INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A CYBER GIRL: EXPLORING INSTAGRAM AS A POTENTIAL COUNTERSPACE FOR BLACK GIRLS' LITERACY PRACTICES

By

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ABSTRACT

JIMMEKA LASHONDA ANDERSON: Incidents in the life of a cyber girl: Exploring Instagram as a potential counterspace for Black girls' literacy practices. (Under the direction of DR. CHANCE LEWIS and DR. BRITTANY ANDERSON)

Although research has been done to explore social media as a safe space with Black girls (Womack, 2013), there is limited research that assesses social media as a counter space for Black girls' literacies. According to The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2017), Black teens are the largest users of Instagram and SnapChat. While broader research has looked at Black girls' literacies and digital literacies among (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Price-Dennis, 2016), there is limited research that has explored the literacy practices of Black girls specifically in the digital space they predominantly use, Instagram. Most importantly, the need to explore the elements of literacy that engage Black girls in non-formal academic spaces in which they utilize excessively may provide context for application in academic curriculum. This research study explored whether Instagram may provide a potential counterspace for Black girls' literacies and the ways in which they practice literacy through the examination of digital posts, online observations, and interviews with two adolescent Black girls during an eight-week period. Findings showed that Instagram offered several affordances of active resistance and counter-narrative formation with Black girls but lacked in building meaningful relationships that did not already exist in their physical lives. While acts of racism and sexism were shared to be visible on Instagram by participants, findings showed that Instagram empowered Black girls to advocate for themselves and others. Additionally, findings from this study highlighted that literacy

practices with Black girls were multiple in practice, tied to their identities, historical, intellectual, critical, and collaborative with an emphasis on emotional connection.

Keywords: Instagram, Counterspace, Black Girls, Literacy, Social Media

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

With the many disparities and critical issues that impact the lives of Black girls, it is important to center their experiences to reduce any barriers confronting them on the path to college or career success. In-school literacy proficiency is one of the critical issues among Black girls in the US that does not receive much attention yet needs to be a focus. National data shows that Black girls in the United States perform at the lowest proficiency rate in reading out of their gender peer group (NAEP, 2019). By viewing the alarming national findings with reading proficiency scores, this research has been inspired by the necessity to explore the literate lives of Black girls and their practices outside of school. According to The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2017), Black teens are the largest users of Instagram and SnapChat. Research has looked at Black girl literacies and digital literacies among this population (Price-Dennis, 2016), but have not explored their usage in non-academic or informal practice specifically in the digital space they predominantly use, Instagram. Two research questions guided this study and explored (RQ1) how Instagram was a potential counterspace for Black girl literacies and (RQ2) what literacy practices adolescent Black girls engage in when using Instagram? The title of this project is inspired by Harriet Jacobs's autobiography, *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl*, which is one of the few accounted slave narratives written by a Black girl that conveys the intersectional challenges of self-actualization and victimization linked to oppression. Jacobs's work inspired me to seek the liberatory literacy practices (just as writing her autobiography was to her) with Black girls in digital counterspaces by exploring their autobiographical

artifacts (posts), self-portraits (selfies), language, and communication (comments) on Instagram. Thus, the title of this research is named *Incidents in the Life of a Cyber Girl: Exploring Instagram as a Potential Counterspace for Black Girls' Literacy Practices*.

A Personal Reflection: My Literacy Practices as An Adolescent Black Girl

As a young Black girl growing up in the public school system, I was labeled a reluctant reader. Language arts was my least favorite subject and where I struggled the most during my journey to high school graduation. Interestingly, my passion to express myself as a Black girl through writing poetry, songs, homemade Hallmark cards for friends and family, and reading *Chicken Soup* for my teenage soul was indeed literacy. It was a form of literacy that was not embraced or celebrated in the classroom consistently but made occasional visits in the curriculum like distant cousins on the holidays. I was happy and engaged when poetry or storytelling was presented in the curriculum but was sad to see those lessons go away and hope they would return the following year.

It was during those moments in the curriculum where I shined as a student through poetry contests that allowed for my penmanship to be framed in the elementary school's office entrance and affirmed my literacy abilities. It was during those moments a seven-year-old Black girl living in poverty in a city ranked fifty out of fifty in economic mobility (Chetty et al., 2014) was able to write a short story about the most embarrassing moment in her short-lived life that would label her as a gifted child and change the trajectory of her academic future and existence. Ironically, my exceptionality in creative forms of writing which labeled me as a gifted child did not translate to my success in the formal literacy curriculum and schooling that I was provided. The constant struggle I endured as a Black girl in Language Arts created insecurity, frustration, and eventually

detestation for the overall subject. This is a detestation that is too familiar with many Black girls in education reflected in disproportionately low reading proficiency scores in the United States.

As a fluent speaker of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in my home, I endured a constant struggle with processing formal English vocabulary and academic grammar during my school aged years and onward to adolescence. While I faced challenges with formal literacy comprehension, literacy always remained prevalent in my life. At the age of thirteen, I read my first book for leisure. This book was called *Flyy Girl* by Omar Tyree and was one of the first books to spark the new genre of urban literature. A friend gave me her copy of the book in my eighth-grade homeroom class and told me I had to read it! It is a coming-of-age story about an adolescent Black girl named Tracy Ellison, and the book explores Black girlhood, friendship, materialism, young love, and sexuality. It captured everything attached to my identity and reality at the time. Up until that point of my adolescent life when I engaged in literacy through school, it was as if I was reading a language or culture that was not my own. I did not identify with the stories, characters, or language of any book that was assigned to me as a student. Literature provided to me by the school was not intriguing and made reading feel like it was a chore.

When reading *Flyy Girl*, I heard my voice in the words of Tracey, matched her melanin, and dressed myself mentally in the fashions of her world that synonymously connected us in those moments through text. Challenges endured by Tracey as an urban Black teenage girl were astonishingly congruent with issues that I was facing with my peers. This piece of literature was related to my very own culture. Once labeled as a

reluctant reader, I read the entire book in two days. *Flyy Girl* as a work of literature changed my life by empowering me to recognize I was above my cultural environment and had complete control over my destiny as a Black girl. But unfortunately, there was no space for this urban genre of literature in my schooling. As *Flyy Girl* sparked my interest in reading, I sought out more books that were similar in context and filled my bedroom bookshelf with Black girl stories. It was then as an adolescent Black girl I began owning my literacy journey and engaged in literacy practices that were not welcomed in school yet shaped my identity outside of school.

Defining Literacy

The idea of defining literacy may seem simplistic at first attempt. But once you seek to explore its purpose and functionality, it becomes a lot more complex by nature. This complexity in conceptualizing its meaning is because there is no definitive definition for the term literacy that exists. Despite the various attempts to define the term by scholars, there is a consensus of acknowledgement to literacy being a human right. While literacy has traditionally been viewed as the ability to read and write text, such as the historical alpha-numeric symbols attached to language, organizations and scholars have expanded and challenged this notion overtime (Gee, 2015; Kress, 2003; Perry, 2012; Street, 2006). For instance, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017) defined literacy as a learning continuum for goal achievement, knowledge development, and active participation in society. There is a sense of fluidity in the concept of literacy as defined by UNESCO (2017) that is similar to the approach for literacy by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

According to NCTE (2019), literacy is a collection of sociocultural practices shared within communities for communication. The word sociocultural means the behaviors, language, and traditions belonging to a group of people that are tied to their identities. While these approaches to literacy are non-binary in function, others may focus on literacy as an ability or skill to be attained by understanding, identifying, and creating alpha-numeric text (Montoya, 2018). These differing approaches have created what is known as the autonomous model and ideological model for literacy. As I begin to share these two models in detail, it is important to note that each approach towards literacy has an overall effect on classroom instruction and student engagement.

The Autonomous Model

The autonomous model looks at literacy as a decontextualized skill that showcases ability or lack of ability (Horn, 2016). With the autonomous model of literacy, "literacy is something that one either has or does not have; people are either literate or illiterate" (Perry, 2012, p. 53). This model seems reflective of the United States's schooling approach to literacy with national assessments and scores that deem students as having or lacking literacy proficiency (Simon & Campano, 2013). Hall (1998) asserted that in school literacy is objectified as something to be studied, obtained, and mastered. By schools reflecting an autonomous model of literacy, narratives such as the Black male literacy crisis with Black boys (Kirkland, 2013) have emerged and caused educators and students themselves to believe in the concept of illiteracy. There is a notion with the autonomous model that illiteracy is equated to ignorance and rectifying this state may lead to economic and social mobility (Graff & Duffy, 2018). Some of the shortcomings of the autonomous model have been highlighted by scholars such as Street (2006) and

Gee (2015) who have evolved this traditional approach to literacy towards an ideological model.

The Ideological Model and New Literacy Studies

With the evolving social practices of literacy, New Literacy Studies challenge the autonomous paradigms of literacy. Street (2006) asserted that through the ideological model, literacy varies with context and culture and thus causes diverse literacies to evolve and shift as conditions change. The ideological model has been deemed more culturally sensitive than the autonomous model as it focuses on knowledge sharing and identity formation (Gee, 2015). Hall (1998) suggested that using the term literacies instead of literacy is indicative of the ideological model's focus on inclusivity and engagement. Similarly, Hull and Schultz (2001) advised that when discussing literacy, it is imperative to highlight practices, identities, and activities in and out of school. By shifting towards exploring literacies or literacy practices, a non-technical approach is established that contextualizes literacy as a social process (Liebel, 2021).

When defining literacies or literacy practices among the Black community, Richardson (2003) stated that it is a way of knowing how to express and love oneself in society. As the ideological model veers away from looking at literacy as an entity, Harste (2003) proclaimed that the affordances of the approach could be revolutionary. I wholeheartedly agree with Harste that an ideological approach to literacy may lend opportunities for transformative learning. It is my belief that the ideological model deconstructs the power structure of Eurocentric ideology and supremacy by devaluing the assimilation of language as practice and monoculturalism as the standard. For this reason, when engaging in literacy practices with students that have historically been

marginalized, such as Black girls, taking on an autonomous approach to literacy is a pernicious practice that is detrimental to their existence and success. Furthermore, this research explores literacy practices as defined by the ideological model as this work centers the literacies that are employed by Black girls. Next, I will share foundational elements of literacies or literacy practices through the ideological model.

Language

Language has been defined by scholars as a social meaning-making process (Halliday, 1975; Smitherman, 2006). Social meaning-making can be thought of as the ways in which we as individuals derive our understanding of information, experiences, people, and even ourselves. Because social meaning-making is a core component of literacy, connecting the socio-cultural and vernacular influence of language is imperative with exploring literacy practices. Black literacy practices of language may consist of AAVE or non-verbal cues such as hand gestures and eye rolls that are understood within the culture but may be misinterpreted as threatening or aggressive by other groups (Richardson, 2003).

Vernacular social language in literature communicates to the audience or readers as everyday conversation (Gee, 2015). For instance, in the book *Flyy Girl* that I read as an adolescent, vernacular social language was used in the text to communicate and connect with me socially as a reader. An example of how vernacular social language is used in the text is seen in a line of the book that says “Come on now, every time we get together we talk about the same-o-same-o.” I could connect with this vernacular and social language as an adolescent because it registered with how I communicated on a daily basis with family and friends. My exposure to reading urban literature during my

adolescent years outside of school heavily supports the ideological model of literacy as a social practice through language.

Multimodality

It is extremely evident in our current digital society that what once counted as text has changed drastically. True enough, reading and writing are social practices that are vital to form language development, but the practices for engaging in reading and writing are fluid and constantly evolving as technology evolves (Gee, 2015). The extensiveness of literacy in the digital era now aligns with media creation and is contingent upon knowing about audio formats such as an mp3 and how to download content, sending emails from mobile devices, and uploading photos to the digital cloud or a social media page (Jocson, 2018). Collaborating in online communities along with connecting and accessing information are additional literacy necessities beyond obtaining a career, but for thriving in the new world (Mirra et al., 2018). The state of digital technology as being ever-evolving has produced many affordances of multimodality (Kress, 2003). Multimodality is described by Jewitt et al. (2016) as the many semiotic resources used for meaning making.

Television shows, music videos, and social media are all considered forms of multimodal platforms and text. Interestingly, these platforms consume most of students and even adults' lives on a daily basis. Stein (2004) highlighted that multimodality acknowledges the limits of language and extends greater expression of the human experience through literacy practices. These affordances may be a draw for students to consistently engage with various modes of texts as often as they do with unlimited and uninterrupted 24-7 access to multimodal platforms through the internet. The internet has

created the emergence of "new media" which is significantly different from traditional media in function. One difference is largely due to the fact that people are no longer restricted to assume the role of viewer and consumer with traditional media (i.e. television and radio) but can be creators as well. Multimodality has lent a more interactive experience through new media for virtual gaming, conversing with friends through video, or just recording fun dance moves to share on Tik Tok. Students can participate and explore the world through multimodal literacies online at any time or place (Jewitt et al., 2016). Unfortunately, some educators do not employ multimodality in their instructional approaches and disregard the benefits of multiple literacy modes that exist in our society today (Larson, 2006).

Content

Content refers to the topics, information, subjects, and meanings found in various modes of text. According to NCTE (2019), literacy practices should allow for content exploration and engage students critically across various modes of inclusive text. As stated by Freire (1970), children read the world before they read the word. Basically, this means children are always making meaning with content they witness in the world every day before they even learn how to read words in a book. A child may not know how to read the word McDonalds, but they know the meaning of the golden arch symbol or the I'm lovin' it jingle on TV. As seen with the doll test developed by psychologist, Kenneth and Mamie Clark, which was used during the Brown vs. Board of Education court case, children at an early age make meaning of the world subconsciously with race by determining the color Black as bad and white as good. For this reason, critical literacies

have been implemented in education with oppressed students to analyze power structures in society.

In addition, NCTE (2019) asserted that literacy practices are to amplify individual narratives and challenge those that are counterproductive. Research has also shown how critical literacies enhance the critical consciousnesses of oppressed youth to their social conditions and provides accessibility to transformative outcomes (Wiggan, 2011). Critical literacy practices have been utilized as a tool to deconstruct systems of power and privilege with marginalized students through sociocultural practices such as poetry and hip hop (Low, 2011). Over time, critical literacies have evolved and extended the development of additional literacy frameworks such as Black Girl Literacies (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) and Critical Media Literacy (Morrell at al., 2013).

Interaction

Many of the core principles of literacy practice as outlined by NCTE highlights connection and interaction. NCTE (2019) suggested that literacy should: (a) involve active and effective participation in a networked world, (b) bridge cross-cultural connections and relationships with others for collaboration and problem solving, and (c) promote culturally sustaining communication. Keefe and Copeland (2011) also highlighted that literacy practices involve communication and contact with others and are the collective responsibility of each individual in a community. Thus, it is important to acknowledge literacy as not a singular trait acquired by an individual, but as a practice that is dependent upon others. As Halliday (1975) asserted, language was not derived for the usage of one person but instead for two or more people to communicate.

Black Girls, Education and Literacy Today

When assessing the many disparities and critical issues that impact the lives of Black girls in the United States, a sense of urgency has emerged to reduce barriers and help them reach their full potential (Evans-Winters, 2005; Price-Dennis, 2016; Womack, 2013). School systems in the United States are plagued by disadvantageous curriculum that influence the academic experience of Black girls (Wiggan, 2011). Culturally insensitive pedagogical practices and inequitable school discipline policies also threaten the existence of Black girlhood versus serving as a support for their liberation (Annamma et al., 2019). Although Black girls make up eight percent of K–12 students nationally, they are more likely from their gender peer group to be excluded or criminalized through disciplinary practices in school (Morris, 2016). Even far more discouraging, Black girls endure higher levels of sexual violence inside and outside of schools than their other female peer groups (Decker et al., 2007). These insufferable schooling experiences have yielded normalcy in the lives of Black girls and unjustifiably influence academic performance, confidence, and validation.

While schools today are requiring Black girls to read books like *Tuck Everlasting* or *The Hobbit*, Black girls are enduring trivial experiences, violence, identity trauma, and opposition that are not reflected in the stories, characters, or literacy practices provided to them for their academic canon. Although schools are not providing literature to help Black girls understand the world in which they live, they are reading the media everyday which depicts kidnapping, sexual abuse, and the killing of bodies that look just like them (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Further, when Black girls turn the channel to try and

escape this horrific literary genre, they read spaces of anti-Blackness, classified as kid-friendly sitcoms, that tell them they are invisible and do not belong (Love, 2019).

Black girl narratives in mass media are submerged in gender bias and racial stereotypes that also influence the perceptions and interactions of adults in school settings on a daily basis (Crenshaw et al., 2015). The dehumanization and misrepresentation of Black girls in media coincides with the disregard and neglect of Black girls in mandated school curriculum by sending a clear message that they do not matter (Jeffries & Jeffries, 2013). Thus, the need to explore spaces that are utilized by Black girls for refuge and healing are vital for educators that are invested in more than just their survival, but their success (Evans-Winters, 2005).

Background of Study

Exploring social interventions such as social media to better reach and effectively serve Black girls should be taken into consideration. Students' use of social media has the potential to offer several benefits such as a connection to other students and the institution, reduced isolation, and access to resources (Miller, 2017). Social media movements capturing violence of Black girls and social activism such as #MeToo, #SayHerName, and #BlackGirlMagic highlight the potential for social media to serve as a space of liberation for Black girls (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016). In addition, the usage of digital media among Black girls provides a space to address issues of identity, achievement, safety, self-expression, and social justice (Greene, 2016). For instance, Kirkland and Shange (2010) discovered the similarities of literacy artifacts witnessed historically with women and digital artifacts that Black girls utilize today online. These digital artifacts captured the stories, struggles, and triumphs of young Black girls. Their research

highlighted how digital artifacts are used by Black girls to express their pain, personal experiences, and create spaces for healing.

Counterspaces are constructed spaces where oppressed populations experience liberation outside of the dominant majority or from hegemonic influence. Case and Hunter (2012) developed the counterspace framework to operationalize the term counterspace for scholarship and practice. By drawing from their framework, practitioners can explore potential counterspaces and their characteristics. The counterspace framework established by Case and Hunter (2012) is one of the three frameworks that I employed in this study. Although research has been done to explore social media, such as #BlackTwitter, as a counterspace with Black youth (Hill, 2018; Maragh, 2018; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2018), there is limited research that assesses social media as a counterspace for adolescent Black girls' literacy practices specifically based on age and gender. According to The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2017), Black teens are the largest users of Instagram and SnapChat. Research has looked at Black girl literacies and digital literacies among this population (Price-Dennis, 2016), but have not explored their usage in non-academic practice or specifically in one of the digital spaces they predominantly use—Instagram. Most importantly, the need to explore the elements of literacy practices that engage Black girls in non-formal academic spaces which they utilize excessively outside of school may provide context for application in academic curriculum.

Study Overview

For my research, I conducted a collective case study to explore how Instagram provides a potential counterspace for Black girl literacies through the exploration of

posts, digital artifacts, interviews, and field notes from online observations with two adolescent Black girls over an eight-week period. Instagram bounded this study with Black adolescent girls. Additionally, the two adolescent Black girl participants comprised two individual cases to be explored. Because this study sought Black adolescent girls who were active users of social media, convenient and criterion sampling were employed. Criteria for the study stipulated that all participants (a) identified as a Black girl; (b) were between the ages 13 and 18; and (c) posted on Instagram weekly.

The analytic approaches utilized for this study were visual discourse analysis and content analysis. Pre-determined categories explored consisted of: (a) language, (b) content and topics, (c) multimodality, and (d) audience interaction. Language involved exploring word choice, point of view and perspective of each case through posts. Content and topics involved exploring the contextuality of each post as being political, entertainment, etc. Multimodality identified the types of mediums used by participants and the relationship between images and caption. Lastly, audience interaction involved exploring who responded, how participants responded, and who they were commenting on in the space. This research was guided by a Critical Race Feminist theoretical lens (Wing, 1997), Counterspace framework (Case & Hunter, 2012) and Black Girl Literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). The broader questions that guided my research were:

RQ1: How is Instagram a potential counterspace for Black girl literacies?

RQ2: What literacy practices do adolescent Black girls engage in when using Instagram?

Definition of Terms

Highlighting the definition of terms is essential for explaining the core concepts to be discussed in a research study (Roberts, 2010). I have provided the definitions of key terms that will be beneficial to understand. These terms connect to various forms of literacy practice and provide insight on content that will be highlighted in the research design and analysis. The following terms will be utilized throughout this research paper.

Affinity Space: A space that allows various perspectives to gather, engage, and contribute based on a common interest (Gee, 2005).

Audience Interaction: Engagement with readers or viewers of content (Gee, 2015).

Black: An individual who identifies their race as being African, African American, African European, Black, or their ancestry originating from Africa.

Black Girl Literacies: A pedagogical approach that center Black girls in the context of literacy and their social practices (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016).

Content Discourse Analysis: Involves analyzing natural conversation for language and social interaction context (Tracy & Robles, 2013).

Counternarratives: Stories that challenge those constructed by the White majority and captures the experiences of marginalized groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Counterspace: Settings that challenge dominant and deficit cultural narratives and promote positive self-concept among marginalized groups (Case & Hunter, 2012).

Digital Artifacts: Content constructed by individuals online consisting of audio, video or images (Kirkland & Shange, 2010).

Instagram: A social networking site that allows users to utilize multimodal literacy practices to share photos, videos, and text publicly or privately through the platform (Handayani, 2015).

Language: Defined by scholars as a social meaning-making process (Halliday, 1975; Smitherman, 2006).

Multimodality: The many semiotic resources used for meaning making such as audio, visual, video, text, etc (Jewitt et al., 2016).

Posts: To publish content on an online forum or electronic message board for viewers to read and engage (Merriam Webster's online dictionary, n.d.).

Social Media: Social media is a web-based application that has become a popular tool for adolescents to express themselves and communicate with peers (Handayani, 2015).

Visual Discourse Analysis: Involves analyzing visual imagery for language and social interaction context (Albers, 2007).

Summary

The importance of this research is necessitated in the urgency to explore literacy as a social practice with Black girls in non-formal spaces outside of school. A collective case study with two adolescent Black girls between the ages 13 and 17 was conducted to explore their informal literacy practices on Instagram and how they utilized the social media app as a counterspace. This collective case study provided insight for educators to learn how Instagram may serve as a digital counterspace for Black girls' literacy practices. Findings from this research may encourage the replication of digital counterspaces such as Instagram in literacy education to produce an equitable and inclusive learning experience for Black girls.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Review of Literature

In this chapter, I explore the historical challenges with access to literacy for Black girls while conceptualizing the purpose for practice from past to present. To conceptualize the purpose for literacy practice, I review examples of literature written by Black girls throughout history and glean the overarching objective for their contribution based on content. This leads to a brief review of literature that delves into the modern day challenges with literacy practices for Black girls in schools and the need to study literacy counterspaces for their success. Next, I review literature and research studies that highlight counterhegemonic literacy practices with Black girls and facilitate a counterspace for learning. Lastly, I provide an overview of literature on the affordances of social media with Black girls' literacy practices and further explore research on Instagram and its usage among this population.

Brief History of Black Girls and Literacy in the United States

Literacy for Black girls, past and present, has been attached to the embodiment of nothing more than a struggle (Ladson-Billings, 2016). In order to contextualize the literacy experiences of Black girls in the United States, we must extend our minds historically to reflect on the sacrifices that were made during the antebellum period to learn how to read and write. Once we grasp the attachment to literacy and liberation from the past, it becomes fundamentally possible to comprehend the challenges for Black girls to practice and achieve literacy in non-liberatory spaces. Moreover, a historical lens also lends a better understanding of the liberatory practices that Black girls engage in when

seeking spaces of refuge to express themselves freely through text, mark their visibility through autobiographical artifacts, and reclaim their existence through counternarratives. Counternarratives are stories that challenge those constructed by the White majority and captures the experiences of marginalized groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is from these understandings of Black girl literacy practices from the past we can understand the emphasis and draw towards expressing their own physical representations in their writings. We may also comprehend their interest in reading about Black girl identity as methods of resistance to oppressive paradigms. Furthermore, we can then explore the lure and practice of Black girls to post images that reclaim their identities and share their own stories through visual texts in social media spaces where they are empowered today.

Literacy During the Antebellum

It is in the hush harbors of the South during the antebellum period where the struggle for literacy among enslaved Black people becomes extremely apparent in America (Anderson, 1988). To mentally saturate the imminent circumstances and perils attached to a life or limb in exchange for literacy while enslaved, we must grasp the unparalleled tenacity for Black girls to learn how to read and write during this period (Collier-Thomas, 1982). In 1830, states such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Louisiana upheld public beatings, fines, and imprisonment for any person teaching enslaved Blacks to read or write (Span & Anderson, 2005). For enslaved Blacks who were caught learning to read, their punishment was harsher and first involved cutting off a finger as a warning (Birgit, 2010). According to Birgit (2010), if enslaved Blacks were found again committing a literacy crime, it could then cost them their life. So why would enslaved Blacks be willing to risk their lives to learn how to read? During this period, enslaved

Blacks were cognizant of the relationship between literacy and economic and political power (Schiller, 2008). But most importantly, literacy within itself represented humanity and citizenship among the enslaved Blacks who were regarded as inhumane and unworthy of citizenship status in America (Bly, 2006). Thus, for many enslaved Blacks, they were actually risking their lives for their humanity and literacy was just the vehicle.

Limited access to literacy during antebellum slavery was primarily obtainable to Black girls who were allowed to work in the homes of their White slave owners (Monaghan, 1998). Such perceived privileges permitted accessibility to news articles, letters, and notes that would serve as a lifeline for information once shared with the enslaved community (Arao, 2016). Affordances of in-home literacy access were granted largely to mulatto Black girls who would eventually leverage their knowledge towards economic mobility postbellum (Reece, 2018). According to Reece (2018), literacy accessibility primarily among mulatto Blacks during the antebellum period contributed heavily to the social stratification of Black people based on colorism following emancipation. While Black girls had similar struggles with literacy during the antebellum period, it is important to understand the intersections of practice and access based on social strata and locality (Crenshaw, 1989). Just as many Black girls today share parallel experiences with literacy as in the past, there are differences that may exist based on accessibility and socioeconomic status.

Although teaching enslaved Blacks to read was prohibited in many southern states, some plantation owners allowed literacy instruction. At times, it was the responsibility and household task for White mistresses to teach enslaved children and women to read (Cornelius, 1999). Enslaved Black girls who served as caretakers of

White children also retained and learned literacy through their assigned duties (Gundaker, 2007). Bible literacy was the primary form of practice granted to enslaved Blacks by slave owners who allowed instruction in reading but not writing (Heather, 2005). According to Heather (2005), slaveowners who provided Bible literacy believed that enslaved Blacks should have access to read the word of God, but providing writing instruction was a threat to the social power structure that existed. Slaveowners who did not allow any form of literacy instruction for enslaved Blacks possessed similar fears and were circumspect that reading and writing would lead to a rebellion and thus sought to limit communication transactions (Williams, 2005).

Despite the fact many criminal sanctions existed for teaching enslaved Blacks to read, several organizations established during the antebellum period sought to promote slave literacy. One of the most prolonged efforts for teaching enslaved Blacks to read was The Charles Town Negro school founded in 1743 in Charleston, South Carolina (Watson, 2009). With Bible literacy at the core of its teaching, the school was an extension of the Church of England and sought to rid paganism through education for free and enslaved Black children. Although schools existed for Black children in the North before the emancipation of slavery, such as the New York African Free School built in 1787, the primary focus of these institutions was for assimilation and not liberation (Rury, 2013). Inversely, organizations established by Blacks that promoted literacy during the antebellum had established different missions for enslaved Blacks to learn how to read. For instance, the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded in 1794 by Richard Allen promoted slave literacy for economic independence and liberation (Wayman, 2000). Richard Allen and other free Blacks established libraries, literary societies, schools, and

publications during the antebellum period to carry out their mission to educate Blacks (Newman, 2008).

Many enslaved Blacks who acquired literacy skills were able to write out their escape plans from slavery and became benefactors for slave communication networks (Cornelius, 1983). Autobiographical narratives of enslaved literate Blacks also became prevalent during the antebellum period to document their experiences. While several autobiographical narratives of enslaved Blacks have been accounted today as historical artifacts and tools of liberation (Moody, 1990), there are very few uncovered as being written by Black girls. Fredrick Douglas, John Andrew Johnson, Henry Bibb, Josiah Henson, and many more autobiographies of enslaved Black men are easily accessible to locate and explore their written stories. *Twelve Years a Slave*, which is an autobiographical slave narrative written in 1853 by Solomon Northup, was turned into a top selling box office historical drama in 2013 and continued to exalt the written experiences of Black boys as the universal Black experience. While the film is a win for the historical experiences of Black boys to be better understood by other races, it is a loss for a literary genre that consistently marginalizes the untold narratives of Black girls and shows the need to explore their stories that have been documented and are still being written. For instance, Harriet Jacobs's autobiography titled *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl* is one of the few accounted slave narratives that conveys an ongoing struggle throughout her life as an enslaved Black girl with self-actualization, victimization, and liberation. The narrative of Harriet Jacobs shows the different experiences of victimization and rape she experienced as a young girl that were not one in the same to those of enslaved Black boys (Braxton, 1986). Similar to the narratives written by

enslaved Black boys, Harriet Jacobs's narrative begins with the declaration and words, "I was born" (Olney, 1984). Black girls today still voice this declaration, as even now they feel invisible in the world, schools, and classroom literacy practices. (King, 1988).

Literacy Postbellum

Once slavery ended, the postbellum period for Blacks attached freedom with the necessity to become literate. Blacks immediately began to start their own institutions for learning at the conclusion of the Civil War but were eventually intervened by the approach for a universal education system introduced by White philanthropists (Harris, 1992). In the text *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935,* Anderson (1988) contributed to the notion that the involvement of northern Whites in creating a universal educational system in the south for Blacks to become literate was never intended to support liberation but instead labor and capitalism. Anderson (1988) created a strong case that White philanthropists aimed to leverage schooling for Black children to support labor production through the Hampton-Tuskegee program promoted by Booker T. Washington. Du Bois (1903) disagreed with the efforts of Booker T. Washington and asserted that the Hampton-Tuskegee program only supported an economic caste system by commodifying education for Blacks. Thus, emphasizing that the role of schooling for Black girls by White philanthropists during this era was merely to exploit them for labor.

At the end of the 19th century, the Black literacy rate had risen close to 40% of the Black population (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003). While much of the success in literacy among Black people had been credited in literature to the Freedmen's Bureau established by Congress in 1865 to assist former enslaved Blacks in the South, Anderson (1988) attributed the increase in Black literacy to Black churches and communities. With literate

Blacks purchasing land and real estate at a 20 percent higher rate over illiterate Blacks (Canaday & Reback, 2010) and possessing the ability to pass literacy tests to participate in elections (Naidu, 2012), after emancipation the ability to read and write remained a valued privilege. The desire for literacy attainment by Black girls postbellum was attached to the belief that elevating Black girls in education could uplift the Black race (Perkins, 1982). After all, during this period, Black women and girls predominately served as teachers in the community and as educators to their Black children in the home. According to Perkins (1982), the uplift of the Black race in the late 19th century with literacy rested heavily on Black girls and women and had a large impact on the educational success in their communities. While community uplift served as a core purpose for the literate lives of Black girls, representation also played a part in their desire to write their stories. Richardson (2003) implied that the need for counter representation and counter storytelling played a large role in why Black girls and women wrote stories and narratives during this period as most literature about their lives were written by White people and depicted misrepresentations.

With Black girls becoming literate and carrying the responsibility to educate others, many of them invested heavily in literacy efforts for their own gender and race. One example is that of Anna Julia Cooper who has been recognized for her work during the postbellum period on gender inclusion in Black literacy efforts. Anna Julia Cooper asserted that the ability for Black girls to reach their full potential would be a fundamental component for any progress of the Black race (Cooper, 1988). The activism of Cooper with Black girls and literacy has earned her the recognition of being a foremother of Black Feminist Thought from scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and

Kimberly Crenshaw (Collins & Blige, 2020; Crenshaw, 1989). In addition to Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs is another example of how Black girls' literacy practice served the purpose of race and gender upliftment. Burroughs founded the National Training School for Women and Girls that was the first all-Black girls' school led by a Black woman in the Northern region (Taylor, 2002). Literacy and education for Black girls in Burroughs's school focused on economic mobility and community uplift (Wolcott, 1997). Outside of formal schooling, literacy societies for Black girls were also created by Black women to provide additional support for reading and writing (McHenry, 2002). Within these literacy societies, effective conceptual frameworks were established for the literacy practices and development of Black girls (Muhammad, 2015).

As literacy rates continued to climb among Blacks, landmark legislation such as the Title IX Education Amendments of 1972 created greater access to literacy for Black girls by prohibiting the discrimination of gender and race in federally funded academic institutions. Consequently, Strickland (2007) suggested that the rise in Black literacy caused the dominant White society to make race more of a barrier over literacy for career obtainment, thus producing what is known as the "literacy myth" among Black people. According to Strickland (2007), the literacy myth is the belief among marginalized populations that proficiency in reading and writing will guarantee social mobility. While the literacy myth can easily be debated by scholars with opposing perspectives, it is important to take such discourse into regard along with the historical accounts of literacy among Black girls to understand their purpose for practice today. Literature that highlights experiences from the past may contribute insight towards the opposition and challenges with current in-school literacy practices and Black girls.

Challenges in Modern Day Literacy Practices with Black Girls

As literacy research on Black children tends to center the experiences of Black boys and the conditions that influence their underachievement, it consequently contends to many that Black girls must be faring well with literacy proficiency. Unfortunately, Black girls perform at the lowest proficiency rate nationally in reading out of their gender peer group just as Black boys do. While research highlights the urgency to address the reading achievement "crisis" with Black boys (Haddix, 2009; Kirkland, 2013; Tatum, 2005), far less research has explored the disparaging scores of Black girls in the United States. According to the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP), in 2019 only 19% of eighth grade Black girls in the nation were at or above proficiency in reading compared to 49% of eighth grade White girls. Although the disparities of Black girls tend to remain marginalized to those of Black boys (Patton et al., 2016), it is important to note that in the same year 11% of eighth grade Black boys were at or above reading proficiency compared to 36% of eighth grade White boys. This yielded a 30% to 35% gap between both gender groups and their White peers, which highlights extreme inequity to be explored among both Black boys and girls independently. The marginalization of Black girls and literacy comparatively to Black boys conveys a notion that they are performing satisfactory in reading achievement and the need to address the intersectional challenges that may exist in literacy curriculum is in no way a necessity.

Moreover, finding research that highlights reading development and achievement of Black girls is extremely limited and presents a challenge. Muhammad and Haddix (2016) highlighted similar challenges and suggested that the scarcity of research in reading development may be attributed to the lack of exploration in the literacy field

among pre-adolescent Black girls. According to Thomas and Jackson (2007), more national statistics on K-12 level reading and literacy assessments need to report data on both race and ethnicity combined. Additionally, national reports providing data on critical and social factors that influence Black girls and academic performance such as language, community, school, and family background should be applied filters to analyze inhibitors for achievement (Thomas & Jackson, 2007). For instance, a study conducted by Charity et al. (2004) compared reading proficiency and achievement of Black students whose primary speech was African American Vernacular English (AAVE) compared to those who primarily spoke the School English. A sample of 217 urban Black students yielded findings that highlighted how language may be an inhibitor towards reading achievement as students who were more familiar with the School English performed better than those who primarily spoke AAVE. Although, this study does not specifically investigate the literacy achievement of Black girls, it was an inclusive study of Black children that contributes insight on factors that may inhibit literacy proficiency among the population. It further proves that research which explores reading achievement, literacy development, and social factors that influence academic performance among Black girls explicitly is needed in the field to better understand the literacy gaps in national data and solutions for their success.

Defining Counterspace

Counterspaces are spaces that are constructed by oppressed populations to engage in liberatory practices without hegemonic influence. These spaces have existed for historically Black people in America since the enslaved Africans were brought to the Atlantic coast and were declared an inferior race. As shared earlier, hush harbors were

one of the first literacy counterspaces for enslaved Blacks to learn how to read in the antebellum South away from their masters and White supremist (Anderson, 1988). The literacy societies created by Blacks during the postbellum period is another example of historical literacy counterspaces which taught reading outside of schools that were founded by White people to assimilate Black children (McHenry, 2002). In education today, counterspaces are a necessity for Black children in schools where Whiteness is normalized and Eurocentric ideology is prevalent in curricula and pedagogy.

A counterspace for Black children can be created by educators through clubs, literacy circles, or afterschool programs. Counterspaces can also be created organically by marginalized students themselves. For example, the book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria* by Beverly Daniel Tatum (2017) explored the subspaces in schools such as in the cafeteria where cultures and races are divided as counterspaces for Black students. By exploring the counterspaces of Black girls and the literacy practices that exist when they feel safe to be their authentic selves, we can then develop pedagogy that is liberating and support their success.

The Case for Black Girl Counterspaces

Although literacy has evolved over time through participatory media tools and practices (Morrell et al., 2015), language and information sharing for Black people since slavery is still entrenched with liberation at its core (Ladson-Billings, 2016). Unfortunately, Young et al. (2018) demonstrated how new methods of systemic slavery in the 21st century have been bestowed upon Black girls through institutionalized forces of oppression in schools and perpetuated in English language arts curriculum where literacy is to be learned and applied. Schools are figuratively sieged as prisons for Black

girls that shackle them to the oppressive literary confinements of Eurocentric hegemonic pedagogical practices (Winn, 2010; Young at al., 2018), and criminalize them through implicit biases from White female educators who overly saturate the workforce (Morris & Perry, 2017).

With Black girls representing the largest increase of school suspension rates compared to their peers across gender (Skiba & Losen, 2016), the concept of liberation becomes elusive through their criminalization in schools. Many of the expulsions and suspensions endured by Black girls are linked to zero tolerance disciplinary policies that reflect anti-Blackness and conflict with White femininity from White female teachers (Hines-Datiri & Carter, 2017). In a study conducted by Annamma et al. (2019), intersectional violence against Black girls in an urban school district was explored. The study examined disciplinary data with 3,628 female students in grades K through 12 throughout the Denver Public School district during the 2011-2012 academic school year. Findings revealed that Black girls were punished more harshly than other girls for the same infractions and experienced more subjective disciplinary accounts from teachers such as disobedience and defiance. Similarly, a statewide study conducted in Texas by Slate et al. (2016) explored disciplinary inequity among Black girls in school. All disciplinary assignments for female students in 4^{th}-11^{th} were examined and revealed a substantial increase in the transitional grades (6^{th} and 9^{th} grade) for Black girls. In addition, Black girls superseded other girls in the state for out of school suspensions and disciplinary consequences.

The neglect of Black girls and disparities that exist among this population are administered through policymakers, administrators, and teachers who overlook the

intersectionality of their experiences (Ricks, 2014). For instance, research conducted by Epstein et al. (2017) exposed the perception of young Black girls from adults as less innocent and more sexualized comparatively to White girls. Findings revealed that Black girls were perceived as needing less protection, comfort, and support, and as knowing more about sex (Epstein et al., 2017). Such perceptions from adults in schools that reinforce a misinformed single narrative of Black girls (Adichie, 2009) and substantiate negative stereotypes, limits them from reaching their full academic potential (Evans-Winters, 2005). Furthermore, research that reflects a massive population of Black girls who have dropped out of school in lack of literacy proficiency (Collins, 2002) signals a constant urgency for American education to reform the political and pedagogical systems in place that prevent the lifelong struggle for liberation from manifestation.

Black Girls and Literacy Counterspaces

While this section is intended to focus on the literacy counterspaces that exist with Black girls, I would be remiss if I did not start off by highlighting the study that inspired me to do this type of research and served as a mentor text. In the book *A Search Past Silence*: *The Literacy of Young Black Men*, Kirkland (2013) conducted a study that dismantles the narrative of the "Black male literacy crisis" by showing a failure of the educational system to understand the literacy-rich lives of Black males and how to educate them. Through his research, Kirkland (2013) discovered how “the Cypha” served as a counterspace for Black boys and exposed how literacy was used in expressive and liberatory ways that were not embraced in school. The Cypha, which is also pronounced as *cypher* in hip hop culture, is an organically formed circle of freestyle rappers and poets who express themselves as a collective musically. As a counterspace, the Cypha in

Kirkland's study was a meet up gathering after school that created opportunities for Black boys to share stories of tragedy, death, police brutality, and heart ache through hip hop music and rhymes. This research challenges the negative stereotypes of Black boys by giving a voice to the voiceless and allowing their words to liberate their identities. Kirkland (2013) shared an African proverb that says, "until the lion learns to write history, the story of the jungle will forever glorify its hunter" (p. 39). While this proverb produces the idea that history is failing to listen and recognize the stories of Black people, this work and those words charged me to seek out counterspaces among Black girls and explore literacy practices that exist in those spaces to amplify their voices.

In America, Black girls and women are the only group who has had their identity socially silenced in critical issues (hooks, 1989). Critical conversations that focus on race tend to center Black men and discourse on gender conversations typically focus on White women. It almost seems as if it is normalized for America to turn a blind eye to the ongoing assaults of Black women daily and specifically those of Black girls in and out of schools (Mayorga & Picower, 2018). Black girls need to have access to safe spaces where they are understood, can share their stories, and resist the micro-aggressions and violence they experience in the world. Price et al. (2017) asserted that spaces need to be reclaimed for Black girls to embrace their identity and explore the literacy practices needed to support their upliftment. By exploring literacy counterspaces of Black girls, Price et al (2017) highlighted that these spaces: (a) afford the intellectual ownership of Black girls' literacy practices, (b) collaboratively produce critical thinking, awareness, and activism, and (c) support identity development, healing, and joy. Intellectual ownership, collaboration, and identity development were also themes found in a study conducted by

Muhammad (2012). Muhammad created a counterspace for Black girls to develop their literacy skills outside of school through a five-week writing institute. During the institute Black girls worked collaboratively at an urban Midwestern university with peers and professionals to explore their identities outside of school. The research of Muhammad (2012) contributed a greater understanding of increased engagement and identity development with collaborative literacy counterspaces and Black girls.

In another study, Majors (2015) explored the literacy practices of Black girls in a non-traditional space for education—the hair salon. Through her research, Majors goes out of her way to provide in depth insight on Black hair salons before making a bold proclamation of adopting the cultural literacy practices within education. She explores how Black women and girls' hair alone is a scared language that only members of the group understand beyond the space of the salon. A form of intersectionality exists in the Black girl hair experience tied to race, oppression, and identity that a Black man or White woman would not understand. The language and literacies in Black salons are an unspoken language with stories that are just as rich as the tattoos on the arms of the young men in the Kirkland (2013) text. One strength of Major's study is how she cultivates non-members of the Black community into the hair salon experience to understand the hidden literacy practices that exist without them having to walk inside a Black hair salon. This study conducted by Majors (2015) is one of few that explores the literacy practices of Black women and girls in counterspaces that they frequent. Thus, the need to explore counterspaces that are organically created or utilized by Black adolescent girls is warranted to have greater insight on this specific population and age group.

Black Girls' Literacy Practices

Counter-hegemonic and abolitionist literacy practices that center the mattering of Black girls in curriculum are vital for their survival and for them to thrive in school (Love, 2018). It is only when researchers and educators begin to explore the perplexing reality that Black girls are performing low in reading proficiency yet are avid readers with literacy rich lives (Koonce, 2017) that a shift in literacy curriculum and pedagogy can occur in practice. Much of this perplexity is caused by Black girls struggling to translate their everyday literacy practices that are intersected with culture and identity, to mandated school literacy practices for proficiency and achievement (Winn, 2010).

Leisurely reading habits and literacy strengths of Black girls are consistently disregarded in education by White female teachers that employ Eurocentric literature as universal content (Asante, 2017; Gee, 2000; Gibson 2016). With evolving research in the last two decades that highlights Black girls' connection to the urban literature genre, findings have shown that Black girls practice substantial literacy skills outside of school (Gibson, 2016). The draw to urban literature among Black girls is based on the commonalities with societal oppression conveyed in the genre and void in school texts (Rountree, 2008). Literary practices in U.S. schools are linked to a history of traditional language arts approaches that support notions of scientific racism and require dismantling for the liberation of Black girls (Willis, 2017). For this reason, there is a need to spotlight literacy practices of Black girls that support development and achievement.

Socio-Cultural Literacy and Black Girls

The identity development of Black girls is heavily situated within culture and language (Morris, 2016). Considering that the interconnectedness of language is situated within the social world, it is also impossible to detach them both as independent (Perry, 2012). Thus, socio-cultural literacy is an essential concept for understanding the influence of culture on literacy through social communication when exploring a particular group such as Black girls. Friere (1970) would associate this concept of socio-cultural literacy through a critical lens that asserted children read the world as they read the word. Gordon et al. (2019) explored the experiences of 100 Black girls at a Black Girls Read! event through a socio-cultural literacy lens. This read-in event created a space for Black girls to embrace their culture and individuality through writing while providing an opportunity for research connecting the similar and diverse experiences of Black girls. Findings from the study showcased how situating socio-cultural literacy with Black girls builds affirmation through their identities and cultural heritage that enables them to deconstruct hegemonic narratives that perpetuate their oppression.

Through socio-cultural literacy, contextualized language may correspond with elements of situated and embodied meaning through text, and may show how experience creates a better understanding of the presented language format (Gee, 2015). Through a Eurocentric paradigm and approach to traditional Language arts, Ebonics, and AAVE have always been considered language deficits versus a value to cultural identity among Blacks (Pearson et al., 2013). But McNair (2010) built a strong case through a study which emphasized the need for African American literature to connect with children through language for self-affirmation and actualization. McNair (2010) asserted that

language patterns that are common in the African American community maintained cultural distinctiveness through socio-cultural vernacular while bridging deeper connections with Black children and identity that is implausible with Eurocentric literature. The usage of double negation with words such as “ain’t,” found in text such as *Honey, I Love* by Eloise Greenfield shows how socio-cultural literacy approaches that utilize language and content to address common childhood issues with Black children are not considered a focus in Eurocentric literature that is commonly deemed as universal (McNair, 2010). While differentiation and several approaches embrace varying learning styles, educators have a responsibility to employ similar approaches through socio-cultural literacy practices to create an inclusive space for Black girls.

Literacy and Identity

The need for connecting identity and literacy with Black female adolescents is essential for their liberation (Womack, 2013). Counter fairy tales, for example, have shown how counterhegemonic literacy practices can be utilized with Black girls to reclaim and reconstruct their own narratives through culturally relevant strategies (Young et al., 2018). According to Young et al. (2018), counter fairy tales allow Black girls to be reflective of the intersections tied to their identities through character analysis and storytelling. Stone (2005) conducted a study with an adolescent Black girl utilizing the concept of counter fairy tales to recontextualize the story of Cinderella. The adolescent girl in the study remixed the character’s identity to align with her own cultural reality. Cinderella’s prince was a DJ in the adolescent girl’s story and he used a cellphone to text. By creating the opportunity for Black girls to reconstruct their identities into stories

where they do not exist, Stone (2005) showed how such literacy practice can create a sense of mattering and agency.

Womack (2013) conducted a study that focused on Black girls' understanding of their identity and hegemonic influences of society through literacy. By employing a Black feminist theoretical lens, findings revealed Black girls' understanding that society places lesser value on Black girlhood and their desire to engage in both traumatic and triumphant storytelling through the literacy practices that were employed. Similar to Womack, McArthur and Muhammad (2017) conducted a study with 12 Black Muslim girls between the ages 12 and 17 to explore their perceptions of their own intersectionality through writings in a four-week literacy program. Some key themes identified from the study through the writings of Black girls were: unity, empowerment, advocacy, and counter representation. Findings from the study identified that Black Muslim girls were extremely conscious of their intersected identities and the need for educators to create a space for centering intersectionality and literacy in their practices.

Black Girls and New Literacies

With the evolving social practices of engaging with texts, New Literacy studies have now challenged the autonomous paradigms of literacy (Perry, 2012). Literacy in modern day technology can come in the form of symbols, photographs, video, and digital texts (Mill, 2015). For instance, the hashtag is an example of a literary symbol and form of text that represents a meaning and understanding of a trend that leads to a deeper discussion outside of a situated context (Parsons et al., 2014). As new methods of communication are developed and present avenues for decoded language among

individuals within the digital space to engage socially, New Literacies enable construction of meaning and language with different modes of text (Gee, 2005).

Research conducted by Muhammad and Womack (2016) provided an understanding of how 14 Black girls utilized new literacies to challenge representations of Black girlhood. By focusing on adolescent girls between the ages 13 and 19, Muhammand and Womack (2016) explored the perceived representations of Black girls through traditional literacy, writing, and new literacy through the website Pinterest. The girls in the study selected photographs that they felt embodied their public selves through pinning on the Pinterest website and writing through reflections. Findings from the study suggested that the usage of both traditional and new literacy practices supported deeper thought, reflection, and expression among Black girls. The convergence of traditional and new literacy was also utilized in a study conducted by Green (2016) with six Black girls through a book club. Framing the text *PUSH* by Sapphire, Green (2016) used online discussions and chats to engage with dialogue. Her findings revealed that the usage of new literacy shaped self-representation among the girls and provided an empowering collective Black girl experience that was celebrated through virtual modality.

Black Girls and Multimodal Literacy Practices

One key feature that separates new literacy from traditional literacy is multimodality. Alphabetic print is no longer able to serve solely as the key focus for literacy composition in a modern era where everyone lives online and digitally connected through smart phone devices (Rowsell & Pahl, 2011). Additionally, monomodal literacy practices in Language Arts classrooms are not viable enough to educate digital native Black girls that practice multimodal forms of communication through selfie pics, Tik Tok

videos, and filtered Snapchats daily. Unfortunately, these multimodal forms of literacy have not been employed in traditional Language Arts curriculum by educators who prefer an autonomous approach to literacy, or outdated policies that prohibit accessibility to new media usage in schools (Jewitt et al., 2016). The emergence of virtual spaces that connect people in real time through hashtags such as #BlackTwitter, shows the capabilities of sociocultural and multimodal literacy with engaging Black communities through identity and language (Jones, 2015). Connecting new literacies and multimodality situates literacy as not only an academic skill or tool but a way of life. Furthermore, multimodal literacy practices embrace the intertextuality of interactive practices that employ technology tools that Black girls utilize on a daily basis (Lewis, 2013).

Ellison and Kirkland (2014) utilized multimodality in their research to examine the identities of two Black girls through their construction of counter-identities, narratives, and technology. Both researchers contextualized the modality of the technology and its usage for constructing literacy. Findings from Ellison and Kirkland (2014) revealed the universality of multimodality through technology and the versatility in its utilization for expression and identity construction with Black girls. In addition to findings from Ellison and Kirkland (2014), Whitney (2016) highlighted that multimodality provides inclusive capabilities that can be utilized with students that may be considered low proficient in literacy. Whitney (2016) explored how students used multimodality to redefine themselves as proficient literacy learners and challenge deficit narratives that intersect ability to gender and race. Findings revealed that multimodal literacy enhanced the writing identities of Black students that were deemed as having a learning disability.

Social Media and Black Girls

Beyond entertainment, social media can provide learning opportunities when strategically implemented into curricula (Abe & Jordan, 2013). Social media has been utilized in literacy practices with Black girls to address issues of self-expression and social justice, and to promote achievement (Price-Dennis, 2016). Heath and Gleason (2019) asserted that applying a critical lens to social media pedagogy has the ability to develop student agency and improve problem solving skills. Identity formation and civic engagement are additional benefits for utilizing social media with storytelling and in literacy practices (Heath & Gleason, 2019). In this section of the literature review, we will define social media and explore the different affordances of social media with literacy practices among Black girls. Lastly, we will highlight how social media serves as a counterpublic for Black girls and how sub spaces such as Black Twitter inherit the characteristics of counterspaces.

Social Media Literacy Practices

Social media is a web-based application that has become a popular tool for adolescents to express themselves and communicate with peers (Handayani, 2015). In part, social media over the last two decades has created a new reality for how we interact, seek information, make meaning of knowledge, and understand the world. Considering that these digital spaces have afforded language and textual exchanges (Chun, 2018), social media is indeed a literacy tool that has become infused more practically in the daily lives of adolescents than the usage of books. In 2014, 90% of adolescents in the United States identified themselves as active users of social media (Duggan et al., 2015). In addition, Black adolescents report being online more than any other racial group

(Lenhart et al., 2015). As a platform for news, entertainment, information and communication, social media's popularity with Black girls also contends opportunities that may translate into literacy education and language instruction (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). According to Couldry and Van Dijick (2015), social media enables the literacy practices of individuals to be shaped by social practices—curated and co-constructed. Creative assembly is another affordance in the literacy practices of social media. Through creative assembly, authors are interactively connected through literacy practices and interests where they may contribute to stories and build new knowledge structures collaboratively (Mills, 2015).

Additionally, social media itself creates what Gee (2005) defined as an affinity space. Gee (2005) asserted that affinity spaces allow for different levels, perspectives, and abilities to gather and contribute. An affinity space is not confined by the internal grammar and instead the external grammar (interactions and actions of participants) shape the internal grammar (content) and allows access to contribution of content from participants (Zhou et al., 2021). The characteristics of an affinity space are evident through social media sites by allowing its followers to engage in conversation through trending hashtags, retweets, and shares where each individual has the opportunity to contribute to the literacy practice. Affinity spaces through social media also employ a socio-cultural literacy approach for Black girls as they allow for community formation based on culture, interests, and ideology (Mills, 2015).

As digital natives, Black adolescent girls today have been connected to the online world through digital interactions since birth. The accessibility of social media through handheld smartphone devices, mobile apps, and messenger notifications enables a level

of efficiency for communication with family, friends, and a perceived audience that was unfathomable with traditional communicative technology (Handayani, 2015). Social media has permitted Black girls to employ literacy practices through posts, comments, and responses with a vaguely defined global network that extends beyond immediate relationships to unknown individuals (Merchant, 2006). Wade (2019) highlighted how social media usage in classroom spaces can build digital kinships with Black girls and their peers through online engagement and support networks. While it is normative for Black girls to converse online with family and peers they know, social media also creates what is known as a perceived imaginary audience. The influence of a perceived audience on literacy practices with Black girls in the social media space is an untapped area of literacy research that presumes exploration. According to a 2018 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, Black adolescents were more likely than their White peers to post content intended to go viral to a larger audience (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). These findings provide a window of further exploration with content construction and the relationship with a perceived audience among Black girls to be explored in this research study.

Social Media and Black Girl Identity

Whether in written text through blogging, commenting, or posting a status on a profile, social media lends the opportunity to present ourselves in personally selected ways to our peers or a perceived imaginary audience. Similar to how Harriet Jacobs created the character Linda Brent in her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to detach herself from the painful realities of oppression (Jacobs, 2018), Black girls continue to create identities attached to their own liberation even in online spaces (Keller,

2012). As shared in the beginning of this literature review when discussing the history of Black girl literacy practices, it is only when we understand the past that we can realize the emphasis of physical representation and expression in the writings or online postings of Black girls.

There is an underlying complexity that exists when researching discourse on Black girl identity and social media. One approach to exploring Black girl identity in online spaces through research is the contention of negative stereotypes that prevail on the world wide web. Noble (2018) highlighted in her book *Algorithms of Oppression* the attachment to hypersexual imagery that is aggregated when searching keywords or phrases of Black girls online. Additionally, Schott (2017) explored the ideals of thinness and White feminist ideology that is pushed on the YouTube platform through imagery labeled as "Black girl thinspiration." In her research, Schott (2017) shed light on a pro-eating disorder culture that exists in social media spaces and in turn inflicts a negative self-image with Black girls. While these examples provide imagery of Black girl otherness, there is a need to explore multimodal texts that are self-created by Black girls to understand how they reflect their own identities on social media. As Williams and Moody (2019) explained in their research, the messaging that Black girls post online reflects how they see themselves from the messaging of their environment about their identity and value.

When exploring research on the type of content that Black girls post of themselves online, Gaunt (2015) highlighted the stigmatization of hypersexual imagery through twerking culture. Gaunt (2015) framed how content that focuses on Black girls and twerking culture on social media is reflective of racist stereotypes such as loud and

ratchet. While there are negative stereotypes that prevail with the identities of Black girls on social media with twerking culture, Halliday (2020) argued that twerking imagery online empowers Black girls to celebrate their bodies and reclaim Black womanhood on their own terms. Furthermore, Halliday (2020) challenged the perception of twerking imagery online as celebratory by White girls and shameful for Black girls. Comparably, Bonilla and Rosa (2015) highlighted that while social media has the potential to stereotype the experiences of Black girls, it also allows for counternarrative formation by the population to reimagine group identities. For instance, hashtags such as #naturalhair and #carefreeBlackgirl are examples of how Black girls can project and explore their identities in a safe space without the fear of rejection on social media (Williams & Moody, 2019). Through social media hashtags like #CarefreeBlackGirl, a space is created that centralizes race and gender identity as independent from hegemonic norms (Mooney, 2018).

Civic Engagement and Liberatory Practices

Black girls have utilized social media for identity representation outside of school for self-advocacy and to resist hegemonic ideologies that oppress their existence (Greene, 2016). As a result of police brutality and victimization experienced by Black girls that have been marginalized to the accounts experienced by Black boys, the twitter hashtag #SayHerName was created in 2014 by four Black girl activists (Towns, 2016). #SayHerName exemplifies how social media has created a counterspace that utilizes literacy for liberation with Black girls by exalting the voices and faces of victims that have been unaccounted and disregarded by media and society (Brown et al., 2017). A growing body of research has asserted that social media movements, such as

#SayHerName (Love, 2017; McMurtry-Chubb, 2015; Williams, 2016) and #BlackGirlMagic (Halliday & Brown, 2018; Morton & Parsons, 2018) which seeks to celebrate the talents and successes of Black girls, have provided a voice and platform for activism.

Sealey-Ruiz (2016) captured the Racial Literacy Roundtable (RLR) event hosted at Teachers College, Columbia University and facilitated by four high school Black girls. Social media activism was highlighted as the theme and consisted of 80 academic professionals in the field of education. Movements on social media capturing violence of Black girls and social activism such as #BLM and #SayHerName were brought to the forefront. Sealey-Ruiz (2016) highlighted that English educators must understand the conflictual positionality and spaces that influence Black girls. Further attention placed on emphasizing the humanity of Black girls through intentionality was deemed vital to illustrate the ways Black girls engage in literacy practices. Transforming English classrooms into critical spaces for re-humanizing Black girls, narrative formation, and social advocacy was suggested.

While Black girls have used social media to advocate for critical issues that impact them in the world, they have also used the platform to shed light on injustices experienced in schools. For instance, Kelly (2018) conducted a narrative analysis with seven Black girls on their experiences with racial microaggression, subjective disciplinary practices, and marginalization at a predominately White high school. Findings from the study revealed that social media was constantly used by Black girls to voice injustice and bring awareness of systemic racism in their school environment. Another way in which racial injustice has been exposed in schools is through digital

storytelling (Matias & Grosland, 2016). Digital storytelling can be used by Black girls to create counternarratives, voice their opinions, and control their own imagery (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012). Price-Dennis et al. (2017) captured how digital storytelling was utilized to protest at a Florida high school in 2016 that demanded two Black girls take off their head wraps. As a result of perceived injustice and discrimination by the Black girls from school administration, they created #BlackGirlsWrapWednesday online to advocate for changes in the dress code policy.

Social Media as a Counterpublic

The affordance of digital storytelling for activism with Black girls in the social media space is attributed to the platform itself being declared a digital counterpublic. In order to define the term counterpublic, it is important to first highlight the research of critical theorist Jurgen Habermas. Habermas contributed a pragmatic approach to Marxist's conflict social theory with his conceptions of Communicative Action, which conceptualizes the power of language (Lemert, 2004), and the Public Sphere, which highlights the influence of capitalist power through democratic media in the 18th century and the exclusion of the poor regarding free speech in journalism (Habermas, 1991). According to Habermas (1962), literacy societies, social lodges and public spaces where the bourgeoisie gathered to engage in democratic dialogue was the historical foundation of the public sphere. As Habermas' concept of the public sphere provides insight on hegemony through mass media and consumer culture, it fails to explore the exclusion of oppressed groups and the democratic spaces that evolved by them as a result (Jackson & Foucault, 2016). Fraser (2021) conceptualized counterpublics as spaces where women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Black people can gather to engage in democratic

discourse and liberatory literacy practices. As time and technology has evolved, the internet has created opportunities for gathering, sharing ideas, and engaging in political rhetoric through digital counterpublics.

Social media is an example of a digital counterpublic by serving as a public space where Black people can mobilize and advocate around injustice (Jackson & Foucault, 2016). Considering that social media serves as a digital counterpublic, the subspaces within social media inherit the qualities of serving as counterspaces. For instance, Black Twitter was established by Black users of the Twitter social media platform to create counternarratives and voice their concerns around social justice issues that impact the Black community (Florini, 2014). Additionally, Black Twitter serves as a counterspace for Black youth to resist hegemony and engage in social activism. Hill (2018) provided insight on how Black Twitter serves as a counterspace that lends pedagogical practices for respectable politics and social resistance. Race-related issues presented through Black Twitter also create community dialogue and discourse among its members as a counterspace for Black perspectives (Baker-Bell et al., 2017). While ample research has looked at Twitter as a digital counterspace among Black youth (Hill, 2018; Maragh, 2015; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2005), there is limited research that explores the digital counterspaces utilized just by Black girls. More specifically there is limited research that explores the literacy affordances of the social media space that Black girls are the most actively engaged users: Instagram.

Instagram and Black Girls

There is a saying that a picture speaks louder than a thousand words. Regarding literacy practices, this saying must be perceived as true with over 54% of social media

users constantly posting original photos and videos on a regular basis to voice themselves to the world (Duggan, 2013). Moreover, two-thirds of Black adolescents reported regularly sharing selfies on social media compared to one-third of White adolescents (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). These findings may possibly contribute to Instagram's notoriety and popularity since its launch in 2010 as the fastest growing social media platform (Al-Ali, 2014). Instagram is a social networking site that allows users to utilize multimodal literacy practices to share photos, videos, and text publicly or privately through the platform (Handayani, 2015). The appeal to Instagram is reflected by 38 percent of Black internet users being active users of the platform as well as 53 percent of them being young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine (Duggan et al., 2015). According to The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (Media Insight Project, 2017), Black teens are the largest users of Instagram, but more specifically Black girls.

Although research studies have highlighted the negative influences of Instagram on mental health with adolescents regarding narcissistic disorder, social media anxiety, and depression (Kleemans et al., 2018; Tanner, 2015), there are beneficial aspects of the platform for literacy practices. Lee et al. (2015) performed a study with 212 Instagram users to explore their motivations and attitudes regarding the social media platform. Findings from the study revealed that Instagram provided the benefits of social interaction, self-expression, escapism, peeking, and digital archiving. Similarly, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) identified documentation as a core motivation for Instagram users to archive images and memories just as Lee et al. (2015) identified. Digital archives and artifacts provide two ways to examine literacy practices with Black girls through

Instagram. Kirkland and Shange (2010) connected the similarities of literacy artifacts witnessed in childhood with their Black mothers and the digital artifacts that Black girls utilize today. This study highlighted how digital artifacts may be used by Black girls to express pain and personal experiences. These artifacts captured the stories, struggles, and triumphs of young Black girls, which reinforces the notion among this group with literacy as liberation even in the digital era.

While digital artifacts such as selfies created by Black girls on Instagram may contend a notion to the average viewer on social media of self-absorption or narcissism, a more in depth understanding of these artifacts may lend a different perspective. According to Chun (2018), selfies are defined as self-portraits and became a common practice over 500 years ago during the European Renaissance era that was explicitly carried out by the royal elite and renowned artists such as Rembrandt. Self-portraits were used to frame roles in society and the identities that were desired to be portrayed by the elite and idolized by the subjugated class who were not privileged or worthy of access to create self-reflective paintings of themselves (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016). With advances in technology such as the camera and smart phone, marginalized groups can now participate in creating autobiographical artifacts such as self-portraits or selfies that represent their identity in the 21st century. Through selfies, Black girls are able to present themselves to the world and control the narrative through their self-presentations that contextualize their identity (Williams & Moody, 2019). Furthermore, as Black girls share images of themselves on Instagram, identity is not static, but forever emerging as old pictures are swapped for new ones over time and collaborators contribute to comments or posts that reaffirm development (Harper et al., 2012).

Instagram as a Counterspace for Black Girls

With pages such as Well-Read Black Girls (WRBG) being created on Instagram as a space to highlight inequity in Black publishing and commune Black girl writers and readers, it is evident that there is an underlying affordance of counterspace formation on the platform. As Instagram has lent itself as a safe space in research for self-expression (Lee et al., 2015), few studies explore the platform as a counterspace for Black girls and the potential liberatory practices the space may present. One of the few studies that I unveiled through research that examined Instagram as a counterspace was a study conducted on the Black Girl Yoga (BGY) page (Cameron, 2019). In the study, Cameron (2019) explored the engagement of BGY as a counterspace on Instagram for Black women to resists norms of whiteness when defining health and wellness. The BGY page presented a sample with over 93,000 followers to examine content. Findings from the study revealed that BGY served as a digital counterspace on Instagram as it deconstructed the perceptions of yoga as normative with thin, White, upper-class women. Additionally, findings showed how the space has mobilized Black women to create counternarratives outside of the traditional yoga paradigm and reaffirm individualism among the group.

Another study conducted by Edwards and Esposito (2018) revealed the liberatory practices afforded by Instagram with Black girls. Edwards and Esposito (2018) conducted a study to investigate the opportunities for Black girl identity liberation and reflection through Instagram posts. By examining 450 posts from Instagram users who identified with three hip hops songs that were presented, the researchers unveiled themes connected to identity and self-expression. Findings from the study showed the influence of hip hop

music on identity posts by Black girls. These findings aligned with research by Williams et al. (2004) with the influence of environmental messaging and the messages Black girls create online. Furthermore, the study conducted by Edwards and Esposito (2018) revealed themes of self-love and visibility as important by Black girls and what they share on Instagram. While limited research is available in the field on adolescent Black girls and Instagram as a potential counterspace, this research paper seeks to fill that gap and has explored the literacy practices of Black girls and their usage of the platform.

Summary of Reviewed Research

Collectively, the research presented in this review has provided a foundation for contextualizing historical literacy practices in alignment with the affordances of new literacy practices and social media with adolescent Black girls that has not been framed before in the field. However, what was left out of the literature review presented, is a more extensive exploration of modern day literacy challenges influencing Black girls. Although national NAEP data presented in the review reflect achievement gaps in reading proficiency of Black girls, challenges with finding studies that explore reading achievement are highlighted in articles on Black girl literacy and was reflected in this section. Additionally, the review of literature has lent further insight on the usage of Instagram as a potential counterspace with adolescent Black girls through studies on Black yoga and Hip-hop identity formation. While these studies were beneficial in exploring elements of liberation and resistance on Instagram, it further supported the need for this research study to investigate the literacy practices of Instagram as a potential counterspace based on age (adolescence) and Black girls explicitly. This dissertation responds to this gap and has highlighted the literacy practices of Black girls on Instagram

for leveraging their literacy epistemologies in curricula and for creating literacy spaces conducive to their liberation in schools.

Theoretical Frameworks

Over the last decade there has been an increase in research around the digital experiences of Black girls. Although there are still few studies that have explored this topic in education, most of them have been employed in the context of formal instruction and even fewer have employed a culturally relevant framework to investigate the literacy practices of Black girls outside of school as individual cases. Age, socioeconomic status, race, and gender in America are all complexities that have been discussed in research (Crenshaw, 1990, Love, 2019; Price-Dennis et al., 2017), yet literature examining these intersections in digital counterspaces outside of schools and the literacy lives of Black girls that use them are merely nonexistent. In this study, the tenets of Critical Race Feminist Theory are operationalized to examine data and digital artifacts of Black girls on Instagram through content and visual discourse analysis. Findings from this research discussed in Chapter 4 are guided by both Counterspace Framework (Case & Hunter, 2012) and a Black Girl Literacies Framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) for education.

Critical Race Feminism

Within America, Black girls perform the lowest in reading proficiency (NAEP, 2018) and are hyper criminalized at an alarming higher rate compared to their gender peer group (Nelson et al., 2017). Taking on a colorblind pedagogical approach to education implies that the detrimental issues which disrupt the academic potential and survival of Black children are a non-crisis (Bell, 2017; Moore & Lewis, 2012). Moreover,

a pedagogical approach that does not see race and gender cannot possibly liberate Black girls in education that are oppressed by racism (Winter-Evans, 2005). At this notion, Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT), also known as Critical Race Feminism (CRF), is deemed a necessity with applying critical praxis in literacy education.

CRFT originates from the core principles of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and several feminist lenses developed in the second half of the 20th century (Wing, 1997). The 60s and 70s in America fueled social theoretical momentum from the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements that supported new forms of ideology from Black intellectuals. A space in critical discourse was established that critiqued the limitations of scholars such as Antonio Gramsci's approaches to Critical Theory and its exclusion of racism (Lemert, 2004). As a critique to Critical Theory which was founded in 1923 by theorists of the Frankfurt School to explore power and classism (Giroux, 2001), CRT was derived by several legal scholars, but most notably Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda and Kimberle' Crenshaw (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Drawing from the scholarship of W.E.B. DuBois and other Afrocentric thought leaders, CRT refuses to separate the association of race and class as the foundation of which hegemony is built in America.

Since the inception of CRT, several theoretical lenses have been extended through the framework to center issues outside of race that marginalize groups such as Black women. CRFT evolved from CRT and critiqued that the experiences of the Black race were not monolithic (Wing, 1997). The foundations of CRFT are also grounded from several feminist frameworks. Patricia Hill Collins's research on Black Feminist Thought highlighted the need to explore feminism, gender, and social inequality together and non-

singular ways (Lemert, 2016). While examining social issues, Collins (2001) contended the inequalities that exist in work and pay for Black women. Moreover, Black Feminist Thought as a theoretic lens provides a framework for analyzing the complexities of Black womanhood and roles in society that are different from White women, yet highly regarded for the liberation of the oppressed Black race (King, 1988). Chicana Feminism (Coterra, 1977) and Black Feminism both provide the notion that the first wave of White feminism was not completely inclusive of all levels of oppression experienced by women. Thus, asserting a universal lens to feminist ideology as one and the same provides the same limitations as asserting a Eurocentric lens as a worldview.

CRFT was developed through the lens of intersectionality grounded in the research of Crenshaw (2001) and Collins (2000). Intersectionality and CRFT introduces the concept of "multiplicative identity," which asserts that the multiple identities of Black women are layered and create a new identity to explore injustice (Patton & Ward, 2016). Wing (1997), Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010), and Rodriguez and Boahene (2012) provide the following four tenants of CRFT that will guide the research of this study:

1) First, CRFT is Intersectional. There is a clear understanding that the experiences of Black girls and women are different from those of Black boys and men, and White women (Wing, 1997).
2) Second, CRFT is Multidisciplinary. Various theories of Black feminism such as Black Feminist Thought are inclusive of critical race feminism (Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010).
3) Third, CRFT is Non-hegemonic. A critique of practices that encompass gender and racial oppression are deconstructed (Wing, 1997).

4) Fourth, CRFT involves Counterstorytelling. Stories of Black girls and women are spotlighted instead of marginalized in discourse. Autobiographical text is used to center the perspectives of Black girls (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012).

Black Girl Literacies Framework

Black Girl Literacies (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) and Counterspace (Case & Hunter, 2012) frameworks were utilized in this study to explore literacy practices and literacy spaces of Black girls. Muhammad and Haddix (2016) provided a review of literature of Black girl literacies by examining research on the literacies of Black girls conducted over the past three decades. Through the usage of threads and themes, Muhammad and Haddix (2016) carved out concepts identified throughout research to develop a Black Girl's Literacy framework. Several pedagogical approaches that center Black girls in the context of literacy were employed. As a result, six core components were derived to conceptualize reading, writing, discussing, and performing with Black girls. The Black Girl's Literacy Framework acknowledges that literacy among this population should include the components listed below:

1) First, literacy should be *multiple* in practice. Concepts of multimodality are embraced in this component through pedagogy.
2) Literacy should also be *tied to identities.* This component attaches elements of socio-cultural literacy with language and identity.
3) Literacy should be *historical*. In this component connections with past and present uses of literacy may be employed.
4) Literacy should be *collaborative*. Social media as an affinity space may possibly foster opportunities for collaboration, communication, and engagement.

5) Literacy should be *intellectual*. In this aspect, literacy should educate and enhance proficiency and achievement.
6) Lastly, literacy should be *political and critical*. Literacy as liberation and a tool for self-advocacy or social justice has been explored in this literature review and aligns with this component.

Counterspace Framework

Counterspaces in education create a domain of liberation for the oppressed members of society that are limited in their freedoms due to hegemonic power and barriers (Wiggins, 2011). Whether formal or informal, counterspaces challenge negative representations and perceptions governing marginalized identities (Case & Hunter, 2012). Poetry, Hip Hop, and Critical Media Literacy education programs have been fundamental counterspaces that are created as a response to unjustifiable hegemonic power structures that exist, and as an opposition to leverage power through language and knowledge (Akom, 2009). According to Prince (2005) "hegemonic forces must be countered by self-regulating pedagogical processes that raise consciousness and inspire hope and vision" (p. 2).

Case and Hunter (2012) developed the counterspace framework to operationalize the term for scholarship and practice. By drawing from their framework, practitioners can define counterspace through four characteristics. These four characteristics include assessing educational spaces as: (a) places where identity narratives and stories are created, (b) places of healing, (c) places of active resistance, and (d) places of direct relational transactions. According to Case and Hunter, "narratives are defined as stories that communicate important things about individuals and groups as a process by which

individuals or collectives give meaning to themselves and others" (p. 262). Thus, it is important for educators to understand the negative and harmful narratives that are created by the world regarding Black girls and understand the influence that it may have on their liberation.

Conclusion

Through literature, we have explored how the second wave of feminism in the United States during the 1970s gave life and breath to the influence of literacy and intellect on the lives of Black girls. An emergence of deeper theoretical ideology that centered Black feminist thought (Collins, 1990), and the intersections of class, race, and gender has provided further implications on education and Black girls (Crenshaw, 1989). According to hooks (2015), although Black girls in America experience a doubled layer of minoritization, this complexity equips them to embody a triple consciousness towards deconstructing systemic oppression. Black feminist intellectuals such as Audre Lorde have contributed a lens on the complex lives of Black girls to birth an awakening of oppression in America. In the book *Sister Outsider*, Lorde (2003) spoke of the many layers of oppression to be peeled from racism, sexism, and sexuality. Thus, it can be concluded from this review of literature that the failure to center the issues of Black girls in literacy education and override the problems that plague their success is to continue a notion of invisibility with their existence (King, 1988). This research study sought to dismantle that proposition and make visible the literacy practices of this group that support their liberation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Methodology Overview

In this chapter, I provide an outline of the methods for data collection and analysis that were used for this study. As this study intended to explore the literacy practices of adolescent Black girls on Instagram, I chose to employ several methodologies for collecting and analyzing data that are explained throughout the chapter. Additionally, I have provided a description of the research design, methods for participant selection, and processes for data analysis. First, I will begin this chapter by highlighting the purpose of my research and sharing more insight on the setting that bounded the study.

The Purpose

Although research has been done to explore social media, such as #BlackTwitter, as a counterspace with Black youth (Hill, 2018; Maragh, 2018; Stevens & Maurantonio, 2018), there is limited research that assesses social media as a potential digital counterspace for adolescent Black girls' literacy practices specifically based on age and gender. According to The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2017), Black teens are the largest users of Instagram and Snapchat. In the study conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research (2017), one-third of Black teens reported being consistent users of Instagram compared to one-fifth of White teens. Girls also consistently reported higher usage of the Instagram app than boys. Research has looked at Black girl literacies and digital literacies among this population (Price-Dennis, 2016), but has not explored their usage in non-academic or informal practice specifically in one of the digital spaces they predominantly use:

Instagram. Most importantly, the need to explore the elements of literacy that engage Black girls in non-formal academic spaces in which they utilize excessively outside of school may provide context for application in academic curriculum.

The purpose for my research was to explore how Instagram may serve as a potential counterspace for adolescent Black girls' literacy practices and the type of literacy practices they engage in within the space outside of school with non-formal instruction. In order to explore how Instagram may function as a potential counterspace for Black girls, I engaged in interviews with participants, collected their digital posts and artifacts for content, and observed participants' online engagement and posting habits. More specifically, to explore the literacy practices of Black girls on Instagram, I analyzed their use of language, text, and audience interactions. A collective case study research design was employed for my study to explore the affordances of Instagram with adolescent Black girls' literacy practices, and as a potential counterspace (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this research study was guided by the following two research questions:

RQ1: How is Instagram a potential counterspace for Black girl literacy practices?

RQ2: What literacy practices do adolescent Black girls engage in when using Instagram?

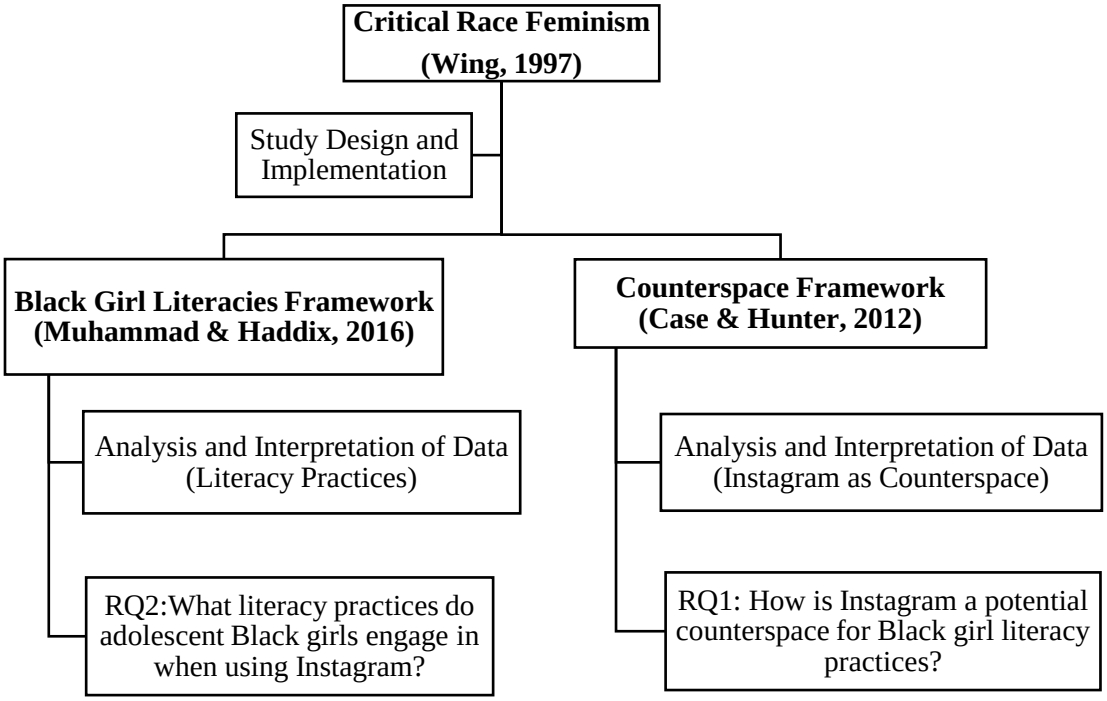
Research Design

A collective case study research design was employed for this study. Case study research involves the examination of a specific subject matter, which can include people, places, or events within a bounded system (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2002). There are multiple data sources involved in case study research to triangulate findings and may include

observations, documents, interviews, and artifacts (Creswell et al., 2007). Instagram bounded this study with Black adolescent girls. Additionally, two girls comprised two individual cases. With a collective or multiple case study, the researcher identifies an issue and multiple representative cases (Creswell et al., 2007). By exploring Black girls' literacy practices on Instagram, a collective case study design provided insight on the similarities and differences of each case.

Figure 1

Theory and Research Design Flow Chart



According to Gee (2012), qualitative data is collected and interpreted through the lens of theory. Additionally, Ezzy (2002) conceptualized theory as a type of interpretive framework and states that theory has a dependent nature of data. Thus, I find it imperative to restate the theoretical lenses that guided my methodology. As seen in

Figure 1, Critical Race Feminism (CRF) (Wing, 1997) has been employed in this research through the study design and implementation of methods. Both Black girl literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) and counterspace framework (Case & Hunter, 2012) guided the analysis and interpretation of data to answer the two research questions for this study.

The Setting

Instagram served as the primary site for research. Established on October 6, 2010, it is a social media mobile space with more than one billion members to date (Manovich, 2017). The age restriction of the space is for ages thirteen and up to be in compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA, 1998). Over 72% of teens between the ages of thirteen and seventeen report using Instagram (Auxier, 2020). While the Instagram space may host many members, each individual member is able to customize their own personal space or network within the app by selecting friends and followers they want to engage with their profile (Mattern, 2016). Therefore, each members' space and experience on Instagram is defined by the people in their network they select to follow, share posts, and communicate with on the app. As a member of the Instagram space, you can choose to follow someone that does not follow you and the other way around.

Members of Instagram can also make their profile or space private where they can be selective with who has access to see their posts and communicate with them. The only way to communicate in the Instagram space is by posting a photo or video through a mobile device. Text may accompany the photo or video but may not be used solely to communicate in the space. An Instagram member may communicate to other members

four ways: publicly, privately, directly, or through Instagram stories (Linaschke, 2011). Communicating publicly or privately is based on the member's privacy settings from their profile. Direct messaging is when a member communicates in a private chat with one or more members on Instagram. Photos are not required to communicate between members through direct messaging. Lastly, members may communicate by sharing an Instagram story where their post is only visible by their followers for 24 hours. By understanding the parameters of Instagram as my setting for research, I was more equipped to explore the ways in which participants use the space and engage in literacy practices.

Sample Description

This research utilized convenient criterion sampling. Because this study sought Black adolescent girls who were active users of social media, criterion sampling ensured that a representative sample of the population was employed. For this reason, the criteria for the study stipulated that all participants: (a) identified as a Black girl; (b) were between the ages 13 and 17; and (c) posted on Instagram daily or weekly. The criteria for participants in this study was attributed to (a) the CRF lens which was employed in the research design to explore the experiences of Black girls, and (b) due to the age restrictions for adolescents on Instagram (age 13 and older) by the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA, 1998).

The two participants that participated in the study both participated in previous programs that I have spearheaded in the community. Recruitment practices consisted of speaking to parents with adolescent daughters that I already had relationships with before the study began. I provided an overview of the study and requirements of participants.

The first two parents and their teens that confirmed that they were interested in participating in the study and met all the criteria were selected. I then sent consent/assent forms electronically via email through the docusign software to both the child and parent/guardian to sign. Each consent/assent form provided information about the study, procedures, and asked background questions about literacy and social media engagement. Once participants and their parent or guardian completed the docusign, they received a confirmation via email and I scheduled their first interview. According to Creswell et al. (2007), it is best to choose a limited number of cases to explore in a collective case study to provide a detailed and thorough analysis of each participant involved in the research. Two participants were selected for this study in order to apply an intersectional lens and establish more than one case required for a collective case study design. In order to compare cases, I needed at least two participants. Additionally, I also wanted to provide an in-depth analysis of each case, therefore I limited the number of participants to a small number. A fifty-dollar gift card was provided to participants at the completion of the study to incentivize their participation over the course of eight-weeks. Participants received information on incentives and terms of commitment before they agreed to participate.

Data Collection

The study protocol for this research was approved by the University of North Carolina at Charlotte IRB prior to implementation. Written consent and assent were obtained from all participants selected to participate in the study and their parents to allow me to become a follower on each of their Instagram accounts. Participants were not allowed to block or set privacy settings in the Instagram space to prevent me from seeing

any content on their pages or posts throughout the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data collection encompasses strategic confidentiality procedures to be implemented. All participants were assured that confidentiality regarding their online profiles and identifying information would not be disclosed. A private folder for all data collection content was created in Google drive and had accessibility restrictions. The private folder contained subfolders for each participant to store their consent/assent forms, interviews, screen captures of posts, field notes, and transcripts. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants prior to the first interview at the start of the study. A Google Doc was created in the private research folder to identify participants with their assigned pseudonyms. Folders and content all contained the pseudonyms of participants instead of their actual name as an identifier. Access to the overall research folder was only granted to me as the researcher and my faculty advisor. Each participant also were granted access to each of their folders.

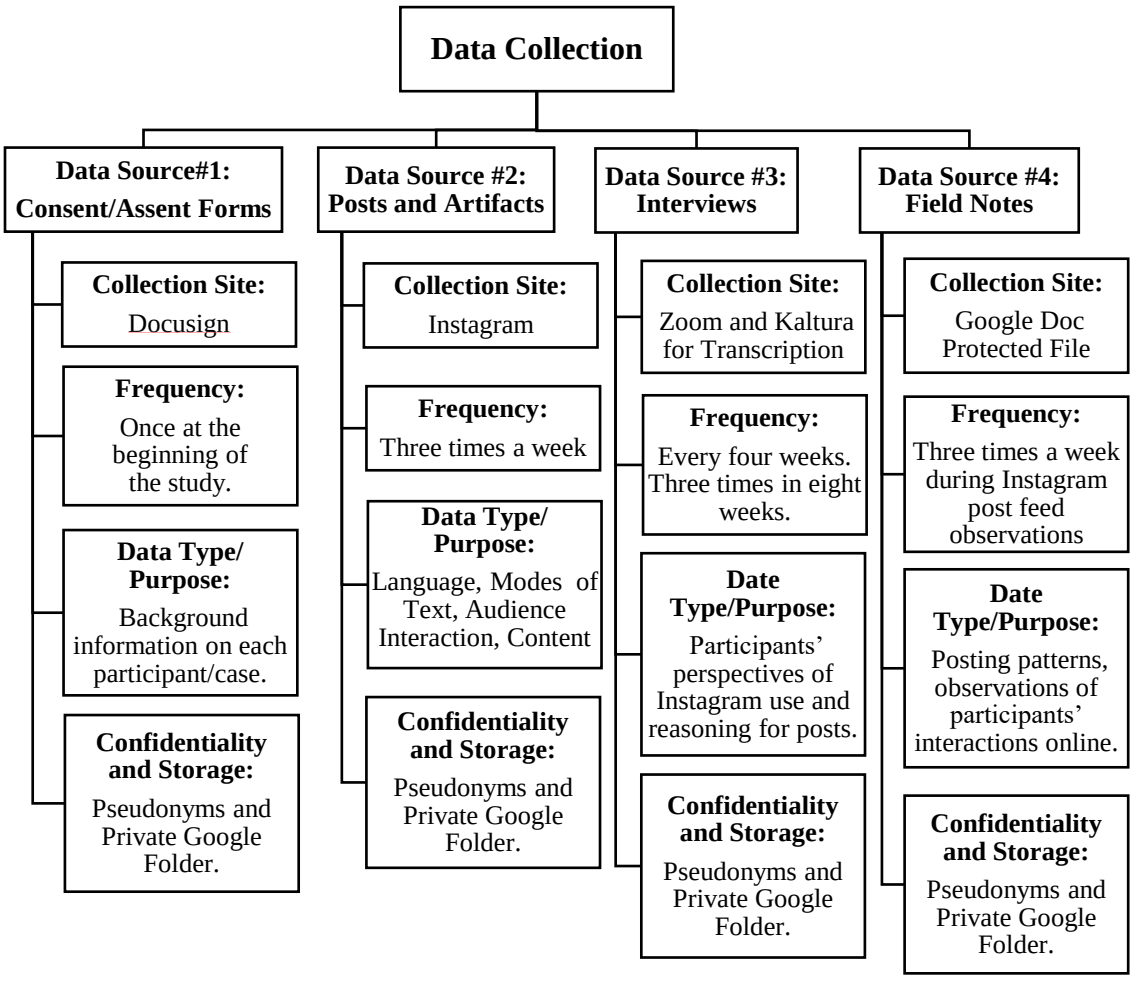
Instrumentation and Data Sources

Yin (2009) suggested that more than three data sources are beneficial for triangulation and assessing details for each case. Moreover, Creswell et al. (2007) suggested that case studies may employ the use of observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, documents, and reports. In this study, the following three data sources were utilized: (a) Instagram posts on timeline and Stories, (d) interviews, (e) and field notes from online observations. All data sources were collected over an eight-week period and analyzed at the completion of the study during the data analysis phase. Background information provided in the consent and assent packet was collected for participant's descriptive data. This data provided insight on each participant's social media and literacy

experiences prior to the study. Semi structured interviews were also employed with participants and took place virtually (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, digital posts were collected online from each participants page and from content share in their Stories section on Instagram. Lastly, field notes were collected throughout the research process by observing participants profiles and engagement three times a week. Figure 2 provides an overview of the three data sources that were collected for the study. Next, I will share more details of how each data source was collected and secured for the study.

Figure 2

Data Sources and Collection Chart



Data Source #1: Consent/Assent Forms

Consent/Assent Forms (See Appendix A & B) were collected prior to the start of the study and before the first interview. Docusign was the online software utilized by participants and their parents to complete the consent/assent forms and answer participant background questions. Data from the assent/consent forms provided background information for each individual participant that was collected as descriptive data. Questions on the consent/assent forms pertained to participant's literacy experiences online. For instance, one question asked, "What types of content or posts do you like to read online?" These responses provided insight on each participant's non-observable and non-visible literacy practices on Instagram.

Data Source #2: Posts (Photos, Videos, Alpha-Numeric Text, Graphics)

Instagram posts were collected as digital artifacts to review three times a week online. I collected posts from participants' timelines and from their Stories. Each post from each participant were screen captured online via computer or screen shot via mobile app and saved as a .jpeg file. Text from conversations were recorded in field notes. Each image was uploaded in each participant's secured personal folder. Once the content was uploaded, it was then deleted from the saved computer hardware files or mobile device. The types of posts collected online allowed me to analyze (a) language, (b) content or topics of interest, (c) multimodality, and (d) audience interaction among participants.

Language

Language involved collecting the typed text (alpha-numeric) and comments of participants. Word choice, point of view, and perspective of participants were visible

through the selection of these posts. Language text were copied verbatim and pasted in a Google Doc with the date and time of posting. Additionally, posts that were visual images of texts, such as memes shared by participants, were collected, and used to observe language use.

Content and Topics of Interest

Content and topics of interests involved collecting posts that provided context to the participants' interests, beliefs, opinions, or expression. For instance, this data included posts about identity, politics, or even entertainment. Data that provided insight on content and topics of interest were collected in the form of screenshots of profile posts and Instagram stories that participants shared with followers. Previously posted photos before the start of the study that were available on the participant's timeline once the study began were also collected to explore for content and topics of interest.

Multimodality

Multimodality identified the type of text modes used by participants and the relationship between images and caption. When collecting posts, I notated whether the post was a (1) photo, (2) video, or (3) typed text. Additionally, I specified if the post involved a combination of mediums. The timing of posts and frequency of posting was also collected in a secured google document.

Audience Interaction

Lastly, audience interaction involved collecting comments, responses, and engagement of participants with followers. This type of data provided insight on how participants responded to others and who or what they were commenting on in the space.

Emoji reactions were collected as data in addition to typed text. All conversational text was copied and pasted verbatim in field notes located in a secured Google document.

Data Source #3: Interviews

Semi-structured interview questions served as one of the primary sources for data collection of this study (Creswell, 2014) (See Appendix C & D). Emerging themes from interviews supported the adding or removing of questions in the semi-structured interview format (Charmaz, 2010; Patton, 2014). Three interviews that were 30-45 minutes in duration were conducted with each participant. Considering that the study extended for eight weeks with data collection, interviews took place at the start of the study and every four weeks. The first interview was conducted at the beginning of the study to discuss archived posts and content on the participants' Instagram page. A second interview took place four weeks later during the study at a midway point to discuss posts made at the start of the study up to that specific date. At the end of the eight week period, a final interview was conducted with participants to discuss posts and content on their Instagram page since the midway point of the last interview.

Calendar invites and an email confirmation was sent to participants and their parent/guardian with a Zoom link two weeks in advance. Approximately two to four warm-up questions were provided at the start of the interview to build rapport with participants. Interview questions were organized by the tenants/themes of counterspace framework into four categories. Participants were required to access their Instagram account(s) during the interview to provide specific experiences and verbiage of social media posts and interactions for reference. Each interview was recorded online virtually via Zoom software. A recording of the interview was downloaded as an .mp3 file,

uploaded to the secure Google folder and all video footage was deleted from computer software. Kaltura software was used to transcribe the audio file into a text file which was stored in the secure Google folder.

Data Source #4: Field Notes

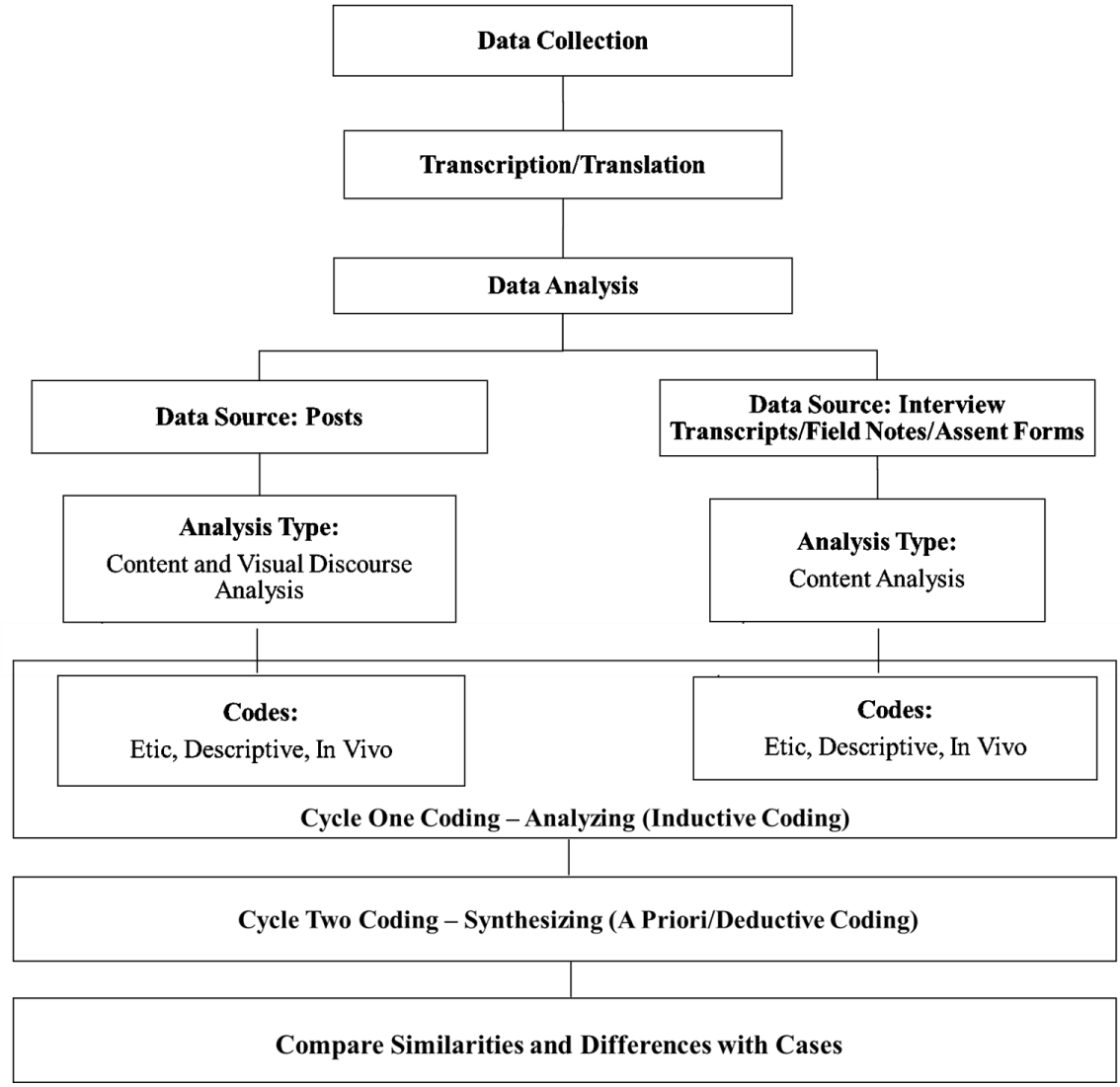
According to Tracy (2019), field notes encompass the inclusion of one's own interpretation. Specifically, good field notes are vivid through the researcher's writing, provide clarity, and are extremely detailed (Miles et al., 2018). To understand how detailed field notes should be, Goffman (1989) asserted that approximately three to five pages of notes should capture one hour of observations. Through the usage of field notes, I recorded my observations three times a week of observed posts and online engagement with participants. I allotted one hour during each observation to explore the content on each participant's page, take screenshots, capture in vivo comments, explore video footage and media, and jot down my observations.

Analytical Procedures

After the data collection phase ended at the conclusion of eight weeks, all data was transcribed and organized to prepare for analysis. Prior to starting the analysis process, participants received access to review and approve the transcripts and data collected in their folders for accuracy. The analysis approaches were utilized for this study were content analysis, and visual discourse analysis. Two coding cycles were employed with data and themes across cases were explored. Next, I will explain how each analysis method was employed in the study. Figure 3 provides an overview of the analysis procedure that was implemented for the study.

Figure 3

Data Analysis Chart



Content Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis

Content discourse analysis involves analyzing natural conversation for specifically for language and social interaction context (Tracy & Robles, 2013). The data sources that were analyzed using content discourse analysis were interviews, posts, and digital artifacts collected from Instagram which explored (a) language, (b) content and

topics, (c) multimodality, and (d) audience interaction. A Black girls' literacies framework provided a lens for analysis when exploring each participant's literacy practices. By applying a Black girls' literacies lens, I explored how a priori and inductive codes align with pre-determined categories from the literature that explores (a) language as socio-cultural and connected to identity, (b) content and topics as critical or political, (c) literacy as multiple in practice, and (d) interaction as collaborative (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). Additionally, content analysis was employed to analyze questionnaires and field notes that did not focus specifically on language use with participants. Content analysis utilizes a set of predetermined categories derived from a theory or theoretical perspective (Mertens, 2014). To explore Instagram as a potential counterspace through all data sources collected, the predetermined categories consisted of: (a) narrative formation, (b) healing, (c) resistance, and (d) relationship building. All data was interpreted, assigned codes, and synthesized to see connections with predetermined categories.

Visual Discourse Analysis

Considering that Instagram is primarily a visual platform and involves elements of visual literacy, visual discourse analysis was used to analyze images (Albers et al., 2009). To employ visual discourse analysis with images, I analyzed (a) framing, (b) focal point, (c) appropriation, and (d) composition (Albers, 2007). Framing involves exploring how objects, backgrounds, or people may be used for a purpose. Focal point consists of examining the primary focus of the image. Appropriation entails investigating manipulation or editing of an image, for example, using filters to change the appearance of a selfie. Lastly, composition assesses the ways in which objects may be arranged in a photo. Primarily composition was evaluated in a constructed photo with text or other

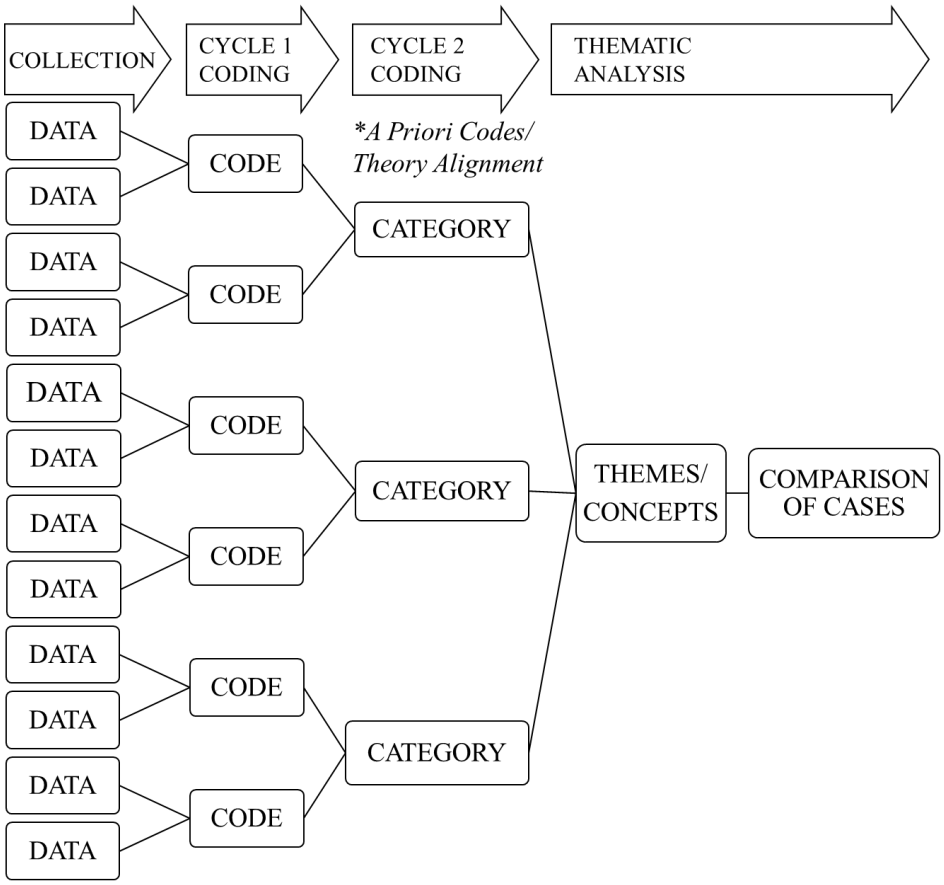
elements added to an image. While I have specified the types of analysis that were used in this study, which are displayed in Figure 3, it is important for me to specify the coding procedures next that were employed to conduct my analysis.

Coding Procedures

As defined by Saldaña (2021), a code is a label assigned interpretively by a researcher to describe the content of text generated from data sources. The process for coding qualitative data involves establishing codes to eventually categorize data (Blair, 2015). Codes may be predetermined (a priori) by a theory or created by the researcher inductively as they engage with the data (Belotto, 2018). For my study, I used a hybrid approach to coding. When implementing the coding process, it is key to establish two cycles of coding which is reflected in Figure 3 and Figure 4 (Saldaña, 2021). The first cycle of coding should serve as an analysis of data to establish codes and the second cycle should serve the purpose of synthesizing codes for categorical assignment. In cycle one, I began my analysis with selecting in vivo codes and creating etic codes as I engaged with the data. Cycle two consisted of categorizing codes from cycle one with a priori codes or pre-selected categories established from Black girl literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) and counterspace framework (Case & Hunter, 2012). I did not use an analysis software package and instead code my textual data in a secured Google document using the comments feature in cycle one of coding. During cycle two of coding, I transferred all codes and data into a secured Google spreadsheet with a list of categories. In Figure 4, I have visually displayed the coding procedural process for my study and will now discuss each cycle in more detail.

Figure 4

Coding Procedures Flow Chart



Cycle One Coding

Once data was collected and transcribed, I began exploring the text and identifying the context of the content to assign codes. When looking at my data set during the first cycle, I began with etic, descriptive and in vivo coding. Etic codes are objectively created by an outsider (the researcher) to define universal meaning to text (Harris, 1976). As the researcher, I generated the etic and descriptive codes to describe content. Descriptive coding uses one-word codes to capture a general idea of the data and is beneficial when observing non-traditional text. I then employed descriptive coding when analyzing videos and engaging in visual discourse analysis (Albers, 2007).

Comparatively, in vivo codes were also used during cycle one and were not based on the interpretation of me as the researcher. According to Blair (2015), in vivo coding involves using the participants' own words instead of an interpretation of the data. Moreover in vivo coding is useful when data emphasizes language use from different cultures. Considering that this study employed content discourse analysis to explore language and sociocultural literacy practices with Black girls, in vivo codes were employed with direct quotes from participants. After I assigned codes to all of my data, I then began cycle two of the coding process.

Cycle Two Coding

The goal for my research during this stage of coding was to become more thorough and detailed with my coding and to synthesize my codes. During cycle two, I began to dig deeper with the data and assigned additional codes as I engaged in line-by-line coding. Codes that were generated in cycle one and that may have been updated in cycle two were assigned to predetermined categories. Cycle two involved synthesizing data with a priori codes (deductive) established from Black girl literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016) and counterspace framework (Case & Hunter, 2012). To answer my first question for this study which explores how Instagram is a potential counterspace for Black girl literacy, I employed the counterspace framework tenets as categories to synthesize codes. Predetermined categories for counterspace framework to synthesize my data were: (a) counter narrative formation, (b) healing, (c) resistance, and (d) relationship building (Case & Hunter, 2012). For my second question which explores the type of literacy practices adolescent Black girls engage in when using Instagram, I employed the Black girl literacies framework tenets as categories to synthesize codes.

The predetermined categories from the Black girl literacies framework for synthesizing coded data were: (a) socio-cultural language and identity, (b) critical and political content, (c) multimodality, and (d) collaborative interaction (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). While analyzing codes that did not fit predetermined categories, new categories emerged during this coding process.

Comparing Cases

Once all the data has been coded and categorized in cycle one and two, I then began to explore themes and patterns from my cases. Each individual case's spreadsheet was combined side by side. Common themes were explored collectively, and differences were highlighted between each case. The findings from the research were provided to the participants and their parents/guardians to review. Participant approval of the analysis was required before the interpretation of findings began. Throughout the research design and specifically during the analysis process it was important for me to engage in reflexivity. According to Glesne (2016), reflexivity is defined as critical reflection from the researcher on how their experiences and beliefs influence the interpretation of data interaction. Considering the importance of researcher subjectivity when engaging in qualitative research and interpreting findings, next I will provide a positionality statement for transparency of research.

Researcher Positionality

Understanding the influences of traditional media and social media on the lives of adolescents initially sparked my interest over ten years ago. This fascination led to me launching community programs that taught teens between the ages 12 and 18 media

literacy. Those efforts eventually culminated into a nonprofit organization I founded in 2011 called I AM not the Media, Inc., which empowers teens to embrace their individuality and uniqueness through critical media literacy (CML) and media creation. It also led me to pursue a master's degree in New Media Literacies. While working with teens through my nonprofit and engaging in conversations with them, they began sharing their experiences online and unveiling the concept of social media as an actual "space" for expression, support from peers, and through their perception, a judgement free zone from parents. My curiosity began to blossom to learn about how marginalized teens may utilize social media as a counterspace for liberation and self-expression.

Additionally, I believe that the need to deconstruct Eurocentric traditional Language Arts curriculum is pertinent. As a Black girl myself, I have experienced the limitations and bias of traditional literacy practices in education and value the benefits of employing new literacies. Therefore, my worldview towards research is critical postmodern, and I am aware it may cause subjectivity in my work. Considering that I possess a critical postmodern paradigm towards research, it is important to note how this may conflict with the constructionist epistemology that this research seeks to provide. Through constructionism, this study examined how Instagram may serve as a counterspace for Black girls' literacy practices. Concepts of meaning construction with social media posts, narratives, and images of participants while analyzing the construct of the Instagram environment were interpreted. I understand that it is important as a researcher to remove critical postmodern beliefs from the study and allow observation and constructed meanings from participants to remain at the forefront of the research to highlight their experiences.

Validity

This study was intended to contribute to a more robust understanding of how education as a whole may assist in creating inclusive literacy practices for Black girls. In order to maintain the integrity of this study, and the emotional wellbeing of participants, relationships were created with parents to assist with this process. Additionally, all field notes, transcripts, and final analysis were shared with participants at the conclusion of interviews and after findings were written for approval. Some identified limitations were considered prior to the start of the study and included the age range of participants and their cognitive ability to critically reflect in depth regarding their experiences online. It was understood that ability may vary between each case and their level of consciousness through reflection. Moreover, the chances of altered posting with participants was also considered as a potential limitation with understanding that a researcher was now following their online activity. All participants were advised in the consent/assent forms to not block or implement privacy settings on their posts. Moreover, I intentionally implemented a plan to assess each participant's posting history and determine whether changes were made in content and posting habits.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this collective case study sought to provide insight for educators to learn how Instagram may serve as a potential counterspace for Black girls and the literacy affordances the space offers. This study analyzed language, content, multimodality, and audience interaction among Black girls' literacy practices on Instagram. Each case was assessed independently, and common themes were identified as a collective. It is my hope that stakeholders in secondary school education will have a more robust

understanding of the benefits and challenges that Black girls experience in the social media world with literacy and expression. Stakeholders will then be able to assess how Instagram or similar digital counterspaces can be incorporated as a learning tool to educate and engage Black girls in classrooms to produce equitable learning experience. Next, I will share findings from my research in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview of Results and Findings

My overarching research questions demonstrated my intentions to explore how Instagram may serve as a potential counterspace for adolescent Black girls and the type of literacy practices they engage within the space outside of school and with non-formal instruction. Thus, this qualitative study intentionally employed a collective case study design to analyze both space and practice among adolescent Black girls on Instagram by using Case and Hunter's (2012) Counterspace Framework and Muhammad and Haddix's (2016) Black Girls' Literacy Framework. The purpose of this chapter is to provide examples of the literacy practices exemplified by Black adolescent girls on Instagram and ways in which they engage in the space. To better understand how their literacy practices and use of Instagram coincide with the theoretical frameworks employed in this study, content analysis and visual discourse analysis were used to examine multimodal texts from posts, stories, interviews, and field notes.

While the setting of this study for both participants was bounded within the Instagram app, their personal experiences with self-validation evolved as a central backdrop with their literacy practices and narratives. Additionally, similar to Harriet Jacobs's (2018) autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which serves as the inspiration for the title of this study, self-actualization was also a consistent theme that rose to the forefront among the literacy practices of both participants. Throughout the eight weeks of the study, the participants shared stories in their interviews that captured their experiences both online and offline. These experiences shaped their identities as Black adolescent girls in very different ways, yet with many similarities in their literacy

practices on Instagram. In many cases, their experiences were at the core of how they engaged with literacy online, framed who they were, and who they wanted to be as Black girls transitioning into womanhood.

During the time I worked on my research, so many life-changing events transpired connected to the fields of critical race feminism and digital literacies. One of those events was the loss of the profound and brave Black feminist scholar bell hooks on December 15, 2021. Thus, as I recently highlighted the connection of self-actualization and Black girls' literacy practices in this introduction, it is only befitting to share this quote from the late bell hooks, written in the preface of her book, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism.* In the new edition, hooks (2014) said, "After finishing the writing of *Ain't I A Woman*, then years later seeing the work published in my late twenties, marked the culmination of my own struggles to be fully self-actualized, to be free and an independent woman" (p. xi). When reflecting on her personal experiences that were tied to who she was as a young Black woman while writing one of the most prolific works that contributed to the field of critical race feminism, bell hooks acknowledged her connection to self-actualization as a literacy practice. As the quote from bell hooks was reflective in context, she lends a retroactive analysis of her personal experience practicing literacy and connects self-actualization to her quest for liberation by using the words "free" and "independent."

The participants in this study have consistently expressed their realization for self-actualization unknowingly by sharing their desires to reach their full potential, embrace their identity, and accept who they truly are. Womack (2013), in her study with Black girls on their understanding of their identity and hegemonic influences of society through

literacy, highlighted their desire to engage in both traumatic and triumphant storytelling regarding their identities. Moreover, Ellison and Kirkland (2014) shared an emphasis on expression and identity construction as a practice among Black girls with the affordance of multimodality through technology. In this study, participants were less likely to share their stories of trauma and triumph on Instagram, and instead utilized art, symbolic imagery, or reposted quotes that connected to their personal experiences with trauma. Their expression of feelings was not shared on their public pages and their identities were strategically and intentionally structured for their audiences.

In this chapter, I will explore the contexts of how participants grappled with self-actualization, self-validation, and identity through their literacy practices on Instagram. Chapter 4 is organized into two sections to address the research questions. Section one is titled Black girls' literacy practices on Instagram and section two is titled, Instagram as a potential counterspace. The first section of the chapter explores the ways in which the participants' use of language, content, multimodal text, and audience interaction coincide with the Black Girls' Literacy framework. The second section analyzes the use of the Instagram space through the four tenants of the Counterspace Framework. Lastly, the chapter concludes with an overview of the findings and summates the practices and experiences of participants on Instagram during this eight-week study. Before I share the findings as relative to the research questions for this study, I will provide participant descriptive data to add context to each case explored.

Participant Descriptive Data

At the beginning of the study, participants provided responses in their consent and assent forms on their literacy experiences and practices outside of school. Responses

collected from participants' consent forms and from their three interviews throughout the study were used to compile participant descriptive data. When conducting qualitative studies, it is vital for data to be descriptive to explore the similarities and differences that exist among participants and cases (Yin, 2011). In this study, descriptive data were utilized to better understand the intersectional experiences of Black girls' literacy practices as it connects to the participants' identities. Before we take a deep dive into the results of the study, the descriptive data compiled from participants will serve as a foundation for connecting the emerging themes with each case. By doing so, we may use this data and the results to formulate conclusions from the study in Chapter 5. Moreover, the descriptions of both participants lend a more detailed understanding of their backgrounds and personal experiences that are at the heart of their literacy practices and use of the Instagram platform soon to be explored in this chapter.

Table 1

Participant Descriptions, Similarities, and Differences

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Outside of School Reading	Literature Preference	Number of Followers/ Audience	Purpose for Using Instagram	Types of Posting	Types of Life Events Shared
Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate	16	11th	Not an active reader	Song Lyrics	1530	Fun and to socialize	(Socially Driven) Selfies, Social Events, Friends	Homecoming, Anniversary Dinner, Friends, Cheerleading
Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	17	12th	Very active reader	Artistic, Personal Development Books	2308	Business, professional purposes	(Goal Driven) Projects, Art, Behind the Scenes Videos, Networking	College Acceptance, Networking Opportunities, Bookings

Participants' Similarities			
Public Profiles	Created accounts at age 10 in the 5th grade (Elementary School)	Created accounts to connect with friends	More than 1,500 followers on accounts
Conscious of Followers	Deleted or archived posts of younger self to not be publicly available	Value friendships	Negative comparisons of younger online identity

Participants

As outlined in Table 1, two participants served as the two cases in this study. Both participants self-identified as Black and as a girl in order to participate in this research which employed a critical race feminist lens. Participants' age, grade, gender, reading activity outside of school, literature preference, social media platforms they use, the purpose for using Instagram, type of posting, and life events shared in interviews during the study are all highlighted in Table 1 to add context to the data and each case. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym that represents their personality and passion expressed in their first interview. The purpose of the pseudonym was to protect the identity of each participant.

Participant 1: The Advocate

Jade is a 16-year-old Black girl with a bubbly personality. At the time of this study, she was in the 11th grade and lived with just her mother as an only child. Her bond and love for her mother was very evident in our conversations and stories that she would share about her past and current events that took place in her life during our eight weeks together. In one of her posts on Instagram, she dedicated it to her mother and emphasized that when her mother is happy, she is happy. Beyond being a junior in high school, Jade

works a part-time job at a fast-food restaurant and is a cheerleader at her school. She has been a cheerleader for many years and loves participating in the sport. When asked why she enjoys being a cheerleader, Jade replied:

> *I like the friendships I make... I just like doing cheers in general, being sexy, showing spirit, and supporting my classmates and stuff.*

Like this quote, a lot of Jade's responses were socially inspired during the three interviews we did over the eight-week period. At the beginning of each interview, I asked both participants whether they had any life events or experiences that happened since the last time we met. Events and experiences that Jade shared included Homecoming at her school and getting to leave school early with her friend, going to a concert with her friend, attending an anniversary dinner with her mother's friends, and cheerleading activities. When looking at Jade's profile on Instagram, most of her posts are photos with friends, pictures at social events, or selfies. On her consent form, Jade also expressed that her purpose for using Instagram was for fun and to socialize.

Jade identified herself as not being an active reader outside of school. Although Jade stated this on her consent form, during one of our interviews, Jade expressed that when she was upset, she preferred to read instead of engaging with social media:

> *Like when I was younger, I used to get on Instagram all the time when I was upset. But the older I got, I started to get into like online books, so I like to read now if I'm upset or I just try to get away. So, I don't use Instagram in that way anymore, but when I was younger you could see everything I was feeling.*

While Jade did not share specific books when asked what type of literature she likes to read, she did express that she enjoys reading song lyrics.

On Instagram, Jade's personality does not appear to be as bubbly as she is in person. When asked how her personality at home and at school compares to her identity online, she stated:

> *At home, I'm really silly, and online you can tell I'm silly a little bit, but I try to keep it classy. On my IG (Instagram) I don't want to put anything crazy on there. But I will post some silly stuff sometimes and share it in my stories. So, I feel like my Instagram reflects my personality a little bit, but you may think my Instagram page is boring and I'm quiet.*

Through conversations with Jade, I began to realize that in her stories, which is a subspace on Instagram profiles where you can post videos and images that are only visible for 24 hours, she showed more of her personality, feelings, and opinions about topics that fueled her passion. Jade's posts in her stories were also motivational, uplifting, and addressed issues with body image, colorism, and beauty standards. In our first interview, Jade informed me that she likes to post content focused on advocacy and social justice which is the reason for her alias pseudonym, The Advocate. She expressed:

> *In my stories, I post a lot of human rights stuff. Mostly I post human rights, animal rights, and just different stuff like that. And now I post a lot of things about just being Black and a Black girl.*

At the time of this study, Jade had 1,530 followers and followed 4,622 people on Instagram. Her profile name was her actual first name and did not include her last name.

In the description section of her profile, which is used to share the about information of the profile owner, her caption read “just for fun.” This was the intention behind the use of the profile from Jade’s perspective, but so many other ways in which she used the platform unknowingly were eventually unveiled and will be shared in the next sections of this chapter.

Participant 2: The Artist

Cali is a 17-year-old Black girl with extreme artistic talents and dreams of becoming a creative executive in media and fashion one day. At the time of this study, she was in the 12th grade and lived with her mother and older brother. Her passion for art in the form of music, fashion, and photography was evident every time we talked as she would share with me the artists that inspire her work and motivate her to creatively express herself. She consistently immersed herself in exploring musicians and fashion designers in books, magazines, and websites from cultures even outside of her own. While getting to know Cali, I learned so much information about new fashion brands such as Daily Paper, a Black culture brand based out of the United Kingdom, discovered punk photographers such as Ed Clover, and even new music artists such as Playboi Carti and his *Die Lit* album, which I promised I would check out. Beyond being a senior in high school, Cali committed her free time to follow her passion in art by working alongside local photographers, videographers, and other artistic friends in her city on projects.

One of the phrases that Cali would use repeatedly in conversation, which speaks to her personality, was “constant progression.” She even posted a photo on her profile feed with the caption “constant progression” that depicted her in deep thought, staring

down at the ground with her as the focal point and wearing a vibrant royal blue blazer. In the photo, the camera is zoomed in as a close up shot and captures her at a side angle, with her hair pinned up, and long colorful chandelier earrings that dripped down from her lobes and rested on her shoulders. The photo is taken by one of her close friends who she tags in her comments with the caption "taken by the GOAT," meaning the "Greatest of All Time." The phrase "constant progression" was also said on several occasions in our interviews.

Example 1:

Yeah, so constant progression is like in everything. I always say that. Because in life, things happen. But you have to constantly keep going, it's a constant progression. It's a constant progression for myself with my content.

Example 2:

And I'm actually going to get that tattoo too, like constant progression, just as like a reminder you know, just never stop regardless of what happens in life.

Example 3:

I'm feeling very accomplished. I've done so much throughout the week and Sunday is my rest day, my reflection day. And I'm able to see that, you know, um, that just progression. Just constant progression and seeing that, like, I've done enough.

Like her quotes that use the words "constant progression," a lot of Cali's responses were goal-focused and driven during the three interviews we did over the

eight-week period. Just as I did with Jade, at the beginning of each interview, I asked Cali whether she had any life events or experiences happen since the last time we met. Events and experiences that Cali shared included receiving her acceptance into college at Hampton University, but she was waiting on a letter from Howard. She also shared with me networking events she attended such as art exhibits by other local artists, and connections she made at a university for her project to enter the next stage of completion. When looking at Cali's profile on Instagram, the majority of her posts are photos are professional photoshoots, behind-the-scenes video footage of her in action directing and producing her projects, and collages of photos of other artists that inspire her creativity. On her consent form, Cali also expressed that her purpose for using Instagram was for professional purposes and to share her art.

Cali identified herself as being a very active reader outside of school. From our conversations, I could also tell that she was indeed a young intellectual in her own right as she educated me on books she had read and provided a critical analysis of the work along with her own reflection without being questioned to do so. During our interviews, I found myself listening in awe for extended periods of time on how much she knew at an early age, and as she would lead the conversation on topics about history, hegemony, and race as a social construct. During one of our interviews, Cali stated:

> *Last year when I was going through like my whole spiritual awakening, I was definitely reading so many books on my history that I was never taught. So it was like an eye-opener for me because I'm like, oh my goodness. I'm this powerful being as a Black person that I never knew before. And as I'm learning that and just learning how they twisted history, and taking control of us, to make sure that*

we don't know who we are, so that they can control us. It's just crazy. And as I learned that, I'd like post more of that.

Like her profile, Cali's personality offline exuded professionalism, passion, and seriousness when we spoke. Her words were passionate in every way and her responses were well thought out, strategic, and intentional. This intentionality was evident in how she constructed the color schemes of photos on her page, the outfits she wore for photoshoots, and even the facial expressions captured to convey emotion to the audience. Just as with Jade, I realized that it was in Cali's stories, and not on her public profile where I could see what made her laugh from videos that she would repost or hear her opinions about the Black Lives Matter movement which she felt was performative by both Black and White people online.

At the time of this study, Cali had 2,308 followers and followed 279 on her personal page. Cali also had a separate productions page titled, Cali Productions, where she had 127 followers and followed one person, herself (personal page). In the description section of her profile, which is used to share the about information of the profile owner, her caption read "constant progression." Although Cali's purpose for using Instagram was primarily professional, this study revealed additional practices and usage of the space which is discussed later in this chapter.

Similarities Among Participants

One interesting finding in the descriptive data of both participants was that they both got on Instagram at the age of ten and in the fifth grade. Social pressure, the desire to be included, and connected to friends on the platform were the same reasons with

participants for why they created a profile on Instagram. According to Jade, “This was back when we didn’t, like, have phone devices that would be on (phone service access). So, you would get on Instagram (using Wi-Fi access points) to you know...text each other.”

Additionally, both participants had negative perspectives of how they constructed their identities in the past at an early age and used words like “bad” or “not it” to describe their younger selves. For instance, when discussing her profile at the age of ten compared to her present age of 16, Jade stated:

> *I used to post a lot of stuff (pictures), but I deleted it now because I got older and it was, like, embarrassing. Because they (pictures) were just really bad and embarrassing and I didn’t want anyone to see them. It’s like sixth grade me and eleventh grade me is so different. I don’t look the same. And what I thought was cute back then...yeah, it was just bad. I used to share stuff like umm... if you choose a blue heart, your soul mate starts with a “J” (laughs) and stuff like that...or like if you don’t like this post, a scary monster will come in your room (laughs). And ummm… I would post pictures of me and my friends and the captions use to be so bad. It would just say “At a park” (laughs). It was just really bad.*

Cali’s response to describe the younger version of herself on Instagram was very similar to Jade’s. She stated:

> *As I've grown, like, in 5th grade I was so different, like, I was a little girl. Honestly, with like my mindset. And as I've grown, like my own mental elevation*

is more different, and so it (Instagram) has become a platform for the foundation of like, what I'm going to accomplish in life, so it started out as just, like, social fun. You know what I'm sayin'? Like here's one of my pictures, where it's just like you look, you look, like a child like a whole little girl. Like just no. No, I had glasses on. It wasn't it.

Profiles from both participants were also intentionally made to be publicly accessible for anyone to view their accounts. Both participants had over 1,000 followers serving as their online audience, though they only knew a fraction of that amount personally.

Black Girls' Literacy Practices on Instagram

For this study, the first research question sought to explore the types of literacy practices adolescent Black girls engage with when using Instagram. To answer this first research question, I collected three sources of data. My field notes were one source of data and were gathered from observing each participants' online engagement for eight weeks. Three times out of the week, I would log onto the app and check their profile to see if there were any new posts or activity on Instagram. If there were photos or videos posted, I would watch and jot down the descriptive details of the content. Captions, comments, and any text on the profile were recorded in my field notes as well. The other two forms of data I collected consisted of interview responses and screen captures of photos on both participants' Instagram accounts. On Instagram, data was collected from both their public profiles and the stories section which functioned as a subspace. With the data that was collected, I examined language use, content or topics discussed, their audience interaction, and how they utilized various modes of text (visual, video, audio, etc.).

Content analysis and visual discourse analysis were both used in this study. Two cycles of coding were conducted which spanned over two weeks. During the first cycle of coding, an inductive coding strategy was employed to explore language, content, interaction, and modes of text. This strategy as discussed in Chapter 3, consisted of me assigning the data etic, descriptive, and in vivo codes (participants' words). Once I coded all data in cycle one for each participant, each code was then assigned to pre-determined categories, also known as a priori codes, based on the six tenants of the Black Girl Literacies framework (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). In this section, I will highlight how each participants' literacy practices aligned with the six tenants of the framework which state that Black girls' literacies are: (a) multiple in practice, (b) tied to identities, (c) historical, (d) collaborative, (e) intellectual, and (f) political and critical.

Theme #1: Multiple in Practice

As shared in Chapter 1, there is no definitive definition for the term literacy, yet the ideological model presents foundational elements of literacy as a practice. One of those elements is multimodality, which according to Jewitt et al. (2016) involves the various semiotic resources used for meaning-making. The keyword in multimodality is multi, or multiple. According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), Black girls' literacy practices are multiple and involve different modes of text. These different modes of texts may be layered in practice, but typically do not appear singular in use. Ellison and Kirkland (2014) highlighted that Black girls use multimodal technology to construct their own narratives and identities. Next, I will highlight the ways in which participants engaged in multiple modes of text as a literacy practice on Instagram.

Table 2

Multimodal Practices on Instagram

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate	Sub-Themes	Participant 1: Cali, The Artist	Sub-Themes
"I'm on Instagram and Snapchat…those are my two main ones."	Multiple Sources	Videos on Cali's profile show, tutorials, behind-the-scenes action-oriented photoshoots, and galleries of art.	Narrative Construction
"I usually go on Pinterest, honestly. And I look up cute captions for my photos."		"Those chipped letters, things like that, I feel like it has stories to it and you're able to, like, see that just through the pictures alone."	
"Well, I felt like the quote itself already said everything that needed to be said. So, I just used emojis because it went with it."	Create Richer Meaning	"I went into that photoshoot and like I killed it. The pictures looked great and they're actually on my website."	Identity Construction
"I like the way quotes as pictures look. I like words and I think people can relate more to quotes."		"I edit my own pictures. So, when I edit the pictures, it just brings it to a whole different level."	
Videos on Jade's profile were clips with friends or selfies that zoomed in on Jade's eyes and face.	Identity Construction	"I love to post art content. I post photos and captions with meaning."	Reconstruct Art

Jade: The Advocate

On Jade's Instagram profile, she utilized various modes of text. Videos, print text, photos, and memes (pictures with print text), were all semiotic resources used frequently by Jade for meaning-making. Jade practiced with multimodal texts on her Instagram page in three distinct ways. She used (a) videos for identity construction, (b) photos and print text to create richer meaning, and (c) multiple sources for gathering multimodal text.

Videos for Identity Construction. Videos on Jade's profile consisted of clips with her friends that captured her social identity and centered the importance of

friendship on her profile. For instance, one video on Jade's profile had the caption "Merry Christmas from me and the bestie." Along with the caption was a five-second silent video clip with Jade and another adolescent Black girl putting on lip gloss, talking, and laughing in the mirror. This video was constructed in the bathroom with a filter applied that created a soft and slightly brightened visual effect. Thus, Jade utilized multimodal text, with her captions, filters, and video to capture her relationship with her best friend and convey an identity of herself that was soft, fun, and friendly. A lot of Jade's videos were in the form of Boomerangs. Boomerangs are a lot of photos in a sequence that create a video that consistently replays in a loop. Creating a boomerang is a feature on the Instagram platform and takes approximately ten photos to make. The boomerangs that Jade created were all selfies and consisted of a burst of picks that zoomed in on Jade's eyes, face, and puckered lips that appeared as if she were blowing a kiss. These images played on repeat and constructed a very sensual and feminine identity of Jade.

Photos and Print Text Combined Create Richer Meaning. As seen in Table 2, Jade provided ways in which she values and uses photos and print text together to create richer meaning. On Jade's Instagram profile, she has a space dedicated to quotes. Considering that Instagram is a visual platform that only allows the sharing of images, each quote uses both print text and photos. When I asked Jade why she designated an entire space to highlight quotes on her profile, she responded by saying:

> *I like the way quotes as pictures look. I like words and I think people can relate more to quotes.*

Additionally, Jade would add captions to her posts that were visual quotes. On one particular post, Jade decided not to use any words for her caption and instead just used emojis. Emojis are small visual graphics used in the same way as print text, but to convey an emotion, object, or symbol. Here are some examples of emojis:

When I asked Jade why she decided to just use emojis instead of print text to caption the visual quote she posted, Jade responded by saying,

> *Well, I felt like the quote itself already said everything that needed to be said. So I just used emojis because it went with it.*

In this instance, the words were powerful enough alone and Jade only felt the need to add emojis that captured her emotional response to how she felt about the post. Below, is another example of how Jade combined print text and emojis with a photo from her 16th birthday shoot to add context to the image, capture her emotions, and share her feelings about the visual content she presented.

Figure 5

Jade's 16th Birthday

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Multiple Sources for Gathering Multimodal Text. One thing that I found interesting with Jade's literacy practices on Instagram was how she engaged with literacy across various platforms simultaneously. She then merged her activity in those spaces across platforms. For instance, when I asked Jade how she would come up with such catchy phrases for her captions on Instagram, she responded by saying:

I usually go on Pinterest, honestly. And I look up cute captions for my photos.

I thought this was an interesting concept of how she would pull print text from images she saw on another public platform, Pinterest, and incorporate it into the Instagram space to contextualize or express her thoughts with the photos she posted on her own profile. Additionally, Jade would casually mention in her interviews how she would repost content from other platforms such as Snapchat and Tik Tok. I asked Jade which platforms she predominantly engaged with and she stated:

I'm on Instagram and Snapchat…those are my two main ones.

Cali: The Artist

When exploring Cali's Instagram profile, her usage of multiple modes of text was very evident. Similar to Jade, videos, print text, and photos were frequently used by Cali for meaning-making. She practiced with multimodal texts on her Instagram page in three facets that I explored through observations and from our conversations. Cali used: (a) semiotic resources to reconstruct art, (b) photos and videos for identity construction, and (c) for narrative construction.

Semiotic Resources to Reconstruct Art. Everything about Cali exudes art and creativity. Therefore, it was not a surprise to see how she immersed multiple mediums together to reconstruct art and make it something new. When I asked Cali the type of content that she liked to post on Instagram in our first interview, her response immediately combined visual imagery and print text as a practice:

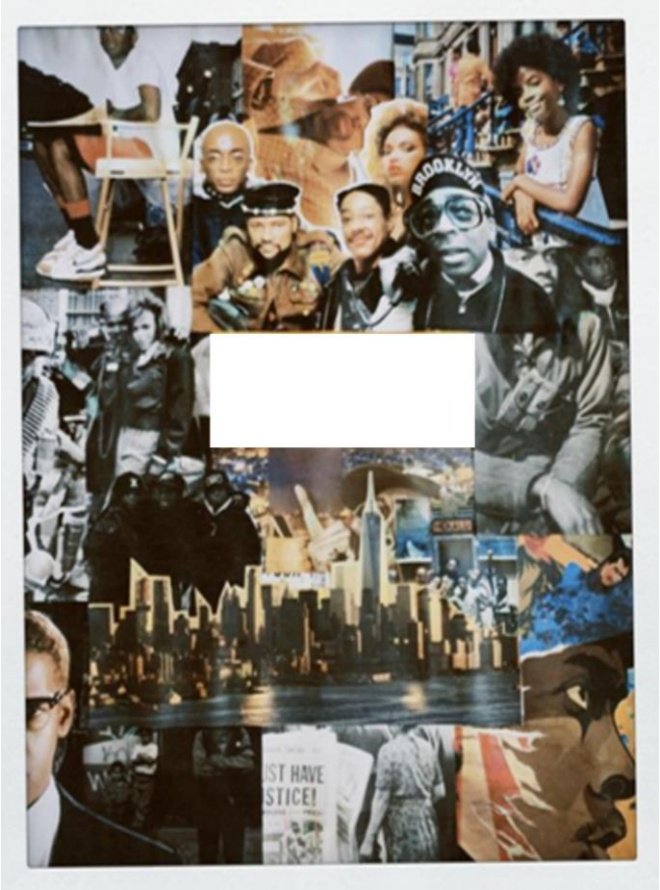
> *I love to post art content. I post photos and captions with meaning.*

But it was so much more than that. For instance, I came across an art collage that Cali designed on her own. To construct this piece of art that captures Black fashion and film culture, she spotlighted movies directed by renowned Black filmmaker Spike Lee. Cali collected magazines, cut out clippings that spoke to her vision, and organized the images to form an abstract collage design. Additionally, she added print text in the center of the artwork with her name. Next, Cali took a photograph of the artwork and uploaded it to the internet to make a new digital piece of art. This is just one of many examples as to how Cali would take art that existed, reconstruct it through graphic manipulation, editing,

or adding text to create something new and beautiful to share on her profile with her audience.

Figure 6

Cali's Art Collage



Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Photos and Videos for Identity Construction. The participant descriptive data presented at the beginning of this chapter showed how Cali's personality was goal-oriented and professionally driven. Interestingly enough, the ways in which she used multimodal text were connected to this professional identity that she constructed in the online space. Cali used photographs to showcase and promote her talent as a model and behind the scenes as an editor. She crafted an artistic identity on her profile through the

intentional use of multilayered content that branded an identity that she wanted to portray to her audience on Instagram and on her professional website as well. In one of our interviews, I asked Cali about a photograph that was in black and white, with her in the center in a modelesque pose. Her hands were gently touching her cheeks while she stared into the camera as if she was connecting eyes with her audience. Her response described the construction process as being intentional and rewarding as if she had achieved a goal for her vision with how she was to be represented in the photo. She stated,

> *I went into that photoshoot and like I killed it. The pictures looked great and they're actually on my website.*

Cali then shared in another conversation how she uses multimodal technology to construct images that are aesthetically pleasing in her perspective.

> *I edit my own pictures. So, when I edit the pictures, it just brings it to a whole different level.*

Photos and Videos for Narrative Construction. Another characteristic I discovered with Cali's personality was the ability to find meaning and story in objects and spaces that the average eye would miss. In one of Cali's photos on her profile, she stood in front of an old, rusted building as she posed with a belly crop top, unbuttoned baggy jeans, and a serious face. I asked her to tell me about the photo and describe what was taking place. She replied:

> *So, everything all correlates together. Where you have even a rusty building, and it has graffiti on it, that graffiti tells a story, like the Food Mart itself. It has some words falling off, but that tells a story to me. Those chipped letters, things like*

that, I feel like it has stories to it and you're able to, like, see that just through the pictures alone. It's beautiful.

Besides using photographs to construct narratives about spaces in her community, Cali also used videos such as informative tutorials or behind-the-scenes footage of her projects to capture stories about her creative process and her passion.

Theme #2: Tied to Identities

Black girls create identities attached to their own liberation in online spaces (Keller, 2012). While Black girls' identities may be self-constructed, similar to Williams et al. (2004), this study unveiled that their online identity is a reflection of how they see themselves from the messaging in their environment based on value. In this section, I will explore how the literacy practices of participants were tied to identities. This theme is the second tenant of the Black Girls Literacies Framework. According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), Black girls' literacy practices always are tied to identities. Under this theme, I have explored how the participants' literacy practices centered their own identities and highlighted themes that arose from their posts and interviews. Furthermore, I will focus on elements of socio-cultural literacy and how participants grappled with selfhood in the Instagram space.

Table 3

Literacy Tied to Identity On Instagram

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Quotes	Sub-Themes	Quotes	Sub-Themes
And I post a lot of things about just being Black and a Black girl. And like in my captions I try to	Affirmation	I've always had like a vision of having like a V cut and everything like that. A V cut is like when your stomach has that V	Body Image

put in there about self-love.		right here.	
Yea, like sometimes when I'm feeling ugly…I mean not as pretty as I am, I will post videos to remind myself just how pretty I am and people will respond back and say I'm very beautiful.		As I get older, I'm definitely going to show more and more sex appeal cause you know, it's certain things at certain ages. I definitely love showing off my body, because I am a woman, but I have curves and I embrace it.	
In my captions, I like to put that I'm dark-skinned and Black and that I love the way I look and that I am not afraid to be who I am.	Colorism	I had been dealing with severe acne on my forehead and I really struggled with my self-confidence because I didn't love myself at that time.	Confidence
I've always been…I mean growing up I was uncomfortable about being dark…because I've always been dark.		My posts right now represent who I am because it's just a confidence. It's a sophistication about my post now where it's just like it's, it's who I am.	
Well, I do cover a lot of things in my pictures cause I didn't like them. But in that one, it wasn't even like showing anything, it was just I didn't like the shirt.	Constructible	Like I'm constantly evolving. So even like 2 months from now, it will look totally different because I'm gonna be a totally different person.	Constructible
I used to post a lot of stuff (pictures) but I deleted it now because I got older and it was like embarrassing.		For each space, you will just get to see a different part of me. So, I'm still the same person regardless, but my online identity, it's just art.	
So, I try to post like encouraging things about natural hair. You don't have to meet the beauty standards of white people.	Hair	And that was one of the looks where it's like I wanted to do this beautiful dress that I had on and I really like the way that it looked and the jewelry.	Hair, Jewelry, and Fashion
Okay, so my cousin, she passed away a few years ago. And her favorite color was purple and so I had purple hair in the picture.		That's like a big thing on Instagram, where everyone like, loves haircare. And then also just natural hair is a big part of who I am. And then that's like the first time that I had tried the perm rod sets, which I really love.	

Jade: The Advocate

Every post on Jade's public profile included an image of herself. In some cases, Jade may post a series of pictures to include a meme or quote as one single post. But even in those posts with multiple images, there was always a photograph of Jade. In most of our conversations, identity as a theme was always at the center of what she shared. Jade's

identity shifted online from her public profile to her stories. She was extremely conscious of having a perceived audience that limited her from being completely uninhibited and her most authentic self. As highlighted in Table 3, Jade's literacy practices were tied to her identity in four ways: (a) to affirm her self-value, (b) to overcome challenges with colorism, (c) to construct her own representation of self, and (d) to express herself through hair.

Affirmation. The literacy practices that Jade engaged with while on Instagram depicted a positive struggle towards self-actualization. Through her struggle, her interactions with literacy among friends and family on Instagram reaffirmed her in areas where she felt insecure. For instance, in one of our interviews, Jade stated:

> *Yea, like sometimes when I'm feeling ugly…I mean not as pretty as I am, I will post videos to remind myself just how pretty I am and people will respond back and say I'm very beautiful.*

Jade's response showed how she utilized the literacy practice of posting a selfie of herself to affirm her self-value and change her socioemotional state. Likewise, the conversations from her audience on Instagram were complimentary and consolatory, which provided gratification, reaffirmation, and served as reinforcement to continue engaging in the practice.

Colorism. In our interviews over the eight-week period of the study, colorism was a topic that continued to enter my conversations with Jade. She shared with me her challenges growing up in a community and school with predominantly White people and how it made her extremely conscious of her darker skin color. Jade once shared with me:

> *I've always been…I mean growing up I was uncomfortable about being dark…because I've always been dark.*

When Jade would discuss how she felt about her skin, she would reframe her words to past tense as if her challenge with colorism was an issue she had completely overcome. Several of Jade's posts were reaffirming as she shared with her audience the importance of accepting being a dark-skinned Black girl. For instance, Figure 7 is an example of one of Jade's posts that focused on skin color.

Figure 7

Jade's Colorism Quote

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Additionally, in one of our interviews, Jade stated:

> *In my captions (on Instagram posts), I like to put that I'm dark-skinned and Black and that I love the way I look and that I am not afraid to be who I am.*

Jade's literacy practices online and comments in our interviews that focused on skin color showed that she still had a heightened level of consciousness regarding colorism.

Moreover, the ways in which she engaged with literacy online through posts, and comments about the topic of colorism may indeed have been her process of self-actualizing her desire to be fully confident in her own skin.

Constructible. Having the autonomy to alter and construct your own identity to represent how you want others to perceive who you are is one of the affordances of the technology on Instagram. In the app, you can manipulate, edit, and add filters to images in a way that makes you appear how you would like. Beyond deleting old photographs and constructing a completely new identity from her younger self on Instagram, compared to when she was ten, Jade constantly cropped or deleted photographs from the present that she would post. I noticed that Jade would use a sticker on some of her photos that said the word "censored" in bold letters. She would place it to cover up parts of her body and angle the sticker as if it was positioned like a stamp on the image. Once, the sticker was placed on her chest in a picture although she had a shirt on. In another photo, the sticker was used on the image to cover part of her waist and arm, as pictured in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Jade's Censored Post

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

I asked Jade the reason for using the censored sticker to manipulate the photograph. Her response was:

> *Well, I—I do cover a lot of things in my pictures cause I didn't like them. But in that one, it wasn't even like showing anything, it was just I didn't like the shirt.*

Jade's response shows how literacy practices tied to identities on Instagram can be constructible as Black girls may choose to delete, crop, or censor content to create images that they are comfortable with to share with their audience.

Hair. On Jade's profile, various colorful hairstyles and looks were different in each photo. One image was a selfie of Jade with orange long straight hair, another with long black curly hair, one with purple curly hair, red long curly hair, braids pinned up, straight Black hair, short orange hair, and one with her wearing a long orange ponytail.

Jade shared how her photos with different hairstyles and colors were a way of her expressing herself and that each photograph with a hairstyle had a meaning. I asked Jade the reason for posting the image with purple hair and she shared:

> *So, my cousin, she passed away a few years ago. And her favorite color was purple and so I had purple hair in the picture.*

Thus, Jade's photo with her purple hair that she posted on her profile was a way of memorializing her cousin who was extremely important to her. Jade also shared that she liked to focus on hair in some of the content she posted. She stated:

> *So, I try to post like encouraging things about natural hair. You don't have to meet the beauty standards of white people.*

Cali: The Artist

Like Jade, Cali's Instagram profile included predominately self-portraits that did not appear to be taken by herself as they did not look like selfies. These photos were images of Cali posing in front of various backgrounds and buildings. She always looked modelesque and many times very sensual with her hands touching her skin (face, chest area, waist, etc.). Aesthetic and presentation were very important to Cali with how things appeared as she envisioned identity as a part of art. She even shared with me that she considered herself a canvas. Also like Jade, Cali's identity shifted online from her public profile to her stories. Her identity in the stories space was more authentic and less strategic. As highlighted in Table 3, overall, Cali's literacy practices were tied to her identity in four ways: (a) to celebrate her body image, (b) build confidence, (c) construct her own representation of self, (d) and express herself through hair, jewelry, and fashion.

Body Image. In Chapter 2, the notion that Black girls utilize social media platforms such as Instagram to celebrate their bodies and reclaim Black womanhood on their own terms was asserted by Halliday (2020). As Cali and I would discuss some of her posts on Instagram, there was a strong emphasis that she placed on how her body looked. One of her photographs on her profile was a silhouette image taken by a photographer and her caption read just one word only: "body." Cali would share with me the goals she had for her body image. For instance, in one of our interviews, she stated:

> *I've always had like a vision of having like a V cut and everything like that. A V cut is like when your stomach has that V right here.*

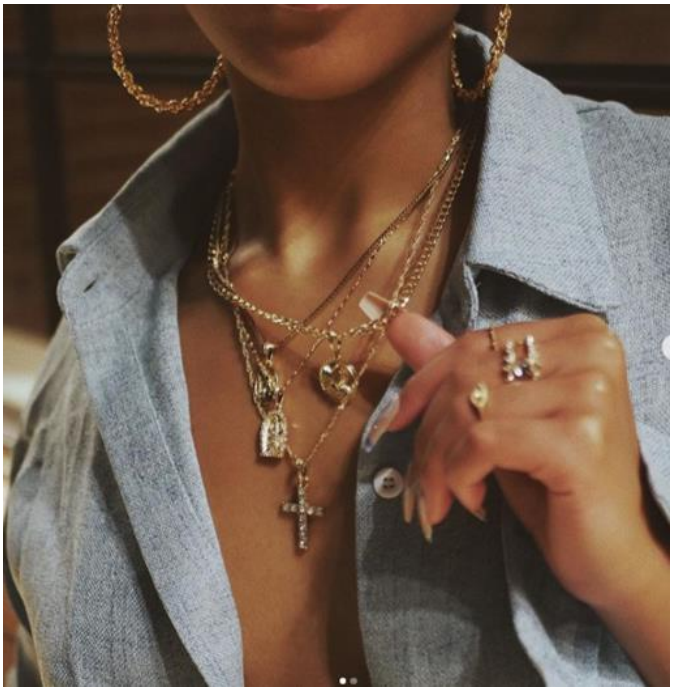
While explaining to me the definition of the term V cut, she used her photographs as a measurement to compare her weight loss and evaluate the closer she was to reach her goal body image. Weight loss and toned stomach muscles were not the only focus areas of body image for Cali. As shared previously, a lot of Cali's photos were sensual or in her words, showed "sex appeal":

> *As I get older, I'm definitely going to show more and more sex appeal cause you know, it's certain things at certain ages. I definitely love showing off my body, because I am a woman, but I have curves and I embrace it.*

Figure 9 is an example of one of Cali's photos where she has on a top that is unbuttoned below her chest area. Cali would also post photos with unbuttoned baggy jeans, form-fitting dresses, and crop tops that showed her belly.

Figure 9

Cali's Body Image Post



Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Confidence. The word confidence came up many times in my interview with Cali. Cali shared how she used the Instagram platform to both build her confidence when she was struggling with insecurities and to exude her confidence when she felt self-assured. When discussing her experiences from the past on Instagram, Cali shared a story with me on her struggle with acne a few years prior to our interview. She stated:

> *I had been dealing with severe acne on my forehead and I really struggled with my self-confidence because I didn't love myself at that time.*

Cali then did a photoshoot without any makeup and decided to be vulnerable and post the photos on her profile. She received many compliments on her vulnerability and natural beauty which boosted her self-esteem and confidence. While this experience was in the past, Cali also mentioned the term confidence when describing some of her recent posts during the time of this study. She expressed:

My posts right now represent who I am because it's just a confidence. It's a sophistication about my post now where it's just like it's, it's who I am.

Constructible. Like Jade, Cali used the Instagram space online to construct an identity of herself that she desired. Cali's identity shifted from spaces within Instagram such as her public facing profile was a professional representation, yet in her stories, she would post funny videos and her opinions about social justice issues. Most importantly, Cali was aware that her identity on Instagram shifted and evolved. She knew she could use herself as art and create a different identity from today and tomorrow. In one of her interview responses, Cali stated:

Like I'm constantly evolving. So even like two months from now, it [her profile] will look totally different because I'm gonna be a totally different person.

Additionally, Cali said:

For each space, you will just get to see a different part of me. So, I'm still the same person regardless, but my online identity, it's just art.

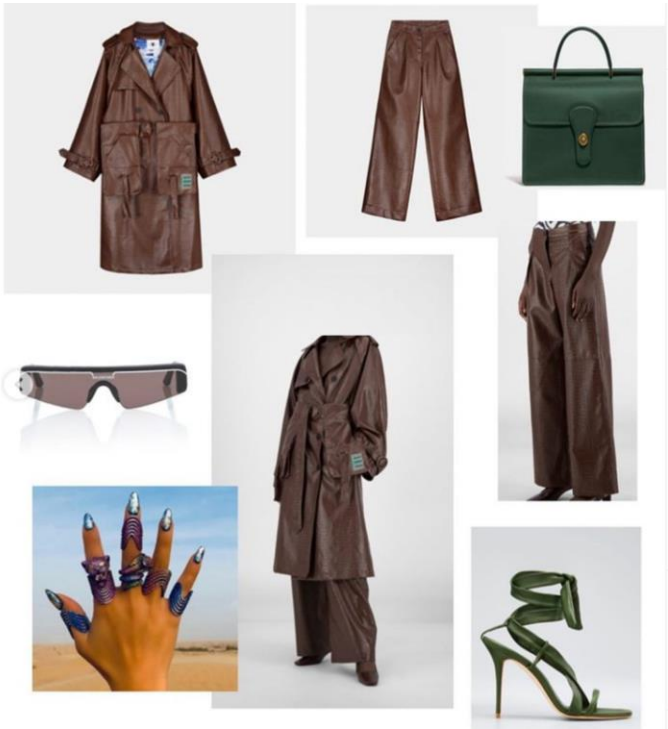
Hair, Jewelry, and Fashion. Hands constantly were a central focus that was visible in many of Cali's images. There was a focus on long nails and lots of jewelry as seen in Figure 9. Cali praised her sense of style and fashion as a big passion for herself. She expressed how an emphasis on jewelry, gold, and chains was a part of the Black culture vibe that she wanted to celebrate in her photos. It was also intentional with the clothing she wore for photos to include jewelry as a focus as well. For instance, when describing one of her photographs, Cali said,

And that was one of the looks where it's like I wanted to do this beautiful dress that I had on and I really like the way that it looked and the jewelry.

A year prior to this study, she initially dedicated her Instagram page to branding herself as a stylist by piecing together fashion collages as seen in Figure 10. Behind the scenes, photographs and videos on her page captured Cali's depiction of Black culture through fashion as she included a caption that said: "unapologetically Black." The photos and videos had a teen male as the focus in a doo-rag, with gold chains. The photo series also included images with a Black woman and man wearing scarves, a famous hip-hop duo, Outkast, wearing gold chains, and two Black males with their hands in the camera lens to emphasize their hand rings.

Figure 10

Cali's Fashion Post



Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Theme #3: Historical

According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), Black girls' literacies are historical. Contextually, the theme *historical* under the Black Girls Literacies framework entails the connections with the past and present uses of literacy among Black women and girls. Muhammad and Haddix found in their research that Black girls practiced and engaged with literacy in similar ways as Black women historically. As previously shared in Chapter 2, Kirkland and Shange (2010) made connections with the ways in which their mothers engaged historically with literacy artifacts compared to Black girls in modern times. Findings from Kirkland and Shange's (2010) study revealed that digital artifacts were used to express pain and personal experiences. These digital artifacts were archived as personal memories that were linked to stories of their past. While Kirkland and Shange's work aligns with the theme of Black girls' literacy practices as historical, in this study, additional themes connected to the historical uses of literacy with Black girls beyond the linkage to their ancestors. Their practices revealed that they were actively engaged with recording the history of the moment as well as curating literacies of the past to connect with their identities.

Table 4

Literacy As Being Historical

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Quotes	Sub-Themes	Quotes	Sub-Themes
Well, I did archive a lot of stuff and deleted some stuff.	Archiving	I always want a reminder of like how far I've come. I never want to fully delete things, and I know, like, for myself and my camera roll, I have so many photos.	Archiving

And in my highlights, I have a lot more memories that I have saved.		I never wanted to delete it just because I want to see how far I've come from, where I first started, to the different projects, the different art, the interviews.	
And umm when the whole George Floyd thing happened, I was posting a lot about it in my stories and stuff and I was trying to spread the word because it was a bad thing that happened.	Recording	I wanted to like recreate a *Vibe* magazine where I'm like on the couch and stuff like that. It was old school vibe because, like, it's distracted from 2000. So that's what we were going for, that vintage look.	Curation
Umm, well, I had this one post when my cousin passed away and I posted about it and it was kinda sad.		I was definitely collecting and reading so many books on my history that I was never taught.	

Jade: The Advocate

On Jade's Instagram profile, her literacy practices aligned in several ways to Black women of the past. For instance, some of Jade's posts were attached to memories of pain and her personal experiences. Jade's practices were historical on her Instagram page in two distinct ways. She engaged with literacy by: (a) archiving memories from her past, and (b) by recording her own history such as life events that impacted her life at the moment.

Archiving. Similar to the findings of Kirkland and Shange (2010), Jade and Cali both practiced archiving digital artifacts as a historical practice of Black women from the past. This practice also aligned with the theme of literacies with Black girls being historically connected with the practices of Black women's ancestors. Jade practiced archiving by removing photographs of her childhood that she was embarrassed by but

saving them as memories in her archives section of Instagram that was only visible to her. When I asked Jade about her archiving posts, she stated:

> *Well, I did archive a lot of stuff [pictures] and deleted some stuff [pictures]. And in my highlights, I have a lot more memories that I have saved.*

The highlights section of Instagram is where an individual can publicly archive images from their stories of the past without it being posted on their Instagram profile landing page. In one of Jade's memories, she shared an image that she captured and captioned as "Nights out." Figure 11 shows this post and how Jade practiced archiving to save memories of past experiences and social events.

Figure 11

Jade's Night Out Post

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Recording. Another way that Jade engaged with historical literacy practices was by recording history as it was made. Jade recorded her own history, major personal life experiences, and major events that were transpiring in the world. For instance, in one of our interviews, Jade shared with me one of her posts and the reason for sharing the content with her audience which was attached to a memory of pain. She said:

> *Umm, well, I had this one post when my cousin passed away and I posted about it and it was kinda sad.*

In this quote, Jade highlighted how she used literacy to express her feelings about losing someone that was very dear to her. Jade also engaged in historical literacy practices by sharing current event news that was making history at the moment. One example of this was her response to the devastating murder of George Floyd that made international headlines in 2020. Jade shared,

> *When the whole George Floyd thing happened, I was posting a lot about it in my stories and stuff, and I was trying to spread the word because it was a bad thing that happened.*

Jade's quote highlights how she practiced literacy in the Instagram space to record current events that impacted her life.

Cali: The Artist

Cali's Instagram profile is similar in some ways to Jade's as to how her literacy practices aligned to Black women of the past. Considering that Cali is an artist and very intentional with her posting, this was reflective in her relationship with literacy being historical. Cali's practices were historical on her Instagram page in two distinct ways.

Like Jade, she engaged with literacy by (a) archiving memories from her past, yet her practices were also different as she (b) curated literacies from the past to connect with her identity.

Archiving. Memories of her childhood were extremely valuable to Cali. After all, she had been on the platform for seven years since she was ten years old. Cali shared:

> *I always want a reminder of like how far I've come. I never want to fully delete things, and I know, like, for myself and my camera roll, I have so many photos.*

The practice of archiving childhood memories was very similar to Jade, but Cali also used Instagram as a space to archive her artwork she created in the past. In one of our interviews, Cali expressed:

> *I never wanted to delete it [pictures of art] just because I want to see how far I've come from, where I first started, to the different projects, the different art, the interviews.*

Curation. One practice that I was intrigued by with Cali was how she would collect old music albums such as Kanye West's *College Dropout* album as seen in Figure 12, and photos of past hip-hop icons to create slideshows on Instagram that would inspire her photoshoots. In Figure 13, Cali is pictured with several hip-hop culture magazines that she collected from the 1990s and early 2000s. For example, *The Source Magazine*, *Vibe Magazine*, *Hip Hop Weekly*, and *Word Up Magazine* are just a few of many historical pieces of literature that celebrated hip hop culture from a different era than her own and surrounds her in the photograph. Regarding the photo, Cali stated:

I wanted to like recreate a Vibe *magazine where I'm like on the couch and stuff like that. It was old school vibe because like it's distracted from 2000. So that's what we were going for, that vintage look.*

Figure 12

Cali's Kanye West Album Cover Post

Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Figure 13

Cali's Old School Hip Hop Magazines Post

Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Theme #4: Collaborative

According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), Black girls' literacy practices should be collaborative. Muhammad and Haddix also further asserted that social media lends itself to serve as an affinity space and provides opportunities for collaboration and engagement for Black girls. In Chapter 2, I provided context to what affinity spaces were as defined by Gee (2005). These spaces are not confined by physical boundaries and allow for individuals with different perspectives and abilities to gather and contribute. In this study, I explored how each participant engaged in literacy through collaboration and interaction with others on Instagram. Under this theme, I explored the co-construction of knowledge with participants and their audience, as well as whether their literacy practices were performed in isolation.

Table 5

Literacy Is Collaborative

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Quotes	Sub-Themes	Quotes	Sub-Themes
Uhm, well, I just...I don't know what to do so I asked my mom like, "How should I pose?" and she is like, "Just do anything." So, I was just like, "Okay," and I just started doing random poses and she was like taking it; taking them for me.	Participatory	And then we just started shooting around we really have fun with it. And honestly, having fun with it produces the best results, because we were just playing and then like we just got like the best shows for the video.	Participatory
Yes, I've had people say thank you and stuff and like share it too. Like my friends they will share it and post it in their stories and stuff.		So, this picture that was that was from when I went out with my friend Leon. And we were just like taking pictures.	
Yea, we [friends] like to send each other funny videos and if we see a sleepover idea or something we will send it over to each other.	Joyful and Uplifting	So, like, I used to, not really reply to anyone, but now as more to like, "thank you," just being—becoming more interactive with my content and that just pretty much keeps the whole following going.	Networking
We tend to send each other a lot of animal videos when we are like sad or something.			
Oh, it just makes me smile because like, she's my friend and when they comment it makes you happy.	Affirming	It makes me feel... um again, like it always feel good when like people appreciate what you post and everything like that.	Affirming
It makes me feel happy. And that's what I love about my friends because they always go out their way to compliment me and make me feel pretty.		I will have tagged him and saying, you know, was taken by him so he responds like, you know how this go like, you already know, I do this.	

Jade: The Advocate

As was shared in the participant descriptive data, Jade is very socially driven on and offline. When it came to exploring literacy as being collaborative, this is where Jade enacted her literacy practices the most. Jade's practices with literacy were collaborative on her Instagram page in three key ways. Her practices were: (a) participatory and not done in isolation, (b) joyful and uplifting with friends, and (c) affirming from her interactions with her audience.

Participatory. By exploring the literacy practices on Instagram, I realized that there was a convergence of physical engagement in literacy with taking photographs and with the digital/virtual engagement of posting and sharing the images. Collaborative practices of literacy with Jade involved participation from others in the physical world and virtual space. For instance, when discussing one of her photographs that she posted on Instagram with her wearing a Black party dress, Jade told me how her mother helped her take the picture. She said:

> *Well, I just...I didn't know what to do so I asked my mom like, how should I pose? And she was like, just do anything. So, I was just like, Okay. And I just started doing random poses and she was like taking the pictures for me.*

Jade also shared in our interview how supportive her friends were with engaging with the content she posts. She stated,

> *I've had people say thank you and stuff and like share it [her posts] too. Like my friends, they will share it and post it in their stories and stuff.*

Joyful and Uplifting. The relationships that Jade had with her friends offline transferred online as well. She shared how most of her conversations with friends were done in direct messages that were private just between them. I asked Jade what type of content did her and her friends share in their direct messages, and she replied:

> *We [friends] like to send each other funny videos, and if we see a sleepover idea or something we will send it over to each other.*

Everything that Jade shared about her private interactions in her direct messages was positive. She continued on to say:

> *We tend to send each other a lot of animal videos when we are like sad or something.*

Her response showed that the collaborative practices of literacy with Jade and her friends were uplifting and joyful.

Affirming. Once again, affirmation was a central backdrop in the findings of this study with both participants but was more dominant in Jade's literacy practices regarding collaboration. Jade's interactions with her audience on her profile were primarily compliments and praises on her physical appearance. Figure 14 is a screenshot of comments from a selfie picture that Jade posted on her Instagram profile. The comments included heart-eyed emojis, hearts, and words like beautiful, pretty, and gorgeous. I asked Jade how it made her feel when people posted these types of comments. Her reply was:

> *Oh, it just makes me smile because like, they're my friends, and when they comment it makes me happy.*

She also shared:

> *And that's what I love about my friends because they always go out their way to compliment me and make me feel pretty.*

Figure 14

Jade's Audience Comments

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Cali: The Artist

Participant descriptive data for Cali highlighted that she was very goal and professionally driven when it came to exploring literacy as being collaborative; many of Cali's practices were transactional and intentional. Cali's practices with literacy were collaborative on her Instagram and were similar in some ways to Jade's. Her practices

were: (a) participatory and not done in isolation, (b) focused on networking, and (c) affirming from her interactions with her audience.

Participatory. Cali engaged others in the construction of her photographs and content on and offline just as Jade did. She shared with me her experiences with a lot of photo and video shoots she had done over the past year and in every story, she mentioned there was always someone else participating. Although Cali seemed serious in most instances, she described these moments with others in a very joyful manner. For instance, in one of our interviews, she stated:

> *And then we just started shooting around and we really had fun with it. And honestly, having fun with it produces the best results, because we were just playing and then like we just got like the best shots for the video.*

Similar to this quote, the participatory practices with literacy with her friends were at many times unintentional and unexpected. In another interview, Cali shared background information about one of her posts and said:

> *So, this picture was from when I went out with my friend Leon, we were just like… taking pictures.*

Cali's words have highlighted how her friends consistently participate in literacy practices with her collaboratively. She uses the words "we" when describing the content creation process which shows that she does enact these literacy practices alone.

Networking. Another collaborative practice that I observed with Cali was her utilization of the Instagram space to foster professional connections. Figure 15 is a flyer that Cali posted on Instagram in her stories to connect with individuals who may be

interested in working on one of her projects with her. This practice was intentional and specifically transactional with her looking to find someone that could contribute their photography and videography skills to her project. Another instance when I observed that Cali approached her interactions on a transactional basis was when she stated in one of our interviews that she was intentionally responding to her audience to increase her following. She stated:

> *So, like, I used to, not really reply to anyone, but now, I will like say "thank you," Just becoming-- more interactive with my content and that just pretty much keeps the whole following going.*

Figure 15

Cali's Old Networking Post

Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Affirming. Affirmation was also a theme associated with collaboration with Cali. She shared how the compliments from others were gratifying and made her feel appreciated. She said,

It makes me feel... um, again, feel good when like people appreciate what you post and everything like that.

Cali would also tag her friend and compliment them on their photography skills on the platform. The interactions between Cali and her friend were affirming for them both. In one of our interviews, Cali mentioned,

I will tag him [her friend] and say, you know, this pic was taken by him and so he responds like, you know how this go, like, you already know how we do this.

The conversation on Instagram with Cali and her friend showed how they uplifted and celebrated each other's talents and gifts that they are extremely passionate about.

Theme #5: Intellectual

When defining literacy as being an intellectual practice among Black girls, Muhammad and Haddix (2016) highlighted that this enactment involves meaning-making, reflection, and critical thought. In Chapter 2, I highlighted that new literacies enable the construction of meaning and language with different modes of text such as photos (Gee, 2005). By exploring literacy as being intellectual with participants, I had to analyze the content of their posts and the meaning behind the posts that they shared in their interviews. What I learned from the interviews and observing both participants' engagement online for eight weeks was that there was meaning and a story behind each post. Their literacy practices touched on social issues, were grounded in critical thought, and connected to them acquiring skills to better navigate and engage in literacy in the Instagram space. This space also allowed for participants to explore and try to better understand others and the world around them.

Table 6

Literacy Is Intellectual

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Quotes	Sub-Themes	Quotes	Sub-Themes
I usually go on Pinterest, honestly. And I look up cute captions to share with my posts.	Explorative	Explore pages to reach out to a broader audience because just it's like the Instagram algorithm, it only showed it to a certain percentage of your followers. So, this allows you to get it to a broader audience, so you can have more people seeing your stuff.	Critical
But, like, sometimes I'll go on social media to get news and to be nosy and see what other people are doing.		So much that I was watching a video and they were saying, like, a lot of cosmetic surgeons. The patients they bring in pictures that look like them but with the filter.	
Cousin Passing—(Created an Acronym) LLM means, like, Long Live Michaela.	Creative	But as it's the collaborating school, I wanted to have the acronyms like NCCU was something but it goes perfectly was like nothing can control us. So, the first, the capital letter of each word.	Creative
Uhm no. Usually, I will use a brown heart if I was talking about like being pro-Black. I feel like a brown heart represents the blackness because of...I don't know. 'Cause like what...I'm not like "Black" like, you know?		So, for instance, like, with the we got the Jazz project. My expression was through my art, but my intention was to show that we got that jazz as a people that no one else can take from us.	
		And as I'm learning that and just learning how they twisted history, and taking control of that, to make sure that we don't know who we are, so that they can control us.	Informative
		And as I've learned that I'd like post more of that. And as I'm learning also, it's like the more that you post about who you are as a Black person	

Jade: The Advocate

While Jade identified herself as not being an active reader outside of school, she was very active in seeking information online. Jade was extremely proficient in knowing how to navigate multiple platforms and connect her literacy practices among them all intentionally. Each platform that Jade used held its own purpose and she implemented her own process with each. For instance, Pinterest was for collecting content, Snapchat was for capturing memories in real-time, and Instagram was for sharing her stories and experiences through photos. One key component of digital competency is knowing how to access and navigate digital platforms. Jade had shown that she had acquired the skills she learned informally from being in the space for nearly seven years. Jade's literacy practices were intellectual in two ways, (a) they were explorative and (b) creative.

Explorative. Beyond posting photos on her profile, Jade was an active explorer on Instagram and across the internet. At times when Jade could not think of captions for her posts that aligned with her thoughts, feelings, or experiences captured in an image, she would do research. For instance, Jade stated:

> *I usually go on Pinterest, honestly. And I look for meaningful captions to share with my posts.*

Additionally, Jade shared that Instagram is one of the ways she stays connected to what is happening in the world. Her news feed on Instagram allowed her to see what topics others were discussing that may have been timely. An example of this is when Jade discovered the murder of George Floyd in 2020 on her news feed with everyone posting about what happened. Instagram has been a space where Jade is reading about not only

current events but what is happening in the lives of her peers, friends, and family. In an interview, Jade said,

> *But like sometimes I'll go on social media to get news and to be nosy and see what other people are doing.*

Although the word nosy can be taken into context as negative, a positive framing of the word shows just how explorative Jade's literacy practices are. Jade was constantly reading "the world" online.

Creative. Another intellectual practice with literacy that Jade engaged with on Instagram was creativity. This practice was evident in her ability to consistently engage in her own meaning-making of symbols, words, and letters. For instance, on one of Jade's posts, she used the acronym LLM. I was unaware of what the acronym stood for, so I asked Jade to provide insight. She then stated:

> *LLM means Long Live Michaela.*

Jade had created an acronym and implemented it in her captions and writing. The acronym she created had meaning and was connected to her personal experience with losing her cousin at an early age. Acronyms were not the only constructed forms of text that Jade created; she also defined meaning to her emoji symbols that she used as captions on her posts. In one of our conversations, she shared with me the meaning behind her frequently using a brown heart emoji. She stated:

> *Usually, I will use a brown heart if I was talking about like being pro-Black. I feel like a brown heart represents blackness because although our race is Black, our skin color is visibly brown.*

Jade's response is an example of how Jade has critically connected her thoughts and perceptions to create meaning behind the representation of the brown heart emoji.

Cali: The Artist

Outside of school, Cali was an active reader. In our interviews, she always shared that she had just completed a new book and would provide me with the background story and her key takeaways from the text. Interviews with Cali were always a learning experience for me beyond being a researcher, but also as an individual. I learned about fashion culture in the United Kingdom, new book releases, and even historical facts about inventors. It was as if I was in class on our Zoom calls and Cali was always teaching me new information about the world that I did not know existed. These were the same practices that Cali enacted on Instagram. Cali's literacy practices were intellectual in three ways: (a) they were critical, (b) creative, and (c) informative.

Critical. Conversations with Cali were always critical and thought-provoking. In one of our conversations, Cali was educating me on the science behind algorithms and posting on Instagram. She shared:

> *Explore pages are for reaching out to a broader audience because it's like the Instagram algorithm, it only shows your posts to a certain percentage of your followers. So this allows you to get it to a broader audience, so you can have more people seeing your stuff.*

A lot of the information that Cali acquires comes from her being an avid reader and constantly engaging with informative content online. When discussing the impact of filters on society and body image, Cali shared a lot of research she found on the topic and

expressed that she was considering making it a focus for her senior project. She also shared how she had viewed videos on how people manipulate their photos with filters and aspire to look like their filtered selves. Cali stated:

> *I was watching a video and they were saying, like, a lot of cosmetic surgeons have patients that bring in pictures that look like them but with the filters.*

Creative. Cali and Jade both showed how intellectual literacy practices can be creative. Similar to Jade, Cali created acronyms and made meanings from the letters. For one of her projects, she was promoting on Instagram, she shared with me the acronym and meaning that aligned with the vision of her art:

> *But as NCCU is the collaborating school for the project, I wanted to have the acronym NCCU. And it went perfectly with, like, the words Nothing Can Control Us.*

Additionally, Cali showed her creativity by having intention behind her art and how she sought to represent Black culture as something to be celebrated. Her thoughts were abstract and intellectual at the same time with connecting the world, people, and experiences through videos and photos. As she passionately spoke about one of her projects, she stated:

> *So, for instance, like, with the We Got the Jazz project, my expression was through my art, but my intention was to show that we got that jazz as a people that no one else can take from us.*

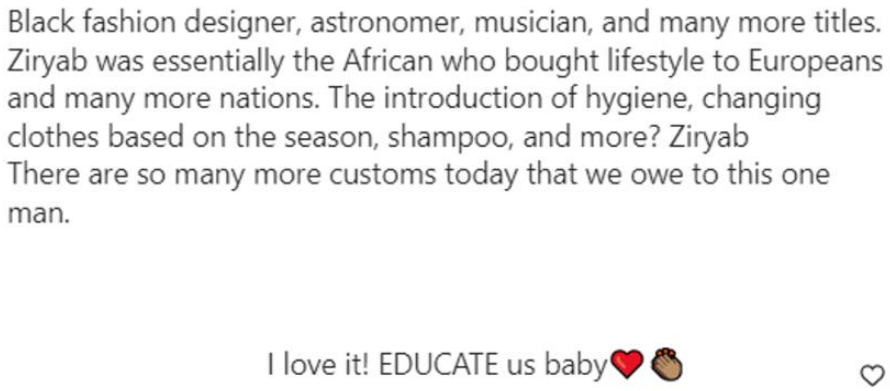
Informative. Sharing information with her audience was a continued practice of Cali's on Instagram. In Figure 16, Cali shared a photograph of a historical artist by the

name of Ziryab. She then further went on to provide information to her audience about the artist and educate others on their historical influence. At the bottom of the image, an individual commented by saying “educate us baby.” Thus, acknowledging that Cali was engaging in intellectual practices of literacy by providing information. Cali also shared with me how she had been reading and learning a lot over the past year. She expressed that what she had learned had provided an awakening and also inspired her posts.

> *And as I'm just learning how they twisted history, to make sure that we don't know who we are, so that they can control us, I've learned that I'd like to post more of that.*

Figure 16

Cali’s Ziryab Post



Note. From Cali’s Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Theme #6: Critical and Political

The need for critical literacy practices is more important now than ever before. This was evident for the prior two years leading up to this study with news headlines and

propaganda that threatened safety and health with misinformation ramped online. Participants in this study had already been bombarded on social media with headlines covering the perils of the nation such as police brutality, race riots, social unrest, voter suppression, and a global pandemic, and they were still under the age of eighteen. The Black girl participants in this study had witnessed more travesty in the world in their adolescent years than I had up until that point as an adult. According to Muhammad and Haddix (2016), literacies are tied to power and the need for social transformation. Thus, it was only expected that the participants' literacy practices would be a reflection of the world they were living in. During this study, I was intrigued to learn how the issues in the world had compelled them to critically and politically engage on Instagram.

Table 7

Literacy As Critical and Political

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Quotes	Sub-Themes	Quotes	Sub-Themes
And also in my stories, I post a lot of human rights stuff. Mostly in my stories I post-human rights, animal rights, and just different stuff like that.	Advocacy	Yes, like the whole Black Lives Matter, like, I went on a rant on my page because I saw through it. It was, it's performative, it's performative.	Critical
It was to support the movement with George Floyd. Black Out Tuesday. I did it to support my people. Black people.		So, it's like, of course you can go out and protest and like be performances because you can post it on Instagram. And then what?	

Jade: The Advocate

Jade was a natural advocate. She cared about people and had a genuine desire for fairness and equity for everyone. On Instagram, Jade advocated for causes that she was

passionate about. Her profile was used to spread awareness regarding acts of injustice and to get involved in any way online to support a cause. Her literacy practices were politically and civically engaged through online discourse as an act of advocacy.

Advocacy. As seen in Table 7, Jade was an online advocate for several causes that she was passionate about. Her posts online touched on issues of oppression where she was impacted as a Black girl, such as colorism. Additionally, Jade extended her advocacy on Instagram to issues where she was more removed as an outsider but was passionate for fairness and justice for all. In one of our interviews, Jade stated:

> *In my stories, I post a lot of human rights stuff. Mostly in my stories I post human rights, animal rights, and just different stuff like that.*

An interesting thing I learned from Jade, was that her posts regarding topics of social justice were in her stories and not on her public profile. Her stories were the subspace on her profile where Jade felt the most comfortable expressing her thoughts and feelings about political topics. During the social unrest that took place in summer 2020, Jade shared with me that she had changed her profile picture to a solid Black image and had posted a lot in her stories about the murder of George Floyd. When asked about her changing her profile picture, she said:

> *It was to support the movement with George Floyd. Black Out Tuesday. I did it to support my people, Black people.*

Cali: The Artist

As explored earlier with literacy as an intellectual practice, Cali's enactments of literacy were extremely critical. She was intentional and conscious of what she posted

and what others posted as well. Similar to Jade, Cali engaged with critical and political literacy practice primarily in her stories. When exploring how Cali engaged with political literacies that addressed challenges with power and race, her practices were always critical.

Critical. In one of our discussions regarding social media advocacy, Cali shared how she felt that a lot of individuals participated online for performative reasons. She stated:

> *The whole Black Lives Matters, like, I went on a rant on my page because I saw through it. It was… it's performative. So, it's like, of course, you can go out and protest and be performative because you can post it on Instagram. And then what?*

Cali further shared that she was very critical of how social media has been strategically used for marketing and capitalism. Her take on the movement was quite different from others and it was grounded in research that she had read. Cali shared with me an entire post that was almost a page in length that she posted in her stories. In this post, Cali expressed passionately her feelings regarding those advocating for Black Lives Matter on social media. Her post read as follows:

> *So far, they've painted Black Lives Matter on streets, canceled TV shows, made changes in sports, hired black people in Executive positions, changed voice actors And now they express their support for Black Lives Matter, that's cute. But can you hold these officers accountable for murder? And this just shows how like they skate around the real issue. Instead of like focusing on the root issue, which is like*

systemic racism. Doing stuff you should have been doing doesn't take away the fact that black people are killed. Like what do you want a cookie? Doing stuff you should have been doing, doesn't equivalent to innocent lives being taken. I'm not satisfied until the root issue of systemic racism within America is dealt with because America is built off of this system of racism. We need to invest in ourselves and our own people because they're not going to give us nothing. We have to go out there and take it. And these white-owned corporations are only voicing their support and doing the bare minimum.

In her post, Cali uses the term "they" a lot. This term is used to represent White people in positions of power. It also shows how she is critically aware of power structures that exist and the need to dismantle the system that has perpetuated its existence.

Potential Counterspace

The second research question of this study sought to explore how Instagram may serve as a potential counterspace for Black girls' literacies. In order to answer this question, I analyzed how the data collected aligned with Case and Hunter's (2012) Counterspace Framework. In Chapter 2, I shared how literacy counterspaces with Black people have existed for centuries to escape the hegemonic norms of society. Tatum (2017) highlighted how counterspaces today can exist in subspaces of schools, such as at a table in the cafeteria where students look like each other yet different from the school majority may gather together and foster community.

Similar to Tatum (2017), I initially approached this research study to explore Instagram as a potential counterspace and realized that it was actually the subspaces within Instagram that provided those affordances of liberatory practice for the

participants. Although both participants had the agency to construct their personal profiles and control the audience who had access to their pages, their practices were interrupted by hegemonic practices online and audience perception with them having a public page. Stories, which served as a subspace on their Instagram profile, is where both participants engaged in liberatory literacy practices. In this section, I will highlight how each participants' use of the Instagram space aligned with the four tenants of the Counterspace Framework. I employed the tenants of the framework to explore Instagram as a space where: (a) identity narratives and stories are created, (b) healing takes place, (c) active resistance is experienced, and (d) there are direct relational transactions.

Theme #1: Counter Narrative Formation

Case and Hunter (2012) described identity narratives as personal stories which provide a voice to "shared ideologies, worldviews, or belief systems that characterize a given counterspace" (p.262). These narratives provide an opportunity for individuals to share their experiences of oppression while challenging false representations and serving as avenues to discuss ways to build identity and restore hope. Over the course of eight weeks, I explored how both participants developed or contributed to narratives on Instagram that challenged those that had been historically created by society. These narratives were mainly attached to their identities of being Black girls.

Table 8

Space for Counter Narrative Formation

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Counter Narrative	Quotes	Counter Narrative	Quotes

Black Women Can Achieve	"It's just like, for some reason, a lot of people think Black women can't do a lot of stuff. And I was just like, this is like really powerful. Like, it has a lot of meaning to it."	Black Joy	So, for instance, like, with the we got the Jazz project. My expression was through my art, but my intention was to show that we got that jazz as a people that no one else can take from us.
All Bodies Are Beautiful	"Oh yeah, like in my stories. I like to share posts like tryna make all girls in general feel comfortable with their bodies. Like all bodies are beautiful bodies. I'm really into stuff like that."	Dark Skin Is Beautiful	And then, another post that I made is that, you know, it said that "I hope every dark-skinned Black girl is feeling extremely beautiful today because you are" and that's something that I posted because I feel like colorism is a huge challenge within our community.

Jade: The Advocate

In one of our interviews, Jade expressed that she felt social media created a safe space for her to feel more comfortable with sharing her opinions on topics and issues that mattered to her. She felt that there was "less backlash" when sharing narratives online that went against the norms of our society because if people did not agree with you, and were confrontational, you had the agency to remove them from your profile. This perhaps made it comfortable for Jade to create conversations around topics such as Black women's achievement and the beauty in all body types. In Table 8, two examples of counternarratives posted by Jade on Instagram are displayed. In one quote she said,

> *It's just like, for some reason, a lot of people think Black women can't do a lot of stuff. And I was just like, this [her post] is, like, really powerful. Like, it has a lot of meaning to it.*

The post that Jade is referencing in the quote is depicted in Figure 17. In the image, a group of Black women nursing students at Howard University gathered in the photo with their lab coats on. Jade felt that the positive representations of Black women

achieving their goals and pictured professionally were not constant visual representations in media. Although Instagram provided a space for counternarratives to form by the participants, they were also met with hegemonic narratives and harmful stereotypes about Black people and women. Jade also expressed how she had witnessed a video on Instagram before with a Black woman "twerking" while holding her baby in her arms. The comments that Jade saw under the post were degrading and referenced all Black women and girls as being ghetto, ignorant, and ratchet. She stated that when she saw content similar to the post she mentioned, it bothered her and made her be cognizant of the content she shared as she did not want to be identified by such hurtful stereotypes.

Figure 17

Jade's Howard University Nursing Students Post

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Cali: The Artist

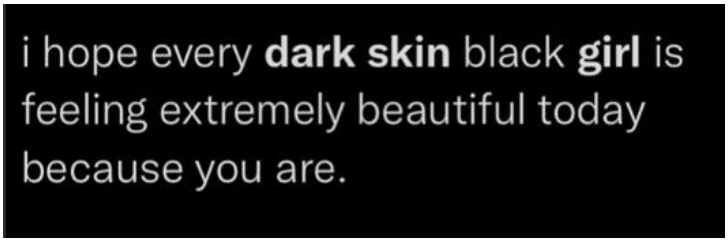
Cali used Instagram as a space to share narratives that celebrated the culture of Black people. Her videos and photos were always depicting beauty in Black style, hair, and fashion, imagery that normally has stigmatized Black people. Cali, though, would represent it as art while capturing their humanity. While doo-rags, scarves, and bonnets have a negative connotation when worn in public by Black people, Cali posted a photoshoot with Black boys and girls wearing them with a sense of pride. As images with Black people wearing gold chains and jewelry have been associated negatively and stigmatized with rap culture, Cali posted images with Black young adults flaunting their gold jewelry with dignity and grace while celebrating the liberating essence of rap and hip-hop culture for Black people. Cali discusses how she depicts counternarratives in of her projects. She stated,

> *So, for instance, like, with the We Got the Jazz project. My expression was through my art, but my intention was to show that we got that jazz as a people that no one else can take from us.*

Beyond using art to create counternarratives online, Cali also uses Instagram as a space to promote positive counter representations of Black girls. Figure 18 is an example of Cali doing this by sharing a quote in her stories that touched on colorism and embraced the narrative that dark skin is beautiful. This is a narrative that has rarely been shared in media and has been harmful in the Black community historically. Cali stated that the reason she shared the post was because she felt that colorism was a major challenge within the Black community and that she wanted to provide a narrative that was uplifting for darker-skinned girls.

Figure 18

Cali's Colorism Post



Note. From Cali's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Theme #2: Healing

In Chapter 2, the disparities that Black girls experience daily with high criminalization and disproportionate disciplinary practices in schools compared to their gender peer group was discussed (Blake et al., 2011; Morris, 2016). Additionally, it was highlighted that Black girls experience higher rates of sexual and physical violence compared to their gender peer group (Woodson & Andrews, 2017). With the excessive layers of trauma encountered by Black girls in and outside of schools, spaces that offer healing and triumph are necessary for their wellness. During this study, I sought to explore whether there were ways in which Instagram may provide a form of digital wellness that could be expanded upon with Black girls in literacy spaces. Or was it the other way around, and this space caused further trauma for Black girls? In this section, I will provide the findings from the data that looked at Instagram as a space for healing.

Table 9

Space for Healing

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Experience	Quotes	Experience	Quotes

Loss of a Family Member	"I felt like I don't post a whole lot about it, but sometimes I just feel like I missed them a lot, and I just post stuff. This day I missed her a lot. It was a hard time for me. And I was saying how I missed her and I was saying everything was going to be okay."	Self-Image: Acne Breakout	It definitely healed me 'cause, like, one, I'm a very private person. I feel like that allowed me to, like, be in a safe space for people to just be like say you're beautiful, and it doesn't matter, like what's on your face.
Relationship Break-Up	"When I was upset one time about a boy, I went on Instagram and shared a post that said something like, you'll never know what you lost, and shared it in my stories. I know, it may have been a little petty, but it made me feel better."		

Jade: The Advocate

In 2015, Jade suffered the tragic loss of her nine-year-old cousin from a house fire. Jade and her cousin were the same age and were extremely close. The loss of her cousin still creates sadness and feelings of hurt from Jade. She has used Instagram as a space to express her feelings. Occasionally, when Jade thinks about her cousin, she will post photographs or quotes on her profile in remembrance of her and their friendship. When I asked Jade about one of her posts on her page where she expressed feelings of sadness, she shared,

> *I felt like I don't post a whole lot about it, but sometimes I just feel like I miss her a lot, and I just post stuff. This day I missed her a lot. It was a hard time for me. And I was saying how I missed her, and I was saying everything was going to be okay.*

Based upon her response, Jade shared how her expressing her feelings on her profile was a form of catharsis and helped her cope with her sadness. Jade also utilized Instagram as a space to express herself after a breakup with her boyfriend. She expressed how she was "in her feelings" or hurt by the ending of her relationship which is why she sought out Instagram as a space to make her feel better. She stated:

> *When I was upset one time about a boy, I went on Instagram and shared a post that said something like, you'll never know what you lost, and shared it in my stories. I know, it may have been a little petty, but it made me feel better.*

Both examples show how Jade used Instagram as a space to release sadness and hurt. The literacy practices she engaged in were acts of healing in the space. The support of family and friends providing words of encouragement to Jade on Instagram also created a safe space for her to heal and receive nurturance.

Cali: The Artist

In Cali's junior year of high school, she experienced an extreme acne breakout that altered her physical appearance.

> Cali: *Like, it happened during my junior year because it was not only like my periods getting worse, but it was a lot of environmental factors that went into why my skin was acting up.*

During that time, Cali struggled with her self-confidence and expressed that she did not feel like she loved herself because of how she looked. Her condition caused her to go into a depressive state and affected her mental health. She attempted to keep herself busy to keep her mind off of the situation with her skin, but nothing helped until she had a

vulnerable moment and shared her experience on social media. Cali ended up doing a photoshoot with no makeup and her natural skin in its undesirable condition. After she saw the photos, she witnessed her natural beauty in its most raw form and received a lot of positive feedback. Cali posted the photographs on her Instagram page and was praised for her bravery, vulnerability, and natural beauty. I asked Cali how that experience impact her, and she responded:

> *It definitely healed me 'cause, like, one, I'm a very private person. I feel like that allowed me to like be in a safe space for people to just like say you're beautiful, and it doesn't matter, like what's on your face.*

Cali's experience is an example of how Instagram afforded a safe space for vulnerability which then contributed to the process of healing. When Jade and Cali opened up to their audience and shared the hardships that they were experiencing through photos and quotes, the support and encouragement they received from their audience created a safe space for them to grow past their circumstances. Self-actualization is a theme that was visible while exploring how both participants used the Instagram space for refuge. Both wanted healing and sought out ways to reach a more well version of themselves through their literacy practices in the space.

Theme #3: Active Resistance

Counterspaces serve as spaces for active resistance. Individuals may express themselves in accordance with identities that may be contrary to those that are valued in the larger society. According to Case and Hunter (2012), through this process of expression, marginalized individuals can celebrate facets of their identities to create

positive images of themselves. Within their framework, they classify the construction of these methods of self-affirmation through resistance narratives and re-imagined narratives. Both participants have shown how they use the Instagram space to engage in active resistance.

Table 10

Space for Active Resistance

Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate		Participant 2: Cali, The Artist	
Form of Resistance	Quotes	Form of Resistance	Quotes
White Dominated Spaces	Because when I was younger, I was nervous, well not nervous, but confused… because I've went to school with mainly White people and I was just nervous to be comfortable in my skin. But now that I am older, I'm more comfortable. I'm just me.	Performative Advocacy	Yeah, like everybody's posting a Black screen. I'm not doing that. I'm saying what it is and what it, what it really is.
White Beauty Standards	So, I try to post like encouraging things about natural hair. You don't have to meet the beauty standards of White people.	Beauty Standards (Using Filters)	And um, it's just reconstructing my face in a way that didn't look natural. It didn't even look like me. So, I was like, yeah, no, that's just not what I stand for. I stand for, like, just being you, you know, and not what society wants of you.

Jade: The Advocate

Jade was accustomed to growing up in predominately White spaces. The town where she lived and the schools she had attended consisted of mainly White people. Because of this, Jade was very cognizant of the fact that she was different at an early age. Navigating these spaces as a child was challenging for Jade. She stated:

When I was younger, I was nervous, well not nervous, but confused… because I've went to school with mainly White people my whole life and I was just nervous to be comfortable in my skin. But now that I am older, I'm more comfortable. I'm just me.

Jade shared how she uses her Instagram to post pictures about her Blackness and skin color. She has found Instagram as a space where she can celebrate her differences with who she is as a Black girl. Her posts are also active in resisting the standards of beauty that exist in society. In one of our interviews, Jade said:

So, I try to post like encouraging things about natural hair. You don't have to meet the beauty standards of White people.

White standards as normative were issues that Jade was aware of and challenged regularly on Instagram. Jade engaged in active resistance primarily in her stories where she shared her opinions on issues with race and body image. Although the Instagram space allowed Jade to escape the pressures of being physically present in a white-dominated space, the same narratives of whiteness as a standard were still visible on Instagram. Jade shared how she used to see a lot of White girls on her Instagram feed with comments that said, "This is what real beauty looks like." She felt that on Instagram, the majority of beauty standards were of White girls, and it used to make her feel bad, so she started to follow Black influencers. Moreover, she expressed more deeply how she felt about the White standards of beauty being shared on Instagram. She stated:

When you see like someone that's pretty or like what society calls pretty… uhm on Instagram, it does make you feel bad a little bit if you don't look like them.

And Instagram could make you feel bad because they'll show you like all of these models or like just girls your age who look different than you. And they'll have a bunch of likes and then you're wondering why you don't have a bunch of likes and it negatively impacts you.

Cali: The Artist

Similar to Jade, Cali was well aware of how hegemonic norms and standards were visible in the Instagram space, yet she met it with resistance. One example of this was with the use of filters on Instagram to reconstruct an individual's physical appearance to current standards of beauty. Cali shared that she was in middle school when she first started using filter features. The first filter feature she used was one with a flower crown. She felt that this feature was fun and playful but still allowed her to look like her natural self. Over time, Cali expressed that she felt the filter features began to become more intense and started altering people's physical features drastically. Cali stated:

Filters are designed to make you look somewhat different than what you are right now. That's solely while like on Instagram, I stopped using filters because the more that you use them, the more you get accustomed to that face.

Cali then continued to express why she felt the filters were harmful to use long term. She said:

All of it is fake and none of it is really real. And it's just sad because we look at these women on Instagram as our beauty standards when it's face injections, when it's lip fillers, when it's all these different small cosmetic surgeries, slowly but surely, make you look like someone you're not. So, again, we're comparing ourselves to something that's fake.

On her page, Cali actively engaged in resistance to conform to the ideals of beauty captured in filters or other forms of physical restructuring. She was adamant about posting photos that showed natural beauty, such as her Transparency Project, where she was vulnerable in showcasing her skin with acne.

Theme #4: Relationship Building

The last tenant of the Counterspace Framework explores space as an affordance for relationship building. Case and Hunter (2012) discussed the importance of social transmission which describes how marginalized individuals within a counterspace share their experiences and knowledge with others to teach them how to respond and overcome oppression. These methods are often cognitive and behavioral in nature. Counterspaces also lend the opportunity for historically marginalized individuals to form authentic bonds and connections. Interestingly enough, this is the tenant where I was unable to find a lot of data from participants to support Instagram as a space for relationship building.

Both participants expressed that the relationships that they had on Instagram with individuals that they engaged with were their friends who they already knew. Additionally, when their public audience engaged with them in the comments sections of their posts, both participants did not feel they had to respond back or interact, and in most cases, they did not. Interestingly, both participants valued in-person interactions with friends more than online exchanges because the conversations were more authentic and afforded the chance to laugh and talk more. Friendship and emotional connections in person with friends were deemed more valuable than communicating on social media. Both participants expressed that they do not feel that their followers truly knew who they were and that having boundaries with their identity and engagement was intentional.

Considering that both participants were minors this could be deemed a positive response to protect their safety online by not engaging or sharing too much information about themselves with people they are unfamiliar with.

Summary

Based on the literature and data shared in this chapter, Black girls do experience literacy-rich lives outside of the classroom setting (Koonce, 2017). Findings from the study showed that both participants were active users of Instagram online and displayed literacy practices on Instagram with writing, communicating with visual texts, and reading the texts of others. The two research questions for this study explored (RQ1) how Instagram was a potential counterspace for Black girl literacies and (RQ2) the types of literacy practices that adolescent Black girls engaged in when using Instagram.

When evaluating Instagram as a potential counterspace for Black girl literacies as defined by Case and Hunter (2012) and to answer RQ1, Instagram offered several affordances of active resistance and counter-narrative formation with Black girls but lacked in the area of building meaningful relationships that did not already exist in their physical lives. Unfortunately, when looking at Instagram as a space for healing, participants shared how they witnessed racism and sexism on Instagram. While acts of racism were shared to be visible on Instagram, findings showed that Instagram empowered Black girls to advocate for themselves and others. Participants in the study advocated for issues on body image and body shaming which aligned with literature that highlights the influence of social media on activism with Black girls (Sealey-Ruiz, 2016). Additionally, findings from this study answered RQ2 and aligned with Muhammad and Haddix (2016) that literacy practices with Black girls were multiple in practice, tied to

their identities, historical, intellectual, critical, and collaborative with an emphasis on emotional connection.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview of Research

For the last two years, I have discussed my research as an exploration of the liberatory affordances of Instagram with literacy practices for Black girls. It was my intention to seek out what characteristics of the Instagram space specifically attracted adolescent Black girls to gather, engage, and continue to enact their literacy practices in a way that was missing from pedagogical approaches in school. While on this quest to explore how Instagram offered a potential counterspace for Black girls' literacy practices, several timely events took place during my study which showed the harmful impact of Instagram and other social media sites on teen girls.

One major event that I would be remiss if I did not mention in writing this dissertation was the *Wall Street Journal*'s investigation on the "Facebook Files" that was leaked in September 2021 by a whistleblower and former employee of Facebook, Frances Haugen (Wells et al., 2021). Following the leak of hidden research and reports captured internally by Facebook on the harmful ways in which the platform negatively impacted teen girls, major news outlets and mass media picked up the story which made global headlines. Evidence from the whistleblower highlighted how the platform was aware of the detrimental effects it caused on youth, but specifically teen girls on Instagram. When the story had been picked up on national news outlets in October 2021, I was midway through my eight-week study with participants. I immediately immersed myself in the news and read the reports and findings that I felt captured a dark and devastating approach to the research I was conducting with adolescent Black girls on Instagram. Findings from the Facebook Files focused on Instagram as being extremely harmful to

adolescent girls with data highlighting that one out of three girls were impacted by body image issues from the platform which caused social comparison. Additionally, the report highlighted how algorithms on the platform pushed negative content such as anorexia posts and self-harm photos to adolescent girls.

Warranting the need to expand the lens through which I viewed my data, the "Facebook Files" and recent news from the whistleblower entered my conversation with participants in our second interview. At the beginning of each interview, I would ask if there were any events that happened in their lives since the last time we met or that they witnessed online. Jade was unaware of the news surrounding Instagram as extremely harmful for teenage girls, but Cali had read about it in an article on her social media timeline. Seeing this information as being extremely valuable to my research with exploring whether Instagram provided a potential counterspace for girls, I asked both participants whether they felt that Instagram impacted how they felt about their physical appearance. Jade shared:

> *In my personal opinion, I do feel like it could be true because like when you see someone that looks like what society calls pretty on Instagram, it does make you feel bad if you don't look like them and they have a bunch of likes and you don't.*

Cali's response was similar to Jade's with the negative impacts that Instagram may have on adolescent girls, as she stated:

> *Well, I think it's so crazy because, um, from my senior project at my school. I think one of the topics that I want to touch on is like the Instagram face. And the Instagram face, literally being that face that so many teenage girls like myself see*

on Instagram with the beauty filter and the lip fillers. People want the plump lips. People want the smaller nose. They like smaller eyes, where it's like more of a cat wing. But there are huge negative effects from that not being who you are at the end of the day. When you look in the mirror, when you take a real picture, that's not what you look like. So, you have to deal with that, and that brings even more confidence issues and conditioning to yourself. Like, you put the filter on because I don't look like that outside. You know what I'm saying?

These conversations with participants allowed me to not only explore the ways in which Instagram had the potential to serve as a counterspace for literacy practices among Black girls but also look at the challenges in the space that prevented it from being completely liberatory in how it functioned. Interestingly, with all the negative coverage surrounding the whistleblower and online polarization on the platform contributing to incidents such as the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. capitol, Facebook (which is the company that owns Instagram), recently changed the name of their company to Meta, on October 28, 2021, during the time of this study. According to a press release from Meta, formerly known as Facebook, the new branding brings together all their apps, including Instagram, and will focus on "helping people connect, find communities, and grow businesses" (Meta, 2021).

As influential global events have transpired relative to my research during the time of this study, it has nonetheless been insightful in providing a springboard for conversations and potential solutions to better support Black girls, their liberation through literacy, and their wellness. In this chapter, I will bring together the summative findings of this study as they relate to the two research questions:

RQ1: How is Instagram a potential counterspace for Black girl literacies?

RQ2: What literacy practices do adolescent Black girls engage in when using Instagram?

Next, I will highlight emerging themes across both cases and share implications for both the field of research and for practice with educators. Following implications, I will share the limitations that were presented throughout this study. Lastly, this chapter concludes with recommendations for educators and a final conclusion statement of the overall research project.

Summative Findings and Conclusions

This collective case study provides insight for educators to learn how Instagram enables literacy practices among Black girls and offers the qualities of a potential counterspace. Each case was assessed independently, and common themes have been identified as a collective in this section. An intersectional lens was utilized to explore the differences of each case and the connection between their findings and individual descriptive participant data. Emerging themes were also prevalent in the data findings with both cases. Thus, by exploring the similarities across cases, it can provide further implications for the type of literacy practices Black girls engage within non-formal and non-academic digital spaces, such as Instagram.

It is my hope that stakeholders in secondary school education will have a more robust understanding of the benefits and challenges that Black girls experience in the social media world with literacy and expression from this research. By reviewing the summative findings of this study, educators, and educator stakeholders, such as administrators and district leaders, will then be able to assess how Instagram or similar

digital spaces can be incorporated as a learning tool to help educate and engage Black girls in schools to produce an equitable and inclusive learning experience.

Comparison of Cases

For this research study, the overarching theoretical framework that was employed was Critical Race Feminism, which employs multiple lenses for exploring Black girls and women, and one being Intersectionality (Wing, 1997). By employing an intersectional lens, I was able to look at each participant on a case-by-case basis. The goal of my research was to further understand the complexity of each case by collecting multiple data sources, field notes (from online observations), interview transcripts, and digital artifacts/posts. Beyond analyzing the differences of each participant, I also explored their similarities in literacy practices and their experiences using the Instagram space. In this section, I will highlight the summative findings from each case and connections that were seen across cases.

Literacy Practices

This study was not intended to categorize all Black girls' experiences with literacy on Instagram. Instead, this study sought to explore each individual Black girl participant as an individual case and glean connections with ways in which participants practiced literacy. It is important to note that all Black girls and their literacy experiences are different, but it is my hope that we can pull from some of the practices that link them together and extend our understanding of how they engage with literacy on a day-to-day basis when no one is forcing or guiding them. It is also my hope that we can better understand how literacy is influenced when no one is defining the ways Black girls are to

exist in spaces, interact, and construct their own understanding of the world and themselves. Table 11 provides an overview of the summative findings from this study on the literacy practices of both participants on Instagram.

Table 11

Summative Findings: Comparison Chart of Literacy Practices

Themes and Concepts	Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate	Similarities	Participant 2: Cali, The Artist
Language (Sample Posts' Captions)	*"Never bitter, Always Better."* *"Be you. Do you. For you."* *"1 of 1, nothing like the rest."* *"Pretty girl"*	Self-Affirming Self-Actualizing Identity	*"And she won't stop 'til she got the masses."* *"Reading the magazines that I will one day be in…"* *"I like dressing up, but I prefer street."* *"Me being the young woman I've always dreamed of"*
Types of Content	Death, confidence, mother, love, and relationships	Colors, Mirrors, Fashion/Style, Beauty standards, hair, colorism, self-portraits/selfies, empowerment, Blackness, Black girl identity	Black culture, music, jewelry, events, projects, art, artists
Theme #1: Multiple in Practice	Used multiple sources for gathering multimodal text	Photos and videos for identity construction Edits, deletes, and archives posts on a continuous basis Use Emojis	Semiotic resources to reconstruct art Photos and videos for narrative construction
Theme #2: Tied to Identities	Colorism	Constructible Affirmation Confidence	Body Image

Theme #3: Historical	Recording	Archiving Memories in highlights	Curation
Theme #4: Collaborative (Interactions)	Joyful and Uplifting	Participatory and Affirming Send memes and humorous content to friends in Direct Messenger Collaborative posting with friends or family. Observational, social, and individual comparisons	Networking
Theme #5: Intellectual	Explorative	Creative	Critical, Informative
Theme #6: Critical and Political	Advocacy	Participatory Use Stories	Critical

Similarities. It is important to note that the two participants involved in this study have never met and do not know each other. While each of them lives in different states and has different backgrounds, there were many visible similarities in their literacy practices on Instagram. Language use by both participants online was self-affirming, self-actualizing and tied to their identities which connects the findings from Muhammad and Haddix (2016). There were similar patterns in the content and imagery of their post with both participants, using colors and mirrors as a concept and focal points in their photographs. As highlighted by Price-Dennis (2016), multimodal literacy practices create opportunities for critical thinking and expression for Black girls which was frequently

evident with both participants using multimodality for their own identity construction (Table 12).

Literacies for both participants were also frequently tied to their identities on Instagram the most out of all the other tenants of the Black Girls Literacies Framework with a focus on building confidence, being affirming, and constructible. These findings may be connected to research conducted by Keller (2012) which highlighted that Black girls continuously create identities in online spaces that are attached to their own liberation. When assessing literacy as being historical, both engaged in the practice of archiving content from their past and used the highlight feature to share memories with their audience. Similar to the findings from Kirkland and Shange (2010), these findings highlighted how digital artifacts are archived as keepsakes of stories from the past that capture struggles and triumphs of young Black girls. Another similarity was how collaborative practices were enacted by participants through affirmative content with friends and by engaging others in constructing content (i.e., assisting with taking photos). Lastly, literacy practices that were deemed as intellectual, critical, and political, were the least enacted (Table 12) by both participants on Instagram yet showed their creativity and were primarily hidden in their stories and not on their public profile pages.

Table 12

Enactment of Literacy Practices

Pseudonym	Multiple in Practice	Tied to Identities	Historical	Collaborative	Intellectual	Critical and Political
Participant 1- Jade: The Advocate	Frequently	Frequently	Rarely	Frequently	Rarely	Rarely

Participant 2-Cali: The Artist	Frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes	Sometimes

Note. Frequently equals five or more posts, sometimes equals two to four posts, and rarely is zero to one post on the participants profile and stories.

Differences. As seen in Table 11 and Table 12, there are clear differences in the type of literacy practices that both participants engaged with and how often they were enacted. When comparing language use on Instagram with both participants, Table 11 shows how Jade's captions were focused on self-image and self-worth, while Cali's were primarily focused on her achieving her goals. Content on both participants' pages also differed, with Jade posting about loss of family, her mother, and relationships. Cali's post consisted primarily of her art projects and artists that inspire her work. These distinctions were connected to descriptive data that showed Jade as being more socially driven in her responses and Cali being goal driven.

Major differences were also seen with how the girls collaborated online with others. With Jade, literacy was frequently collaborative on Instagram, involved taking photos with friends, tagging them in photos, and engaging in conversations for fun. For Cali, collaboration was intentional, not frequent, and was in the form of networking with others on projects or recruiting people to join new projects. Although literacy practices with Cali were less collaborative, they more were intellectual, critical, and political in practice on Instagram compared to Jade. Participant descriptive data for this study highlighted that Cali identified herself as an active reader while Jade did not, which may be a connection to these findings. Cali tended to share informative content and critical perspectives on her page.

Space

To engage in literacy practices that are liberating, the space must provide the opportunity. As a Black girl poet, I myself am unable to truly pour my inner thoughts and feelings on paper, nor dig deep to my inner core and grapple with my darkest truths that exist to embrace healing if I am not in a space that allows the freedom of self-exploration. For Black girls, literacy has always been attached to liberation (Ladson-Billings, 2014). A space that is liberating for Black girls is a space that represents the root of the word libre, which means free. Counterspaces are spaces that provide liberation, visibility, and restorative wellness (Case & Hunter, 2012). As Instagram during the time of this study was one of the most frequently used platforms by Black girls, I wanted to understand what attracted them to this space and kept them engaged with literacy. What I discovered was that Instagram did not serve as a potential counterspace for Black girls, but the stories subspace on the platform did. As shown in Table 13, findings from the study revealed that Black girls were more liberated and vulnerable in the Stories (subspace) than on their public Instagram profile.

Table 13

Summative Findings: Comparison Chart of Instagram as a Counterspace

Themes and Concepts	Participant 1: Jade, The Advocate	Similarities	Participant 2: Cali, The Artist
Theme #1: Narrative Formation	Black Women Can Achieve (Stories) All Bodies Are Beautiful (Stories)	Counter narratives about identity (Stories) Dark Skin Is Beautiful (Stories) Self-Actualization	Black Joy

Theme #2: Healing	Loss of a Family Member Relationship Break-Up (Stories)	Vulnerability with personal challenges and experiences (Stories) Support from friends and audience	Support Others Healing Self-Image (Acne Breakout)
Theme #3: Active Resistance	White Dominated Spaces White Beauty Standards	Self-validation space to build self-esteem and confidence from oppressive paradigms of Black girl identity Shared political and social justice opinions (Stories)	Performative Advocacy Beauty Standards (Using Filters)
Theme #4: Relationship Building		Avoided Interactions with Unfamiliar Audience Responding Optional and Rare Communicated With Actual Friends Only Did Not Build New Relationships on Instagram	
As A Non Liberatory Space	Challenges with Colorism	Code-switching in online spaces (From Profile to Stories) White Beauty Standards (Public Feed) Racism and Negative Stereotypes of Black girls and people (Public Feed)	Filters and face reconstruction

Similarities. When exploring similar themes across cases, both participants engaged in less posting on their profile compared to their stories which are where they

were more likely to share their feelings and opinions. When exploring Instagram as a space for counternarrative formation, both participants used the space for self-actualization and inspiration to post and share their desires of reaching their full potential whether it was with Jade's confidence or Cali's art and career. These findings align with McNair (2010) and emphasize the need for literacy practices to connect with Black girls through language for self-affirmation and actualization. Both participants shared positive narratives surrounding Black girls' identities and discussed the topic of colorism in their post while emphasizing a counter-narrative that dark skin is beautiful. Healing was evident by both participants in the space as they both shared experiences in their life in their stories that required them to be vulnerable. As highlighted by Price et al. (2017), spaces that engage Black girls in literacy should support identity development, healing, and joy. In interviews with both participants, they expressed that their vulnerability on the platform was a catalyst towards their healing process which was also attributed to the support that others gave from their posts.

Additionally, participants used their stories on Instagram to engage in active resistance. Through the stories subspace, participants discussed their feelings towards the social unrest and race riots that took place in 2020 because of the murder of George Floyd. These findings support the growing body of research that has asserted that social media movements, such as #SayHerName (Love, 2017; McMurtry-Chubb, 2015; Williams, 2016) and #BlackGirlMagic (Halliday & Brown, 2018; Morton & Parsons, 2018; Wilson, 2016) have provided a voice and platform for active resistance. While the participants had two different perspectives and opinions towards what was happening in their environment surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement and activism, they both

used the space to resist the issues of white supremacy that they were witnessing and experiencing in the world. White standards of body image and beauty were also challenges that both girls faced and resisted on Instagram. By embracing their natural hair, promoting melanin, and following Black influencers, participants used their Instagram stories and profile to celebrate Black girl identity as opposed to images that make whiteness a standard of beauty. Similar to Bonilla and Rosa (2015), these findings highlight that while social media has the potential to stereotype the experiences of Black girls, it also allows for counternarrative formation by the population to reimagine group identities. For instance, Williams and Moody (2019) shared how hashtags such as #naturalhair and #carefreeBlackgirl were examples of how Black girls can project and explore their identities in a safe space without the fear of rejection on social media which was also evident with participants. Lastly, relationship building was not an act that took place on Instagram with participants. Participants valued in-person friendships as being more meaningful and those relationships transferred online.

Table 14

Use of Instagram Space

Pseudonym	For Counter Narratives	For Healing	For Active Resistance	For Relationship Building
Participant 1-Jade: The Advocate	Frequently (In Stories) Sometimes (On Profile)	Sometimes (Stories Only)	Sometimes (Stories Only)	Rarely
Participant 2-Cali: The Artist	Frequently (In Stories) Sometimes (On Profile)	Sometimes (Stories Only)	Sometimes (Stories Only)	Rarely

Note. Frequently equals five or more posts, sometimes equals two to four posts, and rarely is zero to one post on the participant's profile and stories.

Differences. While there were many differences in the literacy practices of both cases, when exploring the use of the space, there were more similarities (Table 13). Yet some notable differences included how they used the space for narrative formation, healing, and active resistance. When exploring how Jade uses the space for narrative formation, most of her posts focused on seeing Black women achieve success in their careers and affirming that all body sizes are beautiful. Comparatively, Cali's posts centered on Black joy and celebrated Black culture as being positive. Healing in the space was witnessed with Jade online when experiencing her family loss and her relationship break up. Cali used the space to be vulnerable and share photographs of her acne at a time when she did not like how she looked, had low self-esteem and was dealing with depression. Lastly, active resistance was enacted in the space by Jade to escape white-dominant physical spaces at home and in her community. Cali, on the other hand, showed active resistance with how she approached social media activism and refused to engage with filters or any digital tools for facial reconstruction. Next, I will share the emerging themes that came out of the study between both cases.

Emerging Themes

"I was born." Similar to these three opening words found in the narratives written by formerly enslaved Blacks, and specifically Harriet Jacobs's (2018) autobiography *Incidence in the Life of a Slave Girl*, there is a common necessity in feeling visible as highlighted by King (1988), and to declare one's own existence through words or photos from the participants in this study. Through this study, I have gleaned the ways in which Black girls use Instagram as a potential counterspace (Case & Hunter, 2012) and the types of literacy practices they enact on the platform (Muhammad & Haddix, 2016). I

have been amazed at the ways these adolescent Black girls have processed the chaos in this world that has influenced all our lives with the pandemic, murders of Black people witnessed on social media, and social unrest with riots in the streets, and have used literacy to navigate it the best way they know how. Throughout this paper, I have repeated the words of Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014) that literacy is liberation. After observing and learning from the participants in this study, literacy is indeed liberation, but it is also surviving and finding oneself in the process.

Findings from this study have allowed me to make connections with both Black Girls Literacies Framework and Counterspace Framework but have also unveiled more extensive literacy practices afforded by the Instagram space. There is a connection between space and practice that was extremely evident and produced some emerging themes that were prevalent throughout the study. By looking across both cases and exploring patterns beyond the preselected categories from the two frameworks used, there were visible similarities regarding practice and space with participants. These emerging themes have added context to the ways that Black girls' literacies are enacted in the digital space and provide insight on what is essential for constructing a digital literacy counterspace for students. Five emerging themes that were consistently in the backdrop of this research will be discussed here.

The Real Stories Are in The Stories

When exploring Instagram as a potential counterspace, I realized that the stories (subspace) on the platform are where participants were their most authentic selves. While their profiles were intentionally constructed for what they wanted others to see, they did not display characteristics of their full personality. Posts that were made in their stories

(subspace) showed more about who they were inside, their hopes, struggles, losses, and passions. I saw the posts that made them laugh in their stories and discovered a more humorous side of them that I did not see on their profile. Thus, I began to realize that their public profiles represented more so who WE wanted them to be, while their stories represented who they were. The word "we" is capitalized to mean both them and us. Their identity online was a subconscious consensual identity between them and their audience. It was an identity that was well aware of the audiences' perceptions, judgments, and likes from previous interactions, all of which imposed an interrupted, incomplete, and inhibited identity that was constructed and presented. An online identity that was only a fraction of who they really were.

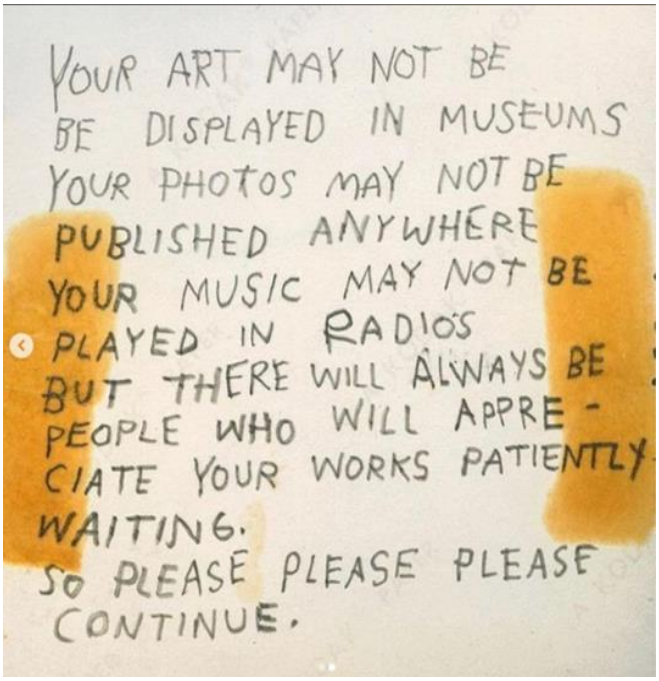
Self-Affirmation and Actualization Are Vital in Practice And Space

Adolescence is a stage in life where one is striving to know who they are and what is truly their full potential. The participants in this study were adolescent Black girls. It was very clear that they were still on a journey with their identity. They were trying to figure out what they want to be when they graduated high school, and what was the next step for them to take in life. This self-actualization was consistently visible throughout the study with the challenges they had experienced and the issues that were impacting their lives at the time. These issues were brought from the margin to the center (hooks, 2000) in this space, thus showing its direct relationship to practice. By being a space that offered the ability to construct one's own identity, speak freely, and have agency on who you want to be and what you want to share with the world, it allowed the practices of self-actualization and self-affirmation to prevail. As I removed myself from looking too close to their profiles as data and I zoomed out my lens and perspective of

viewing the profiles for both participants, I realized that this space was something like an affirmation wall. It reminded me of when I was an undergraduate and I would write affirming words on Post-it Notes that said things like, “You are smart, you are organized, you are punctual, and you are beautiful.” I would post these notes of affirmation on my mirror to see and say to myself everyday words that built my confidence in areas where I was not as secure with myself. I saw how these posts and their practices were creating affirming content throughout their profiles all while capturing their self-actualizing process as seen in Figures 19 and 20.

Figure 19

Cali’s Affirming Post



Note. From Cali’s Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Figure 20

Jade’s Affirming Post

Note. From Jade's Instagram Profile, 2021, Instagram

Literacy is Living and Evolving

A common theme that was at the forefront of this study was that literacy is living and growing with us. The Instagram platform captured how literacy matures as we mature and continues to evolve. Participants expressed how the ways that they practiced literacy when they were children were different from the present time with language use, interactions, and content. Literacy was consistently evolving with participants. Even while we engaged in this eight-week study, I noticed how both participants would review, edit, and remove posts, captions, and photos that they put on their profiles on a regular basis. One photograph could be posted one day, and the participants may decide to remove that particular image the following week. They had the agency to do so on their page. This showed how their Instagram pages were a living thing that was constantly evolving.

Passion Influences Practice

Throughout this study, it became clear that what each participant was passionate about influenced their literacy practices. It influenced what they wrote about, chose to engage with online, and even how they interacted with others. Their online identities were also connected to their passions. These passions were why I provided each participant with not only a pseudonym but an alias that described what motivated them intrinsically. Jade was passionate about people and was named The Advocate. Her posts were about her family, her mother, and her friends. She was socially driven and spoke up against injustices experienced by all people. Cali was passionate about her art and her goals for success as an artist. Her posts were about inspirations from other artists and her own projects. She was goal-driven and used the platform to build her professional brand and network.

Limitations

Although participants' engagement online emphasized the connection between space and practice, it did not explicitly address the characteristics and influence the educator has on these two areas of focus. The need for self-affirming, actualizing, and evolving practices with literacy were made evident in this study. Yet, the context of this research only provided insight on practices in non-formal academic spaces with the hope that future research could explore what these practices may look like in spaces with an educator. There are clear limitations involved in this study that would need to be addressed before practices could be employed in academic settings. One is exploring the qualities that are needed of educators to create spaces for literacy that are self-affirming and actualizing in the digital space.

Many urban schools today that have a majority Black student population also have a majority novice educator pool consisting of White women (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Many of the challenges shared in Chapter 2 that negatively influence Black girls, such as criminalization and disproportionate disciplinary practices in the schools (Morris, 2016), reflect not just the space, but the educators and administrators. This research study could very well provide a blueprint for creating digital counterspaces that are liberating to implement Black girls' literacy practices, but depending on who implements the blueprint may inevitably influence outcomes. Additionally, the design for this study may have lent some limitations that should be considered as well beyond any gaps in the research. Posting frequency, altered content, and profile visibility are all limitations that I have identified in this study that could have influenced findings. Nonetheless, I intentionally implemented strategies for quality in this research throughout this study that I will share after discussing these limitations.

Posting Frequency

During this study, there were some unforeseen challenges that influenced the posting frequency of one of the participants. Although the participant on average posted once a week, there were two weeks in the eight-week study where there were no posts made. The participant explained that she had started a new job and her work schedule had changed her normal routine throughout the week with engaging with social media. Another challenge she faced was when her phone was taken from her for a week due to a bad grade on her report card. Without having access to her phone, she was unable to go on Instagram and engage.

Altered Posting

The chances of altered posting with participants may have been a limitation with the understanding that a researcher was now following their online activity. All participants were advised in the assent forms that they signed to not block or implement privacy settings on their posts. As the researcher, I assessed each participant's posting history to determine if changes were made in content and posting habits. I did not notice any changes in posting habits with participants.

Private vs. Public Profiles

Another potential limitation to this study was that both participants had public profiles. This means that participants allowed open access to anyone on the internet to view their content. Findings revealed that both participants were influenced by their audience with their literacy practices on their public profiles but were more likely to engage in more liberatory practices in their stories (subspace) which are not publicly visible on their landing page. If the profiles of participants were private and limited to just friends and family, it may have influenced literacy practices that they enacted in the Instagram space, thus influencing the findings provided in this study.

Strategies for Quality

To ensure the quality of research, the participants' voices were embedded in this study by using in vivo codes (Mertens, 2014). Voices of participants remained at the center focus of the research and quotes from participants have been highlighted in the findings. Lessons learned from the study have been written in a personal reflection and included in the summary of this paper. Lastly, critical subjectivity was incorporated in the

study and a subjectivity statement was provided in Chapter 3. This study was intended to contribute to a more robust understanding of how the education field can assist in creating spaces that are more inclusive of the literacy practices of Black girls. To maintain the integrity of this study, and the emotional wellbeing of participants, relationships were created with parents to assist with this process. Additionally, all field notes and final analyses were shared and reviewed with participants.

Implications

This research study attended to a significant learning gap that disproportionately affects Black girls. According to the Nation's Reports Card, adolescent Black girls perform at the lowest proficiency rate nationally in reading out of their gender peer group (NAEP, 2019). Thus, exploring how social interventions such as social media may effectively serve Black girls and their literacy practices was the foundation of this work. Moreover, findings from this research serve as an extension to prior studies that have shown how students' use of social media offers several benefits such as a connection to other students, reduced isolation, and access to resources (Miller, 2017). With Black teens and girls being the largest users of Instagram (Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, 2017), this study contributes insight on the non-academic usage of the technology app with Black girls and their literacy practices. Findings from this research may provide interdisciplinary implications for literacy and technology fields. The exploration of Instagram as a potential digital literacy counterspace with adolescent Black girls is also an under-researched area in the fields of media literacy, social media, technology-mediated learning, and racial identity scholarship. Next, I will share implications for practice with educators and for the field of literacy research.

For Practice

The simple use of digital devices and technology in the classroom to engage with literacy lacks effective pedagogical practice for historically marginalized students in general. Educators can pull from this research the need to tie literacy practices, with Black girls specifically, to their identities in digital spaces. Allowing students to have agency in identity and narrative construction enables them to re-imagine themselves and engage in self-actualization. Digital literacy spaces that are liberating for Black girls should also connect literacy practices to content and topics that students are passionate about while using multimodality. While Instagram presented challenges in the platform with body image and self-image, I have sought to highlight some of the findings from this research that educators can glean from to support digital wellness. For instance, creating opportunities for self-affirmation, affirmation from others, and validation, built confidence with the girls in this study, made them feel visible, and that they mattered. Educators should assess how their pedagogical approaches to literacy with Black girls are reaffirming, validating, and allows agency for students.

For Research

By drawing from Case and Hunter's (2012) framework, we can conclude that digital literacy counterspaces in the field of education are: (a) places where identity narratives and stories are created, (b) places of healing, (c) places of active resistance, and (d) places for relationship building. Yet, there is still so much more left to uncover on this topic, specifically when exploring Instagram. Further research that explores Black girls' literacy practices on Instagram with private accounts compared to public accounts may provide new revelations on the influence of audience on literacy practice.

Additionally, an extension of this research could include exploring the strategies of educators in constructing digital literacy counterspaces with students. By doing this research, it may provide more context to how these spaces may be created in an academic setting to support students and the role of educators in influencing digital literacy counterspaces in educational practice.

For Literacy and Technology Innovation

Couros (2015) stated that technology is a tool, not a learning outcome. Currently, in education, most teachers are still using technology to create the same learning experiences that have existed for nearly a century in the classroom versus enhancing education and learning (Buckingham, 2015). A focus has been placed on learning technology versus using technology to collaborate, critique, and create (Mirra et al., 2018). In education, the approach to integrating technology in classrooms should not focus solely on teaching students the use of digital tools, but also on how those tools can lead to exposure or greater learning outcomes. For example, teaching a student how to use or read a book is not the end result for literacy; the book is to be used as a tool to expose students to historical heroes, exotic cultures, or fascinating ecosystems across the globe. The same concept applies to teaching with technology.

This research provides implications for innovative approaches to literacy in digital spaces. Digital resource creators of learning tools, platforms, and learning management systems that engage students in literacy may also glean insights from this work. Learning management systems and digital apps that engage Black girls in literacy practices should have features for collaborations, agency, and affirming and validating features such as hand clap emojis or thumbs-up emojis. These digital learning spaces must-have safety

protocols like removal buttons of content that may negatively influence the self-image or esteem of girls. Creating subspaces on digital learning platforms, similar to the Stories feature on Instagram, may also provide a counterspace for students to share their thoughts and opinions on subject content or topics that matter to them the most.

Recommendations

Findings from this study show the strengths of Instagram as a digital space with engaging Black girls in liberatory literacy practices but have also brought to light challenges that may exist in these type of social media spaces as well. It has shown the liberatory affordances and agentive benefits for Black girls and the shortcomings that must be addressed in order to create a digital literacy counterspace. It is my hope that this study will elevate dialogue and further research that explores the liberatory literacy practices of Black girls in non-formal digital spaces. By meeting Black girls where they are and learning from them, it is the only way that we may truly help them reach their full potential in literacy and in life.

As stated in the implications section of this chapter, this research provides implications for innovative approaches to literacy in digital spaces. Literature and research from Chapter 2 shows that the traditional approaches to literacy are not designed to benefit Black girls and are not aligned with the ways in which they practice. I hope that from this research, educators and scholars may build upon the elements of digital wellness that were uncovered with self-actualization, self-affirmation, and agency in practice that the Instagram platform provided and expand upon ways that these elements may support Black girls in digital spaces. Additionally, the challenges that were identified in the Instagram space have uncovered opportunities for building a safer space

for Black girls through further research, design, and development from platform developers. This research study was implemented to address a gap in literacy research with adolescent Black girls to explore their literacy practices in non-formal digital spaces outside of school. While I have shared the implications of this research, there are specific recommendations I would like to provide based on the findings of this study for educational practice.

Recommendations for School Administrators

Supporting Digital Counterspaces for Literacy in Schools

Community partnerships and strategic literacy programming which incorporate digital spaces should extend outside the school day and implemented in schools. Findings from this study and Koonce (2017) highlight how Black girls engage in rich literacy lives outside of school. It is essential to cultivate literacy spaces for Black girls that extend beyond the classroom and standardized curriculum. School administrators should leverage after-school tech programs, digital media clubs that meet in the morning or afternoons, and weekly or bi-weekly Saturday learning academies where students may engage in digital literacy counterspaces. While digital engagement is key, an in-person social component is also vital that supports in-person relationship building which was deemed more valuable than those formed in the online space from participants in this study. Additionally, establishing partnerships with local tech organizations and businesses to help create digital learning spaces that support literacy in schools with staff may be extremely beneficial.

Supporting Educators' Professional Development

In order to support digital literacy spaces in schools, administrators must support teachers' confidence and competence with incorporating digital media in their classroom practices by providing ongoing professional development. Administration should have clear goals for digital media or social media integration and measurable outcomes that are not limited to a checklist, but visual products and initiatives co-led by teachers and students. Core principles and resources for engaging students in digital media literacy are available on the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) (2007) website for educators. Administrators should support training opportunities beyond those provided in the school to expand teachers' digital skills and build confidence towards implementing digital spaces for literacy. Conferences such as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and Future of Education Technology Conference (FETC) are held annually and provide education stakeholders training on digital technology education.

Recommendations for Educators

Use Culturally Responsive Digital Practices for Literacy

Incorporating digital spaces in school literacy practices must extend beyond offering devices in the classroom. It should encompass creating a space for critical thinking, collaboration, or cultural exposure tied to identity. Learning Management Systems such as Nearpod have been created for teachers that enhance curriculum and utilize technology for group work, collaborative discussions, image sharing, and virtual field trips for students to discover people and places across the globe. Engaging Black girls and other students that identify as BIPOC through imagery, representations, and social identities beyond what is seen in Eurocentric literature is extremely valuable and

affirming (Lachney, 2017). It is important for teachers to move beyond the "basics" of just using digital media for drills and testing, but to creatively embrace the opportunities for students to create multimodal content or narratives that are self-affirming and self-actualizing. Creating opportunities for Black girls to learn, think, and take action through literacy in digital spaces is essential for creating equitable learning outcomes at this stage. Next, I will share some examples of ways teachers can engage Black girl literacies through digital media spaces.

Empower Student Agency Through Blogs

Introducing blogs versus requiring a written paper assignment could be a great way to encourage collaboration and agency for students by allowing them to post pictures online or just express themselves. There are many websites such as Blogger or Wordpress that allow students the opportunity to create their own media content. Blogs also incorporate affirming feedback to students which was deemed important to the participants when practicing literacy and characteristics of the type of space in which they engage. When implementing an assignment that requires students to develop a blog, teachers should provide the opportunity for exploring successful examples from diverse bloggers that look like the students. Welcome discussion for students to analyze and evaluate the medium and be a part of the conversation to discuss the type of space they want their blog to be as it relates to their identity and how they intend to engage with literacy.

Book Trailers Over Book Reports

Book trailers are an example for incorporating multimodal literacy practices in English Language Arts. Based on findings from this study, videos were used by

participants to share their passions and craft new narratives. Teachers can allow students the opportunity to display their talents and create video content centered around course readings in regard to how they connect with the literature. Video equipment or cameras can be outsourced by school technology specialists or media specialists. If school equipment is not available, teachers may consider permitting students to utilize their own mobile devices and collaborate in creating short videos. When teens develop video trailers, they are analyzing a piece of literature and creating multimodal text that articulates key concepts of the work that can only be derived through critical literacy practices.

Replace Quizzes with Digital Design Projects

Highly effective teachers understand the cultural biases of standardized testing and Eurocentric curriculum (Chenoweth, 2007) as disadvantages for Black students and seek to counter traditional paradigms through critical pedagogical approaches that support liberation (Hilliard, 1995). Digital literacy labs that focus on storytelling, graphic construction, and video creation can be used to highlight acquired knowledge in a lesson and replace a test or quiz in curriculum. When teachers employ digital literacy labs in their classroom, students can learn through agency how to use images and digital media to tell stories that matter to them. Students can also explore and practice with online content creation tools, video editing or even music software to construct imagery as related to their identity development.

Summary

The title of this dissertation was inspired by Harriet Jacobs's autobiography, *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl*, which is one of few accounted slave narratives written by a Black girl that conveys the intersectional challenges of self-actualization and victimization linked to oppression. Jacobs's work inspired me to seek the liberatory literacy practices (just as writing her autobiography was to her) with Black girls in digital counterspaces by exploring their autobiographical artifacts (posts), self-portraits (selfies), language, and communication (comments) on Instagram. Thus, I named the title of this research *Incidents in the Life of a Cyber Girl: Exploring Instagram as A Potential Counterspace for Black Girls' Literacy Practices*. From this research, I have learned how the incidents in the lives of Black girls are tied to their literacy practices. Whether written by hand or keyed online, there are stories embedded in their words and in their photos. This dissertation study centered on the literate lives of Black adolescent girls outside of traditional school settings. I wanted to meet the girls where they were, which was online. I wanted to come into their space as an observer on Instagram and learn from them the ways in which they enact literacy.

This research allowed me to think about the ways that I enact literacies online as a Black woman and how it connects to the findings I saw with the girls in this study or even my own twelve-year-old daughter. It is my hope that many people will benefit from this study. Literacy educators, ed-tech developers, researchers, critical feminist scholars, and others can pull from these study findings that intersect with their work. Community organizers and leaders that serve Black adolescent girls through literacy programs may uncover digital learning strategies to better engage students remotely. One thing this

dissertation has made clear is the attachment to literacy and liberation with Black girls (Ladson-Billings, 2016). It has situated a narrative that demands that it is absolutely not enough to just explore literacy practices with Black girls without context to space. It is imperative to their liberation to explore spaces that are liberatory in nature for implementing literacy for them to thrive. From this work, it is my hope that we can continue to analyze and evaluate digital spaces that are liberatory for Black girls to experience self-actualization and be affirmed that their existence matters.

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APPENDIX A: ASSENT FORM WITH BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

UNC CHARLOTTE
Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Assent for Child/Minor (Age 13 – 17) Participation in Research

Title of the Project: INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A CYBER GIRL: EXPLORING INSTAGRAM AS A POTENTIAL COUNTERSPACE FOR BLACK GIRLS' LITERACY PRACTICES

Principal Investigator: JIMMEKA ANDERSON, DOCTORAL CANDIDATE, THE UNIVERITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

Co-investigator: DR. CHANCE LEWIS, DISSERTATION RESEARCH ADVISOR, THE UNIVERITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

You are invited to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. A parent consent form is required to participate in this study along with this form. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Important Information You Need to Know

- The purpose of this study is to find out the literacy practices that you use and engage with on Instagram, and how you may use the Instagram platform in ways to express yourself, share stories, and build relationships with family and friends.

- You may participate in this study if you identify as a Black girl between the ages of 13 and 18 and post at least once a week on Instagram.

- You will participate in three 30–45-minute interviews for this study to discuss the posts on your Instagram timeline. The first interview will be at the beginning of the study to discuss posts you made in the past and recently on your page. A second interview will take place at the end of the first month of the study as a midway point to discuss posts made at the start of the study up to that date. At the end of the second month, a final interview will be conducted with you to discuss posts and content on your Instagram page since the midway point of the last interview.

- You will be required to accept a follow request from the researcher on Instagram for a two-month period. Once the study is complete and the two-month period ends, you will be able to remove the researcher as a follower on Instagram. Privacy settings may not be used to block the researcher from seeing posts during the two-month period.

- You will be required to complete the questionnaire located on the last page of this consent form.

- Two participants will be selected based on the responses from the questionnaire that best fit the criteria for the study. Potential participants and parents will receive an email if they are selected and if they are not selected to be in the study.

- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?
There is a need to explore online spaces that are free for expression, active with communication and language by Black girls to create strategies for their success in literacy courses in school. The purpose of this study is to explore the literacy practices of Black girls on the platform they use the most, Instagram.

Why is you being asked to be in this research study.
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an adolescent Black girl between the ages 13 and 18 and are a frequent user of Instagram.

What will you do in this study?
You will be asked to participate in this study for a two-month period. During the two-month period, you will participate in three 30-45-minute interviews via Zoom (virtual) that will be audio and video recorded. Additionally, you will be required to grant permission for the researcher to observe your online posting habits and content on your Instagram profile for two months and review older posts dating back six months. Once all three interviews are complete, you will be allowed to look at the write up of the study. A digital copy of the report will be shared with you within a month following the last interview.

What benefits might children experience?
There are no direct benefits experienced from this research.

What risks might children experience?
While it is extremely rare, there are minor risks that may arise during the study that must be shared. Some participants may have a certain level of emotional experience when discussing their experiences online and the reasons for their posts. Participants will not be forced to answer any questions that they are not comfortable with during the interview process and are advised to say "pass" if there is a question they do not want to answer. Participants will be volunteering to share their experiences and the interviewer will be as supportive as possible to make each interviewee feel comfortable. To protect their identity and prevent any forms of embarrassment or exposure to the larger community, all interview audio files will be transcribed verbatim and all names will be changed to pseudonyms during the transcription process. Each interviewee will receive a copy of their interview transcripts and have an opportunity to add, correct, or delete any portion of their interview.

How will information be protected?
We will not use your name. Instead, we will use a pseudonym (fake name) and this fake name will be used on all data for the study. The interview recordings will be conducted via Zoom and will not record full names of any of the participants. A private google folder for all data collection content will be created in Google drive and will have accessibility restrictions. The private folder will contain subfolders for each participant, which will store their interviews, and screen captures

of digital artifacts. A Google Doc will be created in the private research folder to identify participants with their assigned pseudonyms. Folders and content will all contain the pseudonyms of participants instead of their actual name as an identifier. Access to the overall research folder will only be granted to the researcher and faculty advisor. Participants' subfolder will be accessible to both the researcher, faculty advisor, and participant.

How will information be used after the study is over?
Information for this study will be used for the researcher's dissertation and doctoral defense. The research will be written as a final paper. Once approved by participants and once research is defended in front of the dissertation committee, all folders and identifying documents will be deleted from the google drive and any computer hardware.

Will you receive an incentive for taking part in this study?
Yes, you will receive a $50 Visa Gift Card for their participation in the study at the conclusion of the two-month period for their time commitment. The $50 Gift Card Incentive will be provided one time at the completion of the two-month period. There are no prorated incentives or scheduled payments throughout the research. Participants must complete the two-month commitment to receive a gift card. The gift card will be delivered via USPS mail and addressed to both the parent/guardian and child. The child and parent/guardian must sign and confirm receipt of the gift card that will be sent via a digital form.

What other choices are there if I don't want my [child/legal ward] to take part in this study?
You are not required to participate in this study and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?
Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop participation at any time.

Who can answer my questions about this study and participant rights?
For questions about this research, you may contact Jimmeka Anderson, jander44@uncc.edu, (704) 281-0976 and faculty advisor Dr. Chance Lewis, chance.lewis@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about research participant's rights, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Participant Assent

By signing this document, I [child's name] am agreeing to participate in this study. I, [child's name] understand what the study is about and have reviewed with a parent or guardian before signing.

You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I [child's name] understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

_____
Participant Name (PRINT)

_____
Signature Date

_____
Name and Signature of person obtaining assent Date

INSTAGRAM USAGE BACKGROUND

Date:

Background Questions

- Name _____
- Age _____
- Grade _____
- How do you identify your race? _____
- How do you identify your gender? _____

Literacy Practices

- How do you feel about English Language Arts?
  _____
- How would you describe yourself as a reader?
  _____
- Are you an active reader outside of school? Yes ☐ No ☐ Sometimes ☐
- What type of books do you like to read?
  _____
- Is there anything besides books that you like to read?
  _____
- Do you like to write?
  _____
- If so, what type of writing do you enjoy?_____

Instagram Use

- Do you have an Instagram account?
  _____
- If so, how often do you post on Instagram (including stories)?
  _____

- What do you like most about Instagram?
  _____
- How do you access Instagram? (Ex: From your own device or a parent/guardian's device)
  _____
- Is your account public or private?
  _____
- What type of content do you like to read online?
  _____
- What type of content do you react to (like or comment) from others online?
  _____

APPENDIX B: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Department of Middle, Secondary, and K-12 Education
9201 University City Boulevard, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001

Parent or Legal Guardian Consent for Child/Minor (Age 13 – 17) Participation in Research

Title of the Project: INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A CYBER GIRL: EXPLORING INSTAGRAM AS A POTENTIAL COUNTERSPACE FOR BLACK GIRLS' LITERACY PRACTICES

Principal Investigator: JIMMEKA ANDERSON, DOCTORAL CANDIDATE, THE UNIVERITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

Co-investigator: DR. CHANCE LEWIS, DISSERTATION RESEARCH ADVISOR, THE UNIVERITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

Your [child/legal ward] is invited to participate in a research study. Your [child's/legal ward's] participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether or not to allow your [child/legal ward] to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Important Information You Need to Know

- The purpose of this study is to find out the literacy practices that [child/legal ward] uses and engages with on Instagram, and how your child [child's/legal ward's] may use the Instagram platform in ways to express themself, share stories, and build relationships with family and friends.

- Your child [child/legal ward] may participate in this study if they identify as a Black girl between the ages of 13 and 17 and post at least once a week on Instagram.

- Your child [child/legal ward] will participate in three 30–45-minute interviews for this study to discuss the posts on their Instagram timeline and posting habits. The first interview will be conducted at the beginning of the study to discuss older posts dating back six months and current posts on their Instagram page. A second interview will take place at the end of the first month of the study as a midway point to discuss posts made at the start of the study up to that specific date. At the end of the second month, a final interview will be conducted to discuss posts on their Instagram page since the midway point of the last interview.

- Your child [child/legal ward] will be required to accept a follow request from the researcher on Instagram for a two-month period. Once the study is complete and the two-month period ends, your child will be able to remove the researcher as a follower on

Instagram. Privacy settings may not be used to block the researcher from seeing posts during the two-month period.

- Potential participants will be required to complete the questionnaire located on the last page of their assent form.

- Two participants will be selected based on the responses from the questionnaire that best fit the criteria for the study. Parents and potential participants will receive an email if they are selected and if they are not selected to be in the study.

- Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?

There is a need to explore online spaces that are expressive and use communication and language frequently by Black girls to create strategies for their success in literacy courses in schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the literacy practices of Black girls on the platform they frequent the most, Instagram.

Why is your [child/legal ward] being asked to be in this research study.

You are being asked to allow your [child/legal ward] to participate in this study because they are an adolescent Black girl between the ages 13 and 17 and is a frequent user of Instagram.

What will children do in this study?

Your [child/legal ward] will be asked to participate in this study for a two-month period. During the two-month period, they will participate in three 30-45-minute interviews via Zoom (virtual) that will be audio and video recorded. Additionally, participants will be required to grant permission for the researcher to observe their online posting habits and content on their Instagram profile for the two months and review older posts dating back six months. Once all three interviews are complete, the participant will be allowed to look at the transcript and report of the study. A digital copy of the report and transcript will be shared privately within a month following the last interview.

What benefits might children experience?

There are no direct benefits experienced from this research.

What risks might children experience?

Albeit rare, there are minor risks that may arise during the study that must be shared. Some participants may have a certain level of emotional experience when discussing their experiences online and the reasons for their posts. Participants will not be forced to answer any questions that they are not comfortable with during the interview process and are advised to say "pass" if there is a question they do not want to answer. Participants will be volunteering to share their experiences and the interviewer will be as supportive as possible to make each interviewee feel comfortable. To protect their identity and prevent any forms of embarrassment or exposure to the larger community, all interview audio files will be transcribed verbatim and all names will be changed to pseudonyms during the transcription process. Each interviewee will receive a copy of their interview transcripts and have an opportunity to add, correct, or delete any portion of their narratives.

How will information be protected?

We will not use your [child's/legal ward's] name. Instead, we will use a pseudonym (fake name) and this fake name will be used on all data for the study. The interview recordings will be conducted via Zoom and will not record full names of any of the participants. A private google folder for all data collection content will be created in Google drive and will have accessibility restrictions. The private folder will contain subfolders for each participant, which will store their interviews, and screen captures of digital artifacts. A Google Doc will be created in the private research folder to identify participants with their assigned pseudonyms. Folders and content will all contain the pseudonyms of participants instead of their actual name as an identifier. Access to the overall research folder will only be granted to the researcher and a faculty advisor. Participants' subfolder will be accessible to both the researcher, faculty advisor, and participant.

How will information be used after the study is over?
Information for this study will be used for the researcher's dissertation and doctoral defense. The research will be written as a final paper. Once approved by participants and once research is defended in front of the dissertation committee, all folders and identifying documents will be deleted from the google drive and any computer hardware.

Will [children/legal wards] receive an incentive for taking part in this study?
Your [child/legal ward] will receive a $50 Visa Gift Card for their participation in the study at the conclusion of the two-month period for their time commitment. The $50 Gift Card Incentive will be provided one time at the completion of the two-month period. There are no prorated incentives or scheduled payments throughout the research. Participants must complete the two-month commitment to receive a gift card. The gift card will be delivered via USPS mail and addressed to both the parent/guardian and child. The child and parent/guardian must sign and confirm receipt of the gift card that will be sent via a digital form.

What other choices are there if I don't want my [child/legal ward] to take part in this study?
Your child is not obligated to participate in this study and there are no consequences for choosing not to participate.

What are my [child's/legal ward's] rights if they take part in this study?
Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to allow your [child/legal ward] to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop their participation at any time.

Who can answer my questions about this study and participant rights?
For questions about this research, you may contact Jimmeka Anderson, jander44@uncc.edu, (704) 281-0976 and faculty advisor Dr. Chance Lewis, chance.lewis@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about research participant's rights, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu.

Parent or Legally Authorized Representative Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to [your child's **OR** the person's named below] participation in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree for [my child OR the person named below] to take part in this study.

_____
Participant Name (PRINT)

_____
Parent/Legally Authorized Representative Name and Relationship to Participant (PRINT)

_____
Signature Date

_____
Name and Signature of person obtaining consent Date

APPENDIX C: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INTERVIEW 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INTERVIEW 1

Date:

Establishing Rapport/Background (Warm-Up Questions):

- How old are you?
- What grade are you in?
- How long have you been on Instagram?
- Tell me how you decided to become a member of Instagram.

Instagram as a space to create your own narrative:

- What type of content do you share or post online?
- How do your posts represent who you are?
- How does Instagram allow you to express yourself?
- Tell me about a time when you shared a positive personal experience online.
- Why did you decide to share that post?
- What were your followers' reactions?

Instagram as a space for healing:

- Tell me about a time when you shared a negative personal experience online.
- Why did you decide to share that post?
- What type of post do you like or share if you are upset, hurt or emotionally disappointed?
- Have you ever utilized Instagram to escape problematic events in the physical world and if so, share an example?

Instagram as a space to resist racism and feminism:

- How has Instagram influenced how you view yourself/felt about yourself as a Black Girl?
- Describe your online identity.
- Describe your offline identity at school.
- Describe your offline identity at home.
- How would you compare your online identity to your offline identity in school and at home?
- Which identity do you feel represents your most authentic self?
- Why do you think there is a difference?

Instagram as a space to build relationships:

- What type of conversations do you have with your friends and followers on instagram?
- What type of conversations do you have with friends offline?
- How are the conversations similar?

- How are the conversations different?
- Which conversations are more supportive and why?
- Have you ever experienced support from friends and followers online, If so, how?

APPENDIX D: SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL –INTERVIEW 2 & 3

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – INTERVIEW 2 & 3

Date:

Establishing Rapport (Warm-Up Questions):

- How are you feeling today?
- Have any major events happened in your life since the last time we met?
- Has anything interesting happened on social media since the last time we met?

Instagram as a space to create your own narrative:

- Share with me a post you have made in the last month to express yourself.
- Why did you select this post?
- What inspired you to share this post?
- How did you think your friends or followers would react to your post when you initially shared it online?

- Share with me a post you have made in the last month when you shared a personal experience online.
- Why did you decide to share that post?
- How did you think your friends or followers would react to your post when you initially shared it online?
- What were your followers' reactions?

Instagram as a space for healing:

- Share with me a post you have made in the last month when you shared a negative personal experience online.
- Why did you decide to share that post?

- Share with me a post you have made in the last month to express hurt, frustration, or disappointment.
- What inspired you to share this post?
- How did you think your friends or followers would react to your post when you initially shared it online?

Instagram as a space to resist racism and feminism:

- Share with me one of your posts you have made in the last month that you feel represents who you are the most.
- Why did you select this post?
- What inspired you to share this post?
- How did you think your friends or followers would react to your post when you initially shared it online?

- Share with me one of your posts you have made in the last month that connects with your identity (Ex: Race, Gender, Sexuality, etc.)
- Why did you select this post?
- What inspired you to share this post?
- How did you think your friends or followers would react to your post when you initially shared it online?

- Share with me one of your posts you have made in the last month to highlight a topic you are passionate about.
- Why did you select this post?
- What inspired you to share this post?
- How did you think your friends or followers would react to your post when you initially shared it online?

Instagram as a space to build relationships:

- What type of conversations have you had on Instagram in the last month?
- Tell me about a conversation that made you feel positive on Instagram in the last month.
- Tell me about a conversation that did not make you feel positive in the last month.

- Share with me a post you have made in the last month that you feel you received a lot of support from friends or followers online.
- How did it make you feel to receive support from others with that post?