Black diaspora⁸. By understanding my own location within the conversation and scholarship on Black girls, I will be able to determine the importance of my contribution to the literature.

Brown (2009) has defined Black girlhood as, “The representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female. Black girlhood is not dependent, then, on age, physical maturity, or any essential category of identity” (p. 2). While I agree with Brown’s definition I posit that there are nuances within Black girlhood that make the experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean distinct from those of African American girls. Using memory work as a methodology, and new literacies and critical Black feminism as frameworks, I will describe how the data collected for this study provides greater insights into these distinctions of identity and experience. This is necessary since one might ask, *why memory, why critical Black feminism, and why memory work* to understand identities and experiences? *What role does each of these frames play in the analysis of data, and the design of the study?* I would respond by saying that these frames are complementary and allow for the development of a project that examines the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean, in addition to the ways in which their cultural memories from those locations shape

⁸ The diaspora can be defined as the scattering or dispersal of peoples from a share community/homeland or continent. It includes people who have emigrated, and those who are descendants of those people (IdEA, 2012). The Black diaspora refers to people of African ancestry who live outside of Africa who have settled in various places around the globe. The origins of the Black diaspora dates back to the Atlantic Slave trade (Segal, 1996).

their relationships with their social world. For example, while memory work, as a feminist methodology, lays the foundation for the study of the lived experiences of women and girls, it is not enough. It is limited by its conception of what qualifies as text; it seems to follow an earlier model that suggests that what constitutes literacy has only to do with print sources, rather than the multiplicity of ways in which individuals are literate. Consequently, pairing memory work (Crawford, 1992; Haug, 1987a, 2008; Onyx & Small, 2001; Fischer, 2015; De Baca, 2015; Schlund-Vials, 2012) with new literacies will allow for a deeper analysis of memory, and it will push for the consideration that memories can be explored not just through written textual articulations but also through a wide range of literary artifacts and new literacy events. These artifacts can serve to extend our understandings of how memories are embodied both within us and in the material world.

Critical Black feminism also allows me to mediate the various understandings of memory among immigrant girls from the Caribbean through their lived experiences. In addition, as a method, it adds participants' voices to research and shifts their positions from subject of study to active participant. By providing spaces for self-definition—an important part of the development of self, and of knowing and acknowledging who you are, each participant is imbued with a sense of agency. This happens when a researcher becomes a vulnerable observer (Behar, 2012). This means that the researcher has established a meaningful connection with the community in which he/she/they/them are researching. This changes the hierarchical structure⁹ of the research to a more approachable, horizontal model where everyone is on a level playing field. In what follows, I discuss in detail the relevance of memory to my research, and why immigrant girls from the

⁹ Hierarchical structures in research refers to an approach where there is a lead investigator, boss, researcher, who makes all decisions for the group. It is a top down approach that suggests that there is an inherent leader, and everyone else is a subject of the research. The non-hierarchical structure on the other hand refers to a model that is collaborative, and decentralized. It is a model based on power sharing, and one which does not have or rely on a leader. (Andrés & Poler, 2014)

Caribbean are so important to my study. I begin with the various ways in which researchers have theorized memory, and why the decision to utilize a methodology of memory is so essential.

Section I

Theorizing Memory

The neuroscientific community has dedicated a tremendous amount of time to research on memory; there is now a journal dedicated to the study of memory research alone (Burton, 2010; Robben, 2012; Schacter, Welker, Schacter, & Madore, 2016; Schacter et al., 2016). Below, I draw on the most recent studies contributed to this journal to aid me in developing an understanding of memory that can serve to extend my own thinking in terms of the ways memories come to shape not only the individual, but also the collective. I look to this body of work since these scholars are not only working in theory, but also in practice. They engage with individuals to determine the scientific, social, cultural, and personal aspects of memory function. In her recent study on the autobiographical memories of European Americans and Asian Americans, Wang (2016) has found profound differences among her participants in terms of the memories they value. European Americans tend to value experiences that are personal and individualized, while Asian Americans form memories based more on social interactions, Wang refers to this process as autobiographical memory. According to Wang (2016), autobiographical memory,

Is not formed in isolation, in the individual mind, but is thoroughly contextual. It can be viewed as an open system immersed in the cultural milieu where the individual is in constant transaction with the environment. In the end, autobiographical memory takes shape as a joint product of the individual and the cultural agenda of the society. (p. 297)

Subsequently, the things these two groups value in terms of memory are vastly different. One group values memory in relation to self, while the other value memories as they pertain to their social world. Wang's research demonstrates that memories are not constructed on an individual basis, but that they are social constructs. What we remember and what we value as individuals is based on the specific values and desires of the collective communities in which we belong, and those values are passed down from one generation to the next through memories. This theory provides one possibility for understanding how and what individuals remember. While this idea might not be true for all individuals, Wang's study offers us some insight into memory function among different cultures and how those memories can come to inform our identities. A significant shortcoming of Wang's study however, is its lack of consideration for the memories of minoritized peoples from the Black diaspora, and how their collective memories are informed by narratives of genocide, slavery, oppression, racism, etc. and how those kinds of memories have the potential to create varied realities in the present. Consequently, this makes the inclusion of an intersectional frame even more significant to my work.

Similarly Schacter (2016a) has argued that memories are an essential aspect of the social connections between individuals within a society. He posits that, while memories are easily prone to error and distortion, they are also an essential element in connecting individuals to both their past and their future. He uses the expression, *memory connection* to describe this phenomenon. He notes,

We consider cultural or collective memories, which are maintained through oral stories, texts, song, pictorial images, monuments, rites, and memorials, and both preserve the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and uniqueness and shape the way the societies think about the future. (p. 242)

These sorts of memory connections are not contingent upon accuracy, nor are they concerned with individual self-representation. Rather, they are concerned with a more collective understanding of the society as it relates to self. In their research, Schacter, Welker, Dudai, & Edelson (2016) discuss

the unreliable nature of memory and the importance of focusing on the flexibility that memory affords. This flexibility in memory allows for adaptation to changes in the environment which means that memories are highly influenced by factors such as conversations or other social elements. They posit that,

Our studies are hence in line with the conclusion that our personal memory is in fact only partially personal. The influence of social information on the mutable nature of memory may afford an evolutionary advantage, allowing rapid adjustment of past representations to accommodate for changes in the present environment. (p. 280)

Thus, even our understanding of what we deem to be personal is highly influenced by our social world.

Another important study in the area of memory focuses on what is called *Episodic Memory* (Schacter et al., 2016). According to Schacter, “A critical function of episodic memory is to support the construction of imagined future events by allowing the retrieval of information about past experiences, and the flexible recombination of elements of past experiences, into simulations of possible future scenarios” (p. 246). According to their study, when individuals lose the ability to remember their pasts, whether through brain injury, disease or some other deficit, they are also unable to imagine their futures (Schacter, Welker, Schacter, & Welker, 2016). This is not only true for personal memories; it is also true of the ones that are about the individuals’ social world. According to another study conducted on memory and the concept of episodic memory,

People relied on their memories of the past to imagine possible future events, for not just individuals but also for nations. That is, those who offered specific memories also offered specific simulations of a possible future, whether when they were discussing their own or their nation’s past and future. (Schacter, Welker, Merck, Topcu, & Hirst, 2016, p. 289)

Consequently, the future and the past are indelibly linked; there can’t be one without the other. If the past is forgotten, then the future cannot be imagined. This makes it imperative for a culture and a people to transmit their knowledge for the future of their society. Subsequently, in the context of the Caribbean, memories of the past might include those of slavery, displacement, trauma,

rebellion, and resiliency. Such past memories are essential to imagining a future that is radically different. This future might take place within the communities and/or countries in which they live, or they can take place here in the United States once these individuals migrate. It is through the literate practice of my participants where I was able to find their articulations of self in relation to the past and their current realities.

The neuroscientific research presented above has been extremely important to my research. The Caribbean, as I have demonstrated in chapters one and two, cannot be imagined as a fixed location, but rather as a social construct. How it is defined is contingent upon who one asks. I am therefore concerned with individuals who share a collective cultural memory of the Caribbean. I am concerned with first and second-generation immigrant girls with memories that link them to the colonial legacy of slavery, gender/racial marginalization, and Blackness. My work also builds on a critical Black feminist tradition that privileges the voices of women and girls in these transformative practices. I have relied on them to define what the Caribbean means for them and how the memories of those locations inform their social worlds, their identities, and the ways that they imagine their future.

This study examines the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean who live in the United States and attend a predominately African American school. I have asked these girls to engage with me in various memory work activities to uncover how their memories have informed their academic and social experiences in the context of their school. Since memories are constructed through social interactions, I examined how they saw themselves in relation to their lived experiences. I also analyzed how their relationships to their home countries had shaped their epistemological and ontological understandings of self. According to Schacter (2016),

Memories are not stored in the head, encoded in some yet understood way in neurological tissue. Rather, they grow out of the interactions between the internal and external, a process that has been demonstrated by research examining the effects of collaboration on recall. (p. 285-286)

It is this concept that guides this research and has shaped my questions and practice with my participants.

The link between what it means to be an immigrant from the Caribbean, and the role of memory in informing specific identities is at the heart of my work. Both the term Caribbean and the concept of memory are complex terms that are difficult to define or categorize. As I think of these concepts, I consider the role of cultural memory in the construction of my own identities as a woman, a mother, a teacher, and an immigrant from Jamaica. I think of the ways in which these memories rest at the center of my consciousness, and how they shape the way I see the world and my own possibilities within it. According to Rodriguez and Fortier (2009)

Memory culture is the process by which a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving, with the help of cultural mnemonics, its collective knowledge from one generation to the next, rendering it possible for later generations to reconstruct their cultural identity.³ When we speak about cultural memory, we are including in this definition two distinct characteristics: (1) the survival of a historically, politically, and socially marginalized group of people, and (2) the role of spirituality as a form of resistance. (p. 1)

Consequently, when working with immigrant girls from the Caribbean, the methodology that I will draw on will be memory work. This methodology will allow me to access the cultural memories, and other memories associated with the places in the Caribbean they are from to understand how such recollections can inform their present lives and experiences.

The use of memory work and critical Black feminism are important in the development of this project with girls who are from historically marginalized communities and countries. By privileging their voices and their memories, it is my hope that they can begin to tell their own stories about who they are and how they see themselves in the world. Below you will meet the girls who I have worked with over the course of a year. They will speak through memories, artifacts, and experiences, about their pasts, their presents, and their futures. Using new literacies as a framework, I will examine all the various texts that they produce as they define the world, and carve out spaces for themselves within it.

Phenomenology: Case study of the lived experiences of students

Above, I centered my discussions on the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean since they represent a group who are not only marginalized by intersecting factors such as race, gender, and class, but also by immigration (Coleman-King, 2014; Ngo, 2010; Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). In order to fully explore the complexity of their social and academic identity formations, I look to phenomenology as a framework for this study. Phenomenological research examines the lived experiences of individuals. It looks at experiences as they occur, either through writing or through the explorations of themes that elucidate a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). Lived experiences represent an important way for researchers to decipher how individuals understand, feel, and interpret phenomena as they experience them. While the lived experiences of individuals are significant and relevant to human science research, this research doesn't go far enough in helping us to understand how groups collectively make sense of their lived experiences (Haug, 2008; Onyx & Small, 2001; Fraser & Michell, 2015). For this study, a phenomenological framework was necessary since it allowed me to examine specific phenomena as they pertain to my participants' lives. This was necessary since I was working to make sense of how they collectively interpret, unpack, and make meaning of their lives.

The method of collective phenomenology is not entirely new. It is a part of the process that constitutes a phenomenological study. However, it is often used as a secondary tool in this sort of research. The goal of this approach is not to generalize a specific phenomenon; rather, it is to get to the essence/heart of the experience in order to reflect on what that experience means for a group (Van Manen, 1990). Van Manen describes this process in the following way:

The collaborative activity of discussing and testing a research text should not be a situation of discussing group polemic debate or argumentative confrontation...The structure of the conversational relation much more resembles the dialogic relation of what Socrates called the situation of “talking together like friends.” (p. 100)

Based on this idea, I have enacted a phenomenological approach with my participants in a dialogic way to explicate an understanding of their literate lives and lived experiences. Clark (1994) also argues that, “The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 12). In a group setting, my participants and I shared these experiences with each group member. I found that accessing their literacies through various approaches and using a Black feminist framework was powerful in bringing forth strength and confidence for them. This confidence was developed since they knew that others were listening, sharing, and engaging with them as they worked collectively and reflexively to get to the essence of their academic and social identities. By reflexivity I mean, “making the research *process* itself a focus of inquiry, laying open pre-conceptions and becoming aware of situational dynamics in which the interviewer and respondent are jointly involved in knowledge production” (Hsiung, 2010). Clark (1994) also says of this process that, “Friends do not try to make the other weak; in contrast, friends aim to bring out strength. Similarly, the participants of a human science dialogue try to strengthen what is weak in a human science text” (p. 100-101). It was important for me to develop such a relationship with my participants since it was their voices that I wanted to privilege in my study. It was also important for me to develop a strong dialogical relationship with them because it was this relationship that helped in the explication of meaning in all of their experiences that were shared.

Another important tenet of both phenomenology and memory work is the use of the written text as a tool in the research process. Van Manen (1990) suggests that the goal of phenomenology is to transform the lived experience into a “textual expression of its essence” (p. 36). In so doing, the text becomes a tool that can be used in a process where one reflexively and reflectively searches

for meaning in and through their lived experiences. In a reflexive process, one looks deeply at how their beliefs, attitudes, and biases shape and influence their understanding and practice in research; a reflective process asks participants to look back thoughtfully at experiences and memory to explicate greater meaning (Van Manen, 1990). As my earlier methodological discussion of new literacies shows, one would have to rethink what constitutes a text in order to grasp the deeper meaning in the exchange with participants. New literacies helped me accomplish this by calling upon participants to use a wide range of texts (and literacies) during the processes of meaning making. Pushing the boundaries of what constitutes texts, and how memories come to be embodied within these texts, allowed for the fleshing out of the essence of students' academic identity formation through literacies.

In research that pays close attention to collectivity and the process through which a group of people are engaging and learning together, there are various ways in which data is collected and analyzed. In phenomenology, for example, one would pay close attention to the phenomenon being studied, and there is a particular way in which this is done. According to Van Manen (1990),

One participant researching a certain phenomenon will read a first (second, third, or fourth) draft of his or her paper. And on the basis of this description other participants share their views of the ways the description does or does not resonate with their own experiences...The research group or seminar circle is a formal way for convening and gathering the interpretive insights of others to a research text... What one seeks in a conversational relation with others is a common orientation to the notion or the phenomenon that one is studying. (p. 100)

This point demonstrates the importance of a framework that is concerned with engagement, and a group process of thinking and fleshing out ideas together. What's important about phenomenology as it relates to memory work is that neither phenomenology nor memory work speak explicitly about other processes (exclusive of writing) that can be explored in the path toward greater meaning. In my study, such processes included (but were not limited to) examinations of images, maps, miscellaneous objects, films, social media sites, and other such resources to note the representations of race and gender and the intersections of both. These other texts, coupled with

the written articulations that participants brought to the table, represented powerful emancipatory sources as we worked together to flesh out deeper meaning in experiences, and in self. We used a framework concerned with the collective, all the while being attentive to the ways in which literacies can give us access to the lives of individuals; this made phenomenological research indispensable to my study.

The Lived Experience and Memory: Personal Reflections

While phenomenology is human science research that gets to the essence/meaning of a particular phenomenon, memory work is research that focuses on capturing and documenting those experiences for liberatory purposes (Crawford, 1992). What also makes memory work interesting and important to phenomenology is its emphasis on a non-hierarchical structure in the research process. In my study, this was especially important and relevant because I was also a participant in the research. I shared equally with my participants and allowed myself to be as vulnerable as they were with me. I was able to engage with participants in the same ways that they engaged with each other. This was crucial since I did not present myself as an expert, but as a learner and contributor to the conversations and discussions relating to each phenomenon we explored. As a researcher, I understood that experiences shape knowledge and ideologies. Consequently, each participant was presumed to have a wealth of knowledge building from their memories and their lived experiences. I therefore relied on their voices and their telling of their stories as I worked through a process of analysis (discussed below). Feld and Basso (1996) capture this fundamental element of memory and its place in research. They ask that we,

Imagine the past and the present as sensed, tactile places that remember and haunt, how the past just comes to people out roaming the hills in body and mind. Picture a “real” embodied in the particularities of precise effects—how identity, social history, and a sense of place can all be recounted together in a litany of places in the hills, social places, and places on the body. There is a constant recounting of places on the body where life has left

its impact—the scars, the locations of pain, the disfigurements, the amputations, the muscle and joints and bones that remember. (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 148)

Feld and Basso (1996) present points here that pushed me to reconsider how I should engage memories, and what causes each of us to remember. Memory based on this conception is therefore without limits. It is with this understanding that I was able to look to more complex nuanced understandings of memory as sources of knowledge for participants. I was able to extend dominant conceptions of memory to consider how places inside and outside of the body can serve as sources of inquiry. In this way, memory was able to serve as an important resource in my study.

The use of phenomenology was also essential to this study since its focus is one's lived experiences. It allows for the exploration of these experiences in a variety of places/contexts. For example, when reflecting on my own lived experiences as an immigrant girl from the Caribbean, I looked to my memories at school, at home with family, back home in Jamaica, and recorded in my journals. These places are significant since it was through them that I was able to flesh out meaning and consider how each of these places contributed to my overall identity. The complexity of studying the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean is that I had to consider that while some of their lived experiences occurred in school, they also took place in spaces that were not tangible, such as the internet. This is why the pairing of memory work and NLS become central to phenomenological research. These tools were essential to accessing the places that conventional phenomenological research cannot go.

Research Participants and Context

Located in a large urban Northeastern city in the United States, City High¹⁰ is located in the largest Caribbean community in the state. The neighborhood of Walden Park¹¹ is home to the majority of Caribbean immigrants in the city. However, the city itself is largely populated by African Americans, with diverse populations throughout (Census, 2010).

I selected a predominantly Black school in a Black community intentionally since this demographic group is the focus of my research. My choice rested on the ethnic diversity that is consistent with this section of the city. I also selected this site because I have developed a rapport with staff, administration, and students over the course of a few months prior to data collection. According to the data for City High, 81% of the school's population is African American (all ethnic groups are presumed to be African American since no distinction is made regarding the ethnicity or culture of the Black population), of which 48% are girls. Many intersecting forces are at play within this school; these include forces such as poverty, religion, and (gang) violence. As a researcher at City High I have learned a great deal from my participants regarding how their overall community has influenced their academic and social identities. Using the methodology and frameworks I discussed above I have been able to gather data that demonstrates a link between my participants' senses of self and their social worlds. I will expound upon findings in chapters four, five, and six.

To understand City High and the students who attend this school, one must consider the rich history of the city and the neighboring counties that border this area. City High is located in an area that can best be described as economically depressed. The abandoned buildings and the dilapidated structures that surround the school are tell-tale signs of poverty, inequality, and the socio-economic disparity that continues to exist globally. A fifteen-minute walk in any direction

¹⁰ Pseudonym

¹¹ Pseudonym

around the school offers a picture that demonstrates a rich cultural history of struggle, Black pride, and religious freedom. This is reflected in the murals, the religious sites, the occasional Black liberation flags, and the businesses that are owned and operated by Muslims, Black immigrants from across the diaspora, and African Americans.

The community surrounding City High reflects the presence of one of the largest Black Muslim populations in the United States. With stores that sell traditional Muslim garb, and stores that offer customers a wide variety of African dashikis, head coverings, and African fabrics, this complexity cannot be overlooked. Even the foods that are sold in the area reflect a mix of culture and diversity that is unique to the city itself. Here we have Caribbean restaurants (mainly Jamaican and Trinidadian), shops that serve halal foods, and food trucks that offer a blend of southern and American fare. There is also an overrepresentation of fast food restaurants throughout the area. With churches and mosques, Black Muslims, Caribbean immigrants, African immigrants, and African Americans, this location reflects a rich history of Black resistance, diasporic diversity, and Black racial consciousness. City High is also a reflection of this rich history and the city's historic struggle to bolster Black pride and unity. As I walk through the hallways of City High I am greeted with Black Lives Matter posters and signs, in addition to positive messages by Black and Brown freedom fighters. Additionally, there is a bulletin board with the faces of Black men who have been killed at the hands of police over the last three-to-five-year period. The messages are ubiquitous throughout the school, and they command the attention of the viewer.

If you drive another fifteen minutes away from City High you are immediately met with the paradox that is consistent with the outskirts of this area; wealth and poverty. Walden Park (pseudonym) differs starkly from the neighboring counties. Whereas Walden Park is predominantly Black (over 76%), neighboring Brooks County (pseudonym) (71%) and Davis County (pseudonym) (79%) are predominantly white (Census, 2010). Lined with row and semi-detached homes, Walden Park residences live in close proximity to each other, while those in the neighboring

counties live in mainly detached structures with very little evidence of the kind of poverty that is evident in Walden Park.

A unique feature of this area is the beautiful parks that function as gathering places for people throughout the community. During the summer of 2016, I often visited some of these parks. I also attended a few events/gatherings at one of them. I was surprised at how important these sites were to the wellbeing of the community and to my participants. One park in particular, Garvey Park (pseudonym), always seemed to be a gathering place for Caribbean immigrants. With cricket games, soccer, and the sounds of reggae and calypso music, the Caribbean heritage is clearly represented in this section of the city. This rich diversity and cultural complexity makes this site extremely important for my study.

Since the start of my project, my participants have had a great deal to contribute to my understanding of what it means to be a first and second-generation immigrant girl living in this city, attending this school, and redefining what Black girlhood means for them. Below I have provided two different figures. In Figure one, you will see images of the school, and the neighboring community. In the second figure, I have provided a chart detailing who my participants are, and the ways in which they self-identify. It's important to note that these identities are extremely fluid. The ways students expressed their academic and social identities throughout the course of the study shifted and changed for various reasons. These reasons will be discussed in later chapters.

Figure 3- 1



Images of Walden Park and City High

Table 1: Student Participants

<i>Students (Pseudonyms)</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Place born</i>	<i>How students self-identify</i>
Serenity James	15	10	US	Jamerican (Pegasus)
Rashida Brown	17	12	US	Trinidadian
Zuri Smith	16	11	Jamaica	Jamaican
Amanda Roswell	16	11	US	American
Kali Murphy	16	11	Barbados	Afro Bajan
Jocelyn Wright	16	11	US	Jamaican American
Imani Rhone	17	12	US	Jamaican American
Zion Campbell	15	10	US	Vincentian
Ife Bell	16	11	Barbados	Bajan American
Nina Stewart	19	12	US	Puerto Rican

Table 2: Teachers and Administrators

Names (Pseudonyms)	Subject area/Administrative role	Grades Taught
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Stanley King	Principal	
Cathleen Wilson	Dean of School Culture	
Elaine Thompson	Dean	
Jane Rogers	English	11
Jack Francis	English	11
Cynthia Black	English	11 (Student teacher)
Susan Baptiste	African American History	10
Andrea Castella	History	11

Research Design and Overview

In the spring of 2016 I was first introduced to many of my participants. I visited City High over a six-month period (January-June) meeting staff, teachers, and students. I found many opportunities to talk about my project, describe my interests, and to learn about the students who attended City High. My intention was to learn about the site and the community where I would eventually spend a year conducting my research. At the start of the fall semester I acquired permission from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at The Pennsylvania State University to begin the official process toward data collection. I began to reconnect with students I had met in the spring, giving them a flyer that had all the details concerning my project and what I was hoping to learn (see appendix). I asked them to share it with girls from the Caribbean who they thought would be interested. Creswell (Forman, Creswell, Damschroder, Kowalski, & Krein, 2008) refers to this as snowball sampling. This is a process where individuals who were initially identified recommended potential participants who might be interested in the project.

It took about one to three weeks for potential participants to contact me. After this initial contact, I scheduled a meeting where I invited all who expressed interest to answer questions, share information, and learn about each other. Each of the girls who attended expressed a great deal of interest, and they conveyed a willingness to participate. I sent consent forms home with each student, and ten students returned their forms, which initiated the start of the research project. These students became my participants and they remained committed to the project from the beginning until I ended my study. I advised them that at any point during the project they could withdraw. They were made aware each step of the way that the project is strictly voluntary. I also met with staff, teachers, and administrators (see the above charts) and asked if they were willing to participate. Their insights provide me with the context necessary to fully understand City High student performance in classes, and some of the courses in which my participants were enrolled.

The study lasted for the entire academic year (September–June). This time was necessary to ensure that I understood the school culture and my participants' lived experiences and articulations of academic and social identities through NLS. It also provided me the time to build the trust necessary for participants to give me access to their lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Madison, 2005, 2011; Spradley, 1979). During this time, I met with students two to three days a week. These days consisted of memory work group meetings, interviewing, participant observations, and artifact collection. Each week included at least one day where I met with students for a memory work focus group meeting; the other two days I spent observing classes, and having one on one meetings with participants. It was extremely important for me to structure time where I met with participants both collectively and individually. This strategy proved to be generative for expanding and contextualizing past discussions. I also focused a great deal of time writing field notes and engaging in a process of reflexivity. It was important to ask myself each step of the way how my own biases were impacting the kinds of data I collected, and how I was interpreting that data. Maxwell (2012) addresses the importance of these questions,

and suggests that the methods used for data collection should be directly related to the information one desires. I have adapted the research matrix below to demonstrate the relationship between the questions I was interrogating, the purpose for those questions, the sources that would aid me in answering those questions, and how that data would be analyzed.

Table 3: Research Matrix

<i>What do I need to know?</i>	<i>Why do I need to know this?</i>	<i>Where can I find the data?</i>	<i>Who do I contact for access</i>	<i>What kinds of data will answer the questions? (methods)</i>	<i>How will these data be analyzed?</i>
How are students constructing academic and social identities?	To determine the factors that are informing the construction of these identities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks • Grades • Interviews • Digital spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants • Teachers • Administrators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artifacts • Interviews • Observations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NVivo
How can memory work help us to understand the relationship between participant's past, present and future?	To determine if working and thinking collectively with others and can be useful in generating deep critical thinking about one's experiences, and what factors might be shaping them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In memory work meetings • Interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory work meetings • Interviews • Artifacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student responses • NVivo
What can the literate lives of students tell us about who they are and how they see themselves in the world?	To understand the ways in which students are using literacies in the construction of identities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notebooks • Interviews • Digital spaces • Teachers • Administrators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants • Teachers • Administrators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artifacts • Interviews • Observations • Shadowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NVivo
What does it mean to be an immigrant girl from the Caribbean?	This will be essential in understanding what it means for my	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Memory work focus group meetings • Notebooks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations • Shadowing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NVivo

	participants to occupy spaces in a predominately African American school as first and second generation immigrants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital spaces 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memory work focus group meeting 	
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Section II

Data Collection Methods

This study collected data using four qualitative research methods. Each was essential to understanding the academic and social identities of my participants. The data collected included: participant observations, memory work focus groups, artifacts, and interviews. I selected these methods since they were consistent with methods used in ethnographic research, and they provided me with a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of my participants. Also, since this is a qualitative research endeavor, these methods have proven to be effective and reliable in the work of other scholars who have taken up similar questions in their work (Coleman-King, 2014, 2014; Cox, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2011; Finders, 1997; Morris, 2016; J. M. Staples, 2016). In addition, these methods work in a complementary fashion with the methodology I described above. To understand the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean, it is important to ask them, to allow them to self-define, and to work with them to determine how their experiences are informing the identities they are constructing.

My time with my participants has proven the significance of their voices in the telling of their stories. R. N. Brown (2009) has noted in her work that as researchers, “we lack a language

that accurately describes what it means to work with Black girls in a way that is not about controlling their bodies and/or producing white, middle-class subjectivities” (p. 2). Brown (2009) further posits that, “Black girls’ lives are inherently valuable and so is Black girlhood. Some people do not act as if this is the case, including Black girls’ themselves” (p. 3). The methods employed for this study, along with memory work and critical Black feminism, have provided the necessary space to understand how my participants are constructing identities. Memory work, critical Black feminism, and new literacies, have allowed me to approach my research in a holistic manner. This means that I have not only considered what I have learned from my research site, but what I have learned from my participants regarding their school, their homes, and their communities. I have asked them to share with me histories, and memories of who they are, who their families are, where they come from, and where they see themselves beyond the now. Since qualitative research that utilizes ethnographic methods is concerned with peoples and cultures (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Silverman, 2016; Spradley, 1979) I ask that the reader consider that culture isn’t something that is experienced at the site of the research, but that it is also embodied within the participants of this study. I further ask that the reader consider City High a part of a larger puzzle that makes up the wholeness of each of my participants. In this way, we can consider how their actions, and their behaviors are informed by their pasts, presents, and desires for their futures.

According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), ethnographic research is the study of culture where one is immersed in the natural world of their participants. It examines a wide range of data sources, and looks closely at the actions of participants, it is also concerned with a process of reflexivity. This means that the researcher is considering how his or her stance is informing the direction of the research each step of the way. Madison (2005) refers to this as researcher positioning. She posits,

Positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we denounce the power structures that surround our subjects. A concern for positionality is a reflexive ethnography; it is a turning back on ourselves. When we turn

back on ourselves, we examine our intentions, our methods, and our possible effects. We are accountable for our research paradigms, our authority, and our moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation. (p. 14)

Considering this, I will discuss the ways in which the approaches I mentioned above are informed by my methodology and my stance as a critical Black feminist new literacies researcher.

Participant Observations

Participant observation was the first method I used to execute my study. I selected this method since it allowed me to develop a rapport with participants. Spradley (1979) describes rapport as “a harmonious relationship between the ethnographer and the informant” (p. 134). This rapport changes over time, so it was essential for me to spend time listening, learning, and, providing my participants with the space and time necessary to begin to share with me even if that meant that what they shared, and how much they shared, would change over time. Specifically, there were instances over the course of the year when one participant in particular, Jocelyn Wright, demonstrated a shift in what she was willing to share, and when this sharing would occur. This was understandable and I accepted it, knowing that while some of my participants would be ready to share, others would not be. Since the methodology of memory work relied so heavily on open dialogue, and the sharing of personal memories, it was necessary to begin the project with this specific approach. It allowed me to essentially break the ice with my participants in a comfortable and natural manner.

Participant observation is defined as “the process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities” (Kawulich, 2005, p. 2). The use of participant observation was essential to this study because it provided me with deeper insights into the social worlds of my participants. Also, participant observations enabled me to become a member of the community, a sort of insider-

outsider positionality (Emerson et al., 2011). My participant observations took place in a variety of locations, some of which included the cafeteria, classrooms, the auditorium, hallways, the teacher's lounge (where many of our memory work focus group meetings took place), and in out-of-school spaces such as homes, movie theaters, and sports events. Powell (2006) has noted,

Participation has often been defined through activities such as interviews, informal conversations, and limited interactions with those involved in a study. This is particularly true of ethnographies of education, in part due to the limited nature of participatory opportunities in school settings. (p. 34)

Consequently, the field notes data I documented sometimes reflected very minimal interaction. At other times, there are examples of deeper engagement and interactions between my participants.

Participant Observations Discussed

In the context of City High, participant observations were conducted two to three days per week. I went to the high school on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays, each week. The protocol I followed for observations began with a one on one (1:1) approach with each of the ten participants (this is also true of administrators and teachers). These observations took place during the school day, when I sat in on English classes, and in primary elective courses that took place at the end of each day. However, there were some instances where I sat in on History and Social Studies classes. I also spent time with students during their lunch periods, in the hallways, in the auditorium, at gym, and while they hung out with their friends. I arrived at the high school during first period, which begins at 8:16 am, and remained at the school until 3:16 pm. I would meet students in a variety of places throughout City High. During my observations, I sat in their classes, either next to them, close to them, or across the room. I listened to them speak in those spaces, I observed their behaviors, their natural interactions with their teachers and peers, with people they liked and people they didn't like. Kawulich (2005) discusses participant nonverbal behaviors as a way to understand

participants' lived experiences. This approach is especially useful since it provided a more nuanced understanding of each participant.

According to Kawulich, (2005) there are four different ways in which observers engage in the process of observations. One example is when the researcher is a complete participant in his study and hides his/her role and intentions from those being studied. There is another where the researcher is *participant as observer*, or one where the researcher is *observer as participant*. In the final approach, the researcher is so far removed from the participants (literally out of sight) that he/she is barely noticed. While it seems intuitive that one might choose one approach over another, I believe that these approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive. For example, since the methodology of memory work is collective in nature it is important that I am as open with my participants as they were with me. Memory work demands specifically (as will be demonstrated in the discussion below) that the researcher is a member of the group that is being studied (it is made explicit to research participants that they are engaged in a research study). It demands that the researcher is vulnerable and open with participants. This process is reciprocal in nature, which consequently means that I have occupied spaces both a *participant as observer*, and an *observer as participant*.

Kawulich (2005) has noted that,

In the participant as observer stance, the researcher is a member of the group being studied, and the group is aware of the research activity. In this stance, the researcher is a participant in the group who is observing others and who is interested more in observing than in participating, as his/her participation is a given, since he/she is a member of the group. (p. 7)

He describes the participant as observer stance as one in which,

the researcher is a member of the group being studied, and the group is aware of the research activity. In this stance, the researcher is a participant in the group who is observing others and who is interested more in observing than in participating, as his/her participation is a given, since he/she is a member of the group. (p. 7)

I have drawn from each of these approaches in the collection of my data, and in my interaction with participants. The bridging of these approaches means that in some instances (such as the moments in which I was engaged in participant observation groups) I was *participant as observer*, and yet when I sat in classes, walked in the hallways, attended games, and conducted interviews I was *observer as participant*.

The observations I conducted with administrators and teachers was similar to the approaches I took with student participants. The only difference was that my stance was strictly observer as participant. I structured meetings with teachers and administrators according to their schedules and their availabilities. In classrooms, I listened during direct instruction, and I observed student-teacher and student-administrator interactions. I observed the natural interactions that occurred on a regular basis. Insofar as teachers were concerned, I sat in an English classroom. I generated questions based on these observations that I would ask during interviews. It was important for me to observe both teachers and administrators since there were many instances during data collection in which student participants shared information, made comments, and reflected on memories that involved some of these individuals. I wanted to ensure that I had the context to understand my participants and some of our subsequent interviews. While participant observation represents an important approach to my data, there were other approaches that provided me with great insight and understanding about my participants. Memory work, in particular, was another important method.

Memory Work Focus Group Meetings

Memory work focus groups were another essential method used in the collection of data. According to Onyx & Small (2001) this collective and collaborative approach to data collection “breaks down the barriers between the subject and object of research” (p. 775). Memory work

demands that the researcher is a contributing member of the focus group. Consequently, merely characterizing the group meeting as just a focus group doesn't provide an accurate representation of what happened when I met with participants. The memory work component of my research allowed for the development of a rapport that brought about a greater depth to conversations, interactions, and sharing. During my meetings with participants, I recorded audio and occasional video. All of these meetings were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo. During these memory work focus group meetings, we discussed, shared, and engaged in casual conversations—what Onyx & Small (2001) call talking like friends—and finally began the sharing of memories. This sharing occurred in many ways. For example, participants brought in artifacts as material representations of memory. They also recited poetry, wrote memories, and engaged in multiple new literacies events (J. M. Staples, 2016).

The protocol that I followed for memory work focus groups required that I meet with participants once weekly, always on Fridays and always in the teachers' lounge. Finding private spaces where we could share, think, and discuss was important for our time together. On some of the days that we met all ten participants would be in attendance; other times, there were three to five of us. Who attended, when they attended, and how long they stayed all depended on whether they attended school that day, where there was a conflict in their schedule, or if they had other commitments. Once we met, each meeting began with a general catching up of what had transpired in our lives since our last meeting, and how those experiences might have impacted each participant during the course of that week.

Once we all connected, we gathered either at a table that placed us in close proximity with each other, or we sat on a sofa while other participants gathered around on chairs. Participants were often preemptive and brought with them a particular memory they wanted to share, and when they didn't have anything that was completed or thought out in advance, they performed a memory orally. Often these performances were consistent with a memory they had either shared before or

something that came up at different times, either during interviews or observations, or in digital spaces. We often had time for two to three memories at a time, since the analysis and meaning making takes a significant amount of time. Often after a memory is shared we spend upwards of an hour or more engaged in the analysis of that memory. Once we completed our sharing and analysis, it was usually the end of the school day. While some participants would leave, others would remain behind to share some detailed that they didn't always share with the rest of the group.

The Specifics of Memory Work as Method

As a method, memory work has three distinct phases; phase one establishes guidelines/rules, phase two focuses on memory analysis, and phase three calls for evaluation and theorizing (Crawford, 1992; Haug, 1987a). Instrumental to each phase was the equal participation of all student participants engaged in the study (Crawford, 1992). In phase one, the girls and I decided on the topic/phenomenon to be explored. Once we decided on that topic we began to think about and consider the events and experiences linked to that memory. In phase two, a collective analysis/unpacking of that memory took place. In a phenomenological sense, this was where we made meaning, where participants got to the essence of the phenomena at hand. The third and final phase involved participants' theorizing and evaluating what was shared and discussed. During this phase, participants used theories that focused specifically on race, class, gender etc. During the third phase, they were able to talk about the memories they shared and flesh out meaning in a way that made sense to them. The embodiment of critical Black feminism along with memory work provided the space for this kind of analysis and self-defining to take place.

According to (Haug, 1987a) meaning is made together with participants because, if meaning is made alone, then participants run the risk of analyzing their memories through the lens of a dominant structure. By acknowledging the discourses (Gee, 2012, 2014) and ideologies that

inform a white supremacist patriarchal positioning, participants were able to alert and check each other as reminders when these ideologies were reproduced and embodied. Rather than use existing paradigms to make sense of their lived experiences, participants were able to enact a critical consciousness (Freire, 1997) to avoid recreating white supremacist ideologies. In our memory work focus group meetings, participants worked together to bring about awareness through reflexivity.

This practice contributed to visibility for each of these girls. They were able to see in concrete ways who they were, and what they wanted the world to know about them. The sharing of memories provided space for reflection that gave way to the possibility of self-discovery. It allowed each participant to find herself and discover who she really was with the help of her peers. For example, Crawford (1992) notes, “If...we write down and scrutinize any given memory from childhood, we find ourselves confronted with a diverse number of apparently fixed and given opinions, actions, attitudes, motives and desires, which in themselves demand explication” (p. 47). Participants create meaning through the process of explication. The table below describes the phases of memory work in greater detail. You can see that each phase is collaborative, from the selection of topics to the group effort of understanding each other’s memories.

Table 4: Phases of Memory Work

Note: This table should be read from top to bottom starting with the left column, then move to the other columns on the right. It also represents an example of how memory work is used in its current structure.

Phase I Rules according to collective (researchers)	Phase II Analysis of memories.	Phase III Evaluate and theorize.
Write a memory	Each memory work group member expresses opinions and ideas about each memory in turn.	Compare and contrast the memories produced in relation to the cues presented (Cues are co-constructed).

Of a particular episode, action or event	Look for similarities/differences between memories. Look for continuous elements among memories whose relations to each other are not immediately apparent. Do not resort to autobiography or biography (this implies that participants shouldn't tell stories about themselves or others to distract from making connections or links to other participant's memories).	Incorporate insights gained from the theorizing of late memory topics. (Late memories refer to more recent memories. Since memory work focuses on childhood memories, these late memories can be useful in sense making).
In third person	Each memory work member identifies clichés, generalizations, contradictions, cultural imperatives, and metaphors.	Read and listen to group discussions and critically examine the themes and commonsense understandings arrived at, relating them to your own understandings of social practices as informed by particular theoretical positions.
In as much detail as possible, even the seemingly inconsequential (consider senses)	Discuss theories, popular conceptions, sayings and images about the topic.	Discuss forgetting and remembering, repression and suppression. Consider the impact of gender on the ways in which theory is applied.
No interpretation, explanation, or biography.	Each member examines what is not written in the memories (but might be expected to be).	Consider the differences between childhood and adult memories.
Write one of your earliest memories.	Rewrite the memories.	Evaluate and theorize. (Participants are free to theorize using theories that are familiar to them or ones we discuss collectively)

(Table adapted from Crawford, 1992, p. 44-51)

This table provides a look at memory work in its current structure. Phase one and two would be where the tenets of collective phenomenology and new literacies can be used to push memory work a little further in collective action and purpose.

Artifact Collection

In her text on memory (remembering), spirituality, teaching and endarkened feminisms, Dillard (2011) describes the multisensory nature of artifacts and their importance in memory

research. She speaks specifically about beads and the importance of them in the study of cultures and peoples. These beads, like the artifacts I have examined with my participants, are much more than simple objects. According to Dillard (2011),

[They] tell a deeper story of the culture and the history of the people who created it, the relationship between peoples and how it traveled from place to place. As a container of memory, they are a beautiful reminder of the cultural nature of life all over the world...They are containers of memory that are embodied, that engage, body, mind, and spirit. In other words, like memory, you can hear, touch, see, smell, taste, and feel them in and with the body. (p. 41)

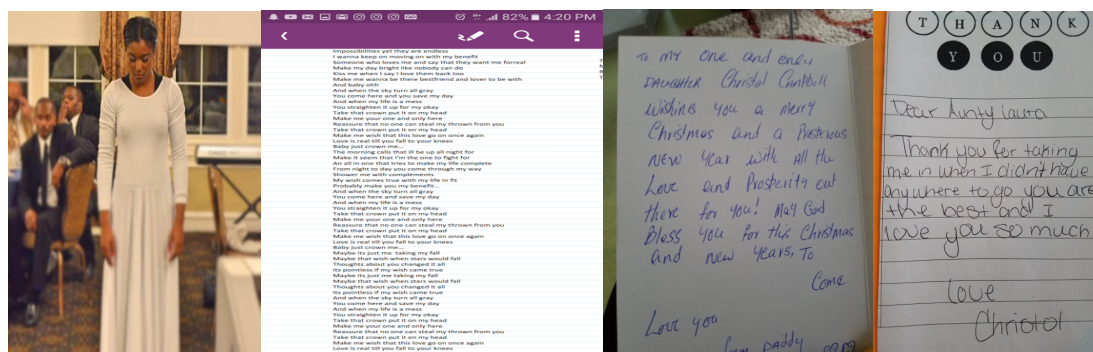
It is this very idea that informed the use of artifacts in my study. It is also what Rodrigues and Fronteir (2009) are talking about when they argue that cultural memories can take on various forms(see chapter one). Drawing on these ideas, I asked my participants to consider artifacts as material objects that can be discussed, analyzed, and reflected on in the same way that we would reflect on written text. As a new literacies scholar, I contend that artifacts present an excellent source for deeper analysis towards the understandings of identities. It is a place where we can learn about an individual's identity, and how such identities are a part of a larger network that extends beyond the boundaries of self. Artifacts are an essential part of understanding the literate lives of my participants. In terms of analysis, we can read them through a process of photo elicitation; in many ways, we can analyze them in the very way we would a written document. My ability to read these artifacts occurred with the help of my participants. They helped with context and with the meaning each object had for them. This offered me tremendous insight into who they were, and their relationship with their social worlds.

In addition to the idea that memories can be embodied within artifacts, they can also be used to extend learning and understanding of various topics and ideas. According to Pahl & Rowsell (2010),

Artifacts create a pedagogical space that invites sustained meaning making, a web of activity that includes talking, listening, crafting, cutting, drawing, gluing. They can be used by educators to start discussions that can open up new spaces in the classroom. (p. 55)

In relation to my study, artifacts were used in conjunction with other methods to create a richer, more nuanced understanding of each of my participants and their lived experiences. Some examples of the artifacts my participants shared with me over the course of the year included: notebooks, pictures, markings inscribed upon the body, cards, text messages, love letters, essays for class, college essays, snap chats, and Instagram posts. These artifacts and others brought richness to discussions, interviews, and even to the memories that were shared. Below are four examples of artifacts that my participants shared with me.

Figure 3- 2



Participant Artifacts

Interviewing

The ethnographic method of interviewing allows one to “access the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (Seidman, 2013, p. 10). Over the course of a year with my participants I looked to many methods and social interactions to characterize my understanding of what my participants shared, and even what they didn’t share. Learning about my participants required that I listened significantly more than I spoke. This meant that my questions had to be crafted in such a way that my participants would be comfortable and willing to share the details of their experiences with me. The protocol I

followed for interviews with student participants was structured around the concept of the *three interview series* (Seidman, 2013). I did this with my participants since it was vital for them to tell their own stories—to self-define. Administrators and teachers were interviewed once. Seidman (2013) suggests that this approach should begin with:

1. [A] one-shot meeting with an interviewee whom they have never met [and] tread on thin contextual ice. (p. 17)
2. The second [interview] allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. (p. 17)
3. The third [interview] encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (p. 17) (Seidman 2013).

While this approach called for just three interviews, there were instances where I had significantly more than this. This approach allows participants a chance to share their initial experiences of a particular phenomenon then once I have revisited these interviews follow up with them concerning things that needed more clarity. I often relied on them to talk through their ideas without my own reflection or comments about what they had shared. I found the approach of speaking less and listening more to be extremely important to my understanding of what participants had shared with me.

I interviewed all of my participants three or more times to ensure that I had clarity on what we had discussed during memory work focused group meetings, what I noticed during participant observations, or what they had shared in digital spaces. All interviews were digitally recorded and later saved on a password-safe computer in a folder that also required a password to access. Interviews were often conducted in the school building at City High, however, there were instances where interviews took place while walking, over lunch, on the phone, or (in one instance) at the mall. During follow up meetings with participants, I often brought along a transcribed version of past conversations, in order to follow up on ideas touched on, statements made, or emotions

expressed. These transcripts were not meant to be used to interrogate participants; rather they were a way to provide clarity and context, and to help with the meaning-making process. Each member consequently had the ability to revisit, change, or re-do interviews to ensure that they conveyed the meanings they were comfortable with (Bradshaw, 2001; Cho & Trent, 2006). Some examples of questions that were posed to participants were:

- How do you self-identify and why?
- How would you define literacy or what it means to be literate?
- What has your experience been like at this school?
- What has your experience been like at your high school and how is it similar or different from the experiences of others within this group?
- Talk about a moment when you felt different or similar to other girls in your school or grade.
- What can you tell me about your experiences as a first or second-generation immigrant in a predominantly African American school?
- How do you self-identify at this moment? Have you ever identified differently at any point while in high school?

Administrator(s)/Teacher(s) Interviews

When my data collection began, I conducted three interviews with City High administrators. I began with these administrators, since I wanted to gain an understanding of the school demographics, student population, and the mission and vision of the school. It was important for me to understand the expectations of these school leaders before meeting with my student participants. These administrators were the Principal, Stanley King; the dean of school culture, Cathleen Wilson; and another dean, Elaine Thompson, who mainly dealt with behavior, and extra-

curricular programming for City High. They each offered me insight into their relationships with students, the culture of the school, their expectations of students and teachers, and also insight into the community. I conducted only one interview with each of these individuals, and these lasted anywhere between sixty to eighty minutes. I selected this particular approach since a Black feminist stance demands that I give my participants opportunities to tell me their experiences of the school, and how they made sense of themselves within in.

I also interviewed five teachers, three in English language arts, and two whose focuses were history/social studies. These interviews took place at different times during the course of the year. I wanted to wait a few months before interviewing teachers, since I wanted the time to first learn about my participants, and how they experienced their classes, their literate practices within them, and the identities they constructed as a result. I also wanted to conduct participant observations within these classes over the course of a few months before conducting these interviews. Consequently, once I interviewed these teachers, they already had multiple interactions with me and had grown quite comfortable with my presence in the classes. While the rapport we developed differed from the one I developed with my students, we were extremely cordial and respectful of each other. My interviews with teachers also centered on the materials they engaged with and how such materials were received by their students.

Participant Interviews

Over the course of a year I interviewed ten student participants, each at least three times during that time period. As I noted earlier, there were instances when participants were interviewed more than three times. This occurred when students either wanted to talk further regarding an ongoing topic, or if I found that there was a particular phenomenon I wanted to explore further. Interviews lasted anywhere from thirty to eighty minutes. Follow up interviews were often shorter

than interviews conducted the second or third time. These interviews were for clarity, and consequently they didn't always take up a great deal of time. To grasp an in-depth understanding of each of my participants, I often asked questions that offered me insight into participants' literate lives. We often talked about what they did with literacies, where these experiences took place, how their practices changed over time, and what factors influence their literate lives. This was necessary, since during our meetings we often spent time discussing artifacts they would bring with them, their social media presentation of themselves, or other documents that they shared with me and other participants.

Seidman (2013) has posited that,

At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience...At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. That is why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers, and why finding pseudonyms for participants is a complex and sensitive task. (p. 8)

It was extremely important for me to accurately allow my participants to tell their own stories. Having multiple interviews allowed participants to self-define their literate lives and lived experiences. My work with immigrant girls from the Caribbean demanded a tremendous amount of reflexive work. Since I am also an immigrant from the Caribbean, I had to ensure that I wasn't filtering participant experiences through my own. Interviews allowed me to determine how my interpretation and contextualizing of participants' experiences were influenced by my own biases.

Section III

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The analysis of my data took place through the use of a qualitative research tool—NVivo. All data stored in this software was protected in a folder only accessible by password. All documents collected during the data collection process was scanned and uploaded to NVivo; this also included my field notes and memos. All audio files were transcribed and uploaded as well. The mp4 (video) files were also directly uploaded to NVivo. The coding and theming of data all took place within this software. Once all data was collected and uploaded I began the process of revising each interview transcript, memory work focus group meeting transcript, memo, and set of field notes. Beginning in a chronological manner, I began to code the data using a process of open and focused coding (Emerson et al., 2011). According to Emerson (2011),

In qualitative coding, we ask questions of data in order to develop, elaborate, and refine analytic categories and insights... These programs enable the fieldworker to place very specific and detailed codes on particular segments of field notes and interviews, to link these codes to other codes and categories, and to retrieve all data recorded under any code. (p. 175-176)

These codes emerged through a thorough reading and analysis of the data. There were many instances during the analysis process where my participants were providing the codes by directly naming a phenomenon being discussed. The coding of an academic year worth of data required a reliance on my field notes for reminders, (in the moment) reflections, and my memos.

Open coding

The process of open coding demanded that I asked questions of my data as I was analyzing. The coding began with me asking myself two simple questions: *what is the data telling me?* vs. *what do I want the data to tell me?* By beginning at this point, I constantly engaged in a process of reflexivity. I needed to ask myself how my own biases were potentially informing the analyzing of my data and perhaps even the findings. Emerson (2011) notes that,

Open coding begins with the ethnographer mentally asking questions of specific pieces of field note data. In asking such questions, the ethnographer draws on a wide variety of resources, including direct experiences of life and events in the setting; sensitivity toward the concerns and orientations of members; memory of other specific incidents described elsewhere in one's notes; the leads and insights developed in in-process commentaries and memos; one's own prior experience and insight gained in other settings; and the concepts and orientation provided by one's profession or discipline. Nothing is out of bounds! (p. 177)

Consequently, I relied on this process to question the data each step of the way; this allowed me to create codes that I believe were excellent representation of the data I collected. After the creation of codes using NVivo, I revisited the codes to determine whether specific patterns had materialized during this process. It was then that I began to see the emergence of patterns. For example, there were instances when I began to see the relationship between codes, and therefore had to create subcategories to account for this relationship. These codes surfaced while I analyzed photographs, academic essays, poetry, songs, field notes, performances, interviews, letters, jottings, video, and audio.

Focused Coding

NVivo refers to codes as nodes. These terms can be used interchangeably. Finding these codes then allowed for the close reading and fleshing out of the relationship between and across

codes. The intuitive nature of this qualitative research tool allows researchers to begin to use those codes to develop themes and subthemes, to triangulate data across themes, and to begin to ask themselves, what story is my data beginning to tell? This is referred to as focused coding. According to Emerson (2011),

[focused coding] involves building up and, in some cases, further elaborating analytically interesting themes, both by connecting data that initially may not appeared to go together and by further delineating subthemes and subtopics that distinguish differences and variations within the broader topic... With focused coding, the ethnographer may also begin to envision possible ways of making an argument or telling a story about some aspect of the lives of people in the setting. (p. 192-193)

This particular approach allowed me to color coordinate themes and subthemes within NVivo, as they began to manifest through the data. I was able to make connections and determine ways in which I can begin to share the stories of my participants. The ways in which I analyzed, coded, and subsequently themed the data were all linked to my methodological framework, and also my participants.

Artifacts and Written Textual analysis

The analysis of artifacts, for example, required that I analyze the context and the meaning it carried for each participant. While interpreting the meaning a particular artifact had for a participant, I looked directly to their words to make meaning. Holder (2008) posits that,

Meaning does not reside in a text but in the writing and reading of it. As the text is reread in different context it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded. Thus, there is no “original” or “true” meaning of a text outside specific historical contexts. (p. 111)

Since my methodological stance demands self-definition, I used each artifact as a source of discussion and analysis. By the time I arrived at this data, much of the work of understanding how to code each artifact, or the story that an artifact is telling, was often determined during the interview process. As Holder (2008) notes,

The written text is an artifact, capable of transmission, manipulation, and alteration, used and discarded, reused and recycled— “doing” different things contextually through time. The writing down of words often allows language and meanings to be controlled more effectively, and to be linked to strategies of centralization and codification. The word, concretization or “made flesh” in the artifact, can transcend context and gather through time extended symbolic connotations. The word made enduring in artifacts has an important role to play in both secular and religious processes of legitimation of power. (p. 112)

Consequently, the use of artifacts meant that context had to be accounted for, and symbolism had to be discussed. Methods such as photo elicitation (Harper, 2002) allowed my participants and I to flesh out the meanings embedded in photos and objects to get to the essence of their experience of that object and its context.

Ethical Considerations

While engaged in the process of data collection, there were three significant issues that I had to consider. The first was ethical, the next was the issue of validity, and the third was the limitations of my study. In terms of ethics, before the research began, I completed a research application with the Internal Review Board at the Pennsylvania State University. One of the requirements for my study was that it would be strictly voluntary, and all student participants under the age of eighteen had to receive consent from their parents/guardians. Participants were made aware regularly that they could withdraw from the research at any time without explanation. The consent form included all the details of my study, and most importantly, their rights as participants (see appendix). According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2012), “For the most part, issues of ethics focus on establishing safeguards that will protect the rights of participants and include informed consent, protecting participants from harm, and ensuring confidentiality” (p. 15). Consequently, in terms of privacy and the safeguarding of research data, I took all the necessary precaution to use a password-protected computer to save all files, and the folders in which documents were kept were also

password-protected. Artifacts that could not be saved on a computer are kept at my home in a filing cabinet secured with a lock.

During my meetings and interviews with students I ensured that all conversations were private and confidential. I never shared any information regarding my participants and the details of what we discussed. Pseudonym were used for all participants to further secure confidentiality and privacy. The consent forms participants signed also had my contact information in case they had additional questions and or concerns regarding the study. One of the first things I did with each of my participants and their parents was to go through the entire consent form with them and allowed them to ask any questions regarding the project. I also made clear that these questions can arise at any point during their participation in the study. The administration at City High also had both digital and tangible copies of my research application to ensure that they were aware of my role at the high school with student and adult participants.

Issues of Trustworthiness/Validity

Validity issues were also central to my concerns as I collected data. It was at this point where I engaged deeply in the process of reflexivity, that is, I policed the ways my own biases might be influencing the analysis of the data I collected. I often asked myself, *what did you understand from your interaction with the girls in each interview, meeting, or interaction, and what did they want you to understand?* Deciphering between these two ideas often helped to ensure that I was sharing the memories and lived experiences that my participants wanted me to share, and not what I thought was important or relevant to any given meeting or interaction. Proving the spaces for them to make meaning, and for them to have a voice is imperative to a Black feminist positionality.

My commitment to the honest telling of my participants' stories demanded a study that was no less than an academic year. The interview protocol I discussed above was also another important step taken during data collection to ensure that I gave participants many opportunities to tell and retell their stories in ways that best suited them. I often brought the transcribed version of past interviews to meetings and interviews. I used those very transcripts to ask clarifying questions, and also to ensure that the meaning that was conveyed spoke true to what participants wanted me to know. Lichterman (2017) has posited that,

If we ethnographers want to make our explanatory claims more transparent and disputable by readers, then we need to show readers how we came up with our interpretations, how we made mistakes and lucky guesses along the way to capturing other people's meanings. That is what interpretive reflexivity discloses. (p. 38)

In addition to this important process, my field notes and memos provided moments where I was able to talk through the nuances of meaning making, and also the struggles I faced along my journey to the understanding and sharing of my participants' lives experiences.

In addition to the steps discussed above, one of the most important initiatives I took to ensure the validity of the data was to collect multiple data sources. I not only relied on interviews, and memory work focus groups, but I also have my own reflections made during participant observations. I also collected a wide array of artifacts which all provided a broader, more contextual perspective on the literate lives and lived experiences of each of my participants. By ensuring that I had multiple sources of data, I was able to share the story of each participant based on what they told me and what I saw in person, in digital spaces, in notebooks, in classrooms, in interactions with others, at home, and in our meetings and interviews. In the chapters to follow, I have enacted these practices to make certain that what you will read are the stories of my participants just as they told them to me.

Limitations of Study

I have worked specifically with first- and second-generation immigrant girls from different countries throughout the Caribbean. It was always my goal to tell their stories, give them a platform to speak their truth, and define the world for themselves, just as they saw it. I wanted to understand what their literate lives could tell us about the types of academic and social identities they were constructing in their predominantly African American school. In doing this, I also understood that there were other essential voices that could contribute greatly to our conversation, and to the understanding of the wider community, school, and even to my participants. The things I left out contributed to some of the limitations of this study.

One of the limitations I should note in my study is the absence of African American girls from the study, that is, those girls whose families have always lived in the United States and have roots that date back to the enslavement of Africans by white colonists in the United States. While their voices could have added a richness and more nuanced diversity of experience to my study, I opted to exclude them since I wanted to make space for these other girls. It's important to note that future studies will include their voices, but I needed to provide spaces for immigrant girls from the Caribbean to share their stories, and for me to contribute their stories to the wealth of narratives that have been crafted on Black girls' experiences in American schools. I knew as I crafted a study that did not include their stories that there is much that I may miss, or that I wouldn't learn, or understand about Black girls' overall experiences at City High. However, my commitment for this study demanded that I focus on another smaller community of Black girls from countries throughout the Caribbean, to add their already marginal voices to an ongoing initiative to privilege the voices of all Black girls.

Another limitation was the absence of boys. When I initially sent out the general document calling for interest in my study, I received many male students who were interested in participating.

While these boys could also have lent different perspectives to the study, it was important to focus on the small group I selected. I believe that my focus on just a specific group of girls really allowed me to go deeper with them, and to get much richer data. Also, the research on boys and their literate lives, and lived experiences in schools, demanded a much broader study and approach to understanding their lives. However, in the future I anticipate that I will craft a more inclusive study that will highlight their experiences as well.

The final limitation in my study was time. Over the course of my study I visited City High three days a week during the academic year. There were weeks where I could only be there two days. I believe that if I were able to be present at the school for at least a full week each month, I might have been able to observe much more and get richer data. However, since so many of the experiences with the girls came from digital spaces, we did remain in contact daily. We conversed through Snapchat, Instagram, text messaging, WhatsApp, and Google Drive. These digital spaces are also locations that are just as important as being present in a physical location with my participants. Furthermore, they provided quite a rich source of data that contributed to our conversations and discussion when we met for memory work focus group meetings, general conversations, and interviews. I don't believe that the limitations here contributed to any significant roadblocks to fully understanding each of my participant's literate lives, and lived experiences as immigrant girls from the Caribbean.

Conclusion

The lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean matter. While they occupy a very particular place as Black girls and as immigrants, the particularities of who they are and how they make sense of their literate lives and lived experiences is an important part of knowing them. The ten participants with whom I spent time over the course of a year have taught me so much

about the ways Black girls from the Caribbean are enacting their agency and reclaiming their voices. The reason I was able to come to these realizations was due in part to my methodological framework and the methods I used to collect data from my participants. Memory work, for example, allowed me to access the cultural memories and experiences of my participants through a collective process of remembering. It asked participants through a new literacies framework to consider stories, traditional practices, narratives, pictures, songs etc., as sources of knowledge as it pertained to self and their social world—this included the world of the Caribbean and the current spaces in which they occupied. It asked that they work together collectively to determine how their experiences informed specific social and academic identities. It allowed for conscious reflecting and interrogating of memories to determine the impact these memories and experience have on their lives and what they can do about it. The use of critical Black feminism and new literacies as underlying guiding frameworks allowed me to structure a research project that privileged the voices of my participants. By using methods such as artifact collection, memory work focus group meetings, participant observations, and interviewing, each participant was able to find multiple opportunities and avenues for the sharing of their experiences. These methods were integral to understanding what these girls were doing with literacies, and what stories could be told about their literate lives and lived experiences.

Chapter 4

The Dis(ease) is Patriarchy: Resi(stance), Realizations, and the Reclaiming of Self

Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. Yet most men do not use the word “patriarchy” in everyday life. Most men never think about patriarchy—what it means, how it is created and sustained. Many men in our nation would not be able to spell the word or pronounce it correctly. The word “patriarchy” just is not a part of their normal everyday thought or speech. Men who have heard and know the word usually associate it with women’s liberation, with feminism, and therefore dismiss it as irrelevant to their own experiences. (hooks, 2013)

Introduction

The patriarchy, as described by hooks (2013), is a disease; it affects the mind as well as the body. It operates within the unconscious minds of those who benefit from it, in addition to those who are victims of it. It may not be easily named, yet it is a ubiquitous force affecting men and women alike. Its function is so much a part of our existence that we are not able to see ourselves as separate and distinct from it. Therefore, as hooks (2013) tells us, most men would not be able to speak of its existence, name it, spell it, or understand its function, yet they unequivocally benefit from it. In this chapter, I define patriarchy as an ideology that is malevolent. I demonstrate this by highlighting interviews and other artifacts shared with me by my participants. I discuss in detail the ways in which it wounds the body and the mind, is aggressive, dark, and brutal and I describe how it is destructive to all who embody it. In deconstructing this ideological phenomenon, I discuss the ways in which the patriarchy is unfair to both men and women, blinds us of our commonalities and operates through hegemony. As a result, patriarchy is illusory—operating as part of our everyday existence both consciously and unconsciously. It exists within the deepest darkest parts of our hearts and denies us our humanity (Staples, 2018).

This definition situates what is to follow in this chapter. After analyzing data collected over the course of a year, I began to code a persistent emerging idea under the umbrella of patriarchy. While my participants never named it explicitly, it affected their everyday lives and existence. They responded to it, resisted it, and struggled to confront it, but they were never able to name it. What they did was allude to it, used metaphors to describe it, found symbolic representations of it, all while falling short of saying—patriarchy! In what follows I will introduce you to Serenity James (15 years old), and Amanda Roswell (16 years old). Through a wide range of literary artifacts, you will see the ways in which these girls used their literacies as tools to resist and respond to the presence and dominance of patriarchy in their lives. My findings suggest that by tapping into a Black feminist epistemological framework, I was able to read darkly¹² (Staples, 2016) the experiences of my participants in order to uncover the ways in which their literate lives and lived experiences were both informing and being informed by their understandings of and relationship toward the patriarchy.

Specifically, I found ideas concerning patriarchal norms, values, and ideals that had concrete implications for the lives of my participants in multiple contexts. The details concerning each of these findings will be fleshed out below. I found that:

- Patriarchy has to be named so that adolescent girls can understand the systemic nature of its existence.

¹² Reading darkly according to Staples (2016) is the ways in which one reads the ethereal and material logics beneath and beyond what is written and said by and about Black girls and women, and in relation to Blackness and femininity. It is more than inference. It is a way of doing deep excavations within interiorities, paying close attention to the layered nuances of Black feminine/ist identities, and what they tell us about the lived experiences of Black women and girls in schools and society.

- When girls unite through a stance of solidarity they are stronger in their abilities to support each other, and themselves, in the resistance of patriarchal ideals.
- Immigrant girls from the Caribbean blame themselves or become self-destructive because of a system they do not fully understand.

The question that guides this research is, *how can the use of Black feminist epistemologies along with a critical new literacies framework be used to understand the literate lives and lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean?* Through the use of NVivo, a qualitative research tool, I will present evidence that speaks to the findings in this chapter. In the four sections that follows I will begin by introducing the reader to my participants and discuss the illusory nature of the patriarchy as it relates to their lived experiences. In section II we will read darkly (Staples, 2016) into the literate articulations of my participants, and in section III I discuss the consequences of the patriarchy as it pertains to my participants and their survival. I will focus on the strategies of resistance developed by these girls as they worked to understand how their academic and social worlds were being shaped by forces they didn't fully understand. Finally, in section four, I discuss the role of guilt in the embodied experiences of my participants. Each section is an important contribution to our understanding of the ways my participants' identities were marked by a systemic ideology that, without critical analysis, threatened their survival.

Section I

The Illusory nature of the Patriarchy: Adolescent Perspectives

The Cambridge dictionary defines elusive as, “difficult to describe, find, achieve, or remember” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018). This very notion is consistent with the tenets of the patriarchy (Staples, 2018) and the reality of my participants’ lives. What makes the patriarchy elusive is exactly what causes it to exist—men who don’t acknowledge its existence, women and girls who blame themselves for its destructive and toxic nature, and our inability to name it. This illusory characteristic of the patriarchy has tried relentlessly to eat away at the confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth of Black girls. As I coded my data, I began to see evidence of this illusory trait, the ways in which my participants rebelled against it, cursed its existence, and succumbed to its will. hooks (2013) has cautioned that “we cannot dismantle a system as long as we engage in collective denial about its impact on our lives” (p. 2). But how do we dismantle a system that is so entangled with who we are and who it believes we can become? How do we name it if it is built into the structures of our daily lives? Would destroying something that is a part of us mean that we have to destroy parts of ourselves to eradicate its existence? Many scholars have highlighted the significant relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, and their interdependence (Ho, 1999; Collins, 2008; hooks, 2013). The majority of “heads of households,” CEOs, Presidents, Prime Ministers, and lawmakers are men. Even the wage gap is evidence of how patriarchal norms structure men as innately more deserving of societal resources than women. While capitalism is intimately connected to the function of the patriarchy, it does affect people differently. For Black women and girls, this means that, in addition to being socio-

economically disenfranchised, they are also racially and culturally marginalized. Consequently, understanding how these factors intersect is essential to dismantling the patriarchy.

My participants (who will be discussed below) found themselves entangled in a vicious cycle of self-blame, self-love, resistance, and defeat. Being unable to understand that they were a part of an interlocking system of violence and toxicity they found ways to talk about, write about, sing about, cry about, and laugh about the events of their lives. In what follows, I begin with Serenity's reflection of self, all the while ensuring that her voice and stories are privileged so that we can see clearly the ways in which she used her literacies as tools for resistance. However, before she articulates these expressions of self, we will begin with an introduction to who she is. In an interview with Serenity I asked her about her identity and what she could tell others about herself. We engaged in this conversation below:

Donna-Marie: How do you self-identify? When you have to tell people, "I am this," what do you say?

Serenity: I am a Pegasus.

Donna-Marie: What is that?

Serenity: It's a mythical horse. It has rainbows and it flies and nobody really knows where it is from because it is not real, and it has different types of personalities, but it's just an amazing creature that likes to be around everyone. I don't necessarily like saying I'm American, because ... I don't know. I'm not gonna criticize it, but I feel like the kids at my school ... If my cousins back home could see how they acting, they'd be like, "They talk to their mom like what? They do this and this like what?" They would be like, mm-mm. But then I don't always like to identify as Jamaican because people always be like, "Oh, why don't you have the accent? Why don't you do this and this?" It makes me feel like I don't all the way fit in.... (Serenity, 10/10/16, interview)

In her reflection, Serenity chose to self-define as *Pegasus*, the mythical horse of her imagination. She did what many feminist scholars have argued that Black women and girls must do—she named herself as a way to reject the ways in which other names have been chosen for her (Collins, 2008; Dillard, 2011, 2016b; Harding, 2004; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 2007; Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012). Serenity's articulation of self is a reminder that the discursive production of our identities is an act of resistance (Davies & Harré, 1990; McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street, 2009). Dillard (2011) tells us that,

Defining ourselves for ourselves is necessary work for all human beings, regardless of nation. It is fundamentally at the heart of what it means to be educated. And coming to terms with and conscious of complex and often troubling memories and legacies as African ascendant people in relation with/to diverse others and ourselves will require us to choose from and fill in the blanks of often disparate and sometimes competing cultural memories. (p. 17)

What Dillard describes here is significant in many ways. For instance, while Serenity could have said that she is Black, African-American, Jamaican, Jamaican-American, or another acceptable marker of her identities, she chose instead to reject those labels, to reimagine herself as multifaceted, *amazing*, friendly, mysterious, and existing beyond the boundaries of our imaginations. This radical revolutionary act is evidence of her critical consciousness, and of a complex, deeper understanding of self—one that had not been made available to her. It is her way of deepening the praxis of her existence, of (re)-writing herself in a world that had already crafted narratives about who she is supposed to be.

Introducing: Amanda Roswell

Dillard has cautioned us to never forget who we are as Black women or where we are coming from (Dillard, 2011, 2016b, 2016a; Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012). Our past is a part of who we are in the present, and we must remember that. However, often we do forget, and forgetting is

a part of our defense mechanism for survival. We don't always want to remember that we are disenfranchised, pathologized, oversexualized, underestimated, and loathed by society, all because we are Black. Thus, we develop coping strategies to deal with this reality, and one such strategy is to forget (Dillard, 2011). Amanda had done just that. When I met with her and asked her about her identity she talked about the notion of love; she wanted to love, and in turn she wanted to be loved. She didn't want to think about her racial identity, or the ways in which she was read by the world. Up until that point, she also hadn't engaged in deep reflection about what this meant for her life. I asked her,

Donna-Marie: Amanda, tell me about your identity. I'm thinking about your race, your ethnicity, your culture and I'm wondering how the person you are today is informed by your culture, your race, your background, your ethnicity and things like that?

Amanda: Well, it's like I'm Black. We used to be slaves to white people and it's the fact that I'm a girl, too. It's not only the fact that society is already turning us down because of our color and it's already a biased background, but it's also the fact that it's because I'm a girl and because I'm not a guy, I must be weaker or I must not be smart enough to understand things that guys would understand or something. My thing is, this is kind of weird, I kind of forget that people have genders, and I honestly see everybody as who they are. I don't see race or color or anything. We're all humans, we all want to be loved, we all want the same things, so why is it that we have these titles that are so biased that they make people scared to want to open their minds to how people are? Not all people are like that, just some people. (Amanda, 11/17/16, Interview)

Amanda's reflection gives us insight into her thinking regarding her race and gender. She understood that inequalities existed between men and women, but there was no reflection as to why. The illusory structure of the patriarchy denied her access to that knowledge, but it didn't stop her from being hopeful about the future. Her hope was that one-day people would be

accepted for who they were in spite of their gender or racial identity. Additionally, the undercurrent of her reflection also revealed an underdeveloped understanding regarding the intersections of her race, and her gendered self and the consequences for her future. This limitation in her reasoning, was due in part to her limited knowledge of the struggles that had taken place long before she was born, and the ones that were underway just as she was thinking of her future.

Crawshaw (2017) tells us that,

Girls are less likely than boys to report high self-esteem...and a deficiency in that area can lead to self-doubt and insecurity... When a girl's self-expression is stifled, she is less likely to be ambitious and creative, to pursue success in her personal and professional life. Because girls are not structurally or socially supported, we must make room for them to find and practice amplifying their voices. (p. 60)

What Crawshaw discusses here is central to what Amanda needed, and became a critical aspect of her development throughout the course of our time at City High. It is important for the reader to understand that the burden of racial injustice, gender inequality, and the pathologizing of Black girlhood rested very heavily on Amanda's shoulders. Below, we will see examples of how these elements weighed on her, and what she did to resist them.

Section II

Reading Darkly the Literate Articulations of Immigrant Girls from the Caribbean

Figure 4- 1



The Atlas of Tomorrow

Duffy (2011) proposes the concept of the *rhetoric of military literacy* in his research on the Hmong refugees of Wisconsin, and he makes a case that literacy has been used to control, perpetuate, and even win wars—it is in essence, literacy serves as a propaganda tool. This rhetoric was used during the Vietnam War as a training tool for soldiers to “fight and win wars” (p. 93), both ideologically and literally. I would argue that this same tool has long been used against Black women and girls in order to control and wage war against their existence since they were brought to places like the Caribbean and the United States. During slavery (throughout the diaspora) the denial of literacy to Black people was a part of that battle (Fisher, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2005). While the balance of power seemed to rest in the hands of those who waged wars against us, they have been unsuccessful in their efforts to defeat marginalized peoples through literate warfare. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Jacobs, 1861) is an example of the ways in

which Black women have historically resisted their literate oppression dating back to slavery, and Fisher's (2009) work provides other contemporary examples of how literacies are enacted in marginalized Black communities as a form of resistance. Literacy, according to Fisher, has long been used as a counter force by Black people in an effort to regain their humanity.

Fisher (2009) has talked about the Black Power Movement as part of an era of resistance, a time when Black people consciously used their literacies as tools to resist their subjugation. She talks specifically about news and newspapers as apparatuses of counter oppression. She posits,

Black News (news for and about Black people) as discussed by Fisher (2009) specifically addressed issues of "mis-education" among Black and Puerto Rican youth in public schools while challenging these schools to create curriculum that was relevant to the youth they served. It also facilitated a process of "re-education" for Black parents, and educators...*Black News* championed new and revolutionary literacies for its readership with its efforts to inculcate Black youth and their families with the values of literacy, education, integrity, and self-reliance through a "proper" or "correct" Black education (p. 58).

What Fisher describes here is an important aspect of the literate lives of Black people historically, and this battle still continues. For Black youth, the need to have a platform that can be used to counter aggression and warfare against mind and body is essential to survival. I have found amongst my participants the same practice of using literacies as tools of resistance. Amanda and Serenity used their literate practices to wage war against the patriarchy. Since they found difficulty in articulating their frustrations against a system they could not name, they wrote poetry and songs, recalled experiences, and engaged in collective theorizing about the ways in which this system affected them all while demonstrating methods of resistance.

In the poem that follows, Serenity recalls a memory dating back to the 8th grade when she fought with her father. A physical altercation she told me stemmed from his need to control all aspects of her life. This fight marked a significant moment for Serenity—it physically traumatized her and compelled her to write as a way to deal with the reality of her experience.

Figure 4-1 above depicts an image of Serenity at the Atlas of Tomorrow (A symbolic site in the

City that beckons passersby to read messages of hope). In it, she is spinning a wheel, which, coincidentally, landed on a message about a fight. This leads us deeper into our conversation about her father and her memory of what occurred during their encounter. Lorde (2007) tells us that,

For women...poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. (p. 37)

This idea is absolutely crucial because for Serenity, poetry was her way of coping with sadness, violence, and pain. She wrote poetry to defy the reality of the patriarchal dominance she was faced with. She wrote:

Figure 4- 2

Me, Myself, and I

My dad needs his high to calm him down,

I hate when he's around.

He barks orders at me and dictates my life

As if he has a crown.

My mommy wants to leave, she's secretly hurting.

Meanwhile my brother isn't making it easier

By flirting,

He's always talking to hoes, but to me why bother?

I always tell him he keeps them for a year

And not much longer.

My dad is super religious, it has to go his way,

He smashed my phone to bits, ripped my hair,

Busted my lip in the comfort of my own home one day.

No one really knows why I cut off my hair,

Just give me multiple stares.

I wanted a new identity, erased from scene,

My dad always said that without him

I wouldn't be anything.

He said I would crave for a man's attention,

Something I didn't deserve,

But I sure as hell don't need any one

It's just me

Against the world.

(Serenity James, *What's Hidden in the Puma Scholar*, p. 64)

Me Myself and I

In her poem, Serenity talked about her desire for erasure, the need for a new identity, the belief that she was alone in the world, and the secrets that she was compelled to keep from others. She blamed her father's behavior on his need for dominance, aggression, and power, and these were characteristics that she feared. These were the things she hoped a new identity would help her to escape from; however, escaping from this type of toxic masculinity is no easy task.

According to O'Malley (2016),

Toxic masculinity is a narrow and repressive description of manhood, designating manhood as defined by violence, sex, status and aggression. It's the cultural ideal of manliness, where [physical] strength is everything while emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly "feminine" traits – which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual – are the means by which your status as "man" can be taken away. (p.)

This type of toxicity is what Serenity imagined a new life would remove her from. In an interview with her below, she talked about her response to the fight with her father, and how it pushed her toward writing. When she shared her reflection with us, it evoked feelings of both sympathy and empathy from myself and the other girls. While we were compelled to feel her pain, it was evident that she had already begun enacting strategies that helped her to cope. She told me,

Serenity: After the fight (the one discussed in the poem above), a good thing sprung from it though because I started writing poetry. That's what caused me to write poetry cause when we had the fight he told me, "Without me, you wouldn't be anything. All you would know how to do is lay on your back if you didn't have a father in your life. You know how many people wish they had a dad in their life?" Then me, I was just thinking I wish I didn't have a father in my life. Yeah, people would love to have a father in their life, but one that's a good influence on them and you're not being one. That's kind of how my relationship is with him. That's why I don't talk about him more often, I talk about my mom more often. I'm more like her than anybody else, and I respect her for the things that she been through and stuff that she still has to deal with. (Serenity, 12/5/16, interview)

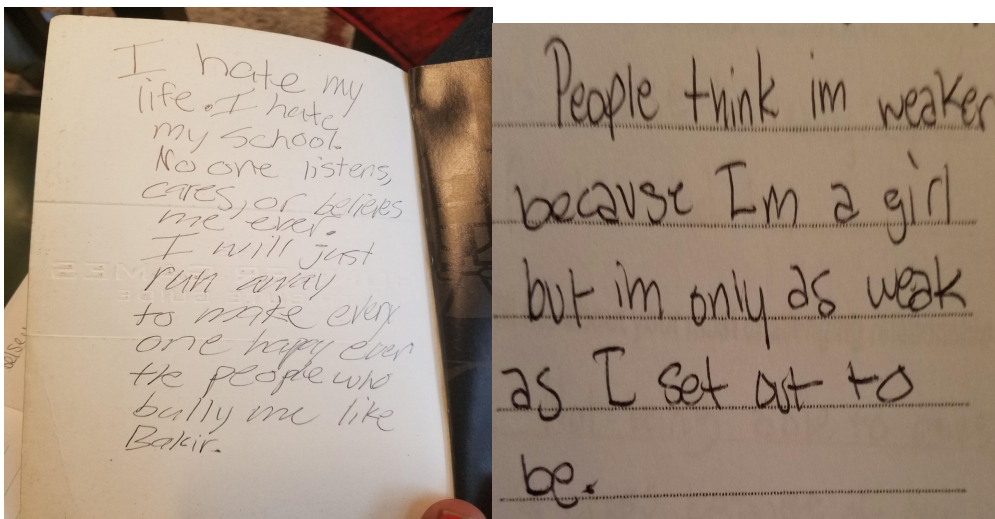
Literacy for Serenity was what she believed saved her from the toxic nature of her relationship with her father. She resisted this form of patriarchy through her words, her poetry, her storytelling, and her desire to confront and reject its presence in her life.

According to Staples (2018), "Reading darkly means finding the roots of systemic beliefs, survival programs, defense mechanisms, narrative structures, and somatic pain" (p.).

Consequently, if we are to read darkly (Dillard, 2012; Staples, 2016) Serenity's poem, we are able to see in the backdrop of Blackness and femininity the roots of her pain and the ways in which she learned to cope. Serenity, like many Black women and girls before her, deeply cared about her mother and her brother—more than she did herself, it seemed. We see her asserting her power, declaring that she needed no one. This was her way of resisting—her way of coping with

the patriarchy. Crawshaw (2017) tells us that “Although everyday acts of resistance might seem small, they help to build necessary pressure in the coming—and persistent—waves of change. Our bodies and actions and voices are weapons” (p. 62). What Crawshaw discusses here is significant to Serenity, and what I observed during my time with her. Her resistance wasn’t physical; while she didn’t literally win the fight with her father, she was winning in other ways. She was reclaiming her voice, self-defining, actualizing, and being agentic in her stance against toxic masculinity and patriarchy.

Figure 4- 3



Amanda’s Artifacts

Resistance through literacies means that a girl confronts and consciously reacts to processes and ideologies that impact her lived experiences in symbolic and concrete ways. Defiance happens through the use of multiple platforms, such as writing, performances, art (inscribed upon the body and other concrete and abstract spaces), social media, and through artifacts. Amanda presented me with two particular artifacts (Figure 4-3) that spoke to her thought process both as an 8th grader and an 11th grader. On the left, she found a notebook that she told me described how she felt when she was an eighth grader at City High, and later in

another book she had been using. I asked Amanda about these notes, what prompted her to write them? What had changed over the course of three years? I wanted to understand the shift that had occurred for her, from being concerned about what others thought to reminding herself that she is in control of her own destiny. Why had she crafted these messages? What purpose did they serve? In her discussion of the literate lives of Black women, Winn (2010) tells us that historically,

The literate practices of women were also a spectacle of sorts—their ability to articulate ideas, develop arguments, and challenge injustices did not go unchallenged. These liminal spaces were part of Black lives in the history of the United States and this is particularly true in the quest for literacy and education. (p. 427)

This very idea is important because what Amanda was challenging in her jottings were the ways that her gender had impacted her experiences at school. She was talking herself through a process of self-assurance and self-love. Whether or not she believed these things is another important discussion to be had. However, what she was able to do through her jottings was provide us insight into her shift in thinking over time regarding the ideas that were central to her identity. In an interview with Amanda, I asked her to share a memory with me that she felt was important—any memory. I wanted to understand what was important to her, what memory still resonated with her. Our discussion wasn't focused on any topic in particular, but she fixated on a memory that spoke to the effect of patriarchy on her life. She told me,

Amanda: This was a while back. We were at Applebee's sitting at the table. I remember this because it impacted my life. It was Applebee's sitting at the table. He had steak (in reference to her step-father) because that's all he eats if he gets something out at a restaurant. I had the boneless buffalo wings. They're really good. I was eating and then my mom had gone outside to get some bags out of the car and he was like, "You know I don't like you right? You're gonna be the end of this marriage." At the time, it was like I wasn't really outspoken enough to say something about it, but I was just like, "okay." I

just kept eating my food. When I think back on it, that was really mean and disrespectful.

That could have really hurt my feelings if ... I don't know.

Donna Marie: You said it really impacted your life. How? Tell me about that.

Amanda: Because of that, I always have an attitude towards him or I don't speak to him... Every time I do something he doesn't like, he'll go and cry about it to my mom and then my mom comes out of nowhere saying ... One time, she was like, "You went in the house without saying anything? Don't do that." She can't do that because she only knows his side of the story. She doesn't know what happened to be like that. She's at work and you're bringing the situation to her for what? If you have a problem address it to me because I'm here. That's it. (Amanda, 11/17/16, interview)

What I learned from Amanda through our discussion regarding her memory was that she had been abandoned by her biological father (who moved to England when she was a young child), and she was being raised by her stepdad—a man she knew didn't like her. This she felt was like a war being waged against her existence. She resented his presence in her life and tried many times to hurt herself because of her pain. However, because of the nature of the patriarchy she didn't fully understand the source of the pain and hurt in her life, and rarely did she attribute it to this dysfunctional relationship. Carter (2015) reminds us that,

Patriarchy is not new. It is a system created and maintained by men of faith and politics who hold the levers of economic, cultural, and political power and who confuse strength and masculinity with domination and brutality. Patriarchy must be replaced by a system in which equal human rights and non-violence are promoted and accepted. This will happen if we embrace the kind of love and mutual respect exemplified and preached by the founders of the world's great religions, and through the persistent efforts of those who speak out and work for a more equal and less violent world. (p. 2)

This reminder is important because Amanda would benefit from clearly knowing that the patriarchy wasn't about her, but rather is a system that exists in and of itself, and is perpetuated by individuals, institutions, and structures. Perhaps, she wouldn't try to harm herself, but rather direct her anger at the system, and those who perpetuate it. This is the hope, but based on what we

understand about this system, she would have to engage with herself daily about the ways the tenets of this system are at play, and how to separate it from who she is.

As we read darkly (Staples, 2016) into her femininity and her Blackness, we see that Amanda faced a degree of loneliness, a loneliness that Black girls often have to confront when they are faced with male dominance and oppression. In addition, she was not being defended by her mother, she was unsure of the right ways to react to her stepfather, and she was negotiating the terms of her power. Society often reminds Black women that we are less than—that we cannot question that we must accept our subjugation—and this reality often prevents Black women and girls from speaking up, and from asserting their power in the face of the patriarchy.

Section III

Consequences of the Patriarchy

Amanda and Serenity both focused their attention on the ways that the tenets of patriarchy affected their family structures and their own lived experiences. While they never used the term patriarchy, they alluded to it, discussed the material manifestations of it, and found ways to resist it through their literacies. During the course of our time, I saw them embody a wide range of emotions brought on by a complex, unstable relationship with the patriarchy. For example, in some instances they expressed apathy and dejection, while at other times they exhibited anger and disdain toward the patriarchy. Their emotions were always in flux, and this became visible upon the body. In one of our memory work focus groups, Amanda wanted to explain to me and to her peers what had been happening to her on a regular basis. She asked me,

Amanda: Wanna feel my heartbeat? Can you feel it?

Donna-Marie: I'm trying. Why? Is your heart pacing fast?

Amanda: No. I just can't feel it.

Donna-Marie: I don't see?

Amanda: You know what a panic attack feels like?

Donna-Marie: I do know what a panic attack feels like. Have you ever had a panic attack? How does it feel to you?

Amanda: Ummm. Have you ever drowned before?

Donna-Marie: I haven't drowned, but I've had panic attacks, and it feels like you're unsure ... (to Serenity and Zion). Have you guys ever had a panic attack?

Amanda: It kinda feels like, you know, well like, for me, at first it feels like your heart...like my heart's like sinking in and everything just gets really tight. And then like my heart starts getting like really roaring. Like right now, I can't feel my heart beat, but when I have my panic attacks, it'll be like I'll feel it. It'll be beating really fast. And then like that's the only thing I can think about. And like the first time I had one, I honestly thought I was having a heart attack because it felt like my heart was getting so high and tight, that it was just gonna burst. And I was so scared, and I was with my friend, and I was like, "I don't want to be right, but if I am, can you take me to safety?" (Amanda, 5/15/17, MWFG¹³)

Amanda's recollection of her experiences with anxiety speaks to the emotional suffering of Black women and girls both in contemporary times and in other historical contexts (Collins, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984; Staples, 2016). If left unacknowledged, such pain can manifest itself through a wide range of emotions, as documented by Staples (2016), who conducted research with Black women and engaged in reflection regarding the big (T) and little (t) terrors

¹³ MWFG- Memory Work Focus Group

that were shaping their lives. She argues that these emotions manifested as fragmented selves that were evident in the narrative artifacts produced by not just one individual, but all of the women who participated in her study. These emotional energies—when unacknowledged, unaccepted, unmitigated, and unreconciled—can prove detrimental to the survival of a Black or Brown girl or women. Staples (2016) argues that with the development of a *supreme lover identity* women have the potential to locate, name, and resist these t/Terrors and develop a more healed, ordered, and unified identity rooted in a radically inclusive and deeply conscious sense of Self.

However, before such a transformation can occur, Black women and girls must deal with the psychological challenges placed in front of them by the patriarchy. They have to understand that the emotions they feel is also felt by other women and girls—they are not alone. They must know that if the t/Terrors they face in their lives are not confronted they leave themselves vulnerable and open to figurative and literal death (Staples, 2016). hooks (2013) discusses the concept of psychological patriarchy in her work. She posits that,

Psychological patriarchy is a “dance of contempt,” a perverse form of connection that replaces true intimacy with complex, covert layers of dominance and submission, collusion, and manipulation. It is the unacknowledged paradigm of relationships that has suffused Western civilization generation after generation, deforming both sexes, and destroying the passionate bond between them. (p. 4)

For Amanda, the psychological nature of the patriarchy ushered in a kind of destruction that tore away at her in both subtle and violent ways. For instance, the subtlety made her quiet, insecure, and shy, while the violence caused her to develop an eating disorder and suffer from chronic anxiety. Consequently, Amanda achieved resistance through therapy and through our memory work focused groups. She told me, regarding our weekly group meeting, that,

Amanda: It's very enjoyable because I thought I was the only person who experienced a lot of things that I've experienced, but when I sit there and I hear everybody else saying what they have to say, it's like, "Oh, I thought I was the only one, but it turns out I'm not." That makes me seem less weird and I enjoy that.

The idea that coming together with other girls, sharing, and confronting many of the issues they faced could be helpful speaks to what Staples (2016) found in her research. The process of healing begins with naming, confronting, and theorizing, not just about the cause, but about the solution to many of the struggles faced by Black women and girls.

Resistance Through Storying: (W)righting Her Way Through the Pain

While Amanda sought therapy to cope with the violence of the patriarchy, Serenity, on the other hand, used her literacies to story its violence and resist it. She needed a way to talk about what was happening to her and other girls like herself. She wanted to craft a narrative in a space that she felt was safe, and this was when she discovered *Wattpad* (a website where freelance writers are able to publish their own writing and offer each other feedback). She told me that her friends had introduced her to this unsanctioned space, where she was free to talk about the topics that she cared about without being policed by parents, teachers, or other adults. She told me,

Serenity: Only a few of us knew about Wattpad. It was me, and two of my friends because we love to read, and the books there were exciting and stuff. They weren't the type of books that we would read in class, in class we read about a girl named Mary, but on Wattpad we were reading about actual Black people like "trapping" (a kind of music and a particular way of dancing to that music. Trapping can also refer to places where illegal activities take place) stuff like that, this was exciting. (Serenity, 12/6/2016, interview)

For Serenity a space like Wattpad provided her with the freedom to express herself. It masked her identity and allowed her to speak freely and willingly about the challenges faced by Black girls like herself. Wattpad was also a space where she could meet other Black people who would read

her story and give her feedback. Since according to hooks (2013), the “Patriarchy promotes insanity” (p. 3), my participants needed many spaces where they felt safe and affirmed. In her narrative entitled, *I Prefer Savanna*, Serenity wrote,

Figure 4- 4

Dealing with her tragic past, Savanna struggles to figure out how to move on with her life. With constant reminders of savanna's struggles to not only trust but to learn how to love again. Will this harm her chances of true love when the perfect guy enters her life?

I Prefer Savanna

Please don't let him get to me tonight.

Oh, but he will anyway...

Despite my tries to be good like he tells me to, he never stops. It's like I can only make him angrier even when I listen, so I tip toed on eggshells afraid to make the wrong move.

He walked into my room and sat at the foot of my bed, staring at me with lust. He started the groping and admittedly I felt dirty and small. I could feel the burning pain as he entered me forcefully and roughly. His callused hands choked me mercilessly although he didn't have to anymore, I finally learned there was no point in screaming.

No one would hear.

No one would see.

No one could save me.

With each forceful thrust my breath became shallower, heaving and yearning for this to be over, for even death to cloud over, and it is then, I could suddenly breath again. I sucked in air as his hands were freed from my throat. I looked up, my vision hazy, to see my mother over him stabbing him wilding and repeatedly crying hysterically before I blacked out.

I jolt awake.

The sun light streamed through the curtains of my bedroom as I wipe the tears from my eyes. Every night, and every morning I was haunted by the nightmares of my past, each one horrifying and so real that I wake up crying. It's as if my memories hated me and wanted me to never move on, but I had to or else life would move on without me. I flipped the warm covers from my side as I sat up straight and tall, before standing up and walking gingerly into the hall.

I headed into the bathroom and locked the door behind me, only to be stopped by the reflection of a lost soul. Her eyes were small, brown, diamonds filled with pools of emotion and knowledge. Her long pink hair was a bird's nest, swooped in a messy circle along her long chubby face that appeared to be as pale as water. Her full pink lips were chapped and dry begging to be wetted by the sweep of her tongue. I faked a smile and she did the same, the smile not quite reaching her eyes, but the smile was enough to fool the people who didn't know her and she knew no one here in Atlanta...

(Excerpt from a story written by Serenity James On Wattpad)

I Prefer Savanna

This narrative of violence, sexual deviance, and pain echoed the stories that Serenity shared with her peers and myself over the course of a year. While this story is fictive, embodied within it are many of the emotions and struggles that Serenity faced in her concrete life. She was not Savanna, but in many regards, she was, and that's what made this narrative even more important. What we are able to see in this story were the consequences of the patriarchy when left unquestioned. We see violence, sadness, insecurity, nightmares, and fear. Serenity wrote about these emotions because they were emotions that resonated with her. They were feelings she had to contend with and writing about them allowed her to distance herself from the pain brought on by these emotions.

Lorde (2007) has cautioned that, "We who are Black are at an extraordinary point of choice within our lives. To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up" (p.

141). This is an important message, and it resonates with my study because I found that in many regards my participants chose to shape their futures by controlling the narrative of their lives. They sought therapy, they wrote, they came together with other girls and told their stories, and they sought refuge in spaces that were not controlled by a system that did not represent them. Lorde (2012), also tells us that resistance against oppression doesn't always take place through militancy, but it takes place through many other forms of resistance. She posits that, resistance "means knowing that coalition, like unity, means the coming together of whole, self-actualized human beings, focused and believing, not fragmented autonomous marching to a prescribed step. It means fighting despair" (p. 142). Amanda and Serenity were engaged in doing just this. They were actively seeking ways to resist and redefine their futures in the ways they knew how. While the consequences of the patriarchy had deeply affected them, they were agentic in resisting it.

Section IV

Nurturing the Patriarchy: Reflections on Guilt and Mothering

One important and common theme that also emerges in my data was *mothers*. Serenity and Amanda were protective of their mothers, they felt that they were responsible for trapping their mothers in the relationships they were in, and they wanted to help them. The irony is that they were the ones needing help and guidance. They needed support, and yet they worried more for their mother than they did themselves. The struggles they dealt with in terms of their fathers were the same ones their mothers faced, according to them. hooks (2013) argues that,

The most common forms of patriarchal violence are those that take place in the home between patriarchal parents and children. The point of such violence is usually to reinforce a dominator model, in which the authority figure is deemed ruler over those

without power and given the right to maintain that rule through practices of subjugation, subordination, and submission. (p. 2)

Both of my participants were faced with this dynamic, and it brought about an intense guilt that sat with them and went unresolved. They dealt with this patriarchal violence by blaming themselves for it. They accepted the brunt of the responsibility for something they did not create, nor were responsible for. They found themselves in a peculiar place. In one sense they were adolescent girls, and yet on the other hand they were young women preparing to navigate a world filled with uncertainties and patriarchal tensions.

My data revealed that, although Serenity and Amanda tried to grapple with the realities they faced, each time they looked to their mothers it seemed that they were being pulled back into a space of complacency, apathy, and indifference. Their mothers were modeling a sort of womanhood for them that was complicit with the patriarchy, and the confusion brought on by this deepened their pain, and intensified the guilt they each felt. To mediate their emotions, they found themselves actively working through their questions through a variety of platforms. I touch on these questions below.

Guilt and the Patriarchy

The uncertainty of their futures and of their lived experiences created a great deal of guilt amongst my participants. Amanda and Serenity both experienced this guilt without questioning the causes or what to do about it. I asked Serenity about this:

Donna-Marie: Did you do something wrong to feel guilty about?

Serenity: I felt like I trapped my mom into situations with my dad, and she shouldn't have to lie for me if I want to hang out with my boyfriend. She shouldn't even be with

him in the first place, and although she says that she doesn't regret me, it's like, you wouldn't be going through half the stuff you're going through if I wasn't here.

(Serenity, 7/12/17, interview)

The feeling that she had trapped her mother and the sense of responsibility that she felt for what the patriarchy had done to her family brought about intense guilt within Serenity. This guilt had engulfed her to the extent that she contemplated a life for her mother where she was not a factor. She considered that her mother's life would have been different if she did not exist, but because she did not understand what the patriarchy was and how it operated, she could not know that what had been happening in her home would continue to happen even if she was not there.

Serenity's guilt and desperate desire to rescue her mother became a consistent theme in our discussions and the way she thought about school and home. The question "*what can I do to change things?*" emerged time and time again amongst her, Amanda, and other participants in my study. Collins (2008) argues that, "Black daughters with strong self-definitions and self-valuations who offer serious challenges to oppressive situations may not physically survive... Emotional strength is essential, but not at the cost of physical survival" (p. 198). What Collins argues here is important because the guilt felt by Serenity pushed her toward writing. Her guilt caused her to craft narratives that were violent, deviant, disturbing, and sad. She embodied these emotions, and it was through her literacies that she worked to place them in fictitious characters, and not within herself. Amanda, on the other hand, experienced physical manifestations of her guilt and sadness. She suffered from anxiety and an eating disorder, and had to seek therapy. These responses are what Collins (2008) refers to when she says that emotional strength is not enough, there have to be concrete structures put in place for girls like Amanda and Serenity. Without such structures, their very survival could be at risk.

What I found during my time with Amanda is that our meetings each week, her therapy, and her willingness to speak about what she was experiencing created an understanding and also

a shift in her guilt. This speaks to my findings that the patriarchy has to be named for a shift to occur, and solidarity with other girls is essential to developing the strength each girl needs to resist the patriarchy. Amanda told me about this shift at the end of the school year:

Amanda: When I'm at school, and someone tries to make me feel little, like I'm under them, like even then I just ... It doesn't bother me because I had that kind of relationship with my stepfather at home, and I don't let that bother me anymore... As a child, I always felt like, "Oh, it's my fault. I trapped my mom here because she's stuck with this man". Now that I'm older, it's not my fault. I know it. And in certain situations, I'm strong, whereas, compared to when I was younger, I was weak. I'd cry a lot. (Amanda, 5/15/17, interview)

Amanda's strength was due in part to her ability to know that what she was experiencing wasn't just about her. While she still struggled tremendously, she also experienced a great deal of growth over the course of a year. However, I found that both girls still had internal turmoil, even when they demonstrated that they had reached a turning point. There was back and forth as if to say, *I can do this, I can't do this...* This sort of apprehension and resistance needed to be questioned, and their desire to further resist the patriarchy needed to be nurtured. Without such possibilities, these girls could continue to face the incredible guilt that they were dealing with.

Is Change Possible?: Looking Ahead at a Future without Patriarchy

As the school year came to a close, and our time together seemed more definite, I wanted to know where Amanda and Serenity were in their thinking regarding all they had shared with me about their fathers, mothers, friends, and literacies. I was curious about how they were making sense of their literate lives and lived experiences after nearly a year of sharing and reflecting. In the two lengthy excerpts that follow, I believe we are able to see the fragility of the patriarchy,

and also of my participants. The patriarchy, as I described above, is illusory, destructive to all who embody it, hegemonic, brutal, and aggressive. It wounds the mind and the body, and it denies us of our humanity. This idea is especially important because its tenets became detrimental to Amanda and Serenity. As they resisted, they relapsed, and the vicious cycle ensued. In one of my end of year interviews with Serenity, she told me,

Serenity: I think after a while, I will have to accept that I have to cook, and that I am the child barer. I will have to accept that things are the way they are.

Donna-Marie: Do you think there is anything you can do?

Serenity: I definitely do, but I think it makes things worse. I see how it affects my mom and it makes things worse for her. So, it's not that I don't want things to be different it's just that it makes things worse. If I can just let it happen it would be ok.

Donna-Marie: So, if you accept that type of behavior as normal (the behavior of her father), you think you can live with it, like your mom has lived with it?

Serenity: I try not to let it bother me anymore, I try to live with it.

Donna-Marie: I'm trying to wrap my head around the idea that you are in such opposition to your dad's behavior yet you don't think there's anything you can do. If you can't change him, do you think there are other things that you can change, or things that you can do?

Serenity: In the future, I don't think I will completely bow down, because my mom isn't like that either. It's a lot of brainwashing. At first, I used to get into a lot of arguments about boys being stronger than girls, but some girls are stronger than some boys. Girls get periods, and girls give birth, and boys can't handle that. They wouldn't be able to take it as much as we would be able to take it. That would be my response before, but it's what we're supposed to do, and there's no point in making that argument because that's what's expected of you.

Donna-Marie: So where is our strength? Where are we most powerful as women? Where is your mother's power? Where's your power? When do you feel the most in control, comfortable, strong... When do you feel like that?

Serenity: When I am not in the house. When I write, because I can kind of control how I want it to go. And If I don't like how the sentence is, or how it's going or the tone, I could just take it out. In my mind, I guess. I have an active imagination, so I can just paint a different image from what just happened. (Serenity, 7/12/17, interview)

What Serenity expressed was some degree of complacency and submission. She talked about the ways that brainwashing occurred and convinces her to accept thing for what they were. She also was clear that she was using her writing as a way to push through her pain. She felt that this was where she had the most power. It was where she was able to use her imagination to construct a future that was representative of her, and if there was something she didn't like she would use her agency to change it.

Amanda also expressed similar sentiments, however, she had developed coping mechanisms to deal with her lived experiences. She told me,

Amanda: I'm pretty sure I done told you this, but for a while, I haven't liked my mom because she kinda put herself into the situation, where like you're staying with somebody who treats you and your daughter this way and you never speak out about it. You just let him talk. And the only thing you ever say is, "Just ignore him." How do you sit there and ignore that? Like But about how it's made me become as a person, like as I got older, I don't know. I don't like the kind of person I've become. I don't know if you guys know this, but I'm a liar. Not like I lie to you guys. Not like that, but more like my feelings, I guess sort of things. I lie about my feelings, and it's like sometimes I can't lie about my feelings, and that's when it all builds up and I can't like, not express them. You know what I mean? (Amanda, 5/15/17, interview)

While lying became a way for her to mask her emotions, she realized that there were things about herself that she did not like. She recognized things about herself that needed to be confronted and changed, and these things were brought on by her relationship with the patriarchy. Her reflection demonstrated a consciousness that sets the stage for intervention and change, and it also served as a cry for help. As I have discussed above, there has to be a naming, a conscious challenging of the patriarchy that disentangles the identities of these girls from this destructive system.

Consequently, by providing more opportunities for these immigrant girls from the Caribbean to speak, listen, theorize, and use their literate practices as a way to confront the patriarchy, we may be able to save their lives.

The reality of Amanda and Serenity's lives was entangled with toxic masculinity, pain, anger, frustration, and guilt. They blamed themselves for things they were not responsible for, and they deeply identified with their mothers. They thought that if they could rescue their mothers from the patriarchy, they could inadvertently rescue themselves from it as well. It seemed that the outcomes of their futures were inadvertently linked to the realities of their mothers' lives. And while they dreamed of change, and they fought to create it, abstractly, metaphorically, and concretely, they often relapsed, not understanding that they could not do it alone. hooks (2013) argues that, "No mass body of women has challenged patriarchy and neither has any group of men come together to lead the struggle" (p. 4). This reality meant that they often struggled in isolation, and while they took steps toward resistance they suffered dearly never fully understanding that they weren't responsible for what they were experiencing, and that the culprit was the patriarchy.

Conclusion

The patriarchy is an ideology that wounds both the body and the mind. It is violent, repressive, and systemic. It maligns and creates destruction both within society and within self. It is not cultural, nor is it specific to any group of people; rather, it manifests itself differently in different cultures. Patriarchy is powerful, yet fragile, and its power is embodied within individuals, institutions, and the social structures of society. Its fragility is exposed when we refuse to engage with it, when we are able to understand its tenets, and when we resist all aspects of it in daily practice. Without a consciousness and a Black feminist epistemology, and a clear fleshing out of the tenets of this system, patriarchy has the power to kill Black women and girls. The patriarchy doesn't care about age or gender, it hurts all equally, as we have seen in the cases of Serenity and Amanda.

The patriarchy nurtures silence, and is illusory in nature. Consequently, coming together with other girls either through therapy, our memory work focused group meetings, or an online community that offered feedback on writing was essential for Amanda and Serenity. They could not (as they learned) defeat the patriarchy alone, they needed a community of Black women to help them. This is consistent with Black feminist scholars who discuss the importance of having a support system of Black women to confront issues that are specific and important to their lives (Brown, 2009; Collins, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2011; Lorde, 2007; Staples, 2016). According to Lorde (2007), her own experience taught her that,

Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had contacted other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridged our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living. (p. 41)

After one year of working with my participants I learned that being able to confront and speak their truth was essential to their recovery, survival, and wellbeing. Not talking about the patriarchy doesn't cause it to go away; in fact, ignoring it gives it strength and emboldens it. By using Black feminism as a framework, I was able to flesh out the ways Black girls were resisting this unjust system. I was able to read darkly (Staples, 2016) the realities they were faced with and what they were doing about it. New literacies also afforded me the ability to consider a variety of literate practices as examples of the ways in which these girls resisted the patriarchy. Through a methodology of memory, these girls also recalled the experiences that were threatening their survival. By tapping into a resource of memory, they used their own experiences of their youth as a platform for considering how to move forward in their lives. While they struggled, they did not give up.

This chapter is organized to privilege the voices of these immigrant girls from the Caribbean. It is organized for them to share their lived experiences, and for us to understand the ways in which the patriarchy was affecting them in all aspects of their lives. They opened up their world to me and provided me with perspectives that I could not have known otherwise. It is my hope that their words can compel us to create spaces where Black girls like them can get the support they need as they struggle to resist a system that threatens to destroy them.

Chapter 5

Solidarity for Survival

When women actively struggle in a truly supportive way to understand our differences, to change misguided, distorted perspectives, we lay the foundation for the experience of political solidarity. Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. (hooks 1986, p. 138)

Introduction

When I began my study in the fall of 2016, I initially met with participants individually to begin establishing relationships with them. I hoped they could get to know me intimately, and I them. Those meetings were wonderful; they often yielded the kind of information that didn't always make its way to large group sessions. However, this intimacy that we shared was short lived. My participants always preferred to have a close friend with them during our meetings. Their friendships with each other had the power to boost their spirits, foster strength and courage, and awaken in them a kind of vibrancy that wasn't always present when they were alone, or with me. Finders (1997) notes in her work that adolescent participants in her study also clung to their relationships with each other as a central aspect of their identities. She posits, "The nature of this group's social interactions created rigid standards used to measure and moderate appropriate behaviors both within and outside of the school context...The unifying thread of their relationships was an unfaltering allegiance to group identity" (p. 48)..Throughout my data I coded this allegiance as solidarity. The term solidarity emerged as I read through field notes, participant observations and interviews. Relationships these girls held dear to their hearts were built around love, academic performance in school, social relations outside of school, families, sex/sexuality,

culture, and race. They clung to each other for advice, for support, for validation, and sometimes for a shoulder to cry on. The vulnerability that was present often surfaced when these girls were together, and always when they were in a judgment-free context.

I define solidarity in this chapter by drawing on the work of Mohanty (2003) and Gaztambide-Fernández (2012). For each of these scholars, the term solidarity is concerned with relationships, action, change, culture, and common struggle. Solidarity isn't passive, it isn't just about words, and it isn't about sameness; rather, it is a term that is imbued with agency and the constant desire to bring awareness to topics and issues that are central to the survival of a people. Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) touches on three modes of solidarity that speak to what a pedagogy of solidarity could look like in practice. Each of these modes—*relational*, *transitive*, and *creative* solidarity—lays the foundation for the conscious questioning and reimagining of a more equitable world. In this world, Black girls from across the diaspora would be visible and their lives would be equally as relevant as the lives of their white counterparts (Chayla Haynes, Saran Stewart, & Evette Allen, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2011a; Joseph, Viesca, & Bianco, 2016; Morris, 2016). Relational solidarity, according to Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), is the phase where solidarity is built through relationships with another. He argues that, “individual subjects do not enter into relationships, but rather subjects are made in and through relationships” (p. 53). This type of solidarity occurs through engagement, through a willingness to listen, and learn. It means that one does not enter a relationship with a fixed idea/concept of what that relationship might look like, but rather that one is open to the co-creation of an organic relationship where each party is equally invested and committed to the imagining of possibilities together.

Another important aspect of solidarity that Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) discusses is *transitive solidarity*. In this phase, he argues, it is not enough to say that one is in solidarity with someone or a cause. One must be taking action towards something in relation to that person or a particular cause. In this phase, the agency that one enacts has the power to leave a mark on that

individual as well as the world; this means that in a transitive stage to be in solidarity with someone means that there is a willingness to allow for change within self. You essentially cannot be in solidarity and remain unchanged, and this change occurs when one engages with, and acts, toward another. Finally, the last mode of solidarity that he examines is *creative solidarity*. In this particular phase, Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) asks us to think of culture as an ever-changing part of our identities. He asks us to consider that culture isn't a fixed concept, but rather one that changes with time and perspective. He posits,

Creative solidarity requires a view of culture as a site of action, change, and dissonance, rejecting the dominant view of culture as something inherent in who we are or something that we can claim to authentically own, with stable and fixed boundaries. (p. 57)

Creativity, as discussed by Gaztambide-Fernández, is concerned with flexibility. It is a willingness to accept that so much of what we know and understand about culture is socially constructed. This means that with some level of creativity one can begin to reimagine what a culture of solidarity might look like if co-constructed by members of that culture—in this case the students and faculty at City High. That means that there has to be an acceptance that culture is always in flux, and that with some degree of creativity individuals can re-envision a more just and equitable world that is representative of their needs and goals produced in collaboration with others.

In addition to the work of Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), I also draw on Mohanty (2003), to establish a lens of solidarity that ontologically centers on agency, common interest, and visibility. Because my research centers on the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean, Mohanty's discussion on marginalized women from the third world is a necessary conversation to include in this chapter. I was primarily drawn to her *feminist solidarity model* because it engages a vision of solidarity that extends across borders, which allows for deep questioning and the linking of movements that may seem disconnected but share many of the same ideals and goals. According to Mohanty (2003),

[The Feminist solidarity model] focus on mutuality and common interests, it requires one to formulate questions about connection and disconnection between activist women's movements around the world. Rather than formulating activism and agency in terms of discrete and disconnected cultures and nations, it allows us to frame agency and resistance across the borders of nation and culture. (p. 523)

This vision of solidarity is especially important since it raises questions about the relationship between the local and the global. It asks us to consider gender as an important part of the conversation on unity and struggle since the voices of women and girls are often disregarded or ignored (Chayla Haynes et al., 2016; Collins, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2011b, 2011a; hooks, 1986). Another important aspect of this chapter is the understanding that difference doesn't have to stand in the way of solidarity. In my work, I speak specifically about the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean. It is my goal to understand their lived experiences in urban schools, however, this doesn't mean that the experiences of other girls in that context is disconnected from those of my immigrant participants. It is important to consider the multiple factors that contribute to who they are. One such factor is where they are from, since where one is from has a profound influence on group affinity (Thornton, Taylor, & Chatters, 2013). Consequently, while difference can influence possibilities for solidarity, Mohanty (2003) notes in her work that it is through the analysis of difference that we are better able to identify areas of need, to find our connections and similarities. She further posits,

The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders. (p. 505)

Therefore, when I address differences that exist between immigrants from the Caribbean and African Americans, I do so to demonstrate the spaces where work has to take place and also to consider how collectively we can struggle through those differences to find connections among communities that often seem so disconnected.

Drawing both on Mohanty (2003) and Gaztambide-Fernández (2012), I discuss solidarity in this chapter from a Black feminist standpoint that aims to privilege the experiences and relationships that exist amongst Black immigrant girls from the Caribbean. These relationships are built around common struggle, similarities, shared experiences, and agency. The girls I study form connections based on their shared desire to overcome/overthrow, resist, and reimagine a world that is equitable, fair, and appreciative of their unique experiences (Chayla Haynes et al., 2016; Collins, 2008; Delicia Tiera Greene, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2011b; Harding, 2004; Marshall, Staples, & Gibson, 2009). Immigrant girls from the Caribbean in this chapter introduce topics that highlight their experiences living on the margins. Their focus centers on race, culture, gender, and their very survival. These issues speak to the question that guides this chapter which is, *In what ways are the academic identities of immigrant girls from the Caribbean shaped by their own lived curriculum and the planned curriculum of City High?* What you will find below is an articulation of academic identities as lived and embodied by each of my participants. These identities are entangled in what Aoki (2005) refers to as “curriculum as planned” and “curriculum as lived experience.” And it is through their literate practices that I am able to see the role of curriculum in the construction of these academic and social identities. Below I have organized this chapter into three sections. Each section is informed by my finding that *literacies can provide us with the tools that we need to understand the ways in which curriculum informs academic identity formation amongst immigrant girls from the Caribbean in schools.*

In section I, I focus on the significance of solidarity as a site where immigrant girls from the Caribbean are developing relationships. Moreover, I focus on the significance of these relationships to self-esteem, self-worth, self-determination, and self-definition, each an important aspect of a Black feminist positionality (Collins, 2008). Secondly, I focus on the significance of solidarity on academic performance in schools, and the pedagogical implications of these relationships for teachers, administrators, and my participants. In section II the conversation

centers on culture, race, ethnicity, and the construction of academic identities. In this section I focus on the ways in which race, culture, and ethnicity are taken up both in and out of the curriculum, the meaning that my participants made of these concepts in terms of their lived experiences, and their overall success in and out of school-sanctioned spaces. In this section, the reader will be privy to the perspectives of teachers, administrators and my participants. Finally, in section III, I focus on the planned curriculum and what teachers and administrators believe should be included in the curriculum and the direct implications for the lived experiences of my participants.

Section 1

Sisterhood and Solidarity: The Building of Academic Identities: “I don’t know what I would do without her.” (Zion interview, 5/2017)

The term *academic identity* as expressed throughout this dissertation is a term that is imbued with complexity. Academic identity, or what scholars have called academic self-concept, is roughly defined as one’s attitude and perception of one’s academic and intellectual skills (Cokley, 2000). Quigley (2011) has further characterized academic identity as an onion, layered with meaning, and each time one pulls away at a layer there is something new to discover. For this chapter, I draw on these ideas for my analysis and discussion of the implications of strong academic identities on the lived experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean. Cokley’s (2000) research suggests that academic identities are shaped by the relationship of students to faculty, relationships with friends, class status, and gender. Each of these factors are highly influential in determining whether students develop strong academic identities. His argument

further suggests that students' overall achievement and the development of these identities is contingent upon students having positive senses of self. This means that my participants' identities as girls, immigrants, and Black all had to be seen as relevant and valued in all aspects of their lives for them to develop such identities. In this section I will discuss what this meant for my participants and also address the importance of their relationships with each other and how these relationships functioned as sources of empowerment.

While the concept of solidarity may seem disconnected from a discussion on academic identity formation, these two ideas are very much intertwined. For my participants, the construction of strong resolute identities is contingent upon support, love, unity, friendship, and belonging. Collins (2008) argues that when the emotional needs of Black women and girls are met through relationships with each other they are better prepared to face other challenges in the world. Consequently, solidarity becomes an integral part of the formation of strong academic identities among my participants. Feeling good about one's self has the power to translate into more concrete actions and practices. Below, I introduce interviews and discussions with Serenity and Zion as they negotiate their relationship with each other and discuss the ways in which their bond worked to prepare them for a world beyond school. They focused on culture, race, ethnicity, and the significance of these categories for their lived experiences. Furthermore, solidarity becomes even more significant since it is through these relationships where these girls found their power in school and in their lives outside of school. I begin below with a reflection from my field notes in a moment where I began to realize the importance of the relationship the girls had constructed with each other and the impact that it had on their lives.

Friendship (Donna-Marie, FN, 11/15/16)

I have been conducting participant observations with the girls for about three months now and it has been interesting to see the bonds that exist between them. Zion and Serenity in particular

seem to be very close, their conversations always seem to be serious, and always private. Today Zion came to the teacher's lounge and asked me if she could speak to Serenity for a while, I gave them the space they needed for their talk. From behind the glass door I could see the pensive, yet attentive look on each of their faces as they spoke. I wanted to ask them about the nature of their discussion, but I didn't. I wanted to know what was it that seemed so serious to these adolescent girls, but I didn't ask. I wanted to respect their connection, their conversation, and their bond. Interestingly, the other girls also had similar connections with each other as well. There are always at least one or two friends that each girl speaks to about matters that she deems serious, matters that captivate and bring them together. I find myself quite curious about what they are sharing with each other, and why every topic is not open to all friends.

In the early months of my study it was clear to me that a sisterhood existed amongst my participants. While sisterhood is a highly contested term often critiqued for its focus on the homogeneity of womanhood and girlhood, without considering its full potential for Black women and girls (hooks, 1986; Mohanty, 2003), I use this term to focus on a more nuanced aspect of the experiences of immigrant girls from the Caribbean. I use this term to focus on the construction of relationships and identities based on similarity of struggle in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, and other intersecting factors for Black immigrant girls from the Caribbean. According to Mohanty (2003), "What binds women together is an ahistorical notion of the sameness of their oppression and, consequently, the sameness of their struggles" (p. 112). For Black immigrant girls from the Caribbean, the sisterhood is an essential part of their survival; from a Black feminist perspective, sisterhood is essential to the development of strong, resilient girls, and women. Furthermore, sisterhood doesn't center on a deficit approach to the building of relationships between Black women. Rather, it is rich with the power these women and girls possess, both to influence their circumstance and empower each other. According to hooks (1986),

Women who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to relinquish the belief that they exercise some measure of control, however relative, over their lives. They cannot afford to see themselves solely as “victims” because their survival depends on continued exercise of whatever personal powers they possess. It would be psychologically demoralizing for these women to bond with other women on the basis of shared victimization. They bond with other women on the basis of shared strengths and resources. This is the woman bonding feminist movement should encourage. It is this type of bonding that is the essence of Sisterhood. (p. 128)

The bonds developed through a sisterhood are fundamental to the survival of Black women and girls in spite of where they are from. The sisterhood is where one is able to be recognized, loved, and respected. It is a sacred space that Black girls have taken ownership of and become protective of, often guarding it figuratively and literally. It is one of the only spaces they have where they are able to be honest, vulnerable, unguarded, fearless, and brave.

While the term sisterhood has been used to talk about women in general terms, I argue that the specificity of the Black immigrant girl experiences requires a consciousness developed in the sisterhood that is mature and historically developed in terms of what it is able to offer Black immigrant girls from the Caribbean. Such a consciousness can be developed together with friends, but often it is handed down from one generation to the next through storying, songs, dance, artifacts, and literate practices. Collins (2008) talks about such a knowledge being central to the survival of Black girls. She posits that, “In the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversations and humor, African American women as sisters and friends affirm one another’s humanity, specialness, and right to exist” (p. 113). This type of affirmation for my participants takes place in the bond they share with each other, and exists in the realm of the sisterhood. I have been able to access the memories and knowledge they bring with them to these relationships through an examination of their literacies, and through their lived experiences. What makes the sisterhood a profound institution is its reliance on solidarity for its strength and survival. Because the sisterhood is constructed around common struggle, it holds within it possibilities for a future that is created out of that struggle alongside other girls who are

emotionally, and psychologically ready to take on any challenge, and to overcome obstacles they face both within society and within self. This is what has brought my participants together, and it is why Zion Campbell describes her relationship with Serenity as essential to how she sees herself and how she faces the world. She told me, “I don’t know what I would do without her” (Zion, 5/15/17, interview), a testament to the importance of their relationship and to Zion’s mental health and survival. Through her study with adolescent girls Piper (1994) found that,

As girls pull away from parents, peers are everything. Teens who hardly speak to their parents talk all night with friends. Peers validate their decisions and support their new independent selves. This is a time of deep searching for the self in relationships. There is a constant experimenting—what reaction will I get from others? Talking to friends is a way of checking the important question—am I okay? The talk is endless, as any parent who shares a phone line with their teenager can attest. Cutting teens off from their friends is incredibly punishing. (p. 67-68)

What Piper is alluding to in her work speaks to the importance of sisterhood as a necessary element in the lives of adolescent girls. The sisterhood is made possible through solidarity; the survival of the sisterhood is contingent upon solidarity. These two ideas are not mutually exclusive, what makes sisterhood different, is its consideration of gender, and a racialized identity. Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) tells us that solidarity is not passive, it happens when one acts toward another, and when each party agrees to enter a relationship based on common interest and struggle. Solidarity, therefore, is the foundation of the sisterhood, it is what makes the sisterhood possible, and what keeps it alive. It is also why my participants are so committed to protecting it, and keeping it sacred. It seems that their very survival is linked to the possibility of its existence.

During the month of May 2017, I met with my participants a few times for group meetings. The purpose was to touch base on where they were in the semester. How were they feeling? How were their classes going? How were things at home? All of these questions were the subject of our conversation. I spoke specifically to Serenity James and Zion Campbell, and they each spoke about the importance of friendship and belonging, and how the bonds they had

developed worked to shape their outlook on the world. The realities of their lives caused them to cling to each other for support, love, and guidance. This is reflected in our discussion on that day.

I asked Zion,

Donna-Marie: What is it about Serenity that makes it so easy for you to talk to her versus other friends that you have who are not easy to talk to?

Zion: Serenity is one that listens, then gives you sensible advice. It's like the people that I hang out with like, they're sensible, but emotion wise, they're not gonna relate to you.

Donna-Marie: Yeah, can you explain.

Zion: For some reason, I feel like I am more able to relate to Serenity because she's from a different place. I'm from a different place. The ones that I hang out with are not really from a different place.

Donna-Marie: So, when you say a different place tell me what that means.

Zion: She's from the Islands. She understands the whole entire family issues, and the friends issues, and real-life type of issues. When I go to them they find me so foreign to a point where it's like, "I can't really relate, but I can give you what I got, and we gonna just have to keep going."

Serenity: I think it's maybe because they don't really have real, real problems. Like don't have real serious problems ... Like even when one of her friends was gone through a state where she was suicidal (To Zion "I think you know who I'm talkin' about"), even then, she didn't really have really strong problems at home that were crazy. She has issues with her mom and stuff, but I feel like, if I compare ... First of all, who am I to downplay her problems? But at the same time, the way she behaves toward her mother, I could never respect. Cause I remember she would tell me stories, and I would just be like, no matter what my mom does, I would never talk to her like that.

Donna-Marie: Yeah.

Zion: I don't try to judge people, I try to understand as much as possible from their point of view. (Serenity, Zion, 5/15/17. MWFG)

This moment between Zion, Serenity and I was significant in that a few things occurred during this meeting. Firstly, they were inadvertently asking questions about what made their relationships with each other different from relationships with other girls who were not from the *Caribbean*. While they were not explicitly interrogating these nuances (as to obtain an answer), they were highlighting the fact that there were differences between them and their nonimmigrant friends/peers. They also felt that it was these differences that allowed their bonds with each other to be stronger and more meaningful. However, these differences speak to the sameness of their struggle, and highlight their ability to recognize when they are supported, understood, and recognized.

Secondly, they were engaged in a process of solidarity that Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) discusses as the co-construction of relationships built on commonality, respect, and the willingness to engage together toward similar goals. They were using the tenets of Black feminism, which focuses on the importance of relationships among Black women and girls and the centrality of those relationships to who they were, and who they hoped to become (Brown, 2009, 2013; Collins, 2008; hooks, 1982, 1984; Lorde, 1984). For example, Zion and Serenity discussed the importance of listening, getting sensible advice from friends, being able to relate to each other, and being aware of the values that were fundamental to who they were, and where they were from. These declarations are important for a number of reasons; for one, teachers, administrators, and other school decision makers can take up this information when crafting curricula for students who are conscious about their need to connect with the people and the materials that they engage with. And another reason speaks to the academic identities of these girls: If they are able to find affirmation for the things they need in the curriculum and in schools,

then they are more likely to be successful in their performance in schools and in other spaces where academic vigor is valued (Cokley, 2000).

In addition, the acts of solidarity that existed between Zion and Serenity centered on the relationship between culture, race, and identity. For these girls, the values, attitudes, and beliefs about self and the world correlated with being from *the islands*; and while the islands seemed to be important in terms of geographical location, it also represented a platform that my participants used to answer questions and to get affirmations for who they were, where they were from, and the values they embraced. It seemed that if their identities were affirmed by someone who shared their world view or an appreciation for those views, they were more receptive, friendly, unguarded, and vulnerable with those individuals. They were building bridges, searching for commonality and for affirmation, all while carving out spaces for themselves and their friends. In her reflection on her time in Ghana where she embarked on a spiritual journey to understand the role of memory in the collective and individual consciousness of Black women, Dillard (2012) discusses the natural gravitation of Black people toward each other. She posits that,

Finding ways toward each other as African ascendants (descendants?) both affirms and deepens personhood, arising from the deep well of memories of what kinship and community might be. However painful, tentative, and hard, learning to be because we all are is the way forward. (p. 112)

This reflection by Dillard speaks to the ways in which my participants bonded with each other, and the promise that unity afforded them often when they were most vulnerable and insecure. *The islands* came to symbolize shared ideologies and world views. This didn't mean that they were unable to see the importance of the bond with other Black people who were not from the islands. Rather, it meant that there were specific characteristics that had to be present for solidarity to be possible. This idea speaks to Mohanty's (2003) feminist solidarity model, and Gaztambide-Fernández' (2012) discussion of common struggle, and relational solidarity. One of my participants, Imani Rhone describes it in this way,

Imani Rhone: To be African American? I feel like being African American is the same as being Jamaican American. I would have to admit that there is a difference but it's just that I feel that it's the same since you still have to fight for everything that African Americans do. People look at us like we're not smart, or we don't know how to act or we're not good enough but that's not true at all. I feel like Black kids are one of the most brightest, smartest kids there are. We have so much potential but people don't really care to see that potential sometimes. (Imani Rhone, Interview, 12/5/2016)

Imani's reflection demonstrates that she and her counterparts knew inherently the importance of kinship to self-confidence and overall self-esteem. It also demonstrated that she understood the broader implications for not just self, but for Black people more generally, in spite of where those people are from.

Lastly, my participants were also engaged in the process of community building with those who were willing to build community with them. Solidarity then, constructed around culture, race, and ethnicity, became central to who they were, as result sisterhood began to emerge in their discourse. Their words were powerful. They spoke explicitly about what they needed and what they wanted from their teachers, friends, families, and each other. They spoke passionately about the importance of the sisterhood, even when they were unable to name it. What I began to realize from my participants was that the solidarity they were engaged in was reciprocal, and each member benefited from the relationship they had established—which speaks to Gaztambide-Fernández' (2012) discussion of relational solidarity. In a dialogue between Zion and Serenity, these two girls touched on the reciprocal nature of their relationship. They noted:

Zion: Serenity is the person that I talk to when I can. When I'm frustrated and I need to get everything out, I'll try to text it. I listen to everybody and I don't really talk too much about my problems, but it just builds up to a point where it's like I feel like I'm going crazy and I tell myself, a couple more years, a couple more years. And then I see

Serenity, and she's like, "Hey, what's wrong?" I'm just like, I explain whatever I have to explain and I try not to talk too much about myself, because I feel so centered.

Serenity: That's another reason why I don't like to have crisis, because there are people who are depending on me. Like there's people that you influence in a positive way, regardless if you're have a negative day, so that's something that always made me like, all right you can't be a buckle to everybody. Because after a while, you get addicted to all the bad stuff that's going on in your life. So, when I had so many friends, who are like, "No, you influence me in a good way, you're so nice. I love your Mom." It's just like, oh, okay. Like I'm here for a reason. It makes sense. (Amanda, Serenity, Zion, 5/15/17.

MWFG)

This brief dialogue demonstrates that their sisterhood demanded action on behalf of each other. Serenity, for example, tells us that because her friends were emotionally dependent on her, it was difficult for her to allow her own life issues to consume her reality and prevent her from being present for her friends. Zion, on the other hand, was seeking support, and having Serenity to speak to provided her with the comfort and space she needed to express her emotions. I believe this interaction speaks to the significance of Black girls as powerful figures in each other's lives. Black feminist scholars have long written about the importance of these relationships to the survival and the sanity of Black women and girls (R. N. Brown, 2009; V. Brown, 2015; Collins, 2008; hooks, 1984).

My participants constructed relationships with each other that resulted in a sisterhood. They validated each other's existences and there was power in that. Through their bond they shared stories handed down through memory, and they supported each other's dreams. They affirmed each other's right to existence—a true representation of sisterhood. This practice resulted in better self-esteem, greater self-worth, a sense of responsibility, and stronger academic performance. These results became evident in school and in other academic spaces. By

understanding the connections that my participants shared, school administrators and teachers can develop and foster their own relationships with students that might give them access and knowledge about what their students' value in the context of their classroom, and the school community. In the following section I explore the role of race, culture, and ethnicity and the ways in which these concepts are taken up in the curriculum as planned and as lived experience (Aoki, 2005) by my participants. While my participants developed solidarity with each other, this was not enough for them to exhibit the kinds of academic identities that are consistent with success in their classes. It was evident that solidarity had to extend to the spaces that were not always sanctioned by my participants. The curriculum became one such site. In what follows we will hear from Serenity and Zion as they struggle to find themselves in the planned curriculum, while drawing on their own lived curriculum as a source of strength and power.

Section II

Race, Culture, Ethnicity: Who am I/Where am I?

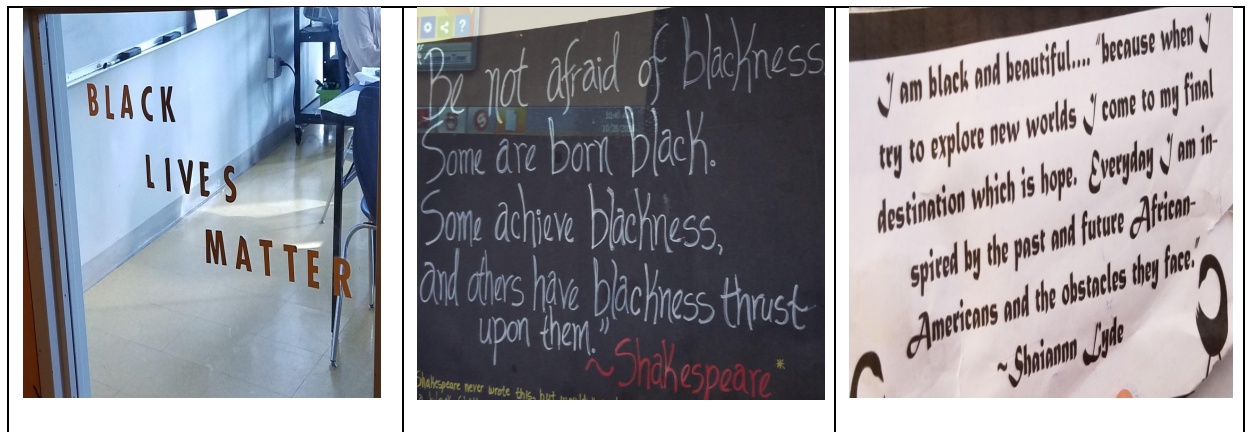
In his curriculum research, Aoki (2005) discusses two types of curriculum that he calls the *two worlds of curriculum*. In these two worlds, there is *curriculum as lived experience* and *curriculum as planned*. Curriculum as planned, he argues,

Has its origin outside the classroom, such as the ministry of education or the school district office... In curriculum as plan there are the works of curriculum planners, usually selected teachers from the field, under the direction of some ministry official often designated as the curriculum director of a subject or a group of subjects. As works of people, inevitably, they are imbued with the planners' orientation to the world, which inevitably include their own interest and assumptions about ways of knowing and? how teachers and students are to be understood. (Aoki, p. 159-160)

Curriculum as lived experience, on the other hand, has a focus on the knowledge the individual brings with them to the classroom from either their own personal experiences or from epistemologies that have been handed down, either through memories, artifacts, or through literate practices (Dillard, 2011; Evans-Winters, 2011a; Halbwachs, 1992). Aoki (2005) is clear in his discussion that this type of curriculum includes the lived experiences of both the teacher and the students. I introduce Aoki's discussion of curriculum here because one of my findings suggests that how students grapple with curricula, both the planned and the lived, has significant consequences for how they perceive themselves academically. In an interview with Zion, I asked her about her own literate identity, and how that is shaped by what she learns, sees, and experiences at school. She immediately brought my attention to the images found on the walls throughout City High. These images promote Black consciousness, and also serve as reminders that Black students matter. Zion explained to me,

Here's what goes down in this school from my perspective. Education comes first, of course, but "Black Lives" is like put in there every second they got. I feel like the only, not the only reason, but most of the reason why we have all of these things around the school is because our principal. His parents are part of the Black Panther party. He's passionate about being Black, so of course, he's going to tell the teachers to put inside our head every minute, "Hey, make sure that you tell them that they're important because they're all Black." I'm thinking, "Okay, this school's passionate about Black people."
(Zion, interview, 2/7/17)

Figure 5- 1



Inside City High

This excerpt from my interview with Zion epitomizes the complexity of the relationship between the planned and the lived curriculum, further demonstrating how life experiences can shape curriculum and leave an impact on the individual. The principal of City High had deliberately fostered an environment where students felt valued, and respected, yet it is often their own lived experiences that determined what mattered to them, and how they are interpreting the materials that were provided for them in school.

Based on Aoki's (2005) theory of these various forms of curriculum, one question we might ask is, *does the curriculum as planned at City High have any impact on the identities of the students there?* To understand this, I looked to Zion's literate practices. As a poet, rapper, and performer, Zion had long used her literacies to address issues of inequality as they pertained to race, culture, ethnicity, and belonging. Through her literacies, I was able to see how the planned curriculum had shaped her ideas and had informed her beliefs regarding self. During one of our interviews, Zion asked me if she could share a poem with me. This poem was an expression of ideas, feelings, and frustrations that she faced. It was also her chance to speak about what a Black racialized identity meant, and the factors that shaped this identity. Crafted for a school poetry

literacy event, Zion's poem is an example of how she used literacies to make sense of her social world. She writes,

Opinion is a view or judgment formed about something that is not necessarily based on facts or knowledge. Black people: Loud, angry, unapologetic, rude and tempered. White people: Sophisticated, polite, well-intentioned, kind-spirited and caring. Police brutality: Deserving, disciplinary, and everyone experience balance, injustice, privileges, only for certain people, not worthy to all, given to the best, for the top, and mostly given to African Americans. Those are all opinions! The same opinion that was believed to be effect from the color of skin, treated as if everywhere it was more precious coming from a person with less melanin, and we take action. Showing the light over the darkness that they left behind, leaving pitch Black, blind, and over time creating worse over the possibility of dark heroes. Leaving the world to understand what measures must go.

The certain belief of opinions dawned upon us more like sunny than in gray. Lie to people telling that privilege was given to blacks since the slaves, shown on TV that the same man ran to be in house going through no struggle to be where thou art now. Half a million dollars was not given to all. That was a privilege that most of the world would say false, but when he leads, gives the possibilities that more of the world will fall on us. Talking about police brutality, they fight us because we're Black, we march up and we attack. They fear us from the jump because they know that we're all that but we still have our imperfections. Our nerve to give rejections toward the help that every person need and somehow get a 3.8 and up is a bad reflection.

Not understand that if we want to show up in the bus, we got to sit together and win ourselves up. No more fighting with ourselves. No more pulling out guns, but only shot this maid as our mindset shouldn't be taken else for no one. Every day is more serious than the next because we have to survive with our skin color unless the rest who don't stress. Those are facts, not opinions that we somehow believe with no doubt because they're putting inside our head that we should

just bow down to the opinions that we're unsuccessful and yet 63% of Blacks are graduating college. We can upgrade the numbers if we keep trying with our knowledge.

They call us savages. Not the cool term that we expect, but the opinionated comment that we should choose to neglect. They call us hideous but should understand that we are beautiful in every way from the thick hair to the brown eyes and in every shade we came. Those are facts!
(Zion Campbell poem)

As Zion read her poem, a sense of pride emanated from her. I wanted to understand all of the factors that had informed this poem. Her poem centered on the agency of Black people, on the resistance of white supremacy, and it challenged the victim narrative that is often consistent with stereotypes against Black people. To unpack the poem, I began by asking her some questions,

Donna-Marie: What inspired you to write that poem?

Zion: Well, I have a friend. Her name is Tatiana. She's Ecuadorian, but she's one of the top people that I know that represent for Black people the most even though she's not Black. That kind of surprises me a little bit.

Donna-Marie: She's from Ecuador?

Zion: Her family is. Yeah, but she was born here. I think she went through my phone one day. She was just like, "Zion, you need to write a poem with me because I don't want to present it by myself." I actually was like, "Why?" She just said, "It's just for a show." She told me it was just a couple of days away. I was just sitting here, "I've got to put this together all last minute." It really took an all-nighter, and I had to put a lot of thought into that, and it just ... Right there.

Donna-Marie: In the poem I hear you say African Americans, do you consider yourself African American?

Zion: Yeah.

Donna-Marie: Okay, and you were born here [in the U.S.A.]?

Zion: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donna-Marie: Your parents are from St. Vincent?

Zion: Yes.

Donna-Marie: Both of your parents?

Zion: My step-dad, he's from St. Vincent. My mom is from St. Vincent. My biological dad is from Barbados.

Donna-Marie: Your parents: Are they also passionate about issues relating to social justice? Where do you get your inspiration?

Zion: When it comes to them, they care about it, but it's like they kind of know not to stress about it too much because they feel like no Black person's ... Well, not no Black person, but most Black people are hypocrites because they want to make a change, but they don't want to do nothing to change it. If it comes to a point where it's like they're included majorly, they'll come up and try to support. If they hear like Black people are trying to say, "Hey, we need justice," but at the same time, they're doing stupid stuff, they're just going to sit back and be like, "Yeah, we need justice." They're just not going to be that included.

Donna-Marie: What does it mean to be African American for you?

Zion: To me? It just means an extra struggle.

Donna-Marie: Identifying as African American also means that you're identifying as a part of a struggle?

Zion: Yeah. Identifying as part of a struggle. If you're African American, you're taking on not a big title, but a somewhat important title because you have to remember at the end of the day, most of the country kind of hates you, but you've just got to deal with it and try to see if you can change their mind a little bit every second you got. It's a struggle just to be African American.

Donna-Marie: Is there a difference between being just Black and being African American or being Caribbean or being African American. Are there differences in your opinion?

Zion: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I don't think it's like a big difference to me. If you're Black and African American, it's just you have a different learning set on how you're supposed to deal with things. It's like you're taught. I think of like a good example, but my mom is like as soon as I'm walking around, she'll say, "Hey, just understand that you're beautiful in every way. Don't let nobody put you down." She'll sit there and try to hit you with all of these lessons, and you don't know for why. As soon as you step outside, that's when people start calling you stuff, and you're like, "Oh, that's why she said it." It's kind of like that.

Donna-Marie: How does your consciousness about race and about what it means to be African American and the struggle translate into what happens here in school? What do you do here in school? Is there any connection at all?

Zion: I feel like there's a little bit of connection. I don't know how to explain this. In this school, of course, there's going to be a lot of people that's very powerful about Blacks and try to get their thoughts out there. At the same time, they're just saying people that do stupid stuff, so you could kind of connect with the whole entire Black thing here, but at the same time, it's not going to carry on for that long unless it's brought in front and somebody chooses to say something. (Zion and Serenity, Interview, October, 3rd, 2017)

From both Zion's poem and our conversation above, it was evident to me that she embodied a racial consciousness that extended beyond her background as an immigrant. It seemed that one could create multiple communities built around the tenets of solidarity, and Zion had done this. While she was passionate about her connection with girls like Serenity who understood her from a cultural perspective, she also understood that there was a larger, more inclusive picture. The fact

that her friend from Ecuador was an advocate for Black lives and an inspiration to her spoke to the idea that solidarity isn't just about difference (Mohanty, 2003), but rather about common struggle. Her poem and our conversation centered on the agency of Black people and their responsibilities in combating injustice and white supremacy. When she wrote in her poem "we have to sit together, and win ourselves up," it was an acknowledgement that any resistance to the injustice as it pertained to Black people rested in their hands.

Another important aspect of our conversation centered on how she self-identified. It was interesting to hear Zion refer to herself as African American especially since she was so passionate about her immigrant identity. But were these two identities mutually exclusive? Did she have to choose one or the other? These questions spoke to the concept of solidarity and the various ways in which it manifested itself among my participants. For Zion, choosing to identify as African American was a conscious decision, an act of solidarity! She was agentic in her decision, and she understood that claiming this identity meant that she was ready and willing to accept all that is embodied within it. For example, she stated above that to be African American in the opinion of those who are ill informed means that one is, *misunderstood, tempered, loud, angry, hideous, and unworthy*. For Zion, choosing to identify as African American speaks to her willingness to struggle with others in spite of where they are from toward a similar goal.

Zion's literate life also revealed a complex understanding of the importance of friendship and solidarity with people who were both similar and different from her. In earlier conversations with Zion she was committed to the idea that the strength of her relationship with others rested on the mutuality of their experiences and the values they each embodied. Yet, through her lived experiences she is able to recognize that solidarity is built around common struggle and not just on the basis of where one is from. The planned curriculum at City High, and the lived curriculum as informed by her mother and by her own reality, were all sources that informed her poem and her ideology regarding race. Her poetry as literary artifact was representative of knowledge that

was acquired in the context of school, knowledge acquired through the stories and ontology of her mother, and her own reflection. In her poem, she discussed the reality of race, culture, police brutality, misconceptions, pain, anger, and frustrations. Zion's poem serves as both a vehicle for the surfacing of her emotions and a literate practice used to make sense of the reality of what it means to be marginalized. Yet, through the opinions she discussed above she was able to use her knowledge to dissect, critique, question, and maintain a strong sense of self—a powerful ability to self-define in the face of an often-difficult reality.

Section III

The Curriculum as a Site of Struggle: “We all Black in this school, Blacks stick together” (Zuri Smith, interview, 11/4/2016)

Multiple factors shaped the academic identities of my participants. These included the sisterhood, the planned curriculum, and their own lived curriculum as informed by memories, beliefs, and the ideologies they embodied. In what follows, I center the voices of Zion and Serenity as they engage in discussions concerning culture and race as it pertained to the planned and lived curriculum. I will also provide insights from teachers and administrators at City High. The discussions with them will center on their practices and the perceived impacts they believed they have had on the academic performances and identities of their students.

This section further builds on the discussion of solidarity, in that it asks us to consider that the solidarity my participants had built with each other could also be fostered with teachers and other members of the school community. This meant that not only could my participants find

strength and encouragement from their peers through the sisterhood, but that they could also find it from administrators and teachers. This self-determination and agency development amongst friends strengthened my participants' senses of self, and it held the potential to influence the broader school community. Below, I begin with my field reflection after a morning spent with two of my participants after viewing *Birth of a Nation* (2016) at a theater in the city. This film was selected by a team of administrators and teachers at City High who saw value in exposing their 9th and 10th grade students to difficult conversation on race, sexual exploitation, rebellion, injustice, and racism, all taking place during Slavery.

Birth of a Nation, A Reflection.

10/21: MOVIE:

Researcher reflection: Birth of a Nation

I arrived at the movie theater at about 9:30 am. The film was scheduled to begin at 10:00 am.

*One week before we saw the movie *Serenity* and a few other students made me aware that the school had arranged for 9th and 10th graders to see the film, I decided to join them since this was a film I also wanted to see. I asked the girls if they knew anything about the film or if they had seen the trailer, none of them knew of the film or the controversy surrounding the producer Nate Parker. Around the time of the film release documents had surfaced that shone light on a sexual assault case that Parker was acquitted of while a student at Penn State University. The girls had no idea about this, nor did it ever come up again in future discussions about the film. On Friday morning, I waited patiently for everyone to arrive at the theater. They were a little late, and they came in just as the film started. The plot centered on slavery, Black exploitation, sexual violence, and Black women's subordination and of course, rebellion. The students were loud during the*

film. They spoke out during scenes that were violent, inhumane. They yelled, "That's crazy", "Naah", "That's some shit." These scenes were plentiful, and their responses were continuous. There were moments in the film when Nat turner was victorious, and the theater erupted in cheers. It seemed that his victory was theirs. They yelled, "Yeah, that's what I'm talking about." They clapped when Turner began his rampage killing white people. There were also tears, even through the dim light I was able to see students wiping away tears, blowing their noses, and leaning on each other.

I knew this movie would be emotional for me as well. I wore my sunglasses through the entire film. They were my Blinders, my buffer between myself and the reality of what was taking place on the screen. The content was penetrating, thought provoking, and intensely painful. I felt it through my body, and even when I tried to hold it together the reality of it brought me to tears. In that moment, I was one of them.

After the film, we gathered in front of the theater entrance. The chaperones accounted for all students who were assigned to their groups. The movie ended at about noon. The students were given one hour to walk through the mall, get some food, and meet back at the theater entrance to return to school. I walked with Serenity and Zion, both were playful as we stood outside of the theater. I was still wearing my sunglasses, afraid that my red eyes would expose me. I walked with them unassumingly, not really wanting to invade their space, but still wanting to hear their reflection.

As we turned a corner I asked Serenity and Zion, what they thought of the film, and Serenity remarked that slavery had long since ended in Jamaica while Nat Turner was revolting in Virginia. Her facts seemed rooted in hope rather than reality. She held steadfast to stories about the Maroons in Jamaica and she remarked that her father and mother always told her that the slaves from Jamaica were powerful, and unruly. She aligned herself with that and smiled when she talked about the strength of the Jamaican people. She said she had learned about Nat Turner

in Ms. Baptiste's class last year, and she lamented that she wished her African American history class offered her more of a global look at Black people.

Zion, seemed quite impacted by the film. While Serenity was upbeat and strategic about where to find strength in the face of the film, Zion told me she broke down a few times during the film. I asked her which scenes made her cry, and she noted that the rape of Turner's wife, and the caging of the slaves whose teeth were knocked out. She also cried when Nat preached. She remarked, "I felt what he was sayin' and the people he was talking to, I felt them too." We walked toward the food court to get lunch as she spoke. Zion, side by side with her boyfriend, and Serenity not too far behind. I hung with them, coffee in hand, listening to them and their friends switch from movie talk to playful chatter.

My reflection above was an important moment for me in the early months of my study. I was extremely excited to see this film with my participants, so much so that I arrived early to the theater and anxiously awaited their arrival. Prior to seeing the film, I spent time in some of their classes where they engaged in discussions about Nat Turner and slavery. In Susan Baptiste's African American History class, in particular, the students discussed their apprehension and frustrations with slave films/narratives, the subjugation of Black people, and oppression. While they knew the outcome of the film, they seemed to be hoping for something more. This hope had been present long before they entered the theater. In my interview with Baptiste, she discussed some of the academic obstacles that she and her students both faced as they dealt with her planned curriculum, and their lived curriculum. She told me,

Susan Baptiste: I've met on a committee to help with the curriculum. We've been like making changes to the curriculum every year. It's gotten better and better.... I mean we talk. We just finished the unit on the Atlantic Slave Trade. We looked at maps at where the enslaved Africans went. I pointed to Jamaica, I pointed to Haiti. Talking specifically

about how those small countries were established, especially Haiti, I looked around and said, you know, "We outnumbered whites three to one."

Donna-Marie: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Susan Baptiste: Well I'm going to talk about that more in detail when we talk about Nat Turner's rebellion and then also talk about other rebellions.

Donna-Marie: Yeah, that would be interesting.

Susan Baptiste: We'll talk about seasoning, like the breaking of a slave. That's about, that's the only time when we talk about Caribbean slave trade and back to the history.

Donna-Marie: Mm-hmm (affirmative). After we saw the movie last week, and I was talking to a few of the girls, and I got a few different responses from them, but one was, "That's not really my history." And another one said, "I wish we learned more about like what happens to Black people in other places." They were maybe tired of hearing about slavery.

Susan Baptiste: Yes, that doesn't surprise me. By the time we reach to Nat Turner they are already tired of hearing about it.

Donna-Marie: Have they said why or what are some of the reasons why?

Susan Baptiste: Because it makes them feel bad about themselves. They don't want to discuss slavery.

Donna-Marie: Yeah.

Susan Baptiste: I've already got requests in my last class. "Well, when are we going to talk about Martin Luther King?" I'm like girl, we got some time to go.

Donna-Marie: Yeah.

Susan Baptiste: That's like to me the most fascinating part to teach. It's my favorite to teach actually. But yeah, it makes them feel bad about themselves. That's why they don't want to talk about it. Nobody wants to talk about their ancestors being chained up and the

complete lack of humanity; it's a hard subject. Like the week that I teach the Middle Passage, and the seasoning of the slave, different types of slaves. It's emotionally hard on me too. Like I break the news over and over.

Donna-Marie: Yeah, yeah. I understand.

Susan Baptiste: I think that's why—because it seems so unfair to them.

Donna-Marie: I wonder if that's why they disconnect to say that's not my history or ...

Susan Baptiste: Yes. I would say so, that's why. Like I went with them, the tenth grade, to see *the Birth of the Nation* and I have two boys sitting behind and I was listening to their commentary. Some of it was really funny. But sometimes it's easier to like crack a joke and laugh. And it's easier to laugh at the pain because it makes it more digestible.

Donna-Marie: Yeah. I wonder if it's a coping sort of mechanism to say it's not happening to me or this didn't happen to the people where I'm from. One comment that I got from one of my participants was that, "Well slavery ended in Jamaica in particular much earlier than that."

Susan Baptiste: Yeah, yes. They make a lot of connections. A lot of it is still around today. But I feel like they sense it. So many of the kids are aware of their own trauma. Their own trauma going on with their families and their neighborhood, and I try to explain as sensitively as I can, and then we work our way through the curriculum, and we start talking about red lining. We start talking about poverty and the criminal justice system, and you know these things didn't happen overnight. And I'll get a question like report period four, three weeks before school ends, "Why are there more Black people locked up, Ms. Baptiste?" Like percentage wise. So, we need to go back to the beginning here. This is something that didn't happen overnight. After slavery, after segregation, the next way to separate Black people was to lock them up.

Donna-Marie: Yeah.

Susan Baptiste: But I mean, I can assure you that means a constant reminder to me that I need to do a better job.

Donna-Marie: I'm asking to understand what they're thinking when I'm talking to them. And they don't necessarily make meaning of what they're thinking in the moment, so this is helpful.

Susan Baptiste: Yeah. But I find a lot of Black people don't like talking about slavery. With my boyfriend, he doesn't want to watch *Birth of a Nation*. His parents were just in town. His mom didn't want to. You know, "why am I going to watch that?"

Donna-Marie: I know. Yeah.

Susan Baptiste: I don't need to watch *12 Years a Slave*. I know it was bad.

Donna-Marie: Yeah.

Susan Baptiste: I mean that's not true for every single Black person, whether you're Caribbean, African, or just straight up African American.

Donna-Marie: Yeah.

Susan Baptiste: But then I feel like there's a lot of people in the community that don't want to face it. (Susan Baptiste, interview, 10/29/16)

My interview with Ms. Baptiste allowed me to understand the meaning students were making of the prescribed curriculum for her African American history class. According to Ms. Baptiste, her planned curriculum was chronological, it was U.S.-centered, and it allowed her to remain on track. While this planned structure allowed Ms. Baptiste to cover a wide range of materials, she admitted that there was much more that she needed to do to further develop the curriculum, and also her approach. In addition, what you were able to see from my interview with Ms. Baptiste was a level of frustration expressed by her students, and many others who attended the viewing of *Birth of a Nation*. Students seemed to be jaded, they were tired of being positioned as victims, even if at one point in history they were. They were frustrated about the inflexibility of the

curriculum, they were asking for more than was offered to them. They wanted a bigger picture of what it meant to be Black from a diasporic perspective.

Serenity, for example, had long expressed her frustrations to me about the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum that she is exposed to at school. Even though Ms. Baptiste's class is a required course offered to 10th grade students, the students are not always exposed to this sort of materials in their other classes. Serenity expressed concerns about the limitations of the planned curriculum and her hopes for a more inclusive one. She had hoped that the story of Nat Turner would also speak of other slave rebellions such as the maroon rebellion in Jamaica. She had spoken to me about two weeks before seeing the film to discuss the many stories she believed needed to be told, and the importance of these stories. She said,

Serenity: I feel like they're a lot of friends who, when I tell them the stories that my mom tells, because my mom got a lot of stories ... Stuff about how the bad slaves got sent to Jamaica, they had hot tempers, that's why they sent them down there and how I got coolie (a coolie person is regarded as a person who is Black but look more Asian in features, especially hair texture) family, I got Chinese family. My great, great grandfather comes from England. She has so many stories and when I tell them her stories they're so fascinated, they act like it's something they've never heard before and I'm like, "Yeah, you should know more stuff about this." I feel like they only focus on two things, they focus on the white history and then they focused on slavery, stuff like that. When people come to America, they're different races, they're not just Caucasian people and African Americans, they're other people here to get a big job and go back and give back the money and stuff to their families. I feel like we don't really learn much about that.

Donna-Marie: Do you think that the history that you're learning here is more, sort of, just American history, and do you also believe that you should be learning more about the entire history of Black people?

Serenity: Yeah. I mean I'm in AP world history so I'm supposed to be learning about everywhere. But, again, it just focuses on Greece, Rome, and Europe.

Donna-Marie: Yes, yes, I understand.

Serenity: And I always hear that. I already know that. I don't want to keep learning about that. I want to learn about different stuff and not just that.

Donna-Marie: Do you ask your teacher, like, "I'm interested in learning about some other cultures, not just European ones?"

Serenity: Yeah, but it's like, at the same time, I don't want them to give me too much work or stuff like that, it's like they'll say, "Oh, well I can show you something that you can look up on your own." But they don't say, "Here's something we can teach in the class." They're not going to take the time out to do that. They teach what they tell them, that's what we teach you to pass the test. They're worrying about passing the test and not influencing you and teaching your culture. (Serenity, Interview, October, 3rd, 2017)

Serenity's reflection above underscores the importance of memories handed down through family and how those memories come to shape one's lived curriculum. Academically and socially, Serenity knew what she needed from the curriculum, she knew that the planned curriculum had its limitations, and so she carried stories with her (those handed down from her mother) that reminded her of her strength and the strength of her ancestors. The academic identity that Serenity crafted was created in spaces that were inaccessible to the planned curriculum. These spaces required a willingness on the part of the teacher to adapt, make room, and to listen to the needs of the students.

The Curriculum and the Development of Selves: Forging New Identities

The viewing of *The Birth of a Nation* sparked dialogue amongst my participants and I on race, cultural identity, and positionality. These immigrant girls from the Caribbean were asking for a curriculum that highlighted their power and their agency in rejecting slavery and all kinds of subjugation. They wanted narratives about themselves that were consistent with the stories their mothers had told them. They needed affirmation from the planned curriculum, and it seemed that most of the affirmation they received emerged from the sisterhood. They built solidarity with others who struggled with them for this recognition. That is why Zion felt encouraged when her Ecuadorian friend stood with her, and pushed her to share her poetry concerning the oppression of Black people. However, I wanted to know more about the other spaces where she felt such encouragement. All throughout City High, the principal and administrators worked hard to let students know they were understood, and while it didn't always translate, often it did. To understand if this was getting through to students I asked Zion,

Donna-Marie: When I walk around the school I see "Black Lives Matter" posters, quotes or things related to that. Such as powerful images of African Americans, or there's even a bulletin board down the hall with picture of Black men who have been murdered at the hands of the police. Do you talk about the images that are in the hallway with your teachers?

Zion: Sometimes, if the teachers were to talk about Black lives, I feel like they go over the topic a little bit. If they want to go into the topic, it's going to be a little bit short. Maybe a couple of words are going to be left out. Last year, I had a history teacher, Ms. Baptiste. She's half Black and half white, so whenever the topic of Black lives come up, she's passionate about that topic. She goes off. If I were to go to another teacher (in reference to white teachers) about it, it's like they'll try to explain it, but they'll skip a

couple of stuff. Like, yeah, they would talk about slavery, but when you ask them, "What do you think about slavery?" Well, they'll say, I think it was a very painful and serious experience for Black people. Stuff like that. There was one time that I asked the Biology teacher, and I guess she got a little bit frightened. I'm not sure, but she just sat there. She was like, "African Americans are people who have darker melanin in their skin." I guess one of the students had asked her about slavery, and she was like, "Can we get back onto the topic?" They'll bring up "Black Lives Matter" when they need us to see it. To me, the posters on the wall it's like they're here as a reminder, but if you were to ask somebody to explain, like one of the teachers, it's like they're not going to really get in that deep and will just tell you, "Hey, it's important just to be in your skin."

Donna-Marie: Do you think white teachers are afraid, or they might not necessarily know how to talk about the topic? Is there a difference between how your Black teachers approach issues relating to race versus how your white teachers talk about issues of race?

Zion: I feel like there is a difference. I feel like white teachers are kind of scared because, "Hey, it's our skin color that did this to you guys like a whole while ago." It's kind of like ...

Donna-Marie: Like guilt?

Zion: Yeah. Almost guilt. Black teacher, of course, they're going to be passionate about it because they can relate. White teachers are a little bit scared to approach the topic, and if they do, they're sensitive towards it. Remember that movie we saw last week (*Birth of a Nation*), and how everybody kept on screaming and rooting for the Black people? I was just looking around at all of the white teachers and they were just sitting there like all quiet and everything. They were all sensitive. I kind of felt bad at the moment because I didn't want them to feel like we're going to shoot you guys, but it was mostly like that.

(Zion, Interview, October 3, 2016)

From a Black feminist perspective, it's evident that students had found support both from friends and sometimes from the consciousness of Black teachers. However, even though many teachers wanted to stand in solidarity with these students they faced many obstacles along the way. Some of those limitations arose from their own positionality concerning Blackness, and the nuances of Black identity. It seemed that their own lived curriculum informed their approach to the teaching of their students, and to the planning of curriculum. In a discussion with an administrator and a teacher at City High, I asked them questions about student identity and how those identities had shaped their pedagogical approaches. I wanted to understand this phenomenon since how students are perceived impacted what teachers and administrators believe was important for them to learn. The voices of Irma George and Cathleen Wilson were useful since they allowed us to juxtapose Serenity and Zion's words to that of their teachers. It also allows us to recognize how academic identities are forged at City High.

Who are Our Students and How do we Know?: *"We, as a school, could do some better work around celebrating the international and the diaspora"* (Irma George)

Throughout my time with my participants they were creating academic identities that were rich, developed, and agentic. They resisted representations of themselves that were inconsistent with the messages that were handed down to them through their families, and the ones developed through the sisterhood. Zion and Serenity in particular expressed frustration at the limitation of the curriculum in meeting their academic needs. Zion found that her white teachers although well intentioned, were unable to engage in difficult conversations regarding race, and racial identity. Their inability to engage in these conversations created a wall between them and their students. Zion looked toward her Black teachers for positive affirmations and for engagement with topics that were important and significant to her well-being, and her survival.

Serenity on the other hand, drew on memories handed down to her through her mother. The narratives of empowerment that her mother shared with her spoke to what Collins (2008) highlights as the way in which mothers socialize their daughters to survive in a racially inequitable world.

However, when my participants were at school they still craved these narratives, they still wanted to be told that they were powerful, valued, and smart. Although teachers and administrators were not always prepared to address the questions and needs of these students, they were always prepared to try. Below I present excerpts from an interview with Cathleen Wilson, an administrator who is Dean of School Culture at City High, and Irma George, a teacher who taught a course that focused on identity and college readiness for juniors and seniors at the school. My discussion with them further echoed the call of students who demand a curriculum that valued their lived experiences as sources of knowledge, empowerment, and growth. While my participants' voices and lived experiences were central to my study, it was also essential for me to speak with teachers and administrators to contextualize what I had learned from them. Consequently, I spoke with Irma George since some of my participants were enrolled in her elective course on Identity. I asked her about who her students were and what efforts she had made through the curriculum to acknowledge their identities. She told me,

Irma George: I think what I have found, historically, is that our non-African American diaspora kids hide a lot of aspects of their identity because they don't want to be other here. We, as a school, could do some better work around celebrating the international and the diaspora. Like we're trying to get the American kids to feel some pride in themselves, and so we sort of like don't ever get to that conversation about the fact that we got cousins all over the place. So, we kind of support the hiding and the neutralizing. All these kids are Black and they don't know that their friend's parents are from places like Liberia, you know like ... but, we all kind of take part in that, we are just so focused on

like the academics and really have missed a number of opportunities to highlight the strength of the diaspora and all the things that kids are coming with. We just had a meeting about like what do we have in our classrooms that makes kids feel included, and embraced, and empowered? We were all talking like "We don't have much," like we'll have like "You can go to college," or like generic educational things, but nothing with their faces on it. Nothing with people who look like them that reflects them. So, I was like, I'm the main one, let me put something up on my wall that's not just like goals they set, but like some faces ... And then even then it's like so whose face goes on the wall? We got a little wall, what are we going to do? I just did Black people who come from this city.

Donna-Marie: Are all of these people from this city? (pointing to the wall)

Irma George: Yes, everybody on that wall is from here.

(Irma George, Interview, 10/10/16)

The acknowledgement by Mrs. George that the identities of immigrant students from the Caribbean, and from other places across the diaspora, were not being recognized speaks to the concerns of Serenity and Zion. It also begged the question; how could strong academic identities be forged in spaces where there is no acknowledgement of who you are? It appeared, from Mrs. George's interview, that there was an awareness that the administrators and teachers at City High, could do more to connect with students personally, and to validate who they were. However, it seemed that this wasn't an easy task. Many of the teachers struggled to connect the curriculum to the lived experiences of their students, further creating a disconnect and disinterest from students who didn't feel validated or recognized, both in the curriculum, and through their practical experiences. To remedy this, the administrators across a network of schools created a mindset committee whose work was to reform the planned curriculum, and to influence the mindset of

teachers who were afraid, or unable to engage in discussions or lessons on race, ethnicity, culture, and the nuances of Black identity.

To better understand the goals and the intentions of this mindset committee I spoke with the Dean of School Culture, Cathleen Wilson. She told me,

Cathleen Wilson: There are a group of us, we have a mindset committee.

Donna-Marie: Mindset committee?

Cathleen Wilson: We'll meet and talk about planning how we're going to plan sessions and curriculum to work on staff mindset. Again, that's also not just an us thing, that was a network wide thing. Working on staff having a positive racial identity for themselves as we believe that you have to influence the mind, the mind influences the actions, your teacher actions directly influence the student mindset, student mindset influences student action. That's the cycle of where it goes, so once teachers can't help students have a positive racial identity, if they hadn't developed one with themselves yet and changed their mindsets. There's a lot of work done around the changing of their mindset. Again, once they change their mindset and understand their places in their world, like who they are, it's predominantly a white staff. Understanding, accepting privilege, understanding power dynamics, recognizing bias, and all that other stuff. Understanding how that all works, and how that works into their teacher practice and their teacher craft, when they're able to understand that all in one, it influences how they teach, it influences how they look at children. It helps to eliminate things like microaggressions, stereotypes, threat, like those kinds of things. Once those things begin to disappear from a classroom where you can actually talk about privilege and race in a classroom with a student, you then influence their mindset as well as their student actions, so that's kind of where that all, like the mindset committee does work around all that stuff.

The development of the mindset committee was an important step toward solidarity between teachers and students at City High. The gains made from this committee had the power to break down the barriers that were preventing students from connecting with teachers, and from sharing who they are with the administrators, and even each other. The fact that Irma George noted that she didn't know where many of her students came from, either suggests a disconnect between the approaches taken up through the planned curriculum, or that students didn't believe that who they were mattered. This is what made the sisterhood such an important resource for my participants, because even when their identities were overlooked, they were present for each other. For according to Collins (2008), "African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity" (p. 113). This affirmation of one's humanity seemed essential to my participants. They needed this affirmation to be receptive and open to what was being offered through the planned curriculum.

The main barriers that stood in the way of solidarity between my immigrant participants and their teachers and administrators was their focus on the wider societal issues affecting Black students more generally, without attending to the nuances of experiences. While this effort on the part of the administration and teachers was important and well meaning, my participants wanted more. Since the focus was the consciousness-building of white teachers, there wasn't always time for a curriculum that dealt with the nuances of the identities of the student body. Consequently, students would shut down, or repress various aspects of their identities, since they didn't always feel there was a place for those identities at school. Below, I include a portion of an interview when I asked Mrs. Wilson about the nuances of Black identity at City High:

Cathleen Wilson: We deal with race in the binary. Cultural experiences come up, but we deal with race in the binary. We deal with race in terms of Black and white. The majority of the teachers are white and of course our students are 99% black. We got like three white kids in here.

Donna-Marie: So, there's no distinction made between the different groups of Black students that are in the school, so it's just Black as a category and not like Caribbean Blacks or Muslim Black students and so on?

Cathleen Wilson: You can self-identify, most of that stuff or their pride in themselves begin to happen when we have extracurricular movements, like the Muslim students will make a club. There are a group of Caribbean girls who want to have the Caribbean cultural club. They can do that. In general, we're talking about kids and we're identifying kids, they're all Black. Partially the world sees them as Black. The teachers see them as Black. They don't distinguish when you live in America and race is dealt with as Black and white. When you start to talk to people and learn their experiences, those things come up...I'll be honest like we don't look at kids in the individual. When you get to know kids and understand them, understand their experiences, yes, but generally no, they're not tagged in that way.

The sentiment expressed by Mrs. Wilson wasn't unusual or new it is an ideology that has long been debated by scholars whose work focuses on the disparity between the African American and Caribbean community (Butterfield, 2004; Rogers, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Thornton et al., 2013; Warner, 2012). To see them only as Black without the recognition of their nuanced identities in many ways created a more difficult obstacle for administrators and teachers like Mrs. Wilson and Ms. Baptiste to overcome. While the creation of individual clubs created spaces where solidarity was fostered it limited the possibility of solidarity to where one was from and not necessarily about all they had in common. Consequently, if the curriculum did the work of reaching across boundaries and extending its limits beyond the local, there is a possibility that students like Serenity and Zion might have been more responsive to what it had to offer.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by touching on the relevance of solidarity to the lived experiences of my participants. I noted that solidarity was central to their identities since the relationships they developed with each other had the power to transform their lives and to empower them in ways that the planned curriculum was unable to do. Central to solidarity was the sisterhood—a bond developed amongst Black girls that is essential to their survival. I argued above that my participants developed this sisterhood since there were gaps in the planned curriculum that they felt their teachers and administrators were unable to fill. They wanted a curriculum that was inclusive of their identities as immigrants and as members of the Black diaspora. The absence of this knowledge meant inherently that solidarity would not be possible between my participants and their teachers, since to be in solidarity with someone or an issue meant that there was a willingness to struggle together toward similar goals. Mohanty (2003) and Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) each argue that solidarity is dependent on the willingness of the individual to act, to listen, and to understand that they each have to determine the relevance and importance of what they are acting toward.

Solidarity was, therefore, essential to this chapter since I found that it was through the power of the sisterhood that my participants were most empowered, found academic prowess, and self-worth. When they were able to validate each other's existence, they gained the courage to step out in the world in ways that were brave and commanding. For example, when Zion's Ecuadorian friend encouraged her to write a poem about race, she felt assured that since her friend was passionate about Black lives, and Black consciousness that she would believe in what she had to say. This was what moved Zion to write her poem entitled "Opinions." While my participants found solidarity with each other, they still looked to their teachers and administrators for recognition of their identities. This is why Zion needed to know where her teacher stood on

matters concerning slavery and Black subjugation. What their teachers had to say mattered, and they were paying attention to the messages that were present both on the walls of school, and in the planned curriculum. They needed their teachers to see them, and when that didn't happen they pressed for a change in the curriculum, as discussed by Susan Baptiste. The challenge they put to their teachers was their way of asking for a curriculum that positioned them as agentic, and not as victims.

While my participants expressed their needs in a variety of ways, I also found that many of the teachers and administrators I interviewed cared deeply about the needs of their students, although they weren't always sure where to begin. Should they begin with the needs of the students, or the consciousness of the predominantly white teachers who taught these students daily? These decisions were difficult, yet they created many spaces for students to develop relationships with each other. The lived curriculum, therefore, became the place to which my participants looked in order to supplement the missing pieces that were necessary for resolute academic identities. The lived curriculum was rich with memories, their own lived experiences, and the epistemologies shared between them and their peers. My findings suggest that curriculum has the power to inform the identities of immigrant girls from the Caribbean, but with the development of the sisterhood, through solidarity, they have the ability to supplement a curriculum that sometimes intentionally, and unintentionally leaves them out of it.

Chapter 6

Living to Love, Learning to Live: Love, Sexuality and Belonging in the Lives of immigrant Girls from The Caribbean

Introduction

In her poem “Girl,” Kincaid (1990) crafts a detailed set of rules that are to be followed if a Caribbean girl dares to be virtuous. The advice that is offered in this poem is from mother to daughter; it is advice for survival. It is the kind of counsel that Collins (2008) argues is fundamental to the relationship between Black mothers and daughters dating back to slavery. In this extensive, well thought-out guide for a young girl, Kincaid’s protagonist cautions that,

On Sunday try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming;... you mustn’t speak of wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions;... this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming;... This is how you smile to someone you like completely;... this is how to make good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child;... this is how to love a man, and if this doesn’t work there are other ways, and if they don’t? work don’t feel too bad about giving up. (Kincaid, 1990)

This excerpt from her cautionary poem represents an important aspect of the narrative of girlhood for many girls from the Caribbean. Kincaid’s words are a reminder that coming of age for adolescent girls from the Caribbean is about strength, resistance, and tough love. There are prescribed rules, both spoken and unspoken that rests at the unconscious and conscious minds of their mothers. They are handed down in fragmented narratives, with the goal of preparing girls for a world that is often unwelcoming and cold.

Kincaid’s poem exists at the intersection of race, culture, ethnicity and gender, and it raises the question of what it means to be a Caribbean girl, or a girl with roots in the Caribbean, or a Black girl more generally; it also challenges us to examine what coming of age means for

these girls. The fragments I quoted above deal with issues of sexuality—a mother’s cautionary advice to her daughter regarding abortions, boys, subliminal messages, love, and heartbreak. I introduce this poem because my own participants were confronting many of these very issues. They were entangled in messages about who they should be as girls, and who they would eventually become as women. This chapter aims to share the ways in which these girls negotiated these messages and what this meant for their literate lives and their lived experiences in an urban school context.

Kincaid’s mother figure protagonist is important because she enforces the rules that govern girlhood; it is she who polices morality. She is important because, like my participants, she brings with her history, wisdom, and the memories of her own girlhood. While her message is tough and can be perceived as intimidating, it is a message of love. A gift to her daughter, it prepares her for a future that she can’t know in the now, but must be ready for when that time arrives. In their analysis of Kincaid’s (1990) “Girl,” Ohito and Khoja-Moolji (2016) suggests that,

...the mother is strategically sowing messages of hope into a larger canopy of survival. The placement of the fragments of advice – like the content – insists upon covertly catering to the full humanity of Black girls and women, and centering the contours of our life-worlds. Each piece is like a lyric in a slave song of rebellion that is disguised as a Negro spiritual, slyly providing us with fodder for both resistance and sustenance. Furthermore, for the mother, like for multitudes of Black women across the diaspora, this unwavering focus on strategies of survival—our own and that of our offspring—In the crosshairs of life-threatening oppressions--signifies abiding love. (p. 449)

Ohito and Khoja-Moolji’s reflection demonstrates the depth and nuance of Kincaid’s message. “Girl” is about the recognition that Caribbean girls abide by a set of rules designed for their very safety and protection, and this acknowledgement rests at the heart of this chapter. It is also consistent with Collins’ (2008) discussion of the historical subjugation of Black girls and the role of their mothers and other women in altering, challenging, and resisting dominant perceptions of what it means to be a Black adolescent girl. History, and the memories that are embodied within it (from this standpoint), seem to transcend time and space, and what we are left with is an

overlapping reality that bridges the past and the present. We are also left with a plethora of messages linked to survival, strength, and resilience. Consequently, we must recognize the importance the past plays in the present. The erasure of the past as relevant to the present is an important part of the structure of a capitalist, normative society (Harootunian, 2015). However, the past seems ever-present in the now, and “Girl” is the expression of this. Harootunian (2015) describes the need to erase the past as capitalism’s way of annihilating history in order to create the eternal present. However, he argues that the past and the present exist simultaneously, never separate and disconnected from each other. He posits that,

The past could not lay claim to the identity of being historical in itself but rather acquires this status through the mediation of the present.... A history derived from the present inclines toward verticality and its appearance is always changeable, brought to the surface by excavating and digging into layered depths of different historical times, which are never completely lost. (p. 23)

This very idea is central to my findings within this chapter, for it is memories, and the lived experiences of my participants that seemed to shape who they were in the present. It is the stories that were handed down to them, the *rules* that governed their girlhood that needed to be excavated in order for them to understand the moment in which they existed.

In what follows, I focus on the experiences of three of my primary participants, both in conversation thorough memory work focus groups and also through literary artifacts (three to five other participants are also included in some of the discussions below). My findings suggest that these immigrant girls from the Caribbean were confronting questions about their sexuality, and their bodies, and they were determined to find answers. They sought these answers through their literate lives, and through their relationship with their social world. What became clear to me is that they deemed their sexuality as formidable, influential, and empowering. The responsibility of womanhood awakened within them an enduring desire for self-determination. They were asking questions that demonstrated an awareness of their shift from girlhood to womanhood. They asked questions such as: *Does my sexuality belong to me? Who decides who I should love? What is too*

young to be sexually active? Is virginity symbolic or literal? These questions and others will be discussed below.

This chapter is broken down into three sections. In section I, I focus on the ways in which my participants were reframing dominant narratives of Black girls' sexuality. Specifically, this section centers on the ways in which they reclaimed and redefined who they were, and perceptions of who they should be. In section II, I focus on what my participants' literacies told me about the types of social identities they were constructing, and what those identities revealed to me about their literate lives. Finally, section III centers on the impact of texts on the identities of my participants. I draw on approaches from Black feminist epistemologies and their contribution to the understanding of the sexualities of Black adolescent girls. I present perspectives and reflections from my participants, as they unpacked the realities of their girlhood, while simultaneously delving into the tough questions regarding the role of culture and gender in the shaping of their identities. I ask, *What role does race, culture, and gender play in the development of the sexual identities of immigrant girls from the Caribbean. Additionally, how are these identities mediated in the context of school?*

Section 1

Caribbean Immigrant Girls Reclaiming their Sexuality and Redefining Black Girlhood?

The very notion that Black girls are reclaiming their sexuality is consistent with research that suggests that their sexuality has been commandeered by white supremacy, and white supremacist ideologies (Collins, 2008; Evans-Winters, 2011; James, 2010; R. Staples, 2006a; Townsend, Thomas, Neilands, & Jackson, 2010). The dominant narrative that governs Black

girls' sexuality suggests that they are promiscuous, have higher rates of teenage pregnancy, mature at a rate faster than girls of other racial groups, are single mothers, and are *at risk*. These messages not only resonate with a wide audience of listeners, they also resonate with my participants. These girls were well aware of what society thought of them, and yet they lived their lives in ways that challenged these dominant perceptions of who they were. They weren't naïve about their reality, they just didn't have the tools to fully understand what to do about it. Serenity and Zion, for example, understood the relationship between their sexuality and the cultural, and racial narratives that aimed to control it. Their resistance to this materialized in a multitude of ways. Serenity, challenged the conception of virginity and questioned its legitimacy, while Zion asked the question of, *whose sexuality?* I will explore what these girls shared with me, and the implication of their message.

During my time at City High, Serenity and I engaged in many discussions, and the topic of sexuality always seemed to surface. She spoke explicitly about her relationship with her boyfriend Hassan, and her parents' opposition to her bisexuality. Throughout my data, I coded these discussions under sexuality/relationships, and later discovered a pattern emerging through that data. It was a message of strength, resistance, and a reframing of conversations regarding my participant's sexuality. In one such example, Serenity recalls her first sexual experience and her naiveté at the time of its occurrence. She regretted that she lost her virginity in the way that she did, and while she knew it was technically her *first* time, she opted to classify it as an unfortunate experience that taught her about what she deserved, and what she didn't. Staples (2016), has documented the experiences of Black women who also recalled their own sexual terrors, and the long-lasting impact that many calamitous circumstances had on their perception of their life-world—Serenity was no different. In this extended excerpt she recalls sharing the details of her lost virginity with her boyfriend:

Donna-Marie: How are things with you and Hassan?

Serenity: Yesterday it got gushy. I was listening to Vybz Kartel's "Virginity" and then I was like, "Oh, remember?" He didn't take mine, I took his. And he was just looking sad (Referring to her boyfriend), and I was like, "why do you look like that? and I was like, "is it because you couldn't hear or whatever?" and he was like. "yeah." And I started telling him how he shouldn't feel that way, because even though I consider it my first time, at the same time I don't consider it special—because the whole time I was basically treated.... It wasn't special, and I was treated bad, and I didn't realize it until now. I realize that I shouldn't have been treated like that. It's because I thought that person really cared about me and I cared about the person so much, and I was like...so oh my goodness.

Donna-Marie: So, your first experience was one that wasn't meaningful?

Serenity: I mean, it mattered to me of course, but when I really think about it, it was horrible!

Donna-Marie: Really! What made it so horrible?

Serenity: So, I walked to his house and then I saw his friends outside, you know where my old house is. All the way up there in the snow and ice. I was with my best friend (a boy), and he lived where the places look like houses, but they are apartments. He walks me in, and it wasn't like, let's be sensitive. It was more like, "okay." It was awkward, just like take off your clothes. He was telling me stuff I couldn't do. He was like, "don't make any sounds, don't do this, this, and this." And then he was just kinda... I don't know if this is explicit for someone telling you this at such a young age, but he was choosing what ways he wanted to do stuff. And he got on a phone call during it, talking to his friend basically telling him what I was doing. Turns out that friend was outside, and they were harassing my gay friend poking him with a pencil and stuff.

Donna-Marie: Really?

Serenity: They were just being really homophobic, really mean, and when I was talking about it with Hassan and I just started crying.

Serenity's recollection pushed us into a discussion about the symbolic loss of virginity, and guilelessness of adolescence. She wanted so bad to forget her first time, but rather than bury that experience into her unconscious, she decided that she would use that horrible occurrence as a cautionary example, of what she would never again accept, nor stand for in future sexual partners and experiences. Even in her youth, she knew she deserved more, she knew that the exploitation of her sexuality and her virginity, had little to do with her and everything to do with the immaturity of her partner. This knowledge and understanding seemed to contribute to a degree of maturity within her, that would lead one to conclude that her first sexual experience had not defined her, but rather laid the groundwork for her self-determination.

In earlier conversations with Serenity concerning sex, and her sexuality, I had cautioned her about the responsibilities that came along with being sexually active. However, it seemed clear to me that she was quite knowledgeable about many of the topics and issues we addressed, but there were many limitations. Her knowledge didn't come from adults like myself, from health care professionals, or from health class—a class all of my participants complained hadn't been available to them since they left middle school. Kali told me, "I think 7th grade, that's the last time we ever had a lesson about sex. We haven't had not one" (Kali, interview, 11/14/16). Her knowledge came from her lived experiences, texts she has read in her classes (which will be discussed below), her friends, and even the music she consumed. Scholars have found that the media has a direct impact on the consciousness of Black girls regarding their sexuality and their perceptions of self (Collins, 2008; Impett, Henson, Breines, Schooler, & Tolman, 2011; E. B. Richardson, 2003; Robillard, 2012; R. Staples, 2006b; Townsend et al., 2010; Winn, 2010). This lasting impact means that the sexuality of girls like Serenity is filtered through a lens that doesn't always have their interest at heart.

Through our memory work focus groups, we unpacked many of the perceptions, conceptions, and misconceptions relating to sexualities of Black girls. In one such session, Serenity shared a memory that centered on a time when she dared to open up and share her past with her boyfriend. The sharing of experiences for my participants seemed to be therapeutic, and for Serenity it was no different. Staples (2016) has discussed the ways in which coming together with other women and talking and sharing their experiences through their literate practices led to healing, and even a heightened sense of awareness about the world and self—what she calls a lover identity. Consequently, our focus groups didn't always center on the memories that were shared; rather, it centered on our experiences of those memories. Questions of, *how did that memory make me feel, and why did I feel that way?* sat with us after listening to each other. While memories were vital to the focus of our groups they also served as a resource for making sense of the future and the present. Lorick-Wilmot (2014) has argued that,

When we each talk about the past, our stories not only disclose currently relevant social particulars, but also provide tools for reasoning about action—our own and others'. In many instances, the stories we tell offer explanations of an outcome that resulted when we acted upon something—or serve as indirect memories of a place or a past event that guides our decisions today. Alternatively, the stories we tell can merely introduce us to a range of behaviors and experiences so that we have a richer context for understanding when we encounter something new. (p. 72)

Subsequently, Serenity sharing a horrific memory about her sexual experience/s doesn't only serve Serenity, it also resonates deeply with my other participants and myself. In the memory that follows, she tells us,

I bit my dancing bottom lip till it bled with currency, I didn't care though. Anything but this, "don't make me tell you this," I said with my crackling voice, the lump made it impossible to say it, but I did. The sound of it rasping made me hate myself. I sounded weak, I sounded pitiful, everything that I worked to prove I wasn't I sounded. I was one of the things I hated—a hypocrite. Clearing my throat, I stared at his long strong dark arms, the color of polished wood smelt of warmth and protection, of innocence and confidence,

of patience, and confidence, yet I couldn't confide in him. Everything that should've allowed me to trust him was there, but the ability to trust was no longer present in me. Everyone who I loved seemed to only hurt me, applying their own marks and scars that would forever stay with me like a drunken tattoo that you hated to show, so you covered it with layers and sleeves; except those layers and sleeves were really smiles and fake laughs I gave to people who knew me too well, who knew when something was wrong, who were suspicious about my well-being, I tried to give it to him, but he knew the truth. "Don't make me talk about this," I pushed away from him sternly—forcefully trying to spring from his hold because he knew how to break me. Those eyes the color of a down coat, soft brown and sensitive. Compelling and welcoming, almost accepting, and now those eyes looked guilty and sympathetic—guilty that he complained about his good life while I found optimism in the horrible things done to me. I never muttered to a soul those things and he feels guilty he wasn't there for me, that I had to keep those secrets alone, but he couldn't be there. Sympathetic because he could feel the pain radiating off me, hot steamy and cloudy—after all we were that close. Still he was begging me to talk about the truth, trying to persuade me that weakness was what made you stronger, that it was okay to cry. (Serenity 10/2016, MWFG)

Serenity's memory is a great example of how healing can occur for those of us who listen, and not just those who share. Her memory was riddled with unspoken truths, yet we all understood what she was alluding to. When she was done sharing, the girls were quiet, and reflective for quite some time before they began to speak again. Finding optimism through pain, knowing that there are people who care, understanding the source of cynicism, and controlling the narrative of our reality were many of the things that sat with us. My participants understood in that moment that Serenity's memory wasn't just about her, it was also about them.

Who Defines my Sexuality: Zion Speaks!

Unlike Serenity, Zion's relationship to her own sexuality seemed to yield more questions than provide answers, and like Kincaid's protagonist, her mother also seemed to play a vital role in her understanding of, and attitude toward, her sexuality. She contested her sexual attraction to girls, she talked about the ways in which her cultural background shaped her relationship to her sexuality, and she focused on the idea that keeping her parents happy would inevitably keep her happy and sane. Zion, like my other participants, had no outlet for talking about their sexualities. While there was indirect conversation, for example through texts, there weren't any other platforms to ask questions, discuss experiences, or learn from professionals about their sexuality. Many scholars have addressed the importance of early sexual education for Black girls and the necessity of such an education for their well-being (Impett et al., 2011; James, 2010; Robillard, 2012; Shelton, 2017; Townsend et al., 2010). This possibility would mean that girls like Zion could have a platform for asking questions, and for engaging with others about the responsibilities of girlhood/womanhood. James (2010) noted that,

Sexuality educators who remain ignorant of the ways in which young Black girls' sexual experiences are shaped by their intersecting race, gender, and class identities will struggle to help Black girls deal with the complexity of their problems, such as the distinct and differentiated forms of homophobia in Black communities. (p. 129)

Having a space where Black girls could talk to Black women is essential to their survival, and their identities. For example, questions relating to homosexuality/bisexuality/queerness are all dealt with very differently in Black communities than in white communities. Adding cultural, and ethnic perceptions to these questions further deepens the complexity and the challenges of addressing the needs of these adolescent Black/immigrant girls.

In what follows I present a memory Zion shared with me during an interview. There is a great deal of significance to this memory, and for that reason I am sharing an extended excerpt of both our conversation and her memory. The implications of this suggest that culture, along with her ethnic background, has a profound influence on her social identity. Specifically, since a person's social identity is so intimately linked to the value in which they assign to themselves, and how they feel about who they are in relation to their social worlds and others, my data revealed that the policing of her sexuality by her parents, didn't change who she desired, it merely changed what she shared with the world, and only that. Zion had used her agency to remain complicit with her parents, realizing that it is through her complicity that she would be able to maintain trust, and regain the peace she had before they discovered her secret. She told me (from a third person perspective, consistent with our memory work protocol):

All right. There was this girl, and she didn't realize that she was gullible that much until she got tricked into a relationship that she didn't mean to be in. It was more like a secretive relationship she couldn't share with her parents or anything, and she was scared to share it with the public because she thought that they would judge her a little bit too much or say something or think she was weird-ish. She was already weird, but just more strange. She didn't realize she was being pretend blackmailed into this relationship until her mother found her phone. She ended up going through the messages of the relationship. She was like, "How come you never showed this to me or how come you're in this?"

She didn't know how to respond or anything, and her mother ended up calling her real father. Her real father was like, "Hey, this isn't your fault or anything. Just understand that you've got to be smarter than that." Her mother reacted way differently and was like, "You basically just betrayed me right there." Every time it was a slight moment of maybe she was just happy during the little time of the week of the incident, her mother showed her like, "Hey, your trust level is like here (uses her hand to measure). It's all the way down here." It kind of bummed her out for a little

while until the same person that was inside the relationship tried to write her letters and everything, and she chose to ignore them....

She literally brought trust down for her family." She is not trusted to even walk off the steps without stating where she's going, when she's going, and how she's going. It's really serious. Now the person in that relationship basically hates her right now, but she doesn't really care. She's slowly trying to get trust back, but every once in a while, that girl is reminded that she made a huge mistake and it kind of brings her down...

She just realized that it's bad enough to disobey your parents on a daily basis in secret, you shouldn't even try it. Not anymore. (Zion, interview, October 3, 2016)

Zion: That memory is like a year old. A year and a couple of months old to be exact.

Donna-Marie: You were in a relationship with a girl?

Zion: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Donna-Marie: You said that you felt like you were tricked into it. Tell me about that.

Zion: The girl kept telling me, "Yeah, my dad is never there. He messes with my mom. He killed my brother." She tried to hit me with all of this guilt to where she was like, "Hey, you make me feel better. Would you be my girlfriend?" I'm just sitting her like, "Oh, snap. She just went through a lot of stuff. I don't want to just let her down just like that, so I might as well just say yes."

Dona-Marie: How did your mother find out about you guys?

Zion: I was facetimeing her, but I waited for my mom to go up the stairs first. My mom heard me talking, and she asked my friend, "Who is Zion on the phone with."

My friend said, "Oh, she's on the phone with this person." My mom met her not too long ago at an eighth-grade dance, and she felt that she was a little bit sketchy. When she found out that I was talking on the phone with that person, she just sat there and she waited until I put down my phone. When she found my phone, she was looking through

the text messages, and she was just like, "Zion, come here." I'm just like, "Yeah, what happened?" She's like, "Who is she to you?" My first instinct was to lie, and I was just like, "She's my friend." She was like, "Listen. I don't want to hear a lie. I just want to know. Who is she to you?" I finally fessed up.

Donna-Marie: Is it that to be a lesbian, let's say, is really frowned upon in your family?

Zion: Yes, ma'am. They'll joke about it every once in a while, and you would probably take it as, "Hey, they're cool with it." When it actually happened, that's totally different.

Donna-Marie: Do you consider yourself heterosexual, bisexual, gay, or where do you put yourself? How do you think about sexuality?

Zion: When it comes to me, I feel like the only direction I'm going to be is straight, so it's just boys, but once in a while, I'm just going to have a thought about girls. I'll just be like, "Hey, she's very cute. I'm going to just be her friend, like try to be close with her." I'm just basically straight but just questionable when it comes to being gay basically.

Donna-Marie: What makes it questionable for you? Is it your parents?

Zion: My parents. It's my parents. Definitely my parent. The only reason why I still have little thoughts about girls is because of people like Serenity. When I was going through the whole entire relationship thing, Serenity was there, and she sat there and she talked to me about it. That's when she told me her own personal story about what happened when her parents found out. I'm just sitting here like, "She really had no shame, and I actually like it." She basically just pulled me out of it and was like, "Listen. Of course, because you came from a family that's from the islands, they're going to be strict about the book (referring to the bible) and everything. Just understand that we don't know that much about the book. We know the stories, but we don't know ...

Donna-Marie: Thank you for sharing that was so powerful. Have you written this at all?

Zion: I'm scared to write about that on my phone or laptop because they still find a little nerve to try to search through my stuff just in case to make sure I'm not doing anything. I feel like if I were to write on the topic on my phone, and they were to find it, it would be a whole other speech, a whole other, "You're doing terrible." A whole other, "Your trust level went from here to down here." I try not to write about it, and if I think about it, I write it down on a piece of paper, ball it up, and throw it away. Make sure you rip it up before you throw this in the trash. A whole procedure.

Zion's memory, and our discussion regarding her sexuality, is a reminder that we need comprehensive sexual education in schools for Black girls. Impett (2011) found that there is a strong correlation between academic achievement and the self-esteem of adolescent girls. Her findings also suggest that societal perceptions have a significant impact on their senses of self. This is noteworthy since for Zion, her perception of self was in conflict with how she believed she was perceived by others. In order to mediate this, she made the decision to reject a part of her identity rather than nurture it.

In addition, her memory reminds us that dominant views regarding Black girls' sexuality rests at the core of her experiences. We are also reminded that there are rules, much like the ones in Kincaid's (1990) poem about what is acceptable and unacceptable for an adolescent immigrant girl. This knowledge had consequently shaped both her literate life and her lived experiences. She told us that she had learned that her own words could be used against her. She had learned that anything she wrote, performed, or had material manifestations of (regarding her sexuality) had to be destroyed; she has learned not to store memories in her electronic devices, or in digital spaces; she had learned to destroy the concrete evidence of her sexuality, and she had also learned to police herself and her desires. This inevitably shaped her thinking, and catapulted her further into the margins. However, her friendship with Serenity was her saving grace, and knowing that she

was not alone allowed her to regain a sense of self, and her confidence in ways that she hadn't expected.

Section II

Literacies and the Construction of Social Identities: Perceptions of Self

Literacies, and the literate events of my participants' lives, presented to them opportunities of self-expression that they weren't often afforded to them in their concrete lives. In literate spaces they were boundless, they broke, and bent every rule, and it was in these spaces where they were in complete control—always staying one step ahead of those who dared to police them. Zion reflected on a time when her mother tried to control her actions and practices on social media, she told me:

My mom saw that (she liked a post that was inappropriate) and she was like, "First off, unlike this. Delete your Facebook." It was a whole bunch of stuff. I was like, "What did I do wrong?" She's like, "Read them before you like them." I'm just like, "Oh, snap." I think it was like a couple of months later that I was like, "I'm going to make a Facebook again. I'm not going to tell her that I made one, but I'm going to make a Facebook again, and I'm going to make sure to do all the right things on there." I did, and that's when I was like, "Oh, snap. I've got this whole entire social media thing down." (Zion, interview, 10/3/2016)

This realization made Zion aware that there were unsanctioned spaces where girls like her could express who they were without consequence if they could somehow remain disguised. In these spaces they decided who they would friend and who could see their posts, and they created

identities that were inconspicuous. It was on Snapchat where I discovered Zion expressing affection and a great degree of tenderness toward a girl. The disappearing platform that is Snapchat allowed her to vocalize her emotions knowing that after 24 hours it would be destroyed. In addition, if memories/posts are stolen from Snapchat, the user is immediately alerted, and told who violated their privacy. When I saw Zion's post, I messaged her to boldly ask at the time if the girl she was with was her girlfriend (this is partly what inspired our discussion above). These platforms and others became refuge for these immigrant girls from the Caribbean. In these spaces they decided that they wouldn't be controlled, and it was through their literacies that they resisted. Greene (2016) has suggested that digital spaces can also be useful to educators in reaching out to these girls, and offering them the instruction they need to support their development. She posits that,

Literacy as a socio-political act also entails literacy educators creating spaces for Black girls' roles in curriculum development to be participatory in nature, so that their experiences, voices, and perspectives are embedded in literacy instruction... Literacy educators can embed digital technology platforms, such as zines, digital storytelling, glogs, podcasts, digital memoirs, and digital storyboards into instruction. (p. 282-285)

If, according to Greene, educators could take advantage of these spaces, then this this would provide them with opportunities to connect with students in ways that can prove to be beneficial, both socially and academically.

Many scholars argue that Black girls are rendered invisible, both by educational research, and through curriculum (Haynes, Stewart, & Allen, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2011; Richardson, 2013; Richardson, 2003; Winn, 2010). This invisibility ultimately created a response from my participants, which suggested that if they wouldn't be accepted at home or at school they would find other forms of acceptance. Ife Bell (another one of my participants) also talked about the ways in which she evaded the scrutiny of her parents as it related to her sexuality. Ife's older sister became pregnant and had to drop out of school, and this reality meant that the policing of her sexuality became intensely oppressive. She wanted me to know that what happened to her

sister would never happen to her. Conversations like these revealed to me that Ife had been living in her sister's shadow, and, while she wanted desperately to carve out a different path for herself, there was a lot of work to be done before this could happen. Ife wanted validation, she wanted her parents to know that she could be responsible and smart, both in love and in her academic life. According to Impett (2011), academic success is often contingent upon one's self esteem; to be successful academically means that one has to have a positive sense of self.

In order to be validated Ife leaned heavily on her boyfriend. She found the support he offered her to be invaluable. Below, I include our discussion about their relationship. She told me that he was different from other boys, and she shared a literary artifact with me that she hoped would demonstrate their connection and the significance of their relationship. Our conversation, and the letter below, is evidence that the literate lives of my participants became a refuge from the rigorous, stringent rules that governed their girlhood. She told me while blushing that,

Ife: If I knew I wanted something, I could come to him and ask him before any other boy, so I guess recently in September we were always texting and was flirting, but it wasn't like a relationship, it was like, "Should I ask him?" "Should I tell him I like him?" "Should I? I told somebody, I called my friend, we're really close, we've been close since 7th grade, and I told him. After that he basically, he came and said, "Can we talk about us?" I thought that was red flag, I'm like ... I got scared, I'm like, "Oh man, what does this mean?" He was just telling me how he felt about me, and it's like ... the thing with some boys these days, I don't think all boys act like that. They're more ... I can't say forceful I guess, he was more sweet about it and I guess some boys aren't like that. I don't know, it's a big difference between him and some boys...

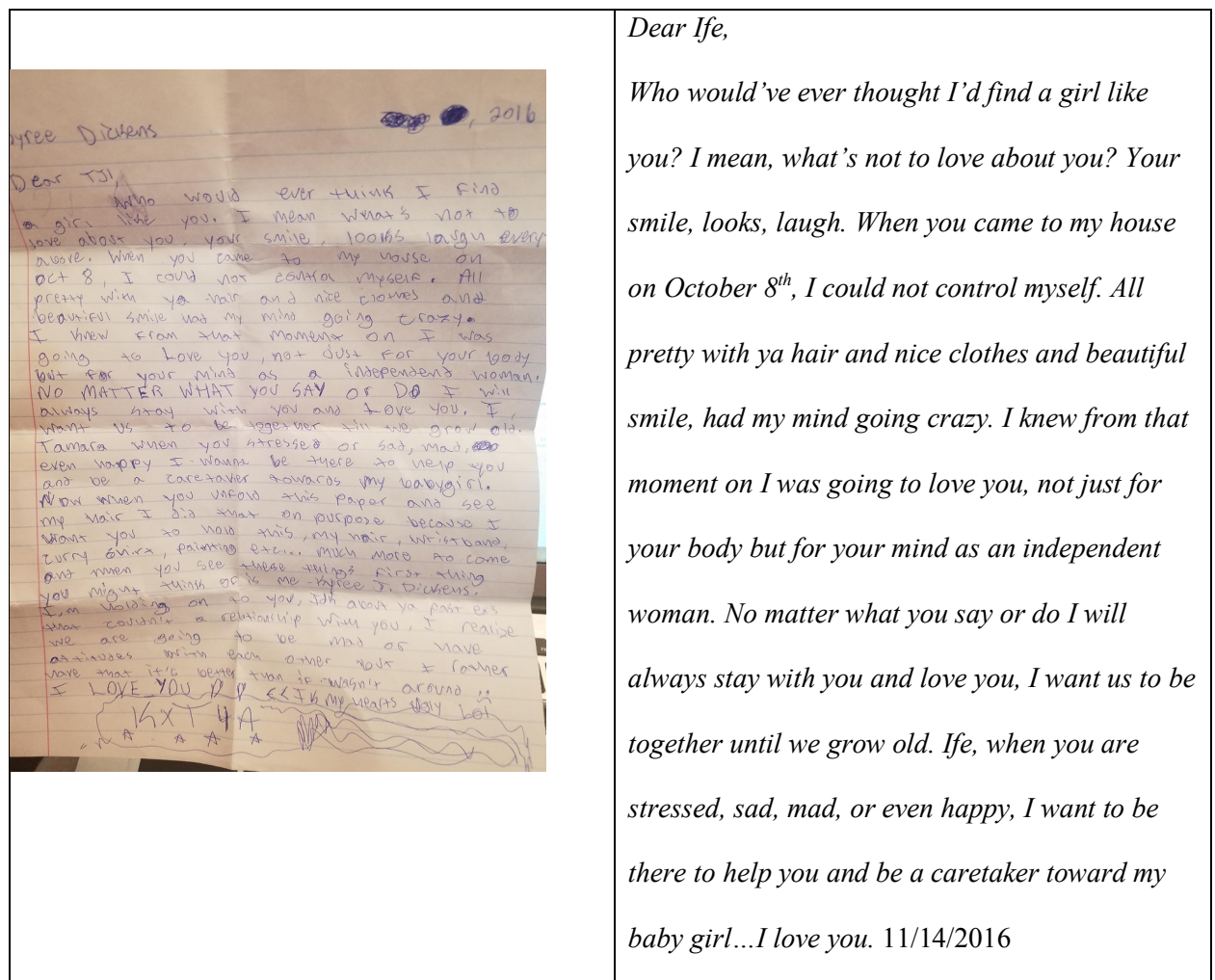
He wrote me a note; do I have that note with me? Yes, I have that note. I think I have the note.

Zuri: Is that like a, "Do you like me, because I like you note?"

Ife: Oh, there it goes. No, it's a note he gave me over the weekend when I went to see him.

The note as reflected here made it clear why Ife was so elated. I have transcribed an abridged version of it making sure to maintain its honesty and tone.

Figure 6- 1



Ife's Love Letter

Through her boyfriend's letter, Ife found the validation she needed. This letter that she kept with her in her backpack months after sharing it with our group was a reminder that she was loved, that she meant something to someone, and she held onto his words as if they provided her

with the very air she needed to breathe. This literate iteration of their love is important because it had even impacted the academic choices Ife made regarding her future. “I’m gonna apply to the same schools he applies to, so we could be together,” she told me during our memory work focus group meeting. For Ife, a high performing student, an academic in own her right, this meant that she would have to settle for schools that were local and affordable since her boyfriend did not have the grades necessary to attend a competitive institution.

Meaning Making through Literate Practices: A poem for Dayana

The literate lives of my participants made up a significant aspect of who they were; it was where they found their power, and it was often where they sought the self-determination that was sometimes wrestled away from them in their concrete lives. These literacies, according to Richardson (2007), help girls “to advance and protect themselves and their loved ones in society. African American females communicate these literacies through storytelling, conscious manipulation of silence and speech, code/style shifting, and signifying, among other verbal and non-verbal practices” (p. 798). I would argue that this is also relevant for immigrant girls like my participants. What they consumed also had significant implications for their identities (as we saw with Ife). Serenity was no different, and in response to her questions concerning virginity, she crafted a poem dedicated to her friend Dayana that allowed her to use her agency to manipulate and construct a vision of the quintessential *lost virginity* (note that Dayana’s virginity was stolen) that partly echoed some of what she shared above. In the *figure* below, her words resound as she shared this tale of rebellion, empowerment, regret, and sensuality, which painted a picture of Black girls’ sexuality as alive and rich with memory and agency in ways that we are unaccustomed to hearing. It was her attempt at self-definition and self-determination, all key attributes to an identity that is necessary for the survival, and thriving, of Black girls. I use these

terms in close relation to each other since in surviving these girls are making their way in spite of the challenges they are faced with, and in thriving they are often flourishing, making advances in their emotional growth and development. This phenomenon can happen simultaneously.

Figure 6- 2

This is for Dayana and for her stolen virginity

Dry lips run over by a wet tongue, arms outstretched like a pig's dissection, palms fumbling on each other, fingers wrestling with one another; the taste of your salty skin is ever so familiar.

Frogs seem to leap around in my stomach as your tadpoles swim in search of my delicate lily pad. You take me here, a place in the clouds, apartment 9 to be exact—strawberry milk rivers flowing over stacks, stacks of vanilla wafer grounds, undressing myself to a blue M&M moon as I feel your breath fan my neck and your body pressed up on my back, just like that you take me—fantasy.

Hot, hot, hot, burning chocolate chip drops, burning my chest and my stomach, my inner thighs resemble the back of a lady bug, spotted with love bites. I put up a fight pushing you down splash into a swimming pool of champagne, as our naked bodies turn and twist to the beat of our hearts.

It's raining skittles as I ride your mechanical bull that pulls me and shifts me wildly, falling onto my knees drenched in your holy water, tasting the whip cream I shook up and sprayed on me.

Laying on an Oreo ground digging my nails into the cookie soil as a gummy python slivers inside Juicy, juicy, juice pouring endlessly, drowning the animal trying to consume me. I open my eyes and I'm on the ceiling, rotating and glowing up purple, blue, green, the rainbow disco ball.

Fingers rubbing the slits of a suicidal girls wrist and I straddle his face, a tongue helicopter sputters uncontrollably and loses control, falling into the salty sea where many men take their last gasp of

*air, clapping thunder roaring in the dark midnight lunar eclipse as my cheeks try to collide but are
stopped by the sausage link between the hotdog buns on a hot barbecue day
screaming, screaming, screaming, this will be my death, but I'm not running from you I'm running to
you, into the mouth of a hungry giant feasting on my flesh like a cannibal.
Cannon ball into the chlorine water choking me, drowning me, Sharks nibbling at my nipples softly
jellyfish stinging the clouds of the earth waking up mother sunrise, he's staring at me my eyes filled
with pools of emotion, yet his eyes are as blank as a delinquent's paper, reality comes flooding back
and he is just stroking me in the room where he once took other girls, the moment is gone faster than
the bust of a nut.
Wrapped in the sheets I cry at what I have done, I have fallen in love with the devil, and I can no
longer be sanctified. Serenity's poem 10/10/2016*

Poem for Dayana and for her stolen virginity

Serenity's poem for Dayana revealed the depths of her thinking, the severity of her pain, and the complexity of Black girls' sexualities. There is a mixture of both pleasure and pain, but echoing in her poem is the reality that no one prepares you for: heartbreak. In her stern warning, Kincaid's (1990) protagonist advises her daughter about the consequences of her actions, however, for Serenity there was no warning, no lessons, no mentors to caution her about her transition to womanhood. It was through her literacies where she asked questions, troubled notions of morality, and rebelled. Her literacies became her saving grace.

Section III

Literate Reflections and the Implications for Our Lives

While my participants' literacies proved to be instrumental in helping them to negotiate identities, they also served as a site where students made sense of their social worlds. In our memory work focus groups my participants asked questions about things they had read, things they had heard, and things they wondered about. These topics very often centered on sex and sexuality. While sometimes the answers were simple, there were other instances when topics needed to be fleshed out, and even then they walked away uncertain of what they should make of these topics. For example, in the following excerpt the girls discussed the importance of father figures in the lives of girls, and how a father figure could impact a girl's relationship to sex and her sexuality.

Nina: I know this girl,... I'm not going to say her name ... She slept with a lot of guys, because she said that her dad was never there to show her love, so she like, gets love from other men. She said in the moment it makes her feel good. But like afterward it's just ...

Kali: I feel like some girls use that as an excuse to be a hoe—to be ... promiscuous.

Jocelyn: Of course, you need a male figure in your life, to guide you ... learn things. I took after my brothers more than I took after my sisters and my mom, because they were always there with me. I had my dad but I only see my dad on weekends and stuff. I feel like you need a type of male figure in your life because it really helps.

Zion: I agree. If you have a male figure in your life, it's like, they kind of shape you up to what you could ... not supposed to be, but like ... your other potential that you could have been. Or like they give you an ideal on what you possibly need in your life- (Kali: Or

don't need) -if they're like a good father figure. Like search for that type of man, that's going to sit there and hold you down or something like that. They're like the example. And if they're not there, that's when you have to find out what's the good ideal in your life and you gonna end up making mistakes and after you gonna have to like, blame it on the dad because he wasn't there to show you.

If: And I also think that females like that, the only reason why they do it, is like, okay they father wasn't there so they search for love in men, but the same way, the men aren't there for you after they got what they wanted. It's like a lot of females, I know a lot of females, they choose their men based on like, how their father is. Like the same quality traits their father have, their boyfriend or their husbands have. That's why I think a lot of females ... sure as hell not me. But, it's like, so your father's not there, he acts a certain way, the man that you're laying down in bed with is like that too, and it's just like ... If you don't like how your father is you shouldn't search for his particular traits in said men.

I don't know, that's how I feel. (MWFG, 2/7/2017)

Discussions such as these were important since they signified awareness, critical consciousness, and the realities of what these immigrant girls were thinking and feeling in relation to their embodied sexual identities. Consequently, these meetings left me with a wide range of questions, and I wanted to know how were these issues being mediated at City High. Were they talking to teachers, administrators or anyone else about questions relating to sex and sexuality? James (2010) discusses the importance of tackling questions of Black girls' sexuality as early as elementary school, since internal and external perceptions of who they are as sexual beings have significant implications for their confidence, and over all self-esteem. This led the girls and I into discussions about the books they were reading in their English Language Arts class and the impacts those texts were having on their consciousness and well-being.

The Influence of Text on Perception of Self

As writers, readers, performers, and literate digital aficionados, my participants made meaning of their lived experiences, and literate lives, in a multitude of ways. When they were unable to find the texts that provided them with the messages and affirmations they needed, they sought them out in other unsanctioned spaces. However, there were instances when they themselves became consumed and inundated with the messages that further marginalized and pathologized their identities. In these instances, Black girls were positioned as Jezebel, wench, slut, and promiscuous. My participants called for a balance, they recognized the importance of the many narratives they read, but they often attributed the meaning of these texts to their own lives. One such text was a narrative entitled *Dime* (Frank, 2015). In this narrative, my participants were introduced to a pre-adolescent Black girl who had ventured into a life of prostitution. This book was a choice read for their ELA class. They had to select from a text about a prostitute and another one about a Black teenage girl who became HIV positive (Brown & Martin, 2008), I am unable to recall the third choice. In an interview with their teacher—a white woman in her 20s, she told me that the choices she made were out of genuine attention to their needs and she believed that these choices were well received by her students. She also said that she found it difficult to find texts that would be meaningful to her students. DeBlase (2003) has argued that,

In a particular classroom in a specific urban neighborhood school, therefore, the negotiation of meaning from text will not be the same for all girls in that class, even if they come from similar economic backgrounds. An African American girl in this same class is very likely to negotiate and interpret a particular literacy event in a way that may be significantly different from that of the European American girl sitting next to her or even from other African American girls in the same class. (p. 285)

This analysis is noteworthy, and the transcript that follows exemplifies the importance of understanding these nuances. Here, Zuri Smith, Kali Murphy, and Ife Bell discuss the relevance of this text, and the implications for their lives. They told me:

Zuri: Well, we're reading the book *Dime*. It's a good book, it's about a girl, she is like 13 or 12, and what puzzles me is the fact of the matter that she's a prostitute at the age of 13 or 12 or how ever old she is. It was prostitution, she's literally standing on a corner and then she goes into a hotel and has sex with some random dude. She makes money for the pimp, who is called Daddy.

Kali: She's in love with Daddy.

Zuri: He beats her though.

Kali & Zuri: Makes her sleep on the floor.

Zuri: He beats her and makes her sleep on the floor, plus, she still has to go to school, but he's trying to convince her to just drop out of school and be a prostitute all day, every day. I don't like the fact that this is brought up in the book, but then she's getting to a point where she's had enough of it and she wants to like leave, but she can't. Yeah, it's like she's writing her own story, but she's like telling it from different perspectives, like she made it into sex, money, and different people, like she's making a story for all these different things.

Ife: Is she not loved at home? That could be a big factor....

Donna-Marie: Tell me something about this book. I know that your teacher gave you three options for books to read. I think Kali said that she had three different books to choose from. Why do you guys think that this was one of the options, why do you guys think that your teacher thought this might be an interesting book for you guys to read?

Zuri: I feel like the teacher thinks that we're loose. She actually gave us three different books, so it was based on our opinion like what we want to read. I guess, I guess she just

thought it was a good book, teach us to stay off the streets, because I mean I know I would never be on the streets... Yeah, in other words she's giving us a life lesson, no she's trying to prevent us from being on the streets, so she's giving us this book to read.

Ife: I think she thinks ya'll are loose. (MWFG 11/14/16)

I selected this excerpt from our conversation because it's evident that my participants were reading this text with a great degree of cynicism. Each week as we met, we would talk about the text they were reading. Although many of them were hopeful, and had powerful messages that resonated with my participants and me, it was the inundation and imbalance of these types of text that became, according to Zuri, *puzzling*. Additionally, the fact that they believed their teacher selected this book because she had negative perceptions of who they were had significant consequences for their identity construction. *She believes we are loose, she doesn't want us on the streets, she thinks we're hos* were all interpretations of their teacher's good intentions. These were the messages that resonated, and it is my conclusion that teachers must adopt approaches that challenge assumptions and beliefs about who their students are and what they need.

Black Girls' Literacies: Consequences and Actions

Black feminist scholars have long argued about the necessity of a critical approach to the study of Black girls' lives. Such an approach must be deeply rooted in an understanding of Black feminism, critical racial theories, and an understanding of the relationship between local and global communities. For example, Staples (2017) argues that Black women and girls need an endarkened, Black feminist epistemology to aid them in understanding the complexity and nuances of their lover identities, and the concrete challenges they are faced with in their lives. She posits that, "This happens by creating space for an intersection of exploration that includes emotionality, sexuality, spirituality, physicality, and intellectualism— aspects of Self, Other, and

All” (p. viii). Such an analysis was missing from their discussion of *Dime* and from many of the other texts my participants read. The notion of Supreme Love (Staples, 2016) as part of an endarkened feminist epistemology could be life altering for both my participants and even their teachers. If supreme love is embodied both within curriculum, and in the lived experiences of my students and their teachers the approach to analysis, interpretation, and even choice of text might look very different than what I presented above. For, according to Staples (2016),

Supreme Love suffers long and is kind. It does not envy. It does not reject or condemn. It does not boast. It is not arrogant. It is not rude. It does not seek its own way. It is not provoked. It thinks no evil. It does not rejoice in iniquity; it rejoices in supreme truth. (p. 509)

In addition to Supreme Love, Black girls should be exposed to many positive representations of Blackness that reminds them of their worth and their value, both intrinsically and extrinsically. This means that there should be an awareness of the hyper sexualization of Black girls and Black women bodies, and a rejection of these controlling images (Collins, 2008; Impett et al., 2011; Shelton, 2017).

The question of sexuality for my participants was very closely linked to the concept of love. Therefore, they questioned ways of being in relationships, and they were often conflicted about what a healthy sexual, emotional, and psychological relationship should and could look like. However, they felt instinctively that there had to be a sort of standard for how they should love, and how they should be loved. They debated this, and agreed that one possible way could be through the understanding of the father-daughter relationship. If they could understand their fathers, they might be able to understand their relationship to other men. While they sometimes held on to certain convictions, they still struggled to get the answers and support they needed. Serenity retreated into her writing; Ife held on dearly to the reminder from her boyfriend that she was loved. Many of my other participants held onto the texts that their teachers had provided for

them. While they desired to know more, I observed a great deal of limitation for what they had access to, and they lacked the guidance that would have steered them in the right direction.

Conclusion

In “Girl” (Kincaid, 1990), Kincaid’s mother figure protagonist cautioned her daughter to be aware of actions that could easily classify her as a *slut*. The notion that she is bent on becoming a slut speaks to societal perceptions of Black girls, and her mother, knowledgeable with the history of her own life and the lives of women before her, cautioned her about the stigma that many Black girls may one day face. Mohanty (2003) tells us that, “History, and memory are woven through numerous genres: fictional texts, oral history, and poetry, as well as testimonial narratives—not just what counts as scholarly or academic (“real”) historiography” (p.79-80). It is through these vessels where we are able to discover the important messages that govern Black girlhood. Black mothers have long tried to protect their daughters from the pathologizing of their sexuality, and Kincaid’s protagonist is no different. According to Ohito & Khoja-Moolji (2016), “The mother’s proclamations are fundamentally focused on securing the daughter’s safety by nurturing her ability to be emotionally, financially, physically and socio-culturally adaptable to the manifold ways in which intersecting oppressions mutate and mingle in her life” (p. 447). Such life lessons are imperative to Black girls and their development. For my participants, positive messages that reaffirmed their humanity and reminded them that they are worthy could have made a tremendous difference. It would have provided them with a resource to draw on when they were confronted with the many uncertainties of their existence.

Findings from this chapter suggests that questions of Black girls’ sexuality are mediated through their literate practices and events and are best understood through their own lived experiences and from what is offered to them through text. The implications of this means that

teachers, administration, and the adults who play a major role in the lives of these immigrant girls from the Caribbean must be able to provide them with the literate resources and critical texts they need to create the conditions to support self-determination, actualization, and high self-esteem. While my participants were agentic in creating many of these conditions for themselves, a more direct approach to supporting them could lead to academic success, and better performance in school. These possibilities must be considered as these girls begin their transitions from girlhood to womanhood. In order to challenge the dominant narrative that stereotypes Black girls we must consider the counternarratives which are fundamental to their development.

Chapter 7

Conclusions/Discussions/Implications

To search for power within myself means I must be willing to move through being afraid to whatever lies beyond. If I look at my most vulnerable places and acknowledge the pain I have felt, I can remove the source of pain from my enemies' arsenals. My history cannot be used to feather my enemies' arrows then, and that lessens their power over me. Nothing I accept about myself can be used against me to diminish me. I am who I am, doing what I came to do, acting upon you like a drug or a chisel to remind you of your me-ness, as I discover you in myself. (Staples, 2016)

Introduction

As a first-generation immigrant from Jamaica, my interest in the literate lives of immigrant girls from the Caribbean stemmed from my own experience as a Black girl and eventually as a teacher in predominantly African American schools in New York City. My interest in this topic is born out of a deep-rooted desire to make visible a population of girls who have been overlooked, and to consider that there is a depth to the Black experience that is not limited to the United States, but exists in the many places where Black girls reside globally. The above excerpt by Audre Lorde (1984) exemplifies this dissertation; it is about my participants finding their power within, and it is about their willingness to forge ahead into the unknown—brave and courageous when all the odds are stacked against them. It is about the acknowledgement of pain and of knowing one's self in such a way that no one can tell you who you are, where you are headed, or where you are coming from. This study is evidence of the agency and strength of immigrant girls from the Caribbean and the ways in which their perceptions of self are intricately constructed in a variety of spaces. It is in the context of these spaces where their academic and social identity formation occurred.

Literature Review Recap: The Caribbean, Literacies, Memory

Caribbean immigrants have been contributors to the Black American landscape since the beginning of the 20th century when they began migrating to the United States for economic opportunities. Since then their numbers have steadily increased and continue to grow until today (ADAMS, 1999; V. Brown, 2015; Butterfield, 2004; Lorick-Wilmot, 2014; Model, 1991; R. Rogers, 2001; R. R. Rogers, 2006; Waters, 1999; Waters, Kasinitz, & Asad, 2014). My participants and their families are a part of that mass migration. They came to the United States for many of the same reasons as other immigrants before them, however, they are often overlooked, underestimated, and their experiences dismissed—relegating them further to the margins. Their intersecting identities means that there is an intricacy to their experiences and this contributes deeper meaning to their time in schools, and in the other spaces they occupy. My study demonstrates that the nuances of their identities make them important members of the many communities to which they belong.

While the Caribbean seems disconnected from the United States mainland geographically, what I argue is that my participants have brought with them to this location, epistemological and ontological worldviews that surpass borders, bridges, and gaps, and muddles our understandings of Black girlhood. From a Black feminist standpoint, I have asked my participants to self-define who they are in relation to the Caribbean and to the United States; what you have seen in this dissertation is their articulation of this self-definition. In one moment, they are African American, and in another they are “Jamerican,” “Pegasus,” Black, or some other hyphenated identity. These identity constructs were constantly shifting and changing during our discussions and interviews, or with the day of the week, demonstrating that these girls did not imagine themselves as singular in their personhood, but a compilation of identities that were

deeply rooted in the local and the global. These girls were discursively producing themselves in relation to the many messages and perspectives they were exposed to (Davies & Harré, 1990). Hall (1995) has noted in his work that identities are not just the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, but they are informed by our relationships to the outside world, and my participants were actively constructing their identities in relation to their social and academic worlds.

Through their literacies, and the framework of Black feminism, I have been able to demonstrate that the girlhoods of my Caribbean immigrant participants were deeply informed by their gender, their race, and their culture. New literacies provided me with a framework which broadened the definition of what it means to be literate. Consequently, this meant that my analysis of my participants' literate practices enabled me to look not only at what they wrote but how they wrote, what they performed, what they listened to, what they spoke about and the purposes of these practices. Staples (2016), tell us that,

Literacy practices are the ways we read, write, speak, and listen in contexts and with regard to dynamics that are valued and enlivened in those contexts... A literacy practice is a socially situated, culturally informed, politically negotiated, and often emotionally and intellectually sensitive social practice. (p. 43)

This perspective means that I had a wide range of artifacts, which could be listened to, touched, imagined, visually unpacked, and felt emotionally (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). This analysis added to an existing conversation on Black girls while widening the scope of our perceptions of who they are and who they are destined to become. Black feminist scholars have written extensively about the experiences of Black girls in America (R. N. Brown, 2009, 2013; Collins, 2008; Cox, 2015; Evans-Winters, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Kinloch, 2010; Morris, 2016; Richardson, 2003; J. M. Staples, 2016; R. Staples, 2006), and this contribution means that we now have a resource for understanding that Black girls are not only those who are African American, but those who are contributors to that very culture.

Herein, I revisit chapters IV, V, and VI, each a valuable resource for scholars, teachers, administrators, and policy makers interested in developing pedagogies, improving practice, developing curricula, and learning about how their students are developing academic and social identities in the context of school and other unsanctioned spaces.

This dissertation is not just an academic contribution to the field of Black feminism, literacies, or education more generally, it is a tangible artifact that sheds light into the beauty and richness of Blackness, immigrant identities, the diaspora, and Black lives. It is my contribution to my people, a work done through love and humility. I compiled these chapters to showcase the vulnerability, wisdom, character, and complexity of my participants lives. I am as much a benefactor of this study as the individuals who will read it.

In analyzing the data for these chapters, the themes which emerged centered on patriarchy (chapter 4), solidarity, curriculum (chapter 5), and Black girls' sexuality (chapter 6). These themes were each unpacked in the chapters, and what you will find is a wealth of information that can be used to better serve the needs of all Black girls in the context of U.S, and beyond. It also has the potential to serve their teachers, administrators, and society as a whole. I have organized this chapter into three sections. In section I, you will find a summary of all data chapters, in section II you will find conclusions and contributions of this research, and finally in section III you will find suggestions for future research and a conclusion. Additionally, what you will find throughout this chapter are bits of reflections from my own time with my participants. I believe it is important for me to share the impact this work had on me, both scholarly, and personally.

Section I

Summary of Findings

Chapter IV

In chapter IV I captured the voices of my participants as they articulated their frustrations regarding patriarchy, and its ubiquitous presence in their lives. I centered the experiences of Serenity and Amanda as they reflected on the ways the patriarchy had shaped and informed their relationships with their social worlds. Each of these girls discussed the impact of their gender on their connections with family, school, friends, and their own perceptions of self. They wanted desperately to change their realities and to challenge the many dominant structures and forces that were impacting them. Furthermore, I drew on scholars whose work addressed the nuances of gender, as it pertained to the lived experiences of Black women and girls (R. N. Brown, 2009; Dillard, 2011; Hooks, 1982, 1986, 2013; Lorde, n.d.; J. M. Staples, 2016).

The time I spent with Amanda, Serenity and my other participants awakened in me a deeper understanding of my own identity as a Black woman. I was once them, and in many ways, I am still very much like them. I blamed others, resented my mother, and many of the male figures in my life. I became self-destructive, and many times wished for either death or the erasure of my identity. I had no clue at the time that my absence, or self-destructive practices would do nothing to change the world, or my place within it. I felt powerless, and didn't understand that my literacies were the embodiment of my power. I wrote myself into realities that made sense, and I crafted poetry so rich with love that I wondered if that love had the capacity to exist in spaces other than my poetry.

Consequently, when Serenity and Amanda told me and my other participants about the tumultuous relationships they had with their fathers I understood and sympathized with them. Chapter IV wasn't just about them, or for them—it was for all of us who understand all too well the everlasting effect of pain, dominance, and the power of the patriarchy. The emotions felt by these girls sparked a fire within them that manifested as rage, anger, frustration, and sometimes indifference. My hope for this chapter, was to honor their voices and their stories, to privilege their narratives, and to give them the space many of us will never have to share our own experiences of terror (Staples, 2016). How brave and courageous were these girls to share so much of their lives with me—with you? This chapter reflects their courage and bravery, and that must be honored in the taken for granted spaces of Black girls lives.

Staples (2016) has discussed the fragmented voices amongst her own participants when dealing with the realities of relationships, sexuality, and their agency. The materials that I examined were written texts (such as stories, and their digital footprints), interviews, observations, poetry, and other abstract and symbolic possessions. From these resources I found that my participants understood the nuances of a male dominated society and decided that they would not be easily subjugated by it. They resisted in a variety of ways, always seeking new paths for themselves, in hope that they could make a difference, or that things would somehow change. One concrete way in which they resisted was through their bonds with each other, always holding on to the possibility of change.

As a first-generation immigrant I have always felt so very lonely in the ways I exist in the world. This loneliness is further magnified by the inability to be good enough for the multiples spaces that I have occupied. For my Jamaican family, my access (as a citizen of the United States) positioned me as disconnected and out of touch with the realities of what it means to live and exist in the third-world, and as a Black woman and an immigrant in the United States, my

identity positions me as an outsider, and often never good enough to a fully deserving of all the society has to offer. Sisterhood, was and has been one of the only spaces where I have found the richness of humanity. It is where Serenity, Amanda, and my other participants found richness as well. While they couldn't fully articulate it, the patriarchy had alienated them from the world in which they existed, and it was the sisterhood, rich with a contextual understanding of Black girls, and Blackness that saved them.

The patriarchy, as I describe it in this chapter, is a ubiquitous force that encompasses every aspect of the lives of my participants. For Amanda, her relationship with her step-father, and the authority he held over her and her mother created intense anxiety attacks, insecurities, and promiscuity. She rebelled by finding a variety of ways out of her reality, some of which were beneficial. For example, she found refuge in therapy and in friendship. Serenity, on the other hand, used her literacies as a site of rebellion. She wrote narratives that juxtaposed her own reality to that of her characters. She crafted poetry that told her truth, and drowned out all other voices except her own. She became a role model for her friends, and fostered safe spaces where they were able to tell their own stories, and reimagine a world that was devoid of toxic masculinity. Through their own self-determination and self-definition, each important tenets of Black feminism, these girls were able to theorize about the intersectional forces that impacted their relationships and perceptions of the patriarchy in relation to their lives. Culture, race, and gender, for example, were each crucial to the meanings made by these girls.

What I found during my research is that the patriarchy manifested itself differently across cultures, but it affected my participants in very similar ways. I found that the patriarchy was dominating and oppressive to the lives of my participants, but they relentlessly pushed back against it through their literacies and by holding onto the memories and narratives of women who had also done the same. There was significant evidence that suggested that—without the support, guidance, and modeling of Black women—over time the consequences of the patriarchy could

threaten the mental and physical survival of my participants. Consequently, families, teachers, administrators, and policy makers, must be aware of the ways in which they inadvertently support the patriarchy through curriculum and practice. They must carve out spaces where girls are able to confront and resist patriarchal norms in concrete ways. For example, they can offer a balance of text where women are positioned as assertive and in control of their destinies, and also provide spaces for girls to speak to each other and to adults about concerns and ideas regarding their lives and experiences. They can also provide other non-concrete possibilities, such as performances, material publication opportunities, digital, and non-digital journaling. Finally, modeling behaviors and practices that are consistent with rejecting patriarchy as abiding by its ideological, and physical manifestations is also another implication of my study.

Chapter V

I begin chapter V by bringing to the forefront the importance of my participants' relationships with each other as a source of strength. I drew on the work of Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) and Mohanty (2003), who each argue that solidarity is a necessary part of the structure of relationships that lead to action and change. From Mohanty's feminist solidarity model, we learn that, for solidarity to be possible, it has to be centered on mutuality and common interest, and it has to be linked to other struggles locally and globally; one must ask questions and make connections that are relevant to marginalized women (Mohanty, 2003). Gaztambide-Fernández (2012) focuses on three types of solidarity, each part of a larger vision for what can be achieved when individuals are willing to act together, when we understand the malleable nature of culture, and cultural beliefs, and when we see our common interest as a site of action.

In this chapter I contend that immigrant girls from the Caribbean built such relations with each other out of necessity. They needed to know that they were understood, cared for, valued,

and loved—and it was through each other that these needs were affirmed. The solidarity they nurtured resulted in a sisterhood that was a necessary part of their identities. It was through the sisterhood that they resisted dominant perceptions of their race, culture, ethnicities, and their Black girlhood. Two of my participants—Serenity and Zion—leaned heavily on each other for what they referred to as *sensible advice*, a listening ear, and for someone who understood the cultural nuances of what it means to be from *the islands*.

Furthermore, chapter V asked the question, *what role does school sanctioned curriculum play in the development of identity amongst my participants?* This question is mediated through Aoki's (2005) discussion of curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived experience. In order to understand the connections between curriculum and the lived experiences of my participants, I focused on their literacies. What their literacies revealed was that who they were, and what they believed about themselves, were not acknowledged in school. They found affirmation in the spaces they carved out for themselves. Examples [of what?] include, performances, listening to stories and the memories/insights of their families and friends. While many of the structures were in place at City High that would allow for the development of a strong critical curriculum that could meet the needs of my participants, the administrators and teachers had to prioritize other important needs before moving ahead toward these ends.

In addition, a great ideological distance existed between my participants and their teachers. I found that many of the teachers and the principal of City High were deeply committed to social justice, equity, and to Black lives. However, they were missing the necessary tools to translate this commitment to my participants. This was noted in chapter 5, in discussion with teachers who expressed uncertainty about ways to give students the tools they needed, when they sometimes struggled to figure out how to expand their pedagogical landscape to meet the need of students. My findings suggest that this inability to move from theory to practice created a void that was only filled by the sisterhood my participants constructed with each other.

Furthermore, the implications for chapter V reveals that there has to be a commitment to the development of curriculum that is critical, curriculum that blurs the boundaries between the local and the global—a diasporic vision of curriculum. Also, teachers can learn from students about the indispensable nature of solidarity. They can learn about the importance of compassion, listening, and common struggle, which are essential to the identities of immigrant girls from the Caribbean. Chapter V reveals that my participants have been marginalized by the school-sanctioned curriculum. Still, through a concerted effort by teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the students themselves, there is the possibility for reshaping and restructuring materials that are consequential to their lives.

Chapter VI

In chapter VI I ask the question *what can my participants literacies tell me about their conceptions of self in relation to practices in school, digital spaces, and other unsanctioned spaces?* In the sharing of their literate practices, chapter VI delves in one of the most intimate aspects of their lives—their sexuality. The insight my participants provided me with unmasked a literate landscape from which I was able to map the varied places where their perceptions of self were being shaped. From the texts in their ELA classrooms to love letters, poems, stories, discussions/theorizing, memory work focus groups, and digital and non-digital performances, these girls used their literacies to strategically answer questions, ask questions, and to challenge dominant perceptions of who they were.

Chapter VI opens with “Girl” (Kincaid, 1990), a poem that reminds us of the historic policing of Black girls’ sexualities. This poem however, doesn’t aim to diminish or pathologize; rather, it works to build up within a girl the strength that is necessary to survive Black girlhood. The mother protagonist is giving advice in the only way she knows how—firm, and directed. It is

a reminder throughout this chapter that there are a multitude of messages all aimed at Black girls—discursive messages that often remind them of their marginalization. While lessons like the ones that come from Kincaid’s poem are indispensable, my participants were getting messages about their sexuality from their mothers, friends, teachers, and from each other—messages that weren’t always positive or affirming.

In chapter VI, I used data gathered from observations, interviews, memory work focus groups, and the literate artifacts my participants shared with me. These resources provided me with access into their lives, and it is there that I realized what they valued and what they wanted and needed from the adults in their lives and from their school. In this chapter I focused on the lived experiences of three of my participants, Serenity, Zion, and Ife. Each of these girls was dealing with rather different challenges in love, life, and sexuality. Serenity, for example, lost her virginity in a way that left her feeling incomplete and disappointed. She needed to do something about the memory of this experience, and she found herself crafting poetry and discussing with others the things she regretted and the things that would never happen to her again. She was agentic in her stance; while she was wounded by her experience, she never allowed it to define her.

Zion, on the other hand, was dealing with what it means to be queer, Black, and immigrant. She received messages regarding her sexuality from her family that left her feeling ostracized, and alone. Consequently, in order for her to regain the trust she lost with her family she had to outwardly reject her queerness, opting to strategically express herself in unsanctioned spaces. Ife, another one of my participants found affirmation from a love letter she received from her boyfriend. What my study revealed is that these girls were engaged in the search for answers for what a healthy love life and sexuality should, and could, look like.

My findings revealed that, in an effort to answer these questions, they mediated this aspect of themselves through their literacies. They wrote, performed, passionately conversed, and

found comfort in their relationships with each other. I also found that there were many places where questions presented by my participants were answered, and one such place was through the curriculum in their ELA classes. Their teacher selected texts that dealt with Black sexuality yet she wasn't able to engage them in meaningful ways about the consequences of these texts. Therefore, my participants concluded that the reason their teacher offered them these choice texts was because she wanted to caution them about the streets; according to them, she believed they were *loose*. In spite of her reasons for selecting these texts, there were concrete consequences for my participants, such as low self-esteem, low self-worth, diminished perceptions of self, and low academic performance, all in relation to her class. My participants seemed to struggle in spaces where their identities were not positively affirmed.

My study demonstrates that these immigrant girls from the Caribbean need literate resources and outlets for asking questions, sharing concerns, and getting the support they need as they transition to womanhood. Furthermore, teachers, administrators, and policy makers need to make these resources available to these girls, offering them the critical perspectives they need to unpack and make sense of their lived experiences.

Section II

Contributions, Limitation, and Conclusion

Contribution of this Dissertation and Methodological Discussions

This dissertation contributes to a body of literature on the literate lives of Black girls. Specifically, it aims to expand our current conceptions of what it means to be Black, a girl, and an

immigrant, and the interconnectedness of these identities in an American context. The lived experiences and literate lives of these girls have been subsumed within that of an African American identity (Coleman-King, 2014), and the goal of this dissertation is to make visible a population that has been historically marginalized and ignored by educational scholars, policy makers, teachers, administrators, and curriculum. It is also to provide space for these girls to proclaim who they are, what they believe, and how they are negotiating their lives in the face of patriarchy, sexual oppression, curricular limitations, and ideological variances. Furthermore, this dissertation aims to contribute to the existing literature on literacies by expanding it into a more 21st century conception of what it means to be Black, gendered, and marked by intersectional dynamics such as culture, race, ethnicity, and pervasive white supremacist ideologies. Scholars have cautioned the educational research community of the importance of expanding the limits of the local (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Duffy, 2011). This means that we have to consider the interrelationships between local and global communities and the ways in which they impact one another and leave indelible marks upon individuals and structures. It is this very idea that shapes and guides this project, and makes it a valuable contribution to the academic community—specifically, the field of literacy, teacher education, memory research, Caribbean studies, (Black) girlhood studies and critical Black feminism.

Another important aspect of this dissertation is the use of a feminist methodology: memory work, alongside the two frameworks of new literacies and critical Black feminism. What this has allowed me to do is to join other Black feminist new literacies scholars in considering that the study of literacies is not enough without considering intersectionality (Brown, 2009; Greene, 2016; Evans-Winters, 2011; Fisher, 2009; Richardson, 2003; Staples, 2016; Winn, 2011). Moreover, it has allowed me to broaden the literate landscape and to consider Black girls as agentic, knowledgeable, self-determined, self-actualized, and critically conscious of their social world. Memory work as a methodology had many limitations. It was originally conceived of as a

methodology used with predominantly white women to confront their memories of their sexuality, and their sexual past, and together as a collective, they would theorize, listen, discuss and consider ways to move beyond where they were in the moment. It was conceived of as a liberatory methodology, however, it hadn't considered the many other obstacles Black women and girls faced in their own experiences, and their own desires for liberation. To add the voices, concerns, and epistemologies of Black women and girls, I drew on critical Black feminism; this added depth to the study of the lives of my participants.

In addition, as a new literacies scholar I had to consider ways that literacies would privilege the stories, memories, experiences, perceptions, and beliefs of these immigrant girls from the Caribbean. I had to also consider what it could tell us about who they were academically and socially, and the consequences of those identities on their perceptions of self. As a socio-cultural approach to understanding literacy, new literacies deem literacy to be political, cultural, and ideological (Duffy, 2011; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 2012, 2014; Powell, 1999; Spears-Bunton & Powell, 2009; J. M. Staples, 2016; B. Street, 2007; B. V. Street, 1993, 2006). New literacies is broad and all-encompassing; it considers talk, texts, artifacts, performances, media, one's digital footprint, signs, symbols, and non-verbal articulation as literate sources (J. M. Staples, 2016). The combination of a feminist methodology that privileged Black girls' voices, and a new literacies theoretical framework provided me with a platform that regarded memories, stories, artifacts, and the literate articulations of my participants' lives as viable resources for understanding who they were.

Additionally, bridging these theoretical frameworks allowed me to understand my participants' contestations of the planned curriculum provided by their school. It allowed me to recognize the ways their own lived curriculum continued to shape their relationship with their school, their teachers, and even themselves. Their literate articulation provided me this insight, and it made clear the significance of understanding how they were using their literacies.

The contribution of this dissertation is also as practical as it is theoretical. In practice, researchers, policy makers, teachers and school administrators can use this study as a way to think about curriculum, support systems, teacher attitudes and beliefs about students, teacher preparation, and the nuances of Black identity. Furthermore, this dissertation also opens up new insights into the lives of these girls, while also pushing us to reconsider how we have thought about them and their lived experiences. My participants were agentic, responsible, smart, deliberate, critical, cynical, and self-determined. These girls were strategic in their decision making and decisive in their action. They were stronger and more empowered when they fostered sisterhood with each other, and they used knowledge generated from a variety of sources to remind themselves of their pasts, their presents, and their possible futures. Immigrant girls from the Caribbean were intellectually aware of their social world, they knew that the odds were stacked against them, but they were not afraid of those odds. They knew that patriarchy was a threat to their survival, yet they found ways to resist, both concretely and symbolically. They knew the curriculum didn't tell their story, so they crafted narratives of their own. They understood that the challenges they faced extended across many boundaries, and they knew that injustice existed. They were not disillusioned about the reality of their intersectional realities, they just did not always have the tools they needed to address the many sources of tension in their lives.

What we can do in light of what we now know about immigrant girls from the Caribbean is listen. We can offer these girls the support they need in and out of schools to ensure that they develop strong and resolute identities. They have to be provided spaces to tell their stories, to ask questions, to share important feedback about texts and curriculum, and to be reflexive amongst their peers and the adults in their lives. They must not be underestimated; these girls occupy an important space in the Black diaspora. While they have a great deal to learn, scholars, teachers,

policy makers, and other administrators can also learn much from them about their literate lives, and their lived experiences.

What I hope the reader will walk away with is a depth of understanding of the everyday existence of the lives of Black girls. I hope we are able to consider that adolescent Black girlhood is a space of love and promise. I felt a sense of freedom in this space that I don't believe I have felt as an adult. These girls are smart and meticulous about the ways they move in the world. They are protective of the ones they love, and they are selfless. However, like Angelou's (1997) caged bird they also sing of freedom. Society is their cage, the curriculum is their cage, their homes are sometimes their cage, but they are daring and brave enough to break through their confinement. They are inspirational, savvy, beautiful, and honest, but they need guidance and support. They need other Black women to model for them a way of being in the world that is as honest as they are, and as daring as they hope to be. They lack nothing, they need not be underestimated, once we are able to understand this, we will be fully ready to engage with them on their terms.

Limitations of this Study

As a qualitative research study, the pool of participants for this project was relatively small. This is consistent with qualitative research, since the goal is not to generalize, but rather to understand a particular phenomenon amongst a small population. While this is a small limitation of this study, I believe there are other limitations that can pave the way for future research. First, this study is about immigrant girls from the Caribbean and their lived experiences. It is a study that focused on what their literate lives, and their experiences could tell us about their academic and social identity development in a predominantly African American school. Throughout my study I provided space for these girls to tell me who they were and to declare how they self-

identified in relation to the Caribbean, however the limitation of this means that I did not focus on girls who had no connection to the Caribbean. This presents a limitation insofar as being able to provide multiple perspectives within the same school around the phenomenon of academic and social identity construction. My focus on just the Caribbean stems from the reality that many literacy scholars have focused their research on the literate lives of African American girls (R. N. Brown, 2009; Evans-Winters, 2011; Richardson, 2003; J. M. Staples, 2016; Winn, 2011b), providing space for scholars like myself to add to the research on literacies a different perspective than what currently exists.

Additionally, another limitation of this study is that it didn't consider the role of class differences between my participants. It didn't question the ways their socio-economic status impacted the kinds of opportunities, access, and resources available to them. Class differences are extremely important to understanding student success and academic opportunities, and even perceptions of self. Consequently, it is unclear how the inclusion of this perspective could have dramatically shaped the outcome of this project. Future research that calls class into question might yield results that can expand our thinking about these girls and their experiences in school, and their literacy practice.

Lastly, while I focused mainly on students, I did include the voices of a small percentage of teachers and administrators at City High. However, I am certain that expanding my study to include the perspectives of more teachers and administrators would have the potential to broaden our understanding of teacher choice, preparation, attitudes, and beliefs. Many of these have direct consequences for students. In addition, having the perspective of more teachers would have given me more opportunities to form a broader picture of many of the stories shared with me by my participants. While the voices of teachers could have helped tremendously, I wanted a study that opened a space to my participants that had not been made available to them before. Moreover, the

framework of Black feminism centers on privileging the voices of Black women and girls, and it was important that this study remained true to that overarching goal.

Section III

Suggestions for Future Research

The future of research in the field of literacy education has to be intersectional. Literacy is a sociocultural practice that, according to Gee (2012), has implications that are economic, social, institutional, moral. Consequently, we have to consider how race, culture, and ethnicity impact one's relationship to one's literacies. In addition, the field of literacy has to be receptive to the changing landscape of education, and immigration—literacy researchers therefore must acknowledge the relationship between the local and the global (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Duffy, 2011; Salomon & Nino-Murcia, 2011). As a starting point, future research has to not only think of the literate practices of girls in general terms, but they must dig deeper and ask, *who are the Black girls who occupy space in schools? what do they care about; what epistemologies and ontologies inform their world view? where do they come from? what do they want from the curriculum, teachers, administrators, and policy makers? who can make this possible?* As we forge ahead as researchers we also have to broaden the scope of what constitutes Black girlhood. We cannot continue to develop research that is exclusionary and ignores a population of girls who are standing in front of us asking to be heard. Consequently, researchers, and practitioners must begin to listen keenly to the voices of Black girls, and one place they can start is right here with my study. The data collected over the course of a year with my participants has the potential to inform future research and to reorient our current perceptions of Black girlhood.

There are three areas in particular that I contend we must pay close attention to when studying the literate lives and lived experiences of Black girls. These areas were significant in my findings and future researchers must consider how they might be consequential to the lives of Black girls more generally. First, I found that the curriculum is a highly contested aspect of my participants' experiences in schools. Either they wanted more from it, or they rejected what they were given in relation to it. Reshaping the planned curriculum (Aoki, 2005) as discussed in chapter V would open up space for Black girls to be centered in a meaningful way in the context of schools.

The second focus of research has to be Black girls' solidarity, and the implication for academic performance in schools. What I found amongst my participants is that when Black girls had the support of each other, they thrived academically and developed strong senses of self in a way that didn't occur when they were isolated and alone with their thoughts. Together, through the sisterhood, they inspired each other and were compassionate to each other's plights. Researchers and practitioners have to consider how to foster such relationships among girls and how to create spaces in schools for solidarity to be possible.

Third, future researchers and practitioners must become educated about the Black diaspora and the relationships between local and global communities. The idea that we have to focus on the local alone prevents us from understanding the ways in which what happens in one place can shape what happens in our schools, even when they seem unrelated. My participants were literate in ways that surpassed the confines of their school, and they were connected to a broader world than what they were exposed to at City High. They brought those perspectives with them into that space, and those viewpoints impacted how they understood text, what they wrote, and how they imagined their present and their future. Understanding a relationship between many communities can have significant implications for teachers and the Black girls whom they teach.

Conclusion: Looking Ahead

When I arrived in the United States from Jamaica at 9 years old, I worried insistently about fitting in. The in-betweens of being an immigrant, a Black girl, and an outsider are forever etched in my heart and mind. Striving to become something I did not understand was my norm, but at that time I had no choice. I was either going to fit in, or going to be left out; the decision was easy. However, my study reveals that multiple decades later girls are still grappling with the in-betweens of what it means to occupy space in multiple communities while existing on the margins. My hope is that this dissertation extends the scope of what we do not know about Black girls and their literate lives and lived experiences. Black girls are not only born in the United States with no connection to the diaspora. Whether they are born in the United States or abroad, they embody memories, experiences, epistemologies, and ontologies, all informed by their relationship to these places. We cannot dismiss that, nor can we treat it as if it is inconsequential. We must respect and recognize this reality as we craft narrative about their lives.

The contribution I am making to the field of literacy, teacher education, memory research, Caribbean studies, critical Black feminism, diasporic studies, girlhood studies, and education more generally is threefold. First, I have opened space for these immigrant girls from the Caribbean to tell their stories, to counter existing narratives about their lives, and to tell us how education should function to better serve their needs. They have self-defined who they are, and I am certain that their voices will enrich the current literature on Black girls. In addition, as a Black feminist scholar from the so called *third world*, I am also contributing a particular perspective that is shaped in part by my own experience as an immigrant. It is necessary for

scholars from all over the diaspora to contribute to the literature on Black girlhood, a call made earlier by Collins (2008).

Second, I believe another important contribution that I am making is one that reminds us that solidarity matters. Solidarity has the power to heal, to increase academic success, and to empower Black girls to self-define, self-actualize, and to find their agency within. Through solidarity, my participants were able to tap into their own lived curriculum (Aoki, 2005) to challenge misconceptions and to create spaces where they could begin healing and inspiring each other. It is important to know that solidarity is an essential survival strategy for Black girls in a world that does not understand them and forces them on the margins.

Finally, another important contribution to the field is the understanding that memory research with Black girls can enable them to tap into knowledge and perspectives that are not available to them in schools. Memory can also aid them in better understanding self and others, further allowing them to unpack and question text, curriculum, adults, parents, and even themselves. Dillard (2011) has suggested that memory research allows us to remember things about ourselves that we have forgotten. Memory represented a site of struggle for my participants and it was through their theorizing that they were able to create fuller, more complex versions of themselves in spaces where they had been rendered invisible. My contribution, therefore, is one that reminds us that the experiences of Black girls are so deeply nuanced that we have to give space to them to tell their own stories, and share their visions of the world

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Appendix A

Consent for Research (Minor)

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH

The Pennsylvania State University

Short Title of Project: Caribbean Immigrant Girls identities

Principal Investigator: Donna-Marie Cole-Malott

Address: 1382 Kirkland Ave, West Chester, Pa 19380

Telephone Number: 347-247-3207

Advisor: Dr. Jeanine M. Staples

Advisor Telephone Number: 609-373-2316

We are asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information about the research. Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you and take your time to make your choice.

Some of the people who are eligible to take part in this research study may not be able to give consent because they are less than 18 years of age (a minor). Instead we will ask their parent(s)/guardian(s) to give permission for their participation in the study, and we may ask them

to agree (give assent) to take part. Throughout the consent form, “you” always refers to the person who takes part in the research study.

1. Why is this research study being done?

This form is to inform you that there will be research study conducted at your high school beginning the fall semester 2016. Donna-Marie Cole-Malott will be the Ph.D. candidate from the Pennsylvania State University conducting the research. The purpose of the study is to understand how first and second-generation immigrant students construct academic and social identities through their literacy practices. This research will focus specifically on Caribbean immigrants from the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean.

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are of Caribbean ancestry and are either first or second-generation immigrant. You were also selected because you are an adolescent female. The study aims to understand, primarily how immigrant girls are constructing academic and social identities.

This research is being done to understand the role of literacy in the construction of identities. It is also being done to understand how girls are making sense of their identities in a predominantly African American school. There will be 7-10 participants in this study. All of the participants will be from your high school, and all will be adolescent girls.

2. What will happen in this research study?

During the course of the study the researcher intends to meet with participants both on an individual basis and for group meetings. During these meetings the researcher will interview participants where questions will be asked about what they do with literacy in and out of the

classroom setting. The researcher will also conduct observations where she visits classrooms, school events, and other normal school activities. The research will not interfere with normal school activities.

- An important part of this research will be the sharing of literary artifacts. The researcher will ask participants to share things that they have written both in and outside of the classroom. This means student participants will be asked to share schoolwork, and other types of projects completed in school for the purpose of this study. The researcher will also ask participants to share artifacts, such as pictures, and other material objects during the course of the study. All of these materials will be returned to the participants. Again, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, however structures are in place to keep such materials private and safe.

3. What are the risks and possible discomforts from being in this research study?

There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if your information or your identity is obtained by someone other than the investigators, but precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. The confidentiality of your electronic data created by you or by the researchers will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

4. What are the possible benefits from being in this research study?

4a. What are the possible benefits to you?

There are no perceived benefits to the participants for accepting a place in this research study. If there is any benefits, that would be for the participant to determine at the conclusion of the study.

4b. What are the possible benefits to others?

The possible benefits of this research is a contribution to the knowledge of the ways in which Caribbean immigrant girls are constructing identities and the factors that are shaping those identities.

5. What other options are available instead of being in this research study?

You may decide not to participate in this research. This research study is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate in this study.

6. How long will you take part in this research study?

The researcher will be present in the school three days per week for the entire fall semester of 2016. Participants are under no obligation to participate for the entirety of the research study. No commitment will be asked of participants, every part of this study is strictly voluntary.

7. How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you decide to take part in this research study?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and sharing of your personal research information to people who have a need to review this information.

- Information collected from you will not have any identifiable information that will be connected to you. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may find out about your participation

in this research study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research.

- The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
- The Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and
- The Office for Research Protections.

Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you. Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

8. What are the costs of taking part in this research study?

This study is strictly voluntary you will not be paid.

- You do not have to participate in this research.
- At any point during the study you can decline to participate.
- If you do participate and at a later time decide to stop there will be absolutely no penalties or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

9. What are your rights if you take part in this research study?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

- You do not have to be in this research.
- If you choose to be in this research, you have the right to stop at any time.
- If you decide not to be in this research or if you decide to stop at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

10. If you have questions or concerns about this research study, whom should you call?

Please call the head of the research study Donna-Marie Cole-Malott, at 347-247-3207 if you:

- Have questions, complaints or concerns about the research.
- Believe you may have been harmed by being in the research study.

You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775,

ORProtections@psu.edu if you:

- Have questions regarding your rights as a person in a research study.
- Have concerns or general questions about the research.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to offer input or to talk to someone else about any concerns related to the research.

Instructions: For parent(s) or guardian(s) signature(s) if child subjects enrolled.

Signature of Parent(s)/Guardian for Child

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you permit your child to be in this research and agree to allow his/her information to be used and shared as described above.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

Printed Name

ASSENT FOR RESEARCH

The research study has been explained to you. You have had a chance to ask questions to help you understand what will happen in this research. You Do Not have to be in the research study. If you agree to participate and later change your mind, you can tell the researchers, and the research will be stopped.

You have decided: **(Initial one)**

_____ To take part in the research.

_____ NOT to take part in the research.

Signature of Subject

Date _____

Printed Name

Appendix B

Consent for Research (Adults)

Short Title of Project: Black Immigrant Girls identities

Principal Investigator: Donna-Marie Cole-Malott

Address: 1382 Kirkland Ave, West Chester, Pa 19380

Telephone Number: 347-247-3207

Advisor: Dr. Jeanine M. Staples

Advisor Telephone Number: 609-373-2316

Subject's Printed Name: _____

We are asking you to be in a research study. This form gives you information about the research. Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you. Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you and take your time to make your choice.

1. Why is this research study being done?

This form is to inform you that there will be research study conducted at City High beginning the fall semester 2016. Donna-Marie Cole-Malott will be the Ph.D. candidate from the Pennsylvania State University conducting the research. The purpose of the study is to understand how first and second-generation immigrant students construct academic and social identities through their literacy practices. This research will focus specifically on Caribbean immigrants from the English-speaking countries in the Caribbean.

We are asking you to be in this research study because you are a parent, a teacher, administrator, staff member, or a member of the community. Your involvement is necessary because you can help the researcher better understand the context and structures of the community where the research will be conducted, and also the adolescent participants.

This research is being done to understand the role of literacy in the construction of identities. It is also being done to understand how girls are making sense of their identities in a predominantly African American school. There will be 7-10 participants in this study. All of the participants will be from your high school (community), and all will be adolescent girls.

2. What will happen in this research study?

During the course of the study the researcher intends to meet with participants both on an individual basis and for group meetings. During these meetings the researcher will interview participants where questions will be asked about where they are from and their connection to the school, the community, and the student participants involved in the study. During the research study, the researcher will reach out to you to ask you questions that may provide some understanding about the student participant, the school, the community, or the country in which you are from. These questions are mainly to help provide a broader context for the research study.

3. What are the risks and possible discomforts from being in this research study?

There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if your information or your identity is obtained by someone other than the investigators, but precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. The confidentiality of your electronic data created by you or by the

researchers will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

4. What are the possible benefits from being in this research study?

4a. What are the possible benefits to you?

There are no perceived benefits to the participants for accepting a place in this research study. If there is any benefits, that would be for the participant to determine at the conclusion of the study.

4b. What are the possible benefits to others?

The possible benefits of this research is a contribution to the knowledge of the ways in which Caribbean immigrant girls are constructing identities and the factors that are shaping those identities.

5. What other options are available instead of being in this research study?

You may decide not to participate in this research. This research study is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate in this study.

6. How long will you take part in this research study?

The researcher will be present in the school three days per week for the entire fall semester of 2016. Participants are under no obligation to participate for the entirety of the research study. No commitment will be asked of participants, every part of this study is strictly voluntary.

7. How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you decide to take part in this research study?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and sharing of your personal research information to people who have a need to review this information.

Information collected from you will not have any identifiable information that will be connected to you. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

We will do our best to keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may find out about your participation in this research study. For example, the following people/groups may check and copy records about this research.

The Office for Human Research Protections in the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, The Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) and The Office for Research Protections.

Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private. However, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

8. What are the costs of taking part in this research study?

This study is strictly voluntary you will not be paid.

You do not have to participate in this research.

At any point during the study you can decline to participate.

If you do participate and at a later time decide to stop there will be absolutely no penalties or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

9. What are your rights if you take part in this research study?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

You do not have to be in this research.

If you choose to be in this research, you have the right to stop at any time.

If you decide not to be in this research or if you decide to stop at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

10. If you have questions or concerns about this research study, whom should you call?

Please call the head of the research study Donna-Marie Cole-Malott, at 347-247-3207 if you:

Have questions, complaints or concerns about the research.

Believe you may have been harmed by being in the research study.

You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775, ORProtections@psu.edu if you:

Have questions regarding your rights as a person in a research study.

Have concerns or general questions about the research.

You may also call this number if you cannot reach the research team or wish to offer input or to talk to someone else about any concerns related to the research.

INFORMED CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN RESEARCH

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Your signature below means that you have explained the research to the subject or subject representative and have answered any questions he/she has about the research.

Signature of person who explained this research Date

Printed Name

(Only approved investigators for this research may explain the research and obtain informed consent.)

Signature of Person Giving Informed Consent

Before making the decision about being in this research you should have:

Discussed this research study with an investigator,

Read the information in this form, and

Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered.

You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

Signature of Subject

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily choose to be in this research and agree to allow your information to be used and shared as described above.

Signature of Subject

Date

Printed Name

ASSENT FOR RESEARCH

The research study has been explained to you. You have had a chance to ask questions to help you understand what will happen in this research. You Do Not have to be in the research study. If you agree to participate and later change your mind, you can tell the researchers, and the research will be stopped.

You have decided: (Initial one) ____ To take part in the research.

____NOT to take part in the
research.

Signature of Subject

Date

Printed Name

Appendix C

Sample Research Questions for Adolescent Participants

- How do you self-identify, and why?
- How would you define literacy or what it means to be literate?
- Tell me about yourself as a student?
- Tell me about whom you are outside of school? (If it's different from who you are at school)
- Do you at all identify with your parent's home country, and if so in what regard. Explain.
- Tell me about your family, and your community?
- What has your experience been like at this school?
- What subjects do you enjoy in school and why?

Interview Questions for Group Discussions

- What has your experience been like at your high school, and how is it similar or different from the experiences of others within this group?
- Talk about a moment when you felt different or similar to other girls in your school or grade?
- What can you tell me about your experiences as first or second-generation immigrants in a predominantly African American school?
- How do you self-identify at this moment? Have you ever identified differently at any point while in high school?

Appendix D

Sample Research Questions for Adult Participants

Interview questions for schoolteachers, administrators or staff

What is a typical day like for you at City High?

How would you describe your school to an outsider? What makes it unique in relation to other schools? What makes is similar?

How would you describe your neighborhood to an outsider? What makes it unique in relation to other neighborhoods? What makes is similar?

How do you think your Caribbean immigrant students feel about their ethnic/racial background in this school? What role does it play in the classroom?

What do you think your Caribbean immigrant students' experiences are like at this school?

Interview questions for community members, policy makers, activists, and other

adults (specific questions are tailored to individuals)

How would you describe your school to an outsider? What makes it unique in relation to other schools? What makes is similar?

How would you describe your neighborhood to an outsider? What makes it unique in relation to other neighborhoods? What makes is similar?

How do you think Caribbean immigrant girls feel about their ethnic/racial background?

What role do Caribbean Immigrants play in this community or at the high school?

Interview questions for parents of primary participants

What is your background and how long have you been in the United States?

How would you describe your neighborhood to an outsider?

How would you characterize your relationship with your child(ren)'s school?

How do you think your child(ren) feel about their ethnic/racial background? What role do you think it plays in their schooling?

What influence do you believe you have in the lives of your children in terms of how they self-identify?

Appendix E

Verbal and E-Mail Recruitment Script for adult and student participants

Hello,

My name is Donna-Marie Cole-Malott, and I am Ph.D. candidate at Pennsylvania State University. I will be at this high school for the academic year, beginning the fall of 2016. I will be collecting data for a research project that I working on for my dissertation. This research focuses specifically on how immigrant girls from the Caribbean; either first, or second-generation students are constructing identities through literacies.

I am hoping to work with mainly adolescent girls (who are from the Caribbean), and possibly their teachers, parents, other school staff, teachers, and administrators to gain a greater understanding and perspective about this process. In order to obtain this understanding, I will shadow students, interview them, and hold various group meetings that can contribute to the insight.

If you would like to participate in this study that would be fantastic, but I should be clear that this is a strictly voluntary project, and you will not be paid for your participation. If you do participate and want to withdraw at any point you can do so with no penalties or objections from me.

If you have any questions, comments, or if you would like to discuss this project in greater detail, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Thank you,

Donna-Marie Cole-Malott

Donna-Marie Cole-Malott
Lebanon Valley College
101 North College Avenue, Annville, PA
347-247-3207 e-mail: malott@lvc.edu

CURRENT POSITION

2018 Director of the Institute of Educational Governance and Leadership –in concert with

- Lebanon Valley College
- Pennsylvania State Board Association
- CM Regent Insurance Company
- CM Cares, The Church Mutual Insurance Company Foundation
- Pennsylvania Public Education Foundation

EDUCATION

2018 Ph.D. Candidate (Defense date, August 21, 2018) Curriculum and Instruction, emphasis in Language, Culture and Society

- Dissertation Title: Immigrant Girls from the Caribbean: Identities, Literacies, and the Social and Academic Construction of Selves
- Minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
- Dissertation Chair: Jeanine Staples, Ed.D.

2007 MA. English Education, CUNY, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY

2005 BA. English, CUNY, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY

2002 A.A.S. Journalism and Print Media, Brooklyn, NY

PUBLICATIONS

Articles in refereed journals, published

Cole-Malott, D., & Malott, C. (2016). Testing and Social Studies in Capitalist Schooling. Monthly Review, 67(10), 51.

Chapters in Edited Books

Pruyn, M. **Cole-Malott, D.** Orelus, Malott, C. (Eds) (2018). Paths to Gender Justice in Education: Theories and Practices. Charlotte, NC: IAP.

Cole-Malott, D. (2018) Introduction: Gender justice in the era of Trump. in Pruyn, M. Cole-Malott, D. Orelus, Malott, C., Paths to Gender Justice in Education: Theories and Practices. Charlotte, NC: IAP.