DIGITAL MIRROR: AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON LATE ADOLESCENT BLACK FEMALES' GLOBAL AND ACADEMIC SELF-CONCEPT

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty
of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Curriculum and Instruction.

Charlotte

2016

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ABSTRACT

NAKESHIA WILLIAMS. Digital Mirror: An examination of social media's influence on late adolescent Black females' global and academic self-concept. (Under the direction of DR. CHANCE W. LEWIS)

The broad socialization of new media has the ability to cultivate the values, beliefs, interests, and personality characteristics of Black females. Specifically, new media's digital platform of social media offers individuals immediate access to vulnerable messages about self or perceptions of self through instant and online cultivated messages about race, gender, and sexuality. The implications of these inherent everyday messages amplified in social media about Black females' race, gender, and sexuality juxtaposed to their developing sense of global and academic self and relationships with others is an understudied phenomenon. By understanding how these mediated messages of racism and anti-feminism influence late adolescent Black females as they begin exploring and maturing into their adult selves is undertaken. This study follows theoretical paradigms of critical media literacy, Black feminist thought, and interpretive phenomenology to examine the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, with social media, and its influence on their global and academic self-concept. This study took place in a large, urban city located in the Southeast. Data sources included interviews, focus group, and a collection of media artifacts. The data was analyzed through thematic analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis to better understand the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females and the ways in which they make sense of these experiences in their adult lives.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my participants who had the courage to share their stories so generously with me. This study is also dedicated to all of the little black and brown girls who ever felt like she did not have a voice. Lastly, this is for my little brown girl, Alexandria, whose love, strength, and courage inspire me every day.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has truly taught me that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). I have to acknowledge and give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for leading, guiding and keeping me throughout this journey.

I would next like to acknowledge and thank my wonderful dissertation chairperson, Dr. Chance W. Lewis, thank you for challenging, pushing, and encouraging me to reach my fullest potential. I sincerely appreciate your unwavering and relentless support. You never gave up on me and always demanded excellence, and for this, I am eternally grateful. Your mentorship and friendship have truly been most influential in my life.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Bettie R. Butler. You are the Professor that I prayed for and the sister-friend I needed in my life. Thank you for the countless talks, encouraging words and untiring support, even as I tried to balance the roles of student, teacher, and mother. You have been a sounding board and pillar of support throughout this journey. Your purpose in my life as a teacher, mentor, and friend have truly been a blessing of which I will continue to pay forward.

To Dr. Jae Hoon Lim, thank you for believing in my critical research ideas and guiding me through the process of becoming a better researcher and person. Your time and willingness to read multiple drafts during the midnight hours has truly been appreciated.

To Dr. Lyndon P. Abrams, thank you for encouraging me to view the world through a multicultural lens, and for making me want to become a better advocate for students, a better counselor, and a better person.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my parents, Leroy and Jacqueline Williams, Jr. I do not quite have the words to truly express how very blessed I feel to call you both my parents. You provided a foundation of hard work, unwavering love, support, and unyielding encouragement for me to always succeed. Your endless sacrifices to see me through this journey have been tireless, and I am most appreciative. Thank you for instilling in me to always dream the impossible dream, and that my voice really does matter.

I would also like to acknowledge my daughter, Alexandria, for always being patient and understanding. Words cannot express how truly blessed I am to have such a smart, kind, loving, talented, independent, and beautiful daughter as you. You have made the most sacrifices to see me through this, and I hope that you have seen that you really can do anything as long as you trust God, try your very best, and never give up. I am most appreciative for you making me want to make this a better and brighter world.

Lastly, I would like to thank and acknowledge the love, support, encouragement, coffee runs, shared cries, laughs, and joyous times with my many friends and family (of whom there are too many to name) for helping me through this Ph.D journey. I feel so very blessed to have you in my life.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

We live in a global information society where a majority of information that people receive comes from multiple media formats. Mass media (e.g. television, film, music, the Internet, print media, digital and social networking sites) interaction has become a dominant source of socialization of people in the twenty-first century. As such, the blending of traditional media such as television, magazines, radio and new media such as text messaging, social media, and online videos has become an integral part of youth lives (Gainer, 2010). The convergence of traditional media with new media's growing trend of digital technologies has propelled media's use for social communication, such as text messaging, blogs, email, online games, videos, and social networking (Ito et al., 2009). Hence, adolescents' consumption of media and other emerging technology often frames what is socio-culturally relevant. Media exposure, particularly for children (Calvert, 2008) and adolescents (Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999), has been demonstrated to be a powerful tool used to brand images and impart knowledge, as well as influence behavioral change (Evans, 2008; Grier & Bryant, 2005).

The influential power of mass media is critical in the developing self-concept of late adolescents who struggle to "be me" or to "find my true self." From this perspective, mass media is seen as an emerging socializing agent for late adolescents during a key

period of their development. Further, this period is also integral for their developing self-concepts, and indeed as "a period of *identity crisis*, in which fundamental dilemmas have to be resolved" (Ito, et al., 2009, p. 28). For many adolescents, the convergence of mass media are significant modalities through which they are seeking, consciously or unconsciously, the answers to identity questions, and looking for what Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) describe as "me that is me." New media technologies, as described by Mizuko Ito (2008), are in fact "embodiments, stabilizations, and concretizations of existing social structure and cultural meanings, growing out of an unfolding history as part of a necessarily altered and contested future" (p. 6). Therefore, adolescent interaction with media can serve as a model for identity formation processes as well as a predictor of academic achievement. Conversely, the volume of time and involvement in which adolescents consume and produce media seems to legitimate mass media as a viable pedagogical institution with a strong impact on the lives of urban youth (Giroux, 1996).

Scholarship on Black womanhood has become more closely connected to identity and media's framing of Black women (Balaji, 2010; Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014). Media's framing of Black females resonates with the pervasive dimensions of the everyday lives of these women as marginalized and subjugated beings in society. Furthermore, Morgan (1999) and Jha (2015) assert that Black women are living in a state of psychological distress due to the many competing and conflicting perspectives about what it means to be a Black woman in contemporary society. Subsequently, the messages conveyed through media may become integrated into the

psyche of adolescent Black females, which could impact their healthy and positive self-concept development both in and out of school.

Richardson (2007) suggests that "today's bad black girl-- video vixen imagery is linked to historic controlling images of the wench and the Jezebel" (p. 790). The processes of interacting with media where Black females' self-concept, and subsequently, their identities are constructed, deconstructed, shaped, tested, and experienced is salient. Therefore, how adolescent Black females are oriented toward their own race and gender, favorably or unfavorably, results in a tendency to watch programs that enable a similar interaction (Gandy, 2011). While adolescence is a time when beauty, attractiveness, personal image, and self-concept are relevant and evolving as their adult self-concept begins to emerge, it is also a period in which Black females are constantly barraged with stereotypes of and about Black women. These stereotypic messages about race and gender potentially impact Black females' academic achievement as well (Gordon, 2015). In spite of social advances, media images continue to reify negative messages and stereotypes, as well as reinforce dominant values (Adams-Bass, Stevenson, & Kotzin, 2014; Morrell et al., 2013). In this regard, not only do young, Black females have to contend with typical adolescent developmental tasks, but they must do so in the context of a society that devalues Blacks and women (hooks, 1981).

The Center for Adolescent Health (2009) suggest that late adolescence, ages 18 to 24, is commonly associated with the period of adolescence in which youth encounter major developmental changes and challenges. This stage of adolescence often consists of youth's "acquisition and consolidation of competencies, attitudes, values, and social

capital necessary to make a successful transition into adulthood" (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006, p. 13). Furthermore, late adolescence has been "noted as particularly important for setting the stage for continued development through the life span as individuals begin to make choices and engage in a variety of activities that are influential on the rest of their lives" (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006, p.13). Consequently, the trending prevalence of how adolescents, particularly, Black adolescent females' self-concept is shaped by media and the ways in which they can produce alternative media texts that challenge dominant media messages is an understudied phenomenon (Gainer, 2010).

Critical media pedagogy allows for a critical examination of media texts to understand how social media has influenced and continues to influence late adolescent Black females' self-concept as they emerge into adulthood. New media consumption and production illustrate how late adolescent Black females construct and respond to their intertwined relationships with social media. By placing Black females' participation with new media as Ito, et al., (2009) suggests, "at the core of the conceptual apparatus, asserts that all media engagement is fundamentally social and active" (p. 28). As Hill-Collins (1998) purports, Black females' identity constructions are rooted in power relations in which members are urged to enter into the "matrix of domination." According to Diggins (2011), this matrix refers to how intersecting oppressions are organized and represents our capacities to be both oppressors and oppressed (p.15). Adolescent media engagement should, therefore, extend beyond traditional models of uncritical participants, but rather, examine media through a critical lens (Morrell, 2013).

Critical media pedagogy is an educational process that makes young people aware of the role that media play in shaping social thought (Kellner & Share, 2007). Critical media pedagogy involves understanding how knowledge is transmitted via the media while decoding and analyzing texts, and lastly reshaping "the world you live in the world you imagine" (Morrell, 2012, p.3). Critical engagement with media provides Black females with a context for understanding the evolution and perpetuation of these media constructions. Daily and Dalton (2003) suggests that as Black females understand their role in the commodification of media and of audiences, then this leads to a critique of media and mediation of their own identities.

Further, when Black females make connections between the way they construct the self and the way the media construct their narratives, the effect may be upsetting or empowering (Daily & Dalton, 2003). Additionally, awareness of stereotypes as personified through social media can consequently influence academic aptitude and achievement of Black females. The way Black females define and view her academic ability when compared with other students is critical as her attitudes, feelings, and perception about her academic ability is constructed by the influential nature of social media. The dominant images and messages about Black females' social constructing her sense of self are inclusive of her academic self-concept and academic achievement in her schooling experiences. Hence, how adolescent Black females think through their multiple and shifting roles within society, and the ways in which these roles are constructed and understood is central to developing a healthy sense of self. Consequently, the tenuous connections to the everyday lives of late adolescent Black females and their interplay

with media hold for the possibility of increasing motivation and citizenship agency among Black females in urban communities and schools.

Therefore, this study seeks to apply concepts of critical media pedagogy and Black feminist thought to examine social media's influence on late adolescent Black females' self-concept. This study was designed to explore how adolescent Black females' social media experiences and the nature of these experiences influence their self-concept and academic self-concept in late adolescence. An examination of how late Black adolescent females make meaning of themselves when confronted with stereotypical images of Black women bounded ideologies of beauty, racial discrimination, and the ways in which social media provide a medium for them to negotiate and explore their developing self-concept in emerging adulthood is undertaken. Chapter Two includes a review of research related to social media use among adolescents, developing self-concept among adolescents, and the perpetuation of Black female stereotypes on social media. Chapter Three addresses the methodology of the study. Chapter Four discusses the key findings, and Chapter Five discusses the implications and suggestions for future research.

Statement of the Problem

Media is a form of communication that transmits messages to audiences for interpretation; yet, despite social advances, media's characterization of Black females continues to replicate stereotypical images (Gandy, 2011). Davis and Gandy's (1999) study of racial identity and media constraint determined that racial identity was a significant predictor of media viewing. Ward published a series of studies with Black

adolescents that examined the relationships among media exposure, media consumption, media influences, self-esteem, and racial identity (Ward, 2004; Ward, Day, & Epstein, 2006; Ward & Harrison, 2005). Gordon's (2008) study examined the relationship between media exposure, racial identity, and the self-concept of Black adolescent females. In each case, these researchers identified the media habits of Blacks and the prevalence of negative media stereotypes as influencing their research designs.

Similarly, the historical discrimination and racism experienced by Blacks often lead to negative associations regarding academic self-concept and academic achievement (Ogbu, 1994). As a result, the prevalence of negative stereotypes reified through media about Blacks is central to one's self-concept as well as academic self-concept. Gordon (2015) surveyed 247 African American adolescents ages 13 to 18, with a majority being female, and found that media use contributes to lower academic performance, lower self-perceptions, and less interest in college-oriented careers. This study's media use focused on students' use of television, music, and music videos and its correlation to students' academic self-concept and academic achievement (Gordon, 2015). Additionally, this study found that students who watched more television, listened to music more often, and identified more strongly with stereotypical media personalities also had lower grades in their classes (Gordon, 2015).

Likewise, several studies have found evidence suggesting that Black students' perceptions of their academic abilities are an important factor in their academic achievement (Awad, 2007; Clark et al., 2003; Justice, Lindsey, & Morrow, 1999; Witherspoon et al., 1997). The significance of academic self-concept in the academic

achievement outcomes of Black students and the need for a more concise examination of ways to increase Black students' academic self-concept is pivotal to their developing sense of self (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014). The bidirectional influence of media stereotypes of Black students establishes the norm for what Black adolescents view themselves as being capable of achieving (Gordon, 2015). Thus, the inequities embedded in society serve as byproducts of a political, social, educational, and racial divide which are reinforced through media messages (Conner & Slattery, 2014).

For Black feminists and critical media pedagogy scholars, the pervasive issue of Black females being characterized by images and dominant messages that reify their marginalization and subjugation are problematic. Gender, sexuality, and relationships are central to self-concept exploration and building for which adolescent Black females use media. The broad socialization of new media cultivates the values, beliefs, interests, and personality characteristics of Black females. Media messages from television resonate most strongly toward Blacks females' self-concept and identity development as both Black and female, and potentially have detrimental effects (Balaji, 2010).

Consequently, Black females have been negatively characterized as hypersexual, aggressive, and violent with negative peer interaction (Brody et al., 2001). These deleterious stereotypes have effectively legitimized representations of Black women (Balaji, 2010) which typically tend to influence others' behaviors and attitudes towards them (Jones, 2010). The negative nature of images presented in the media of Black women is "fundamental to Black women's oppression" (Hill-Collins, 1991, p. 7). Consequently, how Black females are influenced by subtle, yet pervasive mediated media

messages are of vital importance to the development of adolescent Black females. Furthermore, how Black females use new media to construct and express their lives, sense of self, and cultures is a "central pedagogical tool" imperative in the classroom (Graveline, 1998, p. 124). What is of importance as framed by Gee (2000) is how these young women work to reconstruct, maintain, negotiate, and/or resist identities/situations from corporate-controlled media.

Many studies of adolescents and media focus on violence and aggression (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Felson, 1996; Wilson, 2008), sexuality (Zillmann, 2000), sexual behavior and attitudes (Ward, Day, & Epstein, 2006; Ward & Harrison, 2005), self-esteem and body image (Thompson, Berg, Roehrig, Guarda & Heinberg, 2004). These studies provide insight into racial differences in the amount of exposure to media, behavior, and attitudes among youth, but fail to comprehensively address issues of race and gendered experiences as influential on the development and viewing perspectives of urban youth (Berry, 2000; Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003; Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006; Spencer, 1995). A problem in the field of education is educators and other stakeholders not being aware of the primary crises for youth that revolves around their self-concept development; for Black youth, racism is a significant cultural factor influencing self-concept (Morrell, 2012). This inherent issue embedded in subdued media messages in society is detrimental to the academic, socio-emotional, and psychological development of Black females. Due to the pervasiveness of racism and anti-feminist thought that influences everyday interactions and messages about ethnicity, race, and

gender are of primary concern as marginalized adolescents begin exploring and maturing into their adult selves.

Trier (2006) asserts that critical media literacy encourages students to consider why messages are sent and where they come from to help urban youth interrogate texts that may reproduce racism, sexism, homophobia, and other prejudices. Other scholars have expressed similar observations about the role mass media plays in the education of people about race and multiculturalism (Pohan & Mathison, 2007). Stevenson (2010) conducted a study that explored "how racial, gender, and class socialization may frame the adolescents' life experiences and the methods that they use to construct their identities, value systems, and resistance strategies" (p. 270). As educators, "we want youth to understand how knowledge transmitted via the media can reinforce stereotypes and encourage people to feel bad about themselves and others" (Morrell, 2012, p.72).

Traditional styles of learning have placed a gap between the meaningful learning in the everyday lives of urban youth, however, changes in media culture have widened this gap (Kotilainen &Rantala, 2009). In this widening gap, cultural self-concept for youth becomes fluid and negotiated. Consequently, it is important to create democratic spaces for adolescent Black females which support and challenge dominant media messages that reify stereotypes of racism and sexism. Empowering these young women is central to their academic, social, emotional, and psychological development. It also serves as a conduit to the powerful connections to learning and the larger world. From a critical media literacy lens, this pedagogical tool is emancipatory in the sense that it creates space and gives voice to adolescent Black females' identity and meaning-making

processes in which they are able to construct their own narrative to be valued, honored, and respected.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine ways in which late adolescent Black females' social media experiences and the nature of these experiences influence their global and academic self-concept, as well as their social and professional lives. This study explores the salient characteristics of self-concept processes of late adolescent Black females as influenced by social media. By exploring how these Black females have engaged in multimodal media texts, this study provides space to understand how social media positively or negatively influences how they view themselves, their perception of how others view them while providing opportunities for engagement, learning, and empowerment. This study will apply concepts of global self-concept and academic self-concept juxtaposed to the portrayal of Black females in social media. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the discourse of the omission of Black females' voices, stories, and experiences in contemporary society and scholarly literature.

Research Questions

The research questions that follow guide this dissertation study. The first question is the guides the inquiry while providing an overall foundation for the research while the additional questions further refine the focus.

1) How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, describe their social media experiences?

2) How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, perceive images of Black females through social media?
3) What are the lived social media experiences of Black females, ages 18 to 24, and how does this translate into understanding their sense of self (globally and academically)?

Significance of the Study

The emergent focus has been on the premise to highlight the existence and significant impact media has on the lives of youth. The concern about media's ability to influence adolescence dates back to the beginning of the medium. The Pew Research Center (2010) conducted a survey among youth ages 12 to 17 to explore their use of the internet, social media, gadget ownership and wireless connectivity. It was found that 73% of American youth ages 14 to 17 use the internet and social networking websites. Thirteen percent of girls ages 14 to 17 frequently use Twitter, while 75% of youth now have a cell phone. Additionally, the results revealed core internet activities among 93% of youth ages 12 to17, while 62% of online teens get news about current events and politics online. These statistics suggest the significant role media has on what and how these youth view themselves, others, and their environment.

Many scholars have talked about minority youth having a negative or nonexistent image of themselves as smart or talented (Ladson-Billings,1994; Kellner & Share, 2007; Morrell, 2012); these negative identities, often fueled by various institutions, lead to low academic performance, as well as a lack of motivation (Valenzuela, 1999). Stevenson (2010) conducted a study that explored the ways in which cultural media framers of

families influence adolescent Black females' motivation to obtain academic success, and resist or accept negative sexual myths. Stevenson (2010) considered "how racial, gender, and class socialization may frame the adolescents' life experiences and the methods that they use to construct their identities, value systems, and resistance strategies" (p. 270). The findings of this ethnographic study imply that media may serve as a defining experience in students' lives as well as the formation of their academic self-concept. Drawing upon Dorothy Smith (1990) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990), who argue that a person's personal experience is a central pillar for knowledge production; this knowledge production is related to the unique standpoint from which their personal and cultural biographies are significant sources of knowledge (Naples, 2003). Yet, negative images of media are a powerful nuance that universally has the ability to silence these marginalized youths.

Media images of Black females have been historically contributed to the prevalence of microaggressions in society, as described by Sue et al., (2007) "patterns of being overlooked, under-respected, and devalued because of one's race or gender" (p. 273). By focusing on the impact of media culture, few scholars have considered how this relates to Black females socially constructing and negotiating their sense of self. Further, few scholars have explored the manner in which academic self-concept and achievement outcomes of Black students is influenced by media culture (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014). Myers (1989) points out that Black, female adolescents are often ignored or invisible; both their strengths and their problems receive little attention in and out of schools. Historical constructs of inequality have presented Black female experiences as more

masculine or subject to perceived gender equity than their white peers (Davis, 1981), and have left Black females in a tenuous space between males and other women, where they are rendered not only invisible but powerless. Consequently, the implications of media mirroring larger society's reflections of racism and sexism subsequently subjugate Black females' to negative experiences throughout their development of self as well as their academic outcomes.

The implications of stereotypical negative portrayals of Black girls in media and life have led Jones (2010), to posit that common behavioral infractions for Black girls have been hinged upon stereotypes and labels of gender expectations that reinforce mainstream society's normative belief of femininity. Moreover, the academic underachievement of Blacks within the United States is perpetuated through mediated, gendered and racialized roles that influence academic self-concept and career roles (Gordon, 2015). It is this connection between media and an adolescent's lived experiences that cause researchers to argue for adolescents to become media literate by developing skills needed for processing the media images and messages they are inundated with in order to combat its ability to miseducate and negatively influence an adolescent's self-concept (Morrell, 2013). The issues of racism and sexism as presented in media pose as barriers that can potentially prevent adolescent Black females from reaching their full potential. Placing special attention to the defining experiences in Black adolescent females' lives and uncovering how media formally impacts the context of their self-concept development is profound.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, the research questions will examine how late adolescent Black females make sense of social media images of Black females, as well as how these images and messages inform their emerging self-concept. The extent to which adolescent Black girls see themselves as well as their perception of how they are viewed by others unquestionably informs a developing girl's self-concept (Belgrave, 2009). As digital media is both interdisciplinary and dialogical (Bahktin, 1981), it provides easy and instant access for adolescent Black females to view themselves in varied dimensions. Further, by examining the ways in which social media shape late adolescent Black females' self-concept from using a combination of theoretical perspectives. The theoretical perspectives used to guide inquiry for this study are critical media literacy, Black feminist thought, and interpretive phenomenological theoretical perspectives to further explore the phenomenon of social media.

Critical Media Literacy

The school of critical theory questions relationships of power as they appear in the form of institutions and cultural norms (Lemert, 2010). Critical theory is to emancipate the oppressed from the ideological control embedded in language, social habits, and cultural forms that combine to shape the ways people think about the world. Following the paradigm of social change, critical theorists, Freire, and Gramsci challenged the authority of those holding the power in society and advocated for the oppressed to speak for themselves, rising against the forces of oppression that seek to control them (Lemert, 2010). Paulo Freire (1970) intensely argued that hegemony can be

challenged through problem-posing education illustrated through critical reflection, practice, and praxis. From this platform, critical theory extends itself into education through critical literacy and critical media.

Critical media teaches youth to question and challenge the world in which they live as constructed by the media. It involves a problem-posing approach that is student centered and geared towards reflective praxis (Freire, 2007). Students are encouraged to dialogue and reflect to interrogate the effects of power and situate learning within their cultures. From this perspective, youth is able to produce alternate media texts to construct the meaning of themselves and resist misinterpretations from media (Kellner & Share, 2007). Therefore, when youth are provided with space and opportunity to create a counter-narrative to dominant narratives prescribed by the oppressors, liberation of these individuals occurs.

Critical media literacy is often known as critical media pedagogy in social justice education (Turner, Hayes, & Way, 2013). Critical media literacy describes an approach focusing on the political, sociocultural, historical, and economic forces that affect life as they are embedded in the sources of information that surround students (Soares & Wood, 2010). The praxis of critical media revolves around investigating manifestations of power relations in texts and questioning ways which those same texts could serve people of all societal levels (Avila & Moore, 2012; Avila & Pandya, 2013). Critical media literacy utilizes a critical approach to media production. It aims to help youth analyze and resist the reproduction of current societal power structures by using the tools of media analysis, production, and distribution.

Sholle and Denski (1995) wrote that critical media consists of three counter-hegemonic practices:

> (1) deciphering and critiquing media as text, (2) acting upon that critique by changing consumption patterns with the belief that doing can make a difference, and (3) writing and distributing media-based narratives (as quoted in Turner, Hayes, & Way, 2013).

Kellner and Share (2007) insist that critical media literacy must focus on "ideology critique and analyzing the politics of representation of crucial dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality; incorporating alternative media production" (p.8).

Black Feminist Thought

The theoretical lens of Black feminist epistemology (Hill-Collins, 1990) uses the matrix of domination to mitigate the Black female experience. Black feminism positions itself as a critical theory to criticize and address social problems stemming from the historical and contemporary experiences of Black women (Woodard & Mastin, 2005). Hill-Collins (1990) deconstructs the intricate system of oppression from a dominant, male, patriarchal, European perspective that originally sought to maintain and sustain power and control through one clear form of patriarchal dominance through religious images.

Similarly, Black feminists argue for the full deconstruction of European, male, patriarchal domination that justifies religious and gender domination. Black feminist thought, therefore, places the woman at the center of analysis to understand the structure of domination. In order to understand the experiences of these women and their identities

outside of Eurocentrism, a power analysis has to occur to fully operationalize change. The structures of domination are thus so inherent in society and have existed in such systemic forms that praxis of change through human agency is the position of modern theorists, in particular, critical theorists.

Interpretive Phenomenology

Using phenomenological methods (Van Manen, 1990) as a methodological approach to increase understanding of human experience. Phenomenology is a qualitative approached used to unearth essential meanings from participants' lived experience accounts. In phenomenology, participants' experiences are reduced to a description of universal essences (Creswell, 2007). An essence refers to the "nature of an experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Phenomenological research, according to Van Manen (1990), is at its core the human scientific study of essences. To this end, this phenomenology seeks to uncover the meaning of the lived experience instead of just the facts of the experience (Van Manen, 1990).

The foundation of phenomenology is to study the essence of experience from a critical, objective, and rigorous lens to reveal a core essence or phenomenon (Husserl, 1970). According to Husserl (1970), it was important to examine experience from immersion in our everyday existence with the goal of describing things "in terms of their essential concepts, the essences which make themselves known in intuition" (p. 249). Understanding of experience involves understanding intentionality, the practice of bracketing, and essences (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen (1990) states that "it does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control

the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (p. 9).

Husserl's description of phenomenology was extended to an interpretive or hermeneutic approach by philosophers Heidegger and Gadamer (Finlay, 2011). From this viewpoint, "interpretation is inevitable and a part of an experience whereby focusing on the meaning a person takes from that experience" (Quest, 2014, p. 38). Interpretive phenomenology emphasizes human immersion in the world surrounding them (Finlay, 2011). It is an approach which explores how people make sense of experiences in their lives (Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009). According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), this increases an awareness of self which cannot be departed from the world.

Examining the lived experiences yield clear descriptions, thereby increasing the opportunity to draw an idea of its fundamental nature (van Manen, 1990). Further, this approach engages in reflective focus on language while seeking an understanding of participants' perceptions (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The three core concepts of interpretive phenomenology are: the phenomenological components which seek participants' understanding, the interpretive component which considers cultural and physical environments as they attempt to make sense of the experience, and the renewed insight gained by the researcher (Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009).

Definition of Terms

Academic Self-Concept

Academic self-concept is an individual's perception of their efficacy or ability for academic tasks or skills (McGrew, 2007).

Adolescence

Adolescence is the stage of life experienced by young people in which physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and interpersonal changes occur. As they grow and develop, young people are influenced by outside factors such as parents, peers, community, culture, religion, school, world events and the media (McNeely & Blanchard, 2009).

Black Female

A Black female is of Black and African-descent who was biologically born as a female.

Late Adolescence

A developmental period for individuals that is critical of identity formation, ages 18 to 22, in which individuals overcome uncertainty; their choices and challenges shift to include decisions about education or vocational training, entry into and transitions within the labor market, moving out of the family home, and sometimes marriage and parenthood (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006).

Youth

Youth is the period of life between childhood and adulthood (McNeely & Blanchard, 2009).

Identity

Identity is the ability become more self-aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and become more confident in their own unique qualities (Erikson, 1968).

Global Self-Concept

The self-concept is defined as how one perceives oneself as well as by how one's perceptions of how others perceive them (Gallagher, 2000; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976).

New media

New media is integration of traditional media of print, radio, and television with digital technologies used for social communication, such as text messaging, blogs, email, online games, gaming devices, videos, MP3 players, exchanging instant messages, cell phones, video graphics, photos, and social networking (Morrell, 2013).

Patriarchal ideal feminine image

Encourages women to fit a certain beauty ideal represented through mass-mediated messages both in physical and online worlds (Klein, 2013).

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is an aspect of self that refers to feelings and affective evaluations about the self (Belgrave, 2009).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

Social Media

Social media is highly interactive mobile and web-based technologies that are user-generated to share, co-create, discuss, and modify information (Ito et al., 2009).

Social Networking Sites

Social Networking Sites are websites which make it possible to form online communities and share user created content (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010).

Voice

Voice is a variable, dynamic concept that can extend to writing style, authorship, language, or speech. It is constructed both on the individual and social levels. (Sperling & Appleman, 2011).

Summary

Adolescents spend a majority of their time as consumers and producers of media. As producers and consumers of media, salient aspects of adolescents' identity are influenced by youth's media saturation (Morrell, et. al, 2013). How and what media youth consume is of vital importance to their developing selves. By further exploring this connection, this study seeks to contribute to scholarly discourse in providing solutions to support and empower adolescent Black females.

A growing consensus about the images and messages received to, for, and about Black females often portrays negative stereotypes. These unintended messages, albeit positive or negative, contribute to their constructed self-concept. Paradoxically, the relevance of adolescent Black females' self-concept emerging through multimedia formats clearly informs their sense of self and personality development (Erikson, 1976)

as both Black and female. The application of critical media holds promise for change and empowerment for adolescent Black females.

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of social media on late adolescent Black females' developing self-concept as they become adult media consumers. Through an intersectional lens, I seek to explore how these young women and their intertwined relationships with social media shapes their self-concept. The study will provide insight into the role that social media has on late adolescent Black females' sense of self and implications of praxis for change. Using critical media pedagogy and Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical lens, this study uses a qualitative case study approach to explore the experiences of late adolescent Black females to provide a medium for their experiences and through awareness.

Chapter One defines the purpose, provides background, presents significance, introduces the theoretical framework, and establishes the basic premise of this study. Chapter Two provides a context of the research concerning social media use among adolescents, developing self-concept among adolescents, and Black female stereotypes and social media. Chapter Three addresses the methodology of the study. It contains a research plan, describes the sample and the setting, and discusses data collection and analysis while addressing ethical issues, and the validity and reliability of the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived social media experiences of late adolescent Black females, and in turn, its influences on their global and academic self-concept. This literature review focused on four major areas that defined new media as social media, adolescent development and self-concept, femininity and mass-mediated messages, and lastly, Black Feminism and mediated messages. These areas promote an understanding of its significance and explored theoretical applications. The first section demonstrated how the literature defines social media, social media through social networking sites, and social media use among late adolescents. The second section explained adolescent development and self-concept, peers and family influence on self-concept, influences of gender and race self-concept, influences of gender and race on academic self-concept while highlighting social media factors that influence adolescent girls' self-concept. The third section provided a historical context of how the female ideal image was constructed while contextualizing patriarchal implications on media messages about the ideal female. The fourth section contextualized Black feminism as an appropriate lens to examine Black female archetypal trope narratives in media while underlying the prevalence of oppressing Black women through the perpetuation of historical stereotypes in traditional media as well as social media

The New Medium of Social Media

The shifting media landscape from traditional media of television, movies, radio, and print magazines were fundamental to the evolution of digital media such as social networking sites, music and video sharing on the Internet, and smart mobile phones (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). As new technologies are developed, access and use of media have increased tremendously over the years (Lauricella, et al., 2014; Livingstone & Haddon, 2009; Rideout & Hamel, 2006). New media has provided its users with ready access to share music and videos, live-stream television shows, and allows for unprecedented access to friends and family. New media has thus become appealing and its easy use has created what Clark (2005) calls the constant contact generation. In a media-saturated world, the use of new media is shaped by exposure to specific kinds of content and effect on its users (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011).

Social media is a new media form of technology that has become increasingly popular in today's culture (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). This form of technology is a powerful socializing agent that influences how and what people learn as active participants or even as active contributors to digital terrains. Through social media, people have access to multiple digital communication systems through online platforms (Lindsey, 2015). It provides a space and place for meaningful learning, identity-shaping, and how people make sense of their experiences (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). The expansion of social media has increased dramatically over the years while transforming human communication around the world.

Social media is a phenomenon that the world has become reliant upon to its incredible development of the convenience to share information to whomever and wherever (Lindsey, 2015). The influence of social media on younger generations is thus vital to the role in the progression of overall human communication. This medium of communication gives people the opportunity to build and bridge human connection in an instant and across space and time. Kikorian, Wartella, & Anderson (2008) assert that the value of connection remains a crucial quality of the medium in which links within and among people of like interests, topics, and ideas.

There are a multitude of ideas about the earliest occurrences of social media (Edosomwan, et al., 2011). Telegraphy or semaphoric telegraph is a system of communication that was developed by Claude Chappe of France to receive and transmit information in the shortest possible time (Stroh, 1998; Encyclopedia Britannica, 1897). Ritholz (2010) asserts that in 1792, the telegraph was used to transmit and receive messages over long distances. Telegraphy freed communication from all the constraints of space and time and revolutionized the global economy and society. Telegraphy facilitated the growth of organizations and businesses, which influenced society to embrace the use of telegrams (Ritholz, 2010). Moreover, due to the sufficiency of sharing messages and information, the telegraph demanded a language to better facilitate a worldwide media language (Lindsey, 2015). Language in the media became standardized through shared practices and expressions of human communication, which ultimately resulted in social exchange, and social practice (Lindsey, 2015).

Through further technological advancement, the late 1800's saw the development of the radio and telephone (Rimskii, 2011; Edosomwan, et al., 2011). By the end of the nineteenth century, radio and telephone were both common forms of social interaction and exchange. During the 1960's and early 1970's, phone phreaking, a term used for a rogue telephone hacking of the telephone network began (Lapsley, 2013; Edosomwan, et al., 2011). Phone phreaks spent a lot of time dialing around the telephone network to understand how the phone system worked (Lapsley, 2013). Brett Borders asserts that phone phreaks hacked into corporate unused voicemail boxes to host the first blogs and podcasts (Borders, 2009).

During the 1960's, a U.S. government-related computer science research working group, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPANET) Network Working Group was developed (Baran, 1964; The Internet Society, 1992). ARPANET coordinated efforts to share electronic mail, file sharing, remote access, and eventually World Wide Web capabilities (The Internet Society, 1992). As the Internet started to evolve, the time-sharing of ARPANET evolved into the internet use (Yates, 1997). Although expensive, CompuServe was created with a mission to provide time-sharing services by renting time on its computers (The Internet Society, 1992; Rimskii, 2011; Ritholz, 2010). By 1991, the Internet grew beyond its government-restricted and largely research roots to include through a broad user community through public availability and increased commercial activity (Edosomwan, et al., 2011; The Internet Society, 1992; Yates, 1997).

These worldwide communicative technological advancements eventually evolved into a digital communication system in which provided access for people around the

world to gather all information immediately (Lindsey, 2015). Public availability of the Internet became an important aspect of information gathering and socialization, which led to the development of social networking sites. The significance placed on interaction and participation within social networking sites is evident in the numerous ways in which communication is encouraged. The widespread availability of social media in this twenty-first century has thrust social media as a communication staple in the lives of adolescents and adults alike.

Social Media through Social Networking

Social media is a communication medium that has grown in popularity among millions of people across the world and extends beyond the confines of age, gender, race or ethnicity, geographic location, or economics. Moreover, social media is now "an essential communication medium in professional, educational as well as in personal life" (Laimayum, Shobha, Thingbaijam, & Anshu, 2014, p. 1). Conversely, Pewter Research Foundation (2015) has found that using social media websites is among the most common activity of today's children and adolescents (Pewter Research Foundation, 2015). These social media websites, also known as social networking sites are hubs for communication, entertainment, and information (Kumar, 1994).

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (online videos)" (Social media, n.d., para. 1). Social media practices have led to the development of social network sites. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social

networking as “the creation and maintenance of personal and business relationships especially online” (Social networking sites, n.d., para. 1). Cohen (2009) and Stelzner (2009) describe social media as a “strategy and an outlet for broadcasting while Social Networking is a tool and utility for connecting with others” (Edosomwan et al., 2011, p. 5). The development of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and MySpace have evolved digital media use and increased readily-accessible information exchange among people, particularly adolescents (Edosomwan, et al., 2011).

While social networking sites were created in the 1990s, there was a surging launch of social networking sites in 2000 (Edosomwan et al., 2011). The increase in social networking sites may be attributed to the surge in internet use among users. The interaction and information sharing of individuals and organizations launched social networking sites where digital communities were created to advertise products, design and create customized profiles, find other users as friends, exchange messages, comment on photos, join common interest groups, discover, watch, and share originally-created videos (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Edosomwan, et al., 2011; Facebook, 2004; Times, 2010; YouTube, 2005). Social networking sites helped to increases broader means of communication and reach larger audiences.

Conversations can be conveyed through different forums by individuals and groups of people. The expansion of these conversations is evident through micro-blogging and social networking options of Twitter (Jasra, 2010; Tweeternet.com, 2010). Thus, social networks have become online platforms that focus on building and reflecting

social relations among people (Laimayum, Shobha, Thingbaijam, & Anshu, 2014). In research conducted by Donath and boyd (2004), the meaning of social network site practices varies across sites and individuals. The use of social networking through social media outlets is vital in understanding how people engage, associate, and build relationships with others through transmitted and shared information. The conversations conveyed in different forums by its users allows individuals to:

> (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by other users within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.1).

In an analysis of scholarship on social networking services from 2006 to 2011, Zhang and Leung (2015) found that Facebook was the most largely used social network site investigated by scholars, followed by MySpace, Hyves, Cyberworld, and LinkedIn. In this study, the authors found that college students were the major user population investigated (Zhang & Leung, 2015). Further, thematic patterns existed based on Boyd and Ellison's (2007) social networking site profile conceptualization and implications for impression management and self-identity (Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011; Tong et al., 2008; Utz, 2010; Walther et al., 2009). While relational types such as romantic (Elphinston & Noeller, 2011), intercultural/racial (Grasmuck et al., 2009), organization-public (Farrow & Yuan, 2011) have been previously investigated, this study found that those using for interpersonal contact are more likely to enhance social connections than those who use them for solitary activities (Zhang & Leung, 2015). The researchers also identified that trust (Lin & Lu, 2011; Walther et al., 2009), attraction (Antheunis & Schouten, 2011),

emotional closeness (Farrown & Yuan, 2011), emotional support (Baker & Moore, 2008; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009) and perceived social support (Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009) were facilitated by social networking site use. The perceived uses of social media by adolescents is consistent with their search for identity and conceptual transformation during this stage in their lives (Boston & Baxley, 2007).

Social Media Use Among Late Adolescents

Eager to know the latest trends and participate in technological advancement, adolescents are the most extensive users of social media. As such, the frequency in which adolescents engage in social media use has dramatically increased over the years (Laimayum, et al., 2014). The influence of social media among adolescents is often cultivated by online relationships and exposure to content. Mediated practices are an extension of youth everyday practices, rather than an alternate reality (Mackay, 2005). Many late adolescents ages 18 to 24 face significant pressures and challenges due to the rising demands of modern society (Stengard & Appleqist-Schmidlechner, 2010). Living in a more complex and technologically advanced society, scholars suggest that researchers must consider the developmental influences these new technologies are having on adolescents (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014).

Research on patterns of use and effects on adolescents have "struggled to keep up with the rapidly changing media terrain" (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011, p. 95). To better understand the influences of social media on adolescents, it is important to understand how social media has transformed social interaction among children and adolescents. Engaged in an increasingly Internet-mediated and participatory culture, adolescent

development has extended beyond their nonacademic communicative literacies traditionally practiced in schools. Adolescent development is inclusive of new literacies or digital literacies of online reading, writing, and communication (Coiro, et al., 2008; Greenhow, 2008; Greenhow, Robelia & Hughes, 2009; Thurlow, Lengel, & Tomic, 2004). Adolescents employ social practice through activity and inquiry in social media and social networking.

Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) conducted a national survey of 8 to 18 year-olds where they found that adolescents on average were using some media more than 7.5 hours a day, much more than time spent in school or with parents. In this same survey, adolescent media exposure amounted to 10 hours and 45 minutes a day. In 1995, the Pew Research Center found that 14% of U.S. adults had internet access while only 42% of U.S. adults had ever heard of the internet. In comparison, The Pew Research Centered measured its earliest cell phone usage in 2000 with 53% of U.S. adults reporting that they had a cell phone (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Social media habits of adolescents have been examined using a variety of methodological approaches to providing information regarding adolescent communication patterns and social lives (Cash, et al., 2013; Best et al., 2014). Access to the Internet spread with the rise of mobile devices in the last 10 years (Pew Research Center, 2014). In 2007, girls were more likely to talk on cell phones, use instant messaging, send messages on social networking sites and text messages on their cell phones, and to email (Lenhart, et al., 2008). Further, boys were cited to spend more time playing computer games than girls (Lenhart, et al., 2008).

According to Childnet International (2007), social networking sites may result in connections between individuals and include profiles of bands, companies, nonprofits, and political parties. Users can maintain and develop new relationships around shared professional goals, political views, a common language, or racial, sexual, religious, or cultural identities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2007). Young adult internet users ages 18 to 29 report having encountered been treated kindly and unkindly and to have seen people band together and people attack each other online (Pew Research Center, 2014). Equally, 28% of women who use the Internet reported having left an online group because the interaction became too heated or members were unpleasant to each other (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Due to the widespread availability of technology, the convenience and constant access provided by technologies such as smartphones and tablets, users have more access to social media and social network sites. Research conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) reports that 56% of teens, ages 13 to 17 go online several times a day. Equally, it is reported that 87% of American adults use the internet, with nearly 98% of young adults ages 18 to 29; while 68% of adults connect to the internet with mobile devices (Pew Research Center, 2014). Contrarily, 62% of African Americans as compared to 74% of Whites have some sort of broadband connection at home, while African Americans and Whites appear to have equal access to other types of internet access (Pew Research Center, 2014).

Mobile platforms offer easy and on-demand accessibility to social media is attributed to the increase of internet usage and social networking. Nearly three-quarters of

teens surveyed by the Pew Research Center (2015) have or have access to a smartphone and 30% have a basic phone. African American teens are the most likely of any group of teens to have a smartphone, with 85% having access to one (Pew Research Center, 2015). Similarly, adult ownership of smartphones and tablets is at 58% (Pew Research Center, 2014). Research shows that 34% of African American youth report going online "almost constantly" (Pew Research Center, 2015). Further, it was reported that Facebook is the most popular and frequently used social media site among teens, followed by Instagram, and Snapchat (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Adolescents are reportedly using more than one social network site as a part of their online lives and identities. In a study conducted by FfK Group, a survey was administered to over 1,060 teens ages 13 to 17, where it was found that adolescent girls use social media sites more than boys. A study of U.S. college students ages 18 to 24 found that 85% of respondents use social media network sites on a daily basis to keep in touch with others (Salaway, Borreson, & Nelson, 2008). The Pew Research Center (2010) found that 96% of African American internet users ages 18 to 29 are social media networking site users. Conversely, adolescent participation in new online literacies of social network sites is pertinent to understanding adolescent experiences, communication, and literary practices that inform their overall development (Duggan & Brenner, 2013).

Internet-mediated communication via social media and social networking sites has a wide-range impact on the way adolescents get, share, and create information. Social media and social networking also impact the way they learn and communicate. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) conducted a study which focused on social network sites and their

role in adolescents' lives. In this study, 600 low-income urban high school students' participation in the social network site MySpace was examined to understand the role it played in their lives. The also examined the practices the participants employed in using the site. It was found that 82% go online regularly from home and 77% have a profile on a social network site. Study participants' communication was found to be social, relational, and emotional; it provided validation and a platform for self-presentation for the participants (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Similarly, a 2014 study conducted by Laimayum, et al. found that late adolescents have been using social networking sites for more than two years, visit sites several times a day, and prefer to interact with people online rather than face to face. Adolescents' developmental period is pivotal in their developing sense of self, and the frequent, on-demand use of social networking sites among adolescents may potentially influence this life span of development and his or her view of self during this period.

Adolescent Development and Self-Concept

Adolescence has long been characterized as a time when individuals begin to explore and examine psychological characteristics of the self in order to discover who they really are, and how they fit in the social world in which they live. Further, adolescents are reported to be a period of vulnerability due to gaps between emotion, cognition and behavior during this period of the lifespan (Steinberg, 2005; Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014). Most adolescents struggle to find oneself that is individual and unique while at the same time conforming to the various societal pressures to which they are exposed. The developing sense of self in adolescence can be even more

challenging due to the changes in school, work, and family. Another major factor in the developing a sense of self is influenced by technological advances in media, which increase media exposure to advertising and other content targeted to this specific group (White & Wyn, 2004).

Adolescence, as described by Smetana, Campione-Barr, and Metzger (2006) and Kaplan (2004) is divided into three developmental stages known as early adolescence (ages 10 to13), middle adolescence (ages 14 to 17), and late adolescence (18 to 24). These individuals also experience many physical, cognitive, and social changes throughout their developmental period. During this transitional period, adolescents develop a strong sense of self and greater perception of feelings of self-worth (Croll, 2005). They seek to find their true self while looking for orientation, meaning, and purpose as they relate to the world through a social context (Irving, 2008). This broadly covers adolescent developmental stages through their needs based on their life circumstances, cultural influence, gender, peer and family influence, and socioeconomic conditions (Laimayum, et al., 2014).

In early adolescence, ages 10 to 13, individuals are concerned with their appearance and being accepted (Bettendorf, 2012). It is in this stage that adolescents develop concerns about their clothes, physical appearance, as well as adjusting to their new body image (Ashford & LeCroy, 2012). Further, they are also beginning to see that information can be interpreted in different ways, and also beginning to develop into their more self-reflective selves (Marcia, 1966). They use reason and judge content as realistic, and postulate how the message would differ if someone else with different motives

designed it (Strasburger et al., 2009). Individuals become more independent, spending more time alone, and are less dependent on their parents, yet, family support is still important in helping to build a strong sense of self (Pickhardt, 2009; Ashford & LeCroy, 2012). As adolescents transition from early adolescence to middle adolescence, they tend to view themselves in terms of personal beliefs and standards (Harter et al., 1998).

Middle adolescence is from ages 14 to 17 and corresponds to a period of individuals' self-discovery and reflective journey in their lives (Ashford & LeCroy, 2012). According to Erikson (1968), adolescents experience an identity crisis where they begin to struggle with their identity. This is a time that often leads to them having feelings of confusion as they try to figure out how they fit into the world (Harter & Monsour, 1992). Additionally, developmental psychologists posit that during middle adolescence, individuals' self-conceptions differ across contexts and that they see themselves differently when they are with peers compared with parents and teachers (Harter, 1999). They begin to question authority and are frequently rebellious to authority figures (Lawrence, 2014). Further, individuals evaluate themselves along dimensions of academics, athletics, appearance, social relations, and moral conduct (Masten et al., 2012; Adams & Stevenson, 2012). For example, Usmiani and Daniluk (1997) found that middle adolescent females' self-concept was most influenced by appearance as being most important for them for overall self-esteem. In addition to these changes during middle adolescence, individuals establish emotional separation from their parents, and abstract thinking emerges (Croll, 2005).

Additionally, changes occur for individuals in late adolescence, ages 18 to 24, as they begin to view the world and themselves very differently (Bee & Boyd, 2002). Described as emerging adulthood (Arnette, 2000; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013; Steinberg, 2005), the developmental tasks in this stage include the development of a sense of mastery, identity, and intimacy (Erikson, 1968; McLeod, 2013). Eccles and Gootman (2002) go on to specify primary challenges during late adolescence when individuals begin to take on more demanding roles:

> (1) the management of these demanding roles, (2) identifying personal strengths and weaknesses and refining skills to coordinate and succeed in these roles, (3) finding meaning and purpose in the roles acquired, and (4) assessing and making necessary life changes and coping with these changes (p. 47).

In late adolescence, individuals establish a personal sense of self-identity as well as further separate from parents (Croll, 2005).

Furthermore, this developmental period constitutes a time for individuals to search for a sense of self-worth while exploring possibilities of love, work, and world views (Arnette, 2000; McLeod, 2013). By late adolescence, individuals become less concerned about their appearance and social acceptance and more concerned about worldly issues and what they believe or feel (Bee & Boyd, 2002). This is a stage in which individuals learn to think of themselves in terms of enduring traits, beliefs, personal philosophy, and moral standards (Lawrence, 2014). The adolescent transition marks a period in which their self-concepts become more distinguished throughout each developmental stage, and how they begin to characterize themselves becomes more apparent.

The Developing Adolescent Self

Adolescence is a phase of rapid growth and development in which physical, sexual and emotional changes occur as well as a period in which self-concept is developed (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). During this stage of development, adolescents' self-concept changes profoundly (Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008). A significant part of this process, development of self-concept, is adolescents' construct of self through self-reflection and appraisal of others (Harter, 1990; Ashford & LeCroy, 2012). Thus, the developing self-concept is influenced by the adolescent's experiences which increase opportunities for both acceptance and rejection by peers, experience in dating and awareness of sexuality, and major decisions affecting their movement into adult life. As these experiences are explored, the adolescent develops a more integrated self (Ashford & LeCroy, 2012).

Carl Rogers (1959) believes that the self-concept is comprised of one's self-image, self-esteem or self-worth, and the ideal self. Similarly, Baumeister (1998) posits that the major human experiences of reflexive consciousness, interpersonal being, and executive function form the basis of self. In this regard, individuals become self-aware through "everyday experiences of thinking about oneself and feeling self-conscious, experiencing a rise or drop in self-esteem, and trying to learn about yourself all encompass the aspect of self" (Baumeister, 1998, p. 2). Further, Baumeister (1998) asserts that self-concept also encompasses self-esteem, which is "an evaluative dimension of self-knowledge (e.g. "am I good at this?"), where individuals' knowledge about the self is evaluated" (p. 2). Additionally, the self is shaped by group memberships and

relationships through individuals' ability to make choices, initiate actions, and restrain impulses over self and the world (Baumeister, 1998). The interpersonal dimension of selfhood involves how individuals communicate images of themselves to others and alter their behavior when others are watching or even how views of self may shape individuals' interactions and relationships (Baumeister, 1998).

In support of Baumeister's (1998) view of self-concept, Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton (1976) assert a multidimensional, hierarchical self-concept model which best describes adolescents' developing self. This model postulates that multiple dimensions of self-concept (e.g., academic, social, emotional, and physical self-concepts) are separable; however, it is also assumed that there is a hierarchical structure, such that global self-concept is at the top of the hierarchy (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). From this theoretical perspective, it is appropriate to use interchangeably such terms as self-esteem, general self-concept, and global self-concept and to distinguish these from more domain-specific measures of self-concept in terms of globality (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Belgrave, 2009; Pascoe, 2012). Furthermore, self-concept encompasses beliefs and thoughts about the self, while self-esteem is an aspect of self, but specifically refers to feelings and affective evaluations about the self (Belgrave, 2009; Marsh & Hattie, 1996).

Social psychology studies indicate that during and after puberty, children become increasingly self-conscious and more aware of, and concerned with others' opinions (Parker, Cicchetti, & Cohen, 2006; Vartanian, 2000). Baumeister (1998) assert that children learn about their self through "their connections to others (in being members of a certain family) and about how its traits set it apart from others (as being male or female)"

(p. 2). As anticipated by James (1963), the issue of how individuals integrate specific components of self-concept into more global perceptions of the self, and have become a critical issue in the study of self-concept. For example, in his summary of the social psychology of self, Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1988) claimed that the self is of central importance ‘‘because it is a major (perhaps the major) structure of personality’’ (p. 30). In support of this claim, he asserts:

> (a) that the search for self-worth is one of the strongest motivating forces in the adolescent and adult human behavior and (b) that differences between persons in their manner of, and effectiveness in, establishing self-worth are fundamental to personality’’ (Greenwald, et al., 1988, p. 37).

Multidimensional self-concept factors have contributed to explaining human thinking, feeling, and behavior (Marsh, Parada, & Ayotte, 2004). Self-concept is thought to influence achievement through its effect on motivation (Borkowski, et al., 1990; Hay, Ashman, & van Kraayenoord, 1999; Schunk, 1991; Valentine, et al., 2002) and the self-regulation processes of metacognition (Borkowski, 1992). Individuals with low self-concept have been shown to have less positive characteristics in the domains of cooperation, persistence, leadership, anxiety, expectations for future education, and peer interactions when compared to peers with high self-concept (Hay, Ashman, & van Kraayenoord, 1999). Low self-concepts, low educational aspirations, external locus of control, and negative attitudes to school are considered to be interrelated (Hay, Byrne, & Butler, 2000).

The integration of domain-specific information includes such conflicting needs as self-consistency, self-verification, self-protection, and self-enhancement using strategies

such as discounting, selective perception, social comparison, rationalization, and attributional biases (Greenwald, et al.,1988). In support of this, research in developmental psychology has shown that evaluation of oneself becomes more comprehensive and differentiated during childhood and adolescence (Harter, 1990; Crain, 1996; Harter, 1999). Moreover, researchers posit increased adolescent self-concept as it relates to interpreting achievement outcomes of adolescents (Shavelson et al., 1976; McLeod, 2013).

In addition to reflecting on one's own attributes and preferences, the self-concept also comprises the ability to think about what you are likely to do in a given situation (Perry & Pauletti, 2011). This is reflective of the neuroanatomical changes in the brain that occurs during adolescence (Sebastian et al., 2008). During late adolescence, individuals experience changes in brain architecture is in the frontal lobes of the brain, responsible for such functions as self-control, judgment, emotional regulation, organization, and planning (Begley, 2000). A neuroimaging study provided evidence that supports brain region changes during adolescence as individuals begin reflecting on the self (Ochsner et al., 2005).

Moreover, as adolescents continue to reflect on self as their self-concept is developed, Turner's (1985) self-categorization theory asserts that one's self-evaluation relies on self-perceptions and how others perceive them. He argues that self-concept can alternate rapidly between the personal and social identity (Turner, 1985; Hogg, 1996). Throughout the developmental stages of adolescence, individuals begin integrating social identity into their own self-concept in early adolescence by assessing their position

among peers (Levine & Hogg, 2009). Peer effect on self-concept, therefore, originates as soon as early adolescence. Consequently, social acceptance by peers is central to adolescents' self-concept, affecting their behavior and academic success (Kistler et al., 2010; Feliciano, 2015).

Peer and Family Influence and Self-Concept

In examining the ways in which peers influence adolescent development, it is important to consider Charles Cooley's (1902)"looking glass self" theory, where he asserts that the self-concept is shaped based on their understanding of how others perceive them (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934; Schlenker, 1980; Sullivan, 1953; Baumeister, 1998; Schlenker, 1986). Expanded by Kelly (1973), it is suggested that a person's perception of him/herself is formed through his or her experience with his or her environment, and influenced especially by environmental reinforcements and significant others. Furthermore, Wicklund and Gollwitzer (1982) have even asserted that people seemingly feel that their identity claims require validation by others to give them a social reality. Subsequently, self-concept is inferred from a person's responses to situations albeit physical or symbolic (Henry, West, & Johnson, 2010).

According to Lisa McIntyre's *The Practical Skeptic: Core Concepts in Sociology*, in the looking-glass self, a person views himself or herself through others' perceptions in society and in turn gains identity (McIntyre, 2006; Kistler et al., 2010). The concept of self is been said to be the result of the concept in which we learn to see ourselves as others do (Yeung & Martin 2003; Levine & Hogg, 2009). Thus, the looking-glass self for adolescents begins at an early age and continues throughout the entirety of a person's life

as one will never stop modifying their self unless all social interactions are ceased (Cooley, 1998; Levine & Hogg, 2010). As such, when early adolescents believe that social acceptance has occurred, positive effects transpire (Levine & Hogg, 2010).

For developing adolescents, performance is a factor of acceptance from peer groups (Andrews, 1984). Successfully performing within a situation can result in achieving acceptance and can also result in the reinforcement of performance-self-esteem for the adolescent (Feliciano, 2015). Consequently, in relation to performance within a situation, adolescents taking on new social roles through interpersonal environments contributes to changes in the self-concept (Brown, 2004). Furthermore, the child may begin to create a self-fulfilling prophecy where success is the dominant attitude.

Correspondingly, peers influence academic achievement and prosocial behaviors (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997), as well as problem behaviors (Pettit et al., 1999; Urberg et al., 1997). The developmental stages of adolescence are reflective of individuals' influence by peers because they admire them and respect their opinions (Susman et al., 1994). Adolescents choose friends with similar behaviors, attitudes, and identities (Akers et al., 1998; Hogue & Steinberg, 1995). Factors such as adolescents' personality, socialization, and perceptions of peers are all important to consider as their self-concepts are developing.

Adolescents are most influenced by peers in middle adolescence, compared to early and late adolescence (Brown, 1990). Thus, the greater importance of self is placed on other's perception of individuals. Kelly, Wagner, & Heatherton (2015) conducted a study which examined social feedback to a healthy sense of self among college students.

In this study, the researchers were interested in whether vACC would similarly index peer acceptance and rejection, and whether such activity would be more pronounced in people with low versus high self-esteem. Importantly, this study allowed the researchers to assess the effect of self-esteem on response to social rejection (Kelly et al., 2015). There was a significant interaction such that the strongest responses occurred for those with low self-esteem (Kelly et al., 2015).

By early adolescence, individuals are more likely to compare themselves with others and to understand that others are making comparisons and judgments about them; they also begin to place a higher value on these judgments (Sebastian, et al., 2008). In late adolescence, individuals are increasingly independent, acquire and manage greater responsibility, and take on an active role in their own development (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). All adolescents desire to fulfill the criteria peer groups have constructed to achieve social acceptance (Kremar, Giles, & Helme, 2008). These constructed social norms are reinforced over time by the behaviors of those who are within the peer group. Middle adolescence is the period where even if the child is not violating aspects of the social norms, many adolescents have self-esteem levels that are so fragile that they may think they are outside the acceptable boundaries of behavior when a member of the peer group mentions some criteria of the social norm (Feliciano, 2015).

One example to illustrate this concept is the self-images adolescent girls have regarding their weights and physical body images (Kremar, Giles, & Helme, 2008). Although an adolescent girl has a socially accepted physical appearance, her self-esteem may be so diminutive that the mentioning of body images could cause her to feel

insecure, targeted, or unaccepted by the peer group (Feliciano, 2015). Just as acceptance by peers can dramatically increase self-esteem and stabilize self-concept, rejection by peers can be devastating to self-esteem and cause the self-concept to be shattered (Matsunaga, 2011). In accordance with Turner's (1985) self-categorization theory, the self-concept cannot be reconstructed and stabilized without confirmation from an adolescent's peer group.

Similarly, gender differences in the relationship between domain-specific self-concept facets and self-esteem have been partly determined by gender-related differences resulting from gender stereotypes and gender role expectations (Kistler et al., 2010). Scalas and Marsh (2008) found that self-concept of physical appearance had a stronger indirect effect on females' self-esteem than on males'. Allgood-Merten's et al., study (1990) also revealed stronger relations between self-perceived body image and self-esteem for girls than for boys. Similarly, in the qualitative study of Polce-Lynch, et al., (2001), adolescent girls reported more often than boys that their physical appearance contributed to their general feelings about themselves. This study underscores Cathcart and Gumpert's (1986) argument that adolescents make decisions regarding self-concept during a time when external factors are most prevalent throughout decision-making.

Peer acceptance and family influence inherently becomes central tenets of adolescents' developing self-concept (Feliciano, 2015). It has been argued that positive social feedback becomes increasingly rewarding during adolescence and that negative social experiences can contribute to the increased incidence of affective disorders such as depression during this period of life (Davey et al., 2008; Greene & Banerjee, 2008).

Greene and Banerjee's (2008) study specifically looked at adolescents' responses to cigarette offers by peers, suggesting that adolescent smoking is one of the numerous ways they attempt to become socially accepted. This study asserts the notion that through experimentation, adolescents try to find their place within society's expectations (Greene & Banerjee, 2008). Once perceived acceptance occurs, however, the battle to construct an acceptable self-concept is not complete (Bush et al., 2002). The individual must then assess whether he/she is comfortable or satisfied with the way he/she is viewed by peers.

Self-report studies have shown that adolescents find spending time with peers particularly rewarding and are particularly influenced by their peers (Csikszentmihalyi, Larson, & Prescott, 1977; Larson & Richards, 1991). Susceptibility to peer influence is thought to contribute to adolescents' greater propensity to engage in risky activities, compared to other age groups (Steinburg, 2008). A behavioral study measured the incidence of risky driving events in a car simulation video game, in which adolescents and adults played alone or with two friends present (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). For adolescents, the presence of peers more than doubled the number of risks taken, whereas for adults the presence of peers had little effect on risky driving (Gardner & Steinburg, 2005). This empirical study corroborates anecdotal evidence that adolescents are more likely to make risky decisions in the presence of peers (Gardner & Steinburg, 2005).

Likewise, as adolescents are influenced by peer relationships, they are equally influenced by parents during their developmental period. Parent-child relationships are highly related to the developing adolescent self-concept, (Furstenberg, 2005). In addition to school, the family is another institution that often provides adolescents with important

assets for positive development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). During early adolescence, there are increases in parent-child conflicts as children's needs for autonomy and independence increase and they show some resistance to family rules and roles (Collins, 1990). Eccles and Gootman (2002) assert that family relationships generally improve as they move into the later adolescent years, and adolescents who lack familial support during the transition into late adolescence are often placed at high-risk poverty, unemployment, death, or psychological estrangement of parents and their children (Settersten, 2005).

Springer et al., (1995) found that family support, adolescents' personal appreciation for education and learning (interest, value, aspiration), and high academic self-concept (belief in their own competence) are just as important for supporting adolescents' self-concept. Furthermore, parental support, directly and indirectly, influences individuals' later educational achievement and psychological well-being (Midgett, et al., 2002; Ryan & Adams, 1999). As a result of these changes, adolescents have the opportunity to develop and exercise their personal and social identities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Likewise, adolescents' self-appraisals against societal norms of race and gender stereotypes eventually influences their self-concept (Arnett, 2000; Kistler et al., 2010).

Gender and Racial Self-Concept

The global evaluation of one's self is often guided by gender-specific engendered roles for the developing adolescent female. Self-concept has been proposed to be the extent to which self-knowledge is applicable to one's attitudes and dispositions (Ayduk,

Gyurak, & Luerssen, 2009). Likewise, the adolescent female self-concept has been traditionally oriented and relegated to activities remanded in bounded ideologies of femaleness and womanhood (League & Chalmers, 2010). In accordance with Cooley's (1902) assertion of "the looking glass self," a girl's sense of self is therefore determined by how others see her, and in turn, what others expect from her (Belgrave, 2009; Belgrave & Alison 2010).

Respectively, as adolescent girls grow and develop, their developing sense of sense of includes the incorporation of beliefs, attitudes, and meanings assigned to perceptions about the self and others (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). Adolescent girls' journeys along the developmental continuum are ultimately shaped by biological and environmental events that affect them at different points and at different levels in the growth and developmental process (Sigall & Pabst, 2005). As an adolescent girl's self-concept emerges, she may have integrated these events in healthy or unhealthy ways (Sigall & Pabst, 2005). Adolescent girls' self-concept impacts her beliefs and thoughts about who she is. According to Belgrave and Allison (2010), a teen girl with a positive self-concept believes that she can get along with others, that she can do well in school, and that she has special talents and abilities. In contrast, a teen girl who internalizes negative images and expectations from the external environment self-confirms these beliefs that she feels others hold of her (Belgrave & Allison 2010). Subsequently, this leads to a decline in positive actions and achievements, thereby reinforcing a girl's negative self-concept based upon her perception of others' views of her (Belgrave, 2009; Belgrave & Allison, 2010).

Conversely, adolescent girls often experience a decline in their academic ability, attributing their high grades to luck or effort, rather than their own ability (Sigall & Pabst, 2005). Further, these girls' early experiences and environmental exposure are saturated with idealized female oriented careers and patriarchal standards of beauty (Hatorum & Belle, 2004; Sigall & Pabst, 2005; Kistler et al., 2010). Consequently, adolescent girls are strongly affected by body image (Harter, 2006) and gender conformity (Egan & Perry, 2001). As a result, girls experience decreased the sense of adequacy and decreased opportunities as they go through adolescence (Perlick & Silverstein, 1994). Adolescent girls then experience a higher risk of depression (Peterson et al., 2007), eating disorders and decreased self-confidence (Sigall & Pabst, 2005).

Likewise, Brown and Gilligan (1992) identified adolescence as a crossroads in adolescent girls' development; one at which they often lose their voices and their assertiveness. They found that the girls in early adolescence began to disconnect from their own ideas and feelings in an effort to gain approval, avoid conflict, and decrease the probability of loss and isolation that might result from voicing opinions or differences (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Similar to previous research on adolescent girls, loss of voice has also been found to be correlated with girls who experience eating disorders, body dissatisfaction and depression (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). Likewise, Pipher (1994) found that in adolescence, the gap between girls' true selves and the cultural prescriptions for what is properly female creates a decline in self-esteem, a risk for decrease in mental health, suicide, and low academic achievement; however, this does not occur to the same extent for Black adolescent girls (Greene & Way, 2005; Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010).

Although there has been extensive research conducted regarding the effects of unhealthy messages and images of the sexualization of girls on their physical and emotional health and well-being, a majority of attention has been given to White girls (American Psychological Association, 2007; Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). Scholars assert that adolescent girls are receiving media messages as one source for exposure of gender lessons influencing their attitudes and beliefs about gender and their own gender-related self-concept (Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Accordingly, mediated portrayals of the female body, for example, may be used to help form an individual's social and moral standards about the gender-appropriate dress, ideal female body type, and evaluations of female self-concept (Sigall & Pabst, 2005). Mediated portrayals of females symbolize individuals' capability to observe and cognitively organize mediated symbols of attitudes and beliefs about gender (Sigall & Pabst, 2005). Further, Bandura (1986) argues that media messages expand consumer's exposure to issues, images, and the phenomenon they would otherwise never encounter in their daily lives, often functioning as a source of learning about gender norms and values.

Additionally, research demonstrates that there is a significant relationship between media exposure to modeled gender stereotypes and individuals' stereotypical gender role beliefs and expectations (Herrett-Skjellum & Allen 1996; Signorielli, 1997). Gender role beliefs of girls have been organized into four dimensions: traits, physical characteristics, role behaviors, and occupations (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). In this case, adolescent girls are traditionally oriented to take on nurturing roles, occupy jobs that

involve caretaking, lower status jobs, and jobs that do not involve manual labor (Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). Further, the racialized and gendered experiences and mediated messages which girls receive also have implications on their developing self-concept.

Researchers have argued that the negative impact of Black youth's psychosocial development is influenced by their repeated exposure to medium's negative perceptions of Black people by others (Berry, 2000; Brown & Witherspoon, 2002) and race-based archetypologies (Adams & Stevenson, 2012). Research suggests that Black parents affirm racial self-efficacy for their developing adolescents by communicating and teaching behavioral skills that protect and affirm their racial identity (Bentley, Adams, & Stevenson, 2009). In general, the development of a strong ethnic/racial identity is associated with higher self-esteem and self-efficacy among Black adolescents (Townsend & Belgrave, 2000). Research has shown an association with Black adolescent girls who have a high ethnic identity and them having positive behaviors and favorable outcomes (Adams & Stevenson, 2012; Belgrave, 2009; Belgrave, et al., 2011; Townsend & Belgrave, 2000). Other positive benefits of high ethnic identity include better school performance, quality social relationships with friends, and pro-social behaviors (Smith, Walker, & Fields, 1999).

In contrast, low ethnic identity is associated with misconceptions about Africa and what it means to be of African descent (Belgrave & Allison, 2010; Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013). Further, Black girls who have low ethnic identity may want to distance themselves from other persons of African descent. From this

perspective, a Black female's racial self-concept is linked to her feelings and desires about who she is ethnically and racially (Hurley, Boykin, & Allen, 2005). Consequently, Black girls' need and value relationships for their well-being, and to an extent, this contributes to her developing self-concept (Belgrave & Allison, 2010). These relationships, particularly for adolescent Black girls, help to guide their sense of self and their behavior as they emerge into adulthood. In this regard, Belgrave and Allison (2010) asserts that these relationships provide adolescent girls with models of what to expect and how to behave as adult females.

During adolescence, Black girls engage in self and identity exploration and identity work earlier than their White counterparts (Stevens, 2002). Alternatively, Belgrave (2009) suggests that positive attributes of the self among Black girls are likely due to the socialization within the family, extended family, communities. Positive orientation towards race and ethnicity in the home and community affirms Black girls' thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about her race and ethnicity. Additionally, through positive racial socialization, Black girls receive messages that affirm and celebrate Black beauty (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2013). For example, studies indicate that Black adolescent girls' high self-esteem is related to parental approval, peer support, adjustment, and success in school (DuBois et al., 1998).

However, the prevalence of modern images of beauty often contradicts Black girls' beauty preferences of their peers (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2013). The adolescent developmental period often relies more on peer acceptance than family affirmation (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2013). Moreover, adolescent Black girls

consider peers rather than their families as primary sources of support (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2013). Hence, peer rejection or acceptance received by adolescent Black girls has an impact on their developing self-concept.

From Belgrave and Allison's (2010) view on adolescent girls' self-confirming beliefs that she feels others hold of her, parallels to the beliefs influencing adolescent Black girls' developing self-concept as well. Subsequently, gender-based societal pressures and stereotypes often silence Black girls (Fordham, 1993) and stifle their developing self-concept (Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2013). Furthermore, reinforced images in the media of Black females often contribute to adolescent Black girls' susceptibility to stereotypic roles of Black females. In contrast, social media also provides Black girls with the ability to develop strong connections with like peers who support beliefs of Black beauty, affirming positive Black female identity construction, academic achievement, and positive self-concept (Emerson, 2002; Kearney, 2007; League & Chalmers, 2010). Finally, adolescent Black girls find a voice through social media as ways to express their everyday lives and negotiate developmental tasks by forging bonds through nontraditional peer communities (League & Chalmers, 2010).

Gender, Race, and Academic Self-Concept

One's academic knowledge of oneself is a vital aspect of global self-concept, specifically in respect to student outcomes in school (Tan & Yates, 2007). Students' perceptions of academic competence are associated with academic self-concept in that it focuses on the perception of self with respect to achievement in school (Reyes, 1984). Academic self-concept is extensively researched and examines how students' perceptions

of academic ability or achievement will affect their school performance (Marsh, 1990a, 1990b, 1990c, 1993, & 2005). Psychologists and educators are becoming increasingly aware that a students' perception of him/herself may have a significant influence on his/her academic performance in school (Tan & Yates, 2007).

During adolescence, many adolescents seek to define themselves through group membership (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). As race and gender become salient social categories for adolescents (Evans et al., 2011), racial-ethnic identity exploration increases (Pahl & Way, 2006), and many adolescents experience an increased sensitivity to gender stereotypes (Lobel, et al., 2004). As adolescents develop, they become increasingly socialized towards racial and gender stereotypes. They also develop a keen awareness of self-relevant stereotypes about academic achievement, which may have consequences for their academic self-concept and performance (Kellow & Jones, 2008).

Research regarding the implications of traditional stereotypes of Black as having poorer abilities in academic subjects relative to their White and Asian counterparts (Rowley et al., 2007; Bobo, 2001), and exert that boys perform better in mathematics and science than girls (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2008; Beyer, 1999), and that girls are better at reading and writing than boys (Lupart, Cannon, & Telfer, 2004). Early adolescence is a period in which youth become more aware and endorse race academic stereotypes (Rowley et al., 2007). As youth continue through the adolescent developmental stages, Black and White's adolescent students report that White students perform better academically than Black students (Rowley et al., 2007). Research studies have also shown that achievement levels of Black adolescents are being negatively impacted at a

higher rate than the levels of other students and demonstrate that these students are not reaching the levels of academic achievement of their peers as evidenced by the test score gap when comparing Black and White students (Phillips, Crouse, & Ralph, 1998).

Similarly, Evans et al., (2011) conducted a study that examined the relation between race- and gender- group competence ratings and academic self-concept in 252 Black middle school students. The findings from this study suggest that the influence of race stereotypes on Black adolescents' academic self-concepts is significant in that the students reflected traditional racial stereotypes with Whites being better than Blacks in both reading/writing and math/science. Additionally, results indicated that girls were more aware of gender stereotypes and that their self-concepts were influenced by their perceptions of their abilities based on their gender. different for girls than boys (Evans et al., 2011). Likewise, Steele (1997) suggested that increased anxiety related to negative stereotypes generated poor performance on intellectual and academic ability tests. Students also underperformed on difficult tests despite ability and failed to complete the tests due to perceptions connected with their culture or gender groups' academic or intellectual ability (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Constantine and Blackmon (2002) examined the relationship between Black American adolescent students' self-esteem and academic performance by denoting how students process academic experiences. The researchers suggest that students may place different levels of importance on academics based on perceived personal or societal limitations, thus leading to diminished academic outcomes (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). Furthermore, threats to development and acquisition of positive self-view and

image can also influence adolescent girls' educational and vocational attainment as well as their life goals and aspirations (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014) as evidenced by Gibbs' (1985) study of urban junior high school students. Understanding the influences of the social constructs and the contexts in which race, gender, and class impact the individual can be helpful in increasing awareness about the impact of these factors on development and other experiences of adolescents.

Furthermore, Honora (2002) explored the relationship between gender and achievement to the future outlook among African American adolescents, yielding significant information about gender differences and achievement. Higher achieving girls expressed more future goals and expectations and considered more long-term goals than did higher achieving boys and lower achieving girls and boys. Gathering information about the importance of cultural and social constructs that may help shape adolescents' perceptions, viewpoints, and images of themselves and their future are important in understanding the role of gender differences and experiences during development (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014). Beady and Hansell (1981) suggested that expectations for student success held by teachers and communicated to students are potentially important influences on classroom interaction. Often times, Black students are not adequately embraced by educators, and these deficits can be attributed to a number of factors leading to low academic performance (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014).

Equally, Cokley (2000) looked more specifically at African American college students and determined a significant relationship with positive interpersonal relationships as a means of increasing academic self-concept and overall academic

outcomes of students. Students attending both historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominately White colleges and universities (PWCUs) were asked to answer questions related to personal beliefs about academic ability in an attempt to understand how achievement was influenced. The study also showed that the interaction between student and faculty was vital for many students' academic self-concepts, supporting other research linking teacher expectations to student performance (Cokley, 2000; Ferguson, 2003). Therefore, the influence on Black adolescents, specifically, Black female adolescents' self and the potential effects of changes in their social networks should be considered when assessing the impact of socialized stereotypes conveyed through social media on their academic self-concept and academic achievement.

Social Media's Influence on Adolescent Self-Concept

Social media intensifies adolescents' peer interactions as well as access to messages about societal norms. This form of media intensifies adolescents' constant ability to consume and produce mass mediated messages that are constructed based on sociocultural notions of race, gender, and sexuality (Manning, Duke, & Bostic, 2015). Social media's influence on the lives of its users is and can be powerful. Scholars have shown great interest in the impact of social media, particularly on the ways in which relationships and networks are established, mediated, and maintained (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Donath & Boyd, 2004; Thurlow, et al., 2004; Neira & Barber, 2014; Ellison et al., 2007; Park, 2015; Lauricella, et al., 2014), child and youth development (Duggan & Smith, 2012), online self-presentations (DeAndrea & Walther, 2011; Walther et al., 2009), friendship performance (Elphinston & Noeller, 2011) standards of beauty in new

media (Sira & Ballard, 2009), social self-concept and self-esteem (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Davis, 2010; Steel & Brown, 1995; Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Neira & Barber, 2014). Thus, understanding the nature of this influence on adolescent self-concept in the realm of social media is of vital concern.

The effects of mass mediated communication are the main factor which affects adolescents' self-concept (Manning, 2007; Lesko, 2012). Though one study (Cathcart & Gumpert, 1986) argues that mass media has the greatest effect on self-concept, another study (Rill, et al., 2009) suggests that peer interaction is the most significant contributing factor to affecting self-concept. In examining the effects of peer interaction that occurs through social media, researchers suggest a negative relationship between online communication practices and adolescent self-concept (Devine & Lloyd, 2012; O'Dea & Campbell, 2011; Koles & Nagy, 2012), while some report positive effect between online communication and adolescent self-concept (Davis, 2012; Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013). Additionally, research suggests that adolescents benefit from online friendships in the following areas: increased perceived social support; opportunity for emotional relief; increased social integration; opportunity for identity experimentation and extending bridging social capital (Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013; Best et al., 2014).

Research studies have been conducted using measures of self-esteem in relation to social media technologies which revealed positive self-esteem associations between online communication (Gross, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007), while other studies reported no significant relationship between self-esteem and social media technologies (Baker & White, 2011). Conversely, Apaolaza et al., (2013) conducted a study on

loneliness and the relationship between social media technologies among adolescents and found a significant association between loneliness and social media technologies and females. Further, Sponcil and Gitimu's (2013) study revealed a correlation between the number of friends one has on social media networks and the extent of usage, communication, and self-concept. The variable self-concept had a higher correlation with the number of friends one had than communication and the extent of usage of social media usage (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013).

In 2006, Cummings, Lee, and Kraut found that late adolescents use social networking sites to maintain existing relationships and social capital after experiencing major life changes from high school to college. Baym, Zhang, and Lin (2004) studied social interactions of late adolescents across media; whereby results indicated that 16.1% prefer the internet for making social contacts. Furthermore, this study reported that 49 of the 51 participants conducted their social life contacts through at least two, and often three methods on any given day (Baym, et al., 2004). Similarly, the convenience of social networking sites fulfills adolescents' communication needs and wants at their own rate and time (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013).

Adolescents' attitudes about themselves, their own socialization process, and self-identity construction (Urista et al., 2009) can be affected by using social networking sites (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013). Therefore, adolescents' self-disclosure is a way for them to not only open up about their own identities but also presents a way they want others to perceive them (Pempek et al., 2009). Social support from others on social media websites has been found to influence how individuals self-disclose (Lui & LaRose, 2008).

Additionally, it was found that when individuals receive social support from other users, it helped to improve college participants' quality of life (Lui & LaRose, 2008).

The construction and representation of images and messages through social media often contribute to lowering adolescents' self-concept, which frequently leads to them looking to people and possessions in improving and reconstructing their self-images (Chaplin & John, 2007). As it relates to social media profile pictures and postings, Sponcil and Gitimu (2013) assert that by "obtaining comments from other users on pictures and wall postings improves images that individuals have of themselves" (p. 6). According to Urista et al., (2009), when individuals receive timely responses it elicits gratification and good feelings of self and satisfaction of personal and interpersonal desires.

The characteristics of a typical social networking site user and individual personal and social needs have been frequently explored by scholars interested in learning the impact of social networking sites on the well-being of adolescents (Zhang & Leung, 2015; Bryant, Sanders-Jackson, & Smallwood, 2006). Previous studies have identified intrapersonal psychological traits of self-esteem (Ellison et al., 2007; Jones, Millermaier, Goya-Martinez, & Schuler, 2008; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 2006), collective self-esteem (Barker, 2009; Zhang et al., 2011), happiness (Kim & Lee, 2011; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011), satisfaction (Ellison et al., 2007; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011), emotional openness (Zhang et al., 2011), and extraversion (Antheunis & Schouten, 2011; Utz, 2010). Greenhow and Robelia (2009) found that low-income late adolescents, ages 17 to 19, participated in social networking sites several times a week for whereby it

served as emotional support, relational maintenance, and self-presentation. Additionally, participants believed that by participating in social networking sites, they felt a sense of validation and appreciation of their creative work, peer support, and school-task related support (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

In past research, social networking site users have reported experiencing more happiness and excitement via social networking site interactions (Zhang & Leung, 2015). In the past six years however, research indicated that personality characteristics negatively affect individuals' offline and online communication, which includes loneliness (Vergeer & Pelzer, 2009), jealousy (Muise et al., 2009; Utz & Beukeboom, 2011), communication apprehension (Zhang et al, 2011), narcissism (Mehdizadeh, 2010), and neuroticism (Rice & Markey, 2009). Further, Utz and Beukeboom (2011) found that self-esteem was a significant moderator between psychological traits and social networking site use. According to Steele (1999), adolescent media choices are based on sociological position as well as identity aspirations. In this regard, social media provides unprecedented opportunities for selection and interaction driven by and support of identity exploration by adolescents.

Social media is a vehicle in which identity experiments are expressed through media images and symbolization of whom adolescents are and who they desire to be (Steel & Brown, 1995). Integrating new media into one's identity construction is dynamic whereby adolescents can play their favorite music, post pictures, and videos, keep a public diary, ask for comments, and update moods and interests (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). Chandler (1998) examined the process of self-presentation in personal home pages

of users arguing that these profiles can be contexts for multimodal identity practices. In this regard, personal home pages are online multimedia textual examples of how individuals "can display biographical information and preferences and shape oneself in relation to any dimension of social or personal identity to which one chooses" (paragraph 3).

Scott (2007) has suggested that this type of inter-personal communication is a key facet of adolescent identity formation. Similarly, social networking sites reveal personal information about its users whereby other users can find information and common ground can be established (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009) and new connections formed (Donath & Boyd, 2004). This is of particular interests for adolescents who thrive for peer connection and acceptance (Dow, 2015). Likewise, adolescent video-sharing through social networking sites was found to support existing and new interpersonal connections among adolescents (Lange, 2007).

Adolescent users of social media form new connections to establish and generate new relationships or friendships. Boyd (2006) found that the meaning of "Friend" connections in social networking site users differs from traditional conceptualizations of "friendship" offline. Equally, Ellison, Steinfeld, & Lampe (2007) found that social networking sites encourage users to strengthen and maintain connections with former friends, thus allowing them to interact with other users and their networks. Through social networking site interaction, Tinto (1998) and Zhao and Kuh (2004) discussed how low-income and first-generation college students benefit from increased connections with peers as well as community resources which lead to a greater sense of social belonging,

persistence, and success in school. Further, Greenhow and Robelia (2009) assert that the processes of digital communities that allow for self-presentation allow for marginalized individuals to reflect and transform the way they think of themselves, as well as communicate to a mass audience who they want to be.

A moderate level of research has been conducted on the impact of social media on the well-being of its adolescent users, however, existing research has failed to include empirical data on the inter-correlation between social network users and the effects of using social networking sites. The nature of relationships, time spent online, and level of intensity are dynamic among social networking site users when investigating interactions and the resources users commit to relationship-building online. Zhang and Leung (2015) point out that "previous studies have not paid enough attention to the nature of relationships during investigation" (p. 1018). Similarly, the creation and maintenance of friendship networks are considered an important and developmentally significant process during adolescence (Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012).

Likewise, past studies have shown a strong link between social support, adolescent well-being, and social networks (Argyle, 1987; DeNeve, 1999). Nezlek (2000) concluded that those who have greater intimacy and higher quality relationships also have higher well-being. The importance of social support networks is further emphasized when one considers the psychological implications associated with the suppression of emotions caused by limited social support (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Conversely, Best, Manktelow, and Taylor (2014) conducted a systemic narrative review of research published between January 2003 and April 2013, where it was found that social media

technology increased self-esteem, perceived social support, increased social capital, safe identity experimentation, and increased opportunity for self-disclosure among adolescents. In contrast, the harmful effects of social media reported were increased exposure to harm, social isolation, depression and cyber-bullying (Best, et al., 2014).

Focus group research suggests that adolescents use social networking sites to explore their identities and to display aspects of themselves (Manago, et al., 2012). According to Neira and Barber (2014), adolescents experience an increased degree of social comparison, as a result, peer engagement of socially desirable activities. Chou and Edge (2012) found that greater time spent on Facebook was positively associated with having the perception that other people are happier and have better lives. Contrarily, adolescents receive more frequent feedback from peers through social networking sites, than they would from offline interactions (Neira & Barber, 2014).

In a study conducted by Valkenburg, Schouten and Peter (2005), adolescents indicated that one of the primary motives for using the Internet to explore their identities and gain knowledge about themselves and receive peer feedback from others. As a social comparison and peer feedback are integral to adolescents' self-evaluations (Harter, 1999), it is plausible that increased frequency with social networking sites could have an association with adolescent self-concept (Neira & Barber, 2014). In a study investigating the relationship between university students' self-esteem and social networking site use, it found a high frequency of use of social networking site use to be associated with low self-esteem (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Another research study found the greater number of Facebook friends was positively associated with university students' well-

being (Kim & Lee, 2011). However, less research has been conducted in exploring how social networking site use is linked to indicators of the developing adolescent self-concept through stages of development (Neira & Barber, 2014).

Meanwhile, research has been conducted to explore the relationship between indicators of adolescent adjustment and social networking site users revealing higher social self-concept among adolescents receiving positive feedback on social networking site profiles; lower self-concept on negative social networking site profiles for both males and females (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). According to Neira and Barber (2014), despite the prevalent use of social networking sites among adolescents, research has yet to investigate how adolescent identity exploration and reflection is associated with adolescent social networking site use. Correspondingly, the developing adolescent self-concept is highly influenced by context, environment, and life events. Similarly, research studies investigating the influence of social networking sites on adolescent self-concept have included gender-mixed samples; however, while many of these studies have had a higher number of female participants, they have had less minority female participation (Best, Manktelow, & Taylor, 2014; O'Dea & Campbell, 2011; Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013).

Social media filters mediated messages often stigmatized by racialized and sexualized theories about a constructive view of adolescents (Weissman et al., 2006). In this context, adolescents' psychological development, which is specifically sensitive to the development of their personality, self-esteem, and self-conception becomes negatively racialized and gendered (Manning, Duke, & Bostic, 2015). Adolescents are

thereby positioned to either assimilate into the majority culture by rejecting their own culture, or they can live in the majority culture but feel estranged (Dow, 2015). Consequently, how they develop a healthy sense of self-concept while being influenced by these mediated messages along with peer interaction has yet to be understood.

Femininity's Ideal Image and Mass-Mediated Messages

Mediated messages from social media and the Internet provide platforms which surround women with messages of what society thinks they should look like (Klein, 2013). While social media may not create new image problems for women, they intensify the constant ability to critique and analyze bodies in such a way that promotes body dissatisfaction, constant surveillance, and distorted thoughts (Klein, 2013). Conversely, young women, ages 18 to 24, comprise a sizable percentage of social media users who are potentially influenced by the effects of mediated messages regarding ideal female image (Klein, 2013). The literature supports the notion that late adolescence is a developmental stage when these young women are making decisions without their parents (Klein, 2013), and it is, therefore, important to understand the vulnerability social media has on their developing self-concept. Consequently, mediated images of ideal body image are of central focus as these girls develop an outlook of themselves and accept developmental changes that occur during puberty. Hence, examining who controls these images and for what purpose is vital.

Feminist media critics have long criticized the exploitation of girls and women in media (Klein, 2013). Numerous content analysis of magazines, newspapers, film, television shows and advertisements have portrayed women being sexually objectified,

housewives, mothers, or other subordinate roles in society (Jefferson & Stake, 2009; Heinberg et al., 1995). It is often asserted by researchers that women are portrayed in media as seen by men (Kilbourne, 1999). In this regard, the patriarchal domination embedded in society influences ways that encourage female domination and promote a certain body preference for women (Tassell & Flett, 2005, 2002). This supports earlier research which suggests that patriarchy is deeply rooted in the social, legal, political, and economic terrains of society (Malti-Douglas, 2007).

Walby (1990) posits patriarchy as a fundamental concept of the radical second-wave feminists, who define it as "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p. 214). Problematic, patriarchy serves to legitimize the relations of production that have situated women in the most menial, insecure and low-paying jobs (Janus, 1978). Mediated messages of patriarchy have permeated the psychological consciousness of women “often in the form of home obligations that may physically or mentally keep them away from their jobs ...or in choosing jobs which, though lower paying and with less opportunity for improvement, keep them closer to the family role, provide a chance to meet men, allow them to dress prettily” (Baxandall et al., 1976, p. 5). Adding to the problem, these patriarchal messages go on further to reinforce learned behaviors of femininity to girls beginning at birth and reified on a daily basis (Janus, 1978). Advertisements, for example, reinforce the notion that women are subordinate others and objects of sexual desire (Sheikh, 2013). Busby (1974) found that men dominate mass media content shaping society’s perception of women. Further, Busby (1974) found that:

> Regardless of the medium under examination or the scope of the particular study, the conclusions have been very similar: males dominate mass media content, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Roles of males in the mass media have been shown to be dominant, active and authoritative while females have been shown to be submissive, passive and completely contented to subjugate their wills to the wills of media males. Males in all our mass media have varied roles emphasizing their importance in the spheres of employment, politics, science, history, and the family while females have only two important spheres circumscribed by their sexuality and their domesticity (p.10).

As early as 1910, Pond created an advertising campaign contributing to the standard of beauty (Klein, 2013). Therefore, the advertisement solidified a standard of beauty by positioning the woman as an object of desire of men (Klein, 2013). Reichert and Lambiase (2014) assert that the woman's primary responsibility is to be sexually attractive. Historically, media has created gender dichotomies by perpetuating masculinity as domination (Sheikh, 2013). For this reason, patriarchy in media has held a certain power over women as it dictates what is socially acceptable as a female ideal. For example, fashion and beauty have regulated how women look at themselves, and in turn, how others look at them (Reichert & Lambiase, 2014). Jib Fowles (1996) refers to the changing fashion trends as "the cycle of attractiveness" and argues that it is "defined in popular culture and then refined in advertising" (p. 140). According to Kilbourne (1999), advertisers use a variety of idealized graphics to sexualize women as a way to sell a product. Although this form of advertising may result in women developing distorted thoughts of self and body image, the cultural ideal of thinness and beauty are constantly glamorized in media (Kilbourne, 1999).

Subsequently, patriarchy is an inherent system that relies on the oppressed to be in charge of their own oppression (Sheikh, 2013). Reinforced myths of the ideal feminine

beauty have been influenced largely by media throughout the decades. From the 1930's well into the twenty-first century, mediated messages about achieving the ideal femininity focused on selling the product itself and a set of values about appearance (Klein, 2013; Reichert & Lambiase, 2014). Similarly, media's assertion of the female standard of beauty has for decades projected the thin ideal type as a "key signifier of femininity" (Rumsey & Harcourt 2012, p. 175). Additionally, reality television shows in the current 21st century further emphasize women's looks and clothes; placing importance on beauty and outward appearance (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2011).

Similarly, in a study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute (2011), it was found that girls who regularly view reality television differ dramatically from their non-viewing peers in their expectations of peer relationships, overall self-image, and their understanding of how the world works. Seventy-two percent of girls in the study say they spend a lot of time on their physical appearance in comparison to 42% of non-reality television viewing participants. Lastly, regular reality television viewers accept and expect a higher level of drama, aggression, and bullying in their own lives as well (Girl Scout Research Institute, 2011). Reality television is a medium that also cultivates societal expectations and norms for girls and women in the form of patriarchy.

Culturally induced factors of the ideal female image as depicted in media is an ideal rooted in American society (Hesse-Biber, et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Gaesser (2002), college women ages 18 to 25, report that over half of the female participants in this study prefer to be run over by a truck than be fat, while two-thirds would rather be mean or stupid. The National Institute of Mental Health (2011) posits

that college women's development of pathological thoughts surrounding their diet is attributed to negative body image and extreme self-consciousness of diet. For college women ages 18 to 25, this stage of development postulates a time when they are making decisions without their parents and are more influenced by the surrounding of same-age peers (Klein, 2013). Rumsey & Harcourt (2012) asserts that body image is understood to be a combination of "subjective understandings of the body including a conceptual understanding of the body as well as an emotional attitude toward one's own body" (p. 26). Body image normally includes ones' "perceptions of bodily form such as bodily size, shape, and characteristics" (Dittmar et al., 2009, p. 1).

Researchers have noted that average American women compare themselves to mediated figures of women represented in media leaving the average American woman feeling dissatisfied with their bodies (Botta, 1999; Gentles & Harrison, 2006; Schooler et al., 2004). Duke's (2000) study reveals that European American girls feel strong pressure to conform to the beauty ideals found in magazines; resulting in them often experiencing negative feelings when they fail to do so. Although the promotion of the ideal image has persisted, it has often changed with each decade; yet, still controlled by a patriarchal perception of beauty and femininity (Klein, 2013). Advertisers create a sense of desire and aspiration through its mediated messages of women (Reichert & Lambiase, 2014).

The standard of femininity and beauty fascinate women as well as control society's opinions regarding a woman's appearance and socially acceptable behaviors (Klein, 2013). Media messages about the feminine ideal image are further exacerbated through the frequent perpetuation of the female ideal found in the blurred realities of

social media (Klein, 2013; Reichart & Lambiase, 2014). Normalized through social media, the oppressive nature of the ideal feminine image is intertwined through photos in social media and Internet advertisements communicated through technological ideas (Klein, 2013). The critical role of patriarchal messages mediated in media of women can potentially change the way girls and women understand themselves and the world around them. Social media and other forms of technological devices have made it easier for women to connect with other women who have similar views of body image and self (Klein, 2013). Coupled with increased exposure, social media has the ability to stimulate social comparisons with attractive peers (Prieler & Choi, 2014).

Social Media and the Ideal Feminine Image

The widespread use of the Internet and social media constitutes increased socialization of the cultural standard of appearance in American society. Patriarchal ideal feminine image encourages women to fit a certain beauty ideal represented through mass-mediated messages both in physical and online worlds (Klein, 2013). Female Internet users can scroll through news feeds on a multitude of social media sites to learn about the ideal standard of beauty, and therefore, make decisions about what they should look like. Similarly, Shields and Heinecken (2002) argue that women's drive for thinness has a high correlation with media influence and advertising. Further, they argue that "the ways in which advertising perpetuates the norms of a patriarchal society are consistent with the images of women in advertising of a male-dominated gaze" (Shields & Heinecken, 2002, p. 71). In support of this argument is evident in a study of adolescent body satisfaction or dissatisfaction, found that the adolescent females' were immediately influenced by family

and friends' ideology of female body preference, which supports the thin ideal body preference as seen in the media (Kelly et al., 2005).

There has been sizeable research on the effects of social media on body image concerns (Prieler & Choi, 2014; Perloff, 2014; Chrisler et al., 2013; Ferguson et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2013; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). In a 2011 study conducted by Haferkamp and Kramer (2011), it revealed that "people look at attractive users on Facebook have less positive emotions afterward and are also more dissatisfied with their own body image than people who look at unattractive users" (p. 113). Another study conducted in 2011 by Latzer, Katz, and Spivak revealed a correlation between the amount of time adolescent girls, ages 12 to 19, spent looking at Facebook and negative body image and dissatisfaction. Klein (2013) argues that women who participate in social media are exposed to a phenomenon "strongly correlated between changing media technology and affected self-esteem and body image" (p. 27). Conversely, "social media may exacerbate the effect of mainstream media and disseminate socially acceptable norms through social media" (Prieler & Choi, 2014, p. 380).

Social networking sites allow users to upload their own content and share content with other users. The top three most popular social networking sites in the United States are Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest among college-aged females (Niemer, 2012). The ubiquitous increase of social media users by college-aged females and its influence on the psychological implications of their developing self which has yet to be fully understood. Although social media use has been well-documented as a dominant pastime of college-aged women (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Klein, 2013; Niemer, 2012), patriarchal

oppressive influences on self-worth and self-confidence continue to permeate the portrayal of girls and women in society. Social media fosters false ideals of "popularity, acceptance, and attractiveness by encouraging users to like photos or comments" (Klein, 2013, p. 67). Social network users' "perceptions are shared not exclusively by what profile users disclose about themselves, but also based on others' comments on Facebook" (Hong, et al., 2014, p. 340).

For college-aged women in late adolescence, this is a relevant construct given that social interaction, weight, and shape become increasingly important and salient in the college setting (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012). Frederickson and Roberts (1997) assert that women are deeply affected by how they see women portrayed in media. Often depicted as objects to be looked at, women are taught that their physical appearance is the most important part of their identity (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997). Girls and women are taught to criticize certain body parts and to internalize the "objectifying gaze" or that of a man (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 176). Frederickson and Robertson (1997) assert that this objectifying gaze occurs in three different ways:

1. Social interactions,
2. Within media, that recreate social interactions,
3. And most prevalent, within mass media that literally objectify certain parts of the female body, as in advertising (p. 176).

Therefore, perceived attractiveness plays a dominant role in the lives of late adolescents whereby their self-esteem is derived from what they think men consider attractive (Fitzsimmons-Craft et al., 2012). How women internalize themselves becomes central to their self-concept (Choma, et al., 2010; Rumsey & Harcourt 2012). Feelings of

discontent and inadequacy can lead to women developing psychological thoughts and feelings of worthlessness (Choma et al., 2010) based upon of pejorative views of outward appearance as defined through an institution of oppression. Male dominance and female subordination are systemic, political, and self-reproducing (Wilson, 2000). From this stance, patriarchy is understood as “an institution perpetuated by techniques of control" (Millet, 1970, p. 23). Though considerable research has been conducted to explain media’s influence on the perceptions of femininity and beauty, how these mediated messages of oppression influence women and girls of color has yet to be fully examined.

Black Feminism and Mediated Messages

Feminist scholars assert that patriarchy is a byproduct of a widespread social system of institutional male dominance (French, 1985). In this institution of male dominance is an inherently unjust social system that enforces gender roles and oppression of women (Richards, 2013). The true woman or White woman, from a patriarchal perspective, possesses cardinal virtues of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity (Hill-Collins, 2000). These images of White women are juxtaposed with images of women of color and have inherently served to disempower and marginalize (Hamper, 2009). The subjugation of Black females at the intersection of male dominance and racial oppression subsequently leave Black girls and women in a tenuous space.

Paradoxically, scholars have interpreted patriarchy as one worldwide system (Lerner, 1986; Millet, 1970) which led to the formation of the exploitation of race (Wilson, 2000). Critically, White feminism is unable to capture the reality of the intersectionality of the lives of Black girls and women which extend beyond the impact

of sexism alone (Muhammed & McArthur, 2015; Hill-Collins, 1998). Thus the extension of feminism to better encapsulate the marginalized experiences of Black females led to the vision of Black feminism. Bell hooks (1981) wrote, “sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women” (p.15). Black feminism offers perspective on the complex nature of oppression in the lives of Black women.

During the 1970’s, many women of color sought to expand the role of feminism in the Women’s Liberation Movement beyond its concern for the problems of White middle-class women (Jones, 2014). Feminism lacks the inclusion of race and class issues (Walker, 1983); whereby Black feminism encompasses the complexity and everyday nuances of oppressions which crisscross and compound each other (Muhammed & McArthur, 2015). The impasse of compounded marginalization of Black women “is more around the social and cultural devaluation of women of color” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 1241). The experiences of Black women in a White, male dominated society situate Black women in a “doubly burdened, subject to the dominating practices of both a sexual hierarchy and a racial one” (Crenshaw, 2009, p. 827).

According to Hill-Collins (1990), patriarchy is an intricate system of oppression from a dominant, male, European perspective that originally sought to maintain and sustain power and control through the form of patriarchal dominance. This system of dominance permeates race, class, gender, and sexuality and thereby forming intersecting, mutually constructing systems of power in which Black females experience throughout their lifespan. As described by Patricia Hill-Collins (1990; 2004), this bounded system represents overlapping and multiple forms of oppression. The Black feminist paradigm,

therefore, places the woman at the center of analysis as a means to understand the structure of domination (Hill-Collins, 1990). Likewise, intersectionality, as argued by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the simultaneous overlapping multiple forms of oppression. Intersectionality points to the ways in which discrimination experienced by Black females systematically reinforce the marginalization of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 2004; Bhattacharya, 2012). In addition to this added dimension, intersectionality equally explains the ways in which the specific forms of domination to which Black females are subject (Crenshaw, 2009; Walby et al., 2012). Consequently, the dilemma of Black females encapsulates "narratives of gender as based on the experiences of White, middle-class women, and the narratives of race as based on the experiences of Black men" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 1241). The dilemma of the Black female subsequently leaves her at a crossroads of being in gender and race hierarchies, while rendering her in space undescribed or categorized as "other" in which she is misperceived (Crenshaw, 2009).

Othering Black Women

The interlocking systems of oppression aptly frame the experiences of Black women, often othering them and "their humanness devalued" (Merriweather, 2015, p. 52). As patriarchal influence has characterized the ideal female image as thin, White, and female; Black women fail to fit into this scripted dominant narrative. The ideal feminine image thus becomes an inherent bias that bestows power and privilege to some, while marginalizing others simply because of physical appearance. Consequently, the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and sexuality presents a stark illustration of

narrative tropes of race and gender which identify and define the realities of Black women. The ostracized and glaring realities of Black females then sculpts psychological and physical violence relegating their otherness as being negative and undesirable (Crenshaw, 2009).

The stereotypes and myths of Black women represent a central site of oppression as well as legitimized othering. In the eyes of the public, Black women are not seen as pure and feminine like White women, nor were Black women seen as having power or authority to control like males. Black women, therefore, have their reality and identity defined for them, whereby occupying the position of inferiority in relation to those who hold the hierarchical power (cited in Hancock, Allen & Lewis, 2015). Hence, the oppressive systems of patriarchy and racism engender Black females as “other” through ideological and degrading stereotypes.

Historical Black Female Stereotypes and Media Representation

Dominant groups often attempt to legitimate their power through ideological control via a set of beliefs that explains or justifies some actual or potential social arrangement. According to Banks (1995) and W.E.B. Dubois (1903), an examination of U.S. history reveals that the "color line" of race is a socially constructed category, created to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of Whites over others. The cumulative nature of racial stereotypes and their effects is examined by Steele and Aronson's (1995) in which their research suggests that the "immediate situational threat that derives from the broad dissemination of negative stereotypes about one's group the threat of possibly being judged and treated stereotypically, or of possibly self-

fulfilling such a stereotype" (p. 798). Hill-Collins (2000) posits that socially constructed stereotypes and myths of the Black female are “designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of life” (p. 69).

Archetypal tropes of Black women have been prevalent since slavery as attempts to objectify and “other” Black women and their identities (cited in Hancock, Allen & Lewis, 2015). Prevalent in literature and exacerbated through a public medium are the anti-feminist and racist tropes of Jezebel, Mammy, Sapphire, Matriarch, and Welfare Queen. These public images of Black women have for centuries been used to convey dominant and controlling messages about Black females’ identities. Walker (2005) asserts that these controlling images have for decades, dictated how people operate and relate to Black women.

The politics of differences and the pre-occupation with Black women’s bodies dates back to slavery (Hammonds, 2004). The devaluation of the Black female body is linked to the nineteenth-century image of the African woman as that of a prostitute through the capture and public display of the Hottentot Venus. The Hottentot female was Sarah Bartmann, an enslaved African who was objectified and placed on public display for exhibition to the masses because scientific experts considered her genitalia and buttocks sensational and extraordinary (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). This was a horrendous display and viewpoint of the Hottentot Venus as a sexualized object by White men and irregular by White women. In contemporary society, she is known as the Jezebel. The Jezebel is the trope of the highly sexualized Black female who lacks control

of her own body. She is depicted as a woman who is deviant and inherently different than the White female (Mitchell & Herring, 1998). These beliefs became the foundation of Western thinking and treatment of the Black female body, which justified and, therefore, validated the need for White ownership and domination (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). As a result, Black females are subject to "institutional violence such as rape and demoralization. Violence as a conduit to subjugation resulted in more than a demonstration of power" (cited in hooks, 1981, p. 2). White women symbolically represent normativity in womanhood, while Black females were seen as objects who needed to be controlled (Hill-Collins, 2000). Therefore, Jezebel was seen by White America as deserving of "poverty, exploitation, and rape" (Merriweather, p. 54).

More docile, the mammy is another archetype rooted in slavery, and yet, is an enduring trope of Black females in the twenty-first century. The mammy's normative character traits are amiable, loyal, maternal, non-threatening, obedient, and serves as the submissive caregiver to White children and families (Hammer, 2009; Merriweather, 2015). She is the quintessential Black woman as "non-sexual, unfeminine, docile, caring to a fault, self-sacrificing, and most important, non-threatening to the hegemonic power structure" (Merriweather, p. 53). The mammy advances the notion of Black female servitude to White men and women (Walker-Sanders, 2009).

Conversely, the matriarch is seen as the polar opposite of the mammy in that the matriarch is "domineering, rebellious of authority, and not emotionally supportive of the members of her family and community" (Merriweather, p. 53). While the matriarch is seen as a strong Black woman, she also undermines the strength of the Black family

(Hylton, 2005). Similar to the mammy, the matriarchal images of beauty starkly contrast that of the ideal White woman. Asserting standards of beauty for Black women both the mammy and matriarch are pictured as “dark, fat, ugly, and as acting and looking much like a man” (Hylton, 2005, p. 24). The Black woman is devalued as not physically measuring up to the White, female standard ideal beauty image as asserted by patriarchal standards.

Contemporary tropes of Sapphire and the Welfare Queen situate Black women as different from the mammy and matriarch. The Sapphire narrative as described by Yarbrough and Bennett (2000), characterize Black women as being “wise-cracking, balls-crushing, emasculating women” (p. 626). Sapphire was created to battle the corrupt Black male whose "lack of integrity, and use of cunning and trickery provides her with an opportunity to emasculate him through her use of verbal put-downs" (Yarbrough & Bennett, 2000, p. 627). Unlike other images that symbolize Black women, Sapphire is “today’s Angry Black Woman who is always unjustifiably discontent with life, who feels unfairly persecuted by society, and has irrational expectations” (Merriweather, 2015, p. 54). The Sapphire is rude, loud, and often has an inability to freely express a full range of emotions often leaving the Black woman feeling misunderstood and at odds with her peers (Hylton, 2005; Balaji, 2010). As a result, scholars Yarbrough and Bennett (2000) assert that many Black women suppress their feelings of bitterness and rage for fear of being regarded as a Sapphire.

Finally, unlike the matriarch or the Sapphire, the Welfare Queen is a sexually irresponsible, lazy, poor, uneducated Black woman (Blake, 2012; Stein, 2013; Hylton,

2005). She is seen as a breeder of children who lacks ambition and is a burden to society (Merriweather, 2015). The Welfare Queen's children are "delinquency-prone children who grow to become teenaged mothers, gang bangers and similar menaces to society" (p. 1). According to Hylton (2005), the Welfare Queen allows society to blame her for her permanent underclass position while marking her as simply lazy, inept, uneducated and undeserving.

These tropes are the defining narratives of Black women in American society. These narratives about Black females are reified in both traditional media and new media. They are staples in American culture that have come to not only define how Black women are viewed by others but how Black women view themselves. Their binary meaning offers a singular narrative rendering Black women both voiceless and invisible (Harris-Perry, 2011). Patriarchy has defined normative roles for Black women, thereby placing them as disempowered, marginalized, humiliated, and typecast positions which permeate medium (Hammer, 2009). These images of Black women reify ways to subjugate Black women as the Other within interlocking systems of control (Hill-Collins, 2000).

Perpetuation of Black Female Stereotypes in the Medium

Media portrayals of Black women as mammies, matriarchs, Jezebels, Sapphire, and Welfare Queens are examples of the ways in which "Black women as the Other provides ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression" (Dow, 2015, p. 58). There are gendered and racial representations of Black females which impact how their identities are produced, distributed and marketed in medium (Balaji, 2009, 2010).

bell Hooks (1992) contends that black female representation in the media "determines how blackness and people are seen and how other groups will respond to us based on their relation to these constructed images" (p. 5). Furthering hooks' discussion of representation, Hudson (1998) argues that "these stereotypes simultaneously reflect and distort both the ways in which Black women view themselves (individually and collectively) and the ways in which they are viewed by others" (p. 249).

The study of Black female representation is informed by Whiteness studies, and according to Dyer (1997), "the only way to see the structures, tropes, and perceptual habits of Whiteness, is when nonwhite (and above all, black) people are also represented" (p. 13). According to hooks (1997), medium provides a platform for understanding the power of representation of societal expectations for the role of Black women in relationships and life. Images of Black women in media carry out an agenda to imbue certain beliefs to, for and about Black women. However, subtle and undermining themes in media continue to demean and subordinate Black women (Andsager & Roe, 1999; hooks, 1997).

Research indicates that images of Black men and women in media have historically been negative and demeaning, often centering on stereotypical portrayals (Berry, 1998; Andsager & Roe, 1999). The medium of television from the 1970's showed that Blacks were commonly portrayed as poor, lazy, jobless, unintelligent, and incompetent (Graves, 1996; Merritt & Stroman, 1993). Media perpetuates a collective message of hegemony and marginalized legacy that Blacks were not equal to White Americans (Berry, 1998). Further, consistent with racist and anti-feminist tropes, Blacks

in the media were portrayed as deviants in the community and primarily came from female-dominated households (Ward, 2004).

The absence of positive portrayals of Blacks in media questions the impact this has on Black men and women's self-perception. The assertion of this absence indicates that Blacks are unimportant and powerless (Graves, 1999). Hence, the expectation is for Black consumers and media viewers to believe that they are inferior (Stroman, 1991), thereby destroying their own sense of worth or value (Ward, 2004). Frequent exposure to stereotypical images of Blacks lead viewers of all races to believe that these attributes characterize Black men and women in the real world (Davis & Gandy, 1999). Considerable research has been conducted to examine the influence of television on Black children and adults' self-concept (Crocker & Major, 1989; Davis & Gandy, 1999; Bales, 1986; Blosser, 1988; O'Connor, et al., 2000; Bickham et al., 2003; Berry, 1998; Berry, 2000).

Specifically regarding Black females, television and film have been criticized for ignoring Black women (Rhodes, 1995) and for presenting stereotypical images of them as hypersexual, promiscuous, and immoral (hooks, 1992; Ward, 1995; Glascock, 2001). In fact, the image of the Black woman as oversexed fantasy objects, dominating matriarch, and the desexualized mammy figure remains the most persistent in the media (Adams-Bass & Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014). Additionally, White feminine beauty ideals were projected onto Black women, thereby sending the message that feminine beauty was related to light skin, straight hair, thinness, relative youthfulness, and middle-class status (Brooks & Herbert, 2006). Additionally, these images are often found in

advertisements (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000), magazines (Plous & Neptune, 1997), and music videos (Jhally, 1995; Emerson, 2002; White, 2013) which perpetuate misguided messages about the sexuality of Black women that persists today.

Stephens and Phillips (2003) and Dow (2015) highlight the contemporary Jezebel mutations seen in popular culture, including freaks, gold diggers, divas, and baby mamas. Content analysis of music videos, movies, Internet, and video gaming popular (Emerson, 2002; Medina, 2011) massively socialize these marginalized and stereotypic images of Black women. As mass media promotes negative female stereotypes that dominate the portrayal of Black females, society's projection of biases becomes both normalized and internalized (Collins, 2000; Gandy, 2011; Wilson, Gutierrez, & Chao, 2005; Stephens & Few, 2007). Consequently, these negative representations seem real and foster a narrow view of Black women (Holtzman, 2004). As a result, Black female trope narratives continue to permeate American society through the inscription of media.

Though patriarchal influences sculpt the White female ideal body image in media, such images of White women have shown to not negatively influence Black females. Existing research on Black women indicates that many Black women report no changes in body image after exposure to largely White American models in the media (DeBraganza & Hausenblas, 2010; Schooler et al., 2004). According to Amichai-Hamburger & Furnham (2007), social media may strengthen ethnic norms of body image rather than the body image of mainstream culture by gathering like-minded people and limiting the effects of mainstream media.

Subsequently, though studies show that Black girls and women watch more television than White girls and women, Black girls and women reject beauty ideals they saw portrayed on television (Duke, 2000). Jefferson and Stake (2009) use Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory to explain why Black girls and women reject White American standards of beauty. According to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, people make judgments about themselves based on what they see in other people and are most affected by comparisons made to similar others. In this regard, fewer Black females are depicted in television and other media outlets (Schooler et al., 2004), so the majority of figures seen in media are less similar to Black females. In support of this assertion, other scholars assert that Black females substantially deviate from mainstream media's standard of beauty in that the majority of Black girls and women range in acceptable body sizes, facial features, and styles thus significantly reducing the pressure for them to conform to White, male standards of beauty (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Colabianchi et al., 2006; Duke, 2000; Milkie, 1999; Parker et al., 1995).

Similarly, degrading media images of Black females have influenced mainstream perceptions of Black women, as well as served as internalized messages influencing how Black females view their own identity and self-concept (Dow, 2015). The importance of being able to accurately understand the development of the self-concept is crucial because of the significance self-esteem has on the level of satisfaction regarding one's life (Feliciano, 2015). Thereby, the dominant images represented in social media of Black females as subservient, hypersexual, and marginalized (Cobb, 2010), places the developing adolescent Black female in a pivotal position during this period in her life.

Bounded ideologies of feminism, race, and sexuality projected in social media and constructed by dominant narratives situate Black women as an "outsider" (Jordan-Zachery, 2009; Tesfagiorgis, 2001). Media narratives of Black females become highly critical primarily during adolescence as adolescents' experience tensions between their ideal self and how they see themselves during this time period (Chaplin & John, 2007).

Conversely, because of their increased exposure to media content through social media, Black females may be vulnerable to internalizing messages that emphasize beauty and appearance (Gordon, 2008). Likewise, Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, and Stevenson (2014) assert that "media socialization is the critical factor that impacts how adolescent Black girls come to acquire static or stereotypic self- and other representations" (p. 81). Research findings suggest that Black girls use images of Black women as their source of comparison, and these images are thought to offer more realistic and inclusive beauty ideals (Milkie, 1999). Alternatively, Borzekowski, Robinson, and Killen (2000) found that the number of hours watching music videos was positively related to perceived importance of appearance and weight concerns for ninth-grade girls where findings were strongest for Black girls. Furthermore, researchers found that media about Black people promoted a beauty ideal that emphasized characteristics of hair and skin tone rather than weight (Neal & Wilson, 1989; Perkins, 1996).

Supporting this perspective, a study conducted by Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker (2009) found that the effects of greater Black music video exposure on Black youth were associated with expressing more stereotypical gender attitudes and assigning greater importance to superficial qualities when describing the ideal man or woman. Gordon

(2008) examined Black adolescent girls' Black media use and the importance of beauty and appearance in their own lives. Results indicated evidence of connections between media messages and girls' acceptance of attitudes emphasizing the importance of appearance for girls. Overall, it was found that the girls' attitudes reflect the media content they strongly identify with (Gordon, 2008).

Although Black females tend to disregard what they see in the media of magazines as irrelevant to themselves (Duke, 2000), it has been found that Black females use other factors such as personality, attitude, and character to understand how they view themselves as well as judge how others view them (Duke, 2000; Parker et al., 1995). To support this, Muhammad and McArthur's (2015) study examined how Black girls internalize messages from media and society while constructing their identity. It was found that Black female participants believed that Black girlhood is portrayed as being judged by their hair; is seen as angry, loud, and violent; and is sexualized (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015). Media is notably a powerful medium used to maintain the racist and anti-feminist tropes of Black women (Comer, 1982; Stroman, et al., 1989).

Additionally, the Strong Black Woman narrative symbolizes strength and resilience (Hill-Collins, 2009) that was a necessary standard of Black female womanhood. The Strong Black Woman narrative was designed to empower Black women while creating a counter-narrative to the racist and anti-feminist tropes of Black women (Harris-Perry, 2011). Consequently, mainstream media popularized this narrative through television shows and in music, while also functioning as a controlling image to justify their lived experience and constrain their choices (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

Black feminist scholars argue that the Strong Black Woman image reifies White, male interpretations of Black female womanhood and continued oppression (Hill-Collins, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; hooks, 1984; Lorde, 1984). Further, Lorde (1984) accounts for the degree to which Black females' identities and bodies are interconnected and play a role in many women's lives. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2009), Black women can experience negative impacts on their bodies and minds when internalizing emotions related to the struggles and disappointments of striving to be the Strong Black Woman. In contrast, Dow (2015) found that when Black women confront two controlling images, the Welfare Queen, and the Strong Black Woman, they believed that they had to overcome the image of the Welfare Queen to gain acceptance within White, middle-class. Additionally, results indicated that many mothers felt as though the Strong Black Woman image made them feel like failures as they were unable to fulfill the expectations of this image (Dow, 2015).

The duality of media has the ability to reinforce and legitimate subordination and subjugation of Blacks, but it also has the ability to function as an agent of social change (Allen et al., 1993). Thus, the tensions and paradoxes that are manifested in the oppression and exploitation of Blacks, but specifically to Black women, are evident in varying forms of media. In addition, many of the Black women featured in music videos depict a White female beauty ideal (Brooks & Herbert, 2006). She is therefore seen and interpreted by others in music videos as the tragic mulatto (Edwards, 1993). According to hooks (1994), racist and sexist thinking informs the way color caste hierarchies affect Black females.

An analysis of hip hop music reveals that most Black female artists use sexuality and sexual appeal to define who these women are (Stephenson & Phillips, 2003). Similarly, Ward and Rivadeneyra's (2002) analysis of popular Black music videos found sexual imagery in 84% of the videos, with the most frequently occurring sexual behaviors involving sexual objectification. Further, Emerson (2002) found that music videos present a one-dimensional image of Black womanhood in which their sole purpose is to look good and be desirable to men. Researchers assert that Black women are characterized as hypersexualized in media due to the prevailing images represented in the music industry (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999; Emerson, 2002; Balaji, 2010).

When examining Black females' heavy media consumption, it has been reported that media gratifies their need for personal identity satisfaction (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014). Through media socialization, identity satisfaction is accessible through viewing reality-based television shows that depict versions selfhood that individuals can possibly achieve. Although clichéd, the current trend of reality television includes implicit racial stereotyping and biases as evident in mainstream media (Tyree, 2011). In the same regard, digital technology of social media allows its consumers access mainstream media such as television shows, music videos, video-sharing, and peer interaction that feature Blacks men and women (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014).

Black Females and Social Media

In this digital age of technology, adolescent Black females are widely exposed to media content as they seek to find their true self, meaning, and purpose that informs their

growing views. Social media is a digital platform that provides instant and easy access to information for and about Black females, albeit favorable or unfavorable. These girls' interconnections between information and social media thereby become a powerful learning tool for who and what she believes she is (Kellner & Share, 2007). Hence, this new medium of social media allows its users to tacitly select members to interact with based upon shared interests, beliefs, and attitudes while creating online presentations representing their beliefs of self (Matabane & Merritt, 2014; Goff, 2012).

Although less researched, social media's role in shaping the self-concept of adolescent Black females who are growing up in an advanced Internet-mediated society offers critical insight into how the world views them, and in turn, not only in how they view themselves, but also how they perceive others view them as well. The cognitive processes employed by adolescents to interpret these mediated messages is questioned (Brown & Cantor, 2000). From this perspective, Gerbner's cultivation theory suggests that repeated exposure to television images results in viewers believing what they view are real-world representations and is useful for confirming associations between the level of television exposure and real-life perceptions (Gerbner, 1998). As postulated by Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, and Stevenson (2014), this theory suggests that Black adolescents will accept "Black-character portrayals and media images as valid models of acceptable and expected behaviors for Black people" (p. 82). Although cultivation theory does not address the history of racial oppression and stereotyping (Adams & Stevenson, 2012), it does offer a framework for how adolescent Black girls may interpret media messages of Black females.

Black females' media consumption both as traditional media (Gandy, 2001; O'Connor et al., 2000; Bickham et al., 2003) and as new media (Lauricella, et al., 2014; Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Zhang & Leung, 2015; Neira & Barber, 2014) is well-documented. Black women receive contradictory and complex messages through medium about Black females. Although the visibility of Black females has increased in medium, these images continue to "lack diversity and dimension" (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014, p. 80). To this end, an increase in Black females' Internet use signifies greater access to these images which lack accurate reflection of Black women in diverse roles. Further, as self-concept influences interests and drives processes of searching, finding, assessing, interpreting, and interacting with information, it is important to identify viable resources for Black females to encompass such needs (Warren et al., 2010). Thus, mediated identity-relevant information fosters confidence and belief of self for Black females (Warren et al., 2010).

Furthermore, Black females are put into a double bind of balancing the desired amount of what it means to be Black and female while also resisting racist and sexist tropes. They are supposed to repress their feelings while at the same time trying to achieve some sense of career or job success on the same level of White and Black men, as well as White women, who are not subject to any of those expectations (Kilbourne, 1999). This message can be especially conflicting for developing adolescents who are struggling to define their true self, both internally and externally. Black females come away with conflicting messages about what it means to be Black, a woman, and what it means to be successful.

Conversely, skill levels, social constraints/supports, motives, self-confidence, and ethnic culture influence females' social media use (Barzilai-Nahon, Rafaeli, & Ahituv, 2004). However, there remains a lack of exploration of cultural factors that influence Black females' use on social. Additionally, it has been found that photographic self-presentation of females on social media has sparked an interest in research to explore the unintended negative consequences of sexualized self-presentation (Walther et al., 2011; Willem et al., 2012). However, race in relation to photographic self-presentation has received little attention (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015).

In a study analyzing user profile photographs on a site where realistic photographic self-representation is the norm, Kapidzic and Herring (2015) operationalized and categorized race and gender through employing visual content analysis methodology. Patterns of culturally dominant norms of attractiveness as reinforced by mass media images were uncovered in this study. Results from this study revealed girls' profile pictures which displayed seductive behavior more frequently than boys. Since media has traditionally depicted Black women as stereotypically negative, their binary experiences with medium have resulted in both negative psychological and physical outcomes, as well as having a positive sense of self, race, and gender (Hammer, 2009).

From this perspective, Black women and girls struggle and thrive with notions of femininity as medium plays a significant role in their lives (Duke, 2000). Kaplan et al., (1991) assert that "the late adolescent woman does not develop out of the relational stage, but rather adds on lines of development that enlarge her inner sense of relational being"

(p. 131). During this stage of adolescence, Black females are learning their values, roles, and developing their self-concepts. This can make them very susceptible to cultural fads as well as following other leaders, and can make it difficult to resist or question dominant cultural messages from the media, even if it might be dangerous or detrimental to their development (Kilbourne, 1999). These females are caught between society's concepts of stereotypes, myths, and controlling images (Hammer, 2009), yet they also yearn for connection and relationship (Kaplan et al., 1991).

Social media has become a real value for Black women to expand, interact, and connect with people across the globe. Even though traditional forms of media reify marginalized and subjugated views of Black females, many view social media, specifically social networking sites as a means for Black women to deconstruct dominant narratives (Ellington, 2015). Gordon and Crenshaw (2014) found Black women positioning self-preservation as an act of political warfare on both individual and institutional levels. Social media has provided Black women with a voice that has been traditionally silenced to address issues of domestic violence, the perpetuation of rape culture, the pervasiveness of street harassment, negative media depictions, and political marginalization (Poletta, 2014). Social media is a medium in which Black women not only follow, but create their own narratives independent of the racist and anti-feminist tropes created by patriarchy (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Additionally, social media has the ability to impact social connectedness, solidifying its users' sense of support and affirmation (Oh et al., 2014). Social media is a medium that serves as a social,

psychological, and cultural support of Black women which remains significant to the Black experience (Thompson, 2010).

Additionally, Nabi and Keblusek (2014).) found that social media sites such as Instagram and Pinterest allow Black females to define and redefine how they want to be perceived through images and information they post. Further, it was found that many Black women using social media believe their voices are valued and heard through their connections on social media (Nabi & Keblusek, 2014). In this sense, social media offers opportunities for Black females to counter traditional racist and anti-feminist narratives that pervasively loom in society. Lastly, social media also illustrates the participatory nature of this media unlike other forms of traditional media (Gordon et al., 2014).

Social networking sites have also been documented in enhancing individuals' self-esteem (Goswami, et al., 2010; Oh et al., 2014). However, this research fails to explicitly report if Black women experienced increased self-esteem as a result of participating in social networking sites. Ellington (2015) examined social networking sites presence in supporting natural hair and support gained from social networking sites for Black college females, with a median age of 20.4 years and with natural hair. Results revealed that the participants use Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and Instagram. YouTube was the social networking site most widely used by participants, as well as the site identified as a major support system. Overall, it was reported that the participants experienced emotional support and enhanced self-esteem in acceptance of natural hair for Black women from social media (Ellington, 2015).

Further, results from Kapidzic and Herring's (2015) study revealed that adolescent females who participate in social media reported having internalized societal messages of women as submissive and sexually alluring. Consistent with previous research on self-sexualizing objectifying content has been found to positively correlate with female self-sexualizing behaviors, offline and online (Kapidzic, 2011). Additionally, this study contrasts with previous research on adolescent Black girls rejecting the White female ideal image, suggesting that Black girls are becoming more concerned with beauty ideals (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). The authors suggest that this is possibly due to the frequent, easy access to mainstream media of Black females whose appearances embody White female ideal (Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). Further research is, therefore, necessary to explore the influence of social media on adolescent Black females. Although social media continues to be used by many Black females as a platform to mobilize, build awareness, and raise consciousness for Black women to navigate their identities in a White, male dominated world (Poletta, 2014), the literature lacks empirical inquiry to support its effectiveness.

Summary

This chapter described the implications of the wide exposure of social media in the lives of adolescent Black females, and how the centuries-old effects of racist and anti-feminist tropes continue to permeate in American society is a phenomenon that continues to be understudied. Patterns of invisibility experienced by Black females is coveted by the overarching systems of oppression prevalent in media. Black women's narratives on social media are still influenced by racism, sexism, and misogyny (Valari, 2015), but the

extent and depth to which these systems of oppressions influence their self-concept is unknown and thus make this study distinctive. In the next chapter, the research study design is further explicated. Therefore, this study investigates social media's influence on late adolescent Black females' self-concept.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe social media's influence on late adolescent Black females' developing global and academic self-concept in their emerging adulthood. The researcher, working from a critical media literacy framework, Black feminist paradigm, and interpretive phenomenological lens sought to find evidence to examine the lived experiences with social media as expressed by late adolescent Black females. The focus of the study was specifically designed to learn about the experiences of late adolescent Black females with social media (highly interactive mobile and web-based technologies that are user-generated to share, co-create, discuss, and modify information) in shaping their developing global and academic self-concept. This study focused on the following questions:

1) How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, describe their social media experiences?
2) How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, perceive images of Black females through social media?
3) What are the lived social media experiences of Black females, ages 18 to 24, and how does this translate into understanding their sense of self (globally and academically)?

To maintain the goals of the study, a qualitative interpretive phenomenological study approach was most appropriate for the research design of the current research. The methodology was most appropriate for the current study because it captured the participants' experiences as they described them to me and provided an in-depth analysis of the influence that these factors had on their developing self-concept. In qualitative research, it is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences. Therefore, uncovering the meaning and understanding of the participants' perspectives involve a thick description of the phenomenon under study and their interaction over a period of time (Merriam, 2009). Hence, a key purpose of qualitative research is to understand the situation from the participants' perspective (Merriam, 2009).

The research questions in the current study involved individual human memories, human emotions, and human thoughts. A particular phenomenon, lived social media experiences, was investigated by examining participants' memories and past experiences. Additionally, the late adolescent Black females were asked about their current experiences with social media in their emerging adult lives. This design allowed the researcher to acknowledge multiple realities by discerning the perspectives of the late adolescent Black females involved in the study, which added texture, depth, and insight. Conversely, these components provided a solid foundation for exploring the social media experiences of late adolescent Black females and the meaning they made of these experiences as it related to their developing global and academic self-concept. Additionally, this methodology was most appropriate for gathering data for the research

questions. Further, it provided the ability to accept participants' social phenomena as it relates to how they articulated the phenomena as it related to race, gender, and sexuality.

This chapter explored the utility of an interpretive phenomenological study as the most appropriate methodology for understanding the experiences of late adolescent Black females and how they make sense of their social media experiences as it relates to their sense of self. It defined and contextualized interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and thematic analysis as tools of interpretation. The chapter also explored ethical issues and researcher bias, as well as presents the limitations of the study. In the next section, I discussed findings from a preliminary research project which provides background about how I arrived at this research topic. Therefore, the subsequent pilot study served as a launching pad for my current research.

Pilot Study

An exploratory case study was conducted to explore how adolescent Black females' social media experiences contributed to Black females' sense of self and view of other Black females. A pilot study is normally the first step in creating a larger scientific study and often speaks to overall trends that require more research (Spencer, 2010). During this project, there were three participants selected who were members of the general sample investigated in the research study. The pilot study participants consisted of a convenience and purposeful sample of three Black females, ages 20 to 21, from an urban city in the Southeast. To learn about the context of the participants' social media experiences, I conducted a focus group to pilot my focus group questions (see Appendix E) to identify concepts of social media that were salient among the participants to

determine social media consumption and production practices that influenced and supported girls' sense of self.

The setting for the focus group was selected by the participants in order to create a natural environment. During the focus group, I generated field notes to record body language exhibited by the participants. I also asked the participants if my questions were clearly generated to uncover the essence of their experiences directly related to the research questions. The participants provided feedback regarding the interview protocol in which adjustments were made to accurately reflect the intended data to be gathering directly relating to the research questions. Additionally, I conducted three one-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix D) which were audio-recorded.

Pilot Study Data Analysis

The setting for the individual interviews was selected by the participants, and based on their level of comfort. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which initiated the data analysis process. Once I collected data, I used qualitative data analysis software, Atlasti, to organize transcripts and field notes and began coding. I developed categories by creating three levels of codes which first consisted of open coding, where I searched for reoccurring themes amongst interviews. Second, I administered axial coding where I collapsed analogous codes. Lastly, I employed selective coding to produce themes which encompassed the essence of participants' responses (Creswell, 2013). Also, I compared observations to interviews and codes to enhance my understanding of girls' responses in relation to their social media experiences. Moreover, field notes contributed to my knowledge about the broad context of Black females' social media experiences.

Through this pilot study, I arrived at the realization that participants sought to negotiate their developing racial, gendered, and academic self-concept through their socialization membership in social media communities. This initial study sought to understand Black females' experiences with media, and will advance findings to further explore Black females' social media experiences and how these experiences have influenced their developing self-concept. Furthermore, the overarching research questions delved into participant's experiences with social media as they transition to womanhood and adulthood.

Interpretive Phenomenological Study Design

Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology designed to uncover the essence of human experience (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenological research, according to Van Manen (1990), is at its core the human scientific study of essences. Interpretive phenomenology is described as an analytic approach which draws upon other disciplines "to understand the interaction between people and their environment…it is not possible to separate the meaning of a text from the person who created it" (Quest, 2014, p. 38). Utilizing an interpretive phenomenological approach is useful in understanding "our embeddedness in the world of language and social relationships" (Finlay, 2011, p. 11).

The major characteristics of this design sought to uncover the essence of the research question of "what is the nature of the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, with social media influencing their global and academic self-concept?" To this end, this question seeks to uncover the meaning of the lived experience instead of just the facts of the experience (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, collecting

stories of lived experience are co-constructed and negotiated between the Black females involved as a means of capturing complex, multi-layered and nuanced understandings of the work so that we can learn from it. This presentation addressed issues of relationship, methods, collaboration, and ways of knowing. Collecting and analyzing the participants' stories from a place influenced by their lived world allowed me to more aptly understand the factors of the women's experiences, and how their interaction with social media was related to their developing self-concept (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

Relying upon interviewing as a primary source of data collection, McCracken (1988) said that interviewing is "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing" (p. 9). Data collection from other sources, such as a survey, would not have produced the quality of rich responses that were necessary to answer the research questions. Interviewing is a powerful way to help us understand our fellow human beings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The study design incorporated interviewing as well as relied on introspection because social media memories were personal experiences not directly observable by the researcher. The interviews gathered subjective knowledge that increases understanding of how social media experiences influence late adolescent Black females' developing sense of self globally and academically.

This interpretive phenomenological study focused on multiple realities and perspectives of developing Black females, ages 18 to 24, involved in the study. As the central focus of this study was on the lifeworld of the participant is at the core of phenomenological inquiry and requires openness to the participants' experiences (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2005). It was important to have an awareness of lifeworld to gain an understanding of how the participants lived their experiences. Hatch (2002) said, "informants are selected for interviews because they have some special knowledge that the researcher hopes to capture in his or her data" (p. 104). However, it was necessary for participants to have and to be willing to share recollections and current experiences with social media.

In the current research, the phenomenon of social media and the interactions of such phenomenon with Black females during late adolescence underscores the breadth of how these indivuals experienced the phenomenon. Further, this research examined the extent these social media experiences influenced the participants' global and academic self-concept while examining their understanding of these experiences. The four components of lived experiences: temporal, spatial, corporeal, and relational are of great importance in understanding how the participants describe their experiences (Van Manen, 1990). While the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon may be common, each participant described her experiences in different language.

In the process of interaction between humans, multiple explanations surfaced, all of which have value and meaning for the study participants. The findings were presented interpretively through inductive analysis. The multiple sources of information collected throughout the length of the study from the participants assisted in triangulation of data to maintain the validity of the study. The sources of data from the study included individual interviews, focus group, and collection of media artifacts collected from the participants over the course of the study.

Participants

The study participants were ten Black females, ages 18 to 24 with current and past social media experiences. Marshall (1996) said, “An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question” (p. 523). The age range of the participants was selected because of the high social media usage of this age group, high susceptibility of influence from social media over time, and the high amounts of pressure that girls experience during adolescence. Girls of this age will also have the perspective of how much social media exposure is a significant, or has been a significant part of their lives.

After receiving IRB approval, purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were used to select participants. Participants were identified through their status as "Female, Black, ages 18-24, with the past and current social media use." The researcher had no previous or existing relationships with any of the participants prior to this research study. From the researchers' contacts with Black females, ages 18-24, a few participants were initially solicited for this study via their personal email. Using the contacts of the initial participants and their close association with other late adolescent Black females within the Southeast, additional participants who met selection criteria were recruited.

The researcher was provided with potential participants' email addresses by informants and was contacted via their personal email who fit the criteria of the study. Female, Black or African American, ages 18 to 24, with current and past social media users were then selected. As mentioned, from the researcher contacts, recruitment letters (see Appendix A) were sent to participants' personal email addresses who meet the

specified criterion. Before asking the demographic questions (see Appendix C) to the participants, the researcher confirmed the participant's information after obtaining written consent to participate in the study (the participant's age and social media experience). In regards to the study's sample size, ten late adolescent Black female social media users participated in this study. The specific criterion for this study is as follows: Female, Black or African American, ages 18-24, the past and current social media users. The solicited participants all had various social media experiences, varying in terms of frequency and site usage.

After reviewing the process of IRB, I then arranged to meet with each participant individually to provide them with consent forms to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The participants and I worked together to plan eight weeks of interviews and focus groups. I also worked with participants to obtain media artifacts during the course of the focus group. Finally, we created a calendar, planned my interviews and focus groups, as well as established means of communication.

The interview and focus group protocol are included in the Appendices. The interviews were guided by the interview protocol that allowed participants to reflect upon their social media experiences as late adolescent Black females. When planning, we took into consideration suggestions provided by Merriam (2010) on gathering thick, rich descriptive purposes. Thus, the interviews and focus groups sought to uncover the individual and shared experiences in which the participants had with social media's framing of Black females over time. This collection of data addressed issues of relationship, methods, collaboration, and ways of knowing.

The ten participants were assigned pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and protect their identity in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24, with inclusionary criteria of being Black or African American, current and past social media users, and having no specific academic attainment. Demographic data included their age, gender, birthplace, geographic of their high schools, highest educational level completed, and family socioeconomic status.

In addition to the demographic data, participants were asked about access to social media (e.g. the internet, videos and newspaper articles accessed through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Periscope, GroupMe, Instagram, Vine, Vimeo, Snapchat, etc.) in adolescence, family and social relationships during adolescence, special classes that they attended during their academic experience and any transitions that happened in their young lives, such as changing schools, moving houses, or being retained in a grade at school. This information could affect the developing self-concept experiences of the participants. The stories told during the interviews generated significant data related to the research study questions.

Data Collection

Before data collection began, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the Office of Research at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), "the researcher must adhere to legal and ethical requirements for all research involving people" (p. 40). The Institutional Review Board is charged with reviewing research proposals to be sure that no mental, physical, or emotional injury will result from an individual participating in a study. Additionally,

participants were not deceived, and all information shared by the participants remained anonymous and confidential.

In designing this study, I addressed three questions regarding Black females and their social media experiences. Participants were selected from purposeful recruiting and snowball sampling techniques who met inclusionary criteria of being Black and female, between ages 18 and 24, and who have current and past social media experience. The site of recruitment was a large urban city located in the Southeast. The most important criterion for participation in this study was that participants current and past experiences with social media. It was important to identify participants who have current and past social media experiences to be able to reflect upon these experiences. The following research question was posed, guiding the direction of the study:

> What are the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females, and how do they make sense of these experiences as it relates to their developing self-concept?

As mentioned, from the researcher contacts, recruitment letters were sent to participants' personal email addresses who met the specified criterion. The researcher was provided with the participants' telephone numbers in which the researcher arranged to meet with the participants to obtain written consent to participate in the study. The researcher confirmed the participants' inclusionary criteria and demographic information (the participant's age, gender, geographic location of schools, highest education level completed, marital status, family socioeconomic status, and social media experience). Pseudonyms were used for participates in this study. In regards to the study's sample size, ten late adolescent Black female social media users participated in this study.

Participants were made aware of any potential risks that may be associated with recalling past social media experiences in the informed consent document (see Appendix B). Participants were also informed that they will have the right to decline any question that they want and withdraw from participating if they felt uncomfortable at any time. Great attention was given to social cues, participants' comfort levels as questions are asked, and participants' body language so as to minimize any risk factors. Participants only recounted their social media practices and experiences. Participants were given the right to decline any question that they want and withdraw from participating if they felt uncomfortable at any time.

Data collection occurred over the course of a two-month period and gathered by the researcher. The data collection for this study was a three step process. Step one in the data collection process was an individual interview which was audio-recorded with a hand-held recorder. The interviews were open-ended, a semi-structured interview which lasts approximately 45 to 60 minutes took place at a local non-profit agency. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. A structured interview format asks all respondents the same questions, with little room for variation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A structured interview would have adversely limited participant discussion because participants would not have been able to talk about issues that were outside the boundaries of the pre-established questions.

In a semi-structured interview, the researcher "attempts to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 653). I conducted semi-

structured interviews with participants for them to reflect on and share their social media experiences and the effects it has had and may still have on their self-concept globally and academically. The semi-structured interviews allowed freedom for participants to reference topics outside the boundaries of the questions presented, while ensuring coverage of the initial topics.

During the interviews, participants were encouraged to tell stories about their social media experiences during their early and middle adolescence years and about their social media experiences and preferences during their late adolescent years. Further, the interview protocol (see Appendix F) encouraged reflection of how these experiences influenced their emerging self-concept over time. Although each participant responded to the same set of questions, the incoming data allowed continuous refinement, resulting in additional questions for some participants. I followed this process for all participant interviews.

Additionally, the interviews allowed the participants to freely and openly express social media's role in the participants' lives during their emerging adolescence to present-day. I asked additional questions in order to gather more details about their experiences. This role may have included the type of social media consumed and/or produced, the frequency of consumption, thoughts, beliefs, or feelings evoked about self from their interplay with social media. The potential risks using social media in the study was meant to be minimal through the development of a carefully-considered interview protocol plan.

The second process of data collection included participants participating in one in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured focus group (see Appendix G), which lasted

approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The focus group took place at a local non-profit agency. The focus group was videotaped with a video camcorder to record non-verbals and audio of the participants during the focus group interview. The focus group was conducted to collect data on shared experiences of the participants and their experiences and perceptions of Black female images on social media.

Step three of data collection included the collection of media artifacts through a private Twitter account (https://twitter.com/) specifically created for the purposes of this study. During the focus group, media artifacts were collected for roughly 30 to 45 minutes through participation in a live Tweet chat with the other participants through a private and secure Twitter account that the participants were provided access to at the time of the interview. The purpose of this data collection was to uncover how the participants understood and made sense of images they saw of Black females on social media. This process was to intentionally have the participants reflect on the uniqueness of these meaning-making experiences with social media's portrayal of Black females. At the conclusion of the study, the Twitter account was deactivated to maintain the privacy of the participants.

Through triangulation of data included the collection of individual interviews, focus group, and media artifacts. I analyzed data from multiple data sources to provide trustworthiness to qualitative studies (Gay et al., 2006). Triangulation offers a greater picture of the context, gains greater insight into the phenomenon being studied, facilitates rich description, and works to increase the trustworthiness of the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

Data Analysis

The data from the study was analyzed by an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach by providing a detailed analysis of one case before moving onto the next (Quest, 2014). Next, the interpretive phenomenological analysis is inductive, which allows for unanticipated themes to emerge. Thirdly, results were discussed using existing literature, creating an interrogative element between the results and existing literature. Lastly, the analysis is influenced by researchers' biographical backgrounds and knowledge of the literature, as well as for data to be interpreted through their own lens when developing themes (Smith, 2004). Larkin et al., (2008) recommend that researchers be open to adjusting their ideas and responsive to interpretations of data based on participants' responses. Researchers should understand that participants' experiences within a specific context, which relates the person to the phenomena at hand (Larkin et al., 2009). Further, the interpretive phenomenological analysis includes a double hermeneutic process where the researcher tries to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their experiences (Smith, 2004; 2011).

Thematic analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis were used to analyze the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Larkin, et al., 2009). The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which initiated the data analysis process. Next, I organized the data. The goal of organizing the data was to conduct an inductive analysis in which participants' descriptions represent their understanding of events that may have meaning to them. After transcribing the interviews and asking follow-up questions when needed, I

then used interpretive phenomenological analysis to interpret the participants' stories in relation to the phenomena being studied.

My goal was to understand and describe what the world of the participant was "like" (Larkin, et al., 2006). Additionally, I sought to provide a "critical and conceptual commentary" (Larkin, et al., 2006, p. 104) on how participants make sense of their experiences. Once the interviews were transcribed, I used qualitative data analysis software, Atlasti, to organize transcripts and field notes. As suggested by Dahlberg et al., (2008), I used bridling to assist me in keeping my pre-conceptions in check and focus my attention on the participants' descriptions. The process was "iterative and inductive cycle" (Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009) involving several readings of each transcript, developing of codes, identification of themes, creation of a framework in which to explore the relationships between themes, consultation with my methodologist and advisor, and the development of a short summary describing the themes.

Next, I examined the interview transcripts multiple times. Yin (1993) explained that in order to collect, analyze, and synthesize data, a researcher must be able to be an investigator because the sources of evidence are likely to intermingle. I then highlighted passages in the text that seemed to contain a meaning to the participants. The meaningful codes were chunks of text that held a comment or passage that spoke clearly about a particular aspect of an experience in which the participant described. I created a working file for each participant and compared them across all participants.

During the comparison, I made notes of similar meaning and combined them, maintaining each participants' particular phrasing. Meaning codes that seemed to identify

a similar experience were collapsed or merged, becoming the beginning list of themes. Lastly, I employed selective coding to produce themes which encompassed the essence of participants' responses (Creswell, 2013). The themes captured the essence of the participants' meaning. Themes were differentiated from each other by examining the context of the participant's story, and how the participant phrased what they shared with me. This was the iterative process with theme names moving back and forth from my words to the participants' words, and from individual participants to the group of participants.

I engaged in the process of imaginative variation in order to explore all possible meanings of a theme. According to Beech (1999), this process involves examining the phenomenon in order to include only essential features. The themes presented in the next chapter describe participants' unique experiences while also holding common meaning across all participants. Also, I compared observations during the focus group to interviews and codes to enhance my understanding of the participants' responses in relation to their social media experiences. Moreover, field notes contributed to my knowledge about the broad context of Black females' social media experiences.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended that early data analysis should include identifying themes, issues, and questions after each contact. For this study, data collection began with the first interview and continued throughout the transcription and analysis process. Data analysis focused on participants' responses to the interview questions, as well as additional follow-up information. Each interview was transcribed verbatim within

one week of completion of the interview. Each focus group transcript was transcribed verbatim within one week of completion of the focus group.

Follow-up

The primary focus of phase four was member checks. Making sure that I understood what the participants meant in their interviews and focus groups while ensuring that I represented their work appropriately was important to the overall assessment of data (Gay et al., 2006; Yin, 2009). Member checks took place via cell phone and face-to-face to ensure that the participants' voices were accurately reflected. To provide closure for the study, I asked participants if they had any final comments or remarks that they would like to share that they may not have had an opportunity to do so throughout the interviews. Allowing the participants to speak without a script provided us the opportunity to speak more freely about the experience and the changes in their lives.

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

When working with participants in a research study, ethics should be of high priority. Considering ethics, confidentiality is the utmost goal of this study. Participants were given pseudonyms and their personal stories and experiences were confidential. The following steps were taken to ensure confidentiality: Individual interviews were transcribed and de-identified. In order to de-identify the data, identifying information such as names were not collected. If names were mentioned on the recording, they were redacted during the transcription process. Instead, pseudonyms were used instead of participants' real names. Data was stored on a secure, password-protected laptop computer and destroyed three years post study. Participants were informed that if at any

point in the study, they wished to withdraw, they may do so. The inclusion or exclusion of their data in the study was dependent on continued informed consent. Accessibility of the data was limited to the one primary researcher in this study.

As the primary researcher, I created the Twitter account for the participants to participate in the live Tweet chat. The Twitter account was a private account in which the participants were provided access to at the time of the focus group interview. The participants were given access to the account by requesting to follow the researcher's account and then given access to post and comment on the twitter page during the focus group. The Twitter account is a private account in which unauthorized individuals do not have access to view tweets or any identifying information regarding the account user, posts, or comments on the Twitter page without direct consent of the Twitter account holder which was the primary researcher. All tweets were protected and were not visible to the public. Additionally, I had access to the data on the Twitter account that was kept on a password protected laptop ensuring participants' privacy and confidentiality. At the conclusion of the study, the Twitter account was permanently deleted.

Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness

It was important to establish the trustworthiness of data and conclusions drawn from qualitative studies. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) said, “Once all information is gathered, synthesized, and reported, a case study researcher should confirm the findings of the study before disseminating a final report” (p. 66). The following methods were used to establish trustworthiness in this study: rich, thick description, triangulation (artifacts), member checking, peer reviewer/external auditor. The risk of researcher

subjectivity was heightened by familiarity with the research participants and their background. However, to limit my personal subjectivity constant review of the data as it related to the research questions and study's purpose were employed. Furthermore, the review of analysis and findings by faculty dissertation committee members served as a buffer to reduce the presence of personal biases.

Strategies for Quality

To ensure quality, collaboration with my methodologist from my dissertation committee who is well-versed in interpretive phenomenology assisted with further probing, insight, and reflection upon the themes within the text, and how the meaning could be universally shared. This assisted in enhancing the overall quality of the data and participant interpretations. Further, I used techniques such as organizing the data, reading, epoche, and memoing to assist in enhancing the overall quality of the data gathered. An important aspect of the interpretive process of the data was forming codes or categories to describe personal experiences through epoche (Creswell, 2013). Having a faculty member to engage in this research with me was essential for de-briefing as to fully gather the essence of the participants' experience.

Role of the Researcher

The purpose of this study was for the researcher to explore the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females with social media, and the ways in which these experiences has influenced these girls' emerging global and academic self-concept. This study addressed a subjective, personal experiences of the participants. The study was designed to learn about the relationship between the late adolescent participants' use of

social media and their emerging self-concept into adulthood. Part of the genesis of the study was my acute awareness of the array of media who helped shape my life, beginning in middle adolescence. As a Black woman, mother, daughter, student, therapist, and teacher who engages in social media consumption and production, I was aware of my role and experiences with media. Additionally, I was acutely aware of the controlling images and messages of domination and oppression disseminated through media outlets of Black females. The large-scale accessibility of social media and the mediated messages produced through this on-demand outlet serve as powerful nuances in the emerging self-concept of young and impressionable Black girls growing into women. How a girl makes sense of who she is and aspires to be is thus formidable in part to the messages that she receives in her developing adolescence.

I experienced traditional media outlets where Black women were portrayed in bounded ideological stereotypes, but I also experienced some very positive images of Black women over time through media. In the changing spaces of today's media, social media expands the social terrain than its traditional media counterpart. This research is thus situated in the experiences of Black females with social media consumption and production which can include reading news stories, watching videos or television shows through social media outlets. This research provides a place and space to critically examine my own presuppositions and opinions.

The issues that plague Black females are often overlooked and under-researched. Being a member of this population, and understanding how societal expectations of class, race, and gender are projected onto you, I understand how people and mediated media

messages of Black women influence how Black girls view themselves personally and academically. I present this description of my personal background to clarify the ways in which researcher bias could enter the study. Although I was not with my participants during their social media experiences, I had personal experiences, which might hinder examining the data from a neutral position. However, it is important to note that Hatch (2002), stated that "it is impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective" (p. 15).

Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) do not consider the personal beliefs and experiences of the researcher to be a hindrance in the study. Instead, they say that a researcher enters the scene expecting that certain events, problems, and the relationship will be important. As the research continues, some of these predetermined ideas will prove to be significant, and others will be of little consequence. Research creates or extends the knowledge base. Researchers must determine an appropriate approach to framing a study. "Researchers are a part of the world they study; the knower and the known are not to be taken inseparable" (Hatch, 2002, p. 10).

Overview of Findings

In this section, I described the findings that emerged from this research which add to and extend a growing body of research investigating new media's influence on Black females' global and academic self-concept. I engaged in the analysis using Thomas (2006) inductive analysis to uncover emerging themes within and between cases. First, I read through each participants' interview several times, including the focus group interview, and interpreted the media artifacts collected during the focus group. A simple

coding system using color highlighting was utilized to identify key themes using participants' words. In this process, codes were created and then combined to form 44 codes. Codes were then combined to form 9 themes. I present general findings of the examination of experiences in these participants' experiences. Next, to further examine the phenomenon of the participants' social media experiences, I further immersed myself in the participants' experiences for a more intensive study to learn how social media has influenced their global and academic self-concept. After analyzing the participants' description of their social media experiences, I then highlighted comparisons and contrasts between the responses as well as inductive themes found across the participants' data. The description of the participants' experiences was to help our understanding of the phenomenon.

Summary

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to examine the lived social media experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, as well as to learn how social media has influenced their developing self-concept (globally and academically). In this chapter, I described my methods for conducting this qualitative research study. The participant interviews, focus groups, a collection of media artifacts constituted the data I analyzed for patterns and from which I developed generalizations. The data sources included interviews, transcripts of interviews, focus group, transcripts of the focus group, and media artifacts.

This chapter described the rationale for the research methodology, the selection process for participants, the data collection process, the data analysis procedures, and the

methods for establishing trustworthiness. Hard copies of the analysis, as well as the transcripts, will be stored for at least three years after completion of this research. In the next chapter, interview narratives and focus group responses are presented and discussed in chapter four. The study results and findings are discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected for this study using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach to understanding and describing late adolescent Black females' social media experiences and the ways in which they make sense of these experiences on their developing self-concept as evidenced in their emerging adulthood. As participants attempted to make sense of their experiences with social media and its influential nature on their developing global and academic self-concept, the essence of their experiences illustrates their voices in the context of their lives. The phenomenon of the participants' social media experiences describes parts of an experience that while unique for each participant, also holds common threads and meaning across all participants. Therefore, this chapter presents three main essential features (Beech, 1999) of participants' social media experiences and its influential nature on the participants' sense of self globally and academically. Each feature contains several themes and variations which are described in detail. Through an interpretive phenomenological methodology, I created detailed narrative portraits of the ten Black female study participants are presented.

By listening, recording, and analyzing the participants' experiences, I learned about their social media experiences and was able to "open up to the world of the reader through rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places" (Patton, 2002, p.

438). By analyzing this "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), I found themes and variations that are common in the participants' experiences. The ways in which social media's connection between the participants' lived experiences as late adolescent Black females and the influence of these experiences on their sense of self, body image, and academic achievement were further explored in this study. The following questions served to focus the study:

1) How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, describe their social media experiences?
2) How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, perceive images of Black females through social media?
3) What are the lived social media experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, and how does this translate into understanding their sense of self (globally and academically)?

In this chapter, I first present a description of the participants using a pseudonym and basic demographic characteristics to introduce the study participants. I then outline the flow of the study. Next, I explain the coding system and illustrate the thematic analysis identified to analyze the data. I also utilize interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyze the data based on the three research questions to highlight the main features of the participants' social media meaning-making experiences as seen in Table 1. Each major feature consists of themes and variations describing the participants' social media experiences. I also use the research questions to guide my analysis. This chapter concludes with a summary regarding the three major features from the data collection

findings from the research study examining the social media experiences and its influence on late adolescent Black females' global and academic self-concept.

Table 1: Summary of Findings

Questions	Feature	Theme
How do late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, describe their social media experiences?	Finding Voice	Expression of Self The Importance of Peer Approval Importance of Beauty and Appearance The Drama
In what ways do Black females, ages 18 to 24, perceive images of Black females on social media?	If It Doesn't Sell	Objectified and Sexualized Beings The Making of the Angry and Strong Black Woman The Absence of the Black Female Intellect
What are the lived social media experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, and how does this translate into understanding their sense of self (globally and academically)?	I Am Who I Am	Resisting Black Female Stereotypes My Academic Self Countering the Single Narrative

Research Participants and Context

This study utilized purposeful and snowball sampling techniques to recruit study participants. Ten Black females who met inclusionary criteria who self-identified as either Black or African American, female, as well as past and current social media consumption and production participated in the study. In this section, I present brief narrative portraits of my ten participants that resulted from data gathered from their interviews, focus group participation and media artifacts. The data collected from the individual interviews with the participants included demographic information about their sexuality, current relationship status, number of children if any, family size, number of siblings, family socio-economic status, highest grade completed, type of high school attended (rural, suburban, or urban), type of college attended (PWI or HBCU) their

current employment status, type of social media used, primary means of accessing social media, and the frequency of social media use. From this demographic information, I constructed each participant portrait. These portraits allowed me to discuss the phenomenon of social media experiences among these late adolescent Black female participants and its influence on their global and academic sense of self throughout their emerging adulthood. Some initial thematic coding (Saldana, 2013) helped me to organize the portraits of the participants which emerged through a review and analysis of interview transcripts.

Participants

The participants in this study included ten females, all of whom met inclusionary criteria to participate in this study. All of the participants self-reported their race as being Black. The participants also identified their gender as being female. Further, the participants identified their sexuality as either heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Additionally, the participants reported having current and past social media experiences.

The age of the participants ranged from ages 18 to 24. The participants included one 18-year-old, one 19-year-old, one 20-year-old, one 21-year-old, three 22-year-olds, one 23-year-old, and two 24-year-olds. The participants in these age groups represented a range of beginning and developing adult Black females. A summary of the participants' demographic background gathered during the individual interviews is found in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Participant Demographic Background Summary

Participant	Age	Race	Sexuality	Family SES	Highest Grade Completed	High School Attended	College Type	Current Work Status
Cameron	18	Black	Homosexual	Middle-Class	Attending community college	Suburban	PWI	Part time
Michelle	19	Black	Heterosexual	Middle-Class	Attending 4-year College	Urban	HBCU	Not working
Janine	20	Black	Heterosexual	Low-Income	Attending 4-year College	Rural	HBCU	Not working
Brittany	21	Black	Heterosexual	Middle-Class	Attending 4-year College	Suburban	PWI	Not working
Tammy	22	Black	Heterosexual	Middle-Class	Attending 4-year College	Suburban	PWI	Part time
Bridget	22	Black	Bisexual	Middle-Class	Attending 4-year College	Suburban	PWI	Part time
Monique	22	Black	Heterosexual	Middle-Class	Graduated 4-year college	Suburban	PWI	Full time
Amanda	23	Black	Heterosexual	Low-Income	Attending community college	Urban	PWI	Full time
Ingrid	24	Black	Heterosexual	Middle-Class	Graduated 4-year college	Urban	HBCU	Full time
Jackie	24	Black	Heterosexual	Low-Income	12th grade	Urban	Not Applicable	Full time

The participants in the study all attended and graduated from public high schools that were classified in the geographic region as either Urban, Rural, or Suburban. The participants also reported their highest level of education. The participants also identified whether they attended a Predominately White Institution (PWI) or a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). In addition, the participants reported their work status as not working, part-time, or full-time. Finally, during the initial interviews, the participants reported the type of social media they participate on regularly, the frequency of participation, and how they primarily access these social media sites (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Participants' Preferred Social Media and Frequency

Name	Age	Preferred Social Media	Social Media Frequency
Cameron	18	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter	6-10 times per day
Michelle	19	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter	6-10 times per day
Janine	20	Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter	Greater than 10 times per day
Brittany	21	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube	Less than 5 times per day
Tammy	22	Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter	6-10 times per day
Bridget	22	Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube	Greater than 10 times per day
Monique	22	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube	Greater than 10 times per day
Amanda	23	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter	Less than 5 times per day
Ingrid	24	Facebook, Instagram	6-10 times per day
Jackie	24	Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat	6-10 times per day

Cameron

Cameron is 18 years old and identified herself as a Black, homosexual female from a two-parent household where she has a younger brother and older sister. She describes her family as being close. She shared that she currently lives at home with her family. She described herself as growing up in a middle-class household and graduating from a suburban public high school in a large urban city located in the Southeast. She shared that she currently attends a community college part time and works at a local grocery store part time. She shared that she would like to become a dentist one day, which is why she is attending a community college and desires to transfer to the local public University in the next year to pursue her degree. She shared that her parents have been most influential in her life. She shared that she enjoys playing basketball and softball, and has done so most of her life. Outside of working and going to school, she volunteers as a basketball coach at her old high school. Cameron shared that she currently

uses Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter primarily through her cell phone 6 to 10 times per day.

Michelle

Michelle is a 19-year-old female and identified herself as a Black, heterosexual female from a two-parent household where she has two younger sisters. She describes her family as being loving and very close. She shared that she currently lives at home with her family when she is home from college break. She described herself as growing up in a middle-class household and graduating from an urban public high school located in the Southeast. She shared that she attends a historically black college in the Southeast where she is a Freshman graphic design major. She shared that she enjoys cooking and helping her family around the house. She also shared that she likes hanging out with her friends "to just relax and get school and stress from school off her mind." She shared that her mother has been most influential in her life. Michelle shared that "my mom has a huge impact on my life, like the main reason why I want to be successful is because of her and all the advice and things that she has told me growing up." Michelle shared that she currently uses Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter primarily through her cell phone 6 to 10 times per day.

Janine

Janine is a 20-year-old female who identified herself as a Black, heterosexual female from a single-parent household where she has an older brother and four older sisters. She shared that her mother died when she was 2 years old, and her father died when she was 16 years old. She shared that she was raised by her Aunt and older cousins.

She shared that she currently lives at home with her Aunt and cousin when she is not in college. She described herself as growing up in a low-income class home and graduated from a rural public high school. She shared that she currently attends a historically black college located in the Southeast. Janine shared that she is a Sophomore majoring in Psychology because she wants to help people. She shared she "likes listening to people and giving my advice, or giving feedback to people that need it." She shared that her older female cousin has been most influential in her life. Janine shared that her cousin "went to college and that I just want to follow her footstep, and I watch her do things, and how she helps people." She shared that she enjoys hanging out with her friends and dancing. Janine shared that she currently uses Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter primarily through her cell phone more than 10 times per day.

Brittany

Brittany is a 21-year-old who identified herself as a Black, heterosexual female. She shared that she also identifies herself as a mother since she has a 10-month old son. Brittany shared that she grew up in a two-parent household where she has a younger brother and younger sister. She describes her family as being close. She shared that she currently lives at home with her family and son. She described herself as growing up in a middle-class household and graduating from a suburban public high school located in the Southeast. She shared that she is a Senior at a local, public predominately White university where she is majoring in education. She shared that she desires to be a teacher "it's something I've always wanted to do especially playing school with my little brother and sister." She shared that prior to having her son, she enjoyed playing softball, but now

enjoys being a mother. Brittany shared that her grandmother has most influenced her life because of the overall support that she has given her. Brittany shared that she currently uses Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube primarily through her cell phone less than 5 times per day.

Tammy

Tammy is a 22-year old female who identified as being a Black, heterosexual female. She shared that she grew up in a single-parent household. She shared that her father was incarcerated for the first seven years of her life, "so it was just my mom, me, and my older brother." She shared that her mother remarried when she was 12 years old. She shared that she grew up in a middle-class family. Tammy shared that she graduated from a suburban high school in a large urban city. She described her relationship with her family as being very close and that they spend every Sunday together. She shared that she is a Senior, majoring in criminal justice at a public predominately White university in the Southeast. She shared that she would like to attend law school and become a lawyer when she graduates with her degree. Tammy shared that she works part time at a local bank as a bank teller. When she is not working or attending class, Tammy shared that she likes to sleep, and hang with out with friends and family. She shared that her parents, "my mom and stepdad, and my dad have influenced me the most and been very supportive of me." Tammy shared that she currently uses Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter primarily through her cell phone 6 to 10 times per day.

Bridget

Bridget is a 22-year-old who identified herself as a Black, bisexual female from a

two-parent household where she has a younger brother and 2 younger sisters. She shared that she and her family moved from New Jersey to the Southeast when she was 9 years old. She describes her family as being close. She shared that she currently lives at home with her mother, stepdad, brother, and sisters. She described herself as growing up in a middle-class household and graduating from a suburban public high school. She shared that she currently attends a public university in the Southeast that is predominately white. She shared that she transferred to the university after attending a community college for one semester. She shared that she is a Senior education major at an urban predominately white institution. Brittany shared that she desires to become a teacher upon graduation. She shared that she works part time at a local youth organization. She shared that her grandmother has been the most influential person in her life because she pushes her to be her best. She shared that she enjoys hanging out with her friends and family, shopping, and meeting new people in her spare time. Brittany shared that she currently uses Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and YouTube primarily through her cell phone more than 10 times per day.

Monique

Monique is a 22-year-old who identified herself as a Black, heterosexual female. She shared that she grew up in a two-parent household with her mother, father, and two younger brothers. Monique shared that she comes from a middle-class family and graduated from a suburban high school in the Southeast. She shared that she is a recent college graduate from a public university in North Carolina. She shared that she earned her degree in human development and family studies and that she would like to pursue a

Master's degree in social work in hopes of becoming a licensed social worker one day. She shared that she works full time in the social services. She shared that in her spare time, she volunteers at a local women's organization with their childbirth classes, mentors to teen parents, and reads to children. She shared that her mother has been most influential in her life because "she was my first teacher and I have learned a lot from her. Like she never gave up on me and just always pushes me to be the best I can be." Monique shared that she currently uses Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube primarily through her cell phone more than 10 times per day.

Amanda

Amanda is a 23-year-old who described herself as a Black, heterosexual female. Amanda shared that she has two boys, ages two months and three years old. She shared that she identifies with being a mother. She shared that she and her fiancé are currently co-parenting their children together. She shared that she grew up in a two-parent low-income household with her mother, father, older sister, and younger brother. She shared that she currently lives in the home with her two children, mother, father, and younger brother. She shared that she initially attended an urban high school and then transferred to a suburban high school during her 10th-grade year when her family moved to the suburbs. She shared that she works full time and attends a local community college part time where she is majoring in early childhood education. She shared that she desires to own her own daycare one day. She shared that her older sister has been most influential in her life "because when she grew up, she got out of the neighborhood that we were in and she actually went to college, and she's a really big role model to me." Amanda shared that

she currently uses Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter primarily through her cell phone less than 5 times per day.

Ingrid

Ingrid is a 24-year-old who described herself as a Black, heterosexual female. She shared that she is currently engaged and that she and her fiancé live together. She described growing up in a two-parent middle-class family with her older sister and younger brother. She shared that she was born in New York and that her family relocated to the Southeast when she was 12 years old. She shared that she attended and graduated from an urban public high school. She shared that she attended a historically black college where she majored in social work. She shared that she currently works full time in public services, but she is interested in pursuing her Master's degree in social work in the fall. She shared that her parents have been the most influential people in her life. She shared in that she enjoys talking to and spending time with her friends, likes cooking, and spending time with her family. She shared that she uses Facebook and Instagram primarily through her cell phone 6 to 10 times per day.

Jackie

Jackie is a 24-year-old who described herself as a Black, heterosexual female. She shared that she most identifies with being a mother to her two children. She shared that she and her mother, stepdad, and older brothers relocated from the Northeast to the Southeast when she was five years old. She described her family's socio-economic status as low-income. She shared that she graduated from an urban high school. She shared that she works full time as an insurance agent. She shared that she did not attend college. She

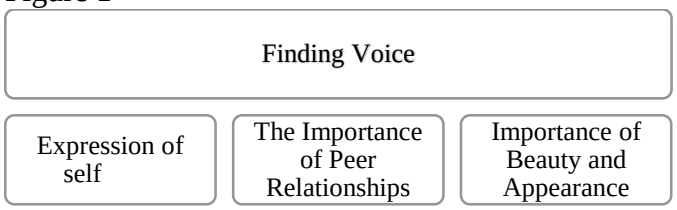
shared that her older female cousin and mother have been the most influential people in her life. Jackie shared that she has always looked up to her older female cousin because she graduated from college and that she has always looked to her for advice. She shared that when she has free time, she like to talk on the phone, hang out with friends, and spend more time with her kids. Jackie prefers to use Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat through her cell phone 6 to 10 times per day.

Finding Voice: Description of Social Media Experiences

The feature *finding voice* includes a description of the participants' experiences with social media throughout early, middle, and late adolescence. This feature presents how participants became aware of their own voice through their exploration of social media. The participants' *finding voice* represents their journey of creating their voice, albeit online or offline, as they navigated held expectations of acceptance from their parents, peers, and others' to find their authentic voice.

The guiding research question asked how the participants describe their social media experiences. In this section, participants' interactions with social were based upon their general exposure to a variety of social media networking sites, their preferred forms of social media, and how they made sense of the experiences that they shared with me. The main feature of meaning-making for these participants underpinned themes and variations describing the participants' social media experiences (Figure 1).

Figure 1



These themes and variations were closely related in how participants incorporated messages into their social media interactions. Some of the participants' experiences resulted in a change in participants' awareness while other experiences resulted in changes in how they chose to interact with others in future social media outlets.

The feature *finding voice* describes how participants gleaned information from their social media interactions. This feature presents how participants described their social media interactions. Participants' social media use highlighted their independence from parental control while emphasizing their reliance on peer approval and acceptance. This feature also presents how participants gained an awareness of what others thought about them and their consciousness to defy Black female stereotypes of them based upon what they posted on social media in late adolescence.

While the participants emphasized their sense of freedom and independence from parents on social media, they also sought peer acceptance and approval through their consumption and production of social media. The tension found between the participants' independence from parents and reliance on peer acceptance, illustrates the participants' struggle with uncovering their true self, independent of their parents and peers. Appendix H illustrates the following themes – *expression of self, the importance of peer relationships, and the importance of beauty and appearance*– illustrate how participants

took meaning from the messages received and produced during social media interactions. The themes that emerged are included in the following subsections: Expression of Self, The Importance of Peer Relationships, and the Importance of Beauty and Appearance.

Expression of Self

Participants took the meaning they acquired from peers, parents, school, and their environments to inform their social media meaning-making interactions. Social media became meaning-making experiences for the participants to "discover and express their true self." They were attentive to those instances when they were viewed and treated differently by peers, parents, and teachers through social interactions, whereby silencing their voices. For example, several participants reported not feeling like themselves when they did not feel like their ideas or opinions were heard by their parents, teachers, or friends. Additionally, being told by their most influential group of people that they were "weak," "acting like a girl," or felt like they "weren't good enough" demonstrated times in which the participants' sense of self that was not very positive.

As a part of expressing their sense of self through social media, participants integrated symbols such as music, colors, and pictures to express themselves with complete autonomy through social media. They shared stories of designing their first social media pages, selecting profile pictures, and interacting with peers on social media. The participants were careful about selecting the "right" colors, pictures, and words to describe themselves on their social media pages. They used their prior knowledge and experiences about those moments in which their voices were silenced to make sense of their current social media experiences.

Seven out of the ten participants report that their first exposure to social media began between ages 12 to 14 where they participated on the social media networking site MySpace. Participants spoke of posting pictures and "picking out the perfect profile picture" to post as their MySpace profile. One participant, Monique, talked about how "free and grown-up" she felt with creating a MySpace page. Another participant reported feeling under less parental control and being "a real teenager where I could express myself."

Three of the ten participants reported Facebook as the first social media networking site that they participated on. One participant, Cameron stated:

> It felt like the first time that I could really be me. Without apologies. I could say what I want, when I want, uninterrupted. And it felt good. I could yell or curse. I could find people I knew and talk to whoever I wanted as much as I wanted. Like I could do anything.

Participants reported that social media provided them with their first opportunity to post a profile picture, create their own page, post music to their page, and virtually interact with friends. Janine recalled the first time she created her MySpace page and reported:

> I was so excited. I remember first hearing about it at school from some people. And then I went to the school library with a friend and got on the computer to check it out. So we went on the website and was like oh okay. I was excited that I could choose the colors on my page and I could even have music playing. I could even decide who was going to be in my top eight friend list.

Amanda shared that "this was the first time that I had complete control over what I could do in my life." Sharing this same sentiment, Monique, Janine, Michelle, Jackie, Brittany, Bridget, and Tammy reported that having the ability to create their social media pages provided them with a platform to express who they were. Michelle stated, "I used

social media to say things that I wouldn't normally say about things and to people I wouldn't normally say anything to." Several of the participants agreed that growing up in "strict households" confined their ability to participate in certain activities. According to five of the participants, their households were more of where "children are seen and not heard." Janine shared, "I just didn't have much of an opinion around that time, or at least not in my house because I wasn't an adult and I had to be quiet. That was just the rules in my house." Participants agreed that their voices were heard and expressed through their social media profile pages.

Throughout adolescent development, the participants reported their continued use on social media. Seven of the ten participants reported that as they transitioned from middle school to high school that they became more active in social media. Ingrid described her social media participation in high school as "very active" because social media was popular. Participants understood from previous interaction in middle school that their increased social media use was relative to their peer interaction. While they desired acceptance from peers, they also sought some level of independence from their parents. When asked how they became more active in social media, the participants shared that they not only posted pictures of themselves and friends but that they also began commenting on others' posts and pages. The participants' sense of autonomy and independence was demonstrated through their participation of posting pictures of themselves and friends, as well as commenting on others' posts and pages. Four of the ten participants reported using social media to watch music videos and television shows while in high school. One participant, Monique, recalled, "I used to watch music videos

on social media because my parents wouldn't let me watch them at home. So I would sneak and watch them." Several participants also reported that as they transitioned from high school or if they moved, social media became "an easy way to stay in contact with family and friends."

Participants reported that their ability to choose the type of groups to join, ability to like others' posts, interacting with others, filtering messages from others, choosing their profile pictures, and changing their statuses contributed to ways in which they expressed themselves on social media. Tammy shared that she likes that she can "decide who I want to be friends with or not, or even what I like, and post to my page, or allow to be posted to my page." Several of the participants agreed that they like the ability to "filter people and messages" on their social media sites. Monique shared, "I could be as involved or not depending on how I felt or what I had going on at the time." The sense of autonomy and freedom in which the participants gain through their social media experiences offers a sense of liberation throughout their adolescent development.

Two participants reported using social media to "laugh and have a good time." Further, participants shared that social media became their primary source for obtaining information about what was going on in the world. One participant, Amanda, reported, "it became my source of news and information because I didn't watch the news or read the paper." Another participant, Ingrid, reported, "whatever was going on at school or even in the community or even to find out about what's going on with celebrities, you will find it out on social media faster than anywhere else." Cameron reported, "I can just click on the app on my phone, scroll down my timeline and find out whatever I want, whenever I

want, and boom that's it. Just that fast. Just that simple." Bridget shared, "whether the information is true or not, you still have it." Tammy reported:

> like now, I can read a news story from my timeline or even post a story I read on my page. I just feel smarter knowing about stuff other than the hottest song or latest fashion trend. Like I did that.

The participants' abilities to access and obtain news and information in an instant, and with ease contributes to their decision to continue their social media interaction.

Several participants agreed that they have often posted their "feelings about things going on in their lives" throughout the tenure of their social media experiences and that at times, they lack filters and "just say whatever." Jackie shared:

> sometimes I just say whatever I want…just whatever comes to my mind, comes right out on my page. I just don't hold back. It doesn't matter who follows me, who likes me, or nothing. I just say it. And I feel good because I said it.

Many of the participants agreed that they feel comfortable about expressing their viewpoints on social media. Several participants reported feeling like they could "be themselves" on "certain social media sites" and not others.

Six of the ten participants also reported using social media as a source of motivation and inspiration. Michelle shared, "it's a way for me stay motivated and encouraged. I could post something about not having a good day, and the next I'm getting messages about staying focused or something from friends." Several participants reported staying positive on their social media pages and found it important to "be a positive role model for younger girls." Monique shared, "it's important to me just to be a positive person, so that's why I only post things that are encouraging or motivational."

The subthemes emerged from the participants' early, middle, and late adolescent social media experiences reveal their sense of independence, self-expression, and sense of connection as their primary reasons for participating in social media. As indicated in the literature on adolescent development, during early and middle adolescence, self-exploration and self-discovery (Ashford & LeCray, 2012) were the underlying factors influencing their developing self-concept. The participants' social media experiences reflect their struggles to find their true self during this vulnerable time of their lives.

The Importance of Peer Relationships

As the participants begin to understand their sense of self through their social media experiences of their expression of self, social media also served as a mechanism in which they began to see themselves differently with their peers than with their parents as they seek to find their true selves (Harter, 1999). The participants agreed that they sought peer acceptance and approval throughout their adolescent developmental period. One participant, Jackie, recalled her first desire in creating a social media page:

> I remember hearing about it from somebody at school and I just had to have one…I asked my mom for a computer just so I could create a MySpace page and she said that we didn't have the money for that…. if I wanted one, I had to figure out how to do it myself. So I remember going to a friend's house to create my page. After that, I would either go to a friend's house or the library at school or my grandparents' house to post stuff.

Nine out of the ten participants agreed that they used social media during their early and middle adolescent years to "fit in," "post daily status updates," and at times, "maybe even hourly status updates." The participants' desire for peer acceptance consists of positive and negative appraisals as they seek self-acceptance. When answering the question, one

participant stated: “I just felt like I had to update my status to everyone so they would know what I was doing.” Participants viewed this as their way of staying connected with others, and a way for others to stay connected to them. Michelle acknowledged, “it was just a way to stay connected.”

The importance of peer approval and acceptance to participants was a central component to their developing sense of self. Many of the participants reported that they felt “awkward” while in middle school, and viewed their transition to high school as a way to “start over.” Participants reported that their participation on social media is where they learned about the latest trends and fashion. They told stories of how they wanted to be popular in high school and felt like if they could impress their peers with how they dressed then they would be better accepted by their peers. Brittany shared, “I just remember looking at how the cool people dressed and what they posted as being nice or in and would tell my mom that I wanted that particular dress or shirt or pants.” Amanda shared a time when she wanted to look like peer in school. She explained:

> I even remember wanting my hair to be like this girl that was a Senior my 9th-grade year just cause she was really popular and I felt like if I looked like her, then I would fit in. Like I don’t even know where she got her style from…but I just knew that I wanted to look and dress like her. As soon as she would post a picture of herself on Facebook, I would ask my mom or my sister to take me shopping just so I could get something that looked as close to her as possible.

All of the participants agreed that their early social media experiences affected how they felt they should dress, wear their hair, the type of music they should listen to, as well as who they should be friends with and who should not be their friends. Amanda

shared that “fashion” was important at her school, and that to be “popular” you had to wear the latest style of clothing. Another participant, Bridget stated:

> I really took everything to heart on social media when I was in high school. Like everything. Every little thing that somebody said about me on social media I was either in tears or happy about. Like it affected me a lot emotionally. If somebody said I looked fat or something, then I was trying to lose weight. Or if somebody said they didn’t like my hair, then I was changing my hair style. It was almost like I wasn’t good enough unless somebody else said that I was. Like I was just trying to be popular. I just remember being so self-conscious about what was posted about me, even if it wasn’t on my page and on my friend’s page or something. It was terrible. I was still trying to figure out who I was, where I fit in, and what group of people I wanted to be around.

Participants, Amanda, Monique, Ingrid, Bridget, and Brittany agreed that their peers’ comments about them in middle school made them feel “fat and insecure.”

Participants agreed that they felt more self-conscious about their bodies and clothing based on their peers’ perspectives. Several participants admitted to dieting, changing hair styles, what music to listen to, and even who to friend on social media was based on their peers’ perspectives. Ingrid shared, “I just remember wanting to be liked by people, so I did what I thought was expected of me.” When asked where they thought their peers’ ideas of beauty and fashion derived from, the participants reported from “different types of media.” Several participants agreed that the messages on social media are widely broadcasted and as stated by Janine, “everybody knew what everybody was doing, watching, who was dating who, and where they were gonna do every weekend.” Michelle shared, “I kept my social media page because I wanted to be a part of something. And that was my way. Right or Wrong.”

Several participants admitted to wanting to be "popular" as they transitioned to high school. Monique shared that she and her friends measured their popularity in high school by the number of friends they had on social media. In the same regard, Cameron recalled "feeling good whenever she received a friend request from someone." Ingrid agreed that it "made me feel special when someone liked my posts." Brittany recalled:

I remember joining certain pages because my friends on the softball team were members of those pages and they told me that I should join. I didn't even like that stuff, but I did it just to fit it.

Several participants admitted to wanting to be liked by boys, which is why they agreed to certain things that they shared they "would have never done." One participant, Bridget reported:

> When I was in high school, I had this boyfriend and he wanted me to look like Megan Good so bad because he saw a picture of her this social media site. He was like you got the lips for it…So my hair is short and always has been…but I remember getting a weave and I went to school the next day and he did not even speak to me…by the time I got home, he had changed his relationship status from *in a relationship* to *single.* And I just remember feeling so horrible. Like that was probably the lowest I ever felt about myself.

Another participant, Jackie shared:

> I was in a relationship for two years with my boyfriend in high school, and it was our Senior Year and we were sexually active. I performed oral sex on him and he asked me if he could video record it, and I consented…a week or so later, he posted it on YouTube. I didn't even know that he did it until I started getting like all these pages and stuff cause it was after school. Then when I realized what was going on, it was nothing I could do about it. It was probably the worst time of my life. People were posting very derogatory stuff on my page, and I had to just pretend like I didn't care. I had to get thick skin fast. It was just humiliating.

In spite of Jackie and Bridget's negative experiences with peers on social media, they both attributed their resiliency to having "good friends" who supported them. Participants agreed that it was important to them to not only have their parents' approval but the support of their friends in which was offered to them through social media. Although participants agreed that social media was a way "to stay connected to friends," they also continue to seek validation of self through their peers' approval.

In contrast to the initial fun and ability to express self on social media, it was found that while in high school, that several participants encountered chose to limit their social media interaction due to conflict with peers. Bridget talked about how for her, aspects of her social media usage became infused with "a lot of drama." Several participants shared that they "had to take a step back from social media" because "it was just a lot of drama going on" throughout their later years of high school on social media. One participant, Janine recalls:

> I had to delete and block some people on my social media because they always had something negative to say every time I posted something or even liked something. Like it just got to be too much. I couldn't even be myself anymore on there.

The "drama" as many participants described, resulted from conflict with peers and the participants agreed that when their parents created social media pages or friends of their parents created social media pages, that they became conscious about what they posted on their social media pages out of fear of disappointing their parents. Monique admitted, "at one point it just seemed like a lot of he say/she say stuff being posted on

social media from people at school that just kindof kept stuff stirred up between people." Cameron agreed, saying:

> Yeah, it was just a lot of bullying on Facebook if people didn't like you for whatever reason. I found myself doing the same negative stuff because of I saw people that I was hanging around at the time that were not good influences on me. It was like we were part of the Bad Girls Club or something. I mean I made a lot of bad decisions at that time.

Michelle reported that she "took a break from the negativity surrounding how the females were interacting on social media."

The participants agreed that maturity played a major role in the type of content they posted on social media. The participants discussed their changing perceptions of their social media participation and their feelings surrounding why they felt like they had to be more conscious of what they posted and allowed to be posted on their social media sites. Nine of the ten participants reported using the different social media sites for different purposes where they could be professional on one site and "be me" on another. One participant, Tammy, stated:

> Like I'm very conscious of what I post on certain social media sites. I just refuse to be *that girl* – the one who acts like the stereotypical ghetto Black girl – being loud, cursing on my page, posting ratchet half naked pictures of myself, shaking my butt and stuff. Like I just refuse on my public social media sites.

As the participants have further developed cognitively, emotionally, and physically, their social media experiences have changed as well. One participant, Brittany, stated that "I've changed since I was younger like in middle school and high school, and I've just been able to put things into perspective now." The participants discussed their feelings for changing their social media participation. They agreed that

they have "grown" and "matured a lot" since they were younger. One participant, Ingrid, stated:

> I just need to be around positive stuff and I recognize that everybody is not like that so I'm selective about who I friend and follow on these sites. I'm also selective about what I post because it's a true reflection of me.

Tammy shared a story about something she observed on social media which made her reflect on her own experiences. She explained:

> I remember seeing this girl named India Love on social media – she's from this tv show called Meeting the Westbrooks. On the show, her dad was talking to her about things she posts on social media and how he doesn't approve…. the very next day, I go on Instagram and see a half-naked picture of her in just her panties and bra – just some very revealing photos. And I guess for me, I am conscious of what my dad would think of me I did something like that so I don't.

Another participant, Monique attributed changes to the messages and images that she posts on social media to "my spirituality" and "I want to be proud of the messages that I send."

Importance of Beauty and Appearance

Concepts of beauty and appearance for the participants during early and middle adolescence came from ascriptions from their peers' and dominant media images and messages about beauty in media. Participants reported seeing celebrity style and fashion, as well as concepts of beauty on social media. Several participants admitted to purchasing clothing or make-up because their favorite celebrity was wearing the clothing or make-up. Amanda and Bridget admitted to "buying make-up that a celebrity wore" to look "better." Similarly, many participants admitted to "changing their physical appearance to get someone to like them." Several participants shared that a post, news story,

advertisement, or seeing a celebrity on social media made them think about how they looked and from that experience, "made them want to change some physical aspect of themselves." One participant, Bridget, talked about a time when she changed her eye color to get noticed by a boy. She stated:

> I changed my eye color one time because a guy that I liked and followed from my school posted that he liked girls with light brown eyes, so I got colored contacts so my eyes could be that color just so he could pay attention to me.

Eight of ten participants discussed how they saw images of girls as being white, thin, long and blonde hair and they felt a need to conform to this idea of beauty because this is what they saw on media and as Cameron shared, "I thought it was right because it was in the media and my friends were talking about that's you should look on social media." One participant, Monique, stated how she struggled with her own body image during middle school:

> I definitely think Black girls struggle with body image more than anyone cause it's like we're put out there like our bodies and the way we look are put out there more than our intellect. I remember hating my body in middle school…I was overweight and tried like every diet and everything…my mom took me to see a dietician but I just couldn't lose the weight. I was teased so much for being the fat girl. And I just felt so bad, like I wasn't nothing. You know. It hurt...and then 9th grade, when school started, everybody was like dang you look good, and I felt good too. But I was the same person. Literally the same person but just thinner.

Monique's experience with being teased about her weight, and not being accepted by her peers as a result of not being thin or looking like her peers' ideas of beauty is an example of how girls during early and middle adolescence traverse concepts of beauty and ideal female image. Likewise, Bridget talked about how even during late adolescence, as a college student how she struggled with her weight and body image. She stated:

> And just having to make decisions and saying like my body's healthy no matter how it looks because I had put on a lot of weight when I got sick... I just put on so much weight... damn I'm fat now.

Bridget goes on further to say:

> I think now that with social media and media in general and tv and the way they depict us and how these girls look on Instagram sometimes there are so many girls that look similar and really just have thin waists and huge butts, huge breasts. Whether they are fake or not. Every girl wants that. Like every girl I talk to wants a waist trainer and I'm like it's not that serious cause in a few years big waists is gonna be in again… it's hard cause even sometimes I find myself saying maybe I should get a waist trainer or something…when I first started losing weight…I was like dang my butt is gone. Like every time somebody mentions you lost weight it's like it does something to me. Like that's not what I want cause I know my breasts are next and what are people gonna think cause I'm used to being curvy. So now that those are kindof leaving I'm feeling kindof lost.

Bridget expounded on the idea of being "fake" to achieve the perfect sense of beauty, and the phenomena of plastic surgery or purchasing certain products such as waist trainers to have the perfect body in order to be beautiful. Nine of the ten participants reported seeing advertisements for waist trainers on their social media pages, encouraging women to purchase the product to achieve a standard of beauty.

Equal to Bridget's struggle with her own ideas of beauty was similar to that of Amanda. She reported, "I always thought that because I don't have a big butt that no guy would like me. So when I got my first boyfriend, I was like, oh look at me because I never thought I was pretty because I was a big girl, but I didn't have a butt." Amanda reported that in Black culture, a Black female is considered "nice looking if she has a big butt." Janine added:

> You see women like Kim Kardashian who is curvy, but her butt not like Black girls. Ours is natural, but now that White people like her, they think she pretty and exotic looking cause of her butt and all before she was just regular.

Courtney shared:

> that's why a lot of white girls are getting butt injections that don't have butts like that, but then when you see Nicki Minaj, whose butt is just not natural, it takes things to a whole different level….it makes a man think every woman is supposed to look like that to be nice looking and it make women think they supposed to look like that to get a man.

Another participant, Tammy, stated:

> I think now that with social media and media in general and the way they depict us and how these girls look on Instagram and Facebook, sometimes there are so many girls that want to look like that…because that's what society says is beautiful.

The participants agreed that social media projects female images of thin, long and blonde hair. Tammy reported, "but when you try to accept your own body and your own beauty, you see images that try to destroy your own beliefs." Cameron agreed, saying that "the advertisements that pop up on your social media pages are the complete opposite of what I look like." She explained that "even the Black girls are skinny, with the long weave. Is that what pretty is supposed to be?" Bridget shared that the Black women models she sees are thin, but "they have the perfect breasts, and big butts, with a long weave down their backs." She explained that the concept of "white beauty is different than Black beauty." Monique shared that "I just think that these ideas of what pretty comes from men. They construct this. And even though I know that these ideas are someone else thoughts, I still find myself looking up new diets and exercise regimens." Ingrid explained that the concept of beauty is so deeply ingrained in our minds and that "Black women aren't seen as beautiful; we're seen as sexual. We can't be pretty. Look at videos."

The participants admitted that although they may not fit the ideal female body image, and that they are very conscious of this image not being realistic, they still struggle with wanting to be "beautiful" and "comfortable" in their own bodies whether they are thin or not. The participants have learned to embrace their own curvy figures as women of color. Further, the participants shared that "it's a little easier now because curvy is in." They shared that although there is less emphasis on being thin and having long hair, that beauty for women of color is that of being a curvy woman with a thin waist. The conflict for the participants is that "not all Black women have small waists," and societal messages and images embrace "big breasts, small waist, and big hips." The participants insist that Black females have to define their own beauty and be okay with their own bodies as long as they are healthy. While several participants struggled with their body image and weight gain as defined by society's idea of them being overweight; the participants engaged in normal dieting to help them lose weight rather than developing eating disorders.

The participants also talked about differences in hair and the dichotomy of having "good" and "bad" hair. Bridget shared, "I just feel comfortable wearing my hair any way I like. I mean, I've never had long hair." The participants admitted that they feel more comfortable wearing their natural hair out at home than in public for fear of being negatively judged by their hair. Jackie admitted, "when I go to work, I make sure that my hair is straightened out. On the weekend, I wear my naturally curly, big hair." She explained that it would be a problem if she went to work as a Black woman with big, naturally curly hair and that she would be racially stigmatized. Michelle agreed, saying

that “nappy hair is not seen a pretty or socially acceptable. So you conform to what makes the majority comfortable. It’s like code-switching with your hair.” Brittany added, “there are several social media pages where you can join and get support on how to wear your natural hair.” Monique added, “I actually think that it’s becoming more acceptable in certain environments than in others.” The participants agreed that while long hair is seen as the dominant concept of beauty, that more conversations are being had about embracing natural Black women’s hair on social media.

The participants discussed their feelings and experiences of being girls developing into womanhood, and the struggles they had with their body image and racial self-concept. Although five of the ten participants reported using social media to receive positive comments about herself, several participants had a sense of apprehension about using social media for fear of negative comments. In comparison, several participants talked about how very conscious peers made them about their race after being exposed to a variety of images and messages on social media. One participant, Tammy, talked openly and explicitly about her struggle with her complexion growing up and how the standard of beauty was to be light-skinned. Tammy explained:

> I'm a darker complexion than a lot of people. So growing up….in middle school, I used to always get picked on by the boys and girls about how dark I was…I was kind of insecure, and I would just be like questioning, you know, everything, so My mom. Like, growing up, she'd always tell me, you're a beautiful girl. You're a smart girl. If nobody likes you, that's okay. Then my father, he, would say if they don’t like you, forget them.

Several participants shared that they were reluctant to post pictures of themselves on their social media site in middle school out of fear of being teased or rejected by her

peers because of their skin complexion. Tammy, specifically talked about having to learn how to love herself and her skin complexion and that "black is beautiful." Tammy admitted that "it was difficult for a long time, but I kept remembering what my mother would say that I was smart and beautiful no matter what anyone said." Tammy, Janine, and Jackie reported being made very conscious about the darker skin complexion as early as elementary school. Jackie recalled seeing her first skin bleaching ad on social media and admitted:

> I wanted to get that same cream thinking that it would lighten up my skin complexion so I could feel more accepted by my peers. I mean my parents always told me that I was beautiful, but I wanted to hear it from somebody other than them.

Another participant, Bridget, talked about her perceptions of Black girls struggling with skin complexion and idea of beauty:

> Like even in my skin complexion, I see where people accept me more because I'm lighter skinned than like my best friend who is darker skinned with people not accepting darker complexions. And like I think she's beautiful but she's struggled with that all her life especially being in the south.

Janine shared:

> I struggled with my complexion for a long time. Like I hated myself. I have full lips, a big butt, and I'm dark-skinned. Back when I was growing up, dark-skinned was not in. I would purposely not post pictures of myself on social media until I was like in high school when I knew more people and stuff because I was afraid somebody was going to crack on me because of my complexion. I wanted to be white. I remember using skin bleach to try to lighten my complexion.

In contrast, one participant, Amanda, talked about her experiences in high school and how she looked to social media as "support" when she began attending predominately white high school in 10th grade because she was one of few Black students

who attended her school. She reported that she purposely joined certain groups on Facebook because they "had a Black agenda" because I didn't see people who liked like me at this majority white school." She went on to talk about her experiences in 9th grade at a predominately Black high school where she "wasn't Black enough," and how she felt having a "lighter complexion" than many of the students in her classes and being "teased for being so light." Amanda explained, "but I was still Black, regardless of how light I was. I just didn't understand."

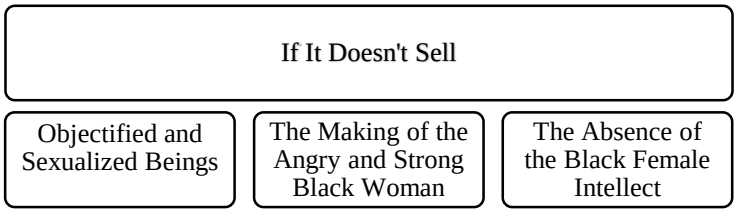
Tammy, Janine, and Amanda experienced issues with colorism where they each received differential treatment as a result of the social values associated with skin color (Walker, 1982). While Tammy and Janine were initially afraid to really engage with social media due to fear of rejection and not being accepted by peers, Amanda utilized social media as a mechanism of support and encouragement. Although the participants agreed that they received validation about their black beauty at home from their parents, they still desired to be accepted and regarded by their peers as beautiful.

Overall, almost all of the participants were conscious of the images and messages that they post on social media in their emerging adulthood because of the perceptions of their professional lives, parents' views, and their developing concepts of beauty as adult Black women in the world. Although social media was an outlet in which the participants found a sense of voice, they agreed that maturity played a major role in the type of content they posted on social media. The theme in this section also reveals the participants' discovery of their perceptions of their true self as they develop into adult Black women through their use of voice to express their ideas, feelings, and beliefs.

If It Doesn’t Sell: Black Female Images on Social Media

In this section, participants explain their experiences with the images they have seen and continue to see of Black females on social media. It is the participants’ perceptions of their social media experiences with how Black females are portrayed, and in turn, how these perceptions influence their sense of self in late adolescence. The guiding research question asked in what ways do the participants perceive images of Black females on social media. In this section, the main feature seen in Figure 2 illustrates the underlying themes and variations describing the participants’ understanding of how Black females are portrayed in social media.

Figure 2



These themes and variations in Appendix I was closely related in how participants incorporated messages into their understanding of race, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices in their social media interactions.

The feature *if it doesn’t sell* describes how participants perceived images of Black females which influence their developing sense of self and their social media experiences. Participants’ social media experiences and interactions with others

underpinned larger assumptions connected to advertising and maintenance of historical stereotypes of Black females as racialized and engendered beings. It also emphasized social media's failure to include multiple perspectives of Black females as diverse, dynamic, and academically successful. This feature highlights the interlocking systems of oppression which continue to bind and typecast Black females in racist and antifeminist roles.

The participants in this section discussed how influential the images and messages they saw of Black females on social media. The participants reported "not really seeing positive images" of Black females on social media throughout their adolescent development. While participants were able to identify positive Black women that they either know personally or even perhaps have seen or heard about in the media in general; very few were able to identify positive images of Black females that they have seen on social media. Further, the participants reported seeing Black females in music videos and in other aspects of media culture, however, only two participants reported seeing academically successful Black women on social media that were not women that they knew personally. The themes that emerged in this feature are included in the following subsections: Objectified and Sexualized Beings, The Making of the Angry and Strong Black Woman, and The Absence of the Black Female Intellect.

Objectification and Sexualized Beings

Participants used the meaning they took from previous interactions with their social media environments to shape their interactions as part of the dynamic development of their sense of self. The shared meaning created during interactions with others

(Robbins, et al., 2012) contributed to their use of observations of how Black females are viewed and treated on social media, and in real life. In these observations, the participants described seeing Black females portrayed as and objectified beings in this online world. Participants painstaking description of Black females on social media were characterized as derogatory and demeaning. Participants used these meaning-making experiences to make sense of what was happening to other women that looked like them.

The participants agreed that the images of Black females on social media were all but positive. Several participants shared experiences of observing the behaviors of Black females that were labeled as "negative," which they incorporated into an awareness of their sense of racial and gendered selves. Three of the ten participants reported seeing positive Black females on social media. One participant, Brittany, stated that she has seen "Marian Wright Elderman and Maya Angelou on social media and the Black girl who took down the confederate flag in South Carolina." Two participants reported Oprah and Michelle Obama as positive images of Black women that they see on social media. When asked about why were there so few positive images and messages about Black females on social media, one participant reported: "because it doesn't sell."

The participants agreed that the majority of images of Black females on social media were "negative" and "sexualized," and that these were selling features to the mass public. At least eight participants reported pervasive images of Black females on social media in hypersexualized music videos and pictures. The participants agreed that Black females were portrayed in misogynistic roles on social media. Similarly, Amanda shared that Black women are depicted as "hoes and strippers" most times. Agreeing with that

point, Bridget said, “I feel like we’re seen as sex symbols to guys rather than as a valuable person.” Michelle shared, “it just seems like so much focus is on our bodies…like you have to have really big breasts or a big butt…and like that’s all you’re seen as.” Michelle explained that “the music industry and popular culture allow for Black women in videos to be degraded.” Brittany admitted:

> I don’t know if things will ever change. These are such dominant images of Black women being seen this way and influences how young girls think about themselves and what they should look like. I remember wanting to look the exact same way as women I saw in the videos I used to watch growing up. I thought that for me to be pretty that I had to look and dress that way. Even now, I have to be conscious of how I dress and even how I carry myself so that I won’t be seen like girls in videos. So it’s like a repeated cycle.

Amanda shared that these “images of these women like this draw attention.” Amanda explained, “there are more symbols of us in media, and especially social media with uploading videos that show us popping and dancing seductively.” Bridget agreed:

> it’s a continuous battle, and I know I struggle. I follow Deelishis on Instagram just to see what she’s up to now. And I know better, but even I still do it.

The participants agreed that while they like to receive comments about how they look, it is important for them to be seen as more than “sex symbols.” Michelle explained that she finds herself “trying not to dress so seductively, but I want to be sexy, but I also want to be respected.” She shared that “I don’t understand why I can’t wear a short dress and not be mistaken for a video ho. It just doesn’t make sense.” Jackie shared:

> you do get a lot of attention when you dress provocatively, especially having a big butt or big breasts. I have thought what if I had a big butt like that, but then I think that there’s a lot of negative attention that comes from that type of attention as well.

The participants agreed that Black women are depicted in social media as "promiscuous and wild, and strippers to get love and attention, and are often referred to as bitches." Monique shared:

> the sad thing is that many women depend on their bodies to get things. But you'll see the video vixens promoted even before the female athletes…I think that if you're not a video vixen, or on some type of love and hip hop something, that Black women are not portrayed in a positive light.

Ingrid commented, "if you see these women on social media, they do use their bodies to get men to pay their bills, or buy them things." Bridget commented:

> Look at Beyonce. She is very talented and has a banging body but you don't hear anybody talking about how smart she is. They'll say she can sing and then the next thing is that they'll talk about her body. I think she's gorgeous, but her being smart is not the first thing that comes to mind nor is it what she's known for and I actually think she's very smart with how she's handled her career.

Janine supported this statement by saying that "Beyonce sells sex and sex sells. Period." Michelle added, "sex is glorified on social media. Just look at girls' pictures on their pages and see their poses and the clothes they have on." Tammy insisted that "young girls are just repeating what they think sells or will get them out of the hood." She went on to explain that young girls' ideas of beauty are that you have to be sexy, and sexy to them means you half naked with your breasts out and your butt poking out." Janine shared, "men don't care whether you're smart of dumb, they're only interested in getting your body. And it's more to me than just my body." The participants agreed that they struggle with re-defining what "sexy" is for themselves and that they "try not to conform to others' degrading ideas of what that means."

The Making of the Angry and Strong Black Woman

The portrayal of Black females on social media as being "angry" was a common theme in which the participants identified as being significant for them. It was also pivotal for the participants to exhibit qualities of being a strong Black woman, and often affirmed the idea of being assertive as also being strong. The participants agreed that Black women are characterized as being "loud and angry even when she is not acting loud and angry." Monique recalled viewing a live news commentary on social media about a Michelle Obama "Get Fit" campaign, and shared that although "she was doing something positive, the media wanted to spin it around and say that she was being too aggressive." Amanda explained, "but look at Michelle Obama, she's smart and pretty; so why is that because she's to the point that she has to be angry?" Jackie explained that media "almost wants Black women to be angry."

Brittany shared that Black women are often misidentified as being angry because she is assertive, but explains that "Black women have to be assertive and smarter, and know that she's smarter because it's harder for Black women to be taken seriously." Jackie shared that Black women have to be strong. She went to say that as wives, mothers, and career professionals, that you have to be strong to be able to "balance all those roles." Monique added that in order to be successful personally and professionally while dealing with negativity from other, that her mother was emphatic that she be a "strong Black woman." Michelle shared that she takes honor in being a "woman of strength," but admits that it can be tough living up to every expectation of the multiple roles that Black women feel the sense to balance. Additionally, Tammy shared that Black women have to be strong and that in order to carry her family, "she cannot be weak and

she has to always find a way." Seven of the ten participants identified their mothers as strong Black women while all of the participants identified having seen images of strong Black women on social media whom they identify with. The participants agreed that the challenges that Black women encounter are not the same as other races, including Black men.

The thin line between being labeled as angry and assertive is visible in the everyday experiences of Black females. For example, Ingrid shared a story about returning a shirt to a store and how she had to "get a little more aggressive with the cashier and insist on a refund and that my shirt had not been worn." Ingrid shared, "I'm not even like a loud person, but just the fact that I had to put a little more bass in my voice to get this lady to do my return because of her assumption that I had worn the shirt was ridiculous." Cameron agreed that "I'm a comedian, and I have had to be that way before just so I could be taken seriously." Monique shared:

> but why do Black women have to act that way to be taken seriously. Nobody else does that. Not white men or women and Black men either. I mean she's called a bitch and she angry just so nobody will walk all over her?

Bridget explained, "at some point it's hard to not be angry if somebody always think you are when you not." Tammy shared:

> It is difficult for young, Black girls to continue to see and hear images of people that look like them acting this way, and not at some point, begin to act the same way because it's seen as acceptable.

Eight out of the ten participants reported watching videos of other girls fighting in the community on social media. Janine shared that she was a member of a local community girls' fight club page on one of her social media sites. She and the other

participants talked about how they did not condone viewing these social media pages, yet they watched girls they know fight on these pages. The participants discussed how peers influenced them to fights other girls "for no good reason." One of the participants stated, "I've gotten into a couple of fights just because of things that other girls posted about me on social media when I was in high school just because I couldn't think for myself." Amanda reported that she used to "feel fat" and "I was angry and I used to get into a lot of trouble for fighting in my neighborhood and at school. But I felt like that was the only way I could get that attention was to fight." The participants discussed their fight with their own struggles with feeling misunderstood and sense of self as they tried to fit in with peers during early and middle adolescence.

When asked, the participants agreed that adolescent Black girls were seen more on social media fighting each other than any other race or ethnicity. One participant, Jackie, reported that "there is even a Facebook page devoted strictly to watching videos of girls fighting." Another participant, Courtney, stated that "there are groups on different social media sites that you can join to watch Black girls fight in whatever community you live in." Two participants reported being members of similar pages that show Black girls in their communities that fight each other. When asked if these images of Black girls fighting contributed to any stereotypes of Black females, the participants agreed that these videos portray Black females as negative, violent, and angry. The participants agreed that such pages contribute to Black females being stereotyped and labeled as being "angry and uneducated."

The Absence of the Black Female Intellect

All of the participants agreed that most of the images they see of Black females on social media do not represent them as being "smart or intelligent." Several participants cited seeing celebrity Black female figures such as Venus and Serena Williams on social media but failed to see them portrayed in any other way other than their being athletic. Further, the participants explained that "if you want to see Black women as smart or academically successful, then you have to search for them on social media or the internet." Monique shared, "even then, you have to be conscious of looking for successful and intelligent Black women."

Six out of eight participants identified as having smart or academically successful Black female friends on social media. When asked to describe "smart, academically successful, Black women," the participants shared that smart Black women look "educated, intelligent, confident, sophisticated, well-put together, and articulate." Tammy shared "it's not common to see Black women this way on social media or just in general." Michelle recalled, "I've only seen Black women like that on like two television shows – Being Mary Jane and Oprah." Bridget added:

> I remember reading this news story on social media about Black women being the highest population of college graduates. That was one story ever that I ready about Black women being smart. I hadn't seen anything else like that and those are definitely not stories that were popular or shared across social media. Matter of fact, I only saw that story because I was looking up something for class.

The participants agreed that being a smart or academically successful Black woman does not necessarily mean that she has to be a college graduate. Ingrid shared, "I think that as a smart Black woman, you have to be an innovative thinker." The participants shared that

although they have seen confident Black women on social media, they do not see them all as academically confident Black women. Jackie shared, “these women can be shaking their behinds and be confident, but it doesn’t mean that they are smart or academically confident.”

The participants described their social media experiences of seeing academically confident Black women as being extremely limited. The participants shared that Black women overall not depicted as being academically confident on social media, however, they are often portrayed as being “hypersexual, baby mamas, maids, video vixens, or selling sex.” This underscores the interpretation of Black females as only being seen in misogynistic and objectified ways on social media. The participants characterized the negative racialized and objectified stereotypes of Black females are selling features for men and servitude for White women. When asked how the stress from racial and antifeminist stereotypes seen on social media influence their academic achievement or achievement-related behaviors (e.g. studying for tests, motivation to attend school, being a good student, belief about academic ability, etc.), the participants reported that “it doesn’t encourage you to do well academically,” but it does serve as a “motivator” for the participants to not be like the women they see on social media. One participant, Cameron, shared “that’s why I study so I won’t have to be that girl looking for a come up or a job like that.” The participants agreed that social media does not project images or messages about academically confident Black females to encourage positive academic-related behaviors for young, Black girls.

The participants described times in which they have seen social media degrade Black women's efforts in pursuing higher education as being "not good enough." For example, Bridget shared a time that she saw a post on social media about being dumb if you go to a community college. She explained that "it pissed me off because I went to a community college before I transferred to the four-year college that I'm at now. I felt like another Black person who could not get into a four-year college." Amanda added, "I'm just going to stay positive and when I transfer, then I'll transfer." Ingrid reported, "I took summer school classes at a community college and didn't see anything wrong with it." Cameron shared a story about one day while working at a local grocery store, an "old white woman" asked her what is she doing. Cameron explained, "this lady had a judgmental mind, and asked what was I doing besides working." Cameron said that when she told her that she was also attending a community college, that the lady walked away. Cameron reported that "it wasn't until I said that I'm on the dental transfer program to the University that she stopped to actually have a conversation with me." Cameron said that she felt like "I was judged, but I was still working hard to achieve something."

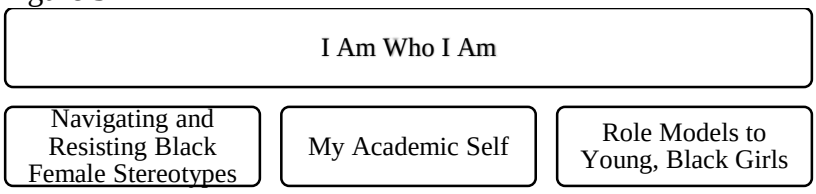
The absence of the academically confident Black females on social media indicates popular notions of Black women as having the inability to be smart and successful. The participants' social media experiences of Black women being anything but "intelligent" are overshadowed by dominant images and messages of them being stereotypically negative. The participants' ability to identify and seek out positive and intellectually confident Black women images on social media illustrates their desire to see more of these images of Black females. The participants' social media experiences of

"you are what you see" as being positive or negative also highlight the underpinnings of them understanding their developing sense of self as both Black and women.

I Am Who I Am: Understanding One's Sense of Self

The feature *I am who I* examine how the participants understand their sense of self globally and academically based upon their past and current social media experiences. It further examines the ways in which the participants use social media to navigate and resist racial and gendered stereotypes while also managing the development of their sense of self globally and academically. This feature highlights the participants' social media experiences as they navigate interlocking systems of oppression they encounter through their social media experiences. The participants' perceptions of their efforts, view of self globally and academically, and value placed on self as it relates to their developing self-concept as influenced by their decision to consume and produce social media over and again. In this section, Figure 3 highlights the main feature of meaning-making for these participants which essential themes and variations describing the participants' understanding of self.

Figure 3



Appendix K features subthemes for this section as follows: Navigating and Resisting Black Female Stereotypes, My Academic Self, and Role-Models to Young Black Girls.

Navigating and Resisting Black Female Stereotypes

The participants found that the representation of Black females on social media to be oppressive and highly hypersexualized. The participants' understanding of their realities and the way that they view themselves was starkly different than how Black females of portrayed on social media. For example, Jackie shared that she has to "tell myself that I am a queen, I am special, I am awesome, I am anything that I want to be, and I have control over that;" however, social media depicts Black females in historical representations of racist and sexist tropes. Monique supports this assertion and explains:

> I'm very confident in myself. But I've seen how social media can make people, especially Black girls, lose their confidence because they may not have people like their pictures or them being destroyed personally because of slanderous comments that people have said about them on social media. So I find myself avoiding social media at times. It's like I get on there to talk to my friends sometimes because we don't live in the same area, and I find myself posting things or liking pictures or something and then I'm like…wait. Stop. That's enough and I get off.

Participants find themselves navigating through multiple forms of oppression on social media because of how they, as Black females, are characterized by others.

Nine of the ten participants attributed having a positive view of self to the support they received from their families, rather than relying on images and messages they viewed on social media. Michelle recalled, "being affirmed by my mother and father and that I am smart and beautiful really has helped me to build my own confidence that I struggled with when I was younger." Tammy agreed, saying that "if it were not for my mom and stepdad continuously telling me not to listen to other people who didn't believe in me then I don't know how I would feel about myself." Other participants like Monique

and Jackie attributed having a positive self-concept to their religious beliefs and value in self. Monique shared:

> that's another reason why I'm so conscious about what I post and like on social media because I want to be a Christian who sets a good example for others. Like I know I can do anything with God.

Jackie attributed changes to her comments and posts on social media to her growing religious beliefs citing "I just want to live a better life and set a better example." The social support that the participants received from their families and religious beliefs influenced their developing sense of self as well as influenced the type of participation they have had on social media over the years. The examples of the participants relying on positive messages from their families and religious support, rather than relying on images and messages they receive on social media are central to an aspect of the participants' positive development of self-efficacy. In this sense, their ability to control their internal and external responses to negative messages on social media about Black females indicates increased positive self-concept operationalized through their resistance of ascribing to their own ideas of what it means to be a Black woman.

Although the participants reported viewing and receiving negative images of Black females on social media, they were able to gain positive social supports through socialization found through their social media friends. The participants reported that their social media connections have helped to influence their self-esteem in terms of how they feel about themselves. Many of the participants such as Bridget and Cameron revealed that they have experienced a sense of belonging through their affiliations with several groups that they are members of on social media. The social media groups mentioned by

several of the participants has affirmed their sexual preference, academic self-concept, and gender beliefs. Bridget shared that she receives a lot of support from a professional Black female educators' social media group page as an aspiring teacher. She shared that "this is where I can see other Black women that look like me that have accomplished what I want to be in my life." Tammy and Michelle agreed that they follow Black women on social media who redefine "what it means to be a Black woman." Tammy shared:

> You see different shades of Black women; different figures, hair textures, wearing different clothes…it's like they redefine sexy…they make their Black beautiful, smart, successful…they didn't all go to college, but they are all confident. I think that's the thing and I guess the difference. They define what it is to be a Black woman…a mother, sister, friend, lover, teacher, superstar, just whatever.

Though seen in mostly negative connotations, the participants shared that their exposure to Black females beyond their immediate network of friends and family, create a space to be more exposed to a greater variety of Black women in the world.

It is in these spaces that the participants have experienced greater social support that contributes to their developing sense of self. For example, Cameron shared that she received support on a social media page devoted to homosexual Black females. Cameron shared a time in which she joined a social media page to receive suggestions on how to "come out to my parents and I was surprised that I found it because you don't hear or see a lot about support Black females who are gay." The participants agreed that "you almost never see anything positive on social media to support gay or bisexual Black females." The participants agreed that they look to other sources such as family, friends, teachers, extended relationships from their online connections, and religious beliefs to support their

views of self as Black females, rather than relying on dominant images of Black females found on social media to display positive views of Black females.

The participants reported finding themselves in their own personal dilemmas with the images they see of Black women on social media as well as others' responses to seeing Black women portrayed in demeaning and degrading ways. Their decision to continue to consume and produce social media in spite of how Black women are portrayed exhibits tension in the relationships between the participants and their social media experiences. Bridget reported:

> Even for me, it's a constant struggle. I see Black women with big breasts and big butts and that's what we feel is beautiful. But I have had to accept that I can attract a man even without a big butt. And it's so hard to say that. Even hearing me say that. It's been programmed into us to think and believe that this is beauty and if I don't look this way then I'm not beautiful.

Tammy agreed about the struggle to resist participating in social media based upon how Black women are depicted:

> Black women on social media are like little memes and posts that say "this is Black beauty" and the women only have on a bra and some panties. Smart Black women are downplayed and viewed as a threat. But you see me still on social media.

Although the participants agreed that they want to defy the stereotypes of Black females on social media, some admitted to having social media sites "where they can be themselves."

The struggle that participants admitted to experiencing with being "themselves" on social media involves them conforming to historical stereotypes of being Black women. In resisting the typecast portrayals of Black females on social media, participants

utilize multiple social media sites to display different versions of themselves. An example of this is that Bridget reported:

> I can just be different versions of me on different social media sites. Like I'm selective as to who I follow and allow to follow me on my more personal sites like Snapchat and Instagram. My Facebook and Twitter are really professional so that's more positive. Even pictures and stuff cause that stuff shows up on your timeline too and I feel like that's another extension of me and I don't want anybody to you know to say let me look at her friends and see what her friends are like and then you on here with your behind hanging out and that makes me look bad. On my Instagram and Snapchat, I'm more laid back. Like for my friends if they go on my Facebook they would say that I'm not that positive all of the time but if you went on my Snapchat you would see my ratchet side just going off on people to let it out but on my Instagram you say oh okay that's really who she is…that's more me. It's like 3 different images at one time. Like I'm just very conscious of what I project and where I project it.

Monique added:

> I find myself being deterred from using social media. I only have a Twitter page only for professional reasons, and I use my Facebook to stay in contact with friends. It just seems like so much negativity on there with people talking about other people and I don't see people who look like me or act like me.

While many of the participants cited using social media sites for varied expressions of self, several of the participants admitted to using social media as an immediate way to receive positive comments about self. Amanda, Janine, Jackie, Cameron, and Brittany agreed that they have used and continue to use social media as an immediate self-esteem booster by posting pictures of themselves, or them doing something that they are proud of. Cameron went on to say that "sometimes I just post things just so I can hear good things about me." In contrast, Tammy shared that "I view myself as an intelligent Black woman, and I have a lot to offer." She added, "so I'm just not going to allow myself to do certain things on social media. I don't care how popular it is. I just always try to put my

best self forward." Jackie added that it was important for her to know who she is and what she deserves as a woman outside of what social media says. She went on to explain that "when you're confident about who you are, it is something that you have to take the time to build and not let anyone or anything take that from you."

Although the participants agreed that their self-image was more than how they are viewed on social media, two participants' view of themselves contrasted their actual beliefs about their own self-image. For example, Jackie and Janine both expressed that they have positive self-concept; however, they also exhibit self-deprecation where they feel that they do not have much to be proud of. Jackie shared a story about being smart, but her ability does not always match her efforts. She also expressed that because she did not go to college and having two children out of wedlock that this means that she does not have much to be proud of. Although she feels good about herself, she does not have a belief that she deserves the best. This is an example of Jackie having high self-esteem as a result of her positive personal evaluation of herself, yet experiencing self-deprecation as a result of her negative beliefs about her ability and what she deserves.

As the participants' self-concept continues to develop, they are discovering their true selves and uncovering their beliefs about themselves and the important aspects of their self-image. The participants' protective factors to the negative images and messages of Black females on social media are activated through their internal and external social supports. Other protective factors include the development of their self-efficacy where they exert control over their own motivation, behavior, and social environment through their online social media lives. These protective factors contribute to their developing

sense of positive self-concept as resilience strategies. The participants identified important aspects of their self-image. They described themselves as being confident, caring, smart, strong-willed, ambitious, resilient, fighters, visionary, strong, independent. Monique explained that to her, "self-concept is you looking at yourself in the mirror your thoughts about yourself are you being pleased with who you see, what you see, and your feeling like a valuable part of the community."

The participants admitted to there being times in their lives where they felt more confident as Black women than they actually were at times. In general, several participants described times in which they purchased fitness equipment, yet they feel confident about their bodies. Bridget, Tammy, Brittany, Janine, Amanda, and Jackie admitted to succumbing to the nuances associated with body image. The other participants admitted that some aspects of their appearance have been influenced by images of Black females they saw on social media. The participants admitted that "this whole body image thing can rip girls apart." Many of the girls admitted to "falling into an illusion." Monique added,

> what you see on social media of Black girls is not at all who they naturally are so to speak. To me, social media tries to make Black girls feel like they're incompetent or that they won't get the type of guy that they want to attract or it's that they won't be as successful as what they define as being *attractive people* and they don't understand or care about the extent of Photoshop and things like that on a girls' self-image.

Many of the participants reported frequently feeling torn over which direction they should lean towards, and how they will be thought about and looked at if they posted certain pictures, music, comments, or even allowed in their friend group. All of the

participants agreed that they are conscious of the images and messages they post on social media citing that they are conscious of the perceptions' of their professional lives, parents' views, and their developing identities as adult Black women in the world. The participants reported making conscious decisions to avoid stereotypical behaviors of Black females on social media. Several participants reported being "conscious of their word choices and pictures posted on social media."

The participants reported trying to avoid being a "stereotypical Black woman" on social media. When asked about what a stereotypical Black woman was, participants reported "looking like a video vixen or sex object, full of drama, angry and argumentative, baby mama, or uneducated." Monique reported:

> Black women are supposed to be angry and sexualized. So the images that we see on social media of Black women are sexual or appealing, and I believe that people internalize the images that they see and form an opinion. These dominant images of Black women on like Instagram or other social media are meant to allude sexual imagery, and in my opinion, influence people to not take us as seriously as they should. For example, when other people see Black women arguing with each other, it's always over a man. It's like we can't help escaping us being at the bottom of the totem pole.

Bridget added:

> I don't go by my first name on my professional social media page. I go by my middle name. I use a very simple white name where I can easily navigate the world so I can get a job. My profile picture is not even a picture of me, but a butterfly. I have my college listed immediately after my name. I'm very conscious of the image that I project because I've seen at my job where if my boss couldn't pronounce your name, she just throws your application in the trash, or she'll go on the person's profile page and if the person's picture sucked, she throws the application away. And this is a woman of color too that's doing this.

Monique added, "so I just try to be conscious of what I post on social media of myself." Janine reported, "I just never wanted to look like that. Like it's just negative." Jackie

agreed, saying "I do admit to arguing and posting crazy stuff on social media when I was in high school, but I just really try to avoid that stuff now." Bridget shared,

> I want to defy stereotypes. That's why I work so hard. I make you that I have good manners. Cause I know white people are watching me when I go to class and when I'm on campus. That's why when I go to class, I'm always dressed up so nobody can say nothing about me. I come to class early and I always make sure that my hair is done. I always have to make sure that I'm up on things because I don't want to be like that girl…those girls that they see.

Jackie, Ingrid, Amanda, Monique, Cameron, Janine, and Tammy agreed that they are very conscious of how Black females are stereotyped and that the majority of images, as well as messages about Black women on social media, are that of stereotypical Black females in which they "consciously avoid acting like." Tammy recalled an incident from high school when she was working at a local clothing store and had applied for the Assistant Manager position:

> My manager told me that I was not considered for the job because she received a complaint on me. I went off on this old, White lady at work one day for making a racist comment to me. I was the only Black girl that worked in the store. I had been polite to this lady and everything, and she was just so rude to me, I mean so rude. I think she was there trying to make a return. And after explaining to her as best as I could, numerous times and repeating the same things for like the fifth time, she made a derogatory comment to me about going back to the ghetto with all my babies. I was like what! So yes, I politely went off on her and I did get a little loud. And she left. My co-worker said to me that I handled myself very well because she didn't know if she would have been able to do the same thing.

Tammy reflected on her being conscious of her behaviors in public and even what she posts on social media "to not give someone a reason to believe that I am like these stereotypes."

Several participants agreed that as they have grown and developed that "they have multiple personas" on different social media sites for "different purposes." The

development of these multiple personas serves as mechanisms of protection against the negative stereotypical images and messages about Black females that the participants have seen on social media. The participants agreed that hearing good things about them does "make them feel good." The participants' increased self-esteem through their online connections has provided them with some sense of validation of self as well as a positive view of self. Participants agreed that they "just want to be me" and social media provides the opportunity for them to express different versions of their self. Overall, the participants reported having a social media profile page on at least two different social media profile sites to avoid being negatively stereotyped, while still allowing them to openly express and positively view their sense of self. There is an innate need for the participants' sense of self to be protected from others' negative views and comments of them on social media, while also still being allowed to express their sense of self through social media.

My Academic Self

Eight of the ten participants attributed their good grades in middle and high school to intrinsic motivation and parental or family support. These eight participants described good grades as being A's and B's or making the honor roll. One of the participants, Janine shared that she had a high school teacher that motivated her to do well in school. Equally, Bridget shared a story about her elementary school teacher whose classroom she was in when she and her family first relocated to the Southeast and recalled the teacher using her recess time to "make me do my work and actually more than I was supposed to just so I could be that much farther ahead than everybody else."

Bridget admitted that her teacher pushing her, and believing in her academic ability along with the encouragement of her family supported her desire to be academically successful in school. Additionally, nine of the participants reported that their parents expected for them to "make good grades." Brittany shared a story about her grandmother encouraging her to always study and recalls that study ethic being "ingrained in my mind since I was a little kid."

The messages that a majority of the participants received from their parents and family about their academic ability were aligned with the positive messages they received about their race and gender from their parents and family. The participants shared stories in which their parents intentionally involved them in clubs, religious organizations, and out-of-school activities that supported their positive racial identity development. Michelle and Jackie recalled being active in their church as young girls as support for their positive racial/ethnic identity development. Michelle attributed her religious beliefs as being influential as to having a positive view of her racial self-concept. Additionally, the participants reported that these out-of-school activities affirmed and validated their race and instilled racial pride. For example, Monique recalled her participation in an all-Black girl scout troop and how being with girls who look like her supported her validation and identification with positive Black females. She shared that "it was just totally different from attending the all-white schools that I was used to and I had friends who actually looked like me." They also reported times in which their parents or family educated them about racial stereotypes and how others would view them and negatively treat them as a result of their race.

In regards to the participants' feeling confident about their academic selves, they overwhelming admitted to there being times in their schooling experiences when they felt more confident about their academic ability, but their grades did not reflect their true ability. Many of the participants agreed that having good grades was important to them, however, their perceptions of their ability to handle honors or advanced placement courses were negative. Ingrid shared a time when she transitioned from middle school to high school and was initially placed in advanced placement classes, but "feared that I wouldn't do well after like the third week of class" so she asked her parents to change her schedule, and reluctantly they did. She went on to say, "that's something I regret doing now." Ingrid explained, "I don't know. I just felt intimidated by the classes. I don't even know if I could have done the work or not because I gave up before I even tried." Monique admitted that although she loved school and that she was an overachiever, she did not "always do well in my science classes." When asked about the differences in her academic performances in science versus her other subjects, she explained, "I don't know, it just seemed like the concepts were just difficult for me to grasp."

Similarly, six participants shared that although they were confident in their other subjects in school, that they did not have good grades in math or science classes. The participants further shared that a majority of their math and science teachers in high school were not Black women. They also shared that they "didn't feel supported in those classes." The participants not feeling supported in traditional socially-ascribed male-dominated subjects is central to the participants' negative academic self-concept in these classes primarily due to their experiencing discrimination because of the gender.

Dissimilarly, Tammy and Ingrid's academic-related ideas of achievement were positive while attending a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). They were able to identify and relate positive educational outcomes with the academic achievement of the Black female professors that they had on their college campuses. In this regard, the cultural notion of self immediately increased their self-efficacy and self-esteem as Black, female college students who were good at math and science. Tammy and Ingrid attributed to their improving their academic confidence in math and science to teachers that looked like them at their historically black college and university they attended. Tammy reported:

> I've always struggled in math. So I never felt confident in math. I feel confident in every other subject, but math, no – it just intimidates me. It wasn't until college when I had my Black female professor – the first time I saw a Black woman with a Ph.D. who pushed me. And I figured, if she can do it then I can do it too.

Ingrid agreed:

> it wasn't until I attended my HBCU where I made A's and B's in math and science. It made me feel like I always had it in me and it showed me that if I really put my mind to it, it can be done.

In contrast, Michelle admitted that she loved math and science in high school and that she did well in those classes. She also shared that she was an honor roll student. Michelle explained that when she transitioned from high school to college that "it was a bit intimidating not only because of the class size but because it was way more boys than anything." She shared that she lost her confidence by being in class with so many boys saying that "it just made me feel like I didn't belong there." This example with Michelle demonstrates how Black females are not encouraged in certain subjects or even expected

to pursue math and science-based career fields. Michelle admitted to being a confident, Black woman in general; however, she was intimidated by being in this male-dominated classroom. Michelle shared that it was not until she was paired with a Black female professor at her college that improved her confidence in her academic ability again because the professor pushed her to do and be her best. In this example, although Michelle's racial self-concept was positive, her losing her academic confidence when she started college in a male-dominated field contributed to her suffering loss of her positive academic self.

In regards to their academic self-concept, as nine of the ten participants transitioned to college, the participants felt they could do well academically and were motivated by earning good grades. For example, it was important for Ingrid to "make the Dean's list" while in college because "I made the honor roll in high school." In contrast, several participants described times in which they believed that they were treated unfairly in their schooling experiences because of their race and gender. For these participants, these experiences represented instances in which they experienced racial and gender discrimination. Four of the participants shared stories of their college experiences while attending Predominately White Institutions (PWI) where they experienced feeling negative about their academic ability and achievement. In these experiences, the participants reported feeling stereotyped by their White peers and White professors on campus. Bridget and Tammy reported feeling alone and isolated in their majors at their colleges, citing often times being the only Black students in class and having to "speak for an entire race of people or as the expert" when discussing issues pertaining to Blacks

and other minorities. Brittany spoke of times at her college when her White peers assumed that because she was Black that she had to have come from a low-income family. She recalled a story about a biographical project that she presented in a class where she had to bring in a picture of her family, the house she grew up in and provide a description of her neighborhood. Britany shared, “it’s like they were just so shocked that I came from a middle-class family. Their faces were priceless.”

Monique, Bridget, Tammy, and Brittany all spoke of times when they believed that their professors did not think that they would do well on an exam or pass the class. Tammy shared that in several of her psychology classes that she was the only Black person in the class, and recalled a time when she had a presentation for class, but felt unprepared for the presentation causing her to doubt her ability to do well on the presentation. Bridget reported a time when a professor suggested that she go to the writing center for support with her writing without ever seeing anything that she has written. When asked about how these experiences influenced their academic self-concept, the four participants shared that they “did not feel like I belonged” and “did not feel supported.” These participants developed concerns about being a “token” Black or experienced instances of imposter syndrome, doubting their academic and achievement-related ability.

When asked about why they think they were negatively stereotyped as not being academically capable, the participants shared that “because they believe that Blacks aren’t smart, Black women should be pregnant and on welfare, or admitted just to meet a quota.” Bridget reported her being conscious of how she dressed when attending class

and coming to class prepared in order to not "look like the typical Black female that they know or have heard about." She went on to say that this is a contributing reason as to why she is conscious about what she posts and who she follows on her professional social media page. Bridget's perception of her experiences both online and offline as a Black female require her to be very conscious of racial and gender stereotypes that typecast her into a very specific role in which she recasts via her social media voice.

Tammy shared that being conscious of her professional and academic image on social media and offline is important to her as well because of racial and gender stereotypes. She shared that she has often felt "discouraged" about completing certain assignments in her major at her college because she feels that she is "more scrutinized" than her White peers. Tammy shared that she "just doesn't believe that my professors think that I am a great student." However, Tammy shared that although she does confident about her academic ability, however, she shared that she has the support of a few professors to be a better student. Brittany shared that although she does not feel supported by a majority of her White professors, she shared that she does feel supported by several professors in her major department. When asked how they stay academically motivated, the four participants shared that they have found Black professors on campus in their major, lean on their families and friends, and rely on intrinsic motivation for support to achieve their academic and career goals.

Brittany explained that if there were more stories on social media about intelligent and academically confident Black women, that even that one story could reach other Black women and encourage academic confidence among Black women, rather than seek

a certain body image. Several participants continue to struggle with dissociating the idea of beauty and appearance with what an academically confident Black female looks like. Two participants identified academically confident Black women as being "pretty." For Janine, although she sees posts of Black women graduating from high school or college on social media, she does not believe that they are necessarily academically confident.

Additionally, Jackie shared that while growing up in her household, academics and going to college was not stressed, and that "if I saw a Black woman as being smart, intelligent, or even pursuing college degrees then I may have gone to college too." Jackie believed that she was smart, however, she did not "place a lot of value in school or my classes." While Jackie shared that her academic-related behaviors were "not the best" such as completing school assignments, study habits and performing well on exams, she still held the belief that she was a good student. In this example, although Jackie believed that she was a good student, her academic grades did not reflect this belief. Jackie admitted that she lacked the support from home and school, and failed to see positive Black females with positive academic self-perceptions during her schooling experiences.

In comparison, several participants identified teachers from the elementary school that pushed them academically; however, beyond elementary school, the participants identified their parents or a family member that encouraged them to do their best academically. These participants viewed themselves as having a positive academic self-concept. For example, Amanda, Bridget, Cameron, Michelle, Janine, Tammy, Monique, and Ingrid credited their parents or a family member with "pushing them to do well in school and expecting them to do well." The participants' view of positive outcomes from

doing well in school contributed to their developing a positive view of their academic self.

The participants agreed that it was important to them to see intelligent and academically confident Black women on social media graduating from college, pursuing higher education, and exploring various career fields beyond traditional female-stereotyped careers. The participants also discussed their feelings regarding being seen by others as being smart and successful. It was important to the participants for others to see them as examples of high-achieving Black females. For example, several participants actively post images and messages about academically high-achieving Black females citing the need to see Black females in this regard. The participants' academic experiences as Black females were influenced by others' perceptions of their academic ability based on historical racial and gender stereotypes, and its effect on the participants' academic self-efficacy waxed and waned between them having both a negative and positive sense of self throughout their schooling experiences.

Role Models to Young Black Girls

The participants agreed that social media should be more than a one-way lens of negative images of Black females. Ingrid explained, "it's like you see a single narrative about Black women on social media." Janine agreed that you can either "support it or fight it." The participants' belief in changing the dominant single narrative of Black females on social media as negative is central to their construct of self. Their belief of having the power and ability to alter these dominant images of women that look like them on social media by producing alternative texts is an example of resistance and the

creation of counter-narratives. Several participants reported “this why I have different profiles of me on different social media sites” so that they can produce positive images of Black women as mothers, daughters, students, career professionals and not just be seen as “angry, aggressive, or loud.”

The participants agreed that because social media glamorizes sex and not academics, that these images that young Black girls see and the things that they hear negatively influences their self-image. The participants had issues with the overwhelmingly negative images of Black females on social media, which is why they were conscious of the messages and images that they posted on social media. Jackie and Amanda shared that “as mothers” they are conscious of how they portray themselves on social media because of their children. The other participants agreed that as working professionals and role models, that they wanted to be seen as “positive.” They talked about how seeing images of women that look like you influences your belief in yourself and what you can and cannot do or achieve in life. Cameron and Monique both talked about how influential these images are and can be to young girls trying to figure out who she is and where she belongs in this world.

The participants admitted that “it’s tough figuring this stuff out,” and attributed having support from their families or relatives as positively influencing their sense of self rather than relying on social media to receive support, encouragement, or viewing positive images of Black females. Michelle reflected on a conversation she had with a young female relative who desired to be famous like a character on Instagram, rather than placing the same focus on her academics. Michelle shared, “that’s exactly why I post

things about me and my friends that's positive so these young girls can see that it's more to life than this illusion on Instagram." The participants recalled how they admired Black females that they saw in media and even viewed them as "role models." Jackie explained the significance of being surrounded by hypersexual images of Black females on social media:

> When I was younger, I used to admire someone older than me and I couldn't wait to get older so I could be just like her. So younger girls are looking up to these women they see on social media cause they're surrounded them as their role models but, for the most part, all they see is Black women twerking on Facebook and not to be positive role models.

Monique agreed, saying how "young girls are easily influenced by the negative images of Black females that they see on social media." She went on further to explain:

> It can affect how viewpoint on herself or her own self-confidence. She might decide, before even trying that she's not worthy or capable of achieving great things. She may not aim high when it comes to setting goals for herself in her life, whether it is to go to college or starting a savings account because of the glitz and the glam that's always on social media. The sexual imagery and lifestyle can definitely negatively influence her for the worst.

Cameron agreed and shared that young girls are affected by this the most because they have difficulty understanding the differences between reality versus fantasy that is created on social media. It was important for the participants to be good leaders and role models for younger Black girls on social media. Bridget explained that she desperately wants to see and hear more instances of Black women as being smart, and in turn, wants to post messages that defy dominant images and messages about Black females. Monique reported that schools need to highlight more influential and successful Black women

from all different career paths and walks of life who are proud to say that they are Black women.

In addition to the participants promoting counter-narratives of what it means to be a Black female, several participants have also undertaken a critical stance to media images and messages of Black females. Monique, Tammy, Jackie, Bridget, Ingrid, and Amanda have a more mature and critical understanding of the ways in which Black females are stereotyped on social media. Their critical view of social media's portrayal of Black females was cultivated by their families' consciousness of how Blacks have been historically viewed and typecast. The participants' critical stance of social media's characterization of Black females enabled the participants' to use negotiation and problem-solving skills Bridget, Tammy, Monique, Ingrid, and Amanda told stories of their families explicitly telling them how to act, talk, and dress in public so that they would not be labeled as ghetto, uneducated, angry, or loud. Tammy and Bridget shared stories in which their mothers insisted that they not dress "like hoes or hoochies" while in high school and intentionally dressed them "like ladies." The participants shared that they take the same approach taught by their families when producing and consuming messages on social media.

The participants' understanding of these experiences has shaped their perspective of themselves as Black females, and in turn, their conscious desire to create more than a single narrative of Black females on social media. Tammy and Brittany agreed that they "just want to be seen as a Black woman that has myself together." Being successful for the participants were them being seen as defying traditional and historical stereotypes as

being independent, confident, well-dressed, owning her own home, and taking care of her business. The participants did not report using celebrities on social media as guides for their ideas of success in their late adolescence; however, they did identify with several celebrity Black females as being successful. Amanda asserted, "when I see a Black woman like that, I know she has herself together and that's exactly what I want."

Tammy explained, "who can tell my story better than me…so why not just put out there what I want people to know about me just the way I want it." Monique explained:

> This is why I purposely only post positive things and don't follow anybody or anything negative. I want to be conscious of what I show people and I want to be conscious of how my students see me because I'm telling them that this is what they should be and do. I only follow people and like posts and pages that empower Blacks and Black women.

The participants expressed that they have a voice through social media to be models to other young, Black girls. According to Brittany their social media voices "has the ability to reach millions in an instant." The participants agreed that their actions on social media affect others' perceptions of them and that by controlling these actions they create their own representations of who they are and how they are perceived. Not only does this social media expression of voice empower the participants, but it also situates the participants to deconstruct dominant narratives of Black females to serve as role models for young, Black girls.

Summary

This chapter presented three main essential features found in the data regarding the participants' social media experiences, and its influential nature on the participants' sense of self through emerging adulthood. Navigating through these personal dilemmas

as emerging adult Black females, while figuring out who they are and where they fit in this world has proved to be challenging for these participants. Being both Black and female are central components of their self-image. Their social media meaning-making experiences as developing Black females has influenced their sense of belonging in both their familial, peer relationships and as career professionals.

Further, the barrage of historically negative stereotypes of Black females on social media has affected their concepts of beauty, body image, and how they desire to be viewed by others. Developing multiple identities on different social media outlets has allowed the participants to express a sense of self through their race and gender while managing the interlocking systems of oppression inherent in society and their schooling experiences. Additionally, the participants' discriminatory experiences from racial and gender stereotypes in their schooling experiences has influenced their academic self-concept vacillating between negative and positive sense of academic self. Similarly, the participants recounted rarely seeing academically confident Black females on social media, and in turn, the positive socialization of academically confident Black females was rarely represented. The participants' academic performance was related to having a strong academic identity; however, several participants' negative experiences in the male-dominated course and college majors reinforced gender stereotypes which fostered negative academic-self relating to those academic schooling experiences. The participants' perceptions of their academic ability, interpersonal evaluation, and future expectations in math and science resulted in many of the participants believing that they "were just not good" in these subjects.

The participants were able to resist and negotiate their multiple identities and sense of self through the creation of their social media sites. The protective factors utilized by participants through the support of their family and friends, as well as intrinsic motivation to resist negative stereotypes. In addition, the participants' creation of counter-narratives to the negative racial and gender stereotypes characterized of Black females on social media demonstrated their sense of empowerment and redefining what it means to be Black and female. Although they are conscious of the images and messages of what it means to be beautiful and successful by others, they struggled to conform to or resist these images and messages controlled by the dominant narrative.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

We live in a multimedia age of advanced digital technologies that allow us the convenience and ease of access to information anywhere, at any time through numerous multimodal and multimedia outlets (Kellner & Share, 2007; Morrell, 2012). The fulcrum of mediated digital technology has bridled the landscape of how, what, and frequency at which we communicate. It has also become a powerful socializing agent among people influencing branded images and knowledge. Consequently, when looking at how late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, use the new medium of social media to construct and express their sense of self, there has been limited scholarship to provide insight into how the images and messages for and about Black females influences their developing global and academic self-concept.

The dearth of scholarship on adolescent media use has generally focused on violence and aggression (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Felson, 1996; Wilson, 2008), sexuality (Zillmann, 2000), sexual behavior and attitudes (Ward, Day, & Epstein, 2006; Ward, & Harrison, 2005), as well as self-esteem and body image (Thompson, Berg, Roehrig, Guarda, & Heinberg, 2004). Although the visibility of Black females has increased in medium, these images overwhelmingly lack the portrayal of Black females in diverse roles. Further, while there has been critique on new media's contradictory and complex messages about Black females (Lauricella, et al., 2014; Brown & Bobkowski,

2011; Zhang & Leung, 2015; Neira & Barber, 2014), the implications of these messages on late adolescent Black females' developing global and academic self-concept remains profoundly under-documented.

This chapter includes conclusions, study limitations, as well as implications for future research and practice. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived social media experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, and its influence on their developing self-concept (globally and academically) throughout emerging adulthood. The second purpose of this study was to better understand the ways in which late adolescent Black females perceive images of Black females on social media. Lastly, the third purpose of the study was to better understand how late adolescent Black females respond to and understand their sense of global and academic self that is based on their past and current experiences of consuming and producing social media. This chapter demonstrates an amalgamation of critical theories used to answer the research questions of this study. The theoretical frameworks also guided this study, compelling me to be fully aware, transparent, self-reflective, and reflexive about my own power throughout the planning, conducting, and analyzing stages of the research process (Fine & Weis, 1996). Based on inquiry and analysis from guiding questions, I came to the following conclusions:

- The participants' experiences with social media highlight their use of protective factors as they developed multiple identities to find and express their sense of self through voice on social media, whereby indicating their need to be their true self.

- The negative images and messages on social media contributed to the participants' motivation to create counter-narratives to the negative stereotypical depiction of Black females on social media. The participants desired to redefine what it means to be sexual, intelligent, and successful Black females.
- The participants' experiences from racial and gender stereotypes in their schooling experiences has influenced vacillation between their negative and positive academic self-concept.
- The infrequency of academically confident Black females on social media contributed to the deficiency of positive academically-related socialization, the paucity of promotion of academic achievement-related behaviors among Black females, and inefficient support of Black females' academic ability in predominately male-dominated subjects and majors of the Black females in this study.

As a result of the conclusions from the study, I provide recommendations for practice and future research. The chapter concludes with a demonstration of the limitations that came about during the course of inquiry and how these impacted my findings and conclusions.

Relation to the Theoretical Framework

This research study and thinking are embedded in the critical media literacy philosophy of Kellner and Share (2007), the critical lenses of Black feminist thought (Hill-Collins, 2009 hooks, 2000), and Interpretive Phenomenology (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2008). The foundation of my thinking is embedded in the idea of emancipation of

hegemony and social change permeates problem-posing education illustrated through critical reflection, practice, and praxis (Kellner & Share, 2007). For the purposes of the study analyses, I was interested in what the literature implied about power that is deeply entrenched in the controlling images of Black females on social media networks, and how this can shape what is known about Black females, and in turn, its influence on shaping late adolescent Black females' sense of self both globally and academically. Black feminist thought provided a way to explore the manner in which Black females have been studied and are perceived by larger sociopolitical structures in which the women are embedded (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Collins, 2009; hooks, 2000). Critical media literacy is concerned with the critical analysis of media that explores and exposes the structures of oppression while addressing issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, and power (Kellner & Share, 2007).

Thus, although the focus is on the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females with social media, I attempted to connect these experiences to the larger issues related to Black females in larger society. Therefore, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to understand participants' lived experiences on social media in order to describe what it means as a Black female within the context of a White, male dominated society which controls images and messages about them (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2008; Smith, 2004). However, in using IPA, I sought to extend the interpretive analysis beyond simple description and make sense of participants' lived experiences in relation to social, cultural, and theoretical contexts. Thus, the results of the analytic findings offer "an interpretative account of what it means for the participant to

have such concerns within their particular context" (Larkin et al., 2008, p. 113). Insights and lessons learned about processes involved in exploring the participants' lived experiences within social media environments may contribute to the understanding of media effects and the issues of power and ideology implanted in media.

Summary and Discussion of the Results

The core of this study investigated the lived social media experiences of late adolescent Black females, ages 18 to 24, and its influence on their self-concept (global and academic). This study provides a useful contribution to our understanding of adolescent Black females' lived experiences with social media, and the ways in which they integrate and understand their self-image, self-esteem, academic ability, and academic achievement as they develop into adult women. Additionally, the study sought to understand the effects mediated stereotypes of Black females, and the ways in which these stereotypes influence the perpetuation of bounded ideologies of Black females in society. Special attention was given to the role of *self* in their social media experiences, the support mechanisms in which the participants' rely on, and the strategies employed to be their true self.

My analysis resulted in three essential features that summarize the participants' social media experiences, and its influential nature on the participants' sense of self (global and academic) through emerging adulthood. These three main essential features highlight the personal dilemmas experienced through the participants' lived social media experiences and demonstrates the resiliency of the participants as they acquiesce the demanding nuances of what it means to be Black and female throughout their mediated

adolescent lives. As these late adolescent Black females use social media as a tool to figure out who they are, and where they fit in this world, it has proved to be challenging for these participants. While being both Black and female are central components of the participants' self-image, this study's findings were similar to Duke (2000) regarding media's ability to shape Black females' view of themselves, and their perception of others' views of them. Findings from this study contribute to existing literature on media's perpetuation of Black female stereotypes, in addition to including the voices of adolescent Black females regarding their perceptions of social media as shaping their thoughts on beauty, body image, ability and academic achievement.

Social Media Voice & Peer Acceptance

In this study, research question one asked for participants to describe their social media experiences. This section encapsulates how the participants largely described these experiences in the sense that they found and expressed their voices through social media. Central to the concept of individuals' self-development was the participants' search and realization of finding their voice in this study. Adolescence has been reported to be a developmental stage in which females lose their voices in efforts to gain approval, avoid conflict and isolation (Brown & Gillgan, 1992). Consistent with previous literature, social media has provided Black females with a voice that has been traditionally silenced by others to address the negative media depictions and marginalization of Black women (Poletta, 2014). The participants' journey through the stages of adolescence reflected their developing sense of self as influenced by their online and offline social interactions. The participants' social media experiences further illustrated the development of voice in

which their participation on social media provided them with independence from their parents. Social media provided the participants with a sense of autonomy for the first time in their lives through their social media consumption and production.

Adolescent Black girls find a voice through social media as ways to express their everyday lives and negotiate developmental tasks by forging bonds through nontraditional peer communities (Stokes, 2007; League & Chalmers, 2010). In this instance, the participants' exploration and discovery of who they were outside of parental control was evidenced by their lived social media experiences in becoming independent while building a strong sense of self through choosing the type of social media group to join, ability to like others' posts, interacting with individuals of their choice rather than parents, filtering messages from others, choosing profile pictures, and changing statuses. Congruent with previous research, the participants' ideal self and how they truly see themselves was different during their initial exploration and discovery stages with social media (Chaplin & John, 2007). This study demonstrated how the participants integrated their newly found sense of autonomy into their online identity construction during middle adolescence. The participants in the study continued to search for their true self while looking for orientation, meaning, and purpose as they related to the world through a social context.

Peer acceptance and family influence inherently becomes central tenets of adolescents' developing self-concept (Feliciano, 2015). Although the participants desired and expressed a sense of independence and autonomy from their parents, they also desperately desired approval and acceptance from their peers. The valued placed on these

relationships with peers was vital for their discovery of self. For example, participants used social media to voice their opinions about topics and people that they would not normally address, yet they increased their social media use to fit in with their peers and stay connected. Their continued consumption and production of social media were a way for them to not only stay connected with peers but also for them to express their sense of voice. While previous studies indicate that adolescents often rely more on peer acceptance than family affirmation (Spencer, Swanson, & Cunningham, 1991; Bentley-Edwards & Adams-Bass, 2013), this study fills a gap in the literature in that participants continued to seek their parents' approval throughout late adolescence by being mindful of language, pictures, and interactions with peers. The participants were keenly aware of their parents or parents' friends as followers on social media as well, which also influenced their social media production on certain social media sites.

As participants navigated relationships with peers, parents, and school, they sought to figure out who they were and where they fit in the world outside of others' ideas, beliefs, and expectations. The participants' oppressed realities resulted from hierarchies of race and male privilege which guided their peers' ideas and beliefs of femaleness. Though existing literature supports the idea that Black females do not suffer low-esteem during middle adolescence, this study supports times in which the participants did suffer low self-esteem as a result of feeling rejected by peers when their pictures were not liked, not selected or removed as a friend, or not receiving perceived comments on posts. Further, the participants continued to struggle with identifying their authentic voice by conforming to peers' expectations by seeking popularity and ways to

validate their sense of self. Additionally, participants believed that by participating in social networking sites, they felt a sense of validation and appreciation (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009).

Relative to previous search on Black females being seen as oversexed fantasy objects (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, & Stevenson, 2014), the participants were oriented towards concepts of beauty as defined by peers and celebrities on social media, whereby creating a reliance upon peers' evaluations from their social media outlets to influence their physical appearance and body image. These examples further illustrate the deleterious effects of others' ideas of Blackness and femaleness on developing adolescent females. These experiences for the participants during middle and high school caused the participants to experience a rise and fall in their self-esteem and evaluation of self. The mental and emotional impact this had on the participants resulted in their struggle to define beauty for themselves during middle adolescence. Additionally, it resulted in several participants experiencing self-hatred of their body image, skin color, hair length, and texture. The exactness of this burden of the oppressive ideology of the patriarchal ideal female image reifies the bestowal of power and privilege to some while marginalizing others (Merriweather, 2015). Similarly, several participants were reluctant to post pictures of themselves on social media during middle adolescence due to fear of being rejected because of their skin complexion.

Furthermore, the participants generally agreed that they were socialized to mainstream standards of beauty on social media, and these standards of being White, thin, and long hair were reinforced by their peers. This study's findings were consistent

with Kapidzic and Herring's (2015) findings in that it found that adolescent Black females use culturally dominant norms of attractiveness as perpetuated by social media to influence their sense of self. Additionally, the findings in this study contribute to existing literature regarding the effects of unhealthy messages and images of the sexualization of girls on their physical and emotional health and well-being (American Psychological Association, 2007; Brown, White-Johnson, & Griffin-Fennell, 2013).

Although previous research has omitted the experiences of adolescent Black females, this study reports the effects of unhealthy messages and images of the sexualization of adolescent Black girls. For example, the participants succumbed to specialized diets to lose weight, altered physical features and hair to meet society's standards of beauty as guided by the images they saw on social media and supported by their peers. Some participants suffered from low-esteem as a result of not exhibiting the ideal female body type. Adolescents in this study were consistently oriented and socialized in media messages that influenced their attitudes and beliefs about gender and race that negatively influenced their own gender- and race-related self-concept. This study demonstrates the frequency and prevalence at which images and messages about bounded ideologies of femaleness and blackness exist on social media.

The participants' racial self-efficacy was affirmed by their parents, in addition to the positive racial socialization they received through their offline and online messages of affirmation which celebrated Black beauty. In this sense, the participants embraced their naturally curvy figures and hair type (Dow, 2015). Although their positive racial self-concept was supported by parents, the participants still developed distorted thoughts of

self and body image, relinquishing to the patriarchal ideal of thinness and beauty that was constantly glamorized on social media. Social media's glamorization of patriarchal beauty caused the participants to seek peer acceptance and approval through social media to support their ideas and sense of beauty. As the participants sought "likes" from their social media production, this behavior demonstrates their yearning for acceptance as well as what they were willing to compromise internally as a result of this acceptance.

The harmful effects of the continued cycle of oppression in which the participants experienced either subconsciously or consciously is an example of the participants' repressing their true selves as Black females. This example underscores the participants' continued silence of their true voices, and dependence on peers' approval. Thus, their developing self-concept was influenced by their lived experiences with social media, whereby increasing opportunities for both acceptance and rejection by peers. It was found that during middle adolescence, the participants' self-concept was most influenced by appearance and peer appraisal as being most important for them for overall self-esteem. Their everyday social media experiences of thinking about self and others' perceptions of them online contributed to their feeling self-conscious about their self-image. The fluctuation between the participants' positive and negative views of self-development was therefore influenced by their mediated online experiences with peers and others.

Developmental Progression of the Black Female Stereotype

The findings in theme two are aligned with previous research and suggest that participants' perceptions of Black females on social media have been largely negative and stereotypical portrayals (Berry, 1998; Lichter et al., 1987). While the participants

reported seeing few positive images of Black females on social media, the assertion of this absence indicates that Black females are unimportant and powerless. The participants found that a majority of images of and about Black women on social media portrayed Black females in objectified and sexualized roles (Dow, 2015; Muhammed & McArthur, 2015). Further, the participants spoke of their perceptions of Black females on social media as video vixens who sell oversexualized fantasies to men. The examples of which the participants spoke about are aligned with previous research findings of Black females in similar contemporary stereotypes of Black females (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Dow, 2015). The participants understood that while they perceived the images of Black women on social media as misogynistic and degrading, they also sought freedom from not being labeled in the same regard.

The participants attributed the negative perceptions of Black females due to the rapid accessibility of these images about Black females on social media. As one participant described, the negative messages about Black females on social media have to ability to reach people in an instant. Patriarchy has defined normative roles for Black women, thereby placing them as disempowered, marginalized, humiliated, and typecast positions which permeate medium (Hammer, 2009). These images of Black females are massively socialized on social media through advertisements, music videos, short videos on the internet, and magazines which perpetuate misguided messages about the sexuality of Black women that persists today.

The lived experiences of these negative perceptions of Black females by the participants in the study were reinforced by social media's constant portrayal of Black

females as sex symbols. The participants were largely socialized in the biases and stereotypes of Black females based upon the dominant images and messages projected on social media about Black females. As a result of these experiences, several participants struggled with their desires to "be sexy," while attempting to resist being stereotyped or labeled as a "sex symbol." It was important to the participants to not be demeaned or disrespected. The participants expressed dissonance from these negative images of Black females on social media.

Along the lines of perpetuating Black female stereotypes found in media (Muhammed & McArthur, 2015), the participants' perceived Black females on social media as loud and angry. Several participants cited times in which they have either experienced or witnessed being misidentified as being angry, when in fact, they were being assertive or strong. Their questioning others' assertion of them as angry undergirds their insight into others' perception of them in stereotypical racist and antifeminist tropes of the angry Black woman. In this sense, the participants understood these experiences as having to be assertive or aggressive to be heard, acknowledged, and respected by others.

The participants failed to perceive Black females on social media as being smart or academically confident. While Black females' narratives have often placed them as invisible and voiceless (Harris-Perry, 2011), the participants' failure to see academically confident Black females on social media further projects oppressive ideology about Black women. Their experiences capitulated Black females as having the inability to be smart. Bacon and Aphramor (2014) noted that gathering information about cultural and social constructs would be informative in understanding gender differences in academics. This

study's findings support that gender differences in academics could be a direct result of cultural and social constructs of Black females as evidenced by social media's lack of socializing images of academically confident Black females. Although the participants shared that they consciously seek out smart or academically confident Black females on social media, this highlights their desire to see more images of Black females viewed in this manner. Further, the participants understood and felt that Black females were not portrayed as being smart, successful, and overly positive because these images are not selling features to the mass public. This further reiterates media's role of casting Black females in subservient and oppressed roles.

The participants' experiences of social media cause them to believe that beauty and sex sells, and are appealing conceptions of White men who control these images of Black females. From this perspective, the image of smart or academically confident Black females are not appealing images to the mass public, thereby minimizing the importance of their academic achievement. For the participants, their academic ability, achievement, and academic-related behaviors were not positively influenced or encouraged as a result of their social media experiences. Based on this finding, the images of Black females on social media are being advertised and promoted in historically oppressed and sexualized roles, and ineffectively portrayed as academically confident.

These shared meaning-making experiences when interacting with others either on social media or offline assisted the participants in understanding their sense of self as being both Black and female. In this regard, the participants' binary experiences with

social media resulted in both negative psychological outcomes, as well as the participants having a positive sense of self, race, and gender (Hammer, 2009). Although several participants understood these experiences as negative, the experiences also increased their awareness of their racial and gendered selves. However, it is uncertain if the participants' view of their academic abilities would have been positively mitigated had they been socialized in school and social media environments which supported and encouraged high-achieving academic behaviors.

Attributions of Selfhood

The theme in this study denotes how the participants understand their sense of self globally and academically as a result of their past and current social media experiences. It is apparent that the participants' perceptions of their academic efforts in their schooling experiences, view of self, and the value placed on self-development was related to their decision to consume and produce social media over and again. From my analysis, my findings suggest that the interpersonal dimension of the participants' selfhood involved how they communicated images of themselves on social media to others and altered their behavior when others (peers, family, and others) were watching. However, this study fills a gap in previous research in that the participants' social media experiences of being socialized in oppressed images of Black females often resulted in a rise and drop in their self-esteem in which not only influenced an aspect of self but their academic achievement as well.

The findings support previous literature in that the participants developed positive racial self-concept through the support of the parents, in addition to their ability to

develop strong connections with like peers on social media (Okeke, Howard, Kurtz-Costes, & Rowley, 2009). The positive social supports in which the participants received on social media positively affirmed their positive Black female identity construction and positive self-concept, whereby assisting in their expression of voice through social media to express their everyday lives. It was important for the participants to have positive support and affiliations from others on social media as these experiences not only influenced the participants' self-image but self-esteem as well. From the participants' perspectives, they rarely saw positive images of Black females who are gay or bisexual. This finding suggests that Black females' sexual preference is not seen beyond constricted heterosexual roles.

The personal dilemmas experienced by the participants exhibits their struggle in being seen in oppressed and stereotypical ways by others while resisting their participation to produce messages resembling stereotypical images of Black females on social media. The participants expressed different versions of their self on different social media sites, identifying spaces in which they felt safe to be their true self. These Black females are caught between society's concepts of stereotypes and controlling images (Hammer, 2009), yet they also yearn for connection and relationship (Kaplan et al., 1991) through their continued social media consumption and production. The participants in this study asserted their importance of expressing their true self while resisting negative stereotypes of Black females. Although the participants agreed that their self-image was more than how they were viewed on social media, two participants exhibited self-deprecation where they felt that they do not have much to be proud of for not having

gone to college and having children prior to being married. While their self-esteem was high, they also experienced self-deprecation as a result of their negative beliefs about their academic ability.

The conflict in the relationship between the participants and social media was evident in this finding in that the participants deeply desired to defy stereotypes of Black females, yet they continued to consume and produce social media to express their sense of self. In this sense, social media offered opportunities for the participants to counter traditional racist and anti-feminist narratives that pervasively loom the online and offline world of others (Gordon et al., 2014). The findings highlight the participants' development of resistance strategies through internal and external social supports to maintain a positive sense of self (Ellington, 2015). However, the findings from the study suggest that the participants consistently experienced times in which their self-concept vacillated between negative and positive self-concept. For example, this study's findings were consistent with Kapidzic and Herring's (2015) study, several participants in this study admitted to still struggling with their body image and the illusion of the ideal female. The findings from this study also support Kapidzic and Herring's (2015) previous research. In this sense, although the participants are conscious of the controlling images of the ideal female, they admitted to feeling torn and succumbing to others' views of beauty and sexy. In an effort to avoid being stereotypically negative Black females on social media, the participants are conscious of the images and messages they post on social media.

Lastly, the participants' perceptions of their academic selves waxed and waned throughout their adolescent development. Students place different levels of importance on academics based on perceived personal or societal limitations, thus leading to diminished academic outcomes (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002). Furthermore, threats to development and acquisition of positive self-view and image can also influence adolescent girls' educational and vocational attainment as well as their life goals and aspirations (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014). The participants reported times in which they felt academically confident, however, their grades did not always reflect their true academic ability. For these participants, they shared times in which they did not always feel supported or encouraged by their teachers to complete homework or class work, their grades were high enough to not get in trouble at home, lacked motivation in school, were concerned more about their popularity among peers.

Subsequently, the participants' lack of motivation regarding their positive academic behaviors provides some insight into the influence of student-teacher relationships on adolescent Black females' academic self-concept. Several participants reported receiving motivation of high achieving behaviors from elementary school teachers while one participant indicated being academically motivated by one high school teacher. Four participants reported identifying more with Black teachers or professors, thereby developing close relationships with this group who also pushed the participants academically, held affirming views of their academic ability, creating high achieving expectations, created positive learning environments The absence of motivation from teachers in middle and high school is a factor that should be further explored along with

the influence of student-teacher relationships among adolescent Black females, classroom environment and school setting as the mitigating factors that may attribute to adolescent Black females' positive or negative development of their academic selves.

Additionally, the participants' negative perceptions of their academic ability stifled their placement in honors and advanced placement courses in high school. The participants did not report if their teachers during high school communicated expectations of success as indicated by Bacon and Aphramor (2014) as factors that influence student high academic achievement. However, the importance of cultural and social constructs helped shape the participants' perceptions, viewpoints, and images of themselves and their future in understanding the role of gender differences and experiences during development (Bacon & Aphramor, 2014). This example signifies the participants' fear of failure, rejection, and not feeling good enough as it relates to their academic self and acquisition of academic ability of their future selves.

Previous studies examine the implications of racial self-concept on the academic achievement of Blacks as a group, however, many studies fail to include an examination gender and racial self-perceptions on Black female academic achievement (Okeke, et al., 2009; Muhammed & McArthur, 2015). This study examined the self-perceptions of Black females as academically confident in an attempt to understand their academic self. Traditional perspectives of girls' academic self-concepts are influenced by the notion of boys performing better in mathematics and science than girls (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2008; Beyer, 1999). The findings regarding the participants' academic self-concept revealed

that a majority of the participants shared experiences included them not feeling supported in traditional socially-ascribed male-dominated subjects such as math and science.

Supported by the previous research on HBCU's and PWI's, the interaction between student and faculty was vital for many students' academic self-concepts, which supports other research linking teacher expectations to student performance (Cokley, 2000; Ferguson, 2003). Similarly, several participants' views of their improved self-confidence were attributed to their Black female college professors' belief in them. The findings of this theme demonstrate that the participants' gender and academic self-concept led to a decline or increase in positive actions and academic achievements based upon the participants' views of self. As seen in previous research, the participants' academic performance was influenced by their motivation (Okeke, et al., 2009). Several participants' views of what an academically confident Black female looks like were associated with the idea of beauty and appearance.

While the participants acknowledge and desire to be seen beyond their physical appearance, they too continue to subconsciously struggle with the maintenance of the oppressive psychological association of the ideal female image. The importance of this study was to the participants for them and for others to see intelligent and academically confident Black females on social media. For the participants in this study, being socialized in images of Black females that defied traditional and historical stereotypes would have assisted in the further positive development of their future global and academic selves. In contrast to the Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, and Stevenson study

(2014), the participants in this study rejected Black-character portrayals and media images as valid models of acceptable and expected behaviors for Black people.

The patterns of invisibility describe Black women's narratives on social media are influenced by racism, sexism, and misogyny (Valari, 2015). The study participants' response to the overwhelmingly negative perceptions of Black females on social media, catapulted their desires in the changing this singular narrative. In this sense, the participants produced counter-narratives through their conscious productions of positive images of Black females in multiple roles on social media. The participants' expressed concern over the damaging effects on young, Black girls surrounding the negative portrayal of Black females in social media.

The assertion of the absence of positive Black females on social media indicates that Blacks are unimportant and powerless (Graves, 1999; Powell, 1982). Several participants had a critical understanding of the historically negative portrayal of Black females in which they consciously attempted to resist. These participants attributed their abilities to attempt commodifying these negative portrayals of Black females due to their families educating them about how Black females are viewed and typecast by others. Assuming this critical stance positioned these participants in better understanding the roles of race and gender as constructs of oppression in society. In summary, it was important for the participants' voices to be heard, for them to create their own representations of who they are, and how they desire to be perceived; rather than a singular negative dominant narrative throughout social media to describe their Black femaleness.

Recommendations for Practice

The four major conclusions from this study have resulted in my developing recommendations for practice. The lived social media experiences described by the participants encapsulate binaries of oppression resulting from gender and racial biases and stereotypes. The implications of these stereotypes are comprehensive and fluent throughout the participants' lives. Racial and gender centrality were central to the participants' sense of self globally and academically, in addition to the ways in which the participants understand their sense of self, based on their lived social media experiences mitigated by patriarchal stereotypes. Social media's influence on how the participants see themselves and the ways they would like to be seen by others was vastly different. The recommendations for improved practice are summarized.

Recommendation One: Encourage Use of Multimedia Platforms

It is important for Black females to find and assert their voice in order to accurately reflect their lived experiences. Adolescent Black females should be encouraged to express and discuss their lived experiences on multiple multimedia platforms to elevate their voices. Adolescent Black females' defining moments should be incorporated into multiple spaces and places that support their personal growth and developments. Additionally, their personal life experiences should be used to educate others. Online and offline communities should support this expression of self by encouraging adolescent Black females to challenge oppressive thinking, support their developing ideas of Blackness and femaleness, and challenge what they may have internalized as Black females. Furthermore, adolescent Black females should be assisted

in developing an awareness to think more critically about their sense of self as both Black and female, while developing skills to navigate their self-esteem in relation to media exposure. Educators, practitioners, scholars, and community members should create communities in schools, neighborhoods, and other third spaces where learning occurs to educate, affirm, raise consciousness, and validate their sense of self as they navigate their identities in a White, male dominated society.

Recommendation Two: Provide a Positive Digital Mirror

Adolescence is a developmental period in which many individuals view themselves the way that others view them. The implications of media's satirized characterization of Black females as oppressed and marginalized beings has had daunting ramifications on Black females' sense of self. To assist adolescent Black females in navigating conflicting representations on new media's readily accessible form of medium, it is important to identify viable resources for Black females to encompass such needs. By presenting Black females in multidimensional, dynamic, multifaceted, and multiperspective roles on social media, this has the ability to not only teach Black females how to resist White, patriarchal views of femininity but to redefine what it means to be Black and female outside of White, patriarchal norms.

Thus, mediated views of Black females as academically confident and competent, assertive, beauty in all shapes and sizes changes the stereotypes and thereby dismantles the oppressive mediated images of Black females in society. These multifaceted views of Black females as positive, academically confident, and successful offers relative information to others while fostering confidence and belief of self for Black females in

and out of school. Increasing adolescent Black females' awareness of multiple career trajectories that are boundless of race and gender stereotypes, better enables them to see themselves beyond traditionally bounded career roles. Hence, increasing positive views of Black females on social media has the ability to positively socialize thoughts, ideas, images, and messages of Black females that influence the cognitive, affective, and behavior dimensions of others.

Recommendation Three: School and Home Support Structures

Increasing support structures for Black females both in and out of school shapes adolescent Black females' academic confidence. Schools, teachers, educational practitioners, parents, and community should create educational pathways at an early age which support the positive development of young, Black females' sense of global and academic self. Consequently, these experiences shape students' academic confidence and ability to handle honors and advanced placement courses throughout their schooling experiences. Increasing personal and academic awareness of factors that support student success such as understanding and respecting students as unique, multicultural, diverse learners; teachers adopt a culturally responsive pedagogical approach which embraces cultural and linguistic diversity; assist teachers in becoming socio-culturally competent teachers; teach rigorous academic curriculum; hold affirming views about Black females academic ability; nurture Black girls' academic identities by promoting academic efficacy; develop a school setting and culture which fosters academic success; encourage and support critical inquiry; present current and future opportunities that offer academic success and career opportunities.

Schools, teachers, and practitioners should develop positive relationships with Black girls and encourage positive interactions with school professionals and peers. Parents of young Black girls should hold affirming views of not only racial self-concept but gender and academic self-concept as well. Parents should not place limits or constraints on Black girls' academic ability or career paths, but foster beliefs of high-achievement, as well as racial and gender pride. When young Black girls are supported by family, teachers, and practitioners to conceptualize themselves as academic beings for academic success, sustainable change can be made. Parents, schools, and communities should also highlight influential and successful Black women from various career paths and walks of life, albeit traditional or nontraditional paths. Schools and communities are also encouraged to create clubs, programs, and organizations that support adolescent Black females' racial, gender, and academic self-concept.

Recommendation Four: Commitment to Critical Media Pedagogy

Schools and communities should commit to adopting and integrating critical media pedagogical praxis. Critical media pedagogy encompasses a critical approach to literacy education which involves critical awareness, reflection, and action. It is an educational approach that allows youth to become more aware of the role media plays in reifying hegemonic ideology. Critical media pedagogues teach students to utilize critical reasoning skills to decode and analyze texts produced across multiple genres while addressing issues of gender, race, class, sexuality, and power. Critical media pedagogy exposes hegemonic representations in media and teaches students to create counter images to these oppressive images.

Critical media pedagogy supports individualistic self-expression while supporting the developing voice of adolescent Black girls. Schools, educators, practitioners, scholars, parents should expand beyond the traditional frames of educating youth by integrating multimedia learning projects to promote social justice. Critical media pedagogy offers promise and potential to transform the lives of traditionally marginalized groups of people. Further, the pedagogical approach motivates and encourages students, whereby offering hands-on creative, and expressive means of learning. Critical media pedagogues foster participatory and collective action among adults and young people as prejudices and oppression are challenged.

Limitations

There are several limitations noted for this study. First, there was a reliance upon participants to self-report as accurate and truthful information about their lived experiences with social media. Further, the study relied on the participants' recollection of their academic experiences in middle and high school, and some participants were able to recall more experiences than others; however, it is unknown as to the factors that may have contributed to the recollection of these experiences. Additionally, utilizing a global self-concept scale and an academic self-concept scale may have yielded more individualized domain-specific results as it pertains to the participants' global and academic self-concept. While it was important to hear and acknowledge the voices of the participants, using a mixed methodology of this study may have produced more concrete data regarding the participants' view of self globally and academically. The study also relied on the participants' understanding of self and as well as insight to critically reflect

on these experiences as influential on their developing sense of self. The younger participants in the study found it difficult to articulate their understanding of self from middle and late adolescence as they were only beginning to self-reflect on their decisions to consume, produce, and participate in certain media genres. The researcher had limited access to the participants' lived experiences on social media, and relied on their self-report regarding the types of social media in which they consumed and produced.

While there was collection of media artifacts for this study, it served as a snapshot of the participants' interactions; however, an ethnographic perspective over the course of several months would have provided more insightful information regarding how the participants truly projected images of themselves, observation of social media interactions with peers, and provide more insight into how the participants viewed their sense of global and academic self, based upon their continued consumption and production of social media. There was no within group comparison conducted from the study to determine if there was the interplay between the participants' socioeconomic status, highest grade completed, school region, and sense of self in emerging adulthood. Although the participants reported fluctuation between positive and negative academic self-concept in their schooling experiences, there was no collection of artifacts to support or refute their perceived academic performance. This study did not consist of a homogenous group of Black females as the participants in this study were not all from the same socioeconomic background, geographic region, and higher education attendance. Therefore, it is unclear if the findings would yield the same or similar results as the current study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study raised several questions that would be beneficial to address in future research. It is clear from the participants' experiences with social media that their shared experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and prejudice were internalized and influential in how they viewed their sense of self. The looming effects of the patriarchal ideal female image that controls ideas of beauty and appearance are far-reaching for Black females. While it is widely known about media's effects on Black females, it is unclear of the depth and breadth of social media's effects on socializing biases and stereotypes of Black females and the long-term implications this has on young Black girls' global and academic self-concepts, thereby additional research is needed to further explore these mediated effects. As such, I offer five recommendations for future research to guide the practices of educators, social service practitioners, scholars, and community programs.

Recommendation One: Examination of the Effects of Patriarchal Image on Black Girls

This study revealed social media's negative influence on adolescent Black girls' body image, specifically pertaining to fitting the patriarchal ideal female image of being thin. The socialization of the patriarchal ideal female image that is used as society's guide of beauty promotes weight loss products, specialized diets, fitness equipment, and plastic surgery as ways to achieve this image. While the participants in this study used special diets and altered their physical features to meet society's standards of beauty as guided by the images they saw on social media, they failed to embrace more recent standards of beauty of having lip and butt injections as socialized on social media. Research is needed

to explore the underlying reasons surrounding why Black females are succumbing to the thin ideal body images, yet rejecting physical feature enhancements of lip and butt injections. Although the participants in this study were keenly aware of the predominate negative images of Black females found on social media, particularly in regards to the misogynistic portrayal of their bodies, they continued to consume and produce social media over and again despite social media's reinforcement of these biased and stereotyped images. Therefore, understanding Black females' reasons for consuming these images on social media over and again and the long-term influence this has on their self-concept is a phenomenon that is yet to be understood.

Recommendation Two: Factors Influencing Black Females' Academic Self-Concept

The second recommendation for future research is understanding adolescent Black females' perceptions of their student-teacher relationships and how these girls perceive support from teachers, classroom, and school environments. This is important in having a better understanding of additional factors that may influence adolescent Black females' academic self-concepts. These factors could also reveal any underlying issues relating to discipline disproportionality as it relates to adolescent Black female behaviors in school and the potential cultural mismatch between them and their teachers. All of these factors are essential when examining social media's effects on others' perceptions of Black females in the classroom, and its subsequent influence on Black girls' academic self.

Moreover, participants' in this study experienced a rise and drop in their self-esteem due to being socialized in oppressed images of Black females, resulting in their

being influenced by how they felt about themselves, in addition to how they felt about their academic achievement. Also, further research is needed in understanding adolescent Black females' perceptions of their schooling experiences in relation to their experiences with social media. In this sense, understanding Black females' academic self-efficacy and how that influences their approach towards goals, tasks, and challenges is critical in understanding their overall academic self-concept. This is pivotal in understanding these influences on these girls' academic-related behaviors, perceptions of academic ability and achievement, and how they make sense of these experiences as it relates to their academic self-concept. As these findings fill the gap in existing research, it would be beneficial to further explore this nuance of social media's influence on adolescent Black females' self-esteem and self-efficacy from both a global and academic perspective.

Recommendation Three: Examination of Intersectional Experiences of Oppression

The third recommendation for future research is an examination of Black females' intersectional experiences of oppression with social media. The participants in this study navigate their intersectional experiences of oppression on social media through their displaying multiple personas on different social media sites. However, research is needed to explore if and at what point, adolescent Black females reveal their true self on social media and the ways in which they understand that process. The rate at which Black females are exposed to the intersectional forms of oppression via social media are significant and occur at much younger ages at a more rapid rate than in the past. Consequently, a part of finding and expressing their true self as it relates to their race,

gender, class, and sexuality are vital to understanding how adolescents' self-concept is developed.

Further, many adolescents struggle with finding voice in regards to their sexuality out of fear of rejection from peers, family, and community members when it involves their sexuality. As Black females navigate the multiple and overlapping forms of oppression, it is essential to understand how social media supports or hinders their sense of self inclusive of their sexuality. Although one participant in the study shared that she used social media for support when she decided to "come out" to her parents, this is vital to understanding the role that social media plays in providing support to individuals' sexual preference. More research is needed to explore how adolescent Black females use social media for support regarding their sexuality and advocate for change.

Recommendation Four: Efficacy of Critical Media Pedagogy

The fourth recommendation for research includes the examination of the efficacy of critical media pedagogy for Black females' use to achieve dissonance from biased and stereotypes of Black females in social media. It is important to know that if schools, community organizations, and social service programs adopt and teach critical media pedagogy to adolescent Black females and other marginalized groups, the influence this would have on their developing sense of global and academic self. This would allow marginalized and oppressed groups to create counter-narratives to the oppressive thinking and ideology embedded within society and the mediated online platform of social media. The historical and existing messages about Black females on social media are so insidious that many do not even recognize that it is occurring. Moreover, these images

and messages about Black females falsely aid in the complexity of what these women understand to be Black and female in a white, male-dominated society. Consequently, the fast-paced and rampant socialization of these derogatory and misogynistic images of and about Black females on social media is truly a phenomenon to be further studied.

Recommendation Five: Social Media's Lasting Implications

The final recommendation for future research is to explore the lasting implications of the negative stereotypical images and messages of Black females on social media. A longitudinal study to understand the effects of social media's socialization of these message of Black females from early adolescence through late adolescence would provide more in-depth, rich detail, and insight into their lived experiences and understanding of their sense of global and academic self. It is important to understand the immense differences between traditional media and new media as social media, and how young people are using social media as their primary source of news and information. Further, it is crucial in understanding how marginalized and oppressed adolescents make sense of their mediated online experiences, and in turn, how these experiences influence their continued consumption of new media over and again. The information that young and impressionable adolescents are accessing and being exposed to informs their sense of self as it relates to their gender, race, sexuality, class, and ability.

In this sense, social media has become a central socializing tool used by adolescents for friendship, support, love, and aspiration for their future selves. The thoughts and ideas supported by social media can either contribute to or dismantle the

systemic forms of oppression within society. However, examining who controls the messages and educating others about the knowledge of Black females is a part of breaking the cycle of oppression. These recommendations for future research have the ability to highlight and offer a more critical understanding of how social media influences adolescent Black females' global and academic selves, the implications of how others' view Black females on social media, and implications for change and practice as critical media pedagogues.

Summary

There are many people who will benefit from this study, including educators, scholars, practitioners, parents, therapists, and other helping professionals who work with adolescent Black females. The effects of how Black females integrate dominant and negatively stereotypical representations of Black females on social media in their meaning-making experiences through social media is pivotal to understanding their sense of self. This study is extremely vital to the fields of education, psychology, media studies, counseling, and social work because social media's rapid and instant communication exposes adolescents to many negative images at faster rates than traditional media. In this regard, adolescents, specifically adolescent Black females, are socialized as oppressed and marginalized beings by these instant images in which they are exposed multiple times per day. The social media content does not support adolescent Black females' academic confidence, ability, or achievement; rather, it socializes deleterious images which negatively influence their self-image as stereotypical and uneducated.

The integration of critical media pedagogy in schools and communities enables historically marginalized Black females to evaluate, dismantle, and produce counter-narratives to the dominant oppressive images traditionally produced on social media. Critical media pedagogy supports the positive and healthy development of Blackness and females for adolescent Black females. Critical media pedagogy also examines the culture of power inherent in media stereotypes of Black females. This study explored the lived experiences of late adolescent Black females on social media and described their understanding of their global and academic selves based upon their offline and online experiences.

This study highlighted the factors aimed at young Black women, why there is such an increase in negative thinking and perceptions, and what can be done to prevent the high volume of negative thinking and perceptions of self globally and academically. This study conveys the changes that should be made about the type of images and messages that are projected on young, Black girls. It is also critical for teachers, counselors, social workers, practitioners, and scholars to have a knowledge base of social media's influence on adolescent Black females and other marginalized groups that are exposed to hegemonic and oppressive information on new media. This study offers recommendations for research and practice offer a sustainable change in the fields of education, media studies, counseling, social work, psychology, and anthropology. This lends credibility to equally understanding the importance of the challenges, pressures, and expectations that adolescent Black females face in medium, schools, and society at-large.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT LETTER

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

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Nakeshia Williams. I am a Ph.D graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I am calling in hopes of recruiting you for my research study. The research topic focuses on how social media may or may not shape adolescent Black females' self-concept.
The following eligibility criteria were selected for my participants:

1) Black female
2) Ages 18 to 24
3) Past and current social media experience

Do you meet the selected criteria? If so, may I interview you? If you do agree to participate in this study, pseudonyms are used and you will engage in a 45 to 60-minute interview, which will be recorded using a handheld audio recorder. There are twenty-five interview protocol questions. This study will also consist of a focus group with five additional participants. This interview will engage you in a 60 to 90-minute group interview, which will be recorded using a handheld audio recorder. There are fourteen interview protocol questions. Interviews will be held at a local nonprofit agency and will be scheduled to accommodate the schedules of all participants. At the conclusion of the study, participants will receive a $15.00 gift certificate for your participation.

Please email (nwilli85@uncc.edu) back specifying the date and time that works best for you in regards to the interview. I cannot thank you enough for assisting me in this matter, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best,

Nakeshia N. Williams, Ph.D Candidate

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

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

Digital Mirror: An Examination of Social Media's Influence on Late Adolescent Black Females' Global and Academic Self-Concept

Project Title and Purpose:
You are invited to participate in a research study entitled Digital Mirror: An Examination of Social Media's Influence on Late Adolescent Black Females' Global and Academic Self-Concept.

This study explores the influence of social media on late adolescent Black females' self-concept.

Investigator(s):
This study is being conducted by Nakeshia Williams-Ph.D Candidate and will be advised by Dr. Chance W. Lewis (Dissertation Chair).

Description of Participation:
Purposeful and snowball sampling is used in this study of 10 to 15 individuals to participate in this study. Participation criteria for the study are female, Black ethnicity, ages 18 to 24, and past/current social media experiences. You will be asked to answer open-ended interview question about your self-concept and social media experiences in an initial 45 to 60-minute audio-recorded interview. There are ten interview protocol questions. Next, you will be asked to participate and answer in-depth, open-ended interview questions about their social media consumption, production, interpretation, perceptions, beliefs, etc. in a 60 to 90-minute video-recorded focus group with other you. There are thirteen focus group interview protocol questions. You will also participate in a live Twitter discussion with other you lasting roughly 30 to 45 minutes using a private and secure Twitter account in which you will be given access to by the researcher during the focus group. The interviews will conclude by offering you a platform to express any additional comments or concerns. Individual interviews and focus group interview will be used to conduct the interviews in order to accommodate the schedules of all you. At the conclusion of the study, you will receive a $15.00 gift certificate for their participation

You may also engage in member checking via a phone or a face-to-face conversation up to one month after the initial interview.

There are potential risks that may be associated with recalling past social media experience. You will be informed that they will have the right to decline any question that they want and withdraw from participating if they feel uncomfortable at any time. Great attention will be paid to social cues, your comfort level as questions are asked, and your body language so as to minimize any risk factors. You will only recount your social media practices and experiences.

Length of Participation

As mentioned, participation in this project will consist of one initial 45 to 60-minute interview using a handheld audio recorder. Next, you will participate in a 60-minute focus group interview using a video camcorder. Lastly, you will participate in a live tweet session during the focus group interview. If you decide to participate, you will be one of 10 to 15 individuals in this study. You may also be contacted later via cell phone or through a face-to-face conversation to engage in member checking during this one-month period after the initial interviews.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

This study poses no risks to informants. Informants will have the right to decline any question that they want and withdraw from participating if they feel uncomfortable at any time. Great attention will be paid to social cues, your comfort levels as questions are asked, and your body language so as to minimize any risk factors. You will only recount your overall social media consumption, production, decoding and analysis, and socialization experiences.

This study seeks to examine ways in which social media influences late adolescent Black females' sense of self. This research does not attend to certain social groups, cultures, and so the meanings gathered from the study are not exclusive to late adolescent Black females. Your voices have the potential to affect media culture, teaching and learning praxis, and how best to meet the educational, psychological, socio-emotional, and socio-cultural needs of students from diverse backgrounds. The impact of this research provides the implication for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars to reflect an understanding of how all students experience media.

Volunteer Statement:

You are a volunteer. The decision to participate in this study is completely up to you. If you decide to be in the study, you may stop at any time. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to participate or if you stop once you have started.

Confidentiality:

Any information about your participation, including your identity, will be kept

confidential to the extent possible. Pseudonyms will be used for all you. The following steps will be taken to ensure this confidentiality: interviews will be transcribed and de-identified. Data will be referred to by coded identifiers for all analysis. Data will be stored on a password-protected laptop computer and destroyed five years post project completion.

Fair Treatment and Respect:
UNC Charlotte wants to make sure that you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Contact the University's Research Compliance Office (704-687-1871) if you have any questions about how you are treated as a study participant. If you have any questions about the project, please contact Nakeshia Williams (678-521-3468), nwilli85@uncc.edu; Dr. Chance W. Lewis (704-687-1210), chance.lewis@uncc.edu.

This form was approved for use on _____for a period of one (1) year.

Participant Consent
I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research project. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the Principal Investigator.

_____ _____
Participant Name (PRINT) DATE

_____ _____
Participant Signature DATE

_____ _____
Investigator Signature DATE

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Before asking the demographic questions below, I will confirm the participant's information given during initial screening after written consent has been obtained.

1. Tell me about your background?
2. What is your relationship status?
3. What is your sexuality?
4. What is your family size?
5. What is the highest grade you completed?
6. Are you currently employed? If so, do you work part time or full time?
7. What type of social media do you use and how do you primarily access social media?
8. How would you describe the frequency of your social media participation?

APPENDIX D: PILOT STUDY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1) Tell me about your social media experiences.
2) What aspects of the social media stand out for you (good or bad)?
3) Do you feel like you see a lot of positive images of Black women on social media?
4) How do you think other people perceive Black females on social media?
5) In what way does this media experience influence your image of yourself academically?
6) What would you change, if anything, about how Black women are portrayed in social media?
7) What are the dominant images of Black females in social media?
8) Based on the images you see of Black females; how do you think others may view you?
9) Have you ever changed any aspects of your appearance due to social media influences and why? If yes, please describe your experience.
10) Was that, or did it ever become that you were trying to fit in with your friends as much as trying to fit into what you saw on social media?
11) Has your interaction with social media changed how you look at yourself or behaviors?

APPENDIX E: PILOT STUDY FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

1) Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your family? Tell me about your friends? What are they like?
2) What do you like about yourself and your life?
3) Is there anything you would change about yourself or your life?
4) How do you describe yourself?
5) How would others describe you?
6) How do you feel about yourself?
7) What are you most proud of?
8) What do you do very well? What things are most difficult for you? What are some things you would like to do much better?
9) Do you believe that you are successful?
10) What are things you think has helped you to be successful?
11) Is there anyone or anything that you feel that has helped to influence how you believe about yourself?
12) Do you consider yourself to be different from others?
13) How would others describe you?
14) Are you on social media? If so, what social media sites are you on and how often?
15) Do you have friends on social media? What kind of relationships do you have with your friends on social media?
16) Do you ever see how Black females are portrayed in social media? If so, has your perception of Black females on social media developed and/or changed over time?

APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Before asking the demographic questions below, I will confirm the participant's information after obtaining written consent to participate in the study (the participant's age and social media experience).

1. Tell me about your background?
2. What extracurricular activities do you participate in?
3. Can you describe a time when you felt positive about yourself?

- What about negatively?

4. Can you describe a time in your schooling experiences where you felt academically confident?
5. How would you describe who or what has influenced your academic confidence?
6. Can you describe a time when you have seen academically confident Black women in social media?
7. How would you describe your participation in social media?
8. Can you describe how your social media experiences have influenced your perception of your academic confidence or academic effort?
9. In what ways have others' perceptions of Black females on social media have affected your academic experiences?
10. What does self-concept mean to you?
11. Can you describe how social media has influenced your perspective on friends, family, career, social life, academics?

APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Before I begin the focus group, I explain to the participants that the purpose of the focus group is to obtain information about their social media experiences. During the focus group, I will ask questions to facilitate a conversation about how social media might influence perceptions of Black females. Please keep in mind that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to any of the questions I will ask. The purpose is to stimulate conversation and hear the opinions of everyone in the room. I hope you will be comfortable speaking honestly and sharing your ideas with us.

Please note that this session will be video recorded to ensure we adequately capture your ideas during the conversation. However, the comments from the focus group will remain confidential and your name will not be attached to any comments you make. Do you have any questions before we begin?

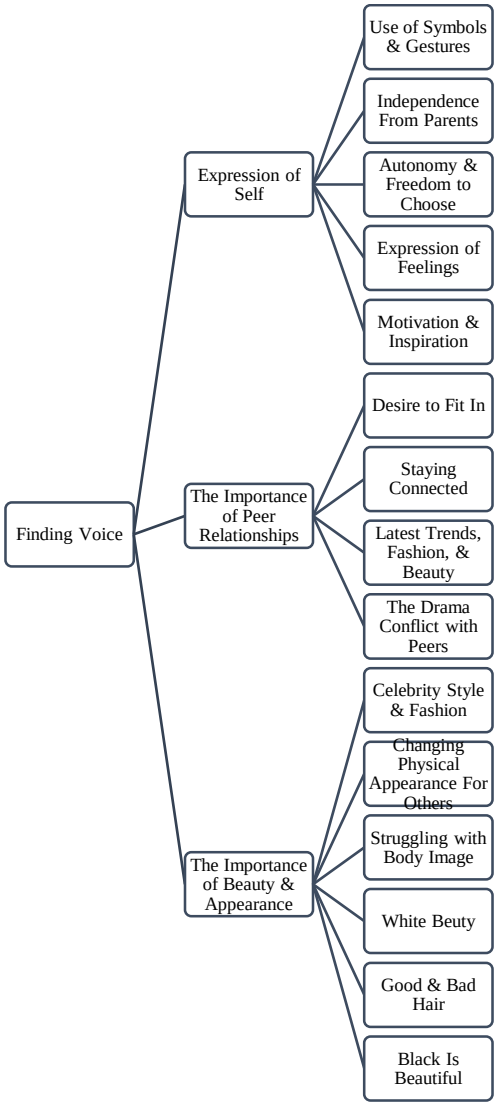
1. Let's do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell the group your name and one fun fact about you?
2. Where do you see yourself in five years?
3. First, I would like to hear about your social media experiences. In what ways do you use social media?
4. What do you like best about social media? What do you like the least about social media?
5. What makes you decide to continue to participate in social media over and again?
6. Where do you get new information?

- How do you feel about having instant and easy access to social media more readily than you would on just television, newspaper, or in magazines?

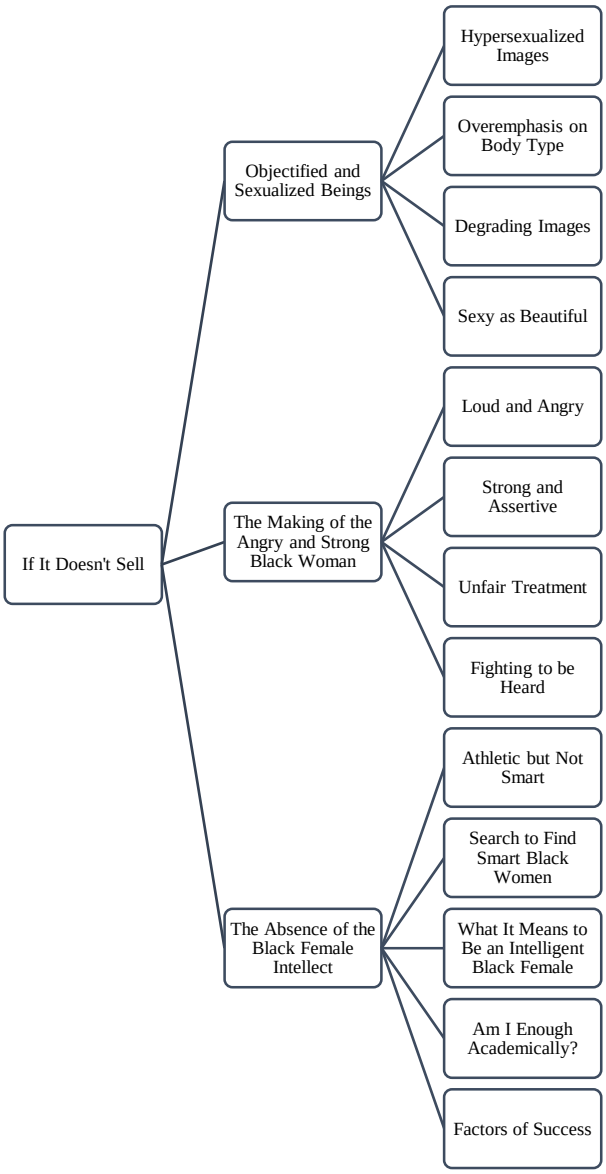
7. What are the dominant images of Black females that you see in social media?
8. Based on the images you see of Black females how would you describe how Black women are portrayed? How would others describe their view of them?

9. In what ways would you describe the similarities or differences between how others view Black females on social media and how you view yourself?
10. In what ways do you feel social media encourages adolescents to fit in with friends as much as trying to fit into what they see on social media?
11. In what ways do these images of Black females on social media encourage or discourage academic effort in school?
12. In what ways has your exposure to Black women on social media influenced your belief about your race, gender, sexuality, or academic ability?
13. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed yet that you think is important to add about this topic?

APPENDIX H: FINDING VOICE FEATURE AND THEMES



APPENDIX I: IF IT DOESN'T SELL FEATURE AND THEMES



APPENDIX J: I AM WHO I AM FEATURE AND THEMES