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Sacred Spaces: A Narrative Analysis of the Influences of Language and Literacy Experiences on the Self-Hood and Identity of High-Achieving African American Female College Freshmen

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Sacred Spaces: A Narrative Analysis of the Influences of
Language and Literacy Experiences on the Self-Hood and
Identity of High-Achieving African American Female
College Freshmen

by

Michelle Flowers Taylor

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,
Loyola Marymount University,
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Doctor of Education

2015

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Language and Literacy Experiences on the Self-Hood and
Identity of High-Achieving African American Female
College Freshmen

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by

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This dissertation written by Michelle Flowers Taylor, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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ABSTRACT

Sacred Spaces: A Narrative Analysis of the Influences of
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Late-adolescent African American students face unique difficulties on their journey to womanhood. As members of a double minority (i.e., African American and female) (Jean & Feagin, 1998), certain limiting stereotypes relevant to both race and gender pose challenges to these students. They must overcome these challenges in order to excel within the various and changing environments they move through on a daily basis (hooks, 1981, 1994). Within the context of social justice, this dissertation provides insight into the role that language and literacy practices play to help enable the positive and affirming development of self-hood of African American college freshmen. This research is qualitative and employs critical narrative inquiry to analyze data collected from six academically high-achieving African American female freshmen college students

attending Ivy League, Historically Black Colleges, and private and state universities in the United States.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

To appreciate the complexities of the lives of high-performing, late-adolescent female African American students, it is important to realize the multiplicity of their experiences. They come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and geographic locations. They aspire to careers in different fields, and their goals are diverse. Yet, despite the heterogeneity of their backgrounds, society tends to under-conceptualize the dynamic meanings of their experiences (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012; Buckley & Carter, 2005). In fact, there is a tendency to conceptualize African American girls in a rather monolithic way based on society's expectations of them. LeeAnn M. Sutherland (2005) described this phenomenon by explaining how African American girls "are often expected within the larger social context to 'be' a particular something, to hold particular values, and to exhibit particular behaviors" (Sutherland, 2005a, p. 370).

Continuing, she stated regarding society's expectations for African American girls:

They are expected to be loud and smart-mouthed. They are expected to be poor and likely to be thieves. They are expected to be sexually promiscuous. In a culture dominated by a Eurocentric standard of beauty, Black women also learn, in myriad ways, that they are not considered as attractive—especially those with dark complexions—as those with blonde hair and blue eyes. Because these ascriptions of identity define Black women as a group, they can serve as boundaries on what individuals are able to be. (Sutherland, 2005, pp. 366–367)

Society's expectations thereby impose boundaries on the lives of African American girls that limit how they may be perceived, and how they feel perceive themselves (Doswell, 1998; Jacob, 2002). These imposed boundaries originate from historical stereotypes and are often associated with terms such as *hostile*, *threatening*, *ignorant*, *loud*, and *angry* (Koonce, 2012; Walley-Jean, 2009). One does not need to look too far to see instances of

how African American women are treated based on these negative stereotypes, in classrooms, in the public, and in society as a whole. The participants in this study represented a larger population of African American female students who are being affected by the negative stereotypes. These negative stereotypes are evident in the way that dominant society conceptualizes this population through language and through social practices.

The 2013 example of Rachel Jeantel, who testified in the historic Zimmerman versus Martin case in Florida, demonstrates how much the expression of language—particularly as it relates to African Americans—is still a pressing topic of public discussion. Jeantel, who was on the phone with Trayvon Martin minutes before his murder, testified regarding what she remembered that night. Minutes after her testimony was broadcasted, Jeantel was mocked and ridiculed via social media and by supporters of the defense. Most, if not all, of the ridicule focused on her use of language. One media critic stated she was “less intelligent and more confused” (Sherri, n.d.). One CNN news blogger aptly summed up the perception of the witness based on her use of language when she stated that Jeantel was viewed as “less intelligent because of the ‘language barrier’ and more confused because of the lawyers' failure to understand whom Rachel is, where she comes from, what kind of life she lives” (Samara, 2013). The perception of Jeantel demonstrated that the language that a person speaks is a common marker of class membership (Purcell-Gates, 1995). The social justice issues that result from this judgmental assessment are impactful and affect the population of this study that I will conduct.

The negative perception of Black English Vernacular (BEV) or African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has existed for many years. In *Language in the Inner City* (1973) linguist William Labov researched whether or not "dialect differences" had anything to do with reading failure and poor academic performance. And if this were the case, could educators' knowledge of the differences between AAVE and Standard American English be useful in curricula design and delivery of services to AAVE speakers? Labov (1973) believed that teachers could be more effective with AAVE-speaking students if teachers used their knowledge about potential interferences between "standard" English and AAVE in their instruction. Moreover, he concluded that the conflicts between AAVE and standardized American English were symbolic of the cultural conflict and racism that is inherent in the society at large, and played out in the classroom.

Research supports that languages are defined politically, not scientifically (Lanehart, 2001; Stubbs, 1976), but prejudice and judgment based on language usage are common and lead to challenges for certain populations, in this case, late-adolescent girls, as we have witnessed in the Trayvon Martin case, and at times in the lives of the girls who participated in this dissertation research. As argued by Norman Fairclough (1993, 1995, 2010, 2015), language is viewed in a certain way as part of a social practice. It is a part of social life, which is related to other parts. Fairclough (2010, 2015) has employed the term "language discourse" to explain this conceptualization of language use conceived as social practice. In a capitalist society, as in the United States, there are specific characteristics of orders of discourse, and "various social institutions contribute to sustaining the position of the dominant class" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 67). Capitalist

societies are highly intertwined and involved in the complex enterprise of maintaining class domination (Freire, 1974a; Gramsci, 2010). According to Fairclough (2015):

There are for instance certain key discourse types which embody ideologies which legitimize, more or less directly, existing societal relations, and which are so salient in modern society that they have “colonized” many institutional orders of discourse . . . For instance, the constant doses of “news” which most people receive each day are a significant factor in social control, and they account for a not insignificant proportion of a person’s average involvement in discourse. (2015, p. 67)

Further, Fairclough’s (2015) stance on the relationship between language and social institutional practices and broader social structures has clarified how the text of media broadcasts is directed to define social structures and power relations that the media operate. The media, therefore, plays an ideological role in muddying the relations of domination. The media influence public and individual people to then brutalize black women, and from seeing black women brutalized through the media, certain narratives about black women are reinforced (Duke, 2002).

In recent years, there have been numerous examples in the media of African American women and girls being treated harshly by agents or representatives of the state, particularly by police officers. For example, videorecorded on a cell phone and shared online was a bikini-clad 14-year-old teenager Dajerria Becton, who was wrestled to the ground and kned in the back by a male police officer at a pool party in Florida because she was falsely accused of attending a party that she was not invited to attend. Eric Casebolt, the police officer who detained Ms. Becton yelled profanities at her and her friends.

More recently is the highly visible police incident and subsequent death of Sandra Bland in Texas, who was thrown to the ground and kned in the back because police

perceived her as "combative" during a traffic stop. A Waller County police official later described her using the term "it," rather than "her," stating: "It was not a model person stopped on a traffic stop" (CNN, 2015). This case demonstrated yet another disturbing trend in the treatment of African American women by representatives of the state, and has catalyzed a responsive social movement called Say Her Name, which comes on the heels of the Black Lives Matter civil rights movement—both aimed at raising awareness of police brutality against African Americans, including women.

In addition to brutality resulting from stereotypes regarding African American women committed by public figures, there have been numerous instances of senseless acts of violence against Black women committed by private citizens, resulting from fearful and negative perceptions of them. For instance, there was 19-year-old Renisha McBride who was shot in the face and killed in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan, with no questions asked, after she knocked on someone's door asking for help after a car accident. The man who killed her, Theodore Wafer, was convicted after a nine-day trial that centered on whether the 55-year-old had a reasonable and honest belief that his safety was in peril. He testified that pounding awakened him on his door, and he shot McBride because he feared for his life. But a jury rejected his claim of self-defense.

While the details of each of these instances are different, each of these African American women were viewed as being guilty of something; being hostile, threatening, ignorant, loud, or angry (Koonce, 2012; Walley-Jean, 2009) Black women. The criminology research has demonstrated that differential policing is doled out to African American women. The differential policing and treatment is evidenced in the language utilized by police in reference to African American women along with their perception of

them (Cashmore & McLaughlin, 2013; Genders & Player, 1989; Karen & Janet, 2008). In research on police perceptions of African American women, data convey that officers think that Black women are “frequently hostile and difficult to handle and tended to attribute these difficulties to innate racial characteristics. Black women were seen to be highly volatile, aggressive, and as ‘having a chip on their shoulder’” (Genders & Player, 1989, p. 123).

Even First Lady Michelle Obama is not exempt from this characterization. As witnessed on the cover of *The New Yorker* magazine (Blitt, 2008), then-presidential candidate Barack Obama appeared with Michelle Obama, who was depicted wearing an afro hairstyle, dressed in military fatigues, toting a machine gun across her back held up by a holster filled with ammunition (Figure 1). The illustration, by Barry Blitt, is called “The Politics of Fear” and, according to a *New Yorker* press release, it “satirizes the use of scare tactics and misinformation in the Presidential election to thwart Barack Obama's campaign” (Sklar, 2008). Satire notwithstanding, the cartoonish image certainly played into the stereotype of the mean, Angry Black Woman. At the Tuskegee University commencement address, First Lady Obama commented about the cover and addressed her detractors stating: “Now, yeah, it was satire, but if I’m really being honest, it knocked me back a bit. It made me wonder, just how are people seeing me” (“Remarks by the First Lady at Tuskegee University Commencement Address,” 2015). Continuing, she addressed the issue of being the first African American First Lady and how she felt about how she was perceived during her husband’s campaign for the presidency by stating how there was “a set of questions and speculations; conversations sometimes rooted in the fears and misperceptions of others. Was I too loud, or too angry, or too

emasculating?” (“Remarks by the First Lady at Tuskegee University Commencement Address,” 2015). We see these stereotypes of African American women being “too loud, too angry, too emasculating” in the media, on the Internet, and in the social fabric of the United States (Walley-Jean, 2009).



Figure 1. Cover of *The New Yorker* magazine (July 21, 2008) with the cartoon image of the Obamas.

The perceptions of African American women and girls are evident in language usage and the interpretation of language usage by the women themselves (Cahill, 1986). Influenced by the work of George Herbert Mead (Mead, 1913), a number of sociologists and educators have maintained that the verbal and written labeling of people profoundly impacts an individual’s sense of self (Owens, Robinson, & Smith-Lovin, 2010; Sharp, Coatsworth, Darling, Cumsille, & Ranieri, 2007; Zavalloni, 1975), and also influences the possible relationships between language practices and their appropriation and display

of social realities (Baker, 1992; Whorf, 2012). Language practices and the internalization of language is a reflexive process rather than unidirectional (Foote, 1951).

In relation to the participants in this study, society's negative stereotypes about African American women and girls that are expressed through language do, indeed, have an impact on them, their behavior, and the ways they form their individual self-definitions (Cahill, 1986). However, the participants claim their own positive social value within the confines of the social identities that the relevant language of social categorization projects on them. As the data in this research revealed, an identity is not absolutely given (Foote, 1951), but it can be invalidated or enforced with continual social validation. Despite the abundance of negative terms and representations of African American women and girls that reject the notion that "the African American experience is not one reality," many African American girls, are, in fact, excelling academically while creating and maintaining an affirming sense of self-hood and identity.

Further, the American Psychological Association has stated that research in the fields of education and psychology reveals gaps regarding this population, "There has been a marginalization of women of color . . . they remain virtually invisible in the psychological literature on adolescent girl development" ("A New Look at Adolescent Girls," 2013). Despite their invisibility, perceptions of the culturally specific and gender-specific communicative skills of African American girls have been portrayed in distorted ways that are stereotypical as a result of structural racism, sexism, and cultural hegemony (Greene, 1990; hooks, 1981; Jean & Feagin, 1998; Richardson, 2002). All things considered, the issues of negative stereotyping, misrepresentation, and

underrepresentation take on a special significance especially when viewing them through the lens of social justice.

As educators and researchers strive to achieve a more complete understanding of the African American students they serve, many researchers have focused on African American students and the disparities that exist between those students and White students. However, by focusing solely on the disparities that exist for African American students, we lose sight of the fact that many African American students are succeeding in schools. Further, literature specifically focusing on African American female students who are excelling academically is lacking from the knowledge base (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). In order to advance knowledge, research on high-achieving African American female students and the factors that contribute to their achievement is sorely needed. More specifically, knowledge regarding the contributing factors that lead to this population's academic success could benefit more students and the field of education, overall. In terms of success-building factors, research points to the role that the language and literacy practices of African American adolescent girls have had in bolstering their levels of self-esteem and academic performance (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Muhammad, 2012; Purcell-Gates, 2008; Richardson, 2002; Smitherman, 1983; Sutherland, 2005b; Williams, 1982), yet more research is necessary to understand this phenomenon.

Statement of the Problem

This study was inspired by the lack of information on African American girls and their use of language and literacy practices as it pertains to their identity development. As an African American woman who has worked as a visual anthropologist, actress, and playwright, and who has developed an interest in how African American women are

represented in the media and in the public, I believe that many of the challenges that African American women have confronted in their passage from childhood to adult (Brooks, Sekayi, Savage, Waller, & Picot, 2010a; Brown, 2013) result from negative representations of women like myself that show up in various social contexts, including the school, the media, and in the public through language and literacy texts (Fairclough, 1995, 2015). I do not mean to suggest that this occurs as a conscious distortion or manipulation of information; instead, it may be regarded as built into the “common sense” of professional practices such as education. As follows, media legitimize and reproduce existing asymmetrical relations of power through language by assuming the voices of those in power are the voices of “common sense.” Unfortunately, this phenomenon has largely been ignored in the field of education and the social sciences; however, this study reveals that it is worthy of further inquiry.

A core issue is that Black women deal with skewed stereotypes, lack of study, and underrepresentation (hooks, 1981; Jean & Feagin, 1998). As members of a double minority (i.e., African American and female), African American females—women and girls—are burdened with certain racial and gendered perceptions that must be overcome in order to feel comfortable within the world in which they live (hooks, 1981, 2000a; Jean & Feagin, 1998).

Hence, I have been compelled to take a deeper look at problems that young African American female students face on their journey toward womanhood while working as an art activist aiming to represent and celebrate Black women as complex and resilient people through live-theater events with the company that I cofounded, Black Women: State of the Union (BWSOTU). In 2008, I launched BWSOTU with other Black

female art activists who had grown tired of the negative perceptions of Black women in society and in the media. BWSOTU seeks to promote a greater understanding of Black women's significant contributions to the world through performance, visual arts, community events, and media. Further:

BWSOTU artists aim to use this platform to empower Black women to love and honor themselves, and to help them self-identify as dynamic, expressive, and nurturing contributors to society. BWSOTU artists communicate and express themselves to help Black women embrace the characteristics that make each of them different and unique—today, tomorrow, and for generations to come. (BWSOTU, 2008)

Inspired by the community support and response to BWSOTU productions, this study is an extension of the goals and aspirations of the stage productions. The support received from young African American women who have shared their enthusiasm and passion for the production inspired this research.

My positionality as an African American female artist, activist, and scholar makes this dissertation research a personal endeavor. My positionality provides an emic, or insider's, perspective on the factors relevant to how the experiences of academically high-achieving African American female students impact their development of self-hood and identity. My emic perspective thereby grants me access to use the first person singular subject and object pronouns, *I* and *me*. Not to do so would sterilize or negate the authentic value of this research. The use of terms such as “the researcher,” or passive language like “it was found that . . .” might likely convey a dissonance or distance that was not present in the research design, implementation, or completion. Further, using the first person singular, *I* and *me*, enhances the clarity of my role in this study, and my sincere connection and similarity to the students who participated in this research.

This study allowed me the opportunity to use both my scholarly and performance experiences to address the need to understand and appreciate the identity development needs of late-adolescent African American girls and to demonstrate how their personal narratives help them succeed using language and literacy in a world that unfairly criticizes or ignores more affirmative representations of both girls and blackness.

There are numerous research projects and initiatives in the United States that have focused on, and continue to focus on, Black male students who attend K–12 schools, including President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper Initiative, which is a cradle-to-college-and-career strategy. The initiative aims to coalesce efforts between the administration, “cities and towns, businesses, and foundations who are taking important steps to connect young people to mentoring, support networks, and the skills they need to find a good job or go to college and work their way into the middle class” (The White House, 2014). Much of this research has examined the current school performance of this group as a series of “problems” and issues that need to be addressed (Sung, 2008). Notable and sizable remediation efforts have been the result, and rightly so, as the graduation rates, standardized test scores, and language and literacy rates of these students have historically been at a less satisfactory level than their female counterparts (Noguera, 2009).

The research projects and initiatives focused on the challenges facing Black male students who attend K–12 schools are very important. However, the result is an essentializing of a community that begins with the Black male students and the lower performing students in that group (May, 1999). This unbalanced representation does not tell the entire story. In fact, data suggest that Black female students who attend K–12

schools may be faring better, and it may be important to uncover the reasons why this is the case, particularly as it pertains to language and literacy results (Noguera, 2009).

While research on female K–12 students exists and they have been the focus of gender research and also language and literacy programs, research regarding Black female students as a subgroup is lacking (DeBlase, 2003; Sutherland, 2005b). Research illustrates that this group has demonstrated higher test scores and language and literacy performance in comparison to Black male students. The performance of Black female students, therefore, sparks questions about what is working and how educators can replicate the successes of this student population for the benefit of other members of this group, and students of other racial backgrounds, as well.

The opposite is true for Black males who receive negative attention in the media. Lastly, stereotypes in United States have not portrayed Black females as dangerous. Critical media research has suggested that Black males are dangerous or aggressive. As a result, Black females gain entry into more social and educational settings and have greater access to opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of the language, literacy, and identity development practices of academically high-achieving late-adolescent African American girls through the development and analysis of narratives in order to arrive at the unstated, implicit understandings that underlie their personal stories. This study takes the position that the experiences of academically successful African American girls reveal them to be multifaceted and multidimensional individuals who

must be moved from the margins of others' experiences to the centrality of their own experiences (hooks, 2000b).

The study used a rhetorical approach to narrative analysis to interpret and evaluate the participants' thinking processes and communication efforts. Using a rhetorical approach to the analysis provided me tools to understand the participants' rhetorical arguments and how they constructed meaning within their personal narratives. In so doing, I arrived at the explicit and implicit meanings of the participants' narratives. While explicit meanings lay on the surface of the narrative structure, the implicit meanings are more often more challenging to interpret. The implicit meanings represent the subtext (McCall, Becker, & Meshejian, 1990) underneath the narratives (Jorgensen & Largacha-Martinez, 2014) that the participants shared during this study.

In both real life interactions and performance, subtext is not explicitly shared between speaker and listener. The subtext may become clear as the narrative unfolds and provides a deeper level of meaning to the speaker's narrative. By making use of a rhetorical approach to narrative analysis, I gained access to the participants' unspoken thoughts, motives of their behavior, and influences of cultural experiences that underlie their personal narratives. The personal narratives of the study participants—academically high-achieving African American late-adolescent girls—reveal the untold stories of young ladies who are using the process of biculturation to navigate through social spaces in ways that could offer insight into strengths-based research in the fields of language and literacy.

The study participants benefitted from having both the cultural experience of being female and the cultural experience of being Black (Buckley & Carter, 2005). While

most of the research on Girlhood Studies has focused on White girls, growing bodies of literature are starting to include Black Girlhood as a focus (Brooks, Sekayi, Savage, Waller, & Picot, 2010b; Brown, 2008, 2013; Sutherland, 2005b). This study contributes to the growing field of Black Girlhood Studies, and particularly focuses on the language and literacy practices that academically high-achieving African American girls use to affirm their sense of linguistic and cultural self-hood.

In this study, the participants participated in an online survey comprised of open-ended questions regarding the influences of language and literacy experiences that they had participated in over the course of their lives. Questions prompted them to reflect on their experience with language in school settings and in social settings. The online survey also delved into their understandings of their own literacy practices and the impact that both language and literacy instances had on their development of self-hood and identity. Self-hood was conceived in this study in the same way that Mead (1913) theorized the “I” as the active aspect of the person, or Freud’s ego. Also, in this study, “identity” is interpreted much like Mead’s “me,” the socialized aspect of the person, the “I” is the active aspect of the person. While the online survey questions did not specify the distinction, during the one-on-one interviews, I inquired more deeply about the distinction between the notions of self-hood and identity in talking about the participants’ self-perceptions and the perceptions that the external world cast on them. The one-on-one interviews were conducted via the online video conferencing program called WebEx, and they were later transcribed for accuracy. During the one-on-one interviews, I solicited more specific information about the participants’ language and literacy practices, including writing, nonverbal, and verbal communication.

Writing becomes a key literacy practice for Black adolescent girls to make meaning of their identity(ies). Although there are a growing number of studies on literacy and identity development of Black adolescent girls, few studies address writing (Muhammad, 2012). Hence, specific areas of interest included: (a) how the participants developed a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk to create strategies—including code-switching, style-shifting, and performative silence—to effectively deal with racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010); (b) the literacy practices as described by the participants themselves that include “writing it out,” and “talking it out” as a healing praxis (Muhammad, 2012); and (c) how participants developed a sense of self-hood by creating sacred spaces to feel safe with people who are similar to them (Cofield, 2012), and also developing a multicultural worldview (Hudley, 2008), which allowed them to grow by engaging in dialogue with people who were dissimilar to them.

Significance of the Study

Although there are a growing number of studies on the separate issues of literacy and identity development of African American adolescent girls (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Muhammad, 2012; Stevens, 1997), few studies address the relationship between the language and literacy practices and how African American girls negotiate these identities. First, it is of unique importance to focus on this intersection because many literacy theorists understand that identity construction and literacy practices are interconnected (Athanases, 1998; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993; Sutherland, 2005b). In this study, I aimed to understand the role that language and literacy played in that process, in order to assess how high-achieving African American girls were excelling. In this way, the hope was to present scalable solutions that may work for other youth.

The recommendations that emerge from this work could offer powerful insights into mitigating the problems with language and literacy education that many Black students face, and provide a framework to support other youth development efforts. This would be an added tool for addressing broader challenges faced by our youth, which are often associated with poor literacy and disengagement from academic settings. To steer youth onto more productive paths, it is important that educators encourage students to write, especially personal narratives, to help them imagine and cultivate their “possible self” and the characteristics that they wish to emulate in life, in addition to their “oppositional self” and the qualities that they are purposefully hoping to avoid as they navigate their daily lives. Therefore, the second point of significance is its application to other learning communities for the purpose of creating sacred spaces that would help to build the overall confidence of students so that they can build confidence in their communication practices.

The syllogisms in this study reveal a relationship between language and power as described by Fairclough (2015), whereby language is a “discourse” determined by “socially constituted orders of discourse, sets of conventions associated with social institutions” (p 51). The orders of discourse impacting the study participants were “ideologically shaped by power relations in social institutions and in society as a whole” (p. 51). By uncovering the syllogisms provided in this study’s storylines, I exposed the links and connections as well as the disconnections and breaks between the participants’ perceived notions of the ways that they could establish a sense of self-hood, and their identity in the world as African American girls or women.

Lastly, the significance of this study is paramount as it contributes valuable insight into the identity development of academically high-achieving African American late-adolescent girls who were in the process of discovering their own creative potential as young, Black, female adults in a society that “devalues Blacks and women” (hooks, 1981; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996). Because adolescence is the time when one forms one’s sense of self, and according to Erikson (1994), one’s identity is the product of one’s ethnicity and gender, then to design a healthy sense of self amidst negative images of Blackness and female-ness must be a challenging exercise. Thus, it becomes important to develop a greater understanding of this process based on the narratives of late-adolescent African American girls who are excelling in life despite the negative perceptions and stereotypes that surround them. Ultimately, this is a study about resilience and self-acceptance, personal growth and achievement.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this study, certain terms are used interchangeably, including: African American and Black, or at times, the terms Negro or Colored from excerpts taken from historical texts and literature that are referenced in this study. In addition, the linguistic terms Black English Vernacular (BEV), African American English (AAE), and African American English Vernacular (AAEV) are used interchangeably.

I opted to forego using the term “minority” for people of color as it creates “injustices of recognition” because it is a misleading term that lacks factual basis (Aspinall, 2002). Further, as Freire stated (Macedo, 1994), “When you refer to ‘minority’ you are in fact talking about the ‘majority’ who find themselves outside the sphere of political and economic dominance” (p. 105). In lieu of using the term “minority,” I use

“bicultural,” in line with Darder’s theory of biculturalism. Darder (2011) contended that the term “minority” linguistically and politically “reflects and perpetuates a view of subordinate cultures as deficient and disempowered” (p. xix). On the other hand, the term “bicultural” displaces the cultural hierarchy by highlighting the experience of bicultural people and how they must negotiate “two cultural/class systems whose values are very often in direct conflict; and (2) a set of sociopolitical and historical forces dissimilar to those of mainstream Euroamerican students and the educational institutions that bicultural students must attend” (p. xix). Therefore, the term “bicultural” encompasses a better description for how the African American girls may view the world and their experience in it.

This study employed a narrative analysis influenced by the critical discourse analysis work of Norman Fairclough, who is concerned with how power is exercised through language. Using narrative analysis, I have been able to uncover the implicit and explicit stories regarding the influences of language and literacy experiences on the self-hood and identity of high-achieving African American college freshman based on their interactions with institutions and social structures, including school and media discourses. The stories that they share about their experiences help to demonstrate how they make sense of their lives through the ways that they communicate with other people. Through the stories that they share, each storyteller demonstrated her version of the actions, and they also provided an interpretive commentary on this experience. The storyline was shared between the participants. From that storyline, the researcher was able to analyze the embedded meanings, sometimes hidden from the surface. Using a rhetorical analysis, I was able to explore the social interactions and constructed meanings. These meanings

included both explicit and implicit storylines, as well as oppositions that clarified the meaning of the stories by explaining what is true and what is not true. Similar to the research of Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, and Horner (2004), “for each story an opposition could be identified” (p. 155). The oppositions point to what is implied in the story. Building on the oppositions, syllogisms demonstrate the logical arguments in the stories, and they “help the storyteller express the ideas of the story” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 155). In this study, the process of constructing syllogisms proved to be an interactive process based on testing and retesting the logic in the syllogisms and oppositions in order to arrive at the conclusive storylines.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

While the negative effect that institutional racism has on African American children and families is clear, the fact that many African American children are succeeding in schools and that their families are able to provide and support them is not well documented in the literature (Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). As a result, we know more about challenges facing African American students than we know about how and why they succeed. Sadly, this presents a skewed representation of African American children and their educational capabilities. In short, it overemphasizes the deficits and pays little attention to the strengths that African American students offer to the educational praxis.

The strengths and stories of success need to be considered alongside the challenges to ascertain a full and comprehensive picture of African American students, including late-adolescent female students. By offering a critical analysis based on language discourse (Fairclough, 2015), this study can achieve a more balanced approach

to help target and develop interventions to not only fix the problems, but also build on the strengths of African American female students who are achieving.

Theoretical Framework

In order to arrive at an asset-based perspective on the topic, this study drew upon the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is defined by what it does. As a pedagogy, it incorporates a critique of society, a raising of consciousness, and valuing students' voices by honoring students' needs, values, and individuality as part of an active pedagogy that enables students to become truly participatory members of a society who are empowered to create and recreate that society by continually increasing freedom.

Critical pedagogy provides an apt lens to examine the role that schools play, both in the historical context and in the existing social and political fabric, which was the educational setting of the participants in this dissertation research project. The objective of critical pedagogy is to empower the marginalized and amend existing social inequalities and injustices. Further, a significant task of critical pedagogy has been to disclose and challenge the role of schools as political and cultural entities.

Informed by the works of today's leading critical pedagogists in the field of education (Darder, 2014; Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1974a; Freire, 1974b; Giroux & McLaren, 1986, 2014; Morrell, 2008), this study uncovered and challenged the role schools play in the political and cultural life of African American female students included in this study.

Schooling is a purposefully political and cultural enterprise. The process of education in the United States is intimately linked to capitalism, as it serves the important function of being an ongoing system that creates a willing and able workforce that will

adhere to the needs of the nation. It is a system that is flawed and maintains oppressive conditions for working class and bicultural students. As Paulo Freire stated:

Brutalizing the workforce by subjecting them to routine procedures is part of the nature of the capitalist mode of production. And what is taking place in the production of knowledge in the schools is in large part a reproduction of that mechanism. (as qtd. in Darder, 2014, p. 23)

Critical educational theorists emphasize that any genuine pedagogical practice demands a commitment to social transformation in solidarity and together with subordinated and marginalized groups (Darder, 2014; L. Delpit, 1988; Giroux & McLaren, 2014). Critical pedagogies challenge the assumption that schools function as major sites of social and economic mobility. The proponents of these pedagogies argue that education must be analyzed as a cultural and historical process “in which select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groupings” (Morrell, 2008, p. 162).

Conceptual Framework

Critical pedagogy provided the conceptual framework for this study. Today’s students are faced with many challenges. The students are aware of the social, historical and political contexts of which their schooling is a part. The literature on racial socialization has focused mainly on African American families and how they prepare their children to cope with being in a society where racism and discrimination are still present (Tatum, 2003). African American parents and community leaders often equip their children with tools to manage discrimination as a matter of necessity. Based on the nature of racial socialization, one of its premises is that it exists to prepare students for potential racism and discrimination (Miller, 1999) with a critical worldview that

encompasses concepts used by Paulo Freire (Darder, 2014; Fairclough, 1993; Freire, 1974a), including:

- Conscientization to act upon the environment to critically reflect on their reality and thereby transform themselves through future actions and critical reflection. Additionally, conscientization provides a means by which the African American students expose social myths to uncover real issues and address actual needs.
- Dialoguing through challenges in a manner that builds on the oral and expressive language qualities found in African American culture.
- Negation of the banking concept of knowledge by using a problem-posing approach to expose their oppressor-oppressed language discourse.

Although not extensively studied, and while the African American students' parents and community members may not use these terms to describe the process, there is a small, but growing, body of literature that demonstrates that the theoretical concepts introduced by Freire are operating in this community for the advancement of its pupils (Lynn, 1999; Morrell, 2008). In order to excel, I anticipated that my study participants engaged the world in a similar fashion using Freire's framework as they devised strategies to utilize dialogue to develop a critical awareness of their reality through reflection and action, or what Freire called *conscientization*. Additionally, they have decodified situations and people around them in order to be less impacted by potentially negative stereotypes or perspectives that may deter them from achieving success in school.

The critical theoretical framework of this study as it related to the language and literacy practices of the participants and how they constructed their self-hood at the intersection of race, gender, and communication is its contribution to the field of

education, as well as other fields including African American Studies, Girlhood Studies, and Black Girlhood Studies.

Research Question

Qualitative data were collected and evaluated using narrative analysis to answer the research question: How do the language and literacy experiences of academically high-achieving African American female college students influence their sense of self-hood and identity?

Limitations

The study had the following limitations: The participants were drawn from private universities; therefore, results may not be generalizable to state, public, and other institutes of higher education. Many factors outside of my control could impact the students' academic achievement. These factors may include the difference between how girls and boys are treated in the classroom (Hubbard, 1999), the quality of the K–12 instructional programs that the students participated in, parental involvement, and a diversity of social issues not covered in this study.

Data for this research came from three data points: (a) Preliminary online surveys; (b) Individual, one-on-one interviews, which I conducted once with each participant; and (c) Two focus groups where multiple participants joined a videoconference line to discuss topics together, and I interviewed them. In some instances, the scenarios convey data that participants shared in reported speech rather than examples of actual language usage. In these cases, this information was important because it captured relived experiences that the participants could compare and contrast with each other. Meanwhile, other data were examples of actual language usage in action. In both cases, I explain in this dissertation

whether the data in the scenario were reported speech, or examples of language in use collected during the study.

Delimitations

The delimitations used by me in this study were determined by a desire to better understand the role of different uses of the English language of African American female college students in the development of their cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity. In order to gain the perspectives of participants, I only sought study participants who were in their first year of college. The use of this data set prevented me from gleaning the views of those individuals who were not yet in college, or adult African American women. Nor did it involve data collection from their teachers, parents, or peers.

The nature of the social networks used to recruit students limited the data pool to student who were attending private colleges and universities. While the colleges and universities offered diversity in terms of the kind of private schools, this study did not include data from public, state, or online colleges or universities. Nonetheless, I sought to find additional participants from other kinds of colleges or universities; however, given the study schedule, no such students were available to participate. Despite this gap in the study, data reported may also be relevant to those locations, and they also offer the opportunity for future research at other institutions.

Assumptions

This study includes the following assumptions: (a) the selected participants responded to the survey, individual interviews, and focus groups accurately and indicated their perceptions honestly and openly; (b) the selected participants understood the

concepts of language, literacy, and identity development; (c) and the interpretation of the narrative analysis data accurately reflected the perceptions of the respondents.

Organization of the Study

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical and conceptual framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the assumptions of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, which includes language, language practices, literacy, literacy practices, identity development and its relevance to Girlhood Studies and Black Girlhood Studies. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for this research study including the selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings including demographic information, testing the research question, narrative analysis presented in scenario format that reveals the explicit and implicit narrative of the study participants, and the results of the data analyses. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the entire study, discussion of the findings, implications, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Language is the only means through which one comes to consciousness”

--Macedo, 1994, p. 124.

This chapter begins with a presentation of my theoretical stance on language and power, and relevant literature on language and practices, African American culture and language context information, perceptions of language and the perceptions of African American girls’ language, along with my theoretical stance on literacy and language practices. Additionally, the growing body of literature in general follows the relatively large body of literature on the African American on girlhood studies and gender identity and its impact on Black girlhood studies borne out of Hip-Hop Feminism. This account is followed by a description of the study’s theoretical framework and its relationship between its components. The literature review seeks to provide background on the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and its relevance to the study of language, literacy, and identity development. The chapter concludes with a summary and provides a brief outline of material that follows in the subsequent chapters of this study.

Theoretical Stance on Language and Power

For the purpose of this study, I depend upon Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager’s (1942) definition of language as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates” (p. 5). While Standard English (SE) is inherently varied, it is often touted as an objective measure of standard language patterns by larger society. Variation remains elemental to SE and all forms of language and speech (L. Delpit, 2002). While there is no true “national norm” of speech in the United States

(Milroy & Milroy, 1999), SE often refers to certain grammatical structures that are taught in elementary grammar textbooks, which are used in K–12 classrooms. A purist attitude exists regarding what SE is, and tremendous research demonstrates how SE is often defined along race, class and gender lines (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). The issue of culture and power is key to this critical study of language because embedded deeply within it is a worldview that is informed by culture and class, grounded in social and material conditions (Fine, 2004).

Regarding social and material conditions, voice and empowerment are significant. This is particularly relevant to the discussion regarding asymmetrical power relations in American society and the disparate number of injustices that face African American girls in schools. African American girls face challenges in schools when their communication style varies from the norm (Fordham, 1993; Koonce, 2012). The norm is determined by the notion of a common culture that is essentially a veiled information-banking model based on a selection of features or symbols presumed to be accepted by everyone. Society determines the arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which the rest of the social group is supposed to cooperate.

However, there are power dynamics in place that cause problems for some people who may not ascribe completely to mainstream culture's communication symbols or language. Instead, many people ascribe to a bicultural identity whereby they "function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live" (Darder, 2011, p. 45). This is the case for the participants in this study who maintain a bicultural existence as African

American girls who have grown up in a society where the dominant group is White, and the dominant language comes from that social group.

The experience of African American females is an important aspect missing from the research regarding the bicultural existence in education. With only a few exceptions (Brown, 2008; DeBlase, 2003; Pough, Richardson, Durham, & Raimist, 2007), little or no attention has been paid to the ways that African American female students choose critical consciousness over commercial consciousness and their use of language and literacy to convey their experiences with the development of self-hood and identity. Further, additional research is needed on the role that power plays in the discourse of language and literacy (Fairclough, 2015) as it pertains to this population. More specifically, as Fairclough (2014) has stated, “seeing language as discourse and as social practice, one is committing oneself not just to analyzing texts, nor just to analyzing processes of production and interpretation, but to analyzing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions” (p. 58). In other words, research is scant on the topic of how African American girls are both participating in, but also refuting the social conditions of language and literacy to develop a sense of self-hood and identity. This study fills that gap as the participants shared their experience regarding this process.

The study participants brought their knowledge and affinity for the language, culture, and symbols that come from their nonmainstream cultural experience as African American girls. Namely, these students carried with them the elements of African American language usage, such as dialogue and interaction that was active and that engaged both the speaker and the listener; variation in both volume and pitch within its acceptable register; and a collective orientation to communication whereby speaker and

listener participated in call and response to acknowledge each other as they dialogued. These are just a few examples that demonstrated how the study participants may have engaged in language as a member of a social group, and in that social group its members adhered to vocal symbols and attached shared meanings to those vocal symbols.

The study participants had a right to maintain a bicultural identity, and a major component of that identity is language. Based upon their academic performance, it is safe to assume that the study participants were showing an alignment with the dominant culture's symbols and style of communication; however, they also were able to code-switch/style-shift to participate as members of their cultural group. To this end, they negotiated their biculturalism through communication and engaged in biculturation, where they “learn and practice both mainstream culture and ethnic culture at the same time” (Valentine as qtd. in Darder, 2011, p. 47). They successfully negotiated their biculturation through social clubs and recreational groups—such as church groups, mentorship programs, school-based clubs, and Black Student Unions—in which they found comfort and safety in sacred spaces where they shared commonalities with their fellow members (Brown, 2013; Cofield, 2012). The participants in this study characterized their sacred spaces as their “foundation” from which they developed confidence and security to exist and thrive in larger society. At the same time, the participants in this study demonstrated that a “multicultural worldview” enabled them to participate in dialogue in a way that presupposed equality among all of its participants.

Language is also a tool used in self-representation (Goffman, 1959; Muhammad, 2012; Stevens, 1997) that can help to gain access to social justice through key

components that I explored based on the data collected from my research subjects. These three components included:

1. The strategic use of language that included (a) Hyperawareness of the radicalized nature of talk/strategies for dealing with racial microaggressions, (b) Code-switching/style-shifting based on context, and (c) Performative silence/silence that speaks loudly.
2. Literacy practices to (a) “write it out” and (b) “talk it out” for the purpose of self-expression.
3. Identity development formed based on the creation of sacred spaces to feel safe with people who are similar, and as a place where one can “just be.” Simultaneously, having a multicultural worldview, which allows one to grow by engaging in dialogue with people who are dissimilar.

The study participants used these key components to excel in school, and to create and maintain personal identity-forming narratives to inform their decision making and sense making of the world around them (Sutherland, 2005a). Moreover, the performance of language and literacy practices allowed them to transcend stereotypical depictions of themselves, and avoid being relegated to discriminatory representations (Buckley & Carter, 2005).

Clearly, there is power in language, and among populations of color the ability to code-switch or style-shift by willfully using language and literacy as tools to bolster identity formation and projection helps to gain power within their cultural group, and to expand their opportunities in society overall (Smitherman, 1977). Accordingly, because of the power of language, to answer the research question in this dissertation, I examined

the ways that African American adolescent students code-switched or style-shifted to develop communicative competency. The study then explains the relationship between the language and literacy practices, and ultimately discusses the identity development of African American female first-year college students.

While current research covers language as a tool for self-representation (Baugh, 1978, 1981; Baumgardt, 2007), and highlights the significance of code-switching and style-shifting as a social process, more attention ought to be paid to power dynamics of language as a discourse (Fairclough, 2015), and the ways that power is enacted along race and gender lines. This dissertation research looks at “the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions” (Fairclough, 2014, p. 58). By analyzing the stories of the participants, I was able to assess the experiences of the participants as part of a larger system of structures or,

Institutional practices which people draw upon without thinking often embody assumptions which directly or indirectly legitimize existing power relations. Practices which appear to be universal and commonsensical can often be shown to originate in the dominant class or the dominant bloc, and to have become naturalized. Where types of practice, and in many cases types of discourse, function in this way to sustain unequal power relations, I shall say they are functioning ideologically. (Fairclough, 2014, p. 64)

Further, as stated by Fairclough (2014), there are levels to all forms of communication (See Figure 2) and power plays a role in the ways that language is heard, perceived, and interpreted in light of the context in which it occurs.

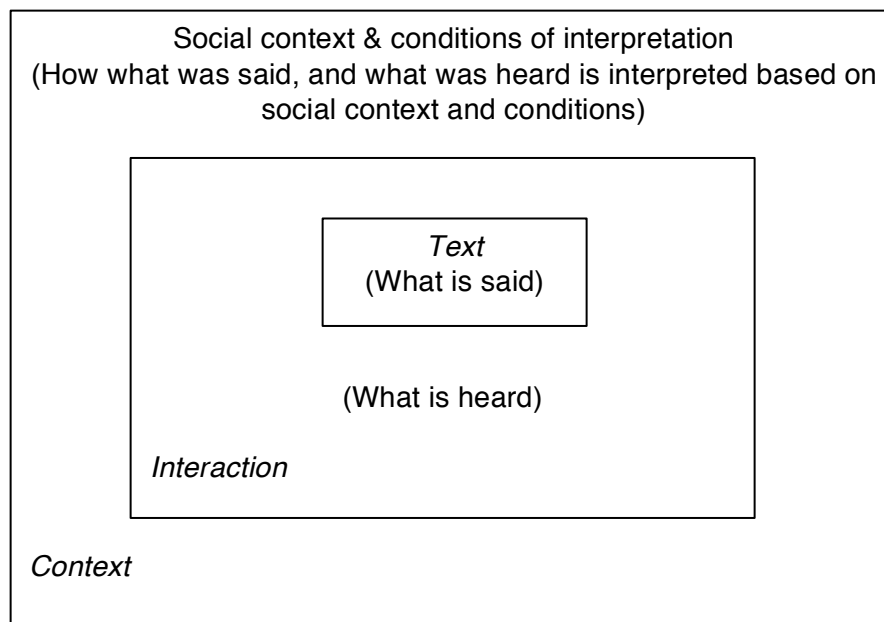


Figure 2. Discourse as text, interaction, and context figure adapted from Fairclough (2015) to illustrate language discourse.

As it pertains to African American females, the social context of their race and gender influence how other people—including their teachers in school settings—perceive them, and how they develop self-hood and identity for themselves. The findings in this research study demonstrates how the participants have found sacred spaces in their lives where they are able to “develop their voice through opportunities to enter into dialogue and engage in a critical process of reflection from which they can share their thoughts, ideas, and lived experiences with others in an open and free manner” (Darder, 2011, p. 62). The sacred spaces allowed them to express themselves in a space where the process of interpretation is safe and where they can feel that this interaction is encouraging and supportive. The context for building this self-confidence was integral to boosting a positive sense of self-hood and identity that empowered their ability to excel academically. This theme regarding the importance of sacred spaces in developing

language and literacy skills and abilities is an emerging topic as it pertains to African American female college students (Abrahams, 1975; Brown, 2013; Cofield, 2012), and one that is demonstrated in this dissertation research.

Language Practices

In this context, the term "language practice" refers to socially typical and recurrent patterns of language behavior (Cahill, 1986). Language practices are formed within groups of people and follow certain expected patterns that help to maintain one's identity while serving as a means by which people can pave a way toward positive self-images (Major, 1970). Therefore, there are both social and individual elements to language practices, and according to Benjamin Whorf (2012), they are seen as determiners of social relations through their role in shaping the culture.

The language practices of American society, unfortunately, have often exhibited deprecating representations of African American culture based upon the overall devaluing of blackness. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., summed up the rather disparaging aspect of American English and its pejorative use of negative terms for African Americans and blackness versus its positive use of terms for Whites and whiteness when he stated:

Even semantics have conspired to make that which is black seem ugly and degrading. In Roget's Thesaurus there are some 120 synonyms for "blackness" and at least 60 of them are offensive—such words as "blot", "soot", "grime", "devil", and "foul". There are some 134 synonyms for "whiteness", and all are favorable, expressed in such words as "purity", "cleanliness", "chastity", and "innocence". A white lie is better than a black lie. The most degenerate member of a family is the "black sheep", not the "white sheep". Ossie Davis has suggested that maybe the English language should be "reconstructed" so that teachers will not be forced to teach the Negro child 60 ways to despise himself and thereby perpetuate his false sense of inferiority and the white child 134 ways to adore himself and thereby perpetuate his false sense of superiority. (King, Harding, & King, 2010, p. 41)

Although Dr. King's statement was made over 40 years ago, sadly the truth of his sentiments remains alive today. In today's classrooms, African American girls, in particular, are often subjected to inequities. As stated by Archer-Banks and Behar-Horenstein (2012), "Schools place greater emphasis on African American girls' social behaviors than on non-African American girls by insisting that the latter demonstrate mainstream-appropriate social behaviors" (p. 199). Further, typically when Black girls demonstrate candid and independent behavior in the classroom, they are stereotyped as "troublemakers" rather than "leaders" (Fordham, 1993; Koonce, 2012) as their male counterparts or White female counterparts may be perceived in the same setting. Similarly, the portrayal of African American girls in the media has exacerbated this perception and impacted the ways that school personnel perceive and interact with them (Fordham, 1993; Koonce, 2012).

We live in a society where language diversity is evident and the studies of language variation is plentiful (Baugh, 2013; Farr, Seloni, & Song, 2010; Johnson, 2000; Ogbu, 1992; Wiley, 1996). However, the language practices of African American girls are woefully under theorized, save for some exceptions (Brown, 2008, 2013; Scott, 2000). Yet to understand the language patterns of African American girls, it is important to first place it within a context of African American culture and language.

African American Culture and Language

African American culture in the United States is rich and dynamic. It is known to have specific characteristics that make it unique from mainstream society, yet tremendously contributive to the broader American cultural landscape. The unique identity of African American culture is rooted in the historical experience of its people,

and is an extension of Western and Central African cultures (DuBois, 1994; Herskovits, 1990; Jackson, 2004). Although the institution of slavery impacted the ability of enslaved African American people to practice freely, many of their original cultural practices survived (Baugh, 1981; McLaren, 2009). One of the most significant and notable features of African American culture is its speech patterns, which have two dimensions, according to Geneva Smitherman (1977). These two dimensions are its language and style. In the groundbreaking book, *Talkin and Testifyin* (1977), Smitherman described the significance of the speech of African American people thusly, “Black English, then, is a language mixture, adapted to the conditions of slavery and discrimination, a combination of language and style interwoven with and inextricable from Afro-American culture” (p. 3). As such, the speech that African Americans use and their choices to use the dialect that is often called Black English Vernacular has historically been a serious issue within the field of education, with relevant social ramifications and consequences (Labov, 1973; Speicher & McMahon, 1992).

Historically, concern over the communication abilities of African Americans was evident in social and political practices of the time (Waters, 2002). From the earliest days of American slavery in the 17th century, slave owners sought to exercise control over their slaves by attempting to strip them of their African culture and languages. Slave owners deliberately tried to repress independent political or cultural organizing as well as the language and literacy ability of enslaved African Americans in order to quell the many slave rebellions or acts of resistance that took place around the world starting as early as the 1600s, and continuing up until the end of slavery in 1865 in the United States.

The history of African American English usage in this country has been riddled with controversy for over 300 years. In the United States, there have been compulsory ignorance laws, which legally barred African Americans from learning how to read and write. The laws impacted enslaved African Americans and in certain states free people of African descent. A portion of these laws dictated that even Whites could be held legally accountable if they took part in teaching African Americans to read or write. Compulsory ignorance laws remained in effect throughout many states until 1865 when most, if not all, states accepted the Emancipation Proclamation and thereby ended slavery in the United States. This was the start of structural racism pertaining to literacy and language access that has continued to provide a context for African American language access and literacy experience.

Research has supported that languages are defined politically, not scientifically, but prejudice and judgment based on language usage are common and lead to challenges for certain populations, including African Americans. Wayne Williams (1982) developed the “language conscious hypothesis,” which provided the adolescents who were the focus of this study with a mechanism to use the authentic voice of their speech community to be a firm foundation to code-switch to other language patterns. Similarly, Shuaib Meacham (2002) explained ways that two African American teachers and trainers viewed language in much the same way that I view the communicative competency of adolescents in this dissertation research. Speaking of one of her research subjects, Meacham (2002) stated that she “saw that the language rules are part of a game, a game in which who you are and the position you hold weighs heavily on how language “standards” are applied” (p. 198). The complex social and historical context of African

American culture and language set the stage for this study. It is an interesting milieu that the participants in this study found themselves in; despite the challenges they faced, they have found a way to use language to their advantage in order to excel academically. Relying on African American language and culture, they developed a style of communication that was the focus of this study and provided a strength-based perspective on African American girls' learning capabilities as it pertained to language and academic achievement. The data in this study suggest that there is more to be learned from academically high-achieving African American female college students for the benefit of other students.

African American Language Variation

Today's African American language style is characterized by several factors that are present in all forms of daily life, including: (a) Emphasis on oral language abilities and an appreciation for oral performativity (DuBois, 1994; Daniel & Smitherman, 1976; James, 1980; LaRue, 2011; White & White, 2005); (b) Expressive communication, both verbal and nonverbal (Caponi, 1999; White & White, 1999); and (c) Strong group affiliation, or sense of a collective community, which is based on a civic consciousness that encourages its members to think about the necessity of doing well as an individual in order to benefit the cultural group. Representations of their collective community are evident in the language and literacy practices of African American people. Taken together, the oral communication, expressive communication, and collective community perspective tied together to help interpret the language and literacy practices and identity development needs of this study's participants, who all demonstrated use of these strategies to respond to the world around them. As Stevens (1997b) stated, "African

American female adolescents develop skillful, unique, expressionistic, and assertive styles” (p. 146) that allow them to overcome challenges, and to develop a sense of resiliency that enables a sense of assertiveness and a sense of power. One of the study participants highlighted the importance of oral communication, expressive communication, and collective community perspective when she stated, “If we ever have like situations that kind of like are mind-blowing to us, like I’ll speak to my friends about it and let them know, like, because I know that they’ll understand for me” (Focus Group #2, T’Nique). The literature illustrates the significance of these topics as discussed below.

Oral Communication

Research on the significance of oral communication among African American people has been extensive (Alim & Baugh, 2006; Alim & Smitherman, 2012; DuBois, 1994; Daniel & Smitherman, 1976; James, 1980; Smitherman, 1977). The oral traditions are grounded in a history of enslavement and emancipation as well as an adaptation to “the conditions of slavery and discrimination, a combination of language and style interwoven with and inextricable from Afro-American culture” (Smitherman, 1977, p. 3). There are several features of Black English Vernacular (BEV) (Abu-Jamal, 1997; Baugh, 1983; Daniel & Smitherman, 1976; L. Delpit, 2002; Labov, 1973; Speicher & McMahon, 1992), which have been examined in the literature, and are relevant to this particular study.

Call and response. Call and response is an important feature of the African American oral tradition. It is present in church services and in everyday conversations. For instance, in church services, in contrast to most other American cultures, an acceptable and common audience reaction is to interrupt and agree with the speaker. This

pattern of interaction is also evident in African American performative arts, speeches, and in certain forms of music, particularly gospel, blues, jazz, and hip-hop.

Signifying. Other aspects of African American oral tradition include signifying or “trash talk” and word play for entertainment. These aspects of African American culturally specific communication have found their way into mainstream American popular culture by way of hip hop music and culture.

Among African Americans, the oral tradition has served as a fundamental vehicle for survival (Baugh, 1983; Smitherman, 1977). According to Smitherman (1977) the role of oral communication is paramount to one’s identity:

Not talking about speech for the sake of speech, for black talk is never simple cocktail chit-chat, but a functional dynamic that is simultaneously a mechanism for learning about life and the world and a vehicle for achieving group approval and recognition. Even in what appears to be only casual conversation, whoever speaks is highly conscious of the fact that his personality is on exhibit and his status at stake. (p. 80)

Written Versus Oral Communication

In any culture, language is a tool for making sense of the world. This is also true of non–African American oral communication; however, within White America there is a significant reliance on the written mode of communication—this is not to say that the written mode is not important among African Americans. Rather, the literature states that there is a substantial emphasis on the oral tradition and the incorporation of proverbs, puns, spontaneity, braggadocio, and tonal semantics (Taylor-DeLain et al., 1983).

One of the most unique attributes of African American English is the use of tonal semantics, which refers to the variation in suprasegmental phonemes or sounds where there are variations of pitch, tone, and volume used for emphasis and clarity (Johnson, 2000). Research on black speech acts of African Americans suggests that this mode of

communication may be a “passport to literacy” (Bamgbose, Banjo, Thomas, & Banjo, 1997), being that it can be connected with the varieties of the languages that have arisen in the course of the co-existence of Standard English and numerous English dialects. In fact, current literature suggests the benefits of the rich and dynamic experience that African Americans often have with figurative language outside of school, and how it offers the opportunity to enhance African American students’ understanding of figurative language in school texts (Abu-Jamal, 1997; Bailey, Baugh, Mufwene, & Rickford, 1998; Labov, 1973; Taylor-DeLain, Pearson, & Anderson, 1983). Further, Taylor-DeLain et al. (1983) indicated that African Americans more fluent in Black English Vernacular, including the language practices of call and response and signifying, often tend to be more fluent in not only the figurative use of English, but also the literary forms of the language of wider communication (Caponi, 1999; Smitherman, 1974; White & White, 1999). Therefore, African American speech acts play an important role in the culture. Author Toni Morrison summed it up best when she stated that language “is the thing that black people love so much—the saying of words, holding them on the tongue, experimenting with them, playing with them. It’s a love, a passion” (Morrison & Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 123). Given that the academic literature and literary world understand the role of oral communication in African American culture, it is important to consider its value to build on the strengths of students from this culture—rather than squash their interests, students’ more engaged oral communication should be welcomed in classrooms. However, this has not been the case, as the literature has shown that often students who try to engage in oral communication in classrooms are labeled as disciplinary problems or uncooperative (US Department of Education Office for Civil

Rights, 2014). The oral communication style of African American students plays an important role in their identity formation, along with the expressive nature of that communication (L. Delpit, 2006).

Expressive Communication

The expressive and emotionalistic style of communication found in African American culture provides the thread that supports the fabric of the population. The value placed on individual expressiveness appears throughout Black society (Collins, 2008). African Americans tend to perceive greater emotional intensity when rating the expressions of others (Matsumoto, 1993). Effective teachers of African American students are often found "displaying emotion to garner student respect" (Delpit, 2006, p. 142). Further, teachers are often expected to show they care by "controlling the class; exhibiting personal power; establishing meaningful personal relationships, pushing students to achieve the (class) standard; and holding the attention of the students by incorporating African American interactional styles in their teaching" (Delpit, 2006, p. 142). African American interactional styles in their teaching involve engaging in dialogue and interaction that is active and that engages both the speaker and the listener.

In terms of vocal patterns, BEV contains a wide range of variation in both volume and pitch within its acceptable register. The voice can range from a very quiet and soft, deep sound to very loud and high-pitched, and all may be considered appropriate based on the context. Expressiveness and the context of the speaking situation is what determines whether the pitch and tone are "appropriate" (Olquin, 1995). Unlike other cultures, there is not a fixed and relatively narrow range of expression in most situations. Additionally, the expressive nature of African American culture and its speech acts have

garnered a lot of research attention (Labov, 1973), and there is a new generation of scholars paying attention to the strengths-building components of this culturally specific form of communication, particularly in terms of its ability to involve its participants in dialogue and to work with the collective group to develop a critical awareness of one's social reality. This study adds to the emerging research (Black Child Development Institute, 2013; Day, 2015), focusing on strengths-building approaches to students from underserved populations.

Collective Community

Traditionally, African Americans have a more collective orientation than European Americans (Allen & Farley, 1986; DuBois, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1985). In fact, research on the role of the community, parents, and families contributing to the positive development of African American children has grown in the last 40 years (Daniel & Smitherman, 1976; McLoyd, 2004). As with other families, African American families help their children develop positive attachment relationships with healthy adults as they support their children with becoming socially competent; however, unique features of African American culture build upon the importance of a group awareness to promote individual growth and development (Daniel & Smitherman, 1976). A group awareness has been shown to impact the developmental progress of students, particularly for the small but growing body of research on female African American learning in group environments (Burack, 2004), and also among adolescents (Markstrom-Adams & Adams, 1995; Phinney, 1989b).

Perceptions of Language Usage

It is commonly believed that language plays a key role in the perception of people (Alim & Baugh, 2006; C. Baker, 1992; Cortes & Others, 1986). According to sociolinguist Michael Stubbs (1976), “We hear language through a powerful filter of social values and stereotypes,” (Stubbs, 1976, p. 10), and the politics of language and race have been heavily contested topics in recent history (Goodwin, 1997; Perry & Delpit, 1998).

The negative perceptions of BEV or AAVE have existed for many years. In *Language in the Inner City*, linguist William Labov (1973) researched whether "dialect differences" influenced reading failure and poor academic performance. If this were the case, he surmised whether educators' knowledge of the differences between AAVE and Standard American English could be useful in curricula design and delivery of services to AAVE speakers. Labov (1973) believed that teachers could be more effective with AAVE-speaking students if teachers used their knowledge about potential interferences between Standard English and AAVE in their instruction. Moreover, he concluded that the conflicts between AAVE and standardized American English were symbolic of the cultural conflict and racism inherent in the society at large, and played out in the classroom.

Black Girls' Language

The majority of research regarding AAVE focuses on the Black community and males more specifically. For example, the early works of Claudia Mitchell-Kernan (Kernan, 1971) and Martha Ward (Ward, 1986) focused on the Black community with emphasis on Black men and families, but overlooked the unique communicative patterns

of Black women and girls. In light of the fact that Ward's (1986) research aimed to uncover "real-life" conditions in which children actually learned their language, it is odd under this premise that women's (presumably mothers in the households studied in the research) distinctive contributions would not be present.

Landmark studies such as William Labov's *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (1973) focused almost exclusively on Black male speech. The few mentions of African American women in his study presented them in terms of deviation rather than linguistically normal. He suggested that women, including Black women, lead language change through hypercorrectness as a means of gaining social mobility (Labov, 1973). However, given that many women are mothers, it makes sense that they would opt for social mobility as a means of survival for themselves and for their children. The evidence of hypercorrection in their language choices would only be a byproduct of their aspirations and goals.

Most of the research regarding specifically African American girls' language usage, albeit limited, comes from the fields of sociolinguistics and communication studies. Of particular interest here is communication research that has shed light on Black women's communicative behavior that demonstrates attempts to overcome the challenges of surviving in contradictory worlds and different identities. An example is Karla Scott's (2000) sociolinguistic analysis of Black women's use of the linguistic markers "girl" and "look" in conversations to foster group solidarity versus a way to call out a person who was not a member of the group. These discursive markers are explained in terms of social relations between women, and in conversations between women who were discussing men, or people whom they are in disagreement with.

The strength of Scott's (2000) analysis is in her ability to explain the importance of the sacred communicative space shared between women, and the ways that these markers illustrated a closeness and feeling of being a safe member of a sacred group. Yet, just like many other studies that focused on African American women's communicative patterns and the significance of creating a safe space for women to "talk it out," the literature regarding adolescent African American girls and the ways that they exhibit the same behavior in their age cohort is lacking, with a few exceptions (Blake, 1995; Brown, 2008, 2013; Muhammad, 2012).

Theoretical Stance on Literacy and Literacy Practices

Literacy is traditionally understood as the ability to read and write. It also includes the ability to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture. However, a deeper meaning is found in the work of linguist Wayne O'Neil, who in Martin Hoyles's edited volume on *The Politics of Literacy* (1977), stated:

Make a distinction: being able to read means that you can follow words across a page, getting generally what's superficially there. Being literate means you can bring your knowledge and your experience to bear on what passes before you. Let us call the latter proper literacy; the former improper. (p. 74)

For this study, I used Brian Street's (2001) definition of Language Practices as "the events and patterns of activity around literacy [linked to] something broader of a cultural and social kind" (p. 21).

African American Literacy

In this study, I interpreted the stories that the African American adolescent girls told about how they perceived their language and literacy practices and the ways in which they used personal narratives to do so. It is believed that the best way to accomplish this goal is to gain insights into their perspectives by using narrative analysis as Bruner

(1993) described as a usefulness in “how protagonists interpret things” (p. 51). Moreover, narrative analyses aim to understand not only the content of the narratives that people tell about themselves and the world, but also why the narratives are told in the way that they are told. The meaning behind the narratives allow the individual sharing to show how meaning is made at the level of a text (Franzosi, 1998; Labov, 2013).

While the literature regarding the language and literacy practices of adolescent African American girls is still somewhat limited, the growing body of literature that does exist (Blake, 1995; DeBlase, 2003; Muhammad, 2012, 2014; E. Richardson, 2002; Sutherland, 2005a) has often engaged the literacy and identity development of Black adolescent girls or girls of color, with only a few recent studies addressing the girls’ writing processes and the development of personal narratives (Blake, 1995; Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008; Brooks et al., 2010a; DeBlase, 2003; Mahiri & Sablo, 1996; Muhammad, 2012; Sutherland, 2005a). Additionally, research has not focused on the practice of linguistic racialization in America and how it has impacted African American adolescent girls, specifically. Instead, the literature on this topic has concentrated on the community as a whole, and converges on the negative impact of the barriers of exclusion, and the academic impact that language policies have produced in the Black community and among other underrepresented populations (e.g., English learners and other socially marginalized groups) (Darder & Uriarte, 2013; Lippi-Green, 2011; Macaulay, Brenneis, & Silverstein, 1987; Siegel, 2006). This exclusion has neglected to provide the necessary attention to uncover the influence of restrictive language practices on the population at the center of this current research.

The methodological framework of narrative analysis was used by Gina DeBlase (2003), who examined the perspectives of urban middle school girls of color to investigate how they constructed social identities of gender and race through their literacy experiences. Her research was interesting in terms of her methodological framework, but she did not focus on African American girls solely thereby delving deeper into that population's unique narratives. However, despite this, DeBlase's (2003) contribution of documenting the girls' efforts to think critically about their own narratives in meaningful ways proved an advancement in the existing methodological approaches of studying girls of color narratives.

LeeAnn Sutherland's (2005) qualitative study, "Black Adolescent Girls' Use of Literacy Practices to Negotiate Boundaries of Ascribed Identity," highlighted the connection between literature, literacy practices, identity, and social positioning within a framework of multicultural education. In addition, Sutherland (2005) used the method of adding literature by and about people of color to a language arts curriculum in order to provide a glimpse into the meaning-making of six 16-year-old black girls as they studied Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 2007) in their high school English class. Morrison's book is the story of a young African American girl's tortured life, and her aspirations to be beautiful and accepted in society. Sutherland (2005) assigned the book and then instructed her African American female students to participate in group and individual interviews as a launching point from which they analyzed their own life experiences. Her study revealed how her participants experienced the impact of a Eurocentric standard of beauty, which is the main theme of the novel, and her participants applied the societal ideals and the novel's theme to their own lives. As they read and

discussed the text, participants modified or criticized the ability of others' ascriptions of identity to act as boundaries in their lives using a narrative analysis approach to the novel. By studying the novel, the study focused on the concept of beauty, which is somewhat limited and the scope did not include other issues. For example, the study did not touch on issues of the participants' identity development in ways other than physical appearance and beauty.

More work should use writing programs to derive meaning as defined by the study participants themselves. Narrative inquiry provides the means to uncover how the study participants made sense of the world and their place in it by documenting their thoughts about themselves, and how they have been able to excel in school. Research supports the significant role that literacy plays in shaping “their reality into one they could represent and confront on their own terms” (Sutherland, 2005, p. 391). Further, a narrative analysis of this point reveals how literacy practices inform

Important sources of resistance to and liberation from negative cultural messages for adolescent girls include the following: a strong ethnic identity, close connections to family, learning positive messages about oneself, trusting oneself as a source of knowledge, speaking one's mind, participation in athletics, non-traditional sex typing, feminist ideas, and assertive female role models. (“A New Look at Adolescent Girls,” 2013)

Beyond these supposed standard elements of adolescent girl development, identity, and language/literacy development are two critical processes shaping the life trajectories of African American late-adolescent girls (Muhammad, 2012).

Identity development, in particular, can present unique issues for African American late-adolescent girls, who must negotiate their identity when presented with the hegemonic language of the dominant society (Collins, 2008; Muhammad, 2012).

Although there are a growing number of studies on literacy and others on the issue of identity development of African American adolescent girls, few studies address the relationship between the language and literacy practices and how African American girls negotiate these identities (Buckley & Carter, 2005; Muhammad, 2012; Stevens, 1997), particularly as they make the transition through late adolescence into young adulthood, and as they start living a life on their own away from home while attending university. It is a time of great change in the lives of most people, and they often face the same challenges that other students face during this time of transition—and they face the additional challenge that results from being marginalized based on their race and gender (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2012).

This literature selection process helped to hone the research topic and question, and provided direction for the search for additional literature. The key research topics emerged and include language, literacy practices, gender, and identity development and formation. Although there are a growing number of studies on literacy, and separately, identity development of African-American adolescent girls (Buckley, 2005; Stevens, 1997; Muhammad, 2013), few studies have addressed the relationship between the language and literacy practices and how these African American girls negotiate their racial and gender identities. Language and literacy are two critical processes shaping the life trajectories of African American adolescents (DeBlase, 2003; Muhammad, 2012; Richardson, 2003). Existing research has stated that the language and literacy practices of African American adolescent girls have helped to bolster their levels of self-esteem across certain variables (Buckley & Carter, 2005), yet more research is necessary to

understand this phenomenon and its possible positive ramifications to increase academic outcomes.

Development of Self-Hood and Identity

Based on Erik Erikson's (1994) psychosocial stages of developing a sense of identity in society, African American female adolescents have unique identity issues that impact their development tasks (Stevens, 1997b). According to this epigenic principle, as late adolescents, they enter young adulthood and join society as independent individuals. At this time, identity is constructed through various means. Namely, literacy experiences and practices, including reading and writing, offer the chance for students to explore their perspective of themselves and the world in which they live. In other words, literacy tools can be plugged into Erik Erikson's framework to alleviate potential tensions with self-hood and to become an instrument for girls to record their experiences for themselves and others (Muhammad, 2012). Moreover, writing and documenting personal experiences give girls the freedom to exert and express themselves and their self-hood. They can then "name, define, describe, explore, and transform" (Blake, 1995, p. 166) hegemony that threatens to silence their voices.

Identity can be conceptualized in many different ways. Identity is multilayered, complex, and often changing based on experiences and in different contexts. The literature on late adolescence and positive identity development has cited other factors, including the formation of a strong ethnic identity and affirming attitudes toward one's community and civic engagement as potentially positive factors for some children. Security and pride in one's own racial and ethnic identity have been shown to promote more positive peer and family relationships and self-esteem (Bennett, 2006; Phinney,

1989a). These sentiments can be fostered by engaging in the collective environment, especially in diverse communities and school environments (Ogbu, 1992), where students can engage in a dialectical process while they are learning in school (Bennett, 2006; Hollins & King, 1994).

Many theorists have considered identity construction and language and literacy practices to be interrelated (Athanases, 1998; Fecho, Commeyras, Eurydice, Bauer, & Font, 2000; McCarthy, 2001; McGinley & Kamberelis, 1993). In other words, when people communicate and read, write and express what they read and write, those actions shape how those people think about themselves and their relationship with what they have read.

The historical context for the process of using literacy to expose and counter misrepresentations, dominance, authority, and conditions that women have endured dates back to 19th-century literature, which included enactments of African American women in this process (hooks, 1981). In response to stereotypes and misrepresentations, African American women wrote to build resiliency and repeatedly used their stories to represent truth from their point of view (Collins, 2008; Richardson, 2003). For example, the most in-depth and textured pre-Civil War slave narrative written by a black woman in America was Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (2001), which provided a personal account of her struggle for self-preservation and freedom through language and literacy. Originally published in 1861, in this autobiography, Jacobs accounts her escape from slavery and her reunion with her family. Her autobiography illustrated how Black women of the past used literacy for the purpose of empowering identity development.

Identity development was always centered in African American women's advancement of their literacy development (hooks, 1981; Jean & Feagin, 1998; Sutherland, 2005a). In the case of this study, in discussing how she had used literacy to overcome negative stereotypical representations of African American girls, one participant shared the kind of literacy that had inspired her:

It's about just her journey and her experience, and like it was just like you don't see [TV] shows like that where you see African American girls in college. So like it was just good to read about someone that, even though it was fiction, like just to hear about someone that's in college and that like it's possible for you to go college and be successful and live out your dreams and stuff. And like a lot of the books that I read like in my library, like, they, in my high school library they had like with African American characters. So it was just easy for me to relate and like see like just different stories about black people and how they can be successful and stuff. (Focus Group #2, T'Nique)

Similar to literacy research on African American girls more broadly, the study of the identity development of African American adolescent girls is somewhat limited to certain leaders in the field such as Brown (2008, 2013), Buckley and Carter (2005), Parham and Helms (1985), Scott (2000), and Stevens (1997a). The significance of the language and literacy practices of African American high school-aged girls and their influence on the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identities is a small, but growing field (Brooks et al., 2010a; DeBlase, 2003; Muhammad, 2012; Purcell-Gates, 2008). Research conducted only recently has attempted to explore the identity development specifically of adolescent Black girls. Some of this research has been anchored in the language and literacy field (Blake, 1995; Muhammad, 2012; Sutherland, 2005a) in order to assess how the boundaries of ascribed identity has impacted the identity development of this population.

Blake (1995) has argued that one way for Black and Latina young women to begin to fight racism and sexism is to talk about their unique experiences through writing, and by developing cultural texts to be used for further examination and discussion in the classroom. Blake's (1995) research also called attention to how co-educational learning environments often inhibit creative sharing from girls because they may be trying to avoid ridicule from boys in the same classroom. Further, she verified that while boys may not outnumber girls in most classrooms, they tend to demand more attention from the teacher and concerns about the boys' behavior may override similar concerns about the girls. She suggested that there is a need for less gender-biased learning environments in order to facilitate learning for female students, particularly those of color (Blake, 1995).

Gholnecsar E. Muhammad's article (2012) sought to move the focus to the language and literacy practices of adolescent black girls by revisiting the practices of 19th-century literary circles in order to assess the ways in which Black adolescent girls struggle with self-hood. By using language and literacy exercises to explore how her participants made meaning of their identity through writing, Muhammad (2012) revealed how the adolescent girls positioned themselves in ways to negotiate their identities when presented with stereotypical language, beauty representations, and concepts of "blackness." Muhammad's work is innovative; however, she scaled down her focus from the group to one student, therefore eliminating the relevance to a group with the group dynamics of the study being lost.

Sutherland's (2005) scholarship examined the common assumption that students of color and girls will "relate to" White, male-dominated literature. Her research considered whether the assumption is true or false, and the significance of relating to

literature for students. In the end, her findings illustrated the impact of literary criticism written by Black females on informing the perspectives of teachers who do not share the same racial, ethnic, or social position. Her study denied the assumption those teachers who are come from different ethnic, racial, or social backgrounds than their students are unable to have positive and affirming impacts on their lives of their students. However, data from this study contrasted Sutherland's (2005) view and revealed that high-achieving girls are positively impacted both by literature that is coming from Black writers who may share a common cultural experience, and can also relate to White, male-dominated literature. For example, participants in this dissertation research shared how they were equally inspired by novels written by female, Black writers such as Toni Morrison (2007) and Alice Walker (2003), as well as White, male writers of nonfiction, self-help books including Stephen R. Covey (Covey, 2013) and Jon Gordon (Gordon & Blanchard, 2007). Their tastes revealed a respect for the stories that occupy the shared sacred space of Black womanhood as well as the multicultural worldview shared by broader society. This demonstrated the multidimensionality of their experience.

Girlhood Studies and Girlhood Identity

Girlhood Studies—the study of the socialization of girls versus boys—is an emerging field of research that has sought to meet at the intersection of feminist studies, women's studies, and childhood and youth studies. The field has emerged from the third wave of feminism starting in the 1990s with books such as *Reviving Ophelia* (1995), written by therapist, Mary Pipher, who posed the question, “Why have so many adolescent girls gone to therapy?” Caught in the crosshairs of society's gender ideals and a desire to develop a healthy sense of self-hood on their journey to womanhood, many

girls reached out for help. The field of Girlhood Studies was borne from this era of confusion (Pipher, 1995). Subsequently, other research attempted to answer Dr. Pipher's question.

Girlhood Studies connects with other fields globally including health, spatial studies/architecture, education, literary studies, sociology, history, and other relevant disciplines (Helgren & Vasconcellos, 2010). The field has posed certain questions such as (a) How is girlhood defined and why? (b) How does the research on girlhood link girls and women? (c) What is the relationship between girlhood studies and gender studies, and also gender relations? (d) What methodologies are being employed to study girls, and how do girls participate in it? (e) To what extent is the work girl-centered? (Driscoll, 2013; Fine, 2004; Helgren & Vasconcellos, 2010). Girlhood Studies has been driven by an analysis of the power structures at play in the lives of girls; however, linguistic racialization is not often included in these analyses despite the fact that "language has become perhaps the primary media of social control and power" (Fairclough, 2015, p. 3). Therefore, an analysis of the socialization of girls should include language and its influence on the development of their cultural and linguistic self-hood.

Nonetheless, Girlhood Studies' theorists have aimed to answer these questions by looking critically at the origin in patriarchy in society and the ways that patriarchal structures have prevented a commitment to focusing on research regarding girls and women, and their unique identities and experiences (Helgren & Vasconcellos, 2010; Klaehn, 2008; Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2005).

Surely, it is important to focus on girls as an entire group. The rise in the field of Girlhood Studies has provided the promise of expanding the focus of research on youth,

to include girls and the issues and challenges that are unique to that population (Bordo, 1997; Lipkin, 2009).

Girlhood Studies research has tended to take a personal and emic approach, as there is a propensity for more of its theorists to include the voices of their participants in the data (Blake, 1995; Brown, 2008; Goldwasser, 2008; Jacob, 2002). For example, Pipher's (1995) study was one of the earliest to provide access to girls' voices and perspectives on issues and challenges unique to girlhood adolescence. Her research included personal accounts of the impact of depression, society's beauty standards, and escalating levels of sexism and violence in American society. In response to Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* (1995), Shandler (1999) used the voices of girls, herself included, as at the time of publication she was an undergraduate student at Wesleyan University.

Around the same time, the personal narratives of girls started to bring a more diverse perspective to researchers expanding their focus to include girls of color. For instance, Blake (1995) examined the experiences of fifth-grade Latina and African American girls. She argued that one way for young women to begin to fight racism and sexism is to develop critical thinking skills through writing to express their particular experiences. She advanced the critical analysis process by using the students' narratives as cultural texts to be used for further examination as part of group discussions in the classroom. Makhijani's (2004) work continued the trend of using personal narratives; however, her focus was on the experiences of women of color reflecting on the impact of race in their development from girlhood to womanhood. The narratives provided lessons learned in hindsight, and documented how those experiences impacted their current lives; but as women, they were removed from the childhood experiences that they discussed.

More recently, Brown's (2008) research in the work *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy* shared the voices of adolescent girls as they demonstrated the significant role that Hip-Hop played in their lives. Through poetry and rhyme, the voices of Black girls demonstrated Hip-Hop's influence on their identity development, and how it may be used as a tool to work with this population in a meaningful and personal way (Brown, 2008).

The personal narratives of girls can provide readers with frank and perceptive insight into the journey of adolescents. For instance, Goldwasser (2008) uncovered the personal stories of 58 girls ranging in age from 13 to 19. In Goldwasser's (2008) collection of essays, the reader learns about the girls' aspirations to embody their possible selves, as well as the ways in which they are actively moving away from the oppositional identities that they encounter in their daily lives. This research was somewhat broad in focus and touched on various topics including, but not limited to, mixed messages they received from society about the concept of femininity, social ailments such as depression, eating disorders, suicide attempts, and excruciatingly low self-esteem (Makhijani, 2004). Similar to recent research in Girlhood Studies, this dissertation research drew from the work of other personal narrative-based research that relied heavily on the voices of adolescent girls—in this case, more specifically, African American girls—in order to understand how they have created meaning and defined themselves.

Black Girlhood Studies Borne from Hip-Hop Feminism

In *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip-Hop Feminist Pedagogy* (2008), Ruth Nicole Brown provided a definition for Black Girlhood that framed the research in this dissertation. Brown offered a definition of Black Girlhood as “the representations,

memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female” (p. 1). Brown’s (2008) study of Black girls was one of the leading texts of Black Girlhood Studies, which is the product of Hip-Hop Feminism and characterized as fulfilling a need to understand the many cultural, social, and political conditions that impact women, especially women of color, of the Hip-Hop generation. This generation is comprised of people born during the heyday of underground Hip-Hop between 1965 and 1985.

Black Feminism was partly prompted by Black women feeling like White feminism did not address the issues they faced. Later, Hip-Hop Feminism was borne out of Black Feminism, a wave of thought and activism largely influenced by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements as a result of many people from the younger feminist generation feeling like the mainstream feminism of old had failed to address the needs of all women, including African American women and girls. Hip-Hop Feminism expanded upon the opinions expressed by Black feminists who expressed concerns about a “whitewashing feminism” that not only avoided issues relevant to race and class, but also excluded the women of color from the intellectual conversation completely (Brown & Kwakye, 2012; Durham, 2012, 2014; Hill-Collins, 2006; hooks, 1981; Pough et al., 2007). In addition to demanding that the issues and concerns of women and girls of color be addressed, Hip-Hop Feminism calls out to feminist to move beyond mere sloganeering and patronizing to arrive at a place beyond “mentoring” and “girl empowerment” to offer more substantive solutions to social and political issues, and to create counternarratives to gender-biased notions of identity.

Black Girlhood Studies literature is growing (Brooks et al., 2010a; Brown, 2008), and the literature highlights key features of language and literacy practices and identity development. Namely, Black women and girls have historically created sacred spaces to “tell it like it is” (Muhammad, 2012). The creation of a sacred space to “write it out,” and “speak it out,” is an element of what it means to be a Black girl. In other words, being together as “Black girls” creates the kind of moments that “allow us to change ourselves and the communities of which we are and are not a part—we, who we really are as Black girls, not being the problem” (Brown, 2008, p. 20).

The need to create a sacred space to simply feel free to be oneself is the product of societal pressures and a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk that results from the unique lived experiences of Black girls who have learned to effectively deal with racial microaggressions such as ascription of intelligence, pathologized cultural values, and so forth (Delpit, 2012; Sue, 2010).

In addition to the creation of sacred space to “write it out” and “talk it out,” a select group of Black Girlhood Studies theorists has focused on highlighting the responses to microaggressions and their impact on the communication styles of Black girls to include code-switching and performative silence in response to demeaning comments from individuals and larger society (Richardson, 2002; Sutherland, 2005a).

Additionally, there is a growing body of literature on the forms of language and literacy that Black girls use to affirm and support a positive self-hood and identity. Namely, Kyra D. Gaunt in *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop* (2006) maintained that Black girls' games are connected to long traditions of African and African American music-making and mythology, and that

they teach musical and social lessons that are carried into adulthood. In short, Black Girlhood Studies has aimed to work with and study Black girls in a way that does not depend on their powerlessness (Brown, 2008), but instead celebrates them for the dynamic individuals they are and who they aim to become.

Study's Theoretical Framework and the Relationship Between its Components

This study used a critical pedagogy theoretical framework. Based on the subject matter of this study, one might assume that I would have chosen to use a critical race theory framework; however, I learned during the course of this study that critical race theory prioritize race first and foremost and as such, does not serve this research. Critical race theory denies other influences on the lives of my study participants, including gender, class, intellectual ability, and the diversity of perspectives produced by the intersection of these characteristics (Darder & Torres, 2004; hooks, 2012). As a result, it did not provide the framework to answer this study's research question. Critical pedagogy provided a more viable alternative, and the means to reflect on my own identity as a multidimensional and multifaceted African American female artist, activist, and scholar.

To arrive at an asset-based perspective on the research topic, this study drew upon the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy was an appropriate choice because, as a framework, it provides a way to understand power imbalances that exist in educational settings, especially in relationship to race, class, and gender. Power is concentrated in the production of knowledge (Darder, 2014; Freire, 1974b). Educational content is often viewed as disconnected from power, and therefore is misconceived as neutral and apolitical (Darder, 2011; Freire, 1974a). However, critical pedagogy offers an

alternative view of education and allows researchers to question power, and its relationship to the production of knowledge. For instance, through the practices of *conscientization*, one can act upon the environment to critically reflect on their reality and thereby transform oneself through future actions and critical reflection (Freire, 1974a). The main pathway to achieve conscientization is through the act of dialoguing through challenges in a manner that builds on those oral and expressive language qualities. Further, it uses the negation of the banking concept of knowledge by using a problem-posing approach to expose the oppressor-oppressed dialectic (Freire, 1974b). This qualitative, interpretive study relied on critical pedagogical themes to answer the research question, and did so by applying Fairclough's (1993, 1995, 2010) discourse analysis to see the texts of language and literacy as discourse and as social practice. In so doing, it helps to make it possible to analyze the language and power conditions.

Summary

In summary, the theoretical framework of critical pedagogy and the seminal works written by several African American feminist theorists who study literacy (DeBlase, 2003; Delpit, 1988; Richardson, 2002; Sutherland, 2005a) and identity development (Brown, 2013; Buckley & Carter, 2005; Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996; Stevens, 1997) framed this research and helped the researcher to assess the themes that emerged from the qualitative data collected in this study regarding how gender and race shaped the identity of the African American study participants (Hill-Collins, 2006; Collins, 2008; Delpit, 1988; hooks, 1981). The African American feminist literature shapes the focus of this dissertation as it overlaps with critical language and literacy theories (Alim & Smitherman, 2012; Baker, 1992; Morrell, 2008; Perry & Delpit, 1998;

Williams, 1982). The research question regarding African American freshmen college students points to the power dynamics of language discourse (Fairclough, 1995, 2015) to help demystify the ideological effects of domination in the media and in society, as a whole. The importance of African American adolescent girls to construct meanings of themselves and counter misrepresentations has been researched and has focused on reading and responding to literature (Brooks et al., 2008; Buckley & Carter, 2005; DeBlase, 2003; Sutherland, 2005a). While this research is helpful, there are gaps in terms of the role that the language and literacy practices of African American high school-aged girls have played in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identities (DeBlase, 2003; Richardson, 2002; Sutherland, 2005b). More research is needed to learn how high-achieving girls are excelling and how they are using language and literacy to do so.

By using a critical narrative approach, what is incorrect and lacking about African American girls and their development is explained, along with the influence of language and literacy in the process toward developing a positive sense of self based on one's ability to critically evaluate social myths and stereotypes that exist about them (Freire, 1974a). In the participants' experience, this process has proven to be a survival mechanism to overcome racism, sexism, discrimination, and the lingering inequities that result (hooks, 1990, 1994).

Finally, the area of knowledge regarding achievement among African American female college freshmen and the role that language and literacy practices play in the process is worthy of further exploration (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2012; Kaplan & Maehr, 1999). Using a narrative analysis framework developed by Feldman et

al. (2004), this study used qualitative data collected from surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups to create scenarios as units of analysis to research and understand how student participants have created meaning in their lives as narratives. By applying this analytical tool to the interview data, I arrived at the implicit and explicit aspects of the personal narratives that answered the research question regarding the language usage, literacy practices, and identity development experiences of high-achieving late-adolescent African American female students.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The primary goal of this study was to discover the role of the different uses of the English-language in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity of African American female college students, as stated in Chapter 1. To this end, separate qualitative data sets to measure this information were utilized. The methodology employed to assess the research question is presented in this chapter. The chapter is organized into eight sections: (a) recruitment of study participants, (b) selection of study participants, (c) introduction to the study participants, (d) procedures, (e) instrumentation, (f) data collection steps, (g) data analysis: narrative analysis, (h) applying narrative analysis to the research question, (i) data management, (j) validation (k) my role as researcher, and (l) summary of this chapter.

I answer the research question through the narrative analysis of scenarios derived from several kinds of data collected for this study, including online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. Narrative analysis allows for not only the telling of people's stories, but also for the actual recreation and co-construction of their lives through the research (Daiute & Fine, 2003). The data in this study were viewed through a critical pedagogy lens as it helps to reveal students' perspectives and to bring those viewpoints into "a dialogue with others in a never ending cycle of meaning making that is characterized by reflection/action/reflection/new action" (Rivera & Poplin, 1995, p. 223). Moreover, the critical pedagogy approach provides a foundation to support an understanding of the narrative analysis results, and how the study participants' use of

language interacts with “social dimensions such as class, ethnicity, gender and race to reproduce inequities both inside and outside school” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 68). Lastly, the use of a critical pedagogy framework with a method of narrative analysis provides a means of redressing the inequities that result from imbalances of power. Given the emphasis on self-hood and identity of this study’s participants, this research study is personal in nature and viewed through a qualitative research lens, which draws on the “lived experiences of real people in real settings” (Hatch & Hatch, 2002, p. 6). This study’s qualitative data resulted from a series of procedures, including a preliminary online survey, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. Figure 3 shows the process visually.

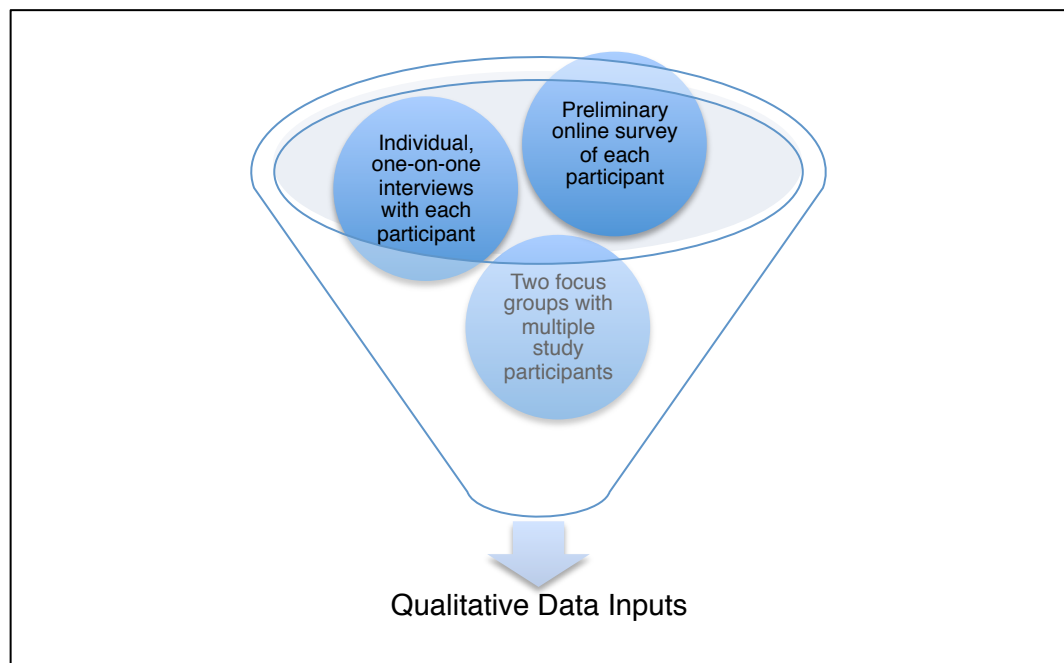


Figure 3. Illustration of qualitative inputs used to conduct the narrative analysis.

Recruitment of Study Participants

In the Autumn 2014, I conducted recruitment on the campus of Loyola Marymount University (LMU) using direct advertising. The advertisements were intended to be seen or heard by prospective subjects to solicit their participation in a study. Three direct advertising methods were utilized including posts on campus bulletin boards and flyers that were intended for prospective subjects (Appendix A). The following items were included in advertisements for this study:

- The name, email address, and phone number of the primary researcher;
- The condition under study;
- The purpose of the research;
- In summary form, the criteria used to determine eligibility for the study;
- A brief list of participation benefits including a \$50 Amazon.com gift card;
- The time or other commitment required of the subjects; and
- The campus location of the research, and the primary researcher's name, email address, and phone number for the purpose of participants requesting further information.

I also connected with on-campus groups at Loyola Marymount University to find potential participants in this study. These efforts brought forth two participants through LMU's Family of Schools. All of the advertising at LMU only reaped two students.

In reaction to the low response, and given my deadline to recruit participants by the end of the calendar year in 2014, I opted to use social media (e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn) to find 10 potential study participants at other universities who met the criteria.

I made an addendum to the study's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) protocol (#LMU IRB 2014 FA 56) regarding recruitment and marketing of the study.

The most effective social media venue proved to be Facebook, where I created a Facebook group page called "Academically High-achieving Female African American College Students Needed." The group page spread the word about the study, and from that page, 16 potential participants were recruited. Several of these participants found the study's Facebook site through their affiliation with organizations from around the country, including The National Society of Collegiate Scholars, Say Yes to Education, Inc., and Base 11. (Refer to Appendix A for a table illustrating the Recruitment of Research Participants.)

Recruitment Sources

The National Society of Collegiate Scholars. On over 300 campuses across the United States, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS) is an honors organization that provides career and leadership opportunities to college students who have a B+ or higher grade point average. It is a member of the Association of College Honor Societies. The associate director of the organization contacted me after her colleague mentioned the Facebook group to her. I met the associate director's colleague while traveling over the holiday season in Washington, DC.

Say Yes to Education, Inc. Founded by a Philadelphia-based entrepreneur who promised more than 100 sixth graders at a local public school that he would pay to send them to college if they graduated high school, Say Yes to Education, Inc., is a national nonprofit organization that supports collaborations with funders, community members, educators, and families to ensure financial support for promising students.

Base 11. Base 11 is an Orange County–based educational nonprofit organization that provides hands-on experience in the fields of aerospace and entrepreneurship. The organization provides financial support and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) training to academically high-achieving students from low-income families.

These organizations and some of their key staff members heard about the research from the Facebook group page, and contacted me. I followed up with the potential participants via my LMU email account. Interviews and focus groups were scheduled via WebEx. These methods of communication were private and no personal communication was shared or posted on the Facebook group page. Further, data collected from the potential participants and actual participants have not been shared with anyone other than the primary researcher. Any paper copies of records have been shredded and destroyed.

Selection of Study Participants

I gained access to participants through social media as the result of organizations and their key staff members hearing about the project through their social networks. As a result, many participants learned about the project from several sources, including, as stated above: (a) LMU-Family of Schools, (b) The National Society of Collegiate Scholars, (c) Say Yes to Education, Inc., and (d) Base 11.

At the start of the study, data were collected from 16 individuals who are referenced here by their pseudonyms. The 16 individuals were Amara, Andrea, Asia, Brittany, Carol, Charis, Dana, Denise, Joy, Katrina, Maria, Sabrina, Shelly, Tasha, Terese, and T’Nique (Appendices B and C). These 16 individuals were narrowed down to six due to limitations of age restrictions, grade points average (the minimum for the study was 3.6), geographic location, or participant availability.

Through the method of study, the research design was resampled to six individuals, creating a new purposive sampling for the purpose of codification (Appendix D). Data from the individual who participated in the online survey, but who was not included in the one-on-one interviews or focus groups (Tasha), were coded. Therefore, the participant data analyzed and discussed in this study include responses from five participants (Dana, Katrina, Maria, Shelly, and T’Nique) who participated in the preliminary online survey, individual one-on-one interviews, and the two focus groups.

The study participants attended colleges and universities throughout the United States. Specifically, one student attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York (Ivy League university), two participants attended the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, California (a private research university), another participant attended Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona (a private Catholic university), and the last participant attended Howard University in Washington, DC (a private, historically Black university). The average grade point average of the participants was 3.62.

Table 1

Students’ Universities’ Demographic Data for the 2013–2014 School Year

Student name ^a	University	University’s undergraduate enrollment	% of Black undergraduate students per university	% of female undergraduate students per university
Dana	Cornell U.	14,453	6	51%
Maria	USC	19,000	4	51%
Shelly				
Katrina	Howard U.	10,002	93	67%
Tasha				
T’Nique	Grand Canyon U.	5,813	22	N/A ^b

Notes. ^aAll of the students’ names are pseudonyms used to protect their identity.

^bData for the 2013–14 school year were not available at the time of this study.

Participants were selected based on their academic achievement, ability to participate in all the steps of the research project, and their ability to adhere to the interview and focus group schedules. The six participants who were selected to participate in the study were chosen from 16 student participants. The list was then narrowed from 16 to six based on the reliability of the students and their ability to participate. Their ability to schedule interviews with me was a critical factor. For example, several of the students lived in a different time zone than the other participants and me, making it difficult to schedule interviews and focus groups. One student, in particular, was studying abroad in England. Given that she was in such a different time zone, I opted to exclude her from the study.

Location

All research was conducted online. The online preliminary survey took place via the Qualtrics database, and participants were able to complete it from their home or school computer. One-on-one interviews and focus groups also took place online using the WebEx online software videoconference program. Interviews were conducted with participants from their home or school dormitory. I participated in the interviews from my home office, which is a private room in my home.

Consent

Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the start of the project. The informed consent document, included in Appendix J, provided a brief overview of the study, outlined the participant's role, defined the possible risks and benefits, and provided important contact information. Additionally, each participant was presented a copy of the IRB Human Subjects Bill of Rights (Appendix J).

I also explained the risk and benefits of participation to the subjects directly. The risks and benefits of participating in the study included the opportunity to reflect and share one's thoughts and perceptions. Participants were informed that this process might have a positive impact on their behavior academically. Finally, I clarified that any risks would be mitigated by a thorough explanation and execution of confidentiality to ease any concerns regarding any potential violations of privacy and/or embarrassment for the participants.

An Introduction to the Study Participants

The participants in this study included six high-achieving African American female college first-year students. One student attended Cornell University (Ivy League university), which currently had 14,453 undergraduates who were 49% male and 51% female. Cornell is a prestigious university with a highly competitive acceptance rate of 16% (2013–2014 school year). Based on demographics shared on the Cornell website (Cornell University, 2015) at the time of this study, more than 39% of undergraduate students were foreign nationals, Hispanic Americans, American Indians, African Americans, Asian Americans, or identified themselves in more than one racial/ethnic group. The university touts that it is diverse; however, its diversity recruitment efforts seemed to be more focused on increasing international diversity. As indicated by the student body enrollment based on race/ethnicity, 44% of its students were classified as White, 16% were Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 10% were Hispanic/Latino, 24% fell under a group category of various categories (i.e., two or more races, race/ethnicity unknown, or nonresident alien). The remaining 6% of Cornell's students were categorized as Black or African American.

Two of the study's participants attended the University of Southern California (a private research university in Los Angeles). USC is one of the Top 10 Dream Colleges in the nation based on the College Applicants' Top 10 Dream Colleges: Princeton Review List (Huffington Post, 2015). In the 2013–2014 school year, its 17.8% acceptance rate was the lowest in the history of the university. The student body consisted of approximately 19,000 undergraduates (rounded up to the nearest 500) (University of Southern California, 2015). Similar to Cornell, the student body was 51% female and 49% male, and USC recruits students from countries around the world. The diversity of USC is to be found in its international student population as well. At the time of this study, the majority of the student population was White (39%), or was Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (23%). The remainder of the student body was Hispanic/Latino (14%), a combination of two or more races, race/ethnicity unknown, or nonresident alien (19%), and the remaining 4% were Black or African American students (University of Southern California, 2015).

Another participant attended Grand Canyon University (GCU) in Phoenix, Arizona (a for-profit, private Catholic university). It was the youngest university included in this study. It was founded in 1949 as a nonprofit liberal arts college, and in 2004, it was purchased by Grand Canyon Education, Inc. (Grand Canyon University, 2015a) and became a for-profit university. The student population is much smaller than Cornell and USC, with 2013–2014 enrollment figures of approximately 5,813 undergraduates. With an acceptance rate of 41.3% in the 2013–2014 school year, GCU's rate was more than twice that of both Cornell and USC in the same year. As a smaller university, it had a diverse student population, which included 27.4% White students, 21.6% Black/African

American students, and 6.1% Hispanic/Latino. The remainder of the student body was Asian (1.9%), multirace (not Hispanic/Latino) (1.7%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (.7%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (.2%). Surprisingly, 40.5% of the school's student body was classified as "Unknown," a rather large percentage (Grand Canyon University, 2015b). Additionally, the current gender statistics at GCU were not available. We concluded from these statistics that the demographic data for GCU may not be as complete as the other universities included in this study.

The last participants attended Howard University in Washington, DC (a private, historically Black university). From its inception, Howard University has been nonsectarian and open to people of both sexes and all races. Founded in 1867, it started with a class of four White female students. However, soon after its opening and shortly after the end of the Civil War, members of the First Congregational Society of Washington created a theological seminary for the education of African American clergymen on the campus (Howard University, 2015). The project expanded to include a charter for establishing a university. In less than two years, the university consisted of the Colleges of Liberal Arts and Medicine. It is the only Historically Black University (HBCU) included in this study. Although Howard is an HBCU, the student population is not 100% African American. In fact, Howard (and other HBCUs) has a small, but notable, population of White and Asian students. At Howard, the enrollment breakdown for the 2013–2014 school year was American Indian or Alaskan native (2%), Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2%), nonresident alien (2%), and White (1%). The remaining student population at Howard (93%) was Black or African American (Howard University, 2015). (Refer to Appendix H for more detailed information about

the enrollment and demographics of the universities included in this study, and Appendix I for a chart illustrating the Types of Colleges and Universities Attended by Study's Participants.)_

The participants were selected based on their grade point average (GPA) in high school and college. All of the participants had a cumulative high school GPA of 3.6, or higher, and a 3.6 GPA or higher in college. The average GPA of the participants was 3.62. Participants needed to be African American female freshman-year college students who were willing to participate in this study regarding the role that language and literacy practices plays to enable a positive and affirming development of self-hood. Participants completed a preliminary online survey and were selected based upon their responses and ability to meet for subsequent, individual one-on-one interviews, and one of two focus groups.

Procedures

This study utilized several characteristics of qualitative research to answer the research question, including: direct interaction with study participants, researcher in a role of key instrument in the data collection, multiple sources of descriptive and qualitative data, and an examination of how the study participants saw and experienced the world (Creswell, 2013). All of the data were collected in a natural setting including online video conversations and phone calls from the participants' home computers, and a review of survey documents submitted via the Qualtrics portal, which the participants accessed from their home or dormitory computers.

As a direct observer, I avoided being a part of the participants' daily lives; however, I did aim to conduct focus groups in order to guide conversations between the

study participants. During the process, I asked questions and prompts, but attempted to avoid biasing the conversations. I accomplished this by asking open-ended questions, and the interview prompts were open-ended to help promote responses that were not the result of my bias. The WebEx online program was a very useful part of direct observation. For instance, during the first and second focus groups, I videotaped the conversations to observe the verbal and nonverbal communication of the participants. Also, through direct observation, I was able to focus on certain sampled conversations and vignettes rather than become immersed in the entire context of the everyday existence of the participants.

Following the preliminary online surveys, I created an interview protocol for the one-on-one interviews. Questions were asked regarding the role that language and literacy uses played in the lives of the participants and the development of their sense of self-hood. (Sample One-on-One Interview questions are listed in Appendix F.)

The individual one-on-one interviews lasted between one to two hours. They took place online via the video conferencing program WebEx that captures audio and visual media during interviews. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed the videotapes for accuracy.

Finally, based on the information received in the preliminary surveys and the one-on-one interviews, I developed an interview protocol for follow-up focus groups (#1 and #2). The first focus group took place on Saturday, February 21, 2015, from noon to 2 p.m. Two of the participants logged onto the WebEx online videoconference with me. The second focus group was held on Saturday, March 2, 2015, starting at 12:00 p.m. and

ending at 2:15 p.m. WebEx also was the videoconference host for this focus group, and the three participants joined the videoconference with me.

Prior to the focus groups, I prepared an interview protocol to delve more deeply into issues that arose during both the preliminary online survey and the individual one-on-one interviews. The goal was to discuss themes that emerged with the group and capture the group dynamic during the focus groups. The group dynamic was beneficial as it provided an additional level of meaning derived from the group. The focus group interview protocol included several questions regarding language and literacy practices as well as information regarding their school environments, and how they related to their classmates and teachers. In addition, I inquired about their interactions with male students and teachers and the role, if any, that gender differences played on their respective campuses, as well as dating and other social interaction issues. (Sample Focus Group Interview Gender Difference Interview Questions are listed in Appendix G.)

I played a key role in the interview process as I designed open-ended questions and statements to prompt responses. I also encouraged the respondents to give long, elaborate answers. All interviews were recorded on videotape via the WebEx program and saved as MP4 files, which were transcribed strictly verbatim. The visual aspects of the interviews were, of course, captured as well. These recordings contain rich representations of the interview situations. Additionally, during and after the interviews, I took field notes as a supplement to the video recordings. The importance of these notes as data material was to provide a means to help code and analyze the data. I wrote those additional notes by hand and then later typed and stored them as text files in the

MAXQDA database that was used to code literature and research content, interview data, and other notes.

The coding of the literature and research content (i.e., qualitative data from the online survey, individual one-on-one interviews, and focus groups) was based on a systematic search for meaning (Hatch & Hatch, 2002). Data were collected into the MAXQDA database to organize and interrogate data in ways that allowed me to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, and make interpretations. The goal was to organize the data in systematic order to ask questions of the data and to find answers (Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). The reduction of themes was achieved by inductive analysis based on themes that were not predetermined. I began with particular pieces of evidence from the data collection. Then, the pieces were pulled together into a meaningful whole by identifying salient themes and assigning them a code, and placing the less significant items aside. This data reduction process allowed me to narrow the focus of the analysis. I read and reread the data to refine the salient domains and record where the themes took place in the various interview content sources.

I decided whether the themes were supported by the data, and then searched for examples in the data that did not fit with or run counter to the themes. Deductive reasoning was used to decide if reading the data with specific themes in mind supported the themes I identified. Searching within the themes, I identified additional levels of complexity, richness, and depth from which to select corresponding subthemes to find other possible ways to organize the data results.

A “data display” was made on an Excel sheet to visually and systematically represent themes and subthemes and indicate the sources of the corresponding data

(Hatch & Hatch, 2002). The data display provided an opportunity to refine the analysis that had been done, and to reassess some of the previously identified themes to alter them for even greater clarity. Finally, data excerpts were selected to support elements in an outline from which the scenarios could be generated and developed further.

Data Collection Steps

Online Preliminary Survey

To find participants who met the appropriate criteria for the study, I also employed a Qualtrics survey. The survey was designed to collect information regarding the potential participant's thoughts about language and literacy practices, and how they have impacted her identity as a young African American woman in her first year of college.

The survey included several open-ended questions regarding how the students explained their academic success, defined language and literacy, and characterized their sense of self-hood. Six of the students participated in the preliminary online survey. I scheduled individual one-on-one interviews after receiving the online preliminary survey responses.

One-on-One Interviews

I conducted individual one-on-one interviews with each of the final study's participants via the WebEx online video conferencing program. The six interviews were scheduled over a one-month period starting on January 14, 2015, and ending on February 11, 2015. The scheduled interview dates and times were as follows:

- Noon–1:00 p.m. (PST), January 14, 2015
- 4:30 p.m.–5:45 p.m. (PST), January 14, 2015

- 11:00 a.m. –12:00 p.m. (PST), January 19, 2015
- 9:00 a.m.–10:30 a.m. (PST), January 24, 2015
- 12:00 p.m.–1:30 p.m. (PST), January 27, 2015
- 9:30 a.m.–11:00 a.m. (PST), February 11, 2015

One of the study participants failed to attend the scheduled interview at noon on January 27, 2015. All of the other participants attended their scheduled interview session.

Prior to interviews, I obtained the participants' signed consent. I also conveyed the parameters of the interview with all six participants individually. Namely, I explained the research project and procedures and allowed the participants to ask any questions relevant to the study. At the start of each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, all confidentiality measures in place, and the Informed Consent (Appendix J) procedures with participants. Although participants had already given their assent, I asked participants to acknowledge their assent to participating in the interview and to having it digitally recorded.

I conducted semistructured interviews. Based on participant's responses, I followed up or asked clarifying questions in an effort to better understand the participant's experiences. During this time, I took handwritten notes about the setting, details, and occurrences of the interview.

At the conclusion of each interview, I restated the confidentiality measures for participants' names, digital recordings, and notes. I also informed the participants about the next stages of the research such as the focus groups. In addition, participants were informed that they would have an opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on the data and findings during the focus group with other study participants. The interview and

notes were transcribed as soon as possible following the interviews to ensure accuracy (Hatch & Hatch, 2002). I kept a reflective journal about the process of data collection, transcription, and data analysis for my records.

Focus Groups #1 and #2 Participants and Procedures

On February 21, 2015, I hosted the first focus group for two hours (12:00 p.m.–2 p.m., PST) online via WebEx. Two participants, Dana and Maria, attended the focus group via their home computers along with myself. In preparation for the focus group, I logged on 10 minutes early to check the audio and visual components of the WebEx platform. Participants arrived promptly at noon. From noon to 12:10 p.m., I welcomed the participants and informed them of some of the themes that had emerged from their prior interviews.

For the sake of clarity, I sent consent forms, reviewed the forms with the participants, and reminded the participants that the results of the interviews and focus groups would remain private. The participants confirmed that they were clear about this information. I also informed the participants that the compensation (\$50 Amazon gift cards) would be emailed within 24 hours of the completion of the focus group. The first focus group's discussion lasted two hours.

The second focus group took place on March 1, 2015, between 12:00 p.m. and 2:15 p.m., and included three participants, Katrina, T'Nique, and Shelly. Similar to the first focus group, I logged on 10 minutes early to check the audio and visual components of the WebEx platform. Participants arrived promptly at noon. From 12:00 p.m. to 12:10 p.m., I welcomed the participants, and reminded them that the interviews and focus group

information would remain private. I also informed them that the dispersal of the \$50 Amazon gift card would take place within 24 hours of the completion of the second focus group.

I analyzed the data collected from the preliminary online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and the focus groups using the coding features in the MAXQDA database. This process involved the categorization of themes through close examination of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Upon coding data, I uncovered themes that supported the overall analysis of the study. The analysis helped me to move from particular instances of themes to the general themes shared among the participants (Hatch & Hatch, 2002; McCracken, 1988). Because my objective was to comprehend the overall "narrative," it was important to connect themes and to also see if there were relevant exceptions. By both coding and analyzing the data, I interpreted the themes using personal knowledge and experiences as tools to make sense of the material (Hatch & Hatch, 2002)

The narrative data were imported into the MAXQDA database, and I conducted several rounds of review to glean commonalities between the narratives. Initially, I believed that the key themes dealt with one level of commonality, but upon deeper review, themes emerged regarding language and literacy and identity development, which have guided the narrative analysis in this research. These themes are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 following the sections in this chapter on data analysis using narrative analysis, validity, my role as researcher, and the summary.

Instrumentation

Responses from the preliminary online, individual one-on-one interviews, and the two focus groups comprise the data in this study. I interpreted the stories that the

participants shared with me to uncover what the participants meant by delving into the “form, structure, and content” of their stories (Feldman et al., 2004). I assessed what the participants included in their stories, and what they excluded. I looked at the story as a whole, including the context within which the stories occurred, and the motivation of the person telling me the story. I asked myself certain questions to arrive at the storyline that is embedded in the story such as: Why are the participants telling me this particular story? How are the participants telling me the stories? Are they trying to convince me of something in their story? Are they trying to prove a point in the story that they relay to me? The answers to these questions provided a way to find the key insights in the participants’ stories. I took a holistic approach to each of the participants’ stories, and I considered the context of our interview conversation, and how the participants interacted with each other during our focus groups. The methodological process involved provided insight into the language and literacy experiences of academically high achieving African American female college students and the influence on their sense of self-hood and identity.

Stories usually contain multiple meanings based on the often-inferred meanings that the storyteller assumes that the listener understands. Because of this, stories are embedded with veiled assumptions, enthymemes, and unexpressed arguments. Therefore, it is necessary to use a more in-depth approach to arrive at the meaning intended by the storyteller.

I interpreted the stories to arrive at the storylines, and I revealed the process of interpretation by detailing how I deciphered the oppositions—both implicit and explicit—in the stories. Oppositions are “the relation between two propositions in virtue of which

the truth or falsity of one of them determines the truth or falsity of the other” (Dictionary.com, 2015). Looking for the oppositions allowed me to “uncover the meaning of a key element of the discourse by analyzing that the narrator implies the element is not” (Feldman et al., p. 155). I tested the accuracy of the oppositions by using Figure 4, below.

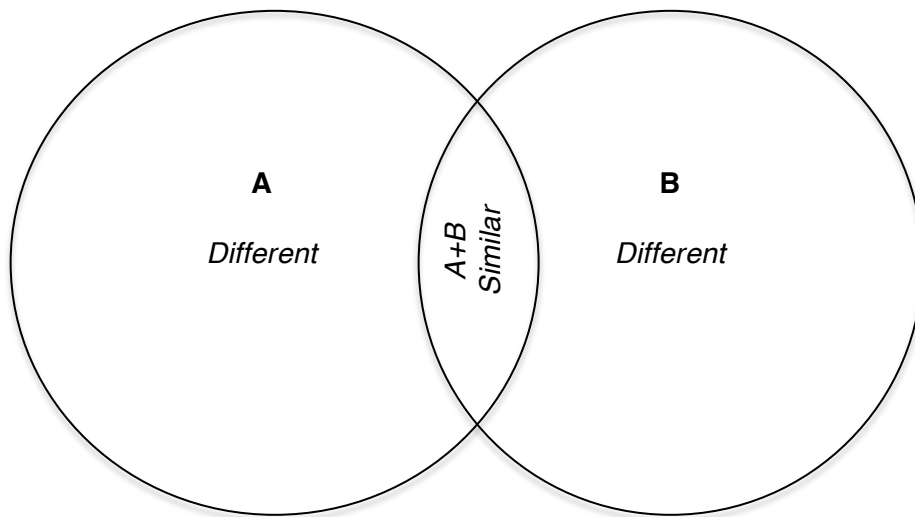


Figure 4. Illustration of the relationship between oppositional statements, whereby A is different than B.

The above illustration of opposition illustrates the relationship between contradictory information. Using this illustration, I was able to say that two statements are contradictory to each other if they express the opposite truth. In other words, if one of them is true then the other must be also, and vice versa. To explain further, the A phrase “Different is normal” and the B statement “Different is not normal” contradict each other. Or, in another example, the contradictory relationship exists between the A term “failure” and the B term “success.” They are different or similar to each other, and they do not intersect logically. Whereas A + B are similar to each other. In which case, I avoided

statements from participants that intersected and were similar in logic. The procedure using oppositions was advantageous and helped to uncover the in-depth truth in each of the participants' stories. "Elements of the story often have meaning based on what they are implicitly contrasted with, in other words, what they are not" (Feldman et al., 2004). In short, when the participants shared a story about their experience, a simple way to understand the story's meaning was to examine closely what was implied as the opposite within the same story.

For example, when T'Nique shared her personal story, which I named "Testament of Dreadlocks," she relayed information about her reasons for wanting to change schools because she felt out of place at her first school. She expressed her deeply felt fear that if she were to stay in her original school, she would perish emotionally. Alternatively, she implied that if she were to switch to a new school that offered her a more nurturing environment, she would thrive emotionally. Hence, as illustrated in Figure 5, below, the oppositions between these two outcomes were in opposition to each other because the truth or falsity of each of the oppositions determines the truth or falsity of the other.

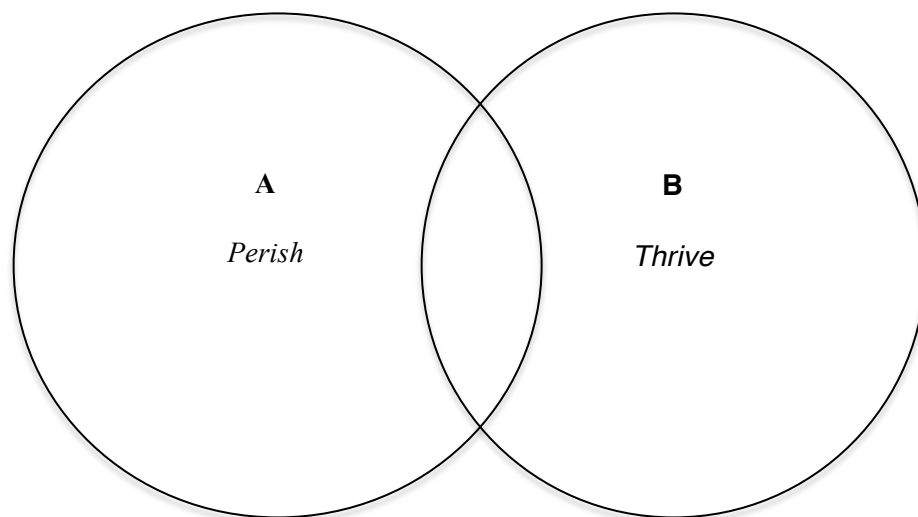


Figure 5. Illustration of sample oppositions in this study.

Once the oppositions were clearly identified, I isolated the syllogisms, or the logical argument made up of two theses and a conclusion. In addition, using the oppositions and syllogisms, I arrived at the enthymemes, or “incomplete or ‘careless’ logical inference” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 152) to further disentangle the story that was shared by the study participants.

Continuing with the “Testament of Dreadlocks,” I was able to see the logic of her argument more clearly. An example is below with two premises and a conclusion:

Premise 1: I could change how I felt about school by going to a different one.

Premise 2: I switched to a different school.

Conclusion: Therefore I felt differently (better).

All of the points in her argument are implicit. In other words, she is saying that good schools foster belonging. I felt like I belong. Therefore my school is good.

Data Analysis: Narrative Analysis

This qualitative study applied a rhetorical analysis approach to narrative analysis (Feldman et al., 2004) that used stories, vignettes, conversations, interviews, life experience, field notes, and video interviews as units of analysis. Scrutinizing the elements of text and subtext created the ability to understand the explicit and implicit ways that participants created meaning in their lives as narratives, and to answer the research question regarding the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity.

The method of narrative analysis used in this study was inspired by the research of Feldman et al. (2004), who examined the topic of individuals’ stories regarding their understandings of abstract plans for change instituted within the organizations in which

they worked. This research drew on two concepts inspired by the studies of semiotics and rhetoric: opposition and enthymeme; for instance:

Traditions of narrative analysis from both rhetoric and semiotics recognize that one way of creating meaning in discourse is through attention to opposites embedded in discourse. Elements of the story often have meaning based on what they are implicitly contrasted with, in other words, what they are not. (Feldman, Sköldbberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004, p. 151)

As stated previously in this chapter, Feldman et al. (2004) applied three stages of narrative analysis that have inspired the research of this dissertation study:

1. Identify the story line of each study participant's personal narratives. It is important to look for both the stated story line and the subtext in each narrative.
2. Identify any opposition—implicit or explicit—in their personal narratives.
3. Build on the story line and oppositions, identify the reasoning in the participants' narratives by assessing the inferential logic in their stories as it relates to their language, literacy, and identity development practices.

I felt that this three-level approach was appropriate as it provided a means to analyze both the explicit and implicit meanings in the personal narratives. The approach further helped to assert the definitive meaning behind these narratives. I also applied Fairclough's (2015) language discourse analysis to examine the text, interaction, and context to assess the language and power dynamic. An illustration of the three levels of the narrative analysis used in this study follows, along with more details about the research process.

As I honed in on the data, I looked for the form, structure, and content of the narratives. I asked questions such as "How does the narrator tell the story?" and "What does she include or exclude in her story?" By doing this, I was able to more holistically analyze the narrative as a whole. The approach was holistic to narrative analysis and

involved a rhetorical analysis of stories to uncover underlying logics and assumptions implicit in the participants' stories.

It is important to note the difference between narrative and story. The narrative is the grand conception that includes several stories that consider one or more themes. The illustration below in Figure 6 provides a more clear visualization of the relationship between narrative and story. In other words, "Stories are instantiations, particular exemplars, of the grand conception. They respond to the questions, 'And then what happened?' or 'What do you mean?'" (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 149). Stories have visible and hidden meaning. They can include multiple meanings and tacit assumptions shared with listeners; it is possible to study them to reveal why and how things are happening.

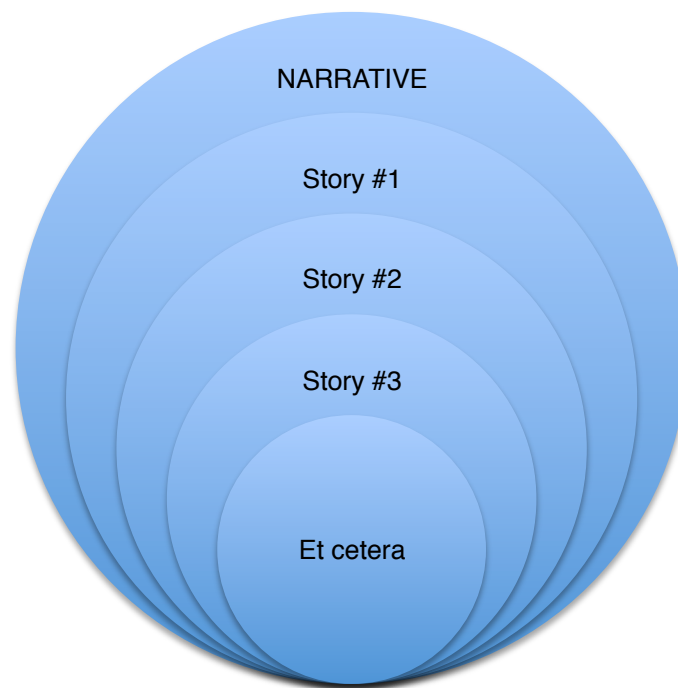


Figure 6. Relationship between narratives and stories in this study.

Borrowing from the world of theater, the following stories in Chapter 4 are written in theatrical script format. Recently, researchers have taken an interest in using theatre as a unique method of presenting, analyzing data, and explaining research

findings (McCall et al., 1990; Saldaña, 2003). Theatrical presentation of data offers the ability to communicate research findings in an emotive and embodied manner.

An overview of the themes that emerged from the narratives begins in section two. Section three introduces the key themes pertaining to affirming Black girl/womanhood self-hood that have emerged from the study. I arrived at the themes of this research based on thematic coding that was inductive and iterative (Hatch & Hatch, 2002). As stated in the previous chapter, I selected the themes based upon the data. Using inductive reasoning, I decided on the specific themes and subthemes that have been organized into the scenarios presented in this chapter.

I concluded that certain themes were more prevalent than others based on multiple rounds of analysis, and then I verified the themes by testing them on each of the stories that are featured in this chapter. More specifically, I coded the data (Hatch & Hatch, 2002) with three main components: (a) Language, (b) Literacy, and (c) Identity Development. From there, I coded themes that emerged under those three main headings. Certain key themes became apparent in individual narratives as well as across all of the narratives. Looking for commonalities under each of the headers and between the themes, I found themes as they re-occurred in the other participants' survey or interviews.

Data in Chapter 4 correspond to the three main components of affirming Black girl/womanhood self-hood, along with the consistent themes that emerged in the narratives. In these sections, all of the key themes of the research are presented in scenario form. To set the stage properly, each scenario begins with a set-up with details, including the name of the story that is shared by the study's participants followed by the interpretation of the storyline, an explanation of the oppositions, syllogisms, and

enthymemes in the each story. Finally, each scenario concludes with an interpretation that considers the background and setting, ethnographic details, data source information (e.g., field notes, email messages, or interview data from the preliminary surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, etc.), and relevant details.

An introduction of the participants follows, along with a detailed description of their academic and personal backgrounds. In the participants' introductions, the foundation is laid to help unravel what will later be revealed in the rest of the scenarios.

As stated in Chapter 1, some of the scenarios conveyed data that participants shared in reported speech rather than examples of actual language usage. In these cases, this information was important because it captured relived experiences that the participants could compare and contrast. Concurrently, other data reported were examples of actual language usage in action. In both cases, I explain whether the data in the scenario were reported speech or examples of language in use.

Applying Narrative Analysis to the Research Question

The narrative rhetorical analytic approach provided a way to answer the research question: How do the language and literacy experiences of academically high-achieving African American female college students influence their sense of self-hood and identity?

Narrative analysis (Feldman et al., 2004) is a challenging process; however, it can be a particularly powerful tool that allows the telling of stories and focuses on “the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world” (Lawler, 2002, p. 242).

Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups with six African American female college students who had demonstrated academic high-achievement, data were collected in the form of narratives. Each student was interviewed by videoconference, individually, and

in groups; videos of the interviews were made and major themes were identified. Participants also provided written permission to participate in the interviews. Each interview was transcribed. Major themes were identified with regard to the three components of the study: language, literacy, and identity development. Each theme was coded a different color on the transcripts as follows: language usage was coded yellow; literacy practices were coded green; and identity development was coded pink. These phrases that were indicative of each of the themes were loaded in the MAXQDA database that grouped them for the purpose of analysis. For ease of reading, the narratives that follow in sections five, six, and seven are organized and presented as scenarios enacted by participant responses in each of the three components of the study.

To answer the research question of the study, I utilized three levels of narrative analysis obtained from research conducted by Feldman et al. (2004). In their article, *Making Sense of Stories: A Rhetorical Approach to Narrative Analysis*, they provide a step-by-step demonstration of their method of narrative analysis. Based on classical rhetoric and semiotics, their method provides a way for researchers to uncover unstated, implicit understandings that are the basis of the stories that people tell. This method provided a useful means to decipher the stories that the participants shared regarding the role that the different uses of language and literacy play in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity. For the purpose of answering this study's research question, I applied Feldman et al.'s (2004) three levels of narrative analysis:

1. Identify the story line of the participants who are sharing their narratives. This element focuses on the ways in which people make and use stories to interpret the world (Lawler, 2002). By uncovering the story line of the participants, I was able

to view their social world as “storied” (i.e., “public” stories circulate in popular culture, providing means people can use to construct personal identities and narratives of their own making). In other words, Ricoeur (1990) argued that narrative is a key means through which people produce their identity.

2. Identify the oppositions, both implicit and explicit. In so doing, I was able to research and reveal the opposition that existed in each narrative. Based on Feldman et al. (2004), “In sum, when a storyteller describes a situation, one way to uncover meaning is by looking closely at what he or she is implying is its opposite” (p. 151).
3. Building on the story line and oppositions within the story line, identify the inferential, logical form of the narrative. Narratives serve a point (a “so what?” factor), which often takes the form of a message intended for the listener. I analyzed the form of reasoning inherent in the narratives based on premises presented (implicitly or explicitly) by the participant. For example, one of the participants made the following argument in one of the scenarios that follows:

Premise 1: I need a sacred space where I can feel safe.

Premise 2: If I don’t feel that I have a sacred space, I feel unsafe.

Conclusion: I need a sacred space to feel safe otherwise I will shut down.

The three levels of analysis are illustrated below in Figure 7.

The narratives of the participants in this study were essentially unique. They represented events of their individual experiences. In sharing their stories, common themes emerged. The result has been rich, thick descriptive data (Geertz, 1977) to provide the many details, conceptual structures, and meanings intended by the participants in this study. The thick description of the participants’ stories allowed me to

expand the data sources to substantiate their meaning more effectively. Further, it is a means by which we can access “a systematic surfacing of the arguments used by the storyteller” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 152). The narrative analysis technique “opens up their narratives to an analysis of the internal arguments that they make” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 148), using logical inference to understand the information that participants shared by means of narrative. In this manner, the answer to the research question surfaced, as did an understanding of the stories of achievement of the study’s participants.

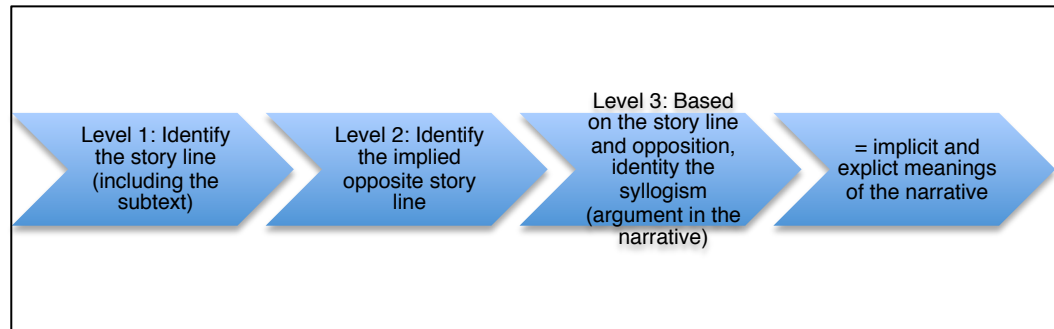


Figure 7. Illustration of the narrative analysis process.

Level One: Identify Story Line

The field of education depends on narrative structure and narrative device to educate and inform its students. The narratives and stories constituted the “data” for this particular research project, and the stories revealed data points of commonality among the study’s participants. Their stories emphasized the participants’ subjectivities and contextual realities, and the way in which events are causally linked and given meaning by their connections.

When considering the concept of the story line, the work of the social constructivist Jerome Bruner is useful. Bruner (1993) suggested that cognition, or the

thought process, is interpreted in narrative structures. For Feldman et al. (2004), “Narratives are useful data because individuals often make sense of the world and their place in it through narrative form” (p. 148). In the case of this project, I focused on the narratives of the participants to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for their thought processes and perspectives of their place in the world, now and into the future.

A story is a subset of a narrative. Given the importance of stories in the overall narrative, I believe in the importance of developing a clear articulation of each of the study participants’ stories. To do this, the narrative analysis began at the granular level of identifying the stories that the participants shared as part of this study. Therefore, the narrative analysis began with the identification of the stories contained in the preliminary surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups.

The story line embraces the emotional or intellectual messages embedded in, or implied by the speaker. In the story line, the textual and subtextual elements exist and can be detected through thought and analysis, and served as tools to help identify meaning in the study participants’ interview responses.

Level Two: Identify the Opposition Statement

Based on the research of Feldman et al. (2004), “In sum, when a storyteller describes a situation, one way to uncover meaning is by looking closely at what he or she is implying is its opposite” (p. 151). Historically, narrative analysis research has focused on the need to recognize that one way to create meaning in a narrative is to draw attention to opposites that exist within the discourse. Continuing with Feldman et al. (2004), “Elements of the story often have meaning based on what they are implicitly contrasted with, in other words, what they are *not*.” (p. 151). It is also found to be true in the fields

of rhetoric and semiotics that use binary oppositions to examine the discourse in a work of literature (Molloy, 2007).

To analyze the study participants' opinions and values in this study, I identified trends and patterns of speech common in their discourse whereby the oppositional message is implied (Hemmings, 2000). For example, a storyteller can convey a sense of what is correct behavior without stating it explicitly, and instead only discuss what is wrong with the opposite behavior (Oyserman & Harrison, 1998). Specifically, this was the case as participants discussed the notion of "possible selves" or who they aspired to be in life, in contrast to the "oppositional self" whom they wanted to avoid becoming in life.

Level Three: Identify the Inferential, Logical Form

The third level of narrative analysis applied to the stories collected in this research includes logical inference. Using the basic principles of inferential logic, it was useful to represent the story lines in the form of logical arguments or syllogisms. It was also helpful to infer implied or unspoken points of the story line, which speakers assumed the listener to be aware of during the telling of the story. In *Rhetoric* (2010), Aristotle observed that enthymemes are "the substance of rhetorical persuasion" (p. 135), and because all storytelling involves an element of persuasion (Jorgensen & Largacha-Martinez, 2014)—be it simply to persuade the listener to pay attention, or something else—enthymemes are commonly embedded in everyday speech (Peregrin, 2008). In this study, I observed the implied or unspoken points of the story line to gain insight into the argument of the participants regarding their point of view, and what they wished to

convey to the listener. In this case, the listener was me, and in some cases it was their fellow study participants.

Validation: Triangulation of the Data

I used triangulation to validate the data. “Triangulation of data combines data of different sources and at different times” (Flick et al., 2004, p. 178). Or, as Creswell (2013) explained, triangulation is “examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (p. 192). This research was triangulated with the multiple data sources, providing me with an opportunity to compare and contrast data sources to develop themes and to uncover research findings.

Data were collected from three sources: the online preliminary survey, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. It was important to compare the results from these three sources to help ensure a balanced presentation of evidence. Each element provided valid data and helped to develop a full picture of the participants’ feedback regarding their language and literacy practices as they pertained to their linguistic and cultural sense of self-hood.

The online survey provided a framework from which I developed an understanding of each participant’s perspective. It was important that they each answered the same open-ended questions. The survey results helped to frame open-ended questions and follow up inquiry in the one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

The one-on-one interviews provided an opportunity to confirm themes that emerged in the survey responses. These interviews were also a good way to speak about more personal or sensitive topics prior to the focus groups.

Lastly, the focus groups offered a way to reassess the themes that emerged. They also captured the participants' group dynamic to collect speech in action in the form of scenarios. The scenarios provided insight into the specific linguistic and cultural ways that this group of participants communicated that is indicative of being African American and a girl.

Data Management

The data coding was set up in the MAXQDA database after all of the interviews and focus groups were entered into the system. I imported all of the interview and focus groups into the database as text files. I retained the audio and video content for reference. Returning to the data, I searched for key terms under the headings of language, literacy, identity, and identity development. Additionally, I added notes from books and articles, and from the other literature review material to cross-reference the themes that eventually emerged from the data. An image of the original coding structure is shown in Figure 8, below.

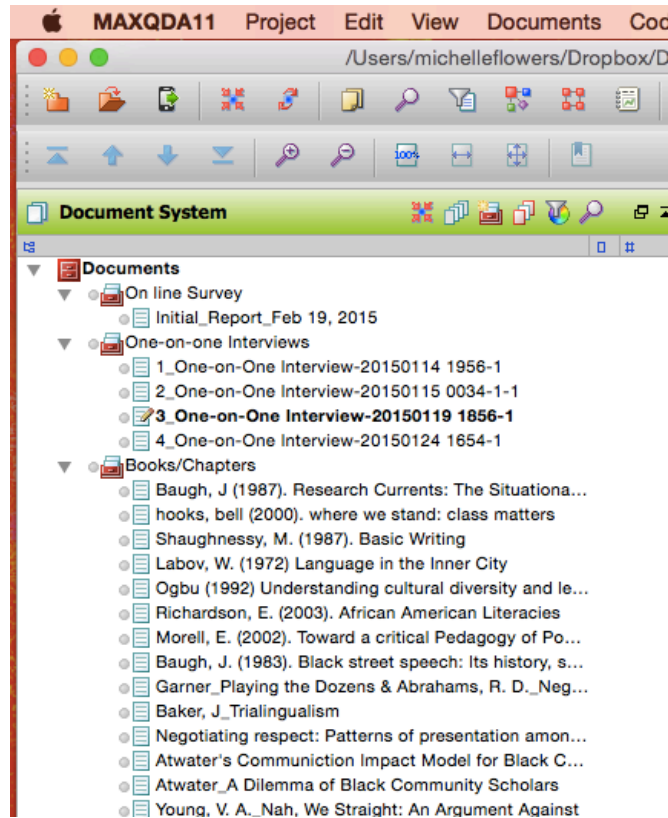


Figure 8. Coding structure of themes in this study.

I coded the data by assigning codes to particular parts of the documents containing the interview and focus group data. The codes themselves were simply names referencing the qualities of the interview and focus group content. For example, using the key themes (language, literacy, and identity development), I was able to select text and assign a key term to that text. After several reviews of the data, certain subthemes emerged based on the frequency of their appearance in the data. Namely, under language, the terms Reactions to Microaggressions later morphed into Hyperawareness to the Racialized Nature of Talk because that theme became more evident over time. Later, the term Performative Silence became a theme. I validated these themes with the data collected in the interviews and focus groups. Also, under the term Literacy, the themes of Write it Out and Talk it Out showed up in

the data collected for the study. As a result, I made it a code in the database. Finally, the codes for the theme of Identity Development rendered two subthemes: Multicultural Awareness and Sacred Space because upon reviewing the content from the Preliminary Survey, One-on-One Interviews, and Focus Groups.

My Role as Researcher

As the researcher on this project and as an African American woman, I was aware of the risk that the data could become more subjective than objective due to overly identifying with the girls' narratives. However, the personal nature of the project was also its strength. Because I am an African American woman, I am personally aware of the implicit things that are said by the girls and, as a result, the participants were less inclined to guard their responses because I am a member of their sacred space community. The results were specific to the participants in the study and were unique. The language and literacy practices of these six students were the focus. Although the study size was small, the narrative inquiry process provided insight into the ways that the participants communicated about their language practices and their perceptions of literacy in order to uncover promotive factors of their academic success.

As a member of a historically marginalized discourse and gender group, I have first-hand knowledge of the impact of racism and sexism in the United States. Racism is an institutionalized system of economic, politic, social, and cultural relations (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997); and, as a major influence on the lives of African Americans, it often shapes the worldview and critical literacies (Richardson, 2003) of this population. These literacies are often enacted in classrooms and educational settings, as the classroom is a place that is falsely assumed to be normative and apolitical (Darder, 2011;

Macedo, 1994), but in reality, it is the site where institutional processes condition “students to ascribe to the dominant ideological norms and epistemological assumptions of the prevailing social order” (Darder, 2014, p. 8). Given the current challenging condition for African American students in schools today—the result of a continuing legacy of segregation and discrimination (Tatum, 2003)—in certain circles, being African American in the United States has become synonymous with poverty and struggle (Berliner, 2012). However, I contend that this is the result of a conceptualization of the African American experience from a monolithic perspective.

Somewhat related to racism, research often fails to elaborate on the heterogeneity of the African American community. By failing to consider the dynamism of African Americans, researchers “construct oversimplified notions of what it means to be Black and thereby compromise our ability to make sense of the substantive variation in achievement performance that occurs among Blacks in and across time” (O’Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007, p. 545). The result has been a concentration on the maladaptations of a subset of this population rather than a more substantive look at the positive adaptations of African American students who are, in fact, excelling academically. In other words, as researchers, we know more about why certain students might be failing than we know about the ways other students are succeeding. By shifting focus to discern the points of proof from individual college female students, it is hoped that how these young women use their language practices to advance academic outcomes will be revealed.

Racism is only one factor that has impacted the lives of the participants in this study. Historically, as African American females, they have experienced challenges as

the result of racism *and* sexism. The convergence of racism and sexism has contributed to African American women experiencing a challenged status and hurtful treatment within American society (hooks, 1981; Jean & Feagin, 1998). For example, negative stereotypes of African American women persist from the era of slavery and subsequent turbulent times and have contributed to a devaluation of African American femininity (Abrahams, 1975) and intellectual capabilities (hooks & West, 1991). One of the most prominent stereotypes is that of the “Angry Black Woman,” and the images of a loud, illogical, and irrational caricature who, as one of the study participants stated, is a stereotype that she “most often reject[s] and push[es] against” (One-on-One Interview, Maria). Yet, this stereotype is simply another example of an oversimplification of the Black experience as it neglects to legitimize the historic and political context within which an African American woman might actually have valid rationale for feeling angry at the challenges associated with being a woman. Moreover, African American women may, in fact, be exhibiting a diversity of emotions—passion, anxiety, frustration, pause, regret, sadness, grief—but it’s all lumped under the category of anger. In short, we are not allowed to express a range of emotions (Walley-Jean, 2009).

Despite the challenges presented by racism and sexism—and the oversimplified notions of what it means to be African American and also a woman—the participants in this study were excelling academically with grade point averages of 3.67 above while attending their respective universities. The qualitative data collected and analyzed in this dissertation demonstrate why this is the case, and my role as researcher provides an emic, or insider’s view to the factors that speak to the intersectionalities of being African American and female in academia, and in the world generally. Engaging in this research

was both a personal and political effort grounded in the belief that Giles Houle stated (1995) regarding “common sense as a specific form of knowledge” (p. 1); it rejected the notion that “expert knowledge” is more legitimate than lived experience or emotional response. The latter fueled my ability to detect the intersectionalities of race, class, and gender in this study.

I endeavored to undertake this research together with my participants, and together they examined the intersectionalities of their experience substantively. Included in this analysis is a study of the impact of racial microaggressions on the language practices and perceptions of literacy practices that were the focus of this research.

This research focused on personal identity development and, as such, the results are not generalizable; however, the goal was to offer insights that were working productively with these participants in the hope that the results would yield benefits for other students elsewhere.

Personal development involves an increased awareness of one’s identity to develop talents and potential, and entails enhancing the quality of one’s life to help increase the chances of realizing one’s dreams and aspirations (Rinaldi et al., 2012). In this study, I drew upon my theatrical and playwriting background to help understand the study participants’ drives, fears, goal relevant to their language, and literacy practices and identity development through narrative analysis.

Summary

This chapter outlined the steps I took to address the research question regarding the role that the different uses of the English language plays in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity of African American female college

students. Outlined in this chapter, I presented the process by which I arrived at answering the research question through a rhetorical analysis approach to narrative analysis of scenarios that resulted from several kinds of data collected for this study, including online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. In Chapter 4, I present the results and main findings of this study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

At times like I guess, instilled in the back of my brain is this idea that you kind of like have an established – you kind of get all this media, all this perception that you assume that some people like of other races, like white people, may not like you or they may be racist or you have this idea that they may not see you as if the other white students. And so you kind of feel like, “Do I know if I can like be myself?” Like do they inside not like me because of the color of my skin? Even if it's not true at all, it's just like this first idea that I have until like a person I feel like proves me wrong or – and it's so bad to think that way but I feel like a lot of black students have like the same idea of like, “I can't be the same around a white teacher or a white student until I absolutely know that they don't care about the color of my skin or where I come from or everything like that.”

--One-on-One Interview, Dana

The above story from Dana introduces the reader to a common experience shared by participants in this study. It is indicative of the bicultural crisis that each of the study participants had experienced when entering each new school and classroom, and when becoming acquainted with new teachers and fellow students. The perception of how teachers, students, and other people viewed them played a role in how the participants perceived themselves. Because one's perception dictates one's experience that is conveyed through language (Fairclough, 2015; Klemfuss, Prinzmetal, & Ivry, 2012; O'Connor, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2008), the perceptions that the participants relayed through their stories provided significant data regarding their development of self-hood and identity.

As such, I built this study around six participants with the intention to understand how their experiences had influenced their sense of self-hood and identity. Obtaining a deeper understanding of how these women viewed their experiences as interpreted using

narrative analysis completed this study. This chapter presents the results of the narrative analysis for the stated research question in the sections that follow.

In the first section of this chapter, I begin with a brief statement about the narrative analysis used to solve the research question of the study. I explain how scenarios were created using a theatrical script format that borrows from the world of theater to help create a visualization of the interactions, and to convey the language usage patterns more effectively (Saldaña, 2003). Additionally, the script format lends itself to uncovering the texts and subtexts that were found in the storylines, oppositions, and syllogisms in the study participants' stories about their experiences.

The second section focuses on the life paths of the study participants. This section of the study presents information about the participants, including their demographic, academic, and personal backgrounds. This demographic information may seem to merely provide basic demographic details, however, these statements are actually revealing in their importance, and enlightening about each person as to what is most salient and germane in how they self-identified. Also, this information provided a foundation to help unravel the data that were present in the rest of their narratives.

The third section of this chapter provides answers regarding the three main components of the research question—language, literacy, and identity development. Using these three main components, I distinguish themes that provide insight into the narratives of the study participants. In this regard, I identify several salient themes that answer the research question concerning the language and literacy experiences on the development of self-hood and identity of high-achieving African American female college freshmen.

In this study, the salient themes regarding language included: (a) hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk, (b) style-shifting/code-switching, and (c) performative silence. In regard to literacy, the data revealed that the salient themes included the role of having the ability to (a) “write it out” and (b) “talk it out.” Lastly, as it pertained to the concept of identity development, data revealed that the study participants (a) devised strategies to create sacred spaces where they could feel safe to be themselves, and (b) develop a multicultural viewpoint to learn more about the world and how they fit into it. These themes were interconnected and overlapped each other.

The last section provides a summary of the data presented in this chapter that has answered the research question: How do the language and literacy experiences of academically high-achieving African American female college students influence their sense of self-hood and identity?

Review of Methodology: Narrative Analysis

I used a three-step narrative analysis approach (Feldman et al. (2004) to conduct this research:

1. Identity the participants’ stories within the data from the online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus group interview transcripts. Capture the stories as relayed by the participants verbatim. In this study, the stories were simply a reported experience regarding the research topic. The stories consisted of both explicit and implicit information. Based on the identified stories, I honed on the storyline, or the specific story related to the predominant narrative of language, literacy, and identity development (Feldman et al., 2004).

2. Identify any opposition in each of the storylines. Similar to storylines, oppositions can be either explicit or implicit.
3. Building on the storyline and oppositions, identify the syllogisms or the reasoning in the participants' narratives by assessing the inferential logic in their stories as it related to their language, literacy and identity development practices.

In the next section, I introduce each of the participants through personal stories that I present and interpret using narrative analysis, including the oppositions in their stories along with the enthymemes and syllogisms to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences. The following table shows the title of each person's story and the oppositions that were in their stories.

Table 2

Title of Each Participants' Personal Story and Oppositions

Name of Study Participant	Title of personal story	Oppositions in their stories
Dana	“Different Environments”	(1) Development and stagnation
Maria	“Reasoned Anger”	(1) Stereotype and prototype, and (2) Justified anger and unjustified anger
T’Nique	“Testimony of Dreadlocks”	(1) Conformity and nonconformity and (2) Perish and thrive
Shelly	“California Girl”	(1) Different is normal and different is not normal
Katrina	“The Nations”	(1) Accommodate and separate
Tasha	“High Expectations”	(1) Failure and success

Personal Stories

Dana

A freshman student from Harvey, Illinois, Dana, was 18 years old. Dana is her pseudonym. She was the middle child born in 1997. Her parents divorced when she was 10 years old. Her dad moved to the suburbs of Chicago to Calumet City into a house, and her mom moved to the city into an apartment. During her early schooling years, Dana attended a Catholic school for kindergarten, and then public school in Chicago until the end of fifth grade. Between sixth and ninth grade, she attended two different private schools, and in high school, she attended a diverse institution. She graduated at the top of her class and selected Cornell because of her interest in marine conservation. She stated in this regard:

I really was attracted, and I love like the ocean and marine conservation, and they have like a very good marine biology program . . . I'm involved in a Rawlings research like scholar program, and they offered that to me. So, I start research this semester, or the second semester, and continue. (One-on-One Interview, Dana)

Dana attended Cornell University, a prestigious Ivy League university located in Ithaca, New York. With an acceptance rate of less than 14% each year, Cornell ranks as one of the most elite universities in the country. It is also one of the least racially diverse institutions in the United States, with the African American student body comprising 5.8% of the student body in the 2015–2016 school year. While female students made up 52.7% of Cornell's incoming Class of 2016, less than 10% of those students were African American females. In addition, compared to faculty at other Ivy League universities, Cornell ranks as one of the least diverse with only 2% of African American faculty on campus in 2014 (“Cornell University - Diversity,” n.d.). This is the context in which Dana found herself at Cornell University.

Dana was not the first member of her family to attend college, but she was the first to attend an Ivy League university. As an academically high-achieving student, Dana kept a journal of her experiences and she credited her journal writing as a key to her personal development. Specifically, she stated:

I write as like a form of self-release and to look back and see like the mistakes that I've made and if I can like learn from them. Like I'll go through my [inaudible word 0:37:58] journals and I kind of see, "Like, wow Dana what were you doing in that situation?" I see what I've done and what I've done wrong and like being able to have this on a page helps me. (One-on-One Interview, Dana)

Dana's parents and her family played a significant role in helping her to develop a desire to achieve academically. They made sacrifices in order for her to attain educational opportunities. She changed schools often as a result of her parents' desire to enroll her in the best learning community while she was in joint custody and living in two households.

The following story is from Dana. It concerns her experience changing schools and how she adapted to the change:

"Different Environments"

After I left fifth grade, I graduated my elementary school and then went to another private school for a year, and then I went to a school in the city that was very diverse. I went from an all black school from like first to fifth grade to a mixed school, like 50/50, and then to high school that was really diverse. Then I would like come back and my parents would be like, "Oh Dana! You're speaking like very proper now," or like they would make other comments and it's like, "I didn't know. I don't know what you're talking about." But yeah. So there was definitely like a change, I guess, as I like changed schools and got into like different environments. (One-on-One Interview, Dana)

The storyline for "Different Environments" was interpreted as follows:

She attended several different schools before graduating from high school. Each of the schools was different from each other. Some of the schools were diverse ethnically and racially. Others were not diverse ethnically or racially. Her fellow students' communications styles varied based on the school. She was able to adapt to the changing environments through her language and speech patterns. The change was not evident to her at the time, but upon reflection, she acknowledges that she did

in fact change as a result of her environments. However, during her K-12 school years, her focus was more on coping with the changes rather than focusing on how the different environments changed her.

Based on this storyline, I identified one opposition: *development and stagnation*. This opposition helped to clarify Dana's story regarding her school experiences. She viewed the impact of the different environments on her language patterns as a matter of course, or normal. It is evident from her comments that her school changes motivated her to grow or change herself so that she could fit into the different spaces. She recognized the difference in the school populations, but not in a way that reflected hardship or challenges based on how she characterized the student bodies. Her description indicated a sense of acceptance with the changing environments in terms of how they influenced her behavior.

From the opposition, I went into greater detail to assess what the oppositions meant based on Dana's story. In order to do this, I discovered one syllogism explicit in her story:

I attended several different schools. My parents noticed a difference in the way that I talked after I changed schools. There was definitely like a change as I changed schools and got into like different environments.

In the different environments, she was presented with opportunities to either develop the ability to fit into the new environments, or to stagnate and remain the same in the different environments. Based on her story, it is apparent that she concentrated on developing the adaptation skills in order to survive in her different schools. It was only after her family recognized the difference that she reflected on her actions. Yet, her personal reflection only served to reinforce her behavior, because based on her story, to stagnate or fail to develop the ability to adapt in the different environments would mean

that she would have failed to make the most of the learning opportunities offered in her different school environments.

Maria

Maria was 18 years old and was born in Anaheim, California. However, she and her family moved to Compton, California, when she was three years old. Living in the urban Los Angeles area, most of her maternal and paternal family lived in and around South Central, which is a predominately working class and Latino and African American community. The community's median household income is \$30,882 (2008 dollars), which is low for the City of Los Angeles and low for the County (*Los Angeles Times*, 2015). For the purpose of this study, I will call participant #2 "Maria."

She attended the University of Southern California (USC) on a partial soccer scholarship, and her mother worked for the university. As a result of her mother's work assignment at USC, she was able to leverage additional funding to cover the remainder of her expenses at the university. Maria described how she selected her college:

Okay. Um, well originally – well actually until I was about a sophomore I wanted to go to UCLA. So that was a dream of mine for whatever reason because I'd only visited once. And then sophomore year was when sophomore recruiting picked up a lot and uh I changed teams to a team that would allow me to be recruited, uh, better than the team I was on previously. Um and by the time I was about like junior, the end of my junior year, I didn't want to go to UCLA anymore because my brother had gone to school and he went to USC and I was thinking about like the money aspect of it and it was like, Okay, well, USC, my mom works there so I get tuition, so that's already, like if I get in that, that's – it seems like a pretty good option.

And then the other school that I wanted to get into was [inaudible 0:21:46]. And so the only difference between the two was if I decided to play soccer or not. That would be the deciding factor because USC has a better soccer team. So I got recruited. My coach – I told my – my coach found out that my ma – like I had money at USC. And he was like, Oh, like I could talk to the coach. So he talked to the coach, then I got in, and then it was like, I'm going to USC. (One-on-One Interview, Maria)

Maria played on the USC soccer team in the outsider defender position. Academically, she was a human biology major, but she planned to switch to physical therapy.

This is the story from Maria. In this story, she shared how she had had experience with trying to disprove the stereotype of the “Angry Black Woman.”

“Reasoned Anger”

I just don't want to be put in a box. I don't want to be [pauses]. I guess – I guess, look, I think there's a stereotype that I, that I most often, um, most often reject and push against, is the Angry Black Woman stereotype where it's like, “Oh you're just mad.” Like and it's okay, “Maybe I'm mad, but it's not, it's not an unfounded anger.” Like it's not, it's not just like I'm just an angry person and I just want to be that all the time. Like no. I have reasons for why I'm angry, if I am angry. And maybe I'm just not angry. Maybe I'm just not – maybe I don't act the way you would like me to or maybe I don't act the way you deem is quote/unquote correct to act . . . I think the angry Black woman would use [language] like circular reasoning and not being able to accurately or articulately, um, express what exactly is the matter. Like if you are angry it – what's wrong, like why are you angry. And I feel like that's a lot of what happens. When people are like labeled like the angry Black person it's like you're trying to get out why you're angry but it's like it doesn't, it's not, like you're not able to – either you don't understand why you're angry completely or you are just unable to express it. (One-on-One Interview, Maria)

The storyline for “Reasoned Anger” was interpreted as follows:

Maria rejects stereotypes about Black women. She dislikes stereotypes because she feels that they limit her, and they prevent her from being taken seriously. For example, she does not like the stereotype of the “Angry Black Woman.” It upsets her that people would label her that way without getting to know her as a person. She explains that while she does not consider herself to be an angry person normally, she does believe that she is entitled to express anger, if she does feel it. Also, by assuming that she is an angry Black woman, she thinks that it could prevent people from trying to understand her point of view when she does, in fact, get angry. She then distances herself from that stereotype by deflection in her description of the “Angry Black Woman” by using the definite article “the” to describe that caricature as if that person is an archetype or prototype. It is as if Maria is saying that person is not me because that person (i.e. The Angry Black Woman) is unable to understand why she might be angry, and unable to use language to express her anger.

I identified two main oppositions from the “Reasoned Anger” story and storyline:

stereotype and prototype and justified anger and unjustified anger. By examining these

two oppositions, a deeper meaning to her story became evident. Maria did not want to be “put in a box,” or stereotyped by other people. As a soccer player and a science major, she defied stereotypes as a female athlete and scholar. Perhaps because she was already working hard and excelling in both sports and academics, she got offended when people tried to characterize her without taking the time to get to know her. Instead, she aimed to be thought of as a prototype, or an original person that is special and unique. This was what she was referring to when she stated that she did not want to be “put in a box,” or stereotyped. As an athlete on scholarship at USC, she might have been mistaken for a “dumb jock,” but her academic track record deterred people from thinking that about her. Simultaneously, with her 3.75 grade point average, she could have been labeled a nerd, but her athletic abilities would likely prevent anyone from labeling her in that way. She demonstrated her persistence in both sports and academics, and her story showed that she believed that her efforts ought to afford her the ability to exert her personal independence rather than adhere to the characteristics that society might attribute to her.

She “pushed against” the stereotype of the Angry Black Woman because it represented the kind of person that she was striving not to be—someone who is incapable of expressing herself. The Angry Black Woman stereotype that she rejected stemmed from a history of racism and sexism against African American women (Fordham, 1993; Hooks, 1981; Koonce, 2012; Walley-Jean, 2009).

The second opposition, *justified anger and unjustified anger*, is relevant to the first opposition as it went against her freedom to feel that she could be the kind of person she aspired to be. Personal expression was important to her. She disliked feeling like she could not express herself, including emotions of anger, simply because it might make

other people feel uncomfortable. She also felt that she was capable of understanding and expressing her own thoughts, and she took offense when other people denied her the opportunity to express herself or feel that she was out of touch with her own emotions. The stereotype has permeated mainstream culture as mentioned in Chapter 1. The terms “loud, angry, emasculating” are often associated with Black women as a part of a dehumanization and commercialization process (Abrahams, 1975; Fields et al., 1998; Greene, 1990; hooks, 1981) whereby they are denied the ability to “experience love, grief, anger, frustration and joy just like everyone else” (Giorgis, 2014). Maria’s sentiments are echoed in a recent *Guardian* article by Hannah Giorgis—who is from Somalia and identifies as an African American woman. In the *Guardian* article, Giorgis described the stereotyping of African American women and the act of negating their feelings in the process by stating that when expressing emotions:

Black women are policed, caricatured, judged and dismissed. We aren’t allowed to be situationally angry at the appropriate moments and have other emotions at other times: we are instead tasked with embodying a singular emotion (like anger) to the point of caricature. (Giorgis, 2014)

In light of these social conditions, Maria’s story—and indeed her life as a whole—illustrated the banality of the stereotype, and revealed how insensitive it is.

Based on the storyline and oppositions, Maria’s story had one syllogism. The implied content is capitalized for clarity:

I just don't want to be put in a box. I most often reject and push against the angry Black woman stereotype. I REJECT IT Because I am A capable HUMAN BEING, AND I understand my feelings and I CAN express myself, including those times when I feel angry.

The first two parts of the syllogism were explicit in her story. However, the conclusion is implied based on her statements, and then confirmed by the oppositions in her story. It is clear that she was working hard to excel in her life as an athlete and scholar, and she

conveyed confidence in her abilities to communicate and express herself. Her outlook demonstrated a critical consciousness and a capacity to illuminate myths about African American women through her abilities and her achievement.

Shelly

Shelly was born in Pasadena, California, in 1996. Shelly was a pseudonym. In 2000, her family moved to Rancho Cucamonga, California, which is 39 miles east of Los Angeles, where she lived until she moved away for college at USC, in Los Angeles. Most of Shelly's family lived in South Central Los Angeles, and Inglewood, California, where she spent most of her weekends and holidays. As a result, Shelly experienced bicultural interactions in her youth as she lived in the predominately White Rancho Cucamonga, and spent her free time in predominately African American and Latino communities in South Central Los Angeles and Inglewood. Rancho Cucamonga is not a diverse city. In the 2010 census, the demographics of the town were 62% White, 9.2% African American, 10.4% Asian, and 18% from other races.

Shelly graduated from her high school at the top of her class. At the time of this study, Shelly was 19 years old and attending her first year at USC where she played soccer with Maria (Participant #2). Prior to selecting to attend USC, Shelly considered attending the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and several Ivy League universities. However, after some consideration, she decided that the Ivy League universities under consideration were "a little too far and a little too cold [giggles] and um, so I was looking out here" (One-on-One Interview, Shelly). She visited several schools, as she explained: "

I visited Stanford. I visited UCLA. Um, but I just always loved USC. When they offered me, um you know, a spot on the team I – I immediately said yes. And then from there on it's been USC.

Shelly's parents both had university degrees. Her mother had a master's degree and she worked as a social worker. Her father had his bachelor's degree. Her parents were avid readers. In describing her parents, Shelly stated:

They read the newspaper every day . . . , my family is a very sports-oriented family so they read the sports section, a lot. We don't really read magazines . . . it's more books. My mom wakes up in the morning, reads the Bible . . . my parents probably love reading more than, um, more than me and my brothers have loved reading. But it's the – but we've seen the benefits. (One-on-One Interview, Shelly)

In her story, Shelly explained why she decided to stay in California and attend USC even though she had other opportunities to study outside of her home state.

“California Girl”

I never wanted to go outside . . . of California because the extreme weathers, and you know, I've just always you know been a California girl. And um, and so out here in Rancho [Cucamonga]– my parents moved out here for us because they wanted, you know, a better education than in Pasadena. My first – I think it was first grade, kindergarten and first grade at Don Benito Elementary in Pasadena. And um, uh, it was a lottery type of school. And so, um, they wanted us to be in a private school but finances, you know, money, it was just too hard. So they moved out here so we could go to the better public schools.

It was a suburban neighborhood, many white families, and I was one of, you know, two African-Americans in the class. And, um, so that also kind of made it a little difficult to, to you know, get acclimated to the school because I wanted to find people who looked like me. But you know, there weren't that many people who looked like me. They sounded different, they talked different. You know, um, looked different.

I eventually bonded with them and, and was able to start a friendship and start, you know, making friends with people outside of my, you know, normal – normal life and people that I see around me. (One-on-One Interview, Shelly)

The storyline for “California Girl” was interpreted as follows:

I am a California Girl and I comfortable here because of the weather. I have lived here all of my life, but I have moved within the state. When I was a child, I moved with my family to Rancho Cucamonga because my parents wanted their children to attend “better public schools” than the ones that were found in other parts of Southern California. We moved here even though the neighborhood lacked diversity. The lack

of diversity felt odd to me, and at first, it made it difficult for me to adjust here. I noticed that people sounded and looked different than me. I eventually bonded with my fellow students even though making friends in this environment did not feel like the “normal life” that I had experienced before moving to the suburbs.

I identified one opposition in Shelly’s story: *different is normal, and different is not normal*. In Shelly’s story, she identified two different kinds of difference. On the one hand, she pointed out that she was a California Girl, and did not wish to pursue her education outside of her home state because of “extreme weathers” or different weather patterns in other states that would not be normal for her. In the same story, she talked about how she had to adapt to the differences in her new school when her family moved to take advantage of “better public schools” in Rancho Cucamonga. In fact, by learning that different is normal, Shelly made new friends and she adjusted to the new normal of her life in the suburbs.

There was one syllogism found in the “California Girl” story. The syllogism drew on the *different is normal and different is not normal* opposition, and showed her willingness to adapt to change in school, despite being uncertain at first because everyone seemed so different to her. The first part of her logic in her statement was explicit, but other aspects of her argument were implied:

I never wanted to go outside of California because the extreme weathers were too different for me. Moving to the suburbs challenged me to adapt to people who were different from me. I can adapt to differences with effort and in the end I could make friends who are different than me.

Even though Shelly adapted to Rancho Cucamonga, she still spent her weekends in South Central, and Inglewood, which are predominately African American and Latino communities. In the latter part of her interview, she relayed how being in those

communities still imbued her with a “sense of community” and a space where she felt like she could “just be.” (One-on-One Interview, Shelly)

Katrina

Born and raised in Manhasset, Long Island, New York, Participant #4 attended public schools her entire K–12 experience. While born in an affluent community (in 2010 the median income for a household was \$105,938), this part of Long Island was not diverse (in 2010, only 2.3% of the population was African American). Her family moved to Queens when she was a child, and she attended a predominately African American school.

Starting her 10th grade of high school, she was promoted to advanced placement (AP) classes, but she admitted that those classes were weird for her because her friends were not in those classes. In fact, while feeling separated from her core group of friends in school, she rebelled in AP classes until she adjusted to her new coursework, stating:

And like one of my friends and I we actually tried to fail out so that we could be in class with our friends. But then we realized like, “All right, we're in advanced for a reason. Why would we want to be in regular classes?” So then, yeah. So I was in advanced classes for the most part. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

She was currently attending Howard University, which is a private, Historically Black College/University (HBCU) located in Washington, DC. For the purpose of this study, I will refer to Participant #4 as “Katrina” to preserve her anonymity. Katrina’s maternal family members, including her mother, attended HBCUs. She explained:

My mom went, and her sisters went to North Carolina A&C and North Carolina Central. My grandparents went to . . . South Carolina State and North Carolina Central. My great-grandmother, she went to Bennett, and my great-grandfather went to Vestige. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

On her father’s side of the family, she would be the first one to graduate college. Katrina appeared very proud of her ancestry, and she demonstrated a strong, positive race

consciousness that, she explained, was one of the many reasons why she decided to attend a HBCU. “This is where they [black students of the past] were accepted. And I'm just like I can't shun my back on my ancestors” (One-on-One Interview, Katrina).

In the following story, Katrina shared her experience of learning in different environments and with Black students versus White students. She expressed uncertainty about what might be a better environment for her, but in the end she concluded that it was important for her to be true to herself regardless of her environment.

“The Nations”

I go back and forth. I was a part of a United Nations school leadership group and so when we would go to conferences, we would be the only black school. And so, I'm not going to lie. Like when I'm around White people, like you tend to talk like them because – I don't know, like they would just assume, like off the bat they would just assume that you know, we were ghetto and that we were 'hood. And I didn't like that. Like we were at the United Nations and I was talking to some [White] guy and he was like “Uh uh,” and like rolling his neck. And I was looking at him like, “Why are you doing that? Like do you see me talking like that? You don't have to talk like that?”

I know how to adapt. But being in that type of environment – that's why I could never go to a predominately White institution (college), because it's just like I would be somewhere where I'm not myself. I would be somewhere where I'm not comfortable, like I feel like someone would judge me. And at an HBCU, you're just yourself. And you know when you're around Black people, you're just more comfortable in the way you talk. But I feel like if you're around White people you have to adjust to what they like, make sure that you're accepted by them rather than just be yourself. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

The storyline for “The Nations” was paraphrased as follows:

I was part of a leadership group and I participated in conferences as a representative of my school, which was located in an urban community. When I attended conferences as a part of my role as member of this leadership group, I met people who had already drawn conclusions about me and the group that I belonged to simply because we were from a school in the urban core of the city. While I feel that I know how to adapt to being around people who are different than me, I learned that some people do not know how to adapt in the same way. During my time serving in this leadership group, I found that some people had stereotypes about our school, and about us as students who attend that school. I inferred from that experience, and maybe other experiences, that I would not want to attend a predominately White

institution (college) where I may have to deal with other people's stereotypes about me. Rather, I decided that I would attend an HBCU where I would feel more comfortable to be myself.

Based on Katrina's story and the storyline, one main opposition emerged: *accommodate and separate*. This opposition helped to explicate her story because for her it was a challenge to navigate between White and Black spaces. She acknowledged this at the start of her story by stating "I go back and forth." She also stated that she knew how to adapt to different contexts, and by stating that, she suggested that other people should be able to do the same thing. Yet, her experience at the United Nations conferences provided an example of how other people allow stereotypes to guide their perceptions of people, and how they felt it was appropriate to treat people based on those stereotypes.

One syllogism resulted from Katrina's story and storyline (emphasis in capital letters):

PEOPLE ASSUME THINGS BASED ON STEREOTYPES AND THEY ACT ON THEIR ASSUMPTIONS. I know how to adapt TO BEING AROUND PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT THAN ME. BECAUSE OF THE CHALLENGES THAT I HAVE FACED DEALING WITH STEREOTYPES, I chose to attend a HBCU where I can be myself.

In summary, Katrina shared her experience about dealing with a person who made assumptions about how she would communicate based on the fact that she attended a school in an urban community. This experience was symbolic of similar experiences. By sharing this experience, she argued that there is a need for people to raise their own awareness about themselves and other people. Katrina shared her experience and shed light on its impact on her need to choose between accommodating herself to the stereotypical notions of other people, or separate herself from those kinds of potentially negative situations to help ensure that she would be free to "just be" herself.

Tasha

Raised in a small town in Kentucky, Tasha attended Howard University. She was in her first year, and she attributed her “self-discipline and determination” for her academic success. Further, Tasha stated that her family had always had high expectations for her. Her academic success provided her with a sense of security and made her feel like she “can survive in the real world” (One-on-One Interview, Tasha). Tasha was her pseudonym.

Although Tasha was the only participant who was a natural-born Southerner, it was not something that was a part of how she self-identified. While attending Howard University and living in Washington, DC, she believed that the city was more suitable for her personality because it offered her a faster-paced lifestyle.

Tasha’s story underscored her desire to achieve, and the strong support that she received from her family.

“High Expectations”

I don't like the thought of failure. I have always had high expectations from family therefore I've always had them for myself. Knowing that I am achieving in school gives me a sense of security that I can survive in the real world. Having good grades defines the fact that I am open to learning and receiving as much knowledge as I can. (One-on-One Interview, Tasha)

The storyline for “High Expectations” was interpreted as follows:

Failure is not for me. My family has always had high expectations for me to achieve in school. Their expectations propel me forward to do well. Because I achieve in school, I feel I will achieve in the real world too. With each good grade, I have an assurance that I will do well in life. My good grades also inspire me to continue to learn and increase my knowledge.

I identified one opposition from “High Expectations” story: *success and failure*. It was clear that for Tasha there is one opposition in her life. She would either succeed or she would fail, and she considered her performance in school to be symbolic or representative

of her success in life. A study participant of few words, Tasha's intensity on the topic of success and failure was penetrating.

In today's world, African American girls with the determination and intensity like that of Tasha are responding to zero-tolerance environments that are neither safe nor conducive to learning. Instead, with the overemphasis on discipline, it leads many girls to become disengaged from the learning process and from school altogether. In order to achieve, students like Tasha must combat against getting less attention than their male counterparts early in their school careers because "they are perceived to be more socially mature and self-reliant. The lack of attention can lead to 'benign neglect' that may diminish school attachment in both high- and moderate-achieving female students" (Crenshaw, 2015, p. 12).

T'Nique

T'Nique was Participant #6, a native of Los Angeles, California. I used the name T'Nique for this participant. T'Nique was attending Grand Canyon University, a private, for-profit Christian university located in Phoenix, Arizona. She was the oldest child in her family. She attended primary school in Inglewood, California. However, when she entered her sophomore high school year, she told her parents that she did not feel like she fit in with her high school friends or the community in which she lived. Additionally, she had grown tired of wearing her hair in an unnatural style with relaxers. In short, she wanted to change her life and to alter her personal appearance to demonstrate to the world her new outlook.

This story is from T’Nique. It is about her feelings about struggling to fit in as a child, particularly because she felt stuck in an environment where she could not be herself.

“Testament of Dreadlocks”

I hated my school. I didn’t fit in. People made fun of me because of the way that I talked. I didn’t feel right where I was. I told my parents that I was unhappy and I didn’t want to go to that school. So, my parents found an organization that matches students with private or charter schools. They found a small Christian charter school in Santa Monica and so I switched to go there in my sophomore year. I could be someone different there. If I had stayed at my old school, I probably would have been pregnant or on drugs right now. It was all around me. Then, I decided that I wanted dread locks. My dad has them. I had to beg my parents to let me have them because they thought it was a fad for me. But I begged them to let me have them. Now, they are my testament. They are my testament to what I’ve overcome in my life. (One-on-One Interview, T’Nique)

The storyline for “Testament of Dreadlocks” was interpreted as follows:

She hated school and she did not feel like she fit in. She sought another school where she could explore her personal identity. Her desire was to fight for her authenticity despite the opinions of others. Once she was in her new school, she wanted to be a different person and to express her new attitude through her hair because she no longer wanted to conform to Western beauty standards. For her, wearing dreadlocks is a symbol of pride in her heritage and an appreciation and acceptance of her natural hair texture.

I identified two main oppositions from this story and storyline: *conformity and nonconformity* and *thrive and perish*. These oppositions helped to define the argument of T’Nique’s story. It was clear that the contrast between *conformity and nonconformity* were at the heart of T’Nique’s crisis regarding her school situation. As she stated, “I hated my school. I didn’t fit in. People made fun of me because of the way that I talked.” The explicit opposition here is between these two choices—to conform or not to conform—to the standard of speech that she felt other students adhered to and imposed on her. She felt perplexed by this opposition, and decided that her only solution was to choose between the opposition. In the end, she was able to select a third choice, which

was to leave that school and continue her education elsewhere. This was an explicit opposition.

Another explicit opposition made it evident that T’Nique felt she was in a crisis of desperate proportion whereby she was destined to *perish* as a consequence of being stuck in an environment where she was not accepted for being her authentic self. Or, she could opt out of the situation where she was unhappy, and find a new school environment where she could be herself where she was eventually able to experience a *rebirth*. She celebrated this with the donning of a new identity as demonstrated by her decision to grow dreadlocks, a testament of her ability to overcome her challenges in school and in life.

There are two syllogisms deduced from the “Testament of Dreadlocks” story. The first syllogism drew on the *conformity and nonconformity* opposition, and honed in on the argument being made about T’Nique’s positionality, namely as a Black girl attending school where the way that she spoke was perceived negatively by her schoolmates. Taking into consideration the context of T’Nique’s experience as an academically high-achieving Black girl in a predominately Black and Latino school in Inglewood, California, I am aware of the pressures that she encountered based upon her choice to speak “proper English” as a means to advance academically. Within the context of the larger interview process, T’Nique shared incidents where she felt out of place or misjudged by her peers because she chose to use consistently standard English, particularly in school. Thus, the first syllogism developed from the *conformity and nonconformity* opposition.

When you feel like you don’t belong in school, school is bad. I did not belong. My school was bad.

While the first and second premises were stated, the conclusion was alluded to by T’Nique’s story. What she actually stated was this: “I told my parents that I was unhappy and I didn’t want to go to that school.” In this case, the explicit premises led to the conclusion that the only way for her to continue to attend a school was to switch to another school, and the consequence of remaining at her first school placed her in a position of conforming to the standards of that school environment—particularly as it pertained to the way that she talked—or to not conform, but continue to be miserable in school. For T’Nique, language was an indicator of academic skill and aptitude.

The second syllogism expanded on the first syllogism, and was also generated from the second opposition: *thrive and perish*. The premises and conclusion were explicitly stated in the story:

I could change how I felt about school by going to a different one. I switched to a different school. Therefore I felt differently (better).

All implicit: Good schools foster belonging. I felt like I belong. Therefore, my school is good.

This was clearly a comeuppance story. To provide context, the arc of T’Nique’s story started with her being unhappy because she hated her school, and she did not feel like she fit in. It ended with the second syllogism in which T’Nique explicitly stated how she overcame her struggles in school, and she was able to avoid perishing in her unhappy situation. Instead, she found a way to have a rebirth in another school. The story illustrated her courage to achieve her personal identity development, and make the decision between perishing in the school where she was unhappy, or to be reborn again in another environment. The outcome was positive for her as she was able to make use of her personal power to overcome her circumstances.

For T’Nique, the school was a site where she felt that she needed to experience her own personal and authentic identity. Her authentic self included her ability to communicate in the manner that she felt was true to her nature, and in line with the way that she was perceived in her learning environment.

Themes: Language, Literacy, Self-Hood, and Identity

Building on the Personal Stories, and as a result of the narrative analysis of the qualitative data collected from the study participants, key themes emerged regarding the three components of this research: (a) language, (b) literacy, and (c) self-hood and identity. In the next portion of this section, I will provide an abstract of the themes that materialized in this study. The following figure, Figure 9, illustrates these components, and the themes that relate to them, along with the titles of the Thematic Scenarios, which I evaluate using narrative analysis in a later section of this chapter.

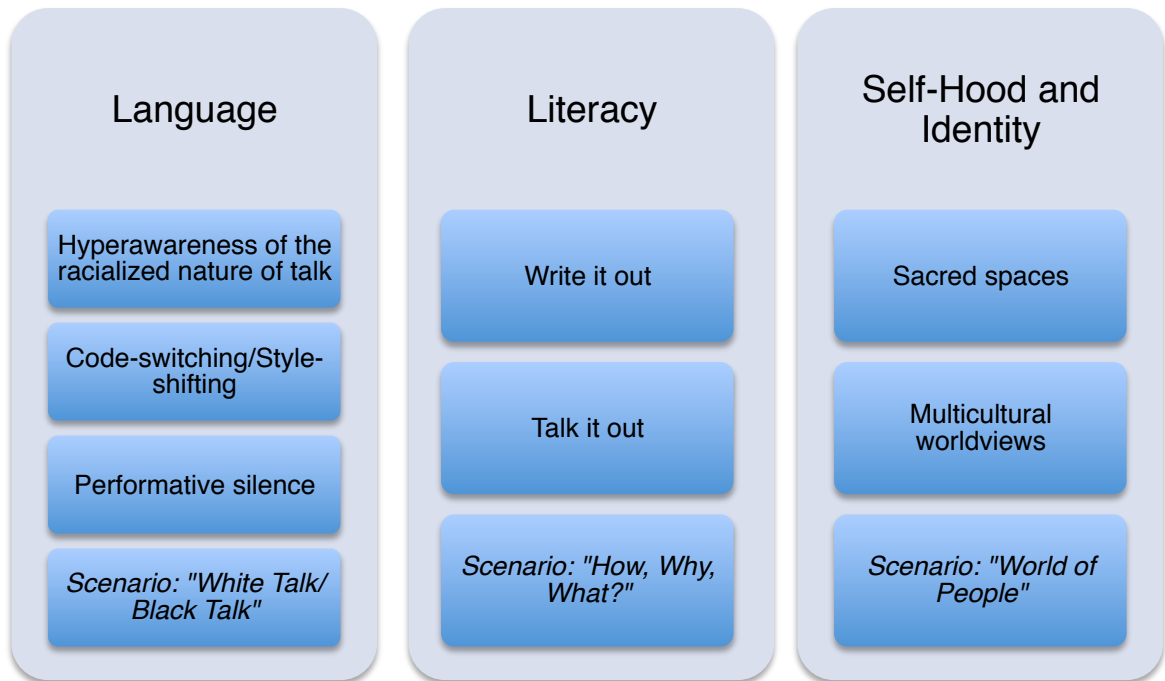


Figure 9. Three components and corresponding themes and scenario titles discussed in this chapter.

These components and themes provide the foundation from which I will build the Thematic Scenarios that answer the research question regarding the influences of language and literacy experiences on the self-hood and identity of high-achieving African American female college freshmen students. The Thematic Scenarios convey a narrative analysis of the storylines, oppositions, and syllogisms found in the data. Table 3 illustrates the title of each Thematic Scenario and the oppositions that are in each.

Table 3

Themes and Names of Thematic Scenarios, and Their Oppositions

Theme	Name of the Thematic Scenario	Oppositions
Language	“White Talk/Black Talk”	(1) Speak like the skin you are in, and speak like the company you are in, and (2) Education is the equalizer and education belongs to the elite.
Literacy	“How, Why, What?”	(1) External reflection and internal reflection, (2) Communication in trusted group builds self-confidence and communication in an untrusted group destroys self-confidence, and (3) Security leads to confidence and insecurity leads to loss of self
Self-Hood and Identity	“World of People”	(1) Provincialism and cosmopolitanism, open mindedness and provincialism and cosmopolitanism, (2) Open-mindedness and close-mindedness, and (3) Strengthen your view and re-evaluation your view

Abstract of the Themes: Language, Literacy, and Self-hood and Identity

The first theme was language. Language practices of the participants were characterized by (a) a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk, (b) code-switching/style-shifting, and (c) performative silences.

Language: Hyperawareness of the Racialized Nature of Talk

An examination of language usage of academically high-achieving African American female freshmen students revealed the subjective dimensions of this experience. Regarding the issue of language usage, the data supported that the participants each demonstrated sensitivity to the ways that people communicate with them and about them, and often the communication had a racialized tone. For the sake of this study, I use the term “Hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk” to express the way that the participants responded to the social struggle that exists in language discourse that is the result of unequal power relations (Fairclough, 2015). The unequal power relations are the product of “Institutional practices which people draw upon without thinking [that] often embody assumptions which directly or indirectly legitimize existing power relations” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 64). For the purpose of this discussion, racialized refers to the processes of attributing racial identities to a group that are often borne out of the interaction of a group with another group that it ascribes identity to for the purpose of continued domination (Omi & Winant, 1994). The process of racialization is evident in language usage because it is a key element in maintaining the dominance of the dominant class (Fairclough, 2015). The social relations between the study participants and people of other races, at times, reflected racialized microaggressions in the form of an ascription of intelligence or pathologized cultural values.

First, study participants reported instances of an ascription of intelligence when people of another social class or race assigned a degree of intelligence to a person of color based solely on their race (Sue, 2010). When describing her experience with someone ascribing her intelligence, Shelly stated: “I mean being a black woman . . . you’re expected – or like you come in and people have this view of you automatically. But the way you speak and either alter or reinforce that view” (One-on-one interview, Shelly). With this comment, Shelly addressed how the stereotypical notions of what a Black woman is “supposed to be” was something that she was conscious of as she entered social situations. Dovetailing on Shelly’s experience, T’Nique explained her encounters dealing with people who had ascribed intelligence to her based on her race. She reported several occurrences where she had been told how “articulate” she is, or how she does not “sound Black.” Other study participants echoed similar occasions when they had been subjected to very similar conversations in which a person (often a White person) expressed surprise because they described the participants as being “so articulate” (One-on-one interviews with Maria and Dana). During focus group #2, T’Nique shared another instance of how she felt about being called “articulate” by people whom she felt were attributing a lower form of intelligence than she had with the reflection: “I find that very offensive.”

Second, study participants identified experiences with racial microaggressions in the form of pathologized cultural values. This theme emerged in the one-on-one interviews and the focus groups (Shelly, Maria, Katrina). Defined by Sue (2010) as “the notion that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal” (p. 128), pathologized cultural values are another instance of the racialized microaggressions

to which the study participants had developed a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk that created a feeling of one's need to be ready for the microaggressions to occur. Shelly, who was ethnically Belizean and self-defined as African American, recalled how upon arrival to the United States, she was often asked to "be more quiet" (One-on-One Interview, Shelly). She would receive comments such as, "Why do you have to be so loud? Calm down. Relax."

The hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk seems to be a reaction to experiencing racial microaggressions. Instances like these were common among the participants of this study as well as other African American girls. However, the participants' experiences in this study were unique because while they had indicated experiencing these racial microaggressions, along with dealing with the crises associated with being a bicultural person, they had managed to rise above the sociocultural constraints "dictated by the dominant culture [that] locates students, from a sociopolitical standpoint, in a culturally subordinate position within school and society" (Darder, 2011, p. 55). In fact, Katrina and T'Nique explained how they negotiated the racial microaggressions and the bicultural crisis with a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk in different ways, such as demonstrating their critical thinking skills to illuminate the myths supporting the elite hierarchy of society. For example, as we will see in the scenario that follows, called "White Talk/Black Talk," Katrina and T'Nique encountered racial microaggressions, but they reported countering them by using code-switching, style-shifting, and performative silence.

Language: Code-Switching/Style-Shifting

The students demonstrated an ability to skillfully use bidialectalism and hypocorrection as they moved between cultural groups. Code-switching was evident in their speech patterns as they shifted between varieties of English; however, more than switching codes, they style-shifted (Alim, 2004; Eckert & Rickford, 2002), altering the style and register of their speech by changing their intonation and pronunciation of words for emphasis. They did this by drawing out vowels and using certain slang words to highlight a particular point. However, it is important to note that their style-shifting was evident primarily in the telling of reported speech acts, but the style-shifting was not reported in the act itself. The style-shifting was reserved for instances when the participants shared examples of reported speech that occurred within familial and trusted groups that constituted sacred spaces. Also, the style-shifting was evident in T’Nique’s story about how she faced a racist person who denied her entry into a fraternity party. In response, she stated: “Oh, it’s like THAT, huh? Well, FORGET you man . . . this ain’t nothing” (Focus Group #2, T’Nique).

Style-shifting is less about the use of grammar or structure of language (Alim & Smitherman, 2012), and more about the way certain words are pronounced and the emphasis that is used. The style shifts as a result of the context and the people who are present. During the one-on-one interview with Katrina, for instance, she stated,

I guess you just like have a time and a place for everything. Like in the classroom, you know, everyone is using big words because your teacher is like telling you, “All right, the SATs are coming up; you need to enhance your vocabulary.” So of course in the classroom, you know, we’re saying words that, you know, come straight from the dictionary. And so then, when I would be around my friends, they were just like, “Why do you always have to use big words?” And it’s just like they put you in that mindset that your vocabulary needs to be enhanced at a certain age level. Like you need to use certain words because you want to sound – I mean, obviously you want to

know how to use them and sound educated, but it just brings your status up. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

For example, T’Nique described a time when she was on campus, and she and her fellow Black students were denied entry into a party by White students because the host feared that she and her friends would make too much noise in the party. T’Nique styleshifted to hypocorrect her comment as she described her feelings about the subject that offended or frustrated someone. Instead of expressing her frustration during a negative, racially motivated interaction, she used hypocorrection as a strategy to soften her response to the person who was directing the racist comment to her. She stated, “Oh, it’s like that, huh? Well, forget you man . . . this ain’t nothing” (Focus group 2, T’Nique).

Language: Performative Silence

Another theme that emerged during the surveys, interviews, and focus groups was the use of performative silence as a communicative strategy (Delpit, 1988; Richardson, 2002). By silence, I am not referring to the silencing of the participants. Nor, am I referring to silence that results from shyness or timidity (Tannen, 1985). Instead, performative silence occurs when silence has social and rhetorical effect thereby carrying meaning (Tannen, 1985). Performative silence often occurs in mixed company and when the participants choose to not get involved in controversial conversations.

For instance, during the Focus Group #2, T’Nique described an instance when she was at school and the college counselor was trying to convince her to not create a Black Student Union on campus. Rather, the counselor asked her if she would consider creating an international club to be more inclusive. After a few tense interactions with the counselor, T’Nique opted to no longer argue with the counselor, and to be quiet even when the counselor approached her for a comment. Shelly further illustrated use of

performative silence by providing examples of times that she was in class and controversial racial topics were being discussed, and she opted to stay silent instead of voicing her opinion because she “didn’t want to act like they expected” her to act by getting upset (Focus Group #2, T’Nique and Shelly).

In the next section, literacy practices are discussed and the significance of the need to (a) “write it out,” and (b) “talk it out” are explained more thoroughly.

Literacy: Write It Out

The second theme in this study is literacy, and the ways that the participants enacted personal reflection through writing, both inside and outside of school. Several of the participants mentioned the importance of writing out frustrations in a journal or notebook. For example, Dana stated:

For me, writing – I write as like a form of self-release and so look back and see like the mistakes that I've made and if I can like learn from them. Like I'll go through my journals and I kind of see, “Like, wow, what were you doing?” I see what I've done and what I've done wrong and like being able to have this on a page helps me. (One-on-One interview, Dana)

In addition to journaling, Dana suggested that her ability to explore her passion for her major in school, which was marine biology, had helped her to “write it out” academically (Muhammad, 2012). Accordingly, she stated:

Like when people like talk to me and they're like, “Dana when you like talk about marine biology or this, like I can feel like a glow in your eyes and that's just so like inspiring to see that you can love something so much.” And from loving that I've met people that like have similarities with me. Like I've been able to write really good essays about something that I love, and I think finding something that you really, really enjoy is a great way to kind of like help you find your identity. (One-on-one interview, Dana)

Literacy: Talk it Out

In addition to expressing oneself through writing it out—both in journals and academically in school—the participants expressed how important it was for them to

“talk it out.” Participants mentioned in one of the instances how they belonged to close family and social clubs where they could “talk it out.” Shelly mentioned how she talked it out with her mother and the social circle of friends whom she had had her entire life. She described: “When I get anxious or frustrated, I’m not going to share that at school. I won’t because that’s what people expect me to do. And I won’t do it to be their entertainment. Instead, I’ll call my mom or a close friend and I’ll talk it out with them.” (Focus Group # 2, Shelly; One-on-One Interview, Shelly). The act of talking it out was also demonstrated during Focus Groups #1 and #2 as the girls offered affirming comments in a “call and response” style to help to provide a clear indication to the speaker that they had entered into a safe space to “talk it out.” During Focus Group #2, the participants, quite naturally and without any prompts from the interviewer, offered supportive comments to show agreement and camaraderie with the other Focus Group participants. For example, as Shelly was introducing herself during the Focus Group #2 to the other participants, she introduced herself as a student at USC, and the other students immediately said things like: “You go, girl!” and “That’s right!” In addition, during Focus Group #1, several of the study participants offered affirming comments to T’Nique as she described the context of the study. Sample comments included: “Very cool.” “Yeah, it’s really important.” Also, the affirming comments found in the scenario called “How, Why, What?” also shows the participants responses to racial microaggressions.

The third theme in this study was the development of self-hood and identity that were both characterized by, and maintained by (a) creating a sacred space to feel safe to be oneself among supportive peers, and (b) also having a multicultural worldview where

one feels empowered by learning about other people and other experiences in the global community (Cofield, 2012). The balance between these identities—one who grounds herself within a safe community comprised of trusted allies who are like her where she can just “be” herself in a safe, nurturing environment, and at the same time be one who is open to experiencing the world at-large—affirmed and supported a positive sense of self-hood in the participants. The significance of having sacred spaces and multicultural worldviews are detailed below.

Identity Development: A Sacred Space to “Just Be”

“You need a foundation,” stated Maria in response to how she would advise other young Black girls on her academic success (Focus Group #1). Dana agreed by saying:

I think discussion, especially with people that are similar. Like you have to feel comfortable, like with people who are like you in order for you to be able to – to feel even more comfortable around people . . . Like being able to empower each other. And once you have like this confidence or like motivation or like inspiration and you know what you want from talking to other people. (Focus Group #1)

These comments reflected themes that emerged in the study regarding the need to develop and maintain a sacred space to “Just Be,” as Dana stated during Focus Group #1 in response, and as T’Nique stated, “where I can get a point across” (One-on-one interview, T’Nique). To continue on this theme, Katrina indicated the main reason that she chose to attend an HBCU was because she stated:

At an HBCU, you're just yourself. And you know when you're around Black people; you're just more comfortable in the way you talk. But I feel like if you're around white people you have to adjust to what they like, make sure that you're accepted by them. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

While participants expressed a need to have a sacred space where they could feel safe and in the company of people who shared racial and gender similarities, they also expressed a

comfort with expanding their social circles and exerting style-shifting skills in multicultural environments.

Identity Development: Multicultural Worldview

One of the best illustrations of possessing a multicultural worldview came from Katrina as she talked about what kind of person her “possible self” was and how that person showed up in the world. She stated:

She can hold her own with a bunch of white guys in Congress and in the government but at the end of the day, you know, she always knows her roots and where she has come from. And she knows how to talk for both – she knows how to talk for all types of people: just not white people, just not African American – every culture, creed. (One-on-one interview, Katrina)

Social interaction in diverse settings boosts the development of a “multicultural worldview” (Hudley, 2008). The role of peers as socializing agents in social development is clear. Based on substantial findings that link peer relationships to children's social and emotional intelligence (Hudley, 2008), it is reasonable to guess that peers also play an important role in the development of a person’s multicultural worldview. The influence of peers from diverse backgrounds has been significant for the participants. In terms of the participants, each of them expressed the importance of experiencing diverse communities and being involved with people from different social and ethnic backgrounds as a means to promote personal growth. For example, Dana cited her semester abroad in Spain and how she felt she grew so much from her time there:

Because you learn so many things from people. Like when, um, went abroad for the summer, and like my roommate – she's from Poland – and we still like Spanish a lot because we were, I guess were in Spain and it was a Spanish program, but like from my 16 year old girl from Poland like I learned so much about like her, her life in Poland and then like what it's like there. And I got to like teach her a lot about America. And it was just like from these little connections and being able to communicate with somebody, and like in Spanish as well, like having a whole 'nother like world of people that you can communicate with, like it's allowed me to learn so

much about other people and it helped me learn more about myself and like learning from other people. (Focus Group #2, Dana)

These three components and their themes—language, literacy, and self-hood and identity—stood on their own as individual components and themes. However, it is important to state that they are interconnected as asserted by several literacy theorists who understand that identity construction and communicative practices, including reading, writing, and speaking, intersect. Specifically, “As people read, write, and talk about text, those practices shape (and are shaped by) how these people think about themselves and their place in the world” (Sutherland, 2005b, p. 366). As such, several of the themes overlapped and informed one another.

In the next section, I present scenarios to demonstrate the ways in which research participants shared their experiences on their language usage and practices, and how such practices reinforced their self-hood and identity. Several of the themes interconnect with the other components of the study. I will call attention to those interconnections in the scenarios.

Analysis of Thematic Scenario: Language

“Be more quiet . . . why do you have to be so loud? Calm down. Relax.” Shelly shared this account of what she had heard in school and in social settings from other people who did not share her racial or ethnic background. These words taken from the One-on-One Interview with Shelly revealed a racial microaggression that she had been victim to, and this racial microaggression demonstrated a pattern of being devalued because of her race. In this section, I present data that reveal racial microaggression in three language scenarios.

The first scenario that follows demonstrates the theme dealing with racial microaggressions and the way that such incidents engender a Hyperawareness of the Racialized Nature of Talk. In the classroom, African American female students often describe their interaction with non-Black students and teachers who perform racial microaggressions. While a single racial microaggression might have only minimal impact, over time, the accumulation of racial microaggressions can impact a student's sense of self-hood and self-esteem (Sue, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). During the focus groups, the participants discussed their experiences with dealing effectively with racial microaggressions.

In the following scenario, Maria explained the conflict that she experienced because she was both a straight A student and a good athlete. She described how teachers and her fellow students ascribed intelligence to her because of her race and her athleticism. In the last scenario in this section, Shelly and T'Nique discussed racial microaggressions that they had experienced in educational settings. During their interchange, the young women demonstrated two different ways of dealing with racial microaggressions: Performative Silence or Interruption. All three scenarios took place during Focus Group #2 between participants Katrina, T'Nique, Shelly, and me.

The study participants provided statements about their experiences living with a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk as demonstrated in the following scenario. The scenario begins with (a) the purpose of this scenario, (b) the time that the scenario took place, (c) background/setting, (d) ethnographic details, and (e) data source information. All the scenarios in this chapter are written in theatrical script form to create a visualization of the interaction and to convey the language usage patterns. The

scenarios were analyzed to compare and contrast different instances of racial microaggressions and how they took place among and between racial groups. The evaluation of these scenarios were captured using three levels of levels of narrative analysis (Feldman et al., 2004).

- Step 1: Identify the storyline between Katrina and T’Nique, which follows below.
- Step 2: Identify the opposition (implicit and explicit) in each person's narrative.
- Step 3: Building on the storyline and oppositions, identify the reasoning in the participants’ narratives by assessing the inferential logic in their stories as it relates to their language, literacy and identity development practices.

Analysis of Thematic Scenario: Hyperawareness of the Racialized Nature of Talk

This scenario demonstrated how two of the study’s participants, Katrina and T’Nique, used hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk in response to racial microaggressions. Interestingly, during this scenario, the participants were discussing two different types of racial microaggressions. Katrina was in her dorm room at Howard University. She seemed rather relaxed and dressed comfortably. Her dorm roommate was home and was quietly going about her day in the background except for when she overheard something funny, and then she might laugh along with the ladies who were participating in the focus group. On the other hand, T’Nique was in her dorm room at Grand Canyon University, and she seemed more anxious as she shared her experience. The topic seemed to be a sensitive topic for her given how she spoke at a pace almost twice that of everyone else in the focus group. Also, her vocal register exhibited more range in pitch. As topics became more sensitive, the register of her voice elevated to a high tone. Then, it would lower when she moved onto another topic. She appeared to be alone in her dorm room. However, in this scenario, it was evident that while Katrina describes an incident where she experienced racial microaggressions from White

students, T’Nique’s experience was the result of interacting with other Black students.

T’Nique’s take on her situation was that it was racial in nature; however, in her case, she was dealing with a situation where she was expected to communicate like other people who were African American.

Katrina was a freshman at Howard U., an HBCU. She expressed how she gained a lot of confidence from being a legacy HBCU student. She was a third generation HBCU student on her mother’s side of the family. T’Nique attended Grand Canyon U., and she was originally from Inglewood, California. She had changed schools from the Inglewood School District to a charter school in Santa Monica, California. The scenario took place via the WebEx portal online via our individual computer-based video web cameras. The focus group took place during a Sunday afternoon on March 1, 2015. As we started the focus group, the students each began with an introduction. This scenario took place during Focus Group #2, and it was shared in a conversation between Katrina and T’Nique as an instance of reported speech:

“White Talk/Black Talk”

Katrina: I went to a white dance school when I was a little kid, and they were just like, “Wow, you don't talk black.” I was just like, “Whoa.” I mean, I don't know how black people are supposed to talk. But I do feel like – well I could say for myself, like if I'm around my – if I'm around black people like I talk the same way, and then if I'm around white people I talk another way.

T’Nique: For me, it's a combination of good and bad . . . as far as bad, yes, I've had people who have been like, they've called me bougie [short for bourgeoisie] because I talk in an educated way. And it's like, that's not bougie, that's educated. There's a difference. I've taken advantage of my education like I'm supposed to; that's all.

Storyline. T’Nique’s storyline in “White Talk/Black Talk” presented her perspective on her language usage resulting from her educational choices, and how they

had impacted the way that she communicated, and her storyline was interpreted as follows:

T’Nique relays a story that indicates how Black people have, at times, interpreted her speech as an indication that she felt superior to them. However, she disagrees with this assumption and feels that her capacity and ability to use Standard English is the result of her education. She feels that there is a difference between people using language to show their superiority, and people using Standard English because they have learned to speak this way as a product of their educational achievement. She feels that people should use the skills that they learn in school to get ahead in life. That is what she feels she is doing when she chooses to speak, as an educated person ought to, in her opinion.

Taken together I detected two main oppositions from this scenario between Katrina and T’Nique: *speak like the skin you are in, and speak like the company you are in, and education is the equalizer and education belongs to the elite.*

Analysis of the oppositions. These oppositions helped to clarify both Katrina and T’Nique’s parts of the storyline. Both portions of the “White Talk/Black Talk” scenario include these oppositions. For instance, when Katrina told her story about being at the dance school that was predominately White, she was recounting an instance where her fellow dance students had demonstrated ascription of her intelligence based on her race, and they expected her to “talk black,” or to speak like a Black person ought to talk. This illustrates the first opposition, *speak like the skin you are in and speak like the company you are in*. Katrina found herself the subject of the conversation because she spoke in a way that she felt was appropriate for the company she was in at the dance school, but her fellow dancers challenged her because they felt that she should speak like the skin she is in. The oppositions in her portion of the story demonstrated her perspective because she believed it was appropriate to speak differently based on the company that she was in, and she code-switched when she changed the company she was in at any given time.

The second opposition relied more on the theme of educational attainment as in Katrina's storyline, which demonstrated that *education is the equalizer and education belongs to the elite* because she was confronted by the other students who felt that only certain people should speak the way that she was speaking. They did not feel that she was a member of the group of people who speak properly, and because Katrina was not like them, her speech should be different from their speech presumably because of the color of her skin. However, Katrina's speech was, in part, the product of her educational background, and she opted to alter it because she had learned that one form of speech is appropriate with certain people who represent the dominant group in society who were represented as White people in the story that Katrina recounted in the "White Talk/Black Talk" scenario.

At the same time, T'Nique's portion of the scenario displayed the *education is the equalizer and education belongs to the elite* opposition regarding the thought that if a person is uneducated they will speak in an uneducated way. Conversely, her decision to speak and use Standard English represented her educational attainment.

Analysis of the syllogisms and enthymemes. There were two syllogisms in the "White Talk/Black Talk" scenario. In Katrina's narrative the logical argument stated—implicitly and explicitly—in her narrative can be represented in inferential, logical form in this way:

Premise 1: If Katrina speaks like her White counterparts, she will fit in.

Premise 2: If Katrina speaks like her Black counterparts, she will fit in.

Conclusion: Code-switching is the socially appropriate way to respond to people in different social and racial contexts.

Conclusion. One could infer the conclusion that Katrina reached. In the case of her Black counterparts, it seemed to be true based on her narrative because she did not indicate otherwise. However, her White counterparts' racial microaggressions demonstrated that they failed to interpret her language/speech choice as a socially appropriate action. Therefore, her logic was solid, but the microaggression remained a symbol of her White counterparts' inability to adapt to her presence in the dance community as an equal member of the dance group.

The opposite seemed to be true among her Black counterparts, who presumably did agree with the inherent and valid logic of her language/speech choice to speak like other members of that group. On the other hand, T'Nique's narrative was more complex because she was explaining how certain people within a community may view educational attainment negatively. Or, more specifically, how certain members of the Black community might feel threatened by Black people who achieve academically (Cokley et al., 2012). The second syllogism in the "White Talk/Black Talk" scenario pertained to T'Nique's logic in the scenario, and it looked like this in inferential, logical form:

Premise 1: Education leads to better communication skills.

Premise 2: Better communication skills do not indicate that I am a bougie person, or that I think I am better than anyone.

Conclusion: If I speak in an educated way, I will present myself as the educated person.

Other data sources followed regarding the participants' hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk. In addition, of particular relevance was the way that all of the participants

felt about the way that some of their teachers spoke to them in classroom settings. Most of the students, even the students who attended predominately Black high schools and college (e.g., participants Katrina and Tasha who attended predominately Black schools throughout her schooling), stated that during their school career they had mostly had White teachers. In the one-on-one interview with Maria, she shared her experiences dealing with racial microaggressions. In the above story, Katrina and T’Nique demonstrated racial microaggressions, and how they effectively dealt with them by using performative silence. Rather than responding to Katrina’s dance mates’ comments, she ignored them and let her silence speak loudly (Tannen, 1985). Additionally, T’Nique echoed similar sentiments in her recollection of her portion of the story, describing her interaction in predominantly Black groups where she felt ridiculed because she talked in an “educated way.”

Analysis of Thematic Scenario: Literacy

As stated earlier, the participants mentioned how they valued belonging to social clubs, groups of girlfriends, and family where they could “write it out.” For instance, Shelly mentioned how she talked it out with her mother and the social circle of friends whom she had had her entire life. She described it this way:

When I get anxious or frustrated, I’m not going to share that at school. I won’t because that’s what people expect me to do. And I won’t do it to be their entertainment. Instead, I’ll call my mom or a close friend and I’ll talk it out with them. (One-on-One Interview, Shelly)

Additionally, several of the participants mentioned the importance of writing out frustrations in a journal or notebook. For example, Dana stated:

For me, writing – I write as like a form of self-release and so look back and see like the mistakes that I’ve made and if I can like learn from them. Like I’ll go through my journals and I kind of see, “Like, wow, what were you doing in there?” I see what

I've done and what I've done wrong and like being able to have this on a page helps me. (One-on-one Interview, Dana)

Talking it out and writing it out were closely related as they related to finding a way to work through issues and to “construct meanings of themselves and resist misrepresentations” of themselves (Muhammad, 2012, p. 205). Literature supports how significant these practices are for Black girls (Brooks et al., 2010b; Brown, 2008, 2013; DeBlase, 2003; Sutherland, 2005b). In the scenario, the participants discussed how they used language as a tool to “talk it out” and “write it out.”

Analysis of Thematic Scenario: Talk it Out and Write it Out

To not only like have these ideas in your mind but to like legitimize them and put them on paper, or share them with other people is like the best way to feel like validated. (Dana, Focus Group #1)

With these words, Dana explained the value of talking out and writing out feelings in sacred spaces, and also multicultural contexts. Dana, Maria, and I met online using the WebEx video conferencing platform on Saturday, February 21, 2015 (Noon–2 p.m.)

The purpose of this focus group was to follow up on points that the participants raised in the survey and the one-on-one interviews about the intersection of writing and talking about one’s feelings. Both girls who participated in the call mentioned how the spoken and written word played such significant roles in their academic success. For instance, Maria mentioned:

Since I was a child I have always had a love for reading and acquiring knowledge. For the purpose of being able to form my own, informed, opinions reading, as well as conversation, have been strong forces in my development. The more I have read and conversed, the more my writing has been affected. (Preliminary Survey, Maria)

The “How, Why, What?” scenario centered on their girls’ stories of success and the role that writing and verbal communication played in talking it out and writing it out

in order to achieve their academic success. In this scenario, both participants were in their dorm rooms as we conducted the call. Maria and Dana relayed this story. This story demonstrated the participants' interpretations of their feelings regarding the role that the different uses of the English language of African American female students played in the development of their cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity. The story follows below.

“How, Why, What?”

Dana: Hmm. I think discussion, especially with people that are similar. Like you have to feel comfortable, like with people who are like you in order for you to be able to – to feel even more comfortable around people. So like discussions to me. And so like with my friends . . . like talking about our insecurities, or ourselves or how you feel. Like being able to empower each other. And once you have like this confidence or like motivation or like inspiration and you know what you want from talking to other people . . . it's kind of like a driver, like a driving force there. You kind of – I think the main thing is confidence in yourself. Like that is what has helped me continue to be good in school. Like when you don't feel like you are like worth – like just worth watermelon. I don't know how to describe it – but when you don't feel like secure, then I just feel like it's kind of like all the bricks at the bottom are going to fall . . . and you're going to just kind of like lose yourself.

Maria: Yeah, I agree. You need a solid foundation. Because – you need these people that you feel like will love you whether or not you agree with them. And it's like you just need that foundation. And then also I feel like you need to just do what you like to do. Because what you love – Yeah, exactly. And so it's like no matter what you like to do, no matter who's there, who's um, a part of that, if you have that foundation you still have those people who you know at all times will be there for you, will be – will help you and support you. And then you can

develop your identity by those other things on that foundation.

Dana: Yeah. I think finding something that you love . . . like when people like talk to me and they're like, "Dana when you like talk about marine biology or this, like I can feel like a glow in your eyes and that's just so like inspiring to see that you can love something so much." And from loving that I've met people that like have similarities with me. Like I've been able to write really good essays about something that I love, and I think finding something that you really, really enjoy is a great way to kind of like help you find your identity.

Researcher: And what role does language and literacy play in that? Where do they intersect? Language and literacy in developing a strong sense of self? What do you think?

Maria: I think being able to express yourself to your foundation, to those people that support you and being able to tell them how you feel and why you feel it and what you think about how you feel and et cetera is – that's where the language part comes in.

Dana: Yeah, and through like writing. Like I know like college essays is just one example . . . of being able to – to not only like have these ideas in your mind but to like legitimize them and put them on paper, or share them with other people is like the best way to feel like validated and like you can build yourself up for doing that . . . so that not only you know these really good things that you are doing but other people can see and how they inspire other people and they kind – it's like a reflection for you to like, by writing down to see – what you're just going to see.

Storyline. The storyline for "How, Why, What?" was interpreted as follows:

The storyline between Dana and Maria centered on several themes regarding the use of language in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity including: (1) the value of having discussions with people "who are like you" for the purpose of talking about (a) insecurities, (b) feelings, and (c) developing a sense of empowerment from this "solid foundation" for motivation and inspiration to excel among other groups of people who are different from you; (2) the need to have

people who love you and who you know will be there for you “whether or not you agree with them” to build trust in other people and in yourself; (3) the significance of finding something that you love to do, and by finding your passion, you can find other people to share it with you and even though they may be different from you in other ways, this shared passion can help to create a broader foundation of support, and lastly (4) the importance of “being able to express yourself to your foundation regarding how you feel, why you feel it, and what you think about how you feel” to help legitimize your thoughts and ideas in order to build a stronger sense of self.

It was evident that on discussing the various components that contributed to the participants’ academic success, key themes emerged and were validated, including the role of writing it out and talking it out. The point here is that through writing and talking out feelings with trusted people, the girls were able to express themselves in a way that helped to build their confidence. This was achieved through dialogue. Dialogue is an encounter with oneself and mediated by the world itself (Freire, 1974a), and also between people. As Dana stated:

It was important to not only like have these ideas in your mind but to like legitimize them and put them on paper, or share them with other people is like the best way to feel like validated and like you can build yourself up for doing that.

Analysis of the oppositions. I detected three oppositions in this story: (a) *external reflection and internal reflection*, (b) *communication in trusted group builds self-confidence and communication in an untrusted group destroys self-confidence*, and (c) *security leads to confidence and insecurity leads to loss of self*. These oppositions helped to clarify the “How, What, Why?” scenario between Maria and Dana.

Dana discussed the need to be among people who were similar to her and the importance of feeling safe in their company because she drew comfort from their implicit and explicit support. As she said, by discussing things with people who were similar to her she felt comfortable, “with people who are like you in order for you to be able to – to feel even more comfortable around people.” In other words, she was inspired by the

validating external support of other people who helped boost her confidence by listening to her and her expression of her insecurities and dreams, her supporters become “like a driving force” to help encourage her, even at times “when you don't feel like you are like worth – like just worth watermelon.” By experiencing their support, or the positive external reflection of their support in her, she was able to feel that her feelings, goals, and aspirations were worthwhile and valid in the eyes of other people. It was a reciprocal process, and she was able to use the support that she received from people to improve the views that she had about herself.

Maria echoed these sentiments regarding the importance of having a “solid foundation” of people who:

...you feel like will love you whether or not you agree with them. And it's like you just need that foundation. And then also I feel like you need to just do what you like to do. Because what you love – Yeah, exactly. And so it's like no matter what you like to do, no matter who's there, who's um, a part of that, if you have that foundation you still have those people who you know at all times will be there for you, will be – will help you and support you. And then you can develop your identity by those other things on that foundation.

This external reflection of how other people value the girls’ feelings, goals, and aspirations fortified a positive identity through their culture, beliefs, and interests.

Meanwhile, in the “How, Why, What?” scenario, Dana and Maria shared their feelings about the need to do internal reflection and the role that language played in that process. Namely, Dana stated,

write really good essays about something that I love, and I think finding something that you really, really enjoy is a great way to kind of like help you find your identity.

She continued to explain the value, more specifically, of writing as she articulated that

through like writing. Like I know like college essays is just one example . . . of being able to – to not only like have these ideas in your mind but to like legitimize them and put them on paper.

These comments were reminiscent of Brett Elizabeth Blake's (1995) work, in which she argued that a good way for Black and Latina young women to begin to fight racism and sexism is to talk about their unique experiences through writing. The internal reflection that Dana and Maria described is an important part of their identity development, and they expressed its significance by highlighting the role that writing played in the process.

The second opposition, *communication in trusted group builds self-confidence and communication in an untrusted group destroys self-confidence*, was evident in comments from Dana who shared, "Once you have like this confidence or like motivation or like inspiration and you know what you want from talking to other people." By "other people," we can infer that she was talking about people that shared her culture and interests. Communication in these trusted groups helped to build her confidence. In much the same way, Maria agreed by saying

No matter what you like to do, no matter who's there, who's um, a part of that, if you have that foundation you still have those people who you know at all times will be there for you, will be – will help you and support you. And then you can develop your identity by those other things on that foundation.

This "solid foundation," as they described it, could boost their self-confidence.

Additionally, the opposition was implied in regards to the threat of people outside of their trusted group, or untrusted people, who did not exhibit support of Dana and Maria. As they described it, they felt that these people could potentially have the power to dismantle their self-confidence, and they felt that this was possible if they did not believe that they had the "solid foundation" to support them. People outside of their trusted group could come from different places in their lives, including but not limited to,

teachers, school administrators, and other people outside of the school environment. The power of feeling insecure in settings where they felt unsupported was described by Dana:

if you don't feel like secure, then I just feel like it's kind of like all the bricks at the bottom are going to fall . . . and you're going to just kind of like lose yourself.

Lastly, the third opposition regarding *security leads to confidence* and *insecurity leads to loss of self* built on the previous opposition. Without having the ability to talk it out or write it out, the girls would feel unsupported and they would feel as if they lacked a foundation upon which to build themselves up (Dana). The opposition to the argument is similar to the comment made by T’Nique when she stated how her life would be different if she had not found a place or people with whom she could express herself:

I know for a sure fact had I not had the mentors that crossed my path in my life I so would not be the same kid. If I didn't have like Angela, if I didn't have some of the people at my church – like there's people who just, who just were in my life. If I did not have those people, I'm telling you right now I would be [giggles] like this and that. I just would not be the same kid. I would be that, like I said, typical –typical teenager: drugs, sex, alcohol – anything else that could just help me pretty much cope with my, you know, emotional issues. (One-on-One Interview, T’Nique)

Analysis of the syllogisms and enthymemes. From the opposition, I went into detail to analyze what the opposition might have meant in terms of the scenario’s argument. The first premise was somewhat evident.

Premise 1: It is important to express yourself to your foundation to tell them how you feel, why you feel it and what you think about how you feel.

This was evident in Dana’s comment as she explained the value of having that “foundation” because it was the “best way to feel like validated and like you can build yourself up for doing that” (Focus Group #1, Dana). This first premise led to the second premise.

Premise 2: Without having that place to write it out or talk it out, I'm lost.

The listener of these premises is left to consider the alternatives, a life that lacks a place to write it out and talk it out, and the impact that this would have on the participants.

Based upon their comments, it was evident that a life without these influences would feel lost. Shelly reinforced this point when she stated in her one-on-one interview how she needed to "talk it out." She mentioned how she talked it out with her mother and the social circle of life-long friends. She described it this way:

When I get anxious or frustrated, I'm not going to share that at school. I won't because that's what people expect me to do. And I won't do it to be their entertainment. Instead, I'll call my mom or a close friend and I'll talk it out with them. (One-on-One Interview, Shelly)

In performing this analysis, I arrived at the scenario's conclusion.

Conclusion. If the girls found a safe place to talk it out and write it out they would feel safe and secure. It was possible to arrive at this conclusion without using this method; however, by viewing it with this method it made the message clearer and highlighted the importance of the girls' viewpoint.

In the following section, I used a scenario to illustrate the way in which the participants' identity development practices supported and affirmed their personal development as Black Girls/Women where they could feel comfortable in a sacred space shared with people similar to them (i.e., other Black girls), while feeling secure as a person with a multicultural worldview that connected them with people dissimilar to them. Using narrative analysis, the stories of the individual participants revealed similarities in the meaning of each person's story.

Analysis of Thematic Scenario: Self-Hood and Identity Development

Research supports the importance that African American girls of all ages place on having the ability to use language to create “sacred spaces to tell it like it is and to be told” (Brown, 2008, p. 12). In this study, the participants mentioned the encouragement and support gained from having sacred spaces and groups that they belonged to, both in school and out of school. Within those sacred spaces, they felt they could “talk it out” and “write it out,” as stated in the previous section. They described these sacred spaces as being their “foundation” and “the place where I can build my identity” (Focus Group #1, Maria). Dana echoed Maria’s point by stating:

I think discussion, especially with people that are similar. Like you have to feel comfortable, like with people who are like you in order for you to be able to – to feel even more comfortable around other people. (Focus Group #1, Dana)

She emphasized the impact of talking it out to overcome insecurities when she said:

Dana: ...like talking about ourselves or our insecurities, or how you feel. Like being able to empower each other. And once you have like this confidence or like motivation or like inspiration and you know what you want from talking to other people...

Maria: Yeah.

Dana: ... it's kind of like a driver, like a driving force there. You kind of – I think the main thing is confidence in yourself. (Focus Group #1)

Further, the participants explained how they felt empowered by identifying with certain groups, including African Americans, athletic and academic teams/groups, and social organizations such as mentorship clubs and church groups. As a member of groups, they felt motivated by both the positive and negative expectations of the group, particularly families and friends. For instance, Katrina extolled the benefits of attending a HBCU:

And just being – like I know how to adapt. But being in that type of environment – that's why I could never go to a (Predominately White Institution) PWI , because it's just like I would be somewhere where I'm not myself. I would be somewhere where I'm not comfortable, like I feel like someone would judge me. And at an HBCU, you're just yourself. And you know when you're around black people; you're just more comfortable in the way you talk. But I feel like if you're around white people you have to adjust to what they like, make sure that you're accepted by them rather than just be yourself. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

She attributed her academic success to being in a community where she could just “be herself.” Further, Shelly echoed the same sentiments in regards to her desire to avoid sharing too much of herself in school when she stated:

When I get anxious or frustrated, I'm not going to share that at school. I won't because that's what people expect me to do. And I won't do it to be their entertainment. Instead, I'll call my mom or a close friend and I'll *talk it out* with them. (One-on-One Interview, Katrina)

Shelly mentioned that she did not want to be “their entertainment,” and with this comment she was remarking on the stereotypical representations of African American women who are “emotional” and “loud” in public settings (Koonce, 2012), which are considered pathologized cultural values (Sue et al., 2008). This stereotypical image is something that each of the participants said they rail against. Maria explained her feelings regarding the stereotypical image and how it can detract from the reality that a person may feel:

I think there's a stereotype that I, that I most often, um, most often reject and push against, is the Angry Black Woman stereotype where it's like, “Oh you're just mad.” Like and it's okay, “Maybe I'm mad, but it's not, it's not an unfounded anger.” Like it's not, it's not just like I'm just an angry person and I just want to be that all the time. Like no. I have reasons for why I'm angry, if I am angry. And maybe I'm just not angry. Maybe I'm just not – maybe I don't act the way you would like me to or maybe I don't act the way you deem is quote/unquote correct to act. (One-on-One Interview, Shelly)

This stereotypical image results from a misconstrued representation of African American females who have historically been socialized to be the backbone of Black culture

(hooks, 1981). Several factors account for this socialization (e.g., institutional racism, the legacy of slavery, sexism within the Black community, etc.). In Joan Morgan's Hip-Hop Feminism cultural criticism book, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down* (2000), she summed up the impact of this socialization on the lives of most Black women:

When you're raised to believe that the ability to kick adversity's ass is a birthright—a by-product of gender and melanin—you tend to tackle life's afflictions tenaciously. This is a useful quality, no-doubt. However, this [stereotype] also tricks many of us into believing we can carry the weight of the world. (p. 104)

The result is the development of multiple consciousness, which “plays an important role in the development of African American language and literacy practices” (Richardson, 2002, p. 686). The scenario that follows is a more in-depth view of the interaction between T’Nique and myself that took place during her one-on-one interview.

Analysis of Thematic Scenario: Multicultural Worldview

The purpose of this scenario was to demonstrate a point made by Dana and Shelly regarding the need to develop a Multicultural Worldview if one wishes to achieve academically. Before and after this scenario, the participants expressed how they felt they had developed new knowledge in their lives by being in dialogue with people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The Focus Group #1 took place on Saturday, February 21, 2015 (Noon –1:15 p.m.). Everyone called into the videoconferencing system via her computer. Both participants were on time and were actively engaged in what the other was saying. During this particular focus group, there was a lot of cross talk that was brought about by people feeling excited to agree with the other person on the topic being discussed: the value of having a Multicultural Worldview. The scenario provides an example of language in use.

“World of People”

Shelly: I think that dialogues, um, they let – they make your perspective either stronger or they make you just think about why you believe what you believe or why you think how you think. And I think that's one of my favorite things about speaking to other people, especially speaking to people who have a different perspective than me 'cause it either strengthens what you do or it makes you re-evaluate your whole like view.

Dana: Yeah, I definitely agree, like talking to people. And like I love, love, I just wish you could just go to a place and just talk to people and listen. Because you learn so many things from people. Like when, um, went abroad for the summer, and like my roommate – she's from Poland – and we still like Spanish a lot because we were, I guess were in Spain and it was a Spanish program, but like from my 16 year old girl from Poland like I learned so much about like her, her life in Poland and then like what it's like there. And I got to like teach her a lot about America. And it was just like from these little connections and being able to communicate with somebody, and like in Spanish as well, like having a whole 'nother like world of people that you can communicate with, like it's allowed me to learn so much about other people and it helped me learn more about myself and like learning from other people.

Storyline. The storyline in this scenario is about learning from people who are different than you are via dialogue. As Dana stated in the above scenario:

I think that's one of my favorite things about speaking to other people, especially speaking to people who have a different perspective than me 'cause it either strengthens what you do or it makes you re-evaluate your whole like view.

Therefore, the storyline for “World of People” was interpreted as follows:

Dana and Shelly agree with Freire’s description of the importance of dialoguing with other people. In fact, their comments mirror his sentiments as he stated that a person who is committed to undertaking dialogue with other people “enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them” (Freire, 1974a, p. 39). In other words, by dialoguing with other people, it is possible to either strengthen your position, or cause you to reevaluate your position. In addition, it can cause you to examine the root cause of your actions and the rationale that is driving your actions. In the scenario, Dana exemplifies this point as she talks about her study abroad program to Spain where she met and dialogued with her roommate who was from Poland. She learned a lot about her friend’s life in Poland, and she shared details of her life in America.

She felt that she learned about her friend, and also about herself as a result of this experience.

Analysis of the opposition. I detected three oppositions in the “World of People” Scenario: *provincialism and cosmopolitanism, open-mindedness and close-mindedness, and strengthening your view and re-evaluating your view.* Both participants spoke about the benefit of seeing another perspective. As Dana stated:

Not only do you just learn about them, but you also learn about the world, and you start to like see situations differently, and kind of like it's just like a very like eye-opening experience to be so connected to somebody and to learn, like to have somebody that's completely like vulnerable and that can just like share all of these things that they're thinking.

The opposition to this argument would be to not allow one to be vulnerable and to close oneself off from different points of view about the world. It was evident from the girls’ comments that that would not be beneficial to their lives.

Analysis of the syllogisms and enthymemes. From the storyline and review of the opposition argument, we arrived at the following argument:

Premise 1: Dialogues make your perspective either stronger or they make you just think about why you believe what you believe or why you think how you think.

Premise 2: If you dialogue with people, not only do you learn about them, but you also learn about the world, and you start to see situations differently.

Conclusion. In conclusion, it was evident that through—especially speaking to people who have a different perspective—than the study participants, they felt “good 'cause it either strengthens what I do or it makes me re-evaluate your whole like view” (One-on-One Interview, Dana).

Therefore, it is critical for Black girls to feel grounded in a sacred space, while also feeling safe to expand a multicultural worldview. For the girls, they were nurtured by

both the sacred space and the multicultural worldview when they found supportive peers, mentors and friends. T’Nique made this point clear when she stated:

Yeah. I'm not gonna say that it was easy. But this is why I have the major that I have, is because I know that given what I went through, I know for a sure fact had I not had the mentors that crossed my path in my life I so would not be the same kid. If I didn't have like Angela, if I didn't have some of the people at my church – like there's people who just, who just were in my life for short spurts of time. If I did not have those people, I'm telling you right now I would be [giggles] like this and that. I just would not be the same kid. I would be that, like I said, typical – typical teenager: drugs, sex, alcohol – anything else that could just help me pretty much cope with my, you know, emotional issues. (One-on-one interview, T’Nique)

Summary

In this chapter, an introduction was given regarding the analysis that was to be discussed and the order in which order it would be addressed. This was followed by a narrative analysis of the participants’ responses. Results from the qualitative research question revealed the role that the different uses of the English language played in the development of the cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity of academically high-achieving African American female college students. In particular, significance was attributed to the (a) hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk, (b) style-shifting/code-switching, and (c) performative silence. Regarding literacy, the data revealed that the participants’ ability (a) to “write it out” and (b) to “talk it out” built self-confidence and self-esteem. Finally, the data revealed that the study participants demonstrated (a) ways to create sacred spaces where they feel they can feel safe to be themselves, and (b) a multicultural worldview that promoted an affirming personal and public sense of self-hood. The next chapter will provide a discussion and a presentation of implications regarding this study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the presentation and analysis of data were reported. Chapter 5 consists of a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and conclusions. The purpose of the latter sections of this chapter is to expand upon the concepts that were studied in an effort to provide further understanding of academically high-achieving African American girls and their use of language and literacy practices as it pertained to their identity development. Also, the latter sections present synthesizing statements to capture the substance and scope of what has been attempted in this research. Lastly, I offer suggestions for further research targeting the appreciation of the integrated nature of language, literacy, and the development of self-hood and identity.

Summary of the Study

This chapter begins with a summary of the purpose and structure of the study and is followed by the major findings related to language and literacy practices of academically high-achieving African American girls. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research are presented and discussed. The primary goal of this study was to discover the influences of language and literacy experiences on the self-hood and identity development of high-achieving African American female college freshmen by applying a critical framework (Darder, 2014; Fairclough, 2015; Freire, 1974b) to a narrative analysis method. The narrative analysis method developed by Feldman et al. (2004) established a useful tool for applying classical rhetoric and

semiotics to understanding the “unstated, implicit understandings that underlie the stories people tell” (p. 147). To further address the language and power dynamic, I used Fairclough’s (2015) language as discourse approach to understand the implications of language as a form of social practice. I utilized a triangulation strategy to test reliability and validity from several sources.

The participants in this study included six high-achieving African American female college first-year students. One student attended Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, two of the study’s participants attended the University of Southern California, another participant attended Grand Canyon University (GCU) in Phoenix, Arizona, and the last participants attended Howard University in Washington, DC. Participants took part in a preliminary online survey, individual one-on-one interviews, and two focus groups where qualitative data were used to develop key themes to answer the research question: How do the language and literacy experiences of academically high-achieving African American female college students influence their sense of self-hood and identity?

Discussion of the Findings

This study has elevated the experiences of academically high-achieving African American female college students for the purpose of seeking to promote their inclusion in the research on the role that language and literacy plays in identity development. Their experiences demonstrated that language discourse power dynamics are at play in their lives, and their use of strategies to overcome challenges related to this discourse. The research drew upon personal narrative-based scholarship that relied heavily on the voices of adolescent girls—in this case, more specifically, African American girls—in order to understand how they created meaning and defined themselves. In so doing, we arrived at

an asset-based perspective on the research topic to show how through the practice of conscientization, the study participants acted upon the environment to critically reflect on their reality and thereby transform themselves through future actions and critical reflection (Freire, 1974a).

The narrative analysis results of this study reveal the ways that high-achieving African American female college students were making sense of the world that they lived in and their place in it by documenting their stories to help facilitate their achievement in school. Further, the narrative analysis provided a deeper understanding of how these students were developing a strong ethnic identity despite dealing with challenges related to the bicultural crisis. Through developing supportive relationships in sacred spaces in social clubs, school-based groups, as well as with family and friends, they were able to develop coping tools to address racial microaggressions, acquire the means to enhance positive messages about themselves, and trust themselves as a source of their own empowerment. In these sacred spaces, they could feel safe to “just be” and to use expressive and emotionalistic styles of communication commonly found in African American culture. In these sacred spaces, they could vent frustrations, and also develop tools to negotiate their biculturation with the commonalities shared with their fellow members. These results were evident in the Personal Stories (i.e., “Different Environments” and “The Nations”) and Thematic Scenarios (i.e., “White Talk/Black Talk” and “How, Why, What?”).

Moreover, the results of this study demonstrate the participants’ development of a “language conscious hypothesis” (Williams, 1982) that has raised their awareness about thoughts and behaviors related to the expression of language in their daily lives. In other

words, they had developed an understanding of how language is conceived as a socially determined discourse (Fairclough, 2015). By writing it out and talking it out within their sacred spaces, they had a “foundation” from which to build confidence to excel and demystify the stereotypes of African American females while operating in multicultural environments. This was evidenced in the Personal Stories (i.e., “Reasoned Anger” and “California Girl”), and Thematic Scenarios (i.e., “White Talk/Black Talk,” “How, Why, What?” and “World of People”). Consequently, this research fills the gap in research on the topics of academically high-achieving African American female college students and how their language and literacy experiences influence their sense of self-hood and identity, as detailed in the following sections of this chapter.

Theme: Language

I conclude from this research that there are gendered and cultural ways of speaking and writing evidenced in how the study participants used and recounted stories of using language. This was evident in the scenarios, which demonstrated a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk as a survival mechanism for dealing with racial microaggressions. By using strategies including code-switching, style-shifting, and performative silence, the participants demonstrated racial pride and identity as they negotiated as bicultural members of society.

Labov (2013) and others have stopped short of thoroughly assessing the relationship in language between texts, processes, and their social conditions (Fairclough, 2015) as this dissertation research reveals through the experiences of the study participants. Liberation comes through language, literacy, and personal development (Morrell, 2008; Smitherman, 1983). Working with the study participants and with the

Black female artist activist company, BWSOTU, I have expanded the personal sense of the creative potential of Black womanhood, and have come to realize that, as Brown (2013) concluded in the introduction of *Hear Our Truths: The Creative Potential of Black Girlhood*, we need to conceptualize “Black girlhood differently than it is described on mainstream television, written about in popular magazines, uncritically interpreted through statistics, and rendered in politics that punish, segregate, and silence” (p. 16). To summarize, what I have found is that the development of self-hood and identity capabilities is a difficult task for African American young women within the context of a society that is structured by an ideology that naturalizes asymmetrical power relations and a language discourse that supports the imbalance of power. Yet, hope resides in the development of critical consciousness over hierarchical imbalances, the illumination of myths supporting the elite hierarchy of society, raising awareness about the thought and language expressed in daily life, and encouraging student and teacher reflection on the positive conditions to create in order to overcome limitations and biases.

The language and literacy practices, as revealed in the Personal Stories and the Thematic Scenarios, illuminate a relationship between text, processes, and social conditions. As seen in the narrative analysis of these stories and scenarios, language activities are not merely a reflection or expression of social practices; they are also “part of those processes and practices” (Fairclough, 2015, p. 56). For instance, the participants demonstrated how language and literacy influences from society play a significant role in their lives and shape their experiences.

As shared by Katrina in her Personal Story “The Nations,” she expressed dismay over her interaction at the United Nations because a fellow student seemed to project a

vision of her (as a Black girl from an inner-city school) that was a stereotype imposed on her by society. Rather than engage in that discourse, she opted to reflect on that situation by stating, “I know how to adapt.” The implied message was “I can adapt, and why can’t he?” She exerted her power in this circumstance by demonstrating her acumen to illuminate the myth about how she is supposed to speak like a young Black woman from the inner city, which supports the elite hierarchy of society. She accomplished this through her language process of reflecting critically on the situation, and her language practice in that situation challenged the myth by how she adapted to the situation.

Maria revealed a similar language process and practice in her Personal Story, “Reasoned Anger” as she demystified the stereotype of the Angry Black Woman. Through the oppositions in the story, *stereotype and prototype* and *justified anger and unjustified anger*, she raised awareness about the thought and language expressed in daily life about Black women and their need to “experience love, grief, anger, frustration and joy just like everyone else” (Giorgis, 2014).

Theme: Literacy

The study participants also employed literacy practices grounded in their experience as Black women who find solace in the safety of sacred spaces with people whom they share an affinity with, where they “write it out” and “talk it out” for the purpose of healing and self-expression. In those sacred spaces, they can “just be,” and be heard. It was there that they developed their individual identities by drawing from the foundation of the sacred spaces where they could express themselves freely and gain a sense of wholeness and liberation that fueled their ability to navigate in multicultural

environments with a multicultural worldview that enabled them to live a life beyond their personal experience.

Another example was found in the Thematic Scenario “How, Why, What?” where Maria and Dana stressed the importance of the intersection of text, process, and social conditions and the need to be able to express oneself in a sacred space where what one says, how it is heard, and how it is interpreted based on the social context makes one feel “supported” and “validated.”

In this study, the stories, oppositions, and syllogisms served to uncover the relationships between text, context, and social conditions to reveal the process of language production—both in terms of the impact of language processes on the lives of African American women, and the ways that these women (a) used language and literacy in order to develop and exercise a critical consciousness by having a hyperawareness of the racialized nature of talk as demonstrated by code-switching and style-shifting, and performative silence; (b) expressed themselves through writing it out and talking it out; and (3) drew support in sacred spaces that prepared them to hone a multicultural worldview. The result, as we see in the stories shared by Dana, Maria, T’Nique, Shelly, Katrina, and Tasha, is the transcendence of African American female college students over the reproduction of social inequality that engenders academic achievement.

Theme: Self-Hood and Identity

By using a strengths-based approach to fostering methods to better understand the complexities of Black girls’ lives and how they can excel in society, universal lessons can be derived from their resilience, self-acceptance, and achievement. The point is to

celebrate the creative abilities of Black girls and to do so in a way that does not stereotype them into oblivion (Steele, 1997).

Demystifying the stereotype of the Angry Black Woman. The prevalence of the “Angry Black Woman” stereotype in literature, media, and even educational settings is evident and played a role in the way that the study participants felt and feared they may be perceived. In response to the question of what are the main stereotypes that people have about Black women, Dana stated in the first focus group, “Angry Black Woman is definitely one.” Maria explained the point in greater detail in her one-on-one interview:

I think there's a stereotype that I, that I most often, um, most often reject and push against, is the angry Black woman stereotype where it's like, “Oh you're just mad.” Like and it's okay, “Maybe I'm mad, but it's not, it's not an unfounded anger.” Like it's not, it's not just like I'm just an angry person and I just want to be that all the time. Like no. I have reasons for why I'm angry, if I am angry. And maybe I'm just not angry. Maybe I'm just not – maybe I don't act the way you would like me to or maybe I don't act the way you deem is quote/unquote correct to act. I don't – but the – just not acting how you would like me to act doesn't make me frustrated, doesn't make me angry just because I don't act like whoever you're comparing me to. I think. (One-on-One Interview, Maria)

The perception of the Angry Black Woman as “loud, talkative, and aggressive” is prevalent and widespread (Koonce, 2012; Walley-Jean, 2009; Williams, 2001). However, despite the prevalence of this image, little or no empirical research on African American women’s actual experience of anger exists, and no data exist that supports that these women generally experience more anger than other ethnic groups experience (Walley-Jean, 2009). This stereotype can impact how African American female students internalize how they may be perceived in the world—including the classroom—and how they feel they can express themselves whether they are angry or not (West, 1995). The participants in this study, and other African American women (Walley-Jean, 2009; West, 1995), may adapt their behavior in an attempt to appear “nonthreatening” (Kaplan &

Maehr, 1999) when interacting with people of different backgrounds. As a result, the feeling to modify their behavior for the sake of easing other people's fears about them can have negative consequences.

As stated by Walley-Jean (2009), "Negative stereotypes and specifically the Angry Black Woman stereotype can have significant negative social and interpersonal consequences for African American woman as well as influence their experience and expression of appropriate anger" (Walley-Jean, 2009, p. 73). Research states how Blacks historically "modify their assertive responses when interacting with an individual of a different race" (Lineberger & Calhoun, 1983, p. 146). However, this is in contrast to African American culturally specific modes of assertiveness as "honest, open, direct verbal or nonverbal expression which does not have the intent of denigrating someone" (Lineberger & Calhoun, 1983, p. 147). Given this contrast, it is clear to see why the African American female students in this study would opt to take solace in sacred spaces in order to shield themselves from misunderstandings and also to avoid the pains of racial microaggressions from different races of people who may not be able to appreciate their culturally specific mode of communication.

Additionally, researchers in the field of mental health have documented the rationale for anger in African American women, which disproves the false notion that these women had anger that was unfounded (Fields et al., 1998; West, 1995). In fact, Fields et al. (1998) cited that African American women's anger revolved around three themes: (a) responding to attempted coercion in the school, work, or home environment; (b) voiced as a fear of losing control; or (c) when they felt that they did not receive the treatment that they deserved. These themes were echoed in the interviews with the study

participants. For instance, in Maria's interview she stated, "Maybe I'm mad, but it's not, it's not an unfounded anger" (One-on-One Interview, Maria,). This research and Maria's comment point to the issue of power and "is used by society, as with other negative images of African American women as an attempt to obtain and maintain control of African American women's experience" (Walley-Jean, 2009, p. 82). This includes the ability to voice displeasure when being treated unfairly and to shield them from a racist, sexist, and classist society.

The participants in this study showed a tendency to suppress anger because of the negative stereotype of the "Angry Black Woman" and the negative associations with it. In its place, the participants had developed a hyperawareness to racial microaggressions in several ways in order to excel academically by using techniques identified in this study, including:

- Making use of sacred spaces to construct the narratives of achievement during their journey to womanhood (Buckley & Carter, 2005) to heal and empower themselves (Sutherland, 2005b) as in the "World of People" Thematic Scenario;
- Overcoming racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010) and negative stereotypes by developing a hyperawareness to the racialized nature of talk, and a keen sense of what is "appropriate" in that social context based on language discourse (Fairclough, 2010) as in the "What Talk/Black Talk" Thematic Scenario;
- Taking into consideration language discourse (Fairclough, 2015), using context-specific style-shifting techniques (Alim, 2004) as a strategy in

different social environments as in the “Different Environments” and “Reasoned Anger” Personal Stories;

- Placing importance on using performative silence as a sign of protest (Elaine Richardson, 2003) as in the “White Talk/Black Talk” Thematic Scenario;
- Developing a multicultural worldview (Hudley, 2008) as in the “Different Environments” Personal Story, and the “World of People” Thematic Story; and
- “Writing it out” and “talking it out” to build confidence in order to excel academically (Muhammad, 2012) in the “How, Why, What?” Thematic Scenario.

Although the strategies that the study participants developed were shared among them, it is also important to note that academically high-achieving African American late-adolescent girls—actually, all African American girls—are not monolithic, nor are they stereotypical. In fact, data in this research demonstrate that academically high-achieving African American late-adolescent girls are heterogeneous, multifaceted, and their language and literacy practices illustrate their complexities as they seek to develop their identities in positive and affirming ways.

By listening to the narratives and the subtexts that emerged in this study, it is evident that they act upon the environment to critically reflect on their reality, and they thereby transform themselves through future actions and critical reflection. Thus, they applied a critical narrative to their experience (Jacob, 2002). By dialoguing in sacred spaces where there is safety and restoration (Brown, 2013), and in the world where they

find opportunities for evolution and growth, the participants negated the banking concept of knowledge; through their communication and actions, they created a praxis of liberation (Smitherman, 1983).

Implications for Practice

This research adds to the growing body of literature on Girlhood Studies and Black Girlhood Studies, and also suggests a need for additional research to be conducted to further understand and appreciate educational efforts to benefit and empower more students to achieve (Brooks et al., 2010b; Brown, 2008; Brown, 2013; Jean & Feagin, 1998). The findings of this study have far-reaching implications for people interested in gaining insight into the educational experience of African American girls, particularly those who desire to provide viable and scalable solutions for enhancing the development of their cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity. This study identified several links between language usage, literacy practices, identity development, and student achievement. It is significant for people interested in the intersectionalities (O'Connor et al., 2007) of these components for the purpose of undertaking to understand the multidimensionality of Black girls' lives. Accordingly, Brown stated:

The creative potential of Black girlhood serves as a double referent for the articulation of Black girls' expressiveness, style, and sound to mean movement that accounts for difference and also highlights what is possible when Black girlhood operates as an organizing construct, not as a static category of identity. (Brown, 2013, p. 188)

Turning the focus to their complex and multivariied lives moves them out of the shadows of "marginalization." In so doing, they are supported and can boost their "critical capacities to reflect, critique, and act to transform the conditions under which they live" (Darder, 2011, p. xx).

It is evident that the study participants are acting critically in the world that surrounds them. This research can provide a model for students and educators who strive to provide an ability to counter stereotypes and biases (hooks, 1981) as they successfully navigate bicultural crises (Darder, 2012). This study also expands the antiracism dialogue (Day, 2015) in education.

Recommendations for Further Research

The goal of this study was to investigate the role that different uses of the English language of African American female college students play in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity. Data were collected to test the research question relating to this goal. The information was evaluated, and several significant findings resulted from the examination of the data. The results, although significant, have some limitations. One limitation is the small research group, which makes the results somewhat specific only to this group. Also, the data were gathered in a two-month period as the students were starting their academic years. As a result, the findings explain only a small proportion of the activities that were affecting the students' academic achievement. Also, the organization of the study presents the three main components as separate from each other; however, the truth is that the components—language, literacy, and identity development—are integrated, as stated earlier in the dissertation. Based on the study's limitations, suggestions are made for further research.

Additional longitudinal studies could yield deeper analysis of the influence of different uses of language and literacy on the development of linguistic and cultural self-hood. Further research along these lines should use a variety of data collection methods. For example, quantitative analysis could uncover relationships between language and

literacy programs in schools, including writing programs that focus on “writing it out” and “talking it out” could be developed to increase student performance and academic achievement. Additional qualitative studies could be used to map specific examples of relationships among the variables.

This study broke information down into scenarios for analysis. Future research could employ more performative elements and involve other students to further validate the results and explore meaning in additional ways. Future studies could also do a comparative analysis between other groups of participants (e.g., African American boys, Latino students, etc.) in order to see what instructional efforts could benefit other students. Another opportunity for research could be to institute a case study of groups of African American students in successful school districts to discover the unique tools that those districts have identified.

This study has shown that it is not enough to simply look at the main components covered in this research. It has shown that there is still more work to be done to find the intersectionalities of these components. Evidently, a strong positive impact on student achievement was a combination of the components, and additional research could build upon these findings.

Several factors contribute to the achievement of high-performing African American female students. There are many other factors that affect student learning, not the least of which is the role that the girls themselves play in creating an emancipatory framework that others could learn from in schools and their personal lives. Further research into their processes would surely be beneficial. Other frameworks may also be at

play, and it is worth investigating the other techniques that Black girls utilize to become agents of knowledge in order to thrive in today's world.

Conclusions

The findings of this study expanded the work of previous researchers in the area of the language usage, literacy practices, and identity development of academically high-achieving African American female college students. This study revealed that these students have developed their own strategies to overcome racial microaggressions and negative stereotypes by developing a hyperawareness to the racialized nature of talk, code-switching/style-shifting, performative silence, sacred spaces, multicultural worldview, and writing and talking it out.

A further assessment of their strategies for excelling academically found in this study showed the participants possess a resiliency required for continued success. The growing body of literature on Girlhood Studies, and Black Girlhood Studies, in particular, suggests a need for additional research to be conducted to understand further and appreciate educational efforts to benefit and empower more students to achieve.

EPILOGUE

This research changed me. I started with one mindset—where I was taking a deficit approach and what challenging language and literacy issues I could identify in African American female students. It was as if I had distanced and compartmentalized myself from the very population I was seeking to study, and quite frankly, I was this same population 20 years ago. As an academically high-achieving African American female student, I had to overcome some of the very same challenges that the participants in my study are facing today. Through this process, I realized that my viewpoint was skewed, but it came to me, quite honestly, as the result of my experience of being a member of a racialized and gendered population. As a former student and now educator, I was challenged to develop a consciousness of radicalization to support the perspective of the students with whom I had the honor to work in this study.

As a result of working on this research, I discovered affirming literature in the field of language and literacy regarding the different uses of the English-language of African American female college students in the development of cultural and linguistic self-hood and identity. The research and interview process with all of the impressive participants, and probing yet encouraging feedback that my committee shared with me, sent me on a very personal journey. On this journey, I learned that I was projecting some of the negative perceptions that teachers in my life had subjected me to, stemming from the oppressed-oppressor dynamic. Sadly, I was using a projected image of my experience to frame my research from the outset.

I am grateful that I was able to develop a critical consciousness of both my experience and how my past was impacting me in the present. My experience in the

performing arts provided a framework of transformation. It reminded me of how some of the strong characters I had created in play scripts, and others that I performed on stage had successfully completed their hero's journey, and how they had found their own voice amid personal hurdles and challenges. If these fictional characters could do it, so could I, and now my evolved consciousness ought to provide a "bicultural mirror" to validate and encourage other African American women, including participants in this study, as they encounter bicultural crisis and the pains of racial microaggressions.

I hope I have done that through this research. I pray that it helps other African American students, and also educators who are dealing with "the manifestation of the oppressed-oppressor contradiction" (Darder, 2014, p. 129), and hopefully along their journey to developing their own critical consciousness. The goal should be to transform the educational structure so that it can become a place where students and teachers are "beings for themselves" (Freire, 1974b). Such transformation, of course, will undermine the oppressors' purposes, and ultimately dismantle the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student *conscientizacao*. Other educators—especially bicultural educators—should go on a similar journey to not only uncover the stories of their participants, but also to reflect on their own evolution in the process.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Venue	Specifically
	The National Society of Collegiate Scholars
	Say Yes to Education, Inc.
Undergraduate Organizations	Family of Schools, Loyola Marymount University
	Base 11
	Facebook
Social Networking	LinkedIn

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS AND THE DATA COLLECTED

Name ^a	Age	University	Location	Home-town	High school GPA	College GPA	Online survey	Interviews	Focus Groups
Amara	28	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Andrea	17	UCLA	Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles, CA	3.7	NA	No	No	No
Asia	18	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Brittany	18	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Carol	19	Oxford	England	Irvine, CA	3.8	NA	No	No	No
Charis	18	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Dana ^b	19	Cornell	Ithaca, NY	Chicago, IL	3.7	3.52	Yes	Yes	Yes
Denise	19	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Joy	18	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Kila ^b	18	Howard	Washington, DC	Long Island, NY	3.67	3.6	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maria ^b	19	USC	Los Angeles, CA	Inglewood, CA	4.0	3.75	Yes	Yes	Yes

Sabrina	18	Howard	Washington, DC	NA	3.6	3.6	Yes	No	No
Shelly ^b	18	USC	Los Angeles, CA	Pasadena, CA	4.0	3.67	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tasha	18	Howard	Washington, DC	Kentucky	3.3	3.6	Yes	No	No
T'Nique ^b	18	Grand Canyon University	Phoenix, AZ	Inglewood, CA	3.88	3.79	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes. ^a Indicates a pseudonym.

^b Indicates final research participants.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT REASONS FOR PARTIAL PARTICIPATION

Name ^a	Reason for partial participation
Amara	Over representation of Howard Students
Andrea	Under the age requirement
Asia	Over representation of Howard Students
Brittany	Over representation of Howard Students
Carol	Could not participate due to distance and challenges with scheduling group meetings with her due to the differing time zones
Charis	Over representation of Howard Students
Dana ^b	N/A
Denise	Over representation of Howard Students
Joy	Over representation of Howard Students
Kila ^b	N/A
Maria ^b	N/A
Sabrina	Over representation of Howard Students
Shelly ^b	N/A
Tasha	School schedule
T'Nique ^b	N/A

Notes. ^a Indicates a pseudonym.

^b Indicates final research participants.

APPENDIX D

FINAL RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND THE DATA COLLECTED

Name ^a	Age	High School GPA	College GPA	Online Survey	Interviews	Focus Groups	Reason for Partial Participation
Dana ^b	19	3.7	3.52	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Kila ^b	18	3.67	3.6	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Maria ^b	19	4.0	3.75	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Shelly ^b	18	4.0	3.67	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Tasha ^b	18	3.3	3.6	Yes	No	No	NA
T'Nique ^b	18	3.88	3.79	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

Note. ^a Indicates a pseudonym.

^b Indicates final research participants.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Item	Source
LANGUAGE AND LITERACY QUESTIONS	
How would you define language?	(Fairclough, 2015)
How would you define literacy?	(Athanases, 1998; Gee, 2000; Hoyles, 1977)
<p>Probe: How do you notice you speak in school versus at home? Does anything happen when you use the home language at school?</p> <p>Probe: Can you give an example of something that's happened recently in your classroom that you noticed about the different uses of language?</p> <p>Probe: Do you notice how other students speak when they are with their friends versus when they are with teachers?</p>	(Baugh, 1983, 2013; Heller, 1988; Smitherman, 1977)
What value do you feel your teachers place on speaking with a dialect that they are familiar with versus one that they are not? Is the experience the same in every classroom?	(Baugh, 2001; Brophy, 1983; Greene & Walker, 2004)
Are the consequences or challenges regarding language usage the same in every classroom? What role do you think language plays in a person's success in school?	

Why?	
<p>Probe: Explain some examples.</p> <p>Probe: Explain how you have done things that were similar to the person you mention in your example?</p>	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Smitherman, 1977)
Do you read books or other material that is not assigned in school?	(Barton, 2012; Gadsden & Harris, 2009; Grabe & Stoller, 2002)
<p>Probe: Describe what you like to read.</p> <p>Probe: Describe your favorite writers/bloggers.</p>	(Barton, 2012; Carlisle, Beeman, Davis, & Spharim, 1999; Grabe & Stoller, 2002)
Is there a lot of reading material at home?	(Barton, 2012; Carlisle et al., 1999; Grabe & Stoller, 2002)
<p>Probe: What kinds of material?</p> <p>Probe: Do you read and discuss the things that you read with your family members?</p> <p>Probe: If so, what kinds of reading material do you discuss with your family?</p>	(Barton, 2012; Carlisle et al., 1999; Grabe & Stoller, 2002)
Do you read books, blogs, and online media and share it with your friends?	(Alvermann, n.d.; Athanases, 1998; Gee, 2000)

<p>Probe: What kinds of material?</p> <p>Probe: Do you write online or in other format to share with your friends?</p> <p>Probe: Do you publish material and share it with the public via a blog or other format?</p>	<p>(Alvermann, n.d.; Athanases, 1998; Gee, 2000)</p>
DEFINING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	
<p>How would you define yourself?</p>	<p>(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994)</p>
<p>How does a person distinguish themselves from other people?</p>	<p>(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994)</p>
<p>What kind of person do you aspire to be?</p>	<p>(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994; Hubbard, 1999)</p>
<p>Probe: Describe your “possible self” in detail.</p> <p>Probe: Do you have people in your life who have similar characteristics?</p> <p>Probe: How does your “possible self” communicate?</p> <p>Probe: Why does your “possible self” speak that way?</p> <p>Probe: What does she gain from using language that way?</p> <p>Probe: What does she lose from using language in that way?</p>	<p>(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994; Hooker & Others, 1996; Hubbard, 1999; Kerpelman, Shoffner, & Ross-Griffin, 2002; Markus & Nurius, 1986)</p>

<p>Probe: What role do you think language and literacy play in the role of the “possible self” that you have in mind?</p>	
<p>What kind of person do you not want to be like? In other words, describe your “oppositional self.”</p>	<p>(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994; Hooker & Others, 1996; Hubbard, 1999; Kerpelman et al., 2002; Markus & Nurius, 1986)</p>
<p>Probe: Describe your “oppositional self” in detail.</p> <p>Probe: Do you have people in your life who have similar characteristics?</p> <p>Probe: How does your “oppositional self” communicate?</p> <p>Probe: Why does your “oppositional self” speak that way?</p> <p>Probe: What does she gain from using language that way?</p> <p>Probe: What does she loose from using language in that way?</p> <p>Probe: What role do you think language and literacy plays in the role of the “oppositional self” that you have in mind?</p>	<p>(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994; Hooker & Others, 1996; Hubbard, 1999; Kerpelman et al., 2002; Markus & Nurius, 1986)</p>

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(After reviewing the notes from the previous interview) Is this an accurate reflection of our last conversation?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
Is there anything you would like to add?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
Is there anything you would like me to change?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
Is there anything you would like me to remove altogether?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	
Did you know why people speak differently in different contexts?	(Eckert & Rickford, 2002; Heller, 1988; Young, 2010)
What is your opinion about this behavior?	(Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
Did you expect to be judged by others because of the way you speak? Do you feel that it is the same for other people?	(Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
Do you think that is fair? Why/why not? What did your family and friends think about this topic?	(Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
In general, do you think that teachers are judging you fairly based on the way you speak and write in class?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
In general, do you think that people are judging you fairly	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson &

based on the way you speak and write in public?	Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
Do you think that the rules are the same for everyone, or do you think some people get treated differently even though they are not following language and literacy practices that society expects of them?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
<p>Probe: [If yes] why do you think they get treated differently?</p> <p>Probe: Do you think that it has anything to do with race? Gender? Class?</p> <p>Probe: Are boys and girls treated the same?</p>	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
If the answer identifies lack of fairness: How does the fact that some people get treated differently from others make you feel?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT	
How have you developed a sense of who you are?	(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994)
How have you developed a sense of who you are not?	(Brittian, 2012; Erikson, 1994)

APPENDIX G

GENDER DIFFERENCE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(After reviewing the notes from the previous interview) Is this an accurate reflection of our last conversation?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
Is there anything you would like to add?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
Is there anything you would like me to change?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
Is there anything you would like me to remove altogether?	(Hatch & Hatch, 2002)
PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY	
Did you know why people speak differently in different contexts?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
What is your opinion about this behavior?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
Did you expect to be judged by others because of the way you speak? Do you feel that it is the same for other people?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
Do you think that is fair? Why/why not? What did your family and friends think about this topic?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan &

	California Univ., 1971)
In general, do you think that teachers are judging you fairly based on the way you speak and write in class?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
In general, do you think that people are judging you fairly based on the way you speak and write in public?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
Do you think that the rules are the same for everyone, or do you think some people get treated differently even though they are not following language and literacy practices that society expects of them?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
<p>Probe: [If yes] why do you think they get treated differently?</p> <p>Probe: Do you think that it has anything to do with race? Gender? Class?</p> <p>Probe: Are boys and girls treated the same?</p>	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)
If the answer identifies lack of fairness: How does the fact that some people get treated differently from others make you feel?	(Baugh, 2001; Dyson & Smitherman, 2009; Fairclough, 2015; Kernan & California Univ., 1971)

APPENDIX H

STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Name ^a	University	University's Undergraduate Enrollment	% of Black Undergraduate Students per University	% of Female Undergraduate Students per University
Dana	Cornell U.	14,453	6	51
Maria	USC	19,000	4	51
Shelly				
Katrina	Howard U.	10,002	93	67
Tasha				
T'Nique	Grand Canyon U.	5,813	22	N/A ^b

Notes. ^aAll of the students' names are pseudonyms used to protect their identity.

^bData for the 2013–2014 school year were not available at the time of this study.

APPENDIX I
TYPES OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ATTENDED
BY STUDY'S PARTICIPANTS

Name of College or University	Type
Cornell	Ivy League, Private
USC	Private, not-for-profit State
Howard	Private, HBCU
Grand Canyon University	Private, for-profit Christian

APPENDIX J

INFORMED CONSENT AND IRB HUMAN SUBJECTS BILL OF RIGHTS

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I WILL BE INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE EXPERIMENT.
2. I WILL BE GIVEN AN EXPLANATION OF THE PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED IN THE MEDICAL EXPERIMENT, AND ANY DRUG OR DEVICE TO BE UTILIZED.
3. I WILL BE GIVEN A DESCRIPTION OF ANY ATTENDANT DISCOMFORTS AND RISKS TO BE REASONABLY EXPECTED FROM THE STUDY.
4. I WILL BE GIVEN AN EXPLANATION OF ANY BENEFITS TO BE EXPECTED FROM THE STUDY, IF APPLICABLE.
5. I WILL BE GIVEN A DISCLOSURE OF ANY APPROPRIATE ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES, DRUGS OR DEVICES THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS AND THEIR RELATIVE RISKS AND BENEFITS.
6. I WILL BE INFORMED OF THE AVENUES OF MEDICAL TREATMENT, IF ANY, AVAILABLE AFTER THE STUDY IS COMPLETED IF COMPLICATIONS SHOULD ARISE.
7. I WILL BE GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE STUDY OR THE PROCEDURES INVOLVED.
8. I WILL BE INSTRUCTED THAT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY MAY BE WITHDRAWN AT ANY TIME AND THAT I MAY DISCONTINUE PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY WITHOUT PREJUDICE TO ME.

9. I WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THE SIGNED AND DATED WRITTEN CONSENT FORM.

10. I WILL BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DECIDE TO CONSENT OR NOT TO
CONSENT TO THE STUDY WITHOUT THE INTERVENTION OF ANY ELEMENT OF
FORCE, FRAUD, DECEIT, DURESS, COERCION, OR UNDUE INFLUENCE ON MY
DECISION.

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