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# NEVER SILENCE MY SEXY: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY STUDY WITH YOUNG BLACK WOMEN WHO HAVE ENGAGED IN SEXY SELFIES

by

Crystal L. White

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Psychology and Research

The University of Memphis

May 2020

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## Dedication

This dissertation is passionately dedicated to my family, my friends, and my sexy ladies that helped to make this dream happen. Each of you have supported me throughout my educational journey and believed in me when I was filled with self-doubt. Your faith never wavered, for that I am truly grateful.

To Melvin and Catrina White, you have sacrificed so much for me to be able to achieve my own personal goals. Although it was not easy being the first generation doctoral graduate in our family, this journey is one that I will cherish forever. Both of you knew this would not be easy but you always believe that I could. You did not hesitate to let me know, that no matter how hard it got, God would carry me through, and you would support me on the earthly side. I will forever be appreciative for your love, reassurance, support, advice, and even your pushbacks. You not only understood the importance of this journey, but you also listened and encouraged me even when you might not have understood what the heck I was doing. You never allowed me to give up and you taught me balance and self-care. I would not have made it to this point without every ounce of your help. Thank you for everything that you have done for me from start to finish. You have helped me construct my own personal identity from birth until now; so, as I continue to grow and learn, I hope to continue to make you proud as our family's first doctor. Mimi-you're next, right?

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Finally, to all the sexy ladies—my Black and Brown queens that are out there, please continue to embrace who you are as a whole. Continue to be carefree, unapologetically Black, Brown and sexy. Continue to take your sexy selfies and do not let anyone hold you back. Let's continue to fuck with a grays and bring wreck to this world that still refuses to fully understand who we are but continues to try to cop our style. Let's enjoy life pleasurably by living it to the fullest every day because you only die once!

**Acknowledgments**

Isaiah 54:17

*No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord. For I, the Lord, promise to bless you with victory!*

First, I would like to give honor to God who is the head of my life. I thank God for providing me with this opportunity and granting me the strength and the ability to persevere throughout this journey. He has been my solid rock, my visionary, my help and my healer.

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## Abstract

White, Crystal L. Ph.D. The University of Memphis, May 2020. Never silence my sexy: A narrative inquiry study with young black women who have engaged in sexy selfies. Major Professor: Denise L. Winsor, Ph.D.

Hip Hop feminist research seeks to combat oppressive experiences of Black women by encouraging them to share their stories through its main tenets: "fuck with the grays" (Morgan, 2017), "bring wreck" (Pough, 2015), and pleasure politics (Morgan, 2015). Previous research on sexy selfies has mainly investigated the trends, motivations, and dangers of these practices, but only a few include the lived experiences and voices of Black women. Building on research surrounding identity and sexy selfie engagement within 21st century Hip Hop (HH) and social media cultures, this HH feminist narrative inquiry study investigated the following research questions: (1) How is young Black women's identity development influenced and shaped by sexy selfie practices? (2) In young Black women, what characteristics of identity are influenced by sexy selfie practices? (3) In young Black women, how are these characteristics of identity shaped by social media and sexy selfie practices?

Nine young Black women, aged 18-24, from an urban city in the southern region of the United States participated in this study. Participants were asked to engage in one semi-structured interview and complete four reflective journal entries. The researcher kept field journals as well. The resulting data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis with respect to two levels of theory: Hip Hop feminist theory at the macro level and identity development theories (e.g. gendered-racial identity, sexual scripting, and sexual attachment) at mid-level. The following themes emerged: (1) there is an "other" that impacts young Black women's display of sexiness; (2) sexy selfies empower Black women to fuck with the grays and bring wreck to oppressive sexuality constraints; (3) social media is a creative space and an outlet for Black women to represent themselves, and (4) everyone is doing it; so protect, not silence us. In addition, nine

unique narratives highlighting participants' sexy selfie experiences were co-created through creative analytic practice. This study demonstrates the importance of Hip Hop and social media as outlets for creative and expressional freedom and establishes the need for (1) laws to help protect Black youth who feel oppressed, demoralized, and silenced; and (2) critical media literacy and educational reform that would mandate a critical analysis of the images prevalent in lives of youth.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Kristin is a 34-year-old Black woman. Upon some reflection about her early and late adolescent memories, she states her relief about not being part of the Generation Z culture. It was during a friendly conversation, when the topic of sexy selfies and modern culture emerged. Kristin said,

> Although the images I took in middle school, high school, and college will never leave the minds of my peers or the minds of my closest family members, those are completely destroyed, unlike [those of] the younger girls in Generation Z who currently take sexy images.

Kristin's comments about taking sexually explicit pictures and making videos at a young age are representative of the experiences of many young women whose developmental process has been drastically impacted by advances in technology, media, communication, and photography in the 21st century. As members of Generation Z, young women and their peers often upload content and images using technology and social media, laying down an electronic footprint in the form of their words and images that will be globally accessible for their lifetime (Madden, 2012). "Sexting," "sexual self-presentation," and "sexy selfies" are all terms that have been used to describe the pervasive trend of producing and sending explicit messages and images through various media outlets (Ibtesam, 2017). Sexy selfies are a form of both sexual self-presentation and sexting that includes pictures, videos, texts, and sexually suggestive emojis that one uses to (re)present their sexuality, preferences, and desires. Sexy selfies include myriad types of images that range from someone with a sexy appearance or scanty dress (van Oosten et al., 2017) to someone who is seminude or completely nude (Lenhart, 2009; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). Importantly, these representations may or may not imply sexual readiness. Sexy selfies are the focal topic of this study in which I may gain an understanding of how this popular cultural phenomenon influences identity development in young Black women. For instance, sexy

selfies can be a tool that contributes to or creates barriers for young women (e.g., the hottie, sexy mama, too shy, repressed, uninhibited, too comfortable, or not comfortable enough with their sexuality). It is also important to note that the identity process is all the more challenging because of the young women's unique generational age range.

Young women born between 1995 and 2002 are considered NexGen or Generation Z (Geck, 2007; Levine & Dean, 2012; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Strauss & Howe, 1991). This generation is different from previous generations when it comes to technology and media use in that they conduct much of their lives via technology and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, Tik Tok, and Twitter). The ways that they meet people, make friends, communicate, and come to know themselves and the world seem to have no boundaries and they derive meaning in ways that have no counterpart in previous generations. Yet we still know so little about the impact that technology and social media have on their development and who they become as a result of how they interact with technology and social media. Furthermore, it is during these years from 18 to 24 that youth are attempting to figure out who they are and who they want to be, while also navigating and deciphering a barrage of media messages that tell them who they should be (McDevitt et al., 1991; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016; Santrock, 2002; Seifert et al., 1994; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). As today's youth become more advanced in their use of these technologies, there is increased concern about the sexual messages that youth are exposed to. Research addresses how the internet, cell phones, and mass media have become important sources of sexual information and sexual exploration for all youth, especially young women (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Shafer et al., 2013). Thus, research increasingly addresses how media exposure and specifically young women's usage of social networking sites (SNS) are

related to their identity and sexual development (van Oosten et al., 2015; Ward, 2003) as well as the effects of this exposure on their overall well-being (Boyd, 2008; Weber & Mitchell, 2008).

Young women do not innately possess their own unique identities as they confront the demands of the dominant culture (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Forgas, 2000). Instead, they develop their identities through a combination of deciphering messages that they receive from within their environmental and sociocultural contexts (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Forgas, 2000) and exploring various identities based on the interaction between their understanding of self and exposures/experiences within their environmental and sociocultural contexts. (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1980; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). According to Tolman (2012), because today's youth are constantly engaged with various media outlets, the media and new technologies—that they own and interact with—have not only shaped their schemas, or unique patterns of thought, but have also become extensions of who they are and how they connect with others. This process of examining their identities with respect to the information gathered from media regarding their culture(s) helps Black and ethnic minority youth determine who and what they want to identify as. They are then able to develop their own self-schemas and, in the process, further define their own identities.

As part of this continuous process of adjustment, today's youth make consistent identity changes throughout their lifetime to assimilate the messages received on their mobile devices, social networking services (SNS), and the internet, as well as from within their peer groups and their sociocultural contexts (Boyd, 2008; Chia, 2006; Tajfel, 2010; Ward, 2003; Weber & Mitchell, 2008) in order to keep up with the trends and perceptions of what the media and their peers deem socially appropriate. Weber and Mitchell (2008) also asserted that youth teach each

other and thus co-construct their identities using SNSs such as MySpace, Facebook, InstaGram, SnapChat, and Twitter.

By utilizing various sources to connect to the media, young women are not only exposed to sexualized content but also produce their own (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Chua & Chang, 2016; Shafer et al., 2013; Stokes, 2007). One way that young women are producing their own sexual content is through sexy selfie practices. Yet an important part of the study of young women who want to express their sexual liberation or share their bodies with their peers through their identity exploration is being neglected. While some young women who engage in sexy selfie practices feel silenced and ashamed of their explicit images becoming exposed to unintended audiences (Hartzog, 2013), others feel empowered (Simmons, 2013) by the ability to be sexually free and noticed. This research will explore the ways in which young Black women experience technology and social media as a tool in their sexual identity development and how their meaning making process may influence who they become.

## Critical Lenses Through Which Sexy Selfies May Be Studied

Two feminist theories critical to this research have differing worldviews concerning girls' sexuality. Black feminists and Hip Hop feminists have strongly contrasting views on how Black women's sexuality exploration and performance should be exemplified. For example, Black feminists believe that Black women should abide by strict respectability politics, which are culturally implicit rules governing how Black women should carry themselves, (Durham et al., 2013), whereas, Hip Hop feminists advocate for pleasure politics (jamila, 2002; Morgan, 2015). This study views sexy selfie practices through the theoretical lens of Hip Hop feminism. Also critical to this study are the concepts and theories of identity development because of their contribution to an understanding of young Black women's engagement in sexy selfies.

## Hip Hop Feminism

Hip Hop feminism seeks to combat the racial and sexist oppression enacted on Black women and other racial and ethnic groups (Morgan, 2017). Hip Hop feminism is utilized for this study because it recognizes that there are myriad truths and because it gives voice to the individual stories of young Black women. According to Pough (2007) people cannot continue to make claims about what is happening to the women in Hip Hop music videos—or in the broader society—without complicating the discussion by adding the voices of young Black women. Writers like Morgan, Pough, jamila, Peoples, and Durham believe that Hip Hop serves as a vehicle for young Black women to critically analyze various problems affecting their lives and that Black women should define for themselves their own ethnic, gender, and sexual identities (Peoples, 2008). Thus, following the tenets of Hip Hop feminism, this study seeks to critically analyze the sexism, racism, ageism and classism, as well as the silences placed on young Black women who engage in sexy selfie practices.

Although women's sexuality has been a much debated and taboo topic of critical discussion, restraints and silences have been perpetually placed on young women in regard to their sexuality and sexual exploration (Baker, 2004; Blair, 2014; Hammonds, 2004). Moreover, women receive contradictory messages regarding how they should express their sexuality. Pipher (1998) specifically stated that:

> Girls today are much more oppressed. They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated culture. They face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated, which … means using chemicals and being sexual. As they navigate a more dangerous world, girls are less protected (p. 12).

While mass and social media images seem to encourage sexual liberties, the American social order and ideology discourages sexual agency, especially for young girls (Harris, 2004; Sales,

2016) and young Black women (Morgan, 2015). By utilizing the critical theory of Hip Hop feminism, one can begin to understand and analyze how the contradictory messages and oppressive factors contribute to a young Black woman's sexuality and identity development.

**Identity Development**

Identity development (ID) is the process of an individual finding out who they are and who they want to become. The process is heavily influenced by the individual's self-schema, which is in turn influenced by the individual's interpretation of the varied messages they receive from the sociocultural and environmental contexts in which they are growing and developing. These contexts include mass and social media messages that youth are exposed to. Thus, in relation to engaging in sexy selfie practices, it is the social media proliferation among Generation Z women that leads to sexual exploration through the use of sexy selfies, which then informs their defined identity. Thomas et al. (2011), found that it was impossible for Black women to separate their Black racial and cultural identity from their gendered identity. Therefore, when discussing the young Black women in this study, it is necessary to examine their combined gendered racial identity. For the purposes of this study, I sought to understand the gendered racial and sexual identity development of young Black women aged 18 to 24 who have engaged in sexy selfie practices.

## Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study has two objectives: to understand how young Black women experience and navigate sexuality during a critical period of identity development and to identify how specific characteristics of identity are cultivated by sexy selfie practices. In this Hip Hop feminist (HHF) and identity development (ID) narrative inquiry, nine Black women residing in an urban community in the Mid-South were interviewed to explore their personal understanding

and experiences about sexuality and sexy selfies practices. During the semi-structured interview, I probed for information about identity (i.e., their perceptions of who they are), specifically inquiring about aspects of their identity that correspond with or have emerged from their sexuality and sexy selfie practices. Participant and researcher journals were used to further identify the relationships between identity and sexy selfie practices. Participant journaling was constructed based on participants' choice and researcher prompts. The researcher journals were the result of reflection from the individual interviews and throughout the analysis process.

## Research Questions

The following research questions emerged through preliminary investigation of this topic:

1) How is young Black women's identity development influenced and shaped by sexy selfie practices?
2) In young Black women, what characteristics of identity are influenced by sexy selfie practices?
3) In young Black women, how are these characteristics of identity shaped by social media and sexy selfie practices?

## Significance of the Study

Like young women of previous generations, the young women of Generation Z depend heavily on the opinions of others (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Milkie, 1999). Since the developmental ages between 11 and 24 represent a prime time in which identity development is most influential, understanding the influence that media and peers have on young women is critical. Understanding how the development of young women's sexual identity is being cultivated through the perceived messages and influences surrounding them is essential for this study. Tolman (2012) has argued that the media strategically encourage young women to look

sexy and perform a more explicit form of sexuality. Specifically, Tolman (2012) stated that girls are being barraged by deafening messages that their appearance is what matters and that looking sexy is what counts. In an effort to blend in with others and do what matters, young adult women, who passionately desire to be esteemed and accepted by their peers, engage in high-risk behaviors, like posting sexy selfies online, in order to mimic what they perceive to be socially acceptable (Brown et al., 2009). As these youth are continuing to understand, navigate, and form their own identities, many more are engaging in explicit sexual self-presentations by using various technologies and media outlets hoping to both express themselves and blend in with their peers (Coulthard, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Ryan, 2014; Simmons, 2013).

Hip Hop is a cultural medium through which Black youth construct their identities. The messages that they receive from various Hip Hop sources can influence the subsequent behaviors that they engage in to express those identities (Morgan, 2017). Hip Hop culture has historically provided a space for disenfranchised youth of color and young women to resist oppression (Morgan, 2017; Peoples, 2008; Pough, 2007). Therefore, youth can use Hip Hop to claim a public voice to evoke change. However, some youth are so heavily influenced by their peers, the media, and Hip Hop culture that they sometimes lose an ideal view of themselves in the dominant messages and images. The majority of the messages that young Black women are exposed to through media in general and within Hip Hop culture in particular portray them as being overly sexual (Stephens, 2012; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stokes, 2007). Thus, young Black women internalize these messages surrounding their sexuality and oftentimes begin to engage in sexting practices (Stokes, 2007). Many of these young women engage in sexting practices as a means of coping with the silences of oppression placed on them by not having

positive outlets and supports to discuss their developing identities and sexualities (Stokes, 2007), while others engage in sexy selfie practices for other unknown reasons.

Hip Hop feminists like Morgan, Durham, Peoples, Pough, and jamila developed key tenets that specifically use various aspects of Hip Hop culture to encourage Blacks, especially Black youth, to "fuck with the grays" (Morgan, 2017) "bring wreck while breaking silences" (Pough, 2015), and demand politics that are centered on pleasure and empowerment rather than respectability and "White is right" ideologies in regard to their sexualities. Though these constructs represent a completely different stance on Black girls' sexuality and identity development from Black feminism, Hip Hop feminism would not and refuses to exist without its predecessor (Morgan, 2017). For this reason, the foundations of Black feminism and other critically dismantling oppressive factors constraining Black women and other minorities are embedded within these tenets. As previously mentioned, Black women form their identities through the sociocultural contexts of their everyday lives (Tajfel, 2010). Therefore, Hip Hop culture and 21st century social media culture are critical to their developing identities. Since social media are so heavily populated with sexual content (Tolman, 2012) and images of hyper-sexual Black women (Stephens & Phillips, 2003), many young Black women project that they have learned what is socially and culturally acceptable by sharing and/or posting sexy selfies. In efforts to appease their three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000), curious Black girls often engage in sexy selfie practices sometimes before weighing out the risks that place them in potentially dangerous situations. Because Black girls have often been silenced through the respectability politics of Black feminism and related ideologies and left alone with no space for discourse, either in school and at home, they are often left to interpret the sexualized media messages on their own (Baker,

2004). Thus, feeling oppressed and silenced, many Black girls do not understand positive ways to present themselves or develop healthy identities or ideologies of their culture (Stephens, 2012; Stokes, 2007). If adolescents and young adults are not given the opportunity to negotiate the messages that they are receiving, or do not have the appropriate supports in place to educate and guide them, then they will have persistent issues with interpreting what the messages mean as well as how they should combat them. Thus, it is imperative to start engaging them in critical conversations regarding their sexual development and teach critical media analysis as early as possible so that they can feel empowered to understand and critique the meanings of the media messages they are exposed to and what they mean for their lives. Hip Hop feminism and identity development theories were chosen to inform this study because of their relevance to the societal issues under investigation here. These theories will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

## Overview of the Study

This chapter explicates the phenomenon of sexy selfies; provides a rationale for the importance of exploring young Black women's identity development; and presents the research questions guiding this study. Chapter Two addresses the theoretical framework that incorporates Hip Hop feminism and identity development theories in support of this study and a review of the literature including the theoretical concepts and tenets as well as previous sexy selfie research. A literature review and the methodology for this research are presented. Chapter Three contains a discussion of the methodology and methods utilized. These include narrative inquiry methodology, and the use of semi-structured interviews, and journaling as an important tool for this research. A discussion of the analysis process and unique co-constructed prose-based representations of the data collected are presented. Chapter Four includes nine unique co-constructed narratives used as data representation of the participants and an explicit

interpretation of how meaning was made based on their shared experiences with engagement with sexy selfies. Finally, in Chapter Five, the emergent themes, implications, recommendations, limitations to the study, and ideas for future research are discussed.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter One was written as an overview and introduction to this study. After reading Chapter One, readers should be able to understand the problem, its significance, and the theoretical framework that was used, and get a slight glimpse of the research design. Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical lenses of Hip Hop feminism and identity development that are used as frameworks to examine the phenomenon of sexy selfie engagement among young Black women and a review of the current literature pertaining to sexy selfies. It begins with an explanation of the cultural factors affecting young Black women in 21st century America, then covers the theories. and finally concludes with research pertaining to sexy selfies.

### 21st Century, Social Media, Peers, & Selfie Cultural Influences on Black Girls

The 21st century is marked by changes in both social and cultural values: families have become more diverse; more people are choosing whether to get married and have children; same-sex marriage has become legalized in the United States; and the idea of gender fluidity has emerged (Harris, 2004; Tobin, 2018). Cultural changes have shaped American lifestyles, including advances in technology, the influx of mass media messages, and the proliferation of social media platforms and mobile devices, all of which may interfere with people's face-to-face conversations and affect their identity developmental process (Lewellen, 2002; Tobin, 2018). Mobile devices further provide immediate access to harmful and influential content, such as pornography, sexy selfies, and violence.

Socialization has changed the way people grow, develop, and learn due to social media and social networking sites and because of the worldwide opportunities to exchange information (Knibbs, 2014; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016). Networks like Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter provide people with the platforms to support people and things they like as

well as learn more from other people. Social sites provide spaces to share sexually explicit videos, photos, and other media images at earlier ages, which can impact their development and behavior (Miller, 2008; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016).

Young adults (ages 18–24) are beyond the "identity versus role confusion" stage of Psychosocial Development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998), but they continue to develop their identity and are prone to sociocultural influences within their social environments, particularly peers and media (Shafer et al., 2013). Young adults engage in behaviors that will give them a sense of commonality and a feeling of love and belonging (Maslow, 1943). Young adulthood is a time for sexual exploration, and the complexities of sexual identity development are influenced by the ease and access of technology and social media (Brown et al., 2009; Tajfel, 2019). Super peer theory, according to Strasburger (2004) and Brown and colleagues (2005), is a phenomenon in which today's youth are exposed to sex, drugs, and violence at higher rates; and this becomes acceptable and desirable behavior. Increased exposure to sexual awareness through technology and social media has created a generational culture wherein sexual language (e.g., sexting) and sexually provocative images (e.g., sexy selfies) are uninhibited and acceptable (Brown et al., 2009; Gorman, 2013; Kohn, 2015; Miller, 2008).

Technology and social media have become catalysts for today's youth to develop peer relationships and explore their sexual selves during a critical period of identity development (Doornwaard et al., 2014). Media and popular culture help young adults make sense of the world around them (Emerson, 2002). According to Brown and colleagues (2009), exposure to sexual content through media outlets accelerate sexual activity and increase the chances of sexual intercourse well before it is developmentally appropriate. Trends toward earlier sexualization in development warrant more in-depth investigation about the impact of media on sexual

understanding and identity development (Chalfen, 2009). Recent research suggests that youth who perceive themselves as similar to their peers who send sexting messages—or who want to be like this type of peer—will likely imitate their role models, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will engage in sexting or sexy selfie behavior (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Love, 2016).

Previous research suggest that older adolescents and young adults share sexual content and images online (Brown et al., 2006; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stokes, 2007); however, prior to 2014, few studies have investigated how sexually explicit online sharing might influence different cultural groups. This research will investigate how exposure and use of technology and media influence young Black women's sexual self and identity development.

Young Black women may assume that, because the media are heavily populated with sexy and explicit images of Black women, then sexualizing their online presence is acceptable and even expected in order for them to be part of their peer group and liked by others (Stephens et al., 2017; Tolman, 2012). As Stephens and Phillips (2003) stated, "The exoticizing of African American women as wild, sexually promiscuous, and amoral continues to be normalized…and used to frame ideas about the population" (p. 4). Therefore, the master narrative created about Black women's sexuality is not new to the media; this is something that has been ingrained in the American culture and Black women's identity (Lorde, 1984; Love, 2016; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Nevertheless, Black women continue to be sexually misrepresented and exploited in the media; this in turn contributes to how young Black women are influenced to identify (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Stephens et al., 2017; Stokes, 2007). More alarming is that, today, the use of media to exploit Black women is not limited to an unknown publisher or filmmaker. It is an entire generation of young Black women who are unknowingly (for some

reason) exploiting themselves. However, it is not yet known which young Black women explore their identity or sexuality through expressions and postings on social media and technology.

In efforts to blend in with others their own age, young Black women may engage in high-risk behaviors such as sexting and posting sexy selfies online. Although several scholars have explored predictors of adolescents' and young adults' sexy selfie sharing, sexual self-presentation (van Oosten et al., 2017; Doornwaard et al., 2014), exposure to sexy selfies (Albury, 2015; Baumgartner et al., 2015; van Oosten et al., 2015), attitudes toward sex, sexy selfies, and sexual experience (Doornwaard et al., 2014; Döring, 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; van Oosten et al., 2015), and how they endorse stereotypical gender roles in their sexy-selfie content (van Oosten et al., 2017), previous research has not been very clear as to why youth display sexual and romantic content online, nor how this behavior influences the Black feminist identity of young Black women. Doornwaard and colleagues (2014) indicate that, because young adults are so susceptible to societal, media, and perceived peer messages, their choice to display sexual and romantic content online may be a way that they are reacting to perceived social norms and a way to try out and embrace their identities.

## What are Sexy Selfies Exactly?

As previously mentioned, sexy selfies, in the cumulative sense, are pictures, videos, texts, and sexually suggestive emojis that one uses to (re)present one's sexuality, preferences, sexual readiness, and desire (Crescenzi et al. 2013; Doornwaard et al. 2014; Döring, 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Albury, 2015; Walgrave et al., 2015; van Oosten et al., 2017). In the past, previous research has used terms such as sexual self-presentations, sexting, and explicit image sharing to describe what will from henceforth be called sexy selfies. Previous research suggests that youth perform and represent themselves in stereotypical gender roles through social media

sites and other communication outlets as a means to explore their developing identities and to learn about what is socially appropriate when it comes to sexual matters (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Doornwaard et al., 2014; van Oosten et al., 2017). One way that these young people are doing this is through the use of sexy selfies, which may be shared privately through text messaging, direct/instant messaging, email. Sexy selfies may also be shared publicly by uploading the images or video content through various media and social networking outlets.

Sexy selfies are particularly unique to the 21st century culture because unlike previous eras, sexy selfies are not disposable or easily deleted like self-portraits on a Polaroid. Also, although webcams, which utilize similar technology as a sexy selfie, were prevalent towards the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, sexy selfies are more permanent. Thus, an individual's present or future identity and overall lifestyle could be gravely affected if the images are leaked, exposed, or sent to the wrong individuals. Sexy selfies are predominant in the lives of youth globally; nevertheless, due to the prevalence of sexual images and media messages central to Black culture, young Black women are very susceptible to the influences of social media and sexy selfie culture (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Stephens et al., 2017; Stokes, 2007).

## Theoretical Framework

Culture and context are very relevant to understanding this research; but theory helps to create a vantage point to truly understand the various layering relevant to this research and used to begin explaining how young Black women engage in sexy selfie practices. Theory is defined as the lens through which one views research and it is dependent upon what it is that one is researching. Crotty (2003) describes an individual's theoretical perspective as the way that individual "looks at the world and makes sense of it" (p. 8). In the following sections, the

theories of Hip Hop Feminism and Identity Development will be discussed in order to create a lens through which to understand how and why young Black women aged 18 to 24 may engage in sexy selfie practices and how this may impact their identities. The following graphic organizer is used to outline the theoretical framework used for this study and to highlight the key players and major tenets of both theoretical lenses (See Figure 1). As exemplified below this research is both a Feminist study and an identity development study.

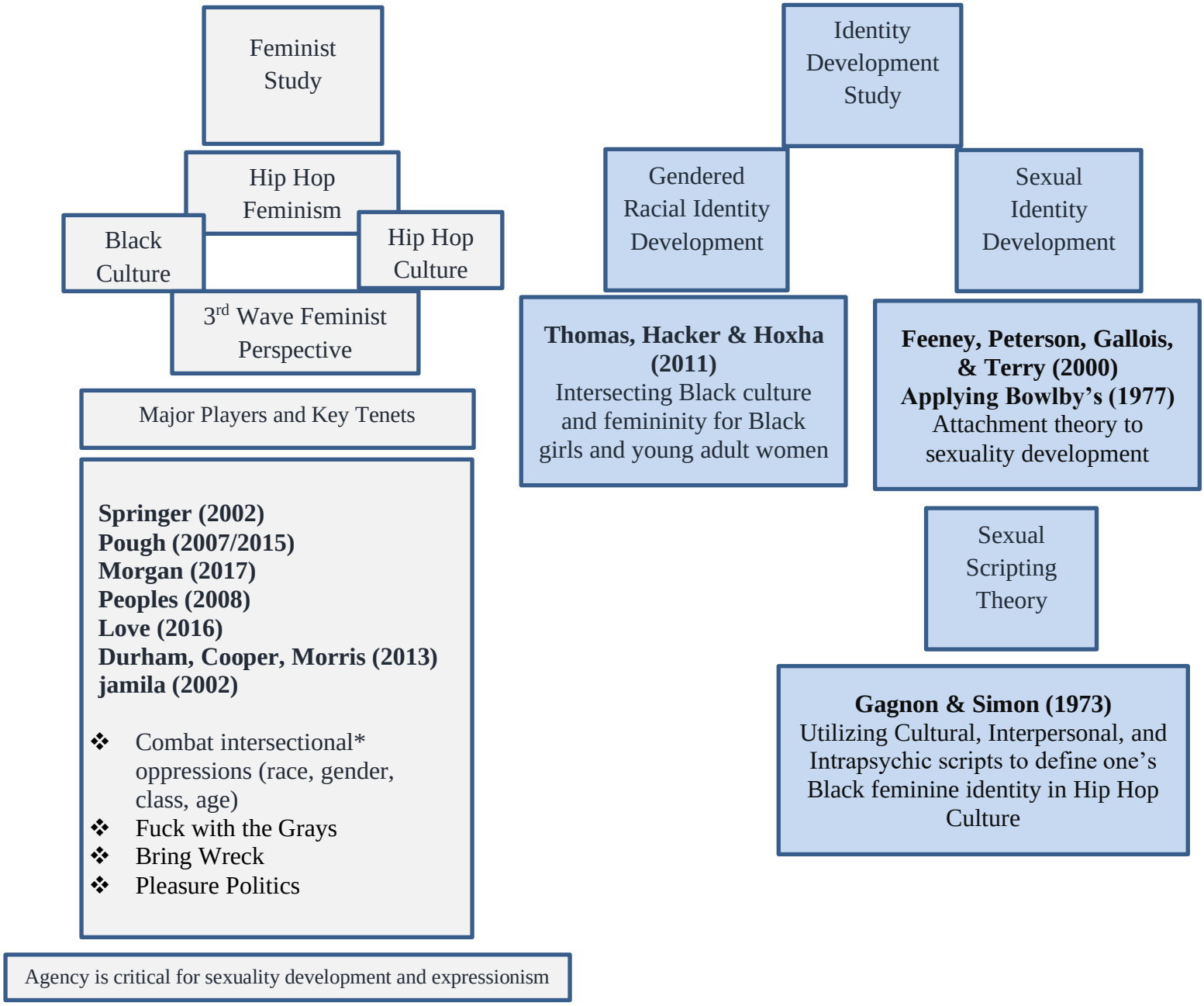



Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

## Hip Hop Feminism

Hip Hop Feminism is a theoretical, political, and cultural movement that was created to bring the Black feminist agendas of the first two waves of feminism and put them into the context of Hip Hop (HH) culture. In 1999, Joan Morgan, coined the term Hip Hop Feminism (HHF) by writing a book about how she did not see a place for herself within the present Black feminist community. The title of her book, *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*, details the lived experiences that brought her home through HH culture. Because Morgan's feelings also resonated with others, HHF became a movement that was created to lay bare the contradictions that confront not only Black women but also other racial and ethnic groups that have been shaped by racial and sexist oppression (Morgan, 2017). One of the ultimate goals of HHF is to empower Black and Brown women through actively combatting injustices related to race, sex, gender, and age. This goal is very similar to those of Black feminisms (Peoples, 2008). However, in the 1990s, Black female writers such as Brent-Zooks, Morgan, jamila, Davis, and Pough argued for a new feminist movement for Black American women because the second-wave Black feminist movement "failed to address the current realities and needs of young Black women" (Peoples, 2008, p. 20).

HHF is a theory that calls for a critical cultural analysis of sexism, racism, classism, and ageism (Henry, 2010) in order to illuminate the shift toward gender equality within HH culture by providing functionality for the young Black women living and thriving in it (Morgan, 2017). According to Peoples (2008), HHF is "a generational and culturally relevant vehicle" (p. 30) that uses feminist tools of resistance that young Black women can use to critically analyze their ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. It also provides a space for activists, writers, feminists, and other scholars to critique racism, sexism, and homo/transphobia beyond the misogyny that is

expressed within mainstream HH culture so that they can spread the message of resistance and empowerment (Peoples, 2008).

HHF is a very elastic theoretical perspective in the sense that it provides a more flexible way of talking about and combatting situations important to Black women as compared to other theoretical lenses. HHF utilizes the creativity of HH culture, without the sexist overtones overtly associated with patriarchal HH to promote self-love, to establish unique self-definitions, and challenge representations that challenge and negate this view of self. In other words, HHF is a modern feminist perspective that offers exploration of Black women as powerful, creative, dynamic, and talented members of the HH culture rather than as victims (Morgan, 2017). According to Morgan (2017) Black feminism (BF) focused too much of its attention on victimization and sexism in rap when these things are only part of the problem. Morgan specifically argues for scholars to explore women's agency instead of continuing to label them as victims. Morgan (2017) would also argue that you cannot conceptualize HHF without first recognizing and acknowledging its predecessors. Therefore, it is important to briefly review the major criticisms HH feminists found with the slack left from Black feminists' agendas.

**Why HHF and Not BF—Three Critiques of Black Feminism**

Contrary to popular belief, HH feminists have not abandoned historical manifestations of Black feminism. Instead, they build quite extensively on the work of first- and second-wave Black feminists by utilizing themes such as empowerment, the importance of images and representation, and Black women's involvement in coalitional politics (Peoples, 2008). According to Springer (2002) the HH generation must pay homage to past struggles and the fights prevalent with previous generations; therefore, HHF is specifically concerned with the "ways the conservative backlash of the 1980s and 1990s, deindustrialization, the slashing of the

welfare state, and the attendant gutting of social programs and affirmative action, along with the increasing racial wealth gap, have affected the life, worlds, and worldviews of the Hip Hop generation" (Durham et al., 2013, p. 722-723). Thus, making HHF a third wave feminist perspective.

Although HH feminists like Morgan, jamila, and Pough have neither forgotten nor neglected BF, they have developed three main critiques of BF which have been used to distinguish and develop HHF's agendas and writings: (1) Black feminists (BFs) are too preoccupied with the misogynistic references within HH to recognize the potential to critically analyze it and (re)create alternatives (Peoples, 2008; Springer, 2002); (2) BFs have very narrow, static ideas about feminine identity and ways to combat them (Peoples, 2008); and (3) BF is outdated and is ineffective for the young Black girls born within and after the birth of the HH generation. Thus, the strategies are not only outdated and ineffective, but further do not empower Black youth (Peoples, 2008). HHFs believe that BFs' agendas are not without use, but they need to be updated to be relevant to the everyday realities of Black youth. HHFs share some of the same agendas as the BFs and womanists who saw their struggles with gender oppression as well as their struggles with race and class oppressions. HHFs, however, are women and men who step up and speak out against gender exploitation in HH. HHFs talk about the gender and sexuality issues portrayed in HH and elicit action from those conversations (Pough, 2007). A HH feminist is someone who immerses themselves in HH culture and experiences it as a way of life. Thus, HH culture influences a HH feminist's worldview and approach to life. Pough (2007) calls for HH feminists to be fully engaged in all aspects of Black girls' lives by recognizing that there are myriad truths and a variety of stories concerning this generation. Thus, HH feminists believe in the voices of the people even if they are contradictory and problematic. According to Pough

(2007), people cannot continue to make claims about what is happening to the women in HH music videos or within the broader society without complicating the discussion by adding their voices. Some women have chosen to buy into the sexism and misogyny and do so by giving new meaning to the Black woman's place in HH culture. Thus, representation and objectification present issues of variability and contradiction because all variables must be considered before having a truthful, meaningful discussion—therefore, representation and objectification have two sides—one where they are chosen and the other where they are imposed. HHF is a theoretical vehicle that encapsulates the varying contradictions concerning Blacks within HH culture.

## Key Tenets of Hip Hop Feminism

HHF embraces the contradictions that previous waves of feminist thoughts either neglected or silenced completely. HHFs "fuck with the grays" (Morgan, 2017), "bring wreck" (Pough, 2015), and make the personal political by considering the possibilities of "pleasure politics" (Morgan, 2015) in order to address the predominant issues concerning women and girls of color.

### *You've Got to Be Bold Enough to Fuck with the Grays*

Joan Morgan believes that when combatting the issues concerning Black women, feminists need to be "brave enough to fuck with the grays." Fucking with the grays (FWTGs) is a foundational tenet of HHF that holds that people have contradictions between their lived experiences and their political and social ideologies. According to Durham and colleagues (2013), this means that individuals reject the "easy and essentialist" views of what it means to be called a feminist, take political stances, and combat the binaries of right and wrong. FWTGs is critical to sexy selfie research because it allows young Black women to break silences placed on them concerning their sexuality and empowers them to combat shame. HHFs often reference

Foxy Brown, Lil' Sasha, and now Nicki Minaj and Cardi B as women who perpetuate the sexually promiscuous stereotype of Black American women. Nevertheless, HHFs also see these women rappers as women who are bold enough to FWTGs by exerting coercive power and using their lyrics as well as their sexual image to disrupt and resist the hetero-patriarchal ideologies and identities projected onto Black women. In this sense, HH artists like Foxy Brown, Lil' Sasha, Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B are catalysts that force a particular conversation about Black women and sexuality to the public domain.

***Wreck This World with How They View Us***

Gwendolyn Pough (2015) borrows the next tenet of HHF, bringing wreck, from HH rap culture. It is centered on how Black women in HH insert themselves within the public sphere to reshape how Black people are viewed in the broader society. Within HH culture bringing wreck refers to someone who has great HH skills that cause their audience to disrupt their automatic thought process and force them to look and listen. Peoples (2008) explains that HHF is a way to break the silence by using that radical, liberating power to express oneself. Pough (2015) and Lindsey (2015) also acknowledge the power of HH culture to dismantle historical and contemporary negative representations of Black womanhood. Specifically, Pough (2015) recognizes that female rappers have power to bring wreck to the dominant HH discourses and stereotypes that often leave women without agency (Lewis, 2005: Peoples, 2008; Pough, 2015). By bringing wreck, Black women in HH are able to use their lyrics to tell their stories, reconfigure their identities, and disrupt the public perceptions of Black people. Although bringing wreck is common within the HH genre of rap, specifically the rap lyrics, it is possible for Black women to also disrupt worldviews and bring wreck with visual imagery and sexy selfies. By using their sexy selfies, Black women can pair with these images their unique stories

and bring wreck by offering their versions of truth with regard to their sexuality and development.

***Pleasure Politics is What Our Generation Needs***

HHF is also focused on promoting self-love and having a defined, unique sense of self (Love, 2016). This stems from a desire to reject the hetero-patriarchal lenses, respectability politics, and notions of what is right and wrong, and instead embrace pleasure politics. HHFs believe that respectability politics places undue strains on Black women by requiring them to maintain behaviors and notions of honor, self-respect, and piety in order to promote racial uplift and equal rights and to represent women of color as ladies and queens instead of bitches and whores (Durham et al., 2013). Respectability politics were created and used by BFs as a forum to discuss and resist the racist and misogynistic injustices they experienced. Nevertheless, Morgan (2015) introduced the concept of pleasure politics in order to create a positive, safe space for Black women to explore the pleasures of their sexuality. Pleasure politics elevates the need for sexual autonomy and erotic agency without shame which challenges BFs to make a commitment to reframe the existing narrative about Black female sexuality by incorporating desire, agency, and Black women's engagements with pleasure without centering the conversations on men and their pleasure (Morgan, 2015). When focused on the sexuality of Black women, HHFs believe that agency is critical for sexuality development and expressionism. Morgan (2015) references the gray areas related to Black women's sexuality and pleasure when she states: "I want an erotic that demands space be made for honest bodies that also like to fuck" (p. 41). What she is essentially advocating for is a space that not only treats Black women with respect as human beings, but also allows Black women to explore their sexualities in whatever way they deem necessary. Other HHFs, like shani jamila (2002) wrote about these contradictory gray areas and

the role that feminists must play in ensuring Black women are not forced into heteronormativity or limited on their explorations of their sexuality. Thus, for the young Black women aged 18 to 24, who have engaged in sexy selfie practices, respectability politics will no longer continue to work for their generation—instead they need pleasure politics.

## Identity Development Theories

Identity Development is one essential part of human life-span development which includes the physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional developmental changes that occur within an individual throughout their life span. Developmental theorists have applied and researched various aspects of development from birth through death and found that development is a lifelong process that is multidimensional, multidirectional, multidisciplinary, and contextual. Of the aforementioned elements, context is a major factor in the individual differences between each individual and their overall development. Contextual factors include everything that surrounds an individual: their family, friends, home, community, school, media, and especially their influencing cultures, all of which help to shape their identity. For example, young adults often create and modify their current selves, their future selves, and the selves that they wish others to see by interpreting the nuanced and often contradictory messages received from each of the aforementioned contexts and cultural influences (Tajfel, 2010).

Today's youth have a precarious developmental process because they are heavily influenced by SNSs and global mass media messages that they can access at lighting speeds. Since media and popular culture help individuals make sense of the world around them (Emerson, 2002), it is crucial to understand the influential power of media on one's developing identity. Social media is an especially influential form of global mass media that creates a space for exploring and developing one's identity. Thus, as young Black women are taking in cues

from the media about the appropriate ways to be a woman, they are influenced by the media messages and images that they are exposed to (Emerson, 2002; Milkie, 1999; Shafer et al., 2013). For young women who have no idea how to perform feminine roles, they turn to the media. Therefore, in this study, young women aged 18 through 24 were afforded the opportunity through interview dialogue and reflective journaling to share how their experiences with social media, their peers, and exposure to mass media messages encouraged their engagement with sexy selfies and thus influence their identity. For the purposes of this research study, young adult women who identity as Black girls or women, who are current consumers of both Hip Hop culture and social media culture, shared their stories in order to help me gain an understanding of how they are navigating their own identity development in light of the pervasive and overly sexualized media messages and other cultural influences. Thus, this study is not only a feminist study but also an identity development study.

**Identity Development—A Critical Component of the Self**

As individuals progress through life, each experiences many forms of development and construct their personal identity. Identity Development (ID) is a phenomenological experience which must be lived in order for one to come to understand oneself (Thomas et al., 2011). Identity deals with who the person is as well as their personality characteristics, desires, values, behaviors, and lifestyle choices; and it is based upon an individual's self-concept in addition to who they could possibly become. One aspect of identity development that is true for all cultures is that individuals must make observations of the world around them and understand their lived experiences in order to determine exactly the who they want to be and thus act accordingly (Emerson, 2002; Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Tajfel, 2010). Developing and solidifying an identity is an internalized process that involves an individual examining multiple self-concepts that

consistently change and grow throughout the lifespan of that person. While gendered-racial and sexual development will be the focal points of discussion for this study, there are myriad identity concepts that influence one's self-concept as well as their possible and future selves.

**Gendered Racial Identity Development and Black Girls**

According to Thomas and colleagues (2011) in order to truly understand the experiences that Black women encounter during identity development, it is critical to understand the intersection of both race and gender. Neither the gendered models nor the racial models independently seem to account for intragroup differences or the varied individual experiences. Additionally, when studied independently, these constructs are limited in fully explaining the cultural identity development of Black women. Therefore, according to Thomas and colleagues (2011) the construct of gendered racial identity may better explain the developmental process that occurs for Black women and girls; and by recognizing the reality that they are both Black and female will help them to be psychologically healthy.

Gendered racial identity is concerned with addressing questions like: What does it mean to be both a Black person and a woman? It assesses the intersectionality of both race and gender and how, when combined, this construct affects the lives of Black girls and women. According to Thomas and colleagues (2011) the focus on single identity factors, either race or gender, fails to acknowledge the complexity of identity or the intersection of multiple identity factors. Though gender and race may be separate social constructs, it is the intersectionality of the two that provide a holistic perspective of one's life and simultaneously structure one's experiences and their self-concept (Thomas et al., 2011).

Thomas and colleagues (2011) conducted a qualitative study with 17 African American (i.e., Black) young women between the ages of 15-21 in order to assess the salience of gendered

racial identity in their lives as well as how the development of a gendered racial identity attributed to their life experiences. Thomas and colleagues (2011) concluded that the participants viewed the simultaneous combination of both race and gender as a critical influence on how they viewed and identified themselves. During their study, Thomas and colleagues (2011) indicated that there was heaviness within their participants' responses because the young women expressed concerns with the pervasive negative images and expectations of Black women within society, and especially in the media. According to the Thomas et al. (2011) study, these young women felt that the negative images influenced their sense of self, their perceptions of beauty, and relationships with others. These findings support the importance of intersectionality and add to the current body of identity development research; and addresses the issues of limitation when using a single identity factor to understand identity development in Black youth. This study further discusses the negative impact of the current Jezebel variations, including "freaks," "gold diggers," "divas," and "dykes" seen in the music videos which influence sexual scripts of Black girls. This study does not, however, define the construct of sexual identity development nor the impact these sexual scripts have on Black women's identity development.

**Sexual Identity Development: Theories and Constructs**

Previous attempts to understanding sexuality and sexual identity development were centered on the rigidities of the libido theory and other Freudian perspectives (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Nevertheless, when examining the effects everyday social life has upon the developmental process and how these connect to culture and context, one must examine the sexual scripting theory. Furthermore, in order to understand some of the rationales provided for engaging in sexy selfies, it is important to investigate how young Black women who engage in sexy selfies form an attachment to the opinions of others through their need to belong and gain

acceptance which as Schachner and Shaver (2004) indicate behaviors has an effect on their sexual motives and activities. In the following sections the sexual identity development theories posited by Gagnon and Simon (1973) (e.g., sexual scripting theory) and by Feeney and colleagues (2002) (e.g., attachment in sexual identity) will be further discussed.

### *Sexual Scripting Theory*

The idea of the sexual scripting theory is that human sexuality and sexual activity are learned and performed through social interactions (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). While human sexuality is usually analyzed through the perspectives of biologists and clinicians, Gagnon and Simon (1973) found that sexuality and sexual activity can be understood in cultural, historical, and social ways. Specifically, Gagnon believed that sexual conduct is entirely historically and culturally determined (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). According to Simon and Gagnon (1986) scripts are simply a metaphorical way of trying to conceptualize everyday behavior within social contexts. Scripts indicate the roles that people must play in various situations and provide a roadmap of what should be done or said depending upon the context regardless of what you may want to do.

In order for behavior to be considered as a script, Simon and Gagnon (1986) identified three distinct levels that must occur: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intrapsychic scripts. These three levels of sexual scripting provide a conceptual framework for understanding how not only sociocultural influences, but also individual factors shape sexual behaviors.

Cultural scenarios occur when individuals are guided by institutions and institutional arrangements to behave or perform a certain way (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). They provide instructive narratives to individuals so that they understand the requirements of specific roles and thus perform accordingly (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Cultural scripts indicate what behavior is

considered to be normal and moral based upon the dominant culture as well as the subcultures, which may include family, peers, mass media, and other religious and community institutions (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). Media messages, primarily produced by adults, convey the sociocultural norms of gender and sexuality; and Stokes (2007) asserts that media messages are an important source of information about sex and sexuality for women as they learn to negotiate their own sexuality. Thus, many women use sexual-cultural scripts as instructions for what is or is not socially and culturally acceptable based on a variety of collective meanings (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Simon & Gagnon, 1986; Simon & Gagnon, 2003; Smith, 2012).

Interpersonal scripts refer to the individual's specific application of the cultural scenarios learned (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) so that the individual determines which of the behaviors will provide them with their specific desired results. While cultural scripts provide the general roles of sexual behavior between individuals based on what is considered right and wrong as outlined by societal standards, the interpersonal scripts help the individual determine when to adapt to the roles in a given context.

Intrapsychic scripts relate to how the individual manages and balances the cultural norms with their own desires. Specifically, intrapsychic scripts are the internal biological and personal aspects for each person as it relates to what turns them on and what they like to imagine (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). According to Simon and Gagnon (1986) intrapsychic scripts refer to an individual's way of ordering images and desires to sustain sexual arousal. Wiederman (2015) stated that intrapsychic scripts represent the true desires of an individual's unique sexuality. For example, a Black woman who engages in sexy selfie practices may be exposed to and acknowledge the mainstream Hip Hop sexual scripts such as the freak but then, through

intrapsychic scripting, internalize how she will (re)present this script to her audience via sexy selfie, text, or video.

During young adulthood Black women are at a critical stage in their development where they begin to engage in a dynamic search for identity and a negotiation of intimate relationships (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Stephens & Phillips, 2003). Black youth are especially impacted by sociocultural influences within their communities, from the media, and within Hip Hop culture, through their engagement as social media and HH consumers, and these influences have a major impact on their sense of self. Hip Hop culture alone contributes to the concepts of self held by many Black youth (Stephens, 2012). Because a lot of the messages Black youth receive about themselves is within HH culture, the videos, music, clothing, and other variations of HH culture must be investigated. When trying to understand the sexual development of Black girls who engage in sexy selfie practices, it is important to examine the influence of Hip Hop culture as well as media messages derived from Hip Hop videos and music lyrics.

**Sexual Scripts, Identity Development, and Black Hip Hop Culture.** Hip Hop culture exists at the intersection of Black culture, Black feminism, Hip Hop feminism, and sexism. Thus, it constitutes a uniquely precarious site for unfolding young Black women's sense of self and particularly their sexual identity (Stephens, 2012). HH culture is exemplified via myriad expressions to include: music videos, commercials, graffiti, dance, clothing, etc. Thus, during a 2012 study of African American women and dating relationships, Stephens (2012) found that physical attractiveness beliefs and sexual behavior outcomes are within the context of mainstream Hip Hop culture. In this study, Stephens (2012) described eight sexual scripts that were not only common within HH music videos, but also proliferated within films, commercials and other forms of media: Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangsta Bitch, Earth Mother, Sister

Savior, and Baby Mama. These mainstream sexual scripts are important to consider given their influence on beliefs about Black women and their subsequent sexual behavior.

As evident from the above conceptualization, sexual scripts are used to organize ideas about appropriate sexual behavior and develop one's own belief system about their sexuality and sexual acts. They also have an impact on how others perceive the sexual behavioral expectations of Black women (Stephens, 2012). Specifically, Stephens (2012) asserts that sexual scripts like the Diva, Gold Digger, Freak, Dyke, Gangsta Bitch, Earth Mother, Sister Savior, and Baby Mama provide people with information about Black women's sexual identity as well as how their dating experiences and interactions with potential partner should be. According to Stephens (2012) men's opinions of women's appearance have a direct impact on the quality and stability of relationships and women's overall self-concept. Thus, when men continuously interpret and accept the sexual scripts prevailing within HH culture, it illustrates their beliefs about the women with whom they will enter an intimate relationship, how they expect the women to behave, and what they are willing to accept. Therefore, as young Black women navigate through the world, they try to appeal to potential partners by mimicking these scripts (Stephens, 2012).

Stephens (2012) confirms the influence of media messages on Black women's identity development. Because they are continuously exposed to sexualized images in mainstream HH music videos, media messages, and on social media, they believe that they should internalize and exhibit the same types of behaviors. Because they are constantly bombarded with these messages and are continuously exposed to sexualized images within the media, they are more inclined to endorse and engage in sexually risky behaviors (Stephens, 2012). Moreover, girls who mature early are more likely to interpret the messages that they see on a constant basis as proof that they should have sexual intercourse and adopt these sexual scripts in order to have a more satisfying

romantic life (Stephens, 2012). Therefore, these beliefs, as research has shown, inform young women's decision-making processes as well as translate into their sexual behavioral outcomes. Thus, Stephens (2012) stressed that due to the fact that media constantly perpetuate these ideals, sexual scripts cannot be ignored as an influencer on Black youth. Sexual scripts portrayed in the media and woven throughout HH culture are influential to Black girls and young adult women who engage in sexy selfie behaviors. Through their developmental explorations, these young girls and women experiment with various scripts by taking explicit images and sharing them in order to get peer approval.

**Attachment Styles Theories and Sexual Identity Development Studies.** In an effort to address the rising concerns of adolescent sexuality and sexual promiscuity, Feeney and colleagues (2000) applied attachment theory to the study of sexuality. Specifically, Feeney et al. (2000) affirmed that the attachment theory is a theoretical perspective that aids in the prediction of sexual attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Additionally, attachment styles acknowledge the individual differences in relationships, sexual beliefs, and experiences (Feeney et al., 2000). Feeney and colleagues (2000) utilized the conceptualization of Bowlby's 1977 theory of attachment to sexuality development.

John Bowlby believed that mental health and behavioral problems occurred as a result of early childhood experiences (Bowlby, 1977). Therefore, after studying various ethological and imprinting studies, he developed a theory of attachment, in which he asserted that all children are biologically pre-programmed to form attachments to others as this will help them to survive and develop a healthy self-concept.

According to Feeney and colleagues (2000) applying attachment theory to studies of sexuality research is pivotal because it is during adolescence and young adulthood that the sexual

system of the individual comes to the forefront. As a part of their research Feeney et al. (2000) stated individuals who form weak attachments to their parents are more likely to engage in sexual activities earlier as well as have more sexual partners than their peers who have a stronger attachment to their parents. Thus, inadequate attachment and bonding presents a risk factor for youth who are already faced with the difficulty of identifying themselves in the world, making and maintaining meaningful relationships, and trying to learn how to support themselves as growing human beings. The results of their study indicate securely attached individuals are less likely to get involved in one-night stands, have multiple sex partners, and engage in other riskier sexual practices. This provides implications for this study as some of the participants did indicate having a distant, strained, or nonexistent relationship with a parent/guardian with whom the participant could have had a weaker attachment to.

The research conducted by Feeney and colleagues (2000) adds to the current body of literature concerning sexual identity development research by shedding a light into the attitudes and behaviors of youth who engage in sexual activities as result of their attachment style. Feeney et al. (2000) found that insecure and anxious attachment styles were linked to increased drug use and unsafe sexual practices. One conclusion made by Feeney and colleagues (2000) was that individuals who exhibited highly anxious feelings about their relationship tended to engage in more risky sexual practices than their peers because they feared the disapproval of their partners. These individuals often viewed non-compliance as jeopardizing to their relationship (Feeney et al., 2000). This illuminates another perspective rationale for why young Black women may engage in sexy selfie practices.

Similarly, Schachner and Shaver (2004) examined the individual differences in attachment styles and sexual motives. Schachner and Shaver (2004) were interested in the way

attachment styles affect the way people care for one another and use their sexuality to represent themselves and meet their individual needs. The results of this study indicate that the higher one's avoidance attachment the more they engaged in sexual activities that were casual, uncommitted and risky. Schachner and Shaver (2004) specifically found that avoidant individuals reported having sex to impress their peers and improve their social prestige, whereas, anxiously attached individuals reported having sex to increase their intimacy, closeness, and feelings of love and belonging to their sex partners. Moreover, anxiously attached individuals also used sex to decrease their levels of insecurity (Schachner & Shaver, 2004). This research adds to sexual identity development research because it helps draw a connection to attachment-related differences in sexual attitudes, motives, and practices which reflect the goals related to the individual's attachment style (Feeney et al., 1993). This research indicated that if the individual wishes to overcome feelings of insecurity or abandonment, they may engage in riskier sexual practices in efforts to form a closer and intimate bond with their partner(s) (Feeney et al., 1993).

### Race, Gender, and Sexuality—Intersections Influencing Black Women's Identity

When identifying as a Black woman, it is hard to separate race, gender, and sexuality. Thomas and colleagues (2011) concluded that Black women are influenced by both race and gender when trying to develop their self-concept and navigate their existence in the world. Furthermore, since Black women have been continuously overly sexualized in the media and in the broader society there is an overarching perception that shapes Black women's sexuality, their self-concept, and what is expected of them (Townsend et al., 2010). Therefore, it is difficult to negate the influence of race, gender, sexuality, and the intersectionalities of all three on developing identity.

## Sexy Selfies Conceptual Model

In the next section, the sociocultural and environmental contexts that influence young Black women's gendered-racial and sexual identity development will be discussed. Figure 2 below represents a way to graphically understand how influences from one's sociocultural and environmental contexts impact their engagement with social media, sexy selfies, and identity development as they are at an age of uninhibited experimentation and self-exploration. Furthermore, this model demonstrates how young Black women's identity development is impacted by the contradictory messages about Black women's sexuality. Finally, the literature specifically addressing how exposure to social media influences a young Black woman's engagement in sexy selfie practices will be presented as well as review of the previous research aims to inquire about sexy selfie practices.

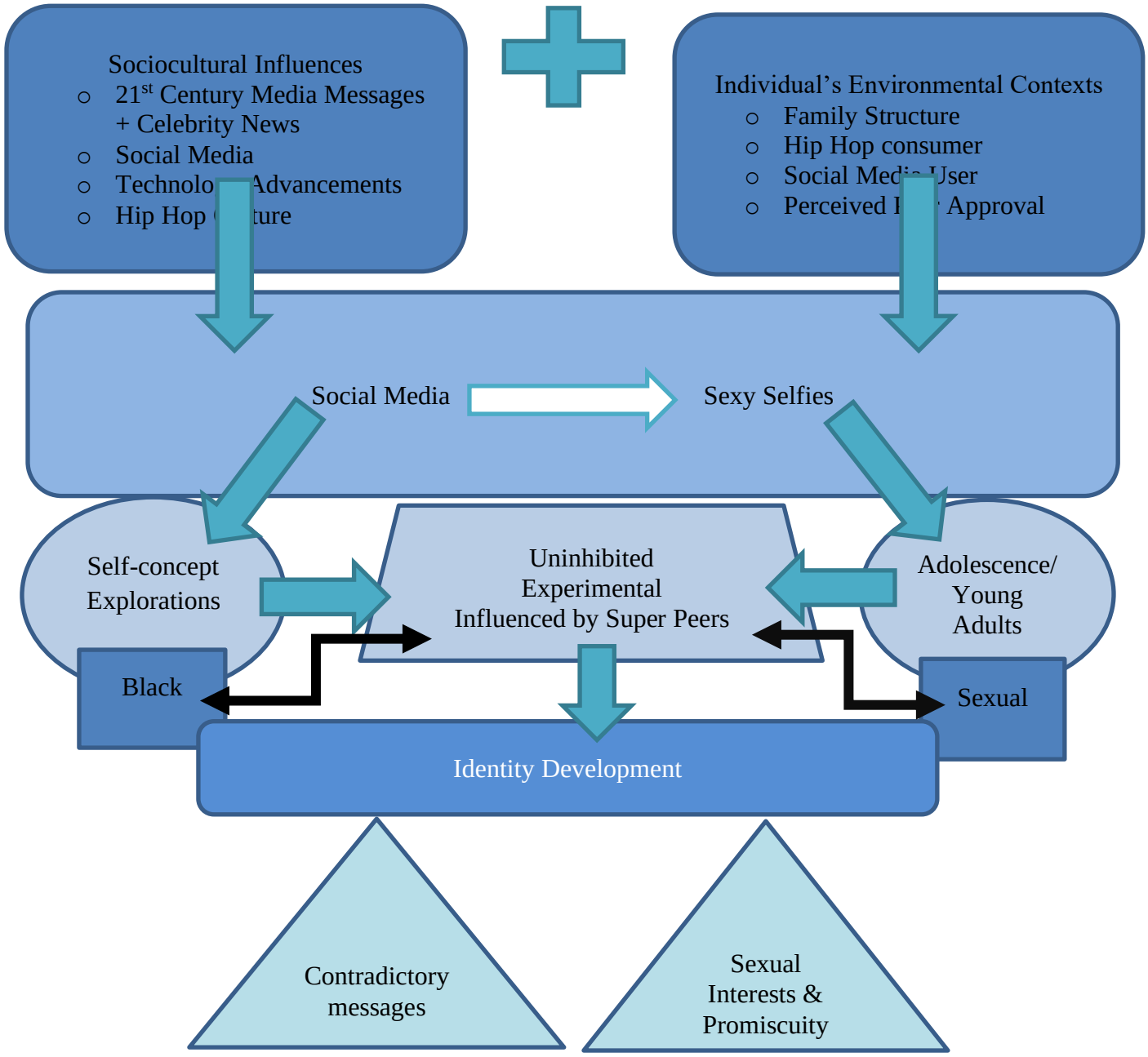



Figure 2. Sexy Selfies Conceptual Model

**Sex Isn't New, but Selfies Are—A Review of Previous Research Aims**

The fact that young women are interested in sex and use various tactics to explore and engage in sexual activities is not a new phenomenon. During the 1980s, research mainly focused on what predicted sex, who was having sex, and why they were having sex as a means to highlight the risks of having sex and prevent the contraction of STDs and underaged pregnancies. During the 21st century, the focus has shifted to youth's engagement with sexual content (i.e., sexting and selfies). Much of the research on sexting and sexy selfies has been focused on identifying their prevalence (Doornwaard et al., 2014), motives for engaging in sexy selfies (Doornwaard et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2017; Walrave, 2015), and risks associated with sharing or posting sexy selfies (Doornwaard et al., 2014; Döring, 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). Nevertheless, research on sexy selfies has primarily focused only on non-Black and non-American youth.

For example, during the Doornwaard and colleagues (2014) study conducted with Dutch youth, researchers found that 24 percent of their participants' profiles contained sexy selfie content and both sexual and romantic references. The specific sexual content included references to safe versus risky sex, requests for sex, texts related to sexual experiences, descriptions of body parts, mood, preferences, and sexual expectations. They also included explicit images, references to porn, and other sexually symbolic images and icons (Doornwaard et al., 2014).

While the Doornwaard et al. (2014) study does provide insight into Dutch youth's engagement with sexy selfie content, their results limited a depth and breadth of the true prevalence. It fails to demonstrate whether or not this behavior is also exhibited offline, through text message or direct message; and it fails to bridge connections on the occurrences within other cultures. Furthermore, Doornwaard et al. (2014) were only able to access what was readily

available and uncensored with the participants' Facebook friends; therefore, if their participants were sharing content that was with someone not within their friend list, then that data was not included. This is critical to HHF and ID research because in order to truly understand young Black women's engagement in sexy selfies practices, it is important to also include the voices of those that are doing it and not to simply access what is available.

On the other hand, van Oosten and colleagues (2015) who also studied Dutch youth were able to use questionnaire data and other methods which were critical for capturing the participants' voices and overall perceptions related to sexy selfies. Based on this study of Dutch youth, van Oosten et al. (2015) found that youth simply exposed to sexy selfies from viewing their peers' online profiles changed their experience and engagement with oral sex and intercourse. Additionally, van Oosten et al. (2015) found that sexual objectification increased within younger Dutch youth than with the older ones.

In 2017, researchers van Oosten, Vandenbosch, and Peter also employed qualitative methods when they investigated how persistent gender stereotypes might affect sexy selfie behavior and gender identity development within Dutch youth. They concluded that one's hypergender orientation inclines them to engage in sharing sexy selfies and post them on SNSs more than those who do not have a heightened sensitivity to gender stereotypes. According to van Oosten and colleagues (2017) hypergender orientation means that individuals become socialized to adopt stereotypical gender roles to the extreme. For example, girls that adopt hyperfeminine gender roles find it important to be sexually attractive, to seek male attention passively, and to influence boys/men to do things by being sexy. Although each of the previous three studies focused primarily on Dutch youth, they do signify that exposure to hypergender and hypersexual profiles influence and impact youth's engagement with sexy selfies. Thus, by simply

seeing these images and reading sexual content influences their involvement which is critical to supporting ID research pertaining to the influence of context and culture. These research studies support the identity development literature previously mentioned that indicates that media portrays images and other sexual content promoting the ideology that sex sales and what is sexually and socially appropriate is what is depicted online and should be followed in order to be accepted by one's peers (Doornwaard et al.. 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; van Oosten et al., 2017).

Chua and Chang (2016) research furthermore supports the ID ideas that context, perception and peer influence are a part of the ID process and a major factor in whether girls will engage in sexy selfie practices. They found that many young girls in Singapore seek attention from their peers, especially boys, by sending and uploading sexy selfies to gain validation, improve their self-esteem, and feel secure (specifically to feel beautiful—physically attractive, and socially secure). This study found that girls are constantly struggling to form their own identities separate from the influence of their peers and on social media. Nevertheless, Paechter (2013) examined young women in the US just three years prior to the Chua and Chang (2016) study and found that although women may struggle to form their unique identities in light of the pervasive images and representations of sexual-seeming girls (Tolman, 2012), they do indeed use online communities, or SNSs, to co-construct their identities. Paechter (2013) specifically found that women collaboratively construct who they are, their public image, and how they understand themselves with their peers and social networks online. Similar to Stokes (2007), this research confirms that girls can pretend to be anyone in cyberspace because they have autonomy to define for themselves and others who they want to be and how they want to be represented.

Following the idea that identity can be constructed, Tiidenberg (2014) found that young women use sexy selfies to tell a story about their sexuality and body. They concluded that the images produced are influenced by the controlling images found within pop culture, consumer culture, and mass media. From this study, one can conclude that culture and media prescribe and control what people's bodies should look like in order to be considered sexy or attractive (Tiidenberg, 2014). Therefore, this study explored how consumers of Hip Hop and social media sites are influenced to engage in sexy selfies and how their identities are impacted by the influences of social media and HH culture.

Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz (2015) continued with this idea of autonomy by examining how youth use selfies and blogging to reclaim control over their bodies. The results indicate that taking and sharing sexy selfies can alter one's relationship with their body, increase their life satisfaction, and provide a space for one to explore their sexuality and identity. Furthermore, Tiidenberg and Gómez Cruz (2015) concluded that taking and posting sexy selfies online is a therapeutic practice because many of their participants indicated that taking the sexy selfies gave them a feeling of freedom and empowerment. This study presents a more body-positive visual discourse that provides a context in which women create new ways of seeing, sharing and discussing sexy selfies with others; and unlike the previous studies focused primarily on younger aged youth outside of the US, this study included the perceptions of older young adult women within the US. Dating as early as 2007, national study researchers found that 20 percent of American youth have engaged in sexy selfie exchanges; therefore, it can be concluded that sexy selfie research is not just occurring within countries outside of the United States with non-American youth. However, there have still been very few sexy selfie studies that have included Black youth.

Stokes (2007) is a foundational study connecting sexy selfies with Black youth. This study provides insight on how Black girls use media, create cultural productions, construct sexual definitions, and negotiate patriarchal cultural scenarios in a naturalistic setting. In this study, Stokes (2007) found that Black girls use home pages (or what we currently call profile pages) to explore and create their own sexual identity. The home pages set the stage for girls' rehearsals of sexual scripts and provide them with a creative space to construct themselves, investigate the types of scripts and stories that currently exist, and how their constructions are similar to or different from the dominant scripts (Stokes, 2007). According to Stokes (2007) the webpages that were created by the participants were used to experiment, perform, resist and challenge the dominant sexual scripts and sexual double standards (p. 179). Similar to the findings in other sexy selfie studies, Stokes (2007) indicates that Black girls already have autonomy for their own representations; however, due to the longstanding master narrative of how Black women are portrayed, it is possible that these young women are consistently influenced by mass media shaping their sexual identity development. Thus, one may question whether or not Black girls would choose these same scripts or create new ones altogether without the influence and power of these longstanding sexual master narratives. As previously mentioned, Black women have been overly sexualized in the media and in the broader society therefore this dominant perception shapes Black women's sexuality (Townsend et al., 2010). Stokes's (2007) study is significant because it demonstrates that Black girls' voices have been underrepresented regarding their sexuality, and that they have had limited control over representations of their sexuality in mass media. Stokes (2007) study is foundational in providing evidence that Black girls should be afforded the opportunity to use their own voices to creatively

(re)define how they want to their sexuality and be represented which supports the aforementioned tenets of HHF and ID theories.

When examining the research conducted on sexy selfies, one side of the debate signifies that sexy selfies are freeing, therapeutic practices chosen to be displayed by women (Albury, 2015; Doornwaard et al., 2014; Jongenelis et al., 2016; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015; Stokes, 2007; van Oosten et al, 2017); while on the other hand, some believe sexy selfies have the power to hurt (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Tynes & Mitchell, 2014; Stephens et al., 2017). Tynes and Mitchell (2014) is another foundational study connecting sexy selfies with Black youth. According to Tynes and Mitchell (2014) Black girls are inept to sending sexy selfies as a result of constant bullying and harassment. Furthermore, Stephens and colleagues (2017) found after interviewing 40 Black college women that sexting is extremely common in high school culture, especially within Black peer groups and that there are negative consequences for Black girls who engage in sexting behaviors. Thus, sexy selfies can be potentially hurtful. When Stephens and colleagues (2017) assessed the perceptual reasons for engaging in sexy selfie practices, researchers found that Black girls engage in these behaviors because they are seeking attention (63%), attempting to fit in (13%), responding to boys' demands (20%), and to avoid boredom (13%). What is especially unique about this study is that the researchers were able to use reflective interview data to capture the critical and subjective reflections of their participants' experiences while also ensuring their social and legal safety. Ideologies similar to these present contradictory discrepancies amongst Black girls. Therefore, HHF provides a space for areas within and between these discrepancies to be questioned, discussed, unpacked, challenged and critiqued. Examining the gray areas of this phenomena presents a space for HHF research

because Black women are encouraged to acknowledge the problems of, and to demand change in, an environment that oppresses them (Stokes, 2007).

Chapter Two began with an examination of the dominant cultures (21st Century social media culture, HH culture, sexy selfie culture, and peer influence) impacting and influencing the identities and overall development of young women who engage in sexy selfie practices. Chapter Two was written to describe the macro and micro theories (Hip Hop feminism and identity development theory) and to review the previous research literature on sexy selfies in order to draw attention to the lack of research that has been done particularly affecting Black youth in America. The cultural and theoretical lenses described above were used to frame this study and provide some rationale for understanding how and why young Black women participate in sexy selfies. They were also presented in order to understand how Black women experience cognitive dissonance when trying to navigate their identity development while also being influenced by contrasting viewpoints related to their sexuality within their cultural contexts, peer groups, and engaged in social media platforms. In addition to discussing the theories, key players, and major tenets of both HHF and ID theory, preliminary studies related to sexual self-presentation were illuminated.

Although sexy selfies are not a new topic of research, specific stories and experiences that young Black women face with engagement in sexy selfies are lacking in the field of educational psychology. Many of the aforementioned research studies only provide a black-white polarized view of this predominant issue when indeed there are several gray areas that must be explored. Furthermore, because there are so many contradictory viewpoints regarding Black women's sexuality, this study attempted to provide a fresh new perspective from the mouths and lived experiences of the specific population that it pertains to. "Feminist qualitative research,

such as HHF research, creates occasions to interrogate both the words that girls and young women speak and what is under them" (Tolman, 2012, p. 752); therefore, HH feminists believe that conversations cannot occur without including the voices and stories of the participants. HHFs believe that young Black women indeed have things to say about the culture and the world in which they live, so scholars and activists must be willing listen (Tolman, 2012); and when we listen, we must understand that "there won't be just one truth but multiple ones" (Pough, 2007, p. 79). Thus, this study sought to honor the tenets of the theories described in this chapter by employing a methodological approach that afforded the participants the opportunity to speak candidly about their truths regarding sexy selfie engagement. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative methodology employed to answer the aforementioned research questions and addresses the study's aims regarding young Black women who engage in sexy selfie practices.

## Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand: (1) how young Black women participate in sexy selfies; (2) how sexy selfies influence identity development; and (3) how young Black women construct and negotiate their gendered, racial, and sexual identity by engaging in sexy selfie practices. Based on the research (Ward & Benjamin, 2004; Tiidenberg, 2014; Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015; Albury 2015) conducted in Hip Hop Feminism, identity development, and sexy selfies, young Black women want to feel safe and supported as they navigate through their sexual identity development. However, because they do not currently have the necessary supports to do so, they are oftentimes left alone to figure out their identities on their own (Brown et al., 2009; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stokes, 2007). By doing so they sometimes engage in risky behaviors as well as face dangerous life-altering consequences (Feeney et al., 2000; Gross, 2017; Schachner & Shaver, 2004; Stephens, 2012; Townsend et al., 2010). Although research has shown the prevalence of sexy selfie practices (Doornwaard et al., 2014; Ibtesam, 2017; Thomas et al., 2011; Tolman, 2012) and highlighted some motives (Doornwaard et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2017; Walrave et al., 2015), little is known about the cultural connections and contextual factors that shape young Black women's (18-24) identity practices in relationship to sexy selfies.

This chapter articulates the study's research methodology, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis and representation and shares how they will help address the aforementioned purpose of the study. In this chapter, I will connect the key tenets of Hip Hop Feminism to narrative inquiry. Then, I will discuss the site where the study was conducted and describe the participants, sources of data used, procedures for collecting data, management of data, data analysis, and representation. The chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

## Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Within the framework of qualitative research, narrative inquiry design was the most suited for this study. Narrative inquiry is an extensive study of experience that examines how people make meaning of their lives in order to be understood through narratives generated via this inquiry. By utilizing this form of qualitative research methodology I was able to focus on how the participants place meaning on their shared experiences through narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); and how our collaborative efforts "over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) contributed to (re)constructing their past, present, and future engagement with sexy selfies. Though narrative inquiry was first used by Connelly and Clandinin as a methodology to describe the personal stories of teachers it is not exclusive to the study of education, nor is it simply storytelling. Instead, it is a methodology of inquiry that uses storytelling to understand and uncover various nuances through dialogue and reflection. The dialogue, reflection, and hence critiques of various phenomena then become intertwined and cyclical between both the researcher and her participants.

Narrative inquiry is ideal when a small sample of the population is desired. Thus, purposeful sampling is almost always used in order to "enrich the understanding of an experience" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140) and when trying to combine live experiences to "explain the social world" (Haavio-Mannila & Ross, 1999, p. 242). Since the purpose of narrative inquiry methodology is to reveal and/or communicate the untold stories and give voice to people of marginalized populations, it was critical for me to strategically select participants that would be knowledgeable about sexy selfies. Additionally, I needed to be cognizant of my own biases and positionality in order to carefully place emphasis on using the participants'

verbatim words and capturing their voice to explain the concept. In order to honor their lived experiences and the tenets of Hip Hop feminism, I took diligent and detailed field notes to ensure that the multiple layering of each story was captured.

Hip Hop culture, racism, sexism, and identity are central to the lived experiences of young Black women (Durham et al., 2013; Love, 2012; Thomas et al., 2011). Thus, narrative inquiry provided an opportunity to better understand the ways that young Black women engage with sexy selfies by privileging the stories and lived experiences of the participants. Narrative inquiry aligns conceptually with Hip Hop feminism in the sense that instead of accepting the truth of the mainstream and hetero-patriarchal society, researchers can challenge Black women to define for themselves how they want to be represented. In this section, I will share how I adapted a Hip Hop feminist narrative inquiry methodology for use in this study.

Hip Hop feminist research requires that cultural issues be brought up, reflected upon, critiqued, and challenged (Morgan, 2017; Pough, 2015). Morgan (2017) argues that Hip Hop feminists studying various issues concerning the Hip Hop culture must be willing to "fuck with the grays" and critique the nuances of these issues. Also, Pough (2015) suggests that feminist researchers must "bring wreck" and, through lots of dialogue, address the very issues concerning our people. Through the use of narrative inquiry methodology with respect of Hip Hop feminists' tenets, my goal was to provide space for these young Black women to share their personal stories of sexual identity exploration with sexy selfies, speak candidly about their sexuality and their identities; to fuck with the grays; and to bring wreck, all in the interest of illuminating the ways in which society at large has contributed to these pervasive practices while challenging the dominant society's disapproval of such candid dialogue. I hoped to capture details from participants' stories that would reveal that there is limited support for Black girls' sexual

exploration (Baker, 2004; Baumgartner et al., 2015; Hammonds, 2004; Hartzog, 2013; Shafer et al., 2013) and the contradictory messages within Black and Hip Hop cultures that are presenting dilemmas for Black youth and continue to make them feel oppressed and silenced regarding their sexuality and femininity (Durham et al., 2013; jamila, 2002). Through the analysis of the participants' stories, and later the co-creation of their representative narratives, I was able to help illuminate the ways in which society, especially social media, has contributed to this pervasive culture for young Black women engaged in sexy selfies.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) there are at least three commonplaces in which narrative inquiry takes place: temporality/continuity, sociality/interaction, and place/situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). Commonplaces of narrative inquiry research are dimensions which need to be explored simultaneously within and through each other and not as separate entities (Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). By attending to the intersections of the commonplaces, I was able to study the nuanced lives of my participants both inside and outside of inquiry as well as their imagined futures and silenced truths.

**Narrative Inquiry—Three Dimensional Framework**

The three commonplaces of narrative inquiry—temporality/continuity, sociality, and place/situation—as articulated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) helped me further to capture how my participants were (re)constructing their past, present, and future sexy selfie experiences. By ensuring that I simultaneously assessed the intersection of the three commonplaces, I was able to bring light to the young women who felt that society often silences their sexy while conjointly and overtly demanding it via social media platforms.

The temporality (continuity) dimension refers to the participants' past, present, and future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al., 2007) that are built from each other and suggests that each participant's experiences and contexts were impacted by time. According to Clandinin and Huber (2010), temporality suggests that people are constantly shaping and revising their stories as time passes and that researchers must attend to their own temporality as well so that they can be cognizant of their own positionality and history with the things being researched.

The second dimension, sociality, refers to the interactions of the personal and social aspects of an individual's lived experiences. According to Clandinin and colleagues (2007), an individual's social, cultural, existential, and environmental conditions form each individual's personal contexts and shapes their storied lives; therefore, researchers must attend to both conditions simultaneously. Additionally, the sociality dimension demands that narrative inquirers attend to the relationship between themselves and their participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2010) by being cognizant of their own role within the research process and understand that they work within a space in which the stories are being (re)constructed with the participants. Thus, it is critical for researchers to recognize when "our own unnamed, perhaps, secret, stories come to light as much as those of our participants" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 62) so that the retelling of the participants' stories are clear and the researchers' own lived and told stories are visible and separate from the participants' truths.

The final dimension is place, which refers to "the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). The key to this commonplace is recognizing that every participant's storied narrative will take place at a specific, concrete time and place (Clandinin,

2006); therefore, researchers must keep in mind that all events happen within some place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) and that identity is formed within and depending on the place or situation in which the lived story takes place. Specific to this study, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, and Kik are also considered a place where sexy selfies are often shared.

In summary, the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place were critical components for this research. Using these tenets in combination with those of HHF allowed me to study the nuanced lives of the participants and frame them as strategically positioned narrators of their own experiences and imagined futures, collaboratively making meaning of their lived experiences with me (the researcher) in the form of co-created narratives. Utilizing narrative inquiry methodology was essential in order to explore the lived experiences of Black women through dialogue and reflection so that they felt able to share their sexy selfie experiences when dealing with their sexuality and/or challenge instances in which they were not allowed to.

## Methods

### IRB Approval

To begin my investigation, I first requested institutional review board (IRB) approval via the university's research portal. The IRB application was submitted on March 7, 2019. Approval for the dissertation was received on March 15, 2019. To conduct this research in a timely and efficient manner, I laid out step-by-step procedures to follow and established a strict timeline. The procedural details and timeline are discussed in the following sections.

## Procedural Timeline and Chart

The following chart includes the actual dates of this study from the onset of the acceptance from the Institution Review Board to the final submission of this dissertation manuscript. The goal for this study was to fulfill partial requirements for doctoral degree completion in Educational Psychology and Research. For this reason, the dates listed below also extend beyond the study to also include dates for the program's dissertation submission process and potential graduation. See Table 1 for a description of the timeline.

**Table 1**

*Dates for Study Through Submission*

| Dates for dissertation through submission | |
|---|---|
| 1. IRB Submission<br>2. Solicitation and Consent Form Collection<br>3. Individual Interviews<br>4. Participant Journaling<br>5. Interview Transcribing | March 2019 – January 2020 |
| Participant Journals Collected | May 2019- November 2019 |
| Study Debriefing | December 2019- January 2020 |
| Data Analysis | September 2019- February 2020 |
| 1. Chapters 4 and 5<br>2. Dissertation Defense<br>3. Edits and Submission | December 2019-April 2020 |
| GRADUATION | May 9, 2020 |

## Participant Inclusion Criteria

To participate in this study, interested individuals needed to meet the following criteria: they had to (1) identify as Black; (2) identify as a girl or woman; (3) be between the ages of 18 and 24; (4) be a consumer of Hip Hop; (5) be an active consumer of at least one social media site; and (6) currently take or have previously taken sexy selfies. They further had to be willing

to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in research on sexy selfies, Black femininity, and identity development including sexuality.

Narrative inquiry typically uses a small sample size. Purposeful sampling is almost always used in order to "enrich the understanding of an experience" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 140) and when trying to combine lived experiences to "explain the social world" (Haavio-Mannila & Ross 1999, p. 242). Since the purpose of narrative inquiry methodology is to reveal and/or communicate untold stories and give voice to people of marginalized populations, it is important to select participants who are knowledgeable about the phenomena as well as place emphasis on using the participants' own words and capturing their voice to explain the concept.

**Site Selection and Participant Recruitment**

I chose to conduct this study in an urban environment within the mid-southern region of the United States for its familiarity and ease of accessibility to participants who could meet the inclusion criteria. Sites for participant interviews would be chosen based on convenience for the individual participant, with attention to comfort, absence of distractions, and conduciveness to safety so that they would feel free to share their stories.

I began recruiting participants primarily through a combination of two methods: through convenience sampling, by contacting people I already knew who might know of potential participants, and by posting recruitment flyers stating participant criteria at select local community centers, university centers on educational campuses, libraries, and workout facilities such as the YMCA to invite interested individuals to participate in the study (see Appendix C).

Additionally, I used referrals through purposeful snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a sampling method in which current or existing participants refer their acquaintances or family members to be participants in the study as well (Goodman, 1961). This was an effective

sampling strategy because it helped me identify participants who would not have been easy to recruit by other sampling means.

I began receiving phone calls from interested individuals in response to the flyers and through word of mouth. During my initial brief phone conversations with participants, I provided pertinent information about the study, including the need to sign a consent form, confirmed that the caller met study criteria, and arranged to meet at a site of their choosing for an interview. I also suggested some relevant journal articles to provide them with more information. Once I had established the first three participants, I encouraged those individuals to refer any friends they felt might also meet participant criteria. Only one caller was excluded from participating in the study; she realized on her own that she did not meet full criteria. Nine individuals were ultimately chosen to participate. They were sent consent forms in the mail (see Appendix D) for their personal review and signature.

I initially anticipated having approximately five to eight research subjects. In contradiction to my expectation of recruiting the majority of participants from flyers, five of the eventual nine participants came from snowball sampling. I had had relationships with two of the participants prior to the study via school or work.

Table 2 lists information about the nine individuals who eventually were selected to participate in the study by their chosen pseudonym, age, sexual orientation, family structure, age of first sexy selfie, and definition of sexy selfie.

**Table 2**

*Participants' Descriptions and Individual Sexy Selfie Definitions*

| Pseudonym + Grade-Level Occupation | Age | Location of Interview + Type of Recruitment | Sexual Orientation | Family Structure | Age of First Sexy Selfie | Sexy Selfie Definition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Jaz Dean**<br><br>College Junior | 24 | Research Lounge<br><br>Flier Recruit | Heterosexual | Single mom<br>Incarcerated Father<br>4 siblings<br>4-year-old son | 17 | *A sexy selfie is when you have on a little sexy outfit, makeup, showing your curves and just giving like, you know, like a seductive look, well not too seductive, but not like all smiles. Definitely giving an inviting or welcoming look…sexy selfies can also be appropriate and not necessarily all butt naked.* |
| **Keisha Sanders**<br><br>High School Senior | 18 | Library Conference Room<br><br>Knew Prior | Heterosexual | Single mom<br>Bio-Father lived separately<br>3 siblings with mom<br>3 siblings with dad<br>No children | 13 | *A sexy selfie is a picture [or video] that is half-naked and you all cute and stuff with your hair done, nails, makeup and a cute outfit like a crop top and jeans or biker shorts you know something like that…or it could be completely naked as well.* |
| **Melanie Staples*** <br><br>College Graduate | 23 | Home (Kitchen)<br><br>Knew Prior | Heterosexual | Biological Parents<br>2 sisters<br>No children | 12 | *An image or video that shows someone in their bra or that fact that you have no bra on at all, your cleavage or bottom showing, makeup on and posing with a more seductive look. They are the most revealing images that show off the body so that people can get approval on social media or from their friends.* |

*- Melanie Staples passed away before this study could receive final approval for publication for the graduate school.

Table 2 (Continued)

| **Pseudonym + Grade-Level Occupation** | **Age** | **Location of Interview + Type of Recruitment** | **Sexual Orientation** | **Family Structure** | **Age of First Sexy Selfie** | **Sexy Selfie Definition** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Alexis Green**<br><br>College Sophomore | 20 | Library Conference Room<br><br>Flier Recruit | Heterosexual | Bio Mom + Stepdad<br>Bio-Father = Jimmy lived separately<br>6 siblings with mom<br>6 siblings with Jimmy<br>No children | 12 | *An image that can be considered as how you may feel about yourself. Some people describe sexy as if by the way that you look in an image (like hair done, nails done, make up showing, etc.). Sometimes sexy is when you take a picture when you have just accomplished something, and you are just smiling. Others may feel that a sexy selfie is a picture with little to no clothes on with bedroom eyes, very seductive… Just to be clear my definition of a sexy selfie is feeling myself—natural hair on point and in the right light.* |
| **Destiny Thomas**<br><br>College Graduate | 23 | Home (Living room)<br><br>Snowball Referral | Heterosexual (Experimented) | Single mom (until 15), then stepdad<br>Bio-Father lived separately<br>3 siblings with mom<br>2 siblings with Bio-Father<br>No children | 19* | *A sexy selfie is one that is cute. It is an image that shows you are feeling yourself because "sexy" is like a vibe that you give off. So sexy selfies can be a selfie, a picture, or a video when you have a moment when you feel, "I think I am the shit…" Yes, you can have a sexy selfie taken in anything because I take a lot of my sexy selfies in bikinis…it's really about the feeling that you get when you look at the sexy selfie that makes it sexy.* |
| **Ashley Brown**<br><br>Hairstylist | 23 | Home (Kitchen)<br><br>Snowball Referral | Heterosexual | Biological Parents<br>11 siblings<br>(6 in home) (5 lived separate)<br>No children | 14 | *Immediately I thought that a sexy selfie was going to have to be about either being naked or it just had to be like this one moment that made someone feel like just so special and just defined me and makes me want to wake my inner sexy up. So, to me a sexy selfie can be any image that defines someone's sexuality and makes them feel that they stand out and are different.* |

Table 2 (Continued)

| **Pseudonym + Grade-Level Occupation** | **Age** | **Location of Interview + Type of Recruitment** | **Sexual Orientation** | **Family Structure** | **Age of First Sexy Selfie** | **Sexy Selfie Definition** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Andriana Clark**<br><br>College Junior | 21 | Library Conference Room<br><br>Snowball Referral | Heterosexual (Implicit Bisexuality) | Bio-Parents divorced @ age 4<br>Single mom since 4<br>Bio-Father lived separately, married, then divorced 2nd wife @16<br>2 sisters<br>No children | 19 | *A sexy selfie can be a nude faced picture as well as a picture with a beat face. By "beat face" I mean a picture where the girl has on a full face of makeup. Whatever state you're in that makes you feel your best is a sexy selfie, in my opinion. This could be with clothes on or completely nude, whatever your preference and style, but you feel good and sexy doing it.* |
| **Draya Peaches Smith**<br><br>College Graduate | 22 | Home (Living room)<br><br>Snowball Referral | Heterosexual | Biological Parents<br>1 brother<br>1-year-old son | 19 | *A sexy selfie to me displays a caught off guard look with either some skin showing or a "bold" come get me posture such as a someone with their leg out, "spread eagle" in the picture. They are the same across all backgrounds and ethnicities because the receiver of the picture does not see the color, they only see the image provided. Mostly, all sexy selfies for black women are the same because the basic pose may be present, or the extreme is present with an exotic pose, cleavage or booty out. But they are mild and not as extreme as one that's completely nude.* |
| **Shanny Crews**<br><br>Vocational Training Student | 19 | Library Conference Room<br><br>Snowball Referral | Heterosexual | Bio-mother + Stepdad<br>Bio-Father lived separately<br>2 siblings with mom<br>5 brothers with Bio-father<br>3-year-old daughter | 16 | *A sexy selfie is showing body (butt, cleavage) or other body parts to gain attention or likes. I do believe though that some pictures can be sexy without showing your body, maybe per se if you have a nice smile.* |

**Data Collection**

Each of the nine participants was asked to meet one on one with me for an hour-and-a-half- to two-hour-long semi-structured interview. In preparation for each interview, I documented my thoughts, expectations, and concerns regarding the upcoming interactions with participants, and I reviewed the research questions for the study. Bernard (1988) recommended using an interview guide, especially if there would be only one interview. This study followed an interview guide of my own design that included a list of 18 open-ended questions and an observation checklist for the researcher (see Appendix A). In addition, I discussed topics related to sexy selfies and identity with the participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006) and asked clarifying questions when further prompting was needed (Bernard, 1988) in order to collect reliable, comparable qualitative data (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The guiding interview questions explored how the young women were (re)creating their Black feminine identities while navigating through the changes within 21st century America. The questions also explored how the women cultivated their identities by utilizing social media sites. Specifically, the interviews included questions regarding social media's influence on the participant's identity development; reflections and rationales for taking and sending sexy selfies at a younger age; and the participants' thoughts and feelings regarding contextual influences on their identity development and engagement with sexy selfies.

Five of these interviews took place in a research lounge or a private library conference room; four of the participants requested to be interviewed within their own home. To ensure accuracy, each participant interview was recorded using a portable voice recording device. Participants were also asked to create a pseudonym to protect their identities. To record my own impressions, I took notes following the interview guide during the interview session. After each

interview, I also read through my pre-interview notes, reflected on my research questions, the purpose of the study, and the participants' demographics, and made further notes.

At the end of the interview, each participant was given a journal booklet and a pen. They were provided with writing prompts (see Appendix B) to serve as a guide and were encouraged to write in their journals about their first sexy selfies. They had the option of using the prompts—one of which was to write a letter to their younger selves—or free writing, but either way, they were asked to complete a minimum of four journal entries. The participants were given six to eight weeks to complete their reflective journal entries before they were collected and review for analysis could begin.

**Data Analysis**

Narrative inquiry methodology requires the use of multiple methods and calls for a research bricoleur who uses various tools to understand the storied lives of their participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005). For this research I used three sources of data for analysis: transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews, participant journals, and reflective researcher journal entries.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected throughout the duration of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2015). Thematic analysis emphasizes the importance of patterns and themes that are critical to understanding the phenomena. Thematic analysis further requires that codes and/or categories be used prior to defining the relevant themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By following this structured process, I was afforded multiple exposures to, or familiarity with, the data and gained new insights with each iteration.

The following is a description of my stages of data analysis. I first transcribed each interview verbatim and member checked the accuracy of my transcriptions with participants.

Once that process was complete, I began a critical phase of analysis: coding the data. Coding is an analytic research process in which the researcher assigns a word or short phrase to a set of data to give it a symbolic meaning, salience, or summation (Saldaña, 2015). Codes are assigned to language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2015) based on the researcher's analytic questions regarding the data that have been gathered (Charmaz, 2006).

When analyzing data through the assignment of initial codes, Charmaz (2006) states that "we study fragments of data…[in order to] select what seems to be the most useful" (p. 42) and grapple multiple times and becoming familiar with the data before creating categories and themes. My coding process involved assigning a category to pieces of data, then reducing those categories to themes. I attempted to employ two rounds of initial coding. These included open coding to identify any patterns and in vivo and values coding to use verbatim the words and phrases as well as the ideologies, values, and thoughts of the participants (Saldaña, 2015).

Some common threads emerged even as I was transcribing the first participant's interview. By the second participant's interview, the categories of identity, culture, and sex had emerged. After I had transcribed all nine of the participant interviews, I was able to abstract nine meaningful categories from participants' language: identity, socio-cultural, social media, cultural identity, sexual identity, gender (feminine) identity, gendered-racial identity (Black femininity), and silences (things that were not being stated). These nine categories were further reduced to five cohesive categories that seemed to capture participants' experience: identity, culture, sexuality, Black femininity, and "the other" (see Table 3). Thus, the final five categories emerged through an iterative process during successive transcriptions.

To align with the key tenets of Hip Hop feminism and narrative inquiry methodology, it is important to use in vivo and values coding to present participants' thoughts and feelings in

their own words. Kegan (1982) asserted that an individual's identity is intertwined with their lived experiences, the stories that they share, and the meanings attached to those stories and experiences. It was important to analyze the data thoroughly with the intent of capturing the truths (Riessman, 2002) of the young Black women in the study. In so doing, the researcher takes part in helping to create liberation and a sense of power for the participants.

Once the five major categories were identified, I looked closely at the relationships across the categories and observed that certain ideas or themes began to emerge. Although my true form of analysis was thematic, as I employed this iterative process of: (1) reading and re-reading the data several times, (2) journaling to further form inquiry-based questions and analyzing smaller chunks of data, and (3) taking notice of these emergent chunks, I realized that I was also following what Bhattacharya (2017) describes as inductive analysis.

Once I had established these five categories, I directed my attention to the participant journals and applied the same process using the categories to the journals, culling material by each of the five categories in preparation for crafting narrative representations. As part of my inductive analysis, I had already noted in my researcher journal a number of key words and phrases that recurred in the speech of the participants that stood out to me from each interview or transcription (Bhattacharya, 2017). These included: "best of the best," which seemed to relate to Black femininity as well as identity; "puppet" in reference to culture and identity; "validation" and its near synonym "clout," both having to do with culture and identity but with "clout" evoking sexuality also. "Crime cycle" and "criminal mentality" referred to the impact of the other, while "superficial" and "inauthentic" related to both culture and identity. Every participant without exception used the term "trust" in relation to sexuality. I grouped these and other such terms together, noting how commonalities seemed to relate to a type of identity development.

**Table 3**

*Categories Emerged from Inductive Analysis*

| Categories that were noted in my researcher journal while transcribing the individual interviews | Finalized Major Categories used in the Analysis Process |
|---|---|
| Identity | **Identity:** Identity included demographic information and descriptions of self. This was based on the participant's sense of self and description of their cultural and contextual influences. |
| Socio-cultural | |
| Social Media | |
| Cultural identity | **Culture:** Culture included generational references, connection of self to social media culture, 21st century culture, Black culture, HH culture and the contextual environments of the participant's family dynamics and exposure. |
| Sexual identity | **Sexuality:** Sexuality included any references to sex, sexual positions, sexual preferences, sexual readiness, and physical/sexual body parts. |
| Gender identity (Feminine Identity) | **Black Femininity:** Black femininity (or Black female identity) included references to the Black Woman identity and perceive perceptions of how others view and treat Black women. |
| Gendered-Racial identity (Black femininity) | |
| Sexuality + Black femininity | |
| Silences (things that were not being stated) | **"the OTHER":** The Other included references to outside influences and motivators that contributed to or derailed/ silenced the participants' actions, choices and experiential practices. |

I then began to highlight each part of the interview based on the aforementioned dominant and persistent categories (i.e., *identity, culture, sexuality, black femininity, and the "other"*). In my researcher journal I noted instances in which some of the categories overlapped. For each participant, five separate MS Word documents were created to place the codes and key phrases within the five major categories to be represented by a synthesized category to reflect on the highlighted items for that category. To aid in the understanding of this work, I embedded notes in the side margins of the transcription. After completing the independent dumping for each category, I read through each category at least two or three times and reflected on my initial reactions in my journal. From these cleaned and synthesized files, on each participant, I began to

co-create with my participant a narrative for each categorical section. In this way, each participant ended up with a unique "composite" narrative to reflect her verbatim words, story shared, and overall personality. Based on this composite, I created a unique representation of each participant utilizing various literary genres to represent the participants' story, their individualized style and personality.

Using both the inductive and thematic analysis processes, I identified themes in the data using a process of enumerative and thematic coding. These themes are the foundation for the re-storying of participants' experiences with sexy selfies. Time boundaries, exploration of content and context, and linking stories to relevant cultural and political landscapes are key elements of the re-storying process. To protect identities, I utilized pseudonyms chosen by the participants. The creative narrative representations of Jaz, Keisha, Melanie, Alexis, Destiny, Ashley Brown, Andriana Clark, Peaches, and Shanny with sexy selfies follow in Chapter 4.

Since the main outcome of this study was to capture the thoughts, understandings, and experiences of the participants regarding identity development and sexy selfie practices, it was imperative that the constructed narratives were accurate and not only respectful but also representative of the young women's voices and lived experiences. I had spent an average of four hours with each participant, which seemed an adequate amount of time to develop rich, thick descriptive narratives of their experiences. The crystallization of the multiple data sources in addition to co-constructing and member checking the narratives contributed to this goal.

Furthermore, once the narratives (i.e., poetry, vignettes, short stories and other prose) were initially drafted, each participant was asked to review their own for accuracy and use of voice and to add any additional points to the narrative in order to address possible validity and transferability issues. All the participants, except Melanie Staples, who unfortunately passed

away during the final phases of this research, were able to review and approve of their final representation. This was an enriching experience for me, because it allowed me to build a deeper rapport with my participants.

The participants indicated that they were very pleased. Some even mentioned that they were honored by reading and receiving their narratives and felt a sense of personal pride. While many of the participants had difficulty communicating their understanding of how behaviors and personal practices are influential to identity development, they did have well-articulated understandings of sexy selfies and how their social, cultural, and contextual surroundings impacted their identity. Thematic analysis, which adheres to the three-part conceptual framework of narrative inquiry, was used to gather rich data in efforts to craft the participants' narratives. This approach recognizes that narratives exist in spaces of time and culture and that these elements have profound effects on narratives.

**Co-Creating Representations: Making Meaning**

The interview methods and means of data collection that I chose, the semi-structured interviews and researcher and participant field journals, proved to be rich resources for rendering meaningful information that could be mined in the creation of narrative representations of each participant's experiences with sexy selfies. Young Black women need to feel that they will not be shunned, and they want to be heard; but they will only do so in an open and honest environment (Brown & Gilligan,1993; Chapin, 2016). As a Hip Hop feminist researcher who seeks to bring social change, I utilized interview methods that allowed me to identify both the injustices as well as the privileges regarding sexy selfies for young Black women aged 18-24 within the 21st century.

A field journal is essential to this type of study, because it allows the participants and researcher to record all observations, thoughts, questions, and feelings the writer privileges pertaining to the topic of research. They include things that are brought out, as well as the unspoken things that are not addressed formally or verbally (Ortlipp, 2008). According to Borg (2001), field research journals provide researchers with "illuminating insights into the research process" (p. 156). Thus, the purpose of keeping a research field journal is to help create transparency in the research process as well as explore the impact of critical self-reflection on the research design and topics. Field journals can also be used by participants to dive deeper into their reflective process and connect with the topic of research. For the purposes of this study, both my participants and I kept field journals, which we also used as a form of supporting data. The journals served as a reflective tool for the participants to examine their experiences with taking and sending sexy selfies. Journal topics included sexy selfies, social media, identity development, Black femininity, and any pertinent story details that helped capture participants' thoughts concerning the aims of the study.

My personal journal was utilized to document my thoughts and preliminary analysis. Along with the participants, I also journaled and created analytic memos to describe my experience with this study from start to finish. I captured utterances related to theory and the targeted research questions. My journal was reflective and detailed key points throughout the research process: prior to meeting and/or conversing with each participant; before and after each interview; and during the analysis process. I attempted to honor the personal, social, and relational dimensions of narrative inquiry methodology and reflect on these pertinent dimensions by also including notes on how my participants and I planned to tell and share their co-constructed stories.

As described above, my journals as well as those of the participants were analyzed using thematic analysis. Synthesizing these data sources allowed me to creatively co-construct with my participants narratives that reflected and represented their lived experiences. Each participant was represented with a different type of narrative, which included various poetry structures, a short story, a vignette, and a multi-modal narrative to further exemplify that they are not monolithic (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010).

Through a collaborative approach to narrative inquiry, the participants and I embarked on a journey to (re)construct their past, present, and future storied lives. The dialogue, reflection, and hence critiques of various phenomena then became intertwined and cyclical between the participants and me (Pushor & Clandinin, 2009). Chapter 4 will address the alchemy of turning these interviews and journals into representative forms of narrative for each participant's experience.

## Trustworthiness and Ethics

Based on the premises of feminist research and narrative inquiry methodology, I am required to co-construct meaning and understanding with my participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Paechter, 2013). Therefore, during the interviews, I worked to establish rapport and trust with each participant. It was imperative that the young women felt open to honestly discuss their personal and sensitive experiences with their engagement with sexy selfies, identity development, Black femininity, and their past, present, and future storied lives. In the next section, on trustworthiness and ethics, I discuss that ways in which I attempted to ensure confidentiality, trust, and safety with my participants and their data.

In order to co-construct meaning and understanding regarding sexy selfie research with young Black women, I employed the use of semi-structured interviews and field journals. To

ensure that the participants' accurate responses were documented and captured, I used a recording device and transcribed the interviews verbatim. To abide by confidentiality and ethics with human subjects, I adhered to the protocol for the institutional review board (IRB) at the university approving the study. Once approval from the IRB members was received, I started receiving phone calls from interested participants who found out about the study from the posted flyers (see Appendix C). During initial conversations with the participants, I described pertinent information about the study, sent them the consent form for their personal review, and scheduled an interview. During the interview, each participant was encouraged to create their own pseudonyms to use throughout the study; and when member checking with the participants to co-create their narratives pseudonyms were also used for all characters mentioned.

The study concluded with a debriefing conversation with each participant. Debriefing was imperative so that I consistently ensured trust and security from the start through the completion of the study. Although it is not necessarily a requirement for research that uses human subjects, I found it important as a Hip Hop feminist researcher to debrief with my participants and provide them with potential community and/or counseling supports in case they needed them. Not only is debriefing important for Hip Hop feminist, identity development, and narrative inquiry research, but it was essential to maintaining their trust and safety especially when discussing their personal lived experiences with sexy selfies and their identity development.

## Confidentiality and Data Management

To further ensure that the information provided was kept confidential, I informed the participants that any of the names, places, communities studied and visited, as well as any of the characters named within their interviews was changed and given a pseudonym so that they could

feel confident to speak freely. Moreover, each participant was highly encouraged to use their pseudonyms on all documents (i.e., especially their personal journals) to ensure anonymity throughout the process.

During the interviews, I used a digital recorder to record the participants' answers and all interviews were transcribed verbatim. After transcribing and editing for verbatim words and phrases—based on the audio recordings—I verified the accuracy of the transcripts via member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012) to ensure that the participants and their storied lives were truthfully represented. Member checking is a process in which portions of the interview data are sent to the participants for review and corrections. Adhering to the tenets of Hip Hop Feminism and narrative inquiry methodology, it is critical that the researcher and her participants work together to create a complete and accurate representation of the participants' storied lives. Moreover, member checking allowed me to keep my participants central throughout the research process which is critical to identity development research. Thus, by continuing to employ my participants for member checking, I was able to build trust between myself and my participants. It is my hope that I am also able to build trust within the research field and community at large by providing the most accurate and honest data available. Considering the participants' time, I member-checked the data by meeting with the participants in person and in some cases, by hand-delivering, or emailing the typed transcriptions to the participants so that we could check them for accuracy.

Finally, to further ensure that the data is managed ethically, my journals as well as the participants' journals and all other data were kept in a locked cabinet inside my home office until the conclusion of the study. The participants were advised and provided information for counseling services if they encountered any reflections that presented them with psychological or

emotional distress. I wanted to ensure that we were all safe mentally, physically, and emotionally; therefore, I ensured that all of the interviews were conducted in places that guaranteed this safety. With all of these measures of confidentiality, ethics, and safety put into place, the goal was that the data retrieved was rich and as honest as possible.

In the following section, I describe characteristics, and experiences that contribute to my positionality and subjectivities as they relate to researching young Black women's identity development through the use of sexy selfies.

## Positionality, Subjectivity, and Boundaries

Due to the nature and context of this study, it was imperative that I was aware of my own personal positions, biases, experiences, and boundaries with investigating sexy selfies. Since narrative inquiry requires the adherence to the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place, as well as a co-construction of the narratives, I needed to be aware of my personal contexts and how I am uniquely situated to employ a study on sexy selfies with Generation Z women. Furthermore, although I personally identify as a Black-Cuban woman myself, it was important that I remained cognizant of the fact that I am not an insider. I used my journal frequently throughout this process so that I did not make any biased assumptions. I was aware of my own experiences with sexy selfies; however, I employed this study because I recognized that I do not know all of the truths that may be prevalent in the storied lives of young Black women who engage in sexy selfie practices.

As a mother of an 11-year-old Black girl and a former middle and high school teacher, I feel that I am uniquely situated to research this topic. I am passionate about investigating the contextual and cultural influences on one's identity development. I also find it important to understand the occurrences and circumstances in which young women feel that it is acceptable to

expose their bodies, even parts of their bodies, to others. Thus, I sought with this research, to investigate 21st century sexy selfie practices with young Black women who were willing to share their stories. I sought out the opportunity to bring the voices that continue to be silenced to the forefront. In my opinion, if this work had not been conducted, there would continue to be a slight hole in the research on sexy selfies for this demographic group. Additionally, I feel that if not supported, then more youth and young adults will find it necessary to identify themselves sexually online making them more susceptible to pedophiles and other predators. This sickens me.

According to Sales (2016) children as young as six years old are exposed to online porn and sexually explicit images. Thus, if this work had not done, not only will this trend prevail within the current age range, but there is a potential that younger children may engage in these same practices. Therefore, this research was not just conducted to discuss an issue in an urban, southern city in the United States, for a Black-Cuban mother of a precious eleven-year-old girl, this study instead was conducted to address this as a global issue. According to a report from the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) and Microsoft (2015), kids throughout the world, as young as six and seven years old, are taking selfies and video-recording themselves with the intent to share the images with "friends," or to post on social media sites. While it has been generalized that the reason these youth are engaging in the practices of sexy selfies is to satisfy their needs for attention, affection, acceptance, and relatedness, it is not conclusive and applicable to all youth and especially not all young Black women. Therefore, I conducted this study in the hopes of allowing my participants' voices speak their truths.

Although I only included the stories of young Black women, the phenomenon is also prevalent in Caucasian, Asian, and other ethnic communities as well! However, because sexy

selfies are illuminated and appear to be occurring more dominantly within Black populations, I wanted to start with an understanding of this ethnic population first.

Due to my position as a mother, educator, and mentor and my previous experience as a child and young adult community counselor, I have observed several of my students, mentees, nieces, cousins, and other young Black women expressing themselves sexually online and taking sexually suggestive images. I wanted to have a clearer understanding of why. Furthermore, because I have a Black daughter who is rapidly approaching the targeted age range, I sought to understand how engagement with sexy selfies impacts and influences Black women's identity and development.

Although I do not want to personally think about my daughter exposing her body to others, I do understand and respect the fact that she will also have to go through her very own identity development processes that will include sexual exploration and desires for agency. As a self-proclaimed Hip Hop feminist and having always been slated to be in an altruistic professional field, I became passionate about this research because I believe people should be able to live, grow, and learn freely. I also believe that because there are evils within this world, people, especially youth and underrepresented individuals, should be protected.

I strive to make a difference in the world, and I truly want to understand the world around us. I do not believe that there is only one truth to explain phenomena. I personally believed that this study would show that there are multiple truths to this predominant societal issue—and it did. Although previous researchers have attempted to examine this phenomenon, they only provided one or two definitive rationales. Nevertheless, feminist perspectives alone do not yield to one or two explanations so how can one rationalize this pop culture trend on one extreme or

the other. Although there may not be 50 shades, there are definitely myriad grays that needed to be examined—I allowed my participants' stories to illuminate this.

Over the past fifteen years, I have personally observed how social media are dominating the world and becoming popular among youth and young adults (Knibbs, 2014). I have often pondered the pros and cons of social media sites and just how influential they are in the lives of our youth and how these sites impact their identity. Let me be clear: I am not an ancient Black woman. Still, the world of social media is drastically different today than it was 18 years ago when I was in high school. During my high school years, the late nineties through the early 2000s, everything was different. No, seriously…stay with me: communication, dating, standards of beauty, social media, and even self-images and photography were all different. Nevertheless, Hip Hop culture, music lyrics and videos, and various media sources helped me keep up with the changes. Because middle school, high school, and the very early semesters of college were a part of my identity crises, I would have been lost and following dangerous trends if I had not learned to love myself and be my own leader. Furthermore, if I did not feel that I had someone—an older mentor—to talk to about my feelings and thoughts regarding my sexuality, I truly believe that I would not be here today, because a persistent webcam or explicit video request could have left me badly injured or deceased. It is because of all of the aforementioned reasons that I chose to explore this topic of research and share my findings within the field of educational psychology.

It is imperative to note that while I identify as a Black woman, I am not an insider to this research. My positionality, subjectivity, age and background all place me in different contexts and cultures than my participants. Throughout this process, I have been reminded that my role as a researcher requires that certain professional and personal boundaries be maintained to not only respect, but also protect and honor my participants. Although I personally knew two of the

participants prior to conducting this study, I did not allow my relationship or knowledge of their stories—spoken or unspoken—taint the data or my representation of their lived experiences. While Keisha's story was what springboarded my passion and desire to study sexy selfies, I wanted to hear her truth. I needed her to explain to me how and why she engaged in sexy selfies when she was in middle school. Nevertheless, while I was initially intrigued by Keisha's sexy selfies lived experiences, I hoped that there were additional stories and lived experiences to learn from. So, similarly to how I conduct myself in business and within my classroom, I treated all my participants with respect and utilized this study as a way to examine this phenomenon and their unique stories through a fresh set of eyes.

**Summary**

This qualitative research study employed narrative inquiry methodological procedures including convenience and snowball sampling to capture the storied lives of nine young Black women between the ages of 18 and 24 who engaged in sexy selfie practices in a mid-southern urban environment. Analysis procedures included multiple codings that resulted in the creation of narrative representations of each participants' sexy selfie experiences that I will discuss in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Data Representation and Explicit Interpretation

Black women have been systemically silenced (Hartzog, 2013) and/or exoticized (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens et al., 2017) with regards to their sexuality. They are not being adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for successful navigation of their sexual identity because they are oftentimes left alone to decipher the mixed messages regarding women and the expression of their sexual identity (Baker, 2004). Thus, as young adults, 18-24, seek to find out who they are and what they like (Stephens, 2012; Stokes, 2007), they turn to their same aged peers, social media, and the examples within their immediate social and cultural contexts (Brown et al., 2005; Strasburger, 2004). An essential element of sexual identity development is having the opportunity to explore, seek guidance when needed, and define for yourself—by yourself—who you desire to be defined as (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Kroger & Marcia, 2011: Tajfel, 2010). The purpose of this Hip Hop feminist, identity development narrative study was to understand the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of how young Black women experience and navigate sexuality during a critical period of identity development; and to identify how specific characteristics of identity are cultivated by sexy selfie practices.

1) In order to capture the voice of young Black women who have engaged in sexy selfies, narrative inquiry was an appropriate choice for research. Narrative research provides the opportunity for the participants to tell their own stories (Coulter & Smith, 2009). Marrying narrative inquiry with Hip Hop feminism was a reasonable decision because participants were being asked to reflect on how their experiences with sexy selfies may have influenced their identity development within a 21st century, social media saturated culture. These narratives provided opportunity for

nine young Black women's voices to be inserted into the discourse on sexual identity development and sexy selfie practices. Additionally, the co-constructed narratives were used in an attempt to answer the following research questions:*How is young Black women's identity development influenced and shaped by sexy selfie practices?*

2) *In young Black women, what characteristics of identity are influenced by sexy selfie practices?*
3) *In young Black women, how are these characteristics of identity shaped by social media and sexy selfie practices?*

The findings of this study, presented in this chapter, represents how the data (interviews, participants' and researcher journals) mentioned in chapter 3 was synthesized and reflexively analyzed (Maxwell, 2013) to co-create a narrative about each of the participant's sexy selfie experience(s). In order to honor the tenets of HHF and narrative inquiry, I collaborated with each individual participant, by member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012) and discussed strategies for their representation. Based on these discussions and through the process of iterative inductive-thematic analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017), nine unique narratives were created as a way to interpret their verbatim words and sexy selfie experiences for the purpose of the study. Through the iterative procedural process outlined in chapter three, I created a unique amalgamated narrative to reflect each participant's verbatim words and story shared. Each unique representation of the participants utilizes a different literary genre to represent the participants' story, their individualized style and personality. Below is a list of the participants with the narrative style chosen and co-selected to represent them: Jaz Dean is represented by a free verse poem with refrain; Keisha Sanders is represented by a poem with rhyme; Melanie Staples is represented by a short story; Alexis Green is represented by a poem using five Haiku; Destiny Thomas is

represented using a vignette; Ashley Brown is represented using an acrostic poem; Andriana Clark is represented in a poem using five cinquains. Draya Peaches Smith is represented using a narrative poem with end rhyme; and Shanny Crews is represented using a multi-modal concrete poem. Each of the unique narratives that were co-created between me and my participants will be presented and further explained in this chapter.

## Nine Unique Women Represented with Style

The following representations are presented here to connect the aforementioned purposes and research questions for this study to the lived experiences of nine amazingly unique women. Each participant was represented with a different type of narrative prose which included various poetry structures, a short story, a vignette, and a multi-modal narrative to further exemplify that although they are all young Black women, they are not monolithic (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). Synthesizing the data sources allowed me to creatively co-construct with my participants narratives that reflected and represented their lived experiences. Initially the narrative was created, reviewed by the participant for member checking, then a unique title was constructed mimicking the hashtag style typically used on social media sites and text messaging within the 21st century.

This next section of Chapter Four will include a thorough description of the participants, present each participant's unique narrative representation, and define the rationale behind the narrative choice. I will describe the meaning making process that I used when creating the narratives which were based on the five categorical topics (e.g., identity, culture, sexuality, Black femininity, and the "other") as well as an adherence to the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry research. Finally, a horizontal representation of all of the participants will be presented in

the form of rap lyrics to not only honor and represent the lived experiences of my participants but also to honor the tenant and alignment of my macro theory, Hip Hop feminism.

**Jaz Dean**

Jaz is a 24-year-old African American college student, mother, full-time employee, and Bible study teacher. Jaz prefers to be called by her childhood nickname. She identifies herself as a Black (African American) woman and she is currently a college junior. Jaz was raised in a single-parent household with only her mother and four younger siblings. Although Jaz knew her biological father, she confessed that he was in and out of her life from childhood to most recently due to repeat incarceration and an inability to be a stable father figure. Although Jaz's mother married her stepdad later, Jaz had a strained relationship with him and now feels relieved that it is just her mother and siblings again. Jaz is the eldest of her siblings on her mother's side; she has two brothers aged 21, one sister aged 19, and a baby sister aged 17. She did not mention having any siblings on her father's side of her family. And she seemed very proud to state that her grandparents, especially her grandmother, were around a lot and contributed to her upbringing. Jaz has a son who is four years old. Jaz is approximately 5'8" in height and has a small and curvy frame. She is approximately 130 pounds. She has medium-sized (or average) dark brown eyes, dark brown hair, and unique features.

During the interview, she wore a pair of black pants, a t-shirt, and an army fatigue jacket. She also had a black purse and kept her cell phone handy. Her hair was down and, per the interview conversation, it was in a protective style, natural hair underneath. She wore very minimal jewelry. Jaz chose a chair with pillows adjacent to me, on my right. She adjusted comfortably in the chair and used several facial expressions and hand gestures and engaged in

light laughter during the interview. Her voice was mostly clear. Jaz did use several colloquial phrases and pop-cultural terminology.

Jaz began taking sexy selfies at the age of 17. She admitted that she was rather young but used the justification that she was out of high school before she began engaging in sexy selfie practices. Jaz defined sexy selfies as follows:

> *A sexy selfie is when you have on a little sexy outfit, makeup, showing your curves and just giving like, you know, like a seductive look, well not too seductive, but not like all smiles. Definitely giving an inviting or welcoming look…sexy selfies can also be appropriate and not necessarily all butt naked.*

Jaz believes that explicit images are ones that are completely nude or depict people who are only seen in their underwear. While she admits to still engaging in sexy selfies now, she confessed that she is now in control of the content and only shares them with her current boyfriend, whom she trusts.

Next is the representative poem entitled, "#UnapologeticIntimacy." This poem was co-written to reflect Jaz's unique sexy selfie experiences, member checked, and then titled based on her predominant message. Additional rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

**#UnapologeticIntimacy**

I am a private person
That is me
I won't apologize for who I am nor what I am becoming
I know that my true self is grounded in good morals I follow the examples of Godly women—
the matriarchs in my life that held it down
See they held it down even when it was hard, too hard
Because all these sorry men continued to be disappointments
So I will stand for what I believe in and fall for nothing
I will be me even if that means I intimidate others
Because that's who I got to be
I gotta be me
So, I won't apologize for who I am nor what I am becoming
I am a private person
That is me
And for now I'm okay with that

To get to where I am going I cannot forget who and what I am
I am a Black Woman
A Phenomenal woman
Hardworking, dedicated and complex like the rest
Trust me I am not a saint
But I a true Black Queen
I am what others aspire to be
I just don't fall for the thirst traps or even set them
I reckon as a Queen they will just flock to me
I don't need the attention but I do indeed enjoy it
But as you can see even as a Black Woman
I still am a private person
I am no spectacle for others to see or hurt
No puppet to be played with—
Instead, I am a Black Woman
A private person
That is me
And for now I'm okay with that

See unlike my peers, I know my culture is changing
Constantly shifting and rearranging
It appears we are losing our values, morals and upbringing
So many of my peers don't even know their history
So many others don't even realize the sacrifices made for us
They don't respect what our ancestors did for us
How our mothers and grandmothers have sacrificed for us
So I hold on to those old-fashioned values
Those values that make me unique in a sex-crazed culture filled with porn, drugs, fakes, and IG models that are doing it for the clout
See I just want to be me
I need my privacy
But that's just how I was raised
And that doesn't make me crazed
It simply means I stand out
In a world that will make my grandmother pout
We are living in a world where sex is everywhere and everyone wants attention
But did I fail to mention
I don't crave that validation
Because I am a private person, a Black Queen, a truly unique individual that knows how to have fun
But I truly live for my son
So I must allow my light to shine even if I don't receive the likes
I know that we will be alright
Because I am a private person striving to resist the evils of this world

So you'll only get a 24 hour glimpse of this girl
As I am a private person
And I refuse to apologize for who I am nor what I am becoming
A private person
That is me
And for now I'm okay with that

I have to be okay with that because that is me
Someone who can be cautious, private yet adventurous
And still enjoy talks about birds and bees
I'm no traditional, boring book which makes many men curious
But everyone doesn't get that part
They don't all get that part of me
You will have to look a little deeper you see
If you want to get to my heart and my honeybee
Because although I am sexually free
I am a very private and intimate person
And that's what I love best about me
So, no I won't apologize for who I am nor what I am becoming
A private person
That is me
And for now I'm okay with that

See I need to be okay with that because of my VIPs
I cannot live just for my explorations of the birds and the bees
I have my son, my family, my friends, and more
I am I refuse to go backwards—I refuse to be poor
My greatest disappointments have been my greatest motivations
Therefore even in my private world
I still strive for the greatest aspirations
So no I am not a perfect girl
But for now I am okay with that
I'm okay with having a little tack
And being a private person in a very public world
So if you're looking for something else, you will not find that girl
Because I know whose and what I am
A sexually free being
A beautiful Black queen
A fun-loving, adventurous mom
A well-rounded, old-school Christian
An intimidating, headstrong woman
And
A very private person living in this 21st century crazed world

### *Rationale*

Jaz's narrative is captured and represented with a free verse poem with refrain because she has a very free yet guided spirit. Free verse is a type of literary technique that is not bound by rules of meter, rhythm, and rhyme. Jaz's personality exemplifies an individual that unique and semi-structured. Therefore, it was decided that free form may be the best way to represent the narrative that she co-created with me. As with any narrative, Jaz's sexy selfie experiences had a beginning, middle, and end that centered around two major points: privacy and being unapologetic. Therefore, these themes needed to be thoroughly representative throughout her culminating piece. With free-form poetry, although there are no limitations to the meter, rhythm, or rhyme scheme, it does tend to follow the rhythm and flow of natural speech. Thus, free-form poetry elicited the structural rules that most closely resembled Jaz's personality and interview style. Jaz was unapologetic and certain of who she is and how she wants to be perceived publicly. Therefore, the poem co-constructed with her voice and later member-checked also includes aspects of a refrain. Refrain comes from the French word, *refraindre*, which means to repeat. Refrains are used as a poetic device at regular intervals, in different stanzas, to repeat and place emphasis on specific points addressed in the poem. It was evident that Jaz had one clear message regarding her identity and sexy selfie practices, which will be explained next; therefore, it was critical to construct a set of lines that represented the major points and the ideas that Jaz was trying to convey through her sexy selfie narratives.

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

Jaz's sections on identity, sexuality, and the influence from her "Others" seemed to illuminate a direct and explicit message for analysis. In this section, I will attempt to make

meaning of Jaz's poem through the lens of her identity, sexuality, and the "Other(s)" that influence who she is.

**Identity.** In Jaz's #UnapologeticIntimacy poem it is evident that she has an identity that is both private and unapologetic. Throughout this poem, which was co-created with some of her verbatim interview phrases, she indicates that she "*is a private person*" and "*she won't apologize for who she is now, nor what she is becoming*." This signifies that she has a strong sense of self and the understanding that while she is still evolving as a woman, she will not apologize for wanting her privacy (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Levine & Munsch, 2019; Steinberg, 2016; Tajfel, 2010). Jaz tends to fuck with the grays (Morgan, 2017) because while she does truly enjoy sex (*"And [I] still enjoy talks about birds and bees";* and *"although I am sexually free"*) she still maintains that she is a private person grounded in good morals. Furthermore, Jaz attempts to bring wreck (Pough, 2015) and illuminate her disgust with Black men because, as she states, "*all these sorry men continue to be disappointments*." Her identity is tied to this disgust and disappointment because, through her constant exposure to men who have consistently let her down, she has learned to not depend on a man for anything. She thus takes on an identity of a strong Black woman (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Townsend et al., 2010).

**Sexuality.** While Jaz prides herself on "being sexually free" there is a slight silence that is evident in her speech (Morison & Macleod, 2014; Poland & Pederson, 1998). She has encountered certain contradictions from her upbringing, especially the contradictory messages with Black culture (Morgan, 2017), messages from society (Baker, 2004; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Shafer et al., 2013; Stokes, 2007), and her own sexual explorations (Brown et al., 2009; Chalfen, 2009; Love, 2016) that have made her not only be "free" sexually but also "private." It is later understood when analyzing her "Other" category that part of the reason she desires her

sexuality to be private is because she feels if she only focuses on sex, then she will not flourish in life as indicated when she says "*I cannot live just for my explorations of the birds and the bees/I have my son, my family, my friends, and more/I am I refuse to go backwards—I refuse to be poor*." It is evident here while she does desire to be a "sexual being" and give some men her "honeybee," she still feels obligated to keep that side of her private so that she is not later affected by her sexual decisions and behavior. Jaz is also driven by her desire to be a future educator; thus, she shies away from situations in which she feels may negatively affect her dreams and goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As evident in her first sexy selfie encounter, she was exposed by someone she entrusted with her nude images, therefore, to avoid that happening again she slightly silences a small part of herself to keep her sexuality private and reserved. Furthermore, her constant references to her Christian roots gives off another implied message that Christian women are not supposed to be sexually free, but Jaz will not apologize for liking sex and will at least respect her upbringing by keeping that part of her private. Thus, she is influenced to silence her sexual preferences and behaviors because she is reflectively influenced by the opinions of others (Blair, 2014; Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Milkie, 1999).

**Other.** Jaz specifically named her influencers in the interview which made it so easy to co-create the poem with her others listed as well. In the poem, it is evident that her "others" are the VIPs (very important people and places) in her life: "*I have my son, my family, my friends, and more*." The more that she often referred to was her job and her future place of employment. Jaz knows that her others influence the decisions she makes and thus impacts her development (Blair, 2014; Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Milkie, 1999). Because she feels obligated, motivated, and encouraged to do better than what she saw growing up, she feels that she must uphold a certain image of herself and strive to be her best. Furthermore, Jaz seems to understand that her

others also include the world as a whole—she expresses strong feelings towards not wanting to allow the world or random people change who she is. Thus, she remains "*a private person in a very public world,"* but she is certain that the world/society will not make a *puppet* out of her which signifies her unapologetic demeanor.

**Keisha Sanders**

Keisha is an 18-year-old African American high school student with a passion for being a hairstylist and being financially independent. She self identifies as a pretty, boogie, Black girl that is nice and shy; and states that she is a senior in high school. She prefers to be called by her alter ego, "Keisha" because she says there is a side to her that she rarely ever shows to the public. Keisha was raised in a single-parent household with her mother and three younger siblings—two brothers (17 and 7) and one sister (14). She admits to occasionally visiting her father who also has three younger girls (14, 13, and 3). Keisha is the oldest child for both of her parents who she states were never married. Keisha is approximately 5'3" in height and has a slender frame. She is approximately 120 pounds and has light brown eyes and dark hair. She likes to smile.

During the interview she wore blue jean shorts and a yellow graphic t-shirt. She had her hair pulled back into a ponytail with an afro. She had on very minimal jewelry (just earrings and a small watch). She seemed to be very comfortable sitting in a chair and sat directly across the conference room table from me during the interview. Her voice was mostly clear, and she spoke with hand gestures, colloquial phrases and powerful facial expressions.

Keisha began taking sexy selfies at the age of 13, when she was in middle school. While she regrets her first experiences with taking and sharing sexy selfies, she admits that she still

currently shares sexy selfies and videos with her long-term boyfriend. When asked her personal definition of sexy selfies, she stated:

> *A sexy selfie is a picture [or video] that is half-naked and you all cute and stuff with your hair done, nails, makeup and a cute outfit like a crop top and jeans or biker shorts you know something like that…or it could be completely naked as well.*

Keisha admitted to sharing sexy selfies (pictures and videos) with the wrong people before; therefore, she only takes pictures and makes videos with her current boyfriend because she has been with him for several years and trusts him. She indicated that engaging in sexy selfies practices with her boyfriend has added excitement between them during intimate encounters.

Next is the representative poem entitled, "#Exposed," which was co-written to reflect Keisha's unique sexy selfie experiences, member checked, and then titled based on her predominant message. When member checking with Keisha, she stated several times that she wanted to contribute to future Black and Brown girls, "the young Black folks" as she called them. Moreover, she expressed an extreme interest in wanting to pay homage to her little sisters and prepare them for things that they may be challenged with having to decide on. Additional rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

**#Exposed**

Baby girl you better watch out
Don't get caught with too much skin out
When your pic gets exposed you will pout
And you know you don't want to hear your mama shout

IG, Twitter, Snap Chat and the Book
Yeah I know they will all get you hooked
Online every day trying to post your best look
Show too much skin will have you feeling cooked

Sending sexts, selfies and videos to the wrong boy
Will leave you feeling like a little toy
He will post your naked pics online
Even though we all know that this is a crime

It makes you wonder if it's worth all of the attention
Yes, we know followers are cool but maybe you had a misapprehension
That sexy and explicit selfies break the silence barrier
My pics in the wrong hands now that's even scarier

So please listen to me don't ruin your reputation
By trying to follow an older, wilder generation
Just DON'T DO IT—it will come back on you
And I know all too well that it will leave you feeling blue

See this happened to a friend of mine
Right before grade nine
She thought her boyfriend was straight from a gold mine
But he was only a waste of her precious time

She thought she could trust him
So she stepped out on a limb
She took hours just to get the pose right
And it was on #MSExposed that same night

She and he both took a risk
Because now their devices are being frisked
By the police department
Luckily she saved it in a special compartment

She might slide by this time
Because she does not want to face that crime
I said all this to say be careful what you post online
A sexy selfie is not worth putting your dreams on the line!

***Rationale***

Keisha's narrative has been crafted in a poem that uses rhyme. Rhyme is the repetition of similar sounds in the stressed syllables of words. Rhyme either occurs between words, within the endings of words, or a line of poetry. It was very evident that the message that Keisha had regarding her sexy selfie practices and identity was that she regretted having started so early in life. Although she explained that she still engages in sexy selfie practices, she now has a lot more

control over the content that she produces as well as the audience that receives her images and videos. Therefore, it was imperative that her voice regarding her remorse be shared.

Additionally, co-constructing a poem that utilized an unstructured rhyming scheme seemed to be the best way to represent her style, personality, and approach. Being the youngest in age amongst all of the other participants, I found her interview not to be as challenging as I had originally assumed. Prior to the interview I wrote a memo that expressed my concern about whether or not Keisha would be able to comprehend and elaborate on all of the various topics and questions to tell her narrative in a thorough manner. However, she seemed to have a very clear understanding about herself, her sexy selfie practices, and where she stood on the importance of this topic. With this in mind, it was decided that in order to narrate her experiences and represent the story she truly wanted to share, the central focus would need to be on her reflexivity of her first sexy selfie practices and how she wished that someone older had guided her to make better decisions. Therefore, rhyme was used to have a lasting impressionable effect on others who may later read her story.

***Categorical Meaning Making***

When inductively analyzing Keisha's story ad trying to make meaning of her five emergent categories, the two most prominent categories that emerged were sexuality and culture. In this section, I will attempt to analyze Keisha's poem entitled, "#Exposed," in which she describes her overall experiences with being exposed not just once but twice by people that she sent nude images to. She co-created this narrative with me as an ode to her younger self in the hopes of encouraging other young girls, especially her younger sisters, to be careful when being curious and courageous through their explorations of their sexual identity development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Tajfel, 2010).

**Sexuality.** Keisha adamantly expressed not just with her words, but also through her body language during the interview that she enjoys sex. She implied through the language of this poem (specifically stanzas 3-4) that she desires to be sexually free with her boyfriend (Feeney et al., 1993; Gagnon & Simon, 1973), and she wants to express herself sexually (Stephens, 2012), but she feels silenced and scared because she does not want her sexuality to be placed in the wrong hands (Baker, 2004). She even brings up the issue of trust, when she states that *"she thought her boyfriend was a straight gold mine/but he was only a waste of her precious time.*" While in the poem, it states that this was an experience of a friend of hers, she uses a different characterization to exemplify the important message she wants to send to her younger self. Here she is implying that she wished she could have learned vicariously somehow that sexy selfies in the wrong hands and sent to the wrong, immature boy was not good (Ryan, 2014). Furthermore, it might be implied that the reason she selected to co-create this poem using an alternate persona is because she felt the need to silence her sexy in the hopes of demonstrating a level of respect she has for herself (Durham et al., 2013; Hammonds, 2004).

In her last line and final message to a young "sistah"—she implies that it is okay to take sexy selfies, but "[they]*are not worth putting your dreams on the line*." She took the risks during her own sexual identity exploration; however, she wanted to forewarn young girls that if they too choose to fuck with the grays, bring wreck, and aim to engage in pleasure politics, that they would need to be careful with whom they do it with—IF they care about how the images may affect their futures (Morgan, 2015/2017; Pough, 2015; Sales, 2016; Seifert et al., 1994).

**Culture.** While Keisha namedrops several social media platforms throughout her interview, "*IG, Twitter, Snap Chat, and the Book*," she also indicates how dangerous they can be: "*Online every day trying to post your best look/Show too much skin will have you feeling*

*cooked"* (Chalfen, 2009; Gorman, 2013; Gross, 2017). She expressed deep regret for her initial experiences with sexy selfies; however, it is now with "the right boy" that she now embraces this sexual and cultural practice with pride (Brown et al., 2009; Knibbs, 2014; Love, 2016; Sales, 2016, Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016; Stokes, 2007; Tolman, 2012). In her interview she indicated that she and her current boyfriend enjoy filming themselves and exchanging sexy selfies to spice things up. While she does recognize that this is a cultural and generational trend: "*So please listen to me don't ruin your reputation/ By trying to follow an older, wilder generation*," she does not want younger girls who are exposed to these images and practices to engage in practices that are meant for older, mature women. Because she is aware of the fact that sexuality and sex behaviors are learned and performed through the interactions with others in social settings (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Furthermore, because she is living within the 21st century, she illuminates additional challenges that younger girls might face because sexy selfie images contain minors scantily dressed or nude: "*She and he both took a risk/ Because now their devices are being frisked/ By the police department/ Luckily she saved it in a special compartment/ She might slide by this time/ Because she does not want to face that crime*." While Keisha does not explicitly indicate that she desires to be private, it is implied in her main message that everything is not for public display. Using this poem to illuminate how her first sexy selfie encounters went wrong provides implications for developmental and educational purposes. These will be discussed in Chapter 5.

**Melanie Staples**

Melanie, who has passed away since our last member-checking session, was a 23-year-old African American, college graduate, and an aspiring educator. Melanie completed her bachelor's degree in education one year prior. She preferred the name Melanie because she said

she always thought it was a cute name. Melanie self-identified as a caring, weird, quiet, and bubbly young Black woman. She was very proud of the fact that she was a part of Black culture and considered herself as a "Christian at heart." Melanie also admitted to being self-conscious and knowing that she was definitely different from the norm. Melanie was raised by both of her biological parents and lived with her younger sister, who is 14 years old. She also indicated that she had an older sister (only by a few months) that was 23 and did not live with her. However, she adamantly expressed that she was relatively close to both sisters, even with her older sister living in another state. Melanie was approximately 5'10" in height and had a very slender, frame weighing in at about 130 pounds. Melanie had a very bright smile and eyes that sparkled! Her hair and eyes were dark brown hair. And she had a chocolate complexion.

During the interview, she wore very comfortable pajamas (a t-shirt, flannel pants, socks, and house shoes). During the interview Melanie kept her hair covered with a satin bonnet and mentioned to me that she finally decided to just shave her hair to avoid the constant frustration with having it fall out due to chemotherapy. She was able to be relaxed and comfortable as the interview was conducted inside her home kitchen per her request. Melanie, at the time of the interview, was battling with a progressive illness that made it very difficult to meet in some public places. In order to respect her time and participation, I did what was best and most convenient for my participant (Creswell, 2002). Melanie was also very strategic when choosing where we would conduct the interview as she wanted to ensure that there would be minimal distractions and background noises. Therefore, she chose the kitchen and she sat adjacent to me in very comfortable chairs. She often paused to get water, go to the restroom, and readjust her body; but she ensured me that she was enjoying the interview topics and did not want to stop all together. She used several hand gestures, truly thought through her responses before answering,

and showed great emotions throughout the interview. Her voice was a bit shaky at times and used a few colloquial phrases.

Melanie began taking sexy selfies at the age of 12. She admitted to having mixed emotions throughout her entire first experience of engaging in sexy selfie practices. She expressed her strong desire to be intimately loved and validated as well as having an anxious moment in which her heart was racing, and she felt extremely nervous. Nevertheless, she expressed great joy and admitted to having more confidence after she sent the images. Although the joyous feelings did not last long because her parents found out and she was punished for sending them, she described sexy selfies as:

> *An image or video that shows someone in their bra or that fact that you have no bra on at all, your cleavage or bottom showing, makeup on and posing with a more seductive look. They are the most revealing images that show off the body so that people can get approval on social media or from their friends.*

Melanie described her very first sexy selfie as just sexy and not sexually explicit because she stated that she did not have her nipples showing, only the sides of her breasts. She also stated that she was not completely nude, instead she was just showing the sides of her butt. From this it is understood that Melanie felt as though sexually explicit images left nothing to the imagination and covers no body parts. Although she does not feel that she shared explicit images during her first encounter, she confessed to later sending this same recipient multiple images that progressively became more explicit with every new image sent. Additionally, Melanie admitted to continuing to take sexy selfies with her boyfriend. She also engaged in nude modeling before her death, which occurred during the process of this study.

The following is a short story narrative that initially Melanie and I began co-constructing to represent her first sexy selfie experience. Within the short story, there is dialogue between

several of the characters. Additionally, there are a few cell phone image screenshots to represent conversations potentially shared between the main characters in Melanie story. In adherence to confidentiality (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Creswell, 2002; Poland & Pederson, 1998; Morison & Macleod, 2014) the names mentioned in the short story entitled, "#MySpiceUnintentionallyExposed," have been changed and all of the names were selected by Melanie prior to her death. When member checking with Melanie, I was able to get the key takeaways and lessons that she learned from initially engaging in sexy selfie practices. Based on this discussion, Melanie indicated that she wanted this short story representation to be reflective of her initial sexy selfie experiences as well as a tribute to her younger sister. Additional rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

**#MySpiceUnintentionallyExposed**

I honestly never thought that this would ever happen to me because I am always so meticulous and cautious. I was trying my best to be careful because I was already nervous as heck. I have always made sure that I cover my tracks and delete all of the history. But daddy knew exactly what he was doing by giving me the older computer. And now with mamma not talking to me at all, I have to make this right—but where in the world do I start?

Oh, wait a minute, y'all have no idea what I am talking about do you? So, let me go back to the beginning before I got myself into all of this mess and then maybe you can help me figure out how to make this right for everyone.

It all started about three weeks ago afterschool when me and Kelsey were trying to finish our ELA project in the school library. As we were finishing up, she asked me if I ever responded to the new guy Bryant.

KELSEY: Hey, Mel so have you gotten a chance to respond to Bryant's message on Facebook yet? I know you really like him, and you definitely don't want to keep him waiting because girl he is FIONE!!!

MEL: Yes, girl I know but you know how my mom and dad are plus I have no clue what I am doing. I don't even know if he gone like me like that and I definitely don't want to embarrass myself. I can only imagine him thinking I am too skinny or not as pretty as the other girls at the school.

KELSEY: Girl please! You really need to stop all that because it's so many people here already wondering why you aren't already modeling for an agency. You are freaking gorgeous and as your BFF you know I'm gone get you for saying all this foolishness. Take the pictures TODAY and get it over with already. You saw how well it turned out for me and Shawn so just imagine you will finally have the boy of your dreams and can finally go out with us when we do the group dates!

MEL: This is true love and thanks I just didn't think about it that way because I am so nervous—I don't want to get caught nor do I want him to laugh or get turned off. Speaking of which, should I still ask him for one too?

KELSEY: Uh duh honey! He needs to give to receive, you know how we roll. Besides that will give you something to look forward to when you meet up again. Now how you plan to do it without getting caught so we can finish this last part of our project?

After Kelsey asked me how I would plan to take the sexy selfies without getting caught, I sat there frozen for a moment strategizing. She went to the printer to grab our work for the project and my mind began racing! No, wait…that wasn't my mind racing that was literally my heart beating so fast because I was nervous, anxious, and feeling a bit insecure.

KELSEY: Okay so do you know how you are going to do it yet? Do you know what you are going to wear? Or do you want to just take one completely naked?

MEL: Well I think I might just send him one of my boobs because you know I am too tall and goofy to be trying to get my whole body in the picture and plus I refuse to ask Madi to take it for me. She is just too nosey and annoying. It would probably be best to take it in the bathroom because mamma and daddy already know I take my phone to the bathroom every night. So, I run less of a risk to get caught.

KELSEY: Don't do Madison honey, you know I love your sister!

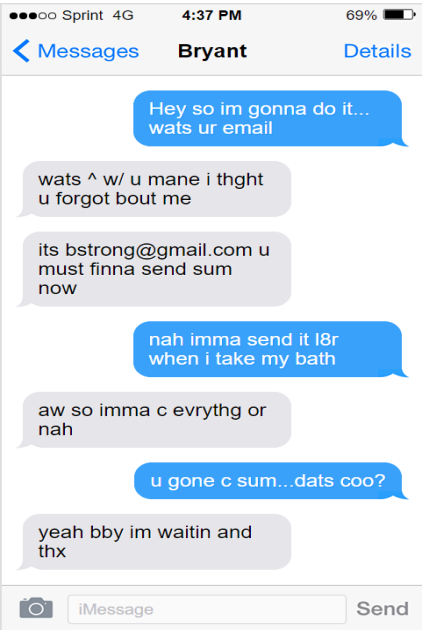
MEL: I do too, and I guess she's part of the reason why I am a little hesitant.

KELSEY: Oh well you said you were going to do it so join the club and send the pictures anyway.

MEL: Okay I will do it later today and see what happens. Are we done with the poster now?

KELSEY: Yes, we are, and my aunt is outside ready to pick us up.

When I got home, daddy was still at work and mamma and Madi were in the kitchen; so, I decided to text Bryant to see if I could get his email address. I thought that it might be best send the images via email versus sending them through text. I just don't trust text messaging besides I know our parents might check our phones but not the emails (or so I thought)!




That was really easy I thought. At least talking to Bryant was easy, now if I could only be sure that I could get these pictures just right. I just wanted to show him that I really like him and hope that he likes me a lot too because I know I can be extremely goofy and a little weird.

I know that dinner should be ready soon, but I feel the need to practice taking these selfies in my regular clothes before I try to take them without. I also know that if I put my night clothes in the bathroom first me and Madi won't fight over who gets to use the bathroom first. I appreciate her beginning to respect my need for privacy. While I love my baby sister sometimes it can feel a bit overwhelming to have her following me around all the time, but of course I would never express this to her directly because it is my job to help build her up not make her feel worse!

MOM: Hey girls, dinner is ready. We will start without your father because he is working late and you two need to get ready for school tomorrow while I check your homework and projects.

MADI: Yaaaah! Let's eat, I'm super excited because I helped with the prepping process.

MEL: Oh, that sounds great Madi! I know you love to help mom cook.

MOM: So, girls why don't you take turns telling me about your day. What was something exciting that happened today; and what was something that was challenging?

We always have some thought-provoking questions each night—tonight's focus was on excitement and challenging. Go figure! My most challenging and hopefully exciting moment for today has yet to happen and the quicker I can get through dinner the better chances I get to getting to the exciting part, but it will be challenging to not get caught or to goof-up the images. OMG!!! I can only imagine how my parents would react—I think I may just keep this one slightly PG, I'm not quite ready for triple X rated anything right now.

Wait a minute are they both looking at me? Oh, shoot it's my turn to "share my day…"

After dinner the routines are pretty simple, me and Madi will help clear the table, wash the dishes and then get ready for bed. I will let Madi get homework help first so that I can spend a little more time in the bathroom tonight, then I will get help by showing mom our finished project. I honestly think she will be very proud of the work me and Kelsey did.

■■■

After giving it much thought and practicing for a bit, I have decided to only send Bryant a picture of my cleavage. I'm not quite ready to send full boobs and nipples, but I'm sure he will like this one. Let me hurry up delete the rest and then send this email to him.

MADI: Mel, can you please hurry up? Mom is waiting and she says I need to be in bed within an hour!!!

MEL: Oh gosh! Okay sorry here I come "Tink" let me just clean up really quick and it's all yours.

I finally did it! I cannot believe I actually took the pictures. Whew!!! Now let's just send them, then I'll wait and see his response.

MOM: Mel, I need to check your project. Can you come on in here now?

Oh gosh why right now mom? I really, really need to send this email quick before he has to go to bed too. Ughhhhh FML I'm always having to do things on everyone else's time.

MEL: Okay Mom! Here I come, let me send an email really quick…PLEASE?

MOM: Okay sure.

MEL: Thanks, you're the best!

So after me and mom went over my project and further discussed my day, I asked her about inviting Bryant to the church event this weekend. She said it was fine but she doesn't want me calling him too late to talk about it because it is "unladylike" to be on the phone for more than an hour and a half, and especially late at night (as in after 8 PM).

To remain respectful of myself, our parents, and Bryant, I just decided to text him. I told him about the event—which he said he was planning to attend any way so that we could see each other and then he said he loved the pictures. Of course, he asked to see more, but I told him that we would need to wait because I was already super nervous to send those. He told me to trust him and that he wasn't going anywhere so he would wait.

■■■

The next day at school Kelsey greeted me to see if I was ready to present our project and then she asked if I made things "official" with Bryant yet.

KELSEY: Hey girl hey!!! So, are you ready to get this thang poppin' in class today? Oh and speaking of which, please tell me that you got it poppin' with B so we can all hang out this weekend…Did you send him the pictures last night or not?

MEL: Yes, ma'am I did! HE LOVED THEM!!! I think I may ask him out tonight and see if he wants to be with me.

KELSEY: Well, yeah it is the 21st century and you know these men-folk be real timid to ask a sistah out these days. Go ahead and shoot your shot girl. Clearly, he likes you.

MEL: This is true, but let's get on in class before we get a tardy. I would hate for my parents to get a call especially after my mom has already agreed to allow me to ask Bryant to the events this weekend.

■■■

As soon as I got home, I opened up my e-mails to be sure that all of our content and my browsing history was deleted, but then I noticed that Bryant sent me something and the subject line was: "Shhh PRIVATE, For Melanie Only." I was a mix of emotions because I was so nervous to open it in the office, but also super excited to see what he sent me. I finally gave in, shut the office door, turned my seat slightly to block the entrance and clicked to open the email and it was only a file. So, I opened the file!!! OH MY GOODNESS! I screamed and hadn't realized that I actually screamed out loud until Madison came running down the hall to check on me. Even after I told her that I was fine, she still demanded to come in. So, to keep myself from making things too obvious, I click on a random YouTube video…you know one of those "Try not to laugh" vine compilations. I told her that I was just LOL.

MADI: Are you okay?

MEL: Yes, I was just watching this vine compilation on YouTube and it was hilarious.

MADI: Oh, okay then because I thought we were going to have to call the ambulance or something. But wait aren't you suppose to be doing work on the computer?

MEL: OMG yes Madi, now I'm going to finish up then maybe we can go play outside today since I only have one assignment.

MADI: OKAY!

I knew that would make her happy, but most importantly I knew that would buy me some time to delete the new browsing history and images from the computer. But wait…this stupid, ancient computer will not allow me to delete his picture! OMG OMG OMG what in the world am I going to do. My parents CAN NOT SEE A DINGILING on our family computer. THINK MELANIE! Okay breathe…Google: How to delete saved images from your computer. Whew! Google saves my life every time! Now I will restart it just to be sure!

■■■

MADI: Mom thanks for letting me and Mel go outside and play. It was fun and we got to play with the other girls down the street too. Melanie really helped me out because those girls never talk to me in school!

MOM: That's great honey. Well, it seems I know one thing that made your day exciting. Melanie, how about you dear?

MEL: Well, let's see…Kelsey and I made an A on our project. Bryant's mom and grandmother agreed to let him come to the revival, and then me and Madi got to play beautiful princesses with the neighbors. I say I had a great day! (If only I could really share with her about other things…but I know she would get so angry. Sometimes I just wish that I had someone I could talk to about boys and sex and stuff without feeling like I'm doing something wrong.)

DAD: Sounds like my girls had a great day today. Only one more day until the weekend! I cannot wait to spend time with you all at the church. I also cannot wait to meet this Bryant fella!

MADI + MEL: Ohhh Daddy! Please be nice.

MOM: He will. I will help make sure of it. Now girls let's get cleaned up and ready for bed! Mel, I'll check your work first.

MEL: Okay mom here I come.

■■■

I really liked what I say but I really wish I had a way to save it in my phone and not have anyone see it. I know Kelsey uses this app but my dad being a tech wiz I would hate to try to outsmart him. I am really looking forward to this weekend, so I decided to spice things up just a bit. I want to send him a nude but make it like a tease somewhat. So, I think I will ask Kelsey to take it this time.

MEL: Kelsey, I will need your help when you spend the night this weekend. I need to take some more pictures for Bryant and see if I can get him more excited to see me on Saturday. Will you help me?
KELSEY: Of course, what are BFFs for? I got you honey…will you take some for me too? LOL

MEL: Sure thang! So, did you bring your clothes to school or will we need to pick up your bag on the way home?

KELSEY: I brought everything…we have no time to waste! I put everything in Mrs. Johnson's homeroom class.

MEL: Cool! Let's go.

■■■

Once we made it to the house, we played outside with Madison and a few of the girls from the neighborhood. They seem to be playing nicely with Madi, but I can tell she is still hiding inside her shell sometimes. While I also have to pep myself up, I never want my sister to feel shy or insecure. So, I will do whatever I can to help support her. But maybe I can do that in the house sometimes too!

MADI: Mel, can I stay out a little longer? I can tell you and Kelsey are ready to leave.

MEL: Of course, but can y'all come in front of our house?

MADI: Okay!

MEL: Hey Kels, you ready?

KELSEY: Sure! Let's go.

As soon as we get inside of the house, she immediately asks me if I want to go ahead and take a few pictures for Bryant and some of her for Shawn before my parents get home. I did not hesitate because I knew that we didn't have much time.

MEL: Yeah, sure because I was thinking of doing a nude one from the side.

KELSEY: Ohhh that sounds hot! Okay you first.

Kelsey and I have been friends since we were little tots, so I wasn't really ashamed to undress in front of her, but I was rather cold and didn't want to appear goofy on camera. So, I asked her to help me put on a little makeup first and then we practiced a few poses before I started undressing. I also cleaned up my room a bit, then she began snapping pictures. When I was done with my "photoshoot" we went to check on Madi before I took pictures of Kelsey. She wanted a few on the bed and she wanted pictures of her undressing for Shawn so her "photoshoot" took much longer. As soon as we were finishing up, Madi and my mom walked in. Kelsey stayed in my room to send her pics to Shawn while I went down the hall to send mine to Bryant. We had already selected the images we were going to send based on whether or not our hair, makeup, nails, and bodies looked on point in the image. It was actually really fun to do this with Kelsey. As soon as Bryant received the pictures, he called me so me and Kelsey stepped outside to talk with him and have more privacy from Mom and Madi. He asked if he could just send me another picture to my phone instead of email because his sister was using their laptop. I was very nervous about that, but Kelsey promised me that she would remind me to delete it before bed. I trusted both of them, so I told him yes. As soon as he sent me the image, I knew then would be the perfect time to ask him out. I called him and told him that I have had a crush on him for a long while so I was wondering if we could start dating. I didn't expect it, but he said yes. He also confirmed that he doesn't just send his personal pictures out to just anyone, so he hoped that I knew he was serious about me too. He confirmed that we would meet up the next day at the church and that if I needed a reminder, he would send more images to keep things spicy until we saw each other.

■■■

Kelsey and I walked back into the house and prepared for "Nacho-ordinary-Friday" which is a game night with my family over nachos and movies. She and Shawn were still texting, but she seemed to be enjoying our time together too. Right before bed, she asked me if I deleted the browsing history on the computer and if I needed one more look at the pictures from Bryant. We exchanged phones for 10-15 minutes and we both did a "clean sweep" of any inappropriate texts and images from our phones. She knew what to look for in my phone and I in hers. We needed to be extra careful because we did not want anyone to misinterpret what we had going on. As we

laid in bed, we talked about how much different our lives would be if we didn't have to hide so much of ourselves from our parents, but also from the world.

MEL: I wish my parents could be more understanding and open with me. I mean I definitely don't want to be disrespectful, but I hate sneaking around, covering my tracks, and hiding parts of me from them.

KELSEY: I totally understand what you mean because I often feel the same way. Sometimes, I just wish we both had an older sister or different parents that would actually talk to us and keep things real. I mean they have to know that we are becoming more curious and they know we like boys, but it seems like they are afraid that if they talk to us about it then we will go out and do stuff!

MEL: Exactly! But I mean what do they expect us to do by not talking to us about things?

KELSEY: I don't know love, but I know one thing…I definitely don't like feeling bad for something that feels normal, natural, and right.

MADI: Can I please come in with y'all tonight?

MEL + KELSEY: Of course, you can, we will make you a pallet.

MADI: Cool, thanks!!! I will go get my sleeping bag.

MEL: We may need to table this conversation until later…although I would love to include Madi, I also don't want her to become too curious about boys and sex just yet.

KELSEY: I agree with that. No need in her starting too early.

MEL: And I also want her to feel more secure about herself before getting involved with anyone.

MADI: Are y'all in here talking about me?

KELSEY: Of course, we are "Tink" now come on so you can tell us all about school and your friends and what you want to do first at the revival tomorrow.

■■■

We spent the majority of the night talking and laughing, then daddy stepped into the doorway and asked us to be sure our phones were off and charging.

The next morning, we all chipped in to help prepare breakfast, then we packed the car to head to the church. On the way there me and Kelsey created a group chat to ask the boys and two of our other friends if they were on their way to meet us. Everyone said that they were either on their way or would be there by 1 pm. Even though the first part was a church service, I was very

anxious to see Bryant and go outside with the crew to play, eat, and talk without the church mothers, deacons, and our parents STARING at us.

KELSEY: What are you staring at over there ma'am?

MEL: Who me? Oh, I am just ready for this to be over so we can go outside.

KELSEY: You too, huh?

MEL: Yep!

Madison nudged me a little as a warning that we were getting louder. She was always really good at looking out for me and vice versa when it came to mom and dad. But there were still things I couldn't honestly tell her just yet.

■■■

After the morning service, they told everyone that we could go outside and enjoy the festivities. I started feeling butterflies in my stomach because I knew I was getting closer to seeing Bryant. His grandmother actually spotted me first and that was the perfect chance for her to meet my parents too. As they talked, me, Kelsey, and Bryant stood off to the side half-way eavesdropping and half-way in our own blissful world of excitement. Just as they were telling us that we could "go be kids," Shawn and the twins walked up. We all decided we would eat first and then find a hangout spot. I can honestly say that it was super fun having all my friends around and then there was Bryant—live and in the flesh! OMG!!! I started having flashbacks of the pictures he sent, and I could feel myself blushing. He squeezed my hand and asked if I was okay.

BRYANT: Hey bae, are you okay? You look like you've seen a ghost just now.

MEL: Oh yeah, sorry I am fine, just excited to be here with you and all my friends.

BRYANT: Oh yeah? But what are you over there thinking about? Because I am definitely thinking about you.

MEL: I was just thinking about the pictures you sent and wondering what all of this means for us.

BRYANT: Well, I'm not sure what it means for you, but for me, it means that I like you A LOT because you are gorgeous, and we always have something cool to talk about.

MEL: I feel the same way.

After we ate, walked around, and played a few games, it was time for the afternoon service. Our parents let us sit together in the youth section and they made Madison sit with them. Although I would have loved to have my sister with us, I was kind of glad to be able to relax more with my friends. I always have to be "big sister" and set an example for her when she is around. It is fun

sometimes to relax and just be a kid. It's already hard enough that the whole world is judging us because we are young, but I also don't always like feeling pressured to be a "good Christian girl" and a "good big sister" or "role model" for the younger kids. That's a lot of pressure to feel the need to be perfect. I have a lot of flaws and sometimes just want to feel okay with that but the world especially here at church with all the elders and my parents sometimes make me feel like the whole world is against us young folk because "we are too wild and free."

■■■

Once the afternoon services were over, the deacons and all the men served us ice cream and popsicles. You would have to imagine how hard Bryant was staring at me and Shawn was staring at Kelsey as we ate our popsicles. It was slightly hilarious, but we tried to make it "sexy." Maybe we were wrong because we were at church, but honestly with Bryant attending another school and me not being able to "officially date" yet, church was the best thing going. As we were finishing up our desserts, we went for a walk and then my parents texted me and Kelsey that it was time to go. Madison saw us and ran to get us. I was able to give Bryant a long hug and promised to text him later. He snuck in a side of the cheek kiss before he let me go and that made my entire day!

■■■

When we made it home, my parents left with Madison to go pick up some groceries for dinner. Kelsey and I used this time to call the crew (Bryant, Shawn, and the twins) to reflect on the revival. In the middle of the conversation, I got a text from Bryant with just eyeballs. I went to check my computer and saw that he sent me a picture. It was one of him topless, showing his "muscles" and forming a heart with his hands. I loved this picture and since it did not show any explicit body parts, I decided to keep it and not delete this one.

When we all got off the phone, I asked Kelsey if she would help me take one more picture before she left for the weekend. Then, we heard my parents pull up in the driveway.

KELSEY: Mane that was quick!

MEL: IKR!?!

KELSEY: You think we will have time to take the pictures before tomorrow, you know I'm leaving from the church?

MEL: We will see, but let's go help with these groceries.

■■■

After dinner, we watched a few movies then we were told to go to bed. Me and Kelsey did the phone swap to "sweep our phones" and then we went to Madi's room to read her a story. After that, I guess we were exhausted because we powered off our phones, put them on the charger, and went to bed!

We went to church, Kelsey left, we had a family dinner at my house, and then me and Madison prepared our clothes and work for the week. I got to talk to Bryant for about 15-20 minutes before it was officially time for bed, and I was reminded that ladies do not talk to boys too long unless we were being "fast." I only said yes ma'am but rolled my eyes inside my head because part of me knew she was right, but the other part of me really wondered how she truly felt growing up and loving my dad so young.

■■■

Two weeks!!! I have been officially together with Bryant for two whole glorious weeks! Even though I didn't have much help this afternoon, today was the only day that no one was home with me while daddy took Madi to practice and mom had to work late. Today I decided to spice things up a bit, so I put on a sheer coverall, my black bra, and some lacey black underwear that Kelsey and I bought alike when we went to Forever 21, our favorite store! I decided to take this picture in my parents' room because their bed was high off the ground and I could use their dresser to prop my phone. I angled the phone, turned on the camera timer, then laid across the bed. I repeated this several times, sometimes with my legs opened, sometimes with more cleavage out, but I did it until I got enough images that I would like to send Bryant in the spirit of our "two-week anniversary"!

I immediately cleaned up their room, shut off the lights, and then put on my regular night clothes. I went to the office to send him the pictures and as I was finishing up, our group chat call started. Everyone was on there and ready to talk. I could tell when Bryant received the pictures because he got silent then asked if we could all talk separately. He said he loved the images and was glad I was becoming more comfortable with him (Maybe a little too comfortable because I was beginning to forget somethings—more on that later!). We talked a little longer then I heard a car pulling in, so I got off the phone. The rest of the night was blissful and enjoyed my time with my family. But that was probably our last best night together before all of my goofy mistakes made my world spin out of control!

■■■

Madison asked if she could use my computer in the office and that's when I realized that I still hadn't deleted the images from the computer that I sent to Bryant and the last ones he sent to me. At this point I began to panic because nothing could be too obvious with my parent, but I also knew that Madi shouldn't see any of my pictures. Daddy overheard her and told her that she could use his computer. While she used his, I took that as an opportunity to go try and delete the images and my browsing history.

ARE YOU FREAKING KIDDING ME RIGHT NOW???

Of course, the computer would be trying to malfunction again. I have the worst luck with technology, and it is especially challenging when I am rushing to cover my tracks and protect my behind! The computer was literally frozen, it wouldn't shutdown, it would leave the screen that it was stuck on and none of my history would delete! I took a few deep breaths then I hard-pressed the power button and it finally shut off. But now it wouldn't come back on. I began praying

because I did not want or need my parents to see these last few images I took—and ON THEIR BED to say the least!

■■■

I'm not exactly sure what Madi did to dad's laptop, but when he was preparing to leave for work, he could not open his documents. So, he went to my computer instead. My heart was racing, and I felt lumps, actual lumps in my throat. No wait—I ran to the bathroom, I felt so sick I actually vomited! Daddy got onto the computer, but nothing was on the screen right away. Whew, I thought, but it wouldn't be long before someone found out what I did. Daddy printed his documents, then left. I was just about to ease into the office when my mom beat me to it.

■■■

Everything is a literal blur. All I remember was mom yelling at Madison to get her things so she could go to the neighbors and that she was so disappointed in me. She snatched my cellphone and was gone outside in a blink. My dad had just turned around and looked as if someone punched him in the stomach…I knew then that mom had already told him.

After dropping off Madison, they asked me about being in their room. Dad knew something, but he still hadn't seen the pictures yet. I had two choices—make something up or confess the truth. I went with the latter. I felt so guilty that I just confessed. I told them everything and they demanded that I immediately stop talking to Bryant. They revoked all of my phone privileges and then called his parents. I was super embarrassed and also hurt. I couldn't understand how I could be so careless, but I also never expected my parents to be so mean and dramatic about it. It made me wonder if they ever went through any of this while they were growing up, or if they were just "perfect celibate and prude angels" until they met. I couldn't really focus on that anymore because now mom was taking it a step further and then called Kelsey's mom. I literally wanted to scream and run and pound the walls, but I sat there in my shame just ready to melt away or die. My boyfriend and my BFF were going to hate me. My parents already hated me, now I would have no one at all! Trust was all I had between me and Kelsey and me and Bryant, if that was broken, I had no clue what would happen. I needed to fix this and fix this fast.

The rest of the weekend was miserable and even more awkward. Bryant wouldn't even look at me in church and them mom made all the older, church mothers pray over me. They never said I was a heathen, but I definitely didn't feel like they were praying (in that moment) for someone they believed was a saint. In the middle of all of that mess, I could hear one woman say that she hoped God would help me find my way as if I was a lost soul, or a lost cause. Since when did liking boys and trying to figure out what I like make me a heathen with a lost soul that needed guidance and re-direction? I was hurt and baffled because as I looked up and around at all these women surrounding me, praying for me, and crying out to God, I wondered if any of them ever liked a boy, ever felt curious, or did they just grow up overnight with no mistakes. It seemed surreal.

Sanity came to me once I was at school. Kelsey ran to me and hugged me. I felt relieved to finally feel love and not have yet another person disappointed or upset with me. She told me that she had overheard our mothers talking and that my mom had found images of me on their bed

scantily dressed. Although Kelsey was relieved that she was not caught up in the mess, she did console me. She gave me even more relief when she showed me the texts from Bryant:

MEL: Thanks Kelsey, this makes me feel so much better. My I text him later from your phone?

KELSEY: Of course you can. Just let me know and you can use it whenever until you get yours back.

MEL: Yeah, but my parents (well at least my mom) doesn't want me talking to Bryant anymore.

KELSEY: Oh no Mel! That breaks my heart because you guys really like each other too!!!

MEL: I know but I honestly have no clue on what to do!
So here I am pretty much at the mercy of all the gods in the universe…and plus I'm asking you…how do I make this right? How can I make my mom love me again? How can I fix things with Bryant? I mean I have learned a lesson or two, but I am still pretty confused on how wrong trying to understand my needs and wants truly is. I know better than to send any nudes because I don't want to be portrayed in a negative way. And I also know to never lower my standards. Although none of the pictures I sent were completely nude, I do know what my parents meant by lowering my standards and I will work on that. But can YOU help me fix this mess I'm in?

End.

### *Rationale*

Melanie, when describing her experiences with sexy selfies, seemed to focus mainly on only one incident in her life in which she took and shared sexy selfies. Although she listed other occasions in which she engaged in sexy selfie practices, there was one sexy selfie encounter that we both agreed stood out the most. When describing this experience, she specifically named precise people, places, and emotions. Additionally, she described certain context within this narrative that caused certain self-conflicts and resistance to authority which eventually led to more exploration of self through sexy selfies. By dictionary definition, a short story is an invented prose narrative that is shorter than a novel and focuses on a few characters and a self-contained incident with the intent of evoking a particular mood or effect. Therefore, when attempting to find the best representation for Melanie's lived experiences with sexy selfies, we agreed that an anecdotal short story seemed best to exemplify the definitive experience that had an effect on her self-exploration and identity development. When member checking with Melanie, prior to her death, she expressed her strong desire to share her story with other Brown and Black girls who might also engage in sexy selfie practices.

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

Melanie's story centered on culture, sexuality, and the influence and impact of others on her identity development. Additionally, these three categories seemed to have the biggest impact on her sexy selfie practices. In this section, I will attempt to analyze Melanie's story by making meaning of her sexy selfie experiences in relation to these three categories and the data evidenced in her interview and participant journal.

**Culture.** Melanie's culture as evidenced in both her short story above, her interview, and journal entries had a Black Southern Christian and media saturated focus. Melanie self-identified

as a "*Christian at heart*," which was also evidenced in her short story because she met her first boyfriend and closest friends at a revival right before the climax of her story. Because of her uniquely situated culture, Melanie expressed her frustrations with an eyeroll during the interview that the world in which she lived disseminated subliminal, hidden and contradictory messages (Chia, 2006; Stephens et al., 2017; Tolman, 2012), especially as it relates to sexuality and Black females (Albury, 2015; Baumgartner et al., 2015; Brown et al., 2006; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Lewis, 2005). While on one hand she knew that her parents and "the older church mothers" expected her to maintain a certain image and not engage in certain practices like sexy selfies, her peers, her boyfriend "Bryant" and even Bryant's grandmother seemed to encourage her to seek sexual pleasure and exploration through the taking of sexy selfies. Because, she was learning through her social interactions (Gagnon & Simon, 1973) that since sex sales (Tolman, 2012), then sexy selfies matter (Stephens et al., 2017; Stokes, 2007). Furthermore, both she and her best friend, "Kelsey" from the story seemed ready to fuck with the grays (Morgan, 2017) and bring wreck (Pough, 2015) as they sent their boyfriends multiple sexy selfies. It did not become a major issue for Melanie, and she seemed to find pleasure in taking the sexy selfies (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Stephens et al., 2017; Stokes, 2007), until she was "caught" by her parents. These discrepancies and mixed messages are exactly what Baker (2004) describes as the reason why younger Black girls have difficulty with their sexual identity development and need support—not to be silenced or shunned because they are exploring their sexualities, which is developmentally appropriate (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Levine & Munsch, 2019; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016; Seifert et al., 1994; Steinberg, 2016; Tajfel, 2010; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012).

**Sexuality.** Melanie was very "spicy," even as evident in her short story title, she never intended for her sexuality to be exposed to her parents or anyone within her community other

than her same aged peers. She even indicated both throughout her interview as well as her co-constructed short story that she was adamant about her younger sister never being exposed to sexy selfies at too young of an age, especially while "Madison" was still dealing with feelings of self-esteem and understanding her place and value in the world. Through the use of this co-constructed short story, Melanie's three sexy selfies described in detail from her interview shows that Melanie, although nervous at first, began to like engaging with, sending and receiving sexy selfies because she enjoyed them. Furthermore, her images advanced in levels of sexiness: from picture one only showing slight cleavage because she "*only wanted to give him a glimpse*" to picture two in which she was completely nude but only showed her side profile "*to keep him interested"* to her final image in which she was in a sheer coverall with lacey underwear and pictured with her legs spread on the bed "*to spice things up*" between her and "Bryant." Although Melanie admitted that she felt she was really young when she first started, she did indicate that she loved how freeing, empowering, and encouraging it felt to take and see images of herself. After having the chance to engage in sexy selfies at a young age she indicated that she then became more interested in modeling. The sexy selfies that she took before she got caught allowed her to do something she enjoyed while exploring her sexuality (Love, 2016; Stephens et al., 2017; Stokes, 2007). Before her death, Melanie continued to model with and without clothes on. And although she was of consenting age, at 23 years old, Melanie still felt the pressure that she needed to hide this fact from her parents. She needed to silence her sexy because although she truly enjoyed taking the pictures both with and without clothes, she needed to abide by the respectability politics often constraining Black women (Durham et al., 2013; Morgan, 2015). Melanie nevertheless continued to fuck with the grays and bring wreck against dominating mindsets and disapproving parents by secretly participating in nude and sexier photoshoots.

**Other.** Melanie had several others that impacted her display of sexiness. These others represented, as described before, the contradictions and mixed messages as evidenced within Black culture regarding young Black women's sexuality (Morgan, 2015, 2017; Smith, 2012; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stokes, 2007; Thomas et al., 2011). While on one end of the spectrum, Melanie heard that it was natural and normal to engage in sexy selfie practices from her peers: Kelsey, Bryant, Shawn, Bryant's grandmother, and media (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Love, 2016; Stokes, 2007; Tolman, 2012); on the other hand, she learned that sexy selfies were not appropriate from her Mother, Father, Kelsey's Mother, neighbors, church members, etc., (Baker, 2004; Blair, 2014; Hammonds, 2004). Furthermore, she was simultaneously learning that engaging in these practices was also "expected," from which she learned from her engagement on social media platforms (Brown et al., 2009; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016; Stephens et al., 2017). With these contradictory and conflicting messages imposing on her self-discovery during such a critical time of development (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; Tajfel, 2010; Thomas et al., 2011; Ward, 2003; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012), Melanie leaves the world with a story feeling as though she has "*no freedom of leniency.*" She gained her wings and hoped that the future would develop a different society that embraced people as individuals and erased double standards. Although Melanie may no longer be here to see any of this come to fruition, she did leave behind letters for her sister, nicknamed "Madison" in her story, to evoke and incite action for other young Black girls and women who sought to have freedom of leniency and be sexually free.

**Alexis Green**

Alexis is a 20-year-old African American college student and a full-time teacher's assistant. She self identifies as a Black, professional woman and loves being a mentor and educator to Black youth. She prefers to be called by her pseudonym, "Alexis." Alexis is currently

a sophomore in college. She grew up in a two-parent household with her biological mother and stepfather and six siblings. She is the oldest child in her mother's home, and she stated that she had a very challenging relationship with her biological father, whom she only refers to as "Jimmy." Although she does not wish to express hatred towards her father, she indicated that she did not meet him until after high school, which was a choice that he made. On his side she is the middle child of six siblings. Alexis is approximately 5'5" in height and has a small but curvy frame. She is approximately 140 pounds and has Black eyes and Black hair. She enjoys wearing her hair natural, in weaves, or some protective style. She like to wear makeup, especially lip gloss.

During the interview she wore a hunter green jumpsuit, sandals, and bangle bracelets. She was also wearing hoop earrings and a watch. She wore her hair down in a straight sew-in style. She brought in a lightweight sweater and her purse, but never used either of them. She kept her phone beside her during the interview and only used it when we paused. She appears to be professionally, yet casually dressed and seemed to be relaxed. She appeared to be very comfortable sitting on a small bench beside me during the interview. Her voice was very soft spoken, but still somewhat clear. She used a few hand gestures, lots of facial expressions, and she used a few colloquial phrases.

Alexis began taking sexy selfies when she was 12 years old, which she defines as:

> *An image that can be considered as how you may feel about yourself. Some people describe sexy as if by the way that you look in an image (like hair done, nails done, make up showing, etc.). Sometimes sexy is when you take a picture when you have just accomplished something, and you are just smiling. Others may feel that a sexy selfie is a picture with little to no clothes on with bedroom eyes, very seductive… Just to be clear my definition of a sexy selfie is feeling myself—natural hair on point and in the right light.*

Although Alexis admits that when she first began taking sexy selfies she shared with a boy a picture of her breasts, she currently understands that there is a wide spectrum of sexy selfies that can be taken and shared. This may be a possible reason for her still engaging in sexy selfie practices. She stated during her interview that she often takes pictures with and for her boyfriend especially while he travels; and she makes home videos with him. It was evident from her interview that the only reason why she continues to engage in sexy selfie practices with her boyfriend is because they are private, only shared between the two of them and they have both agreed to not allow the images to destroy their reputations and professional futures.

Next is the representative poem entitled, "#BeCEOofYourOwnLife," which is a poem that consists of five haiku co-written to reflect Alexis's unique sexy selfie experiences, member checked, and then titled. This poem was written and based on her predominant messages from her interview, journals, and informal conversations with me. When member checking with Alexis, she indicated that she wanted to be represented as a "boss" because she is currently pursuing a degree so that she can be her own leader unlike other people her age. Moreover, since Alexis also enjoys poetry she preferred being represented via poetry. Additional rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

**#BeCEOofYourOwnLife**

I started too young
When I sent him my boobs, BUT
Now Ion post thirst traps

Consumed with media
People live in the shadows
Of likes and bullies

While it's hard for us
Black women must remain strong
Cuz, they'll copy us

‘Be CEO’ they say
But I’m not free to be me
Guarding my future

No—Ion follow trends
Cuz I have strong foundations
& I’m still exploring

***Rationale***

Alexis’s sexy selfie experiences were narrated in an interview that was very brief but still comprehensive. Therefore, the type of creative writing that was determined as best suited to represent her style, personality, sexy selfie experiences, and her request was a haiku. A haiku is a very short poem that originated from the creation of a Japanese writer during the 17th century (Yasuda, 2011). This type of poem has a very specific syllable count represented in the structure of three lines. In the first line of the poem there can only be five syllables, followed by seven syllables in the second line, and then ending with 5 syllables again in the third line (Yasuda, 2011). Typically, haiku are written based on a seasonal reference; however, more modern haiku are written on a myriad of topics following the same 5-7-5 syllable and three-line structure (Yasuda, 2011). Moreover, haiku are often used to represent a juxtaposition of two (often contrasting) images and/or ideas. With this in mind, I found it very critical to select a representative poetic type that would attend to the juxtapositions, contradictions, and silences evident in Alexis’s sexy selfie and identity development narrative. I also wanted to honor her request to be represented via poetry.

During her interview, I noticed that Alexis was not very elaborative; and even when probed to further explain or provide more details she was still very concise in her responses. Additionally, after having the opportunity to listen to her interview several times and then

analyze her transcript and journal entries, I noticed that there were several things that she stated that either seemed contradictory to what she had previously stated or was left unspoken but still essentially implicit. Thus, I found that selecting a poetic type that is also concise, structured, and demonstrated contradictions was critical to staying true to Alexis's personality and interview style. Furthermore, in an attempt to honor Alexis's narrative, it seemed fair and consistent to be sure to co-create with her five haiku so that each haiku could represent the five major categories identified during my inductive analysis coding process. Therefore, each haiku used represents one of the five identified major categories: *identity, culture, sexuality, Black femininity and "the influence of the Other"* in terms of her sexy selfie and identity development practices.

***Categorical Meaning Making***

Alexis's five Haiku will be analyzed with a central focus on her sexuality, Black femininity, and identity emergent categories. Although each haiku in Alexis's representation illuminate all five emerged categories previously identified, these three categories: sexuality, Black femininity, and identity seemed to be the most dominant throughout Alexis's interview, the stories she shared, and how her story was creatively represented in her journal entries. The next section is used to make meaning of the analysis of these three sections on Alexis's sexy selfie experiences.

**Sexuality.** Alexis described her sexuality in very vague terms. Although she was clear on her lived experiences with sexy selfies and opinions regarding younger girls who may take sexy selfies, Alexis remained silent with regards to her own preferences. She also seemed to have been more sexually autonomous and explorative when she was younger. Admittedly she stated that she began taking sexy selfies around age 12. When she was in middle school, she felt that she "*started too young/when [she] sent him [her]boobs*." Thus, in efforts to blend in with her

peers (Coulthard, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Simmons, 2013; Ryan, 2013) and gain acceptance of a boy Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Milkie, 1999; Stephens, 2012; Stephens et al., 2017) she sent him a picture of her breasts and they later started dating. However now, she explicitly and verbatim stated that she no longer engages in "*thirst traps,"* which simply means she no longer sends nude or seminude images to guys just to show interest and "trap" them. Specifically, during the interview, Alexis indicated that "*When Black women want to express their sexuality online, they post what young people call thirst traps. They sometimes over do their images [just] to get attention from men and women.*" There are certain sexual scripts that society imposes on certain cultures; thus, young Black women act according to these scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). While she does seem to deliberately distance herself from the Black women that post and express their sexuality online because she is currently pursuing her career (Deci & Ryan, 2000), she did state that she and her current boyfriend exchange sexy selfies and that they often record their sexual encounters (Samimi & Alderson, 2014; Smith, 2012; Stokes, 2007). Therefore, while she may not feel that her sexuality is necessarily silenced, she personally silences her sexy selfies herself due to her desire to keep that part of her life separate and private.

According to the conceptualization of respectability politics (Durham et al., 2013; Morgan, 2015), Alexis assumes that because she remains "respectable" within the public, she is right. However, HHFs would challenge this and demand that she should take pride in her sexuality, do not hide it and govern herself by pleasure politics (Morgan, 2015). This idea that Alexis is restrained by respectability politics is further evidenced in her interview statements in which she states that she often "feels the need to carry herself a certain way" because she represents not only herself, but also her family and Black women when she steps out. Thus, she feels this overwhelming sense of pressure to always be strong and proper because people are

always looking and watching Black women (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Brown et al., 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013; Siddiqui & Singh, 2016; Stephens & Phillips, 2003).

**Black Femininity.** Alexis expressed strong feelings regarding her Black feminine identity throughout her interview and journal entries. Though she admits that things are more challenging for Black women, she seems to take great pride in her gendered racial identity (Thomas et al., 2011). As evidenced in Alexis's haiku, she believes that other people "*copy*" Black women because they secretly want to be more like us (Austin, 1991; Bailey, 1998; Gubar, 2000; Seitz, 1998; Tate, 2003). She often feels as though she is under a microscope and consistently watched as a Black woman. Thus, HHFs would say it is because of these types of feelings that she should indeed bring wreck and show the world who she truly is (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Pough, 2015; Tajfel, 2010; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). However, Alexis seems to be very much wrapped up in the idea that she "*doesn't follow trends*" that she has a difficult time realizing who she actually is when separate and not comparing herself to what she is seeing in media and amongst her peers.

**Identity.** Alexis prides herself on doing what she feels is right and respectable because she has an overwhelming feeling that people are watching her and scrutinizing her every move (Blair, 2014; Hammonds, 2004). Like other emerging adult women, Alexis is influenced by other's opinions of her, her behavior and choices (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Milkie, 1999). Thus, her identity and even the way that she describes herself, her behaviors and what she enjoys is always circulating back to a comparison of herself against someone else (Emerson, 2002; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013). While she believes in the motto, "*Be a CEO of your own life,"* she also has a difficult time enunciating exactly who she is without comparing herself to others. It is evident in her last Haiku that she feels that she is not only still exploring her own identity and

working to develop her personal self-concept (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Levine & Munsch, 2019), she is still very dependent on the perceived opinions of outside "Others"—the family members that helped lay the "*strong foundation,"* her peers, media, and her potential employers; thus she strives to deliberately not to follow the crowd because they are too "trendy" for her. Since it is her ultimate goal "to be her own boss," then she has indicated that being a follower will not help her to accomplish her goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

**Destiny Thomas**

Destiny Thomas is a 23-year-old African American, recent college graduate, who self identifies as a strong, independent, young female. She currently works both in retail and at an insurance firm where she is able to apply her studies and skills in marketing. She chose "Destiny" as her pseudonym because she stated that she is just attempting to make it in the world, and she feels that she has a great destiny ahead. At the time of the interview, Destiny had recently graduated from college with a degree in Marketing and Communication Strategies.

Until the age of 15, Destiny was raised by a single mother; and shared her home with her mother and two younger brothers. Now, Destiny no longer lives with her mother and step-father but indicated that her 21-year-old brother, 19-year-old brother, and 13-year-old step-sister still lives with them, making Destiny the eldest of her mother's children. Growing up she did spend some time with her biological father, but she indicates that the relationship was strained. With her father, she has one older sister (aged 25) and one younger sister (aged 20), making her the middle child of the three. While she does have a good relationship with her mother's youngest daughter, she specifically stated that she does not have a relationship with her father's youngest. Destiny is approximately 5'7" in height and weighs approximately 128 pounds. She has a petite and slender frame, dark brown eyes, dark brown curly hair, and distinct features.

During the interview Destiny wore an all-white see-though pajama shirt with white pajama shorts, a white and rose gold colored robe, and fuzzy slippers. She wore a silk head wrap around her head and had her natural curly hair pulled up high in one ponytail. She did have on small studded earrings and carried her phone. She appeared to be both relaxed and comfortable. The interview conducted with Destiny took place inside her home, which was a beautifully decorated two-bedroom apartment. We conducted the interview in her living room—she sat in a chair and I sat on the couch adjacent to her. Her voice was very clear. Destiny was very elaborate in her explanations of certain topics and made sure that she explained any colloquial phrases that she used. She seemed to really think through questions before answering them which made her interview one of the longest of the nine. She laughed, smiled, and used lots of body language throughout the interview.

Destiny seemed to have a very thorough and comprehensive idea about what she believed would be considered a sexy selfie, and it is in this definition below that I think explains why she may have engaged in sexy selfie practices:

> *A sexy selfie is one that is cute. It is an image that shows you are feeling yourself because "sexy" is like a vibe that you give off. So sexy selfies can be a selfie, a picture, or a video when you have a moment when you feel, "I think I am the shit…" Yes, you can have a sexy selfie taken in anything because I take a lot of my sexy selfies in bikinis…it's really about the feeling that you get when you look at the sexy selfie that makes it sexy*.

Although Destiny did not begin taking what she considers sexually explicit selfies until the age of 19, she admitted to noticing that she began posing suggestively and above her chronological age when she was still in middle and high school. She admitted to following the lead of several of her closest friends who were also posing and taking pictures to look and appear more mature than they really were at the time. When asked if she was still taken sexy selfies, she indicated

that she did, but she felt pressured to clean up her image and social media profiles to ensure that she had the future that she deserved.

Next, I present the unique narrative co-created with Destiny's sexy selfie experiences in mind. In the vignette entitled, "#QueensShouldUpliftQueens," Destiny's unique sexy selfie experience while she was going through the pledging process for a Black sorority is exemplified using pseudonyms for all of the major characters involved in her experience. This vignette was co-constructed, member checked, and then titled based on her overall lessons learned from this experience. When member checking with her, Destiny stated that she wanted to be sure to stay true to herself and demonstrate that while she embraces her free spirited nature, she is maturing and starting to prepare for the destiny and careers ahead. Additional rationale for the used of this particular prose style will be explained later.

**#QueensShouldUpliftQueens**

Take it down now! Alicia said. I clicked on the image that she was talking about and became even more confused. I literally only post images of me having a great time, enjoying life, and ones showing that a young Black girl who was always told "You are going to fail," is actually destined for success. When I invited her over, I wanted her to say young sis – you are going to be a beast at whatever you do... then help me pick out a dress for my interview. Instead, she is asking me to take down a piece of how I represent me!

If Alicia and all the other girls only knew that I have a lot of versatility. I use my social media in a variety of ways and because this degree is so close to completion, I am networking more and changing my image to truly represent the professional side of me. I mean have they looked at my LinkedIn account lately? I have been making a lot of business connections and granted job opportunities and honestly the potential employees seem to understand there are always two sides to a story. So why can't these women get with the program?

Alicia says that I just don't get it, so she invites Sasha and Journee over to my house – I suppose they are going to teach me social media etiquette, but what they don't realize is — been there, done that! It's not like I post nudes or very revealing images. It's usually me in a bikini pic here and a club pic there. Yes, I know I have over 4000 followers, who like all my sexier images, but what they don't seem to understand is that I have had a lot of experiences and was exposed to different people throughout my life, so yes, they will follow and like and support me. Besides Sasha and Journee were two of my very first clients...they've even bought hair and shoes from

me as well so they should understand that I have a lot of different connections in order to network and promote my side business.

After directions to my house were given and they parked, Alicia, Sasha, and Journee all walked in together ready to lecture me – "You don't have to do it for the gram," they all say in unison. Remember you are a Black Queen and we are always held to a much higher standard. So, sis, if you are truly trying to be one of us, then you have to take heed and clean up your social media accounts now!

You need to watch what you put out here because everything that you do online can be tracked via your digital footprint – which is exactly what I learned in my Internet Marketing class. But what exactly have I posted that would deny me sisterly support and an opportunity to be amongst the "elite" on campus? They still haven't answered this even with their lectures and mini powwows. It seems that they are having their own "Come to Jesus" meeting on my couch. Which makes me wonder – do I even still want to pledge? Shouldn't I be aiming to take my own route? Shouldn't I show them that I am a leader not a follower and blaze my own path?

While I am deep in my own thoughts, they called their lead advisor, better known as, "Big Sister Queen Beatrice" and the first thing she says is "Show her!!! That seems to be the only way she will learn!" As Alicia, Sasha, and Journee proceed to pull up the internet, I noticed that Alicia pulls up FOUR different websites, Sasha pulls up THREE more, and then Journee pulls up a file folder entitled "Destiny" I am immediately blown away! One reason is that I only have three active social media accounts (Facebook, IG, and Twitter); and if they would even consider LinkedIn, then that would be my fourth— but where in the world did they get SEVEN total accounts? Once everything is pulled up, the next few seconds are a blur. Everyone is talking at once, pointing, clicking on images, and then a laser pointer comes from out of nowhere to show that I have a SOLO cup in too many images, my tattoos which are very distinct are showing while I am on the beach in Miami, and then the never-ending cleavage shots that they show me. But to be honest what was most baffling to me was that they also showed me images that they should have known were photoshopped and cropped! As I try to explain that the other sites were not mine—that I do not talk or type like that and half of these sites were created by someone catfishing and pretending to be me, "Big Sister Queen Beatrice" says, "OKAY...Stop right now!" She felt that there was no need to explain or justify any of the images now. She just wanted me to clean up all of the images and profiles, then try to come to the Rush in the spring of next year.

As Alicia, Sasha, and Journee proceeded to pack up because their "Queen" and "Big Sister" had spoken—having the last word, I remembered that I am a Queen myself! I have strived very hard to get to where I am and was never expected to succeed; nevertheless, as I reflected on my transcript, my educational and personal life experiences, I realized that a few SOLO cups at a party and only one side if a butt cheek and cleavage showing in a few bikini pictures should not dictate all of who I am. I am also known as being a Queen, a businesswoman, a scholar, a sister, a daughter, a fun and loving woman who just recently started to learn how to have the proper party swagger and uphold the rules of party and club etiquette. Truth be told, since they so-called did a "deep dive" into my accounts, then they should've seen the reserved and shy girl I used to be. But now that I am beginning to love me and blossom more because I think I'm the shit, then

why can't I promote this self-love??? It is not like I am out here running around butt naked! I have on plenty of clothes and my sexy selfies are just giving off the vibe that I am proud to be who I am, I love the skin that I am in and THAT ALONE should be acceptable to them. But, if they aren't willing to listen to the whole story and realize some people catfish innocent people like me, then maybe this isn't the group of sisters I really need. Because I truly believe that queens should always uplift other queens.

***Rationale***

Destiny is another participant with a very vivacious personality and unique interview style. Destiny's interview was one of the longest of all nine interviews because she was very elaborative and used rich descriptions in narrating her lived experiences with sexy selfies. She also described her process of developing her identity and coming to grips with who she is and what she wants to be known as in an intriguing way. Due to these distinguishing factors, it seemed that utilizing the structure of a vignette was the best way to represent and share her story. A vignette is a brief evocative episode, description, or account of something that has occurred. Vignettes are typically focused on one particular moment or used to provide an impression about one particular idea, mood, aspect, or object. Thus, because Destiny's sexy selfie practices and identity development process centered around one overlapping experience, I found a vignette to be suitable for her narrative representation. Furthermore, according to Vocabulary.com, a vignette is a brief but powerful scene that leaves you wanting more; thus, Destiny's experiences shared left me wanting to know so much more about her, her history, upbringing, and her future use of sexy selfies as well as how she will continue to further develop as an individual. The construction of a vignette is a pretty complex process, so it was important for me to thoroughly think through each intricate detail of Destiny's experiences and member check with her to co-construct her vignette.

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

Culture, the conflicting messages imposed on her Black femininity, and the influence "Others" seemed to be the most prominent categories that were critical for analyzing Destiny's data. In this section, I will attempt to make meaning of Destiny's vignette by making sense of how her identity was impacted by her sexy selfie experiences by focusing primarily on the emergent categories of her culture, Black femininity, and the "Other."

**Culture.** When questioned about her understanding of her cultures, Destiny stated that "*Social media ruins everyday life*." When probed deeper I began to understand that she was referring to social media's persistent (mis)representation of Blacks, and especially Black women. She specifically indicated that social media demands to see the naked bodies of Black women, but then negatively targets the actions and lifestyles of Black people as a whole (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Brown et al., 2006; Emerson, 2002; Kohn, 2015; Lewis, 2005; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Stephens, 2012; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stokes, 2007). Therefore, she cautions both in her interview and her journal entries that younger girls should be mindful and cognizant about what they post online. She used a recent story pertaining to the daughters of former President Obama to state that "*it's all fun until the shit gets real*!" Here she describes the stark contrast of how white and Black women are treated when engaged in similar occurrences.

To further describe her culture and specifically Black culture in connection with social media culture, Destiny indicated that there is a whole line of "Black Twitter" where Black people post and share their experiences of living while Black in America. Based on this and her engagement with "Black Twitter" she realized that there are similar "Black" experiences. While she does find enjoyment in learning that Black people share similar childhood and developmental experiences, she does recognize that these similarities in experiences do not mean

that Black people are monolithic (Hesse-Biber et al., 2010). When further discussing trends within her culture, Destiny finds that she lives in a world in which she states, "*Clout is necessary because clout turns to money*!" What she is referring to when using the colloquial phrase clout is the notoriety and support that individuals receive through likes and follows when engaged on social media sites. Destiny, with over 4000 followers on InstaGram, as indicated both in her interview and vignette has experienced both good and bad from receiving "clout" and support from others. Her interview supports the ideas that emerging adults want to fit in and feel that they belong and will be accepted by their peers (Coulthard, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Simmons, 2013; Ryan, 2013).

Furthermore, Destiny indicated that she lives in a porn-saturated culture. She strongly feels that the society in which she lives id fixated on sex and naked bodies. Thus, the overarching message she feels that she receives from within her culture is that "*sex is good and it sales.*" Thus, as an emerging adult, Destiny feels that being sexy and promoting sexual content is what is expected. This supports existing literature on sexual identity development and previous sexy selfie studies (Doornwaard et al., 2014; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Stephens et al., 2017; Tolman, 2012; van Oosten et al., 2017).

**Black Femininity Conflicting Messages.** As evidenced in her vignette, interview and even within her journal entries, Destiny expressed her frustration and confusion with the fact that "*Black women must work twice as hard to half as good as the next individual*." Her frustrations align perfectly with the critiques presented by Morgan (2015) when she conceptualizes pleasure politics. Although Destiny's "twice as hard" comment does not just pertain to work, education and sociocultural expectations, in her sexy selfie story she shared it also applies to Black female bodies and our sexuality. This was implied in her vignette because the women attempting to

coach and guide her on appropriate and respectable behaviors for Black women disapproved of certain images and behaviors which further prevented her from pledging their sorority. The message that she gained from them was that as Black women we are held to a higher standard and while they never denied her the opportunity to have fun experiences, they did not want her to be displaying certain images publicly. Destiny was not only confused by this, but she also expressed extreme frustration with the fact that there seems to be a double consciousness as it pertains to Black women's sexuality and how people expect Black women to carry themselves (Stokes, 2007).

Additionally, as Destiny and I co-constructed her narrative, she specified that she wanted me to include the contradictions that Black girls receive from older Black women and women represented in our culture. Two key points she made were: (1) *clothes does not equal respect;* and (2) *code switching is critical to the Black American experience.* When she stated that clothes do not equal respect, what she was implying was that just because you are fully clothed does not mean that you will be treated more respectfully. And, further, just because you are half-dressed does not mean that you should be objectified (Brown et al., 2006; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens et al., 2017). Another contradiction pertaining to Black femininity that she addressed is this idea that within Black HH culture, the HH moguls and entertainers re currently teaching young Black and Brown girls that it is critical to code switch and wear different hats because depending on the setting in which one is engaged in, people are critically judging Black women based on the predominant scripts and images portrayed in media (Baker, 2004; Blair, 2014; Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Brown et al., 2006; Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Hammonds, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Simon & Gagnon, 2003; Smith, 2012; Stephens, 2012; Stephens et al., 2017; Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stokes, 2007: Townsend et al., 2010). Furthermore, Tiidenberg (2014) states that

media tells us what and how we should look like in order to be considered sexy. Thus, Destiny's feelings regarding the contradictions within Black feminine culture is also validated by the literature.

Lastly, she strongly indicated that within 21st century culture, Black women are still depicted as angry all the time. With the Big Sister character from her vignette, I attempted to co-create a persona of a disgruntle sorority leader that was tired of pledgees applying, but not upholding "Black excellent" standards. While she did offer advice and try to reach Destiny by showing her the specific images that denied her acceptance, she did so without compassion and an attitude that appeared to be unapproachable—she was the angry Black woman you would want to avoid. This antisocial demeanor was off-putting to Destiny and further implicated her frustrations and confusion with the conflicting messages within Black female culture.

**Other.** Destiny has been influenced to seek success and a new destiny to escape the poverty stricken lifestyle that she grew up in (Deci & Ryan, 2000). She also indicated that she learned from vicariously watching others that she needed to get away from poor patterns and family and peers who set bad examples (Levine & Munsch, 2019). By attending a PWI, which Destiny explained to me was a predominantly white institution, she noticed that many of the other Black women like the ones from her vignette had forgotten their roots. She expressed a strong desire to tell these women that they needed to support her and help bring up other Black women instead of discouraging, denying, and silencing them.

She further exemplifies this frustration with attending a PWI and Black women forgetting their roots by describing issues that the Obama daughters have faced by becoming "puppets" at their predominantly white institutions, especially when around certain friends. Although the experience was negative with the sorority sisters, because as Destiny describes it, "*They didn't*

*want to accept me for me!"* she says that the "others" in her life thoroughly encouraged her to strive for everything that she wants in life. She stated the biggest message she received from all of these others and her experiences with taking, posting, and sharing sexy selfies is that—*Dreams can come true despite your history, upbringing and life experiences.*

**Ashley Brown**

Ashley Brown is a 23-year-old African American hairstylist and a full-time sales associate for a retail sales store. She expressed her passion for doing hair, travelling the world and meeting new people. Ashley is the youngest child of 11 siblings. She was raised by both her mother and father; and lived in a house with six of her older siblings (three sisters and three brothers). The other five siblings (three brothers and two sisters) were her father's biological children from a previous marriage and they all remained in Chicago. Ashley prides herself on having had a bond with both her mother and father as she was growing up and stated that she has mourned the loss of her father since she was a sophomore in high school. Ashley self identifies as an outgoing, determined, headstrong, all team player. She indicated that she is a very outspoken Black woman who centers on some, not all, Christian principles. She chose "Ashley Brown" as her pseudonym because she has always preferred the name Ashley and she is a "Brown" girl with magic to share! Ashley is approximately 5'9" in height and has a curvy frame, weighing approximately 158 pounds. Ashley has sandy brown hair and light brown eyes. She wore her hair pulled up and seemed to smile quite a bit throughout the interview.

During the interview, which was conducted in the privacy of her home (in the kitchen), Ashley wore a gray dress and flip flops. She had on large hoop earrings and a small watch. She also had her phone with her everywhere that she moved. Although she did not have on makeup, which she states she loves to wear, she did have on colored lip gloss and eyeliner. She seemed to

be very comfortable and willing to be honest and open about several vulnerable topics. The interview seemed to flow nicely because she spoke very naturally and relaxed as if in a conversation. She also spoke eloquently in Black English Vernacular (BEV) and was very creative with her word choices. She spoke with her hands and her body. She smiled, laughed and reflected throughout the interview which made it fun.

Ashley first began taking sexy selfies when she was 14 to 15 years old when she was making a major transition from her tomboyish style to exploring and embracing her femininity. When asked what her personal definition of sexy selfies was, Ashley stated:

> *Immediately I thought that a sexy selfie was going to have to be about either being naked or I feel like it just had to be like this one moment that made someone feel like just so special and just defined me and makes me want to wake my inner sexy up I want to say. So, to me a sexy selfie can be any image that defines someone's sexuality and makes them feel that they stand out and are different.*

Thus, it became clear that Ashley's understanding of sexy selfies was also rooted in this essence of a particular feeling that someone gets when taking or viewing the content. Although Ashley no longer takes nude sexy selfies, she did indicate that she still enjoys taking sexy selfies regularly for personal self-evaluation as well as to keep things "spicy" between her and her boyfriend. During the interview, Ashley indicated that by taking sexy selfies, it has allowed her to step out of her comfort zone, track her weight loss goals/progress, and embrace who she is.

The following section that will be presented is an acrostic poem that was co-created by me and Ashley Brown to represent her lived experiences with engagement in sexy selfies and her personal identity development. The poem is entitled, "#ExpressionalFreedom," which was the overarching theme of her interview, participant journal entries, and the informal conversations we had during the two member checking interactions. "#ExpressionalFreedom" used verbatim phrase from her synthesized data and was co-written to reflect Ashley's unique sexy selfie

experiences, member checked, and then titled based on her predominant message. When member checking with Ashley, she expressed her passions in connection with her developing identity. She also dictated that she wanted to her representation to include how she felt about her sexy selfies as well as culture and social interactions as a whole. Additional rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

## #ExpressionalFreedom

**E**ncouraging support for exploration is the key to self-discovery especially when there are

**X**eroxed copies of IG models, strippers & gigolos on social media polluting young minds but still

**P**osting my selfies shouldn't make me a slut I'm only asking that you

**R**espect my versatility even if you don't quite understand it because

**E**veryone has an agenda but silencing my sexy shouldn't be one

**S**exiness is a mind frame, not necessarily an age thing

**S**exiness actually applies to all generations making us feel free and empowered…since

**I**dentity = adaptability, then let me adjust accordingly

**O**pen up your minds and hearts and

**N**ever silence my sexy cuz that's identity homicide

**A**nd remember anyone can change so just

**L**et me be me

**F**ight for yourself—that's the Black life story… a

**R**eminder in the mirror that I'ma Black woman—sexy and distinct and that's okay too, so

**E**xplore new possibilities in life and be sure to

**E**njoy the waves of growth and change but please

**D**on't lose yourself trying to be what everyone else demands of you

**O**nly express who you truly desire to be and consider this:

**M**y sexy selfies made me feel FIERCE, now wouldn't you want that feeling too?

***Rationale***

Ashley Brown has a dynamic and memorable personality. Although each of my participants shared very intriguing experiences and fully immersed me within their lives of engaging in sexy selfie practices, Ashley's interview stood out to me because she enunciated the term, "expressional freedom" that has sat with me since interviewing with her several months ago! It is this very reason that the narrative that was co-constructed with Ashley's experiences in mind yielded the creation of an acrostic poem. An acrostic is an acronym or a type of poem that utilizes certain letters in each line to form a word or line of words. An acrostic typically utilizes the first letter of each line to spell out a word or convey a particular message. Thus, "expressional freedom" being the major theme of Ashley's interview in which she narrated about her sexy selfie practices and identity formation was used as the key word/term that formed her acrostic. Although very strategic in structural design, an acrostic poem, just like Ashley, is something that cannot be taken at face-value. It is imperative that one assesses their understanding of expressional freedom through every phase of trying to understand and interpret her narrative and her experience. In her interview, Ashley described her culture, context, identity, and other topics related to her self-concept, identity and experiences with sexy selfies; therefore, her representative narrative needed to be just as in-depth as her narrative. An acrostic poem may appear to have simple constructive process; however, it is multi-layered and complex just like Ashley's personality and identification. It was evident that Ashley is still finalizing various aspects of her personal identity; nevertheless, it is also clear that she will continue to find herself and express herself in a way that exudes liberated freedom and tack. Thus, utilizing the poetic structure of an acrostic allowed for relevance, structure, and her voice to be truly representative of her sexy selfie and identity formation practices.

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

Ashley had a strong message regarding her sexy selfie experiences. She wanted to encourage everyone to be free in their expressionism. Based on this predominant message and theme throughout Ashley's stories, we co-created the acrostic poem #ExpressionalFreedom. By further analyzing Ashley's story and representative poem, three major categories of the original five seemed to emerge: identity as a Black female, sexuality, and culture. In this next section, I will attempt to make meaning of these three categories using her representative poem as well as a reflection on the synthesized data from Ashley's poem, interview, and journal entries.

**Identity As a Black female.** Although Ashley is truly proud to be a Black woman, she indicated that she feels she has to fight for her rights daily. She states, "*Fight for yourself—that's the Black life story."* She feels that while Black women are very capable of the same things as other women from other ethnicities, we are often denied basic human rights and often have to fight to be seen and respected. To her that is tiring, but she passionately indicated that she would not trade being Black and a woman for anything in the world. This overarching message that Black women must fight supports claims made by HHFs such as Morgan (2015) and Pough (2015). Moreover, it is evident from her synthesized data that she finds it difficult to separate her Blackness from her feminine identity which is supportive of the research and literature on identity development. Ashley's inability to separate her racial and cultural identity from her gendered identity supports the research conducted by Thomas and colleagues (2011) in which that found qualitative data to support that Black women have difficultly separating their gendered-racial identity.

While Ashley is still currently exploring other cultures, ethnicities and even other geographic regions, she has come to have a deeper appreciation for her Black roots (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Marcia, 1980; Phinney, 1993). She appears to embrace other cultures while remaining unapologetically Black. This is evident within all data collected from Ashley in which she states, "*Let me be me*" and "*Explore new possibilities in life and be sure to/ Enjoy the waves of growth and change but please/ Don't lose yourself trying to be what everyone else demands of you."* Here it is evident that she seeks to support and respect other cultures other possibilities in life, while still holding true to who she is at the core.

**Sexuality.** In regard to her sexuality, Ashley was very unapologetic in her interview. She seemed to feel very relaxed to share intimate details with me. This was also a major noticing from her journal entries as well—she did not hold back any information. While she passionately advocated for people to "*respect her versatility,"* and "*support her sexual exploration,*" she just wanted to be free to express herself the ways she sought fit. She advocates for the "expressional freedom" to exercise her sexual agency and manipulate pleasure politics (Morgan, 2015; Stokes, 2007). A message that can be gleaned from Ashley's experiences in regard to her sexuality is that she does not want to be silenced. But at the same time, she cautions younger girls and other youth by saying "*Don't lose yourself.*" While she does advocate for expressional freedom, sexual autonomy, and erotic agency, she is also cognizant that "*sexiness is ageless*" therefore younger girls (and even boys) who want to explore their sexual identities should be careful not to lose themselves in the process. Nevertheless, she was very adamant throughout her interview and all other data collected that she too did not want to contribute to the silencing of you simply because they are young. Instead she advocates for adaptability, open mindedness, and versatility in respect for herself as well as younger sexually explorative people. Specifically, during the

interview, Ashley indicated that because she began taking sexy selfies at a young age she does not want to dictate or silence younger people's sexuality or their exploration of their sexual identity.

**Culture.** When speaking of her culture, Ashley expressed mixed emotions. By indicating that there are "*Xeroxed copies*" of people running around and posting on social media, she was saying essentially that everyone is the same and following the same trends. Which supports the literature concerning how individuals are easily influenced by the opinions of others, the media, and their peers (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Emerson, 2002; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Milkie, 1999; Shafer et al., 2013). She believes that the culture in which she lives of full of "cookie cutters" and people who do not know how to be truly unique and creative anymore. She advocates for people to be expressionally free and adaptable. She believes in self-discovery and exposure without the "*polluting of the mind."* However, her prominent message regarding her culture and how people lose themselves is when she says that "*silencing me is like identity suicide."* She often feels that the culture in which she lives in attempts to create one main image of people; thus, killing anything that is unique and different (Stokes, 2007; Tiidenberg, 2014).

**Andriana Clark**

Andriana Clark is a 21-year-old African American college student, a full-time teacher's assistant, and a server at a local restaurant. She is currently a junior in college and adamantly expresses her passion for teaching and working with youth. She self identifies as a Black, Christian woman and loves being an auntie to her nieces and nephews. Andriana was raised with both of her biological parents until the age of four, at which time her parents got divorced. From four years old and on, she lived with her single mother and two older sisters (age 28 and 24). She

specifically indicated that her father would alternate weekends with her mother, and she got to know him better. Although her mother never remarried, her father did remarry and later divorced her stepmom when she was in high school. Adriana's father never had any additional children outside of his marriage with her biological mother. She prefers to be called by her alter-ego "Andriana Clark" (AC). AC is approximately 5'9" in height and has a curvy frame. She is approximately 165 pounds, has dark brown eyes, dark brown and honey-blonde hair; and she enjoys wearing her hair natural and minimal makeup.

During the interview she wore a floral shirt, tan pans, boots, and a cardigan. She was also wearing a few pieces of jewelry to include: a watch, bracelet set, and stud earrings. She kept her phone handy but was not distracted by it. She appeared to be professionally, yet casually dressed and seemed to be relaxed. She had her hair pulled up into a high ponytail with her natural curls teased out. She appeared to be very comfortable sitting in a chair directly across from me during the interview. Her voice was clear, she spoke with lots of hand gestures, and she used a few colloquial phrases.

Andriana began taking sexy selfies at the age of 19 during a time in which she was exploring and engaging in self-discovery. She admits that it was because she was within the privacy of her own apartment and not living with her parents that she felt more comfortable taking the sexy selfie in just her underwear. Andriana defines sexy selfies as:

> *A sexy selfie can be a nude faced picture as well as a picture with a beat face. By "beat face" I mean a picture where the girl has on a full face of makeup. Whatever state you're in that makes you feel your best is a sexy selfie, in my opinion. This could be with clothes on or completely nude, whatever your preference and style, but you feel good and sexy doing it.*

Andriana still engages in sexy selfie practices to date and admits that she uses sexy selfies to depict how she is feeling in a given moment. She also keeps in mind her intended audience and

what they may like. Although she did not explicit admit to being bi-sexual during the taping of the interview, when member checking and verifying information about her experiences, she did admit to engaging in sexy selfie exchanges with both men and women. Andriana was very candid with the fact that she uses sexy selfies to stay connected with her partner, build a deeper bond, and keep things exciting. Nevertheless, it is imperative that the element of trust is present.

Next is the representative poem entitled, "#SetMeFree," which was co-written to reflect Andriana's unique sexy selfie experiences, member checked, and then titled based on the theme of her synthesized data. When member checking with Andriana, she revealed more things pertaining to her sexual identity development and her sexy selfie experiences that she was neglecting to mention or clarify during the interview. Thus, in the following poem, Andriana and I co-wrote a poem using five cinquains and a uniquely systematic syllable count to represent her lived sexy selfie experiences. Further rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

**#SetMeFree**

Black woman
Yet confident and proud
Still exploring my true identity right now
Embracing diversity all around me until I find my own self
Even with average social media presence, I'm still well-rounded, respectful, and natural

Culture—
Gets richer every day
There is good and bad, but we are still advancing
No one seems to be real and authentic anymore—just copies of others
Online my social media culture is lowkey and quiet so copying me isn't all bad

Two strikes
In a world full of whites
I still embrace Black womanhood, natural hair & our roots
Knowing that we're more than enough but told to work twice as hard is fucked up
But as Black queens we keep our heads held high, our Melanin poppin', but trust me we're not all the same

I'm straight
Well, I thought that I was

But I do love to color outside of the lines
And for me that's just fine, but I'm taught to be more conservative—not wild
But me and my peeps aren't just wild and nonchalant instead we all just want to be free and explore

My world
One mom and two sisters
Nieces, nephews, my job and the world—Can't you see?
I have all these others looking at me which makes it hard to be true & free
So sharing my sexy selfies truly empower me…with a click I'm now set free!

***Rationale***

Andriana Clark's lived experiences with sexy selfies and forming her identity are continuing to evolve. With this in mind, Andriana and I agreed that it would be best to co-create a type of prose that requires some structure and formatting criteria but not very strict. Andriana self-identifying as someone who often enjoys coloring outside of the lines needed a prose type like a cinquain to represent the fact that she not only has a specific structure and guidelines that she follows to govern her life and publicly displayed practices, but also one with slight flexibility. The cinquain is a poetry type that was first created by an American writer in 1915 to mimic the Japanese haiku and tanka. A cinquain is structured in a five-line stanza and has traditionally followed a specific line-by-line syllable formal: 2-4-6-8-2. However, more recent and modern cinquains vary in their syllable structure.

Due to the fact that it was identified that Andriana "loves to color outside the lines" and explore new ways of existing in the world, I tried a new syllable formula that was strictly followed throughout each categorical stanza. The syllable formation structure that I followed was: 2-6-12-18-24. I still wanted to honor the originality of a cinquain and hence how it received its name by maintaining the five-line stanza structure, so that remained the same. Moreover, Andriana's experiences were so complex that when strategizing the best way to co-construct her narrative representation, we both agreed that it would need to be written as five separate five-line

stanzas instead of just one large stanza in order to truly capture the essence of her narrative as well as attend to the five major categories emerged from the inductive process: *identity, culture, sexuality, Black femininity, and "the Other."*

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

In #SetMeFree, Andriana expressed her desires to be free to explore and engage in activities even sexy selfies that will help her form her identity. Utilizing her co-constructed poem, interview data, and journal entries, I further analyzed Andriana's identity especially her sexuality. In the next section, I attempt to use the data collected and the co-constructed poem to make meaning of her lived experiences based on her five emerged categories while attending to the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry. Identity and sexuality were the strongest and most prominent of the five categories; thus, these two are addressed below.

**Identity.** Andriana explicitly stated in all data collected that she was still undergoing an intense identity exploration process (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Levine & Munsch, 2019; Seifert et al., 1994; Tajfel, 2010; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). While she does identify as a Black, Christian woman. She also indicated that she was exploring other identities and embracing the diversity around her: "*Still exploring my true identity right now/ Embracing diversity all around me until I find my own self.*" Although she did appear to be confident and proud, I could still sense that she was having difficulty seeing how her actions were representative of her identity as well. She appeared to have trouble connecting her behavior and identity which are not completely separated. During the member checking process (Harper & Cole, 2012), she seemed comfortable to share more information and admitted to remembering more about her sexy selfie experiences than before. Thus, she began to share more information about ways in which she identified as

well as more information about her sexual identity development. In the next section I will attempt to make meaning of Andriana's sexuality based on her synthesized data.

**Sexuality.** Initially during the interview, Andriana self-identified as a heterosexual woman who enjoys exploring her sexuality with men. Nevertheless, when probed for clarity during member-checking she did clarify that she should probably identify as a bisexual. This was further exemplified in her journal entry in which she describes an encounter with exchanging sexy selfies with another woman. Thus, in "#SetMeFree," Andriana half-heartedly questions her sexuality: "*I'm straight/ Well, I thought that I was/ But I do love to color outside of the lines*." Here she expresses the "coloring outside of the lines" as her sexual exploration and interest. While she is still finding herself, she did not want to silence this story or experience, therefore, when provided the opportunity she shared more with me and gave permission to share this data. She was proud to share her experiences while still feeling as though she might have others in her life that may not understand it: "*And for me that's just fine, but I'm taught to be more conservative—not wild/ But me and my peeps aren't just wild and nonchalant instead we all just want to be free and explore.*" Thus, she indicated that the sharing of sexy selfies in a private and intimate way was critical to her sexual identity exploration.

**Draya Peaches Smith**

Draya Peaches Smith is a 22-year-old, African American college graduate. She is also a mother of a one-year-old son. Draya prefers to be called by her double nickname "Draya Peaches" as the name truly represents her complex personality style. She self-identifies as a Black, Christian woman that is smart, funny, outgoing and "techy." She prides herself on being a follower of the Golden Rule as she attempts to treat others how she would like to be treated.

Draya Peaches has already graduated from college and currently works full time at a company where she hopes to pursue her dreams of being a human resources recruiter. She was raised in a home with both of her biological parents and her younger brother (aged 19). She currently lives independently with her one-year-old son. Draya Peaches is approximately 5'8" and weighs about 250 pounds. She admits to finally embracing her curves and has recently ventured into plus-sized modeling for fun. Draya Peaches has large, beautiful brown eyes, black hair, and prominent facial features illuminated by a bright smile.

During the interview, she wore a white sweater, olive-colored jeans, and sandals. She had on several pieces of jewelry to include earrings, a necklace, bangle bracelets, a watch and one ring. Her purse was sitting next to her on her couch and she kept her phone handy. Her hair was down in a natural protective style. She invited me to her home to conduct the interview so that she could also monitor her son, who seemed to play very well by himself. Draya Peaches sat on her couch and asked me to sit next to her. I could tell she was very comfortable with my presence and fully welcomed me. She used several facial expressions and hand gestures. True to her self-description she also made light of a few challenging topics and used laughter to ease her pain and frustration. She definitely has a funny demeanor when she wants to! Her voice was very clear, her responses were concise, and she used only a few colloquial phrases.

Draya Peaches began taking sexy selfies while in college, at the age of 19, during a time in which she adamantly expressed as a time where she felt free and had the time and space to try out new identities. She enjoyed being in college, out of her parents' home, and meeting new people. When asked how she defines sexy selfies, she stated:

> *A sexy selfie to me displays a caught off guard look with either some skin showing or a "bold" come get me posture such as someone with their leg out or "spread eagle" in the picture. They are the same across all backgrounds and ethnicities because the receiver of*

> *the picture does not see the color, they only see the image provided. Mostly, all sexy selfies for Black women are the same because the basic pose may be present, or the extreme is present with an exotic pose, cleavage or booty out.*

Draya Peaches admitted feeling motivated while in college to take and send sexy selfies because she wanted to show her ex-boyfriend what he was missing. She also specifically stated that she wanted to feel fierce and embrace who she was becoming and how her body was changing. She currently still engages in sexy selfie practices and confessed that is because of those original motivators: self-freedom and revenge that she continues to engage in sexy selfie practices.

"#JustDoYou," is the narrative poem co-written to reflect Draya Peaches' unique sexy selfie experiences. This poem was member checked and then titled based on her most prominent sexy selfie story, which was actually her first and a video! When member checking with Draya Peaches, I remember she was so excited to have just purchased a new pair of tennis shoes, so passively, I asked her if she felt her main message about sexy selfies was similar to the franchised, Nike say, "Just Do It." To my surprise, we both laughed, and we agreed that should the title of her narrative. Below is the narrative poem, "#JustDoYou"; the rationale for the prose style will be explained later.

**#JustDoYou**

Yeah—I'm a plus sized model
Meaning my body is shaped like a Coke bottle
I am unapologetic and bold
Nah— I don't just do what I'm told
Well yes, I do follow the Golden Rule
But that's just because I don't feel like being cruel
Some people don't appreciate Black beauty
But I'm here to tell ya that you can still be sexy and still be a cutie
Yes, we live in a society were sex sells and we're all polluted with porn culture
But let me take you on my very own sexy adventure
I just want to tell you about my first sexy selfie
When I was finally free to be just, well—ME

Oh, I was just eating a banana
No—Not the biblical, Christian manna
Instead I was nowhere near my Christian roots
As I strapped up and put on my dominatrix boots
I needed to show him just what I could do
And nah—honey, I don't leave my men on blue!

I most definitely felt sexy and fierce
But I can't lie all I wanted to do was pierce
Pierce straight through his heart—on some "self-freedom and revenge" ish
I just needed to give back his dish
No, no I'm not some broken and weak ex,
But he was going to find out I was onto the next

To be honest the video was very explicit
But I did what I needed and that was to illicit
The attention of my new boy toy
The one I was hoping to bring lots of joy
Even though the video featured "fake" oral sex
It was definitely not for my ex

Since I was "performing" for my new boyfriend at the time
I didn't feel like I was doing such a crime
However now when I reflect on it
Older Black queens would say that was way too lit
They would want me to behave and save all that for home
But they aren't God, my mom, or a priest living in Rome

As you can see, I don't like to be silenced so now I live to be free
I'm still searching and exploring to find the real true me
Although I'm not anywhere near perfect
My place in society is necessary so I demand my respect because I now know that I'm worth it
For now, I'll continue to do me while you do you
And hopefully one day they'll catch on and they'll have a clue

***Rationale***

Draya Peaches uses very elaborate and memorable phrases throughout her interview that when grouped together they seem to form a very distinct story. The message and story that is represented is one that is short but very complex and to some may seem conflicting. Furthermore, it is very clear that the story she shares has a beginning, middle, and an end.

Therefore, when considering the type of prose to use to represent her lived experiences with sexy selfies, it became clear that she needed to be represented with a type of prose that would honor her key story. Narrative poetry was selected to represent Draya Peaches because it is a type of poem that tells a story. Similar to the one full story that Draya tells in her interview, narrative poems contain all the elements of a fully developed story including characters, plot, conflict and resolution. Although narrative poems do not need to rhyme, Draya Peaches' lived experiences are represented by couplet rhyme scheme in most of her stanzas. The use of the couplet rhyme scheme was implemented to place emphasis on the change in stanza as well as to emphasize Draya Peaches' voice through the narrative poem.

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

Utilizing her poem entitled, "#JustDoYou," her journal entries and her interview data, the lived experiences Draya Peaches had will be further analyzed with a focus on her identity, Black femininity, and other sections. In the following section, I attempt to make meaning of the three most emergent categories of the five.

**Identity Is Tied to Others.** Even though Draya Peaches was one on my younger participants, she spoke with an older soul. By using phrases like "*my body is shaped like a Coke bottle," "I do follow the Golden Rule,"* and *"Christian manna,"* it is evident that she has had some experiences that make her wise beyond her age. Which implicates identity development research that indicates that development is multidimensional and multidirectional (Levine & Munsch, 2019). This also supports research from Erikson and Erikson (1998) that indicates that adolescents and emerging adults within stage five of psychosocial development (Identity versus Role Confusion) may advance through their crises at this stage when guided and supported by adults.

Although she indicated several times that she feels this outside pressure from "others," Draya Peaches is still unapologetic, Black, sexy, and adventurous. Because of these unique characteristics she has an identity that is mature and unique. She indicated that she truly believes that other people have a perception of who she should and should not be and that there are times she feels by identifying as a Black woman she feels this immense pressure to live up to their expectations (Morgan, 2017). She, too, like several of my other participants, indicated that as a self-identifying Black woman there is a "*double standard"* when it comes to what is expected of Black women (Thomas et al., 2011). She specifically indicated that her cultural contexts represent an "other" that has shown her how people treat Black women and how they believe you are supposed to behave.

Along this same ideology, Draya Peaches indicated that media (in all its varying forms) presents and unrealistic image of the Black woman thus she posts contrasting images on her social media accounts in an effort to combat these misrepresentations of Black women (Stokes, 2007). By doing so, she feels that at least the people in her social circles are becoming more accepting and understanding of the Black American female. Draya Peaches' identity is being shaped by the influence of these additional "others": her parents, her son, school (especially college), other family contexts, social media, pastors from church, Entertainment Tonight, her current as well as her ex-boyfriend. According to Draya Peaches each of these "others" has demonstrated to her that the world is closed minded to the Black female experience, so she just wants to be free to do what she enjoys. This is supported in previous literature and studies conducted specifically on Black women who engage in sexy selfies (Stephens & Phillips, 2003; Stephens, 2012; Stephens et al., 2017; Stokes, 2007).

Although in her poem these two categories were represented separated, when further analyzing her data, it was very evident that her identity was strongly impacted by her "others." For example, when describing her revenge sexy, Draya Peaches demonstrates that her identity (and thus her actions) is connected to her feelings and interactions with not only her ex-boyfriend, but also the new one: "*I most definitely felt sexy and fierce/ But I can't lie all I wanted to do was pierce/ Pierce straight through his heart—on some "self-freedom and revenge" ish/ I just needed to give back his dish/ No, no I'm not some broken and weak ex/ But he was going to find out I was onto the next.*" She admits that while she may not have typically sought out revenge through a sexy video, she wanted to make him release she had officially moved on! Additionally, when she describes the actual content of the sexy selfie video, it is also evident that her sexual identity was tied to her new boyfriend and older Black women who may have sunned her behavior: "*To be honest the video was very explicit/ But I did what I needed and that was to illicit/ The attention of my new boy toy/ The one I was hoping to bring lots of joy/ Even though the video featured "fake" oral sex/ It was definitely not for my ex/ Since I was "performing" for my new boyfriend at the time/ I didn't feel like I was doing such a crime/ However now when I reflect on it/ Older Black queens would say that was way too lit/ They would want me to behave and save all that for home/ But they aren't God, my mom, or a priest living in Rome*."

**Black Femininity.** In regard to Daraya Peaches' Black female identity as explained before, she feels that people not only do not understand our experiences and needs, but they also do not want to (Baker, 2004; Blair, 2014; Hammonds, 2004). In her narrative poem, we attempted to co-create a representation of one of her sexy selfie experiences in which she was seen sucking on a banana in a video to her new boyfriend in an attempt to bring wreck to her ex, but to also break a trend of stereotyping Black women and especially plus-sized women (See

stanzas 3–6). In the video, she informed me that she was not only sucking on the banana to depict giving "*fake oral sex"* but she also did a split which a lot of people assume cannot be done by a woman of her size and height. Thus, living true to her words, "*I enjoy proving myself to not fall into certain stereotypes."* In this respect she is not only bringing wreck, but she is also fucking with the grays by doing what society deems as unexpected and impossible for a Black plus-sized woman. Draya Peaches further exemplifies how society feels about Black women by saying that "*Some people don't appreciate Black beauty/* But *I'm here to tell ya that you can still be sexy and still be a cutie*." She challenges the double consciousness regarding Black female sexuality by indicating that you can be Black, sexy, and still be cute with class.

**Shanny Crews**

Shanny is a 19-year-old African American, community college student, a mother, a full-time office administrator health care company and adamantly expressed a passion for clothing design. She self identifies as a Black/multi-racial, Christian woman and prefers to be called by her nickname "Shanny" which is short for Shantel. Shanny is the mother of a three-year-old girl; and she strives to intentionally complete her educational goals. She was raised in a home outside of the research area with her biological mother, older brother (25), and older sister (22). Shanny was the youngest in her mother's household. While her biological parents were divorced when Shanny was at a young age, her mother did remarry, and she lived with her mother and stepfather until he recently passed, and she relocated closer to the site of the study. She has five brothers on her biological father's side and is the second to youngest (his fifth child of six). Although her biological father never remarried after divorcing Shanny's mother, she did have a good relationship with her brother's mothers. Shanny is approximately 5'9" in height and has a slender

frame. She is approximately 145 pounds and has dark brown eyes and dark hair. She truly likes to smile.

During the interview she wore black and hot pink scrubs and black and pink Puma tennis shoes. She had her hair pulled back into a ponytail and had very minimal jewelry—a small ring and a watch. The interview conducted with Shanny took place in a library conference room. She seemed to be very comfortable sitting in a chair and sat diagonal but relatively close to me during the interview. Her voice was exceptionally clear, and she spoke with a few hand gestures.

Shanny began taking sexy selfies when she was 16 years old; and uses these words to describe what she understands sexy selfies to be:

> *A sexy selfie is showing body (butt, cleavage) or other body parts to gain attention or likes. I do believe though that some pictures can be sexy without showing your body, maybe per se if you have a nice smile.*

Shanny expressed that she has continued to take more sexy selfies through the years because they make her feel better about how she sees herself. While she adamantly admits that her sexy selfies are not depicting 100% nudity, she does feel that they are sexy images that help boost her self-image and confidence. She specifically stated:

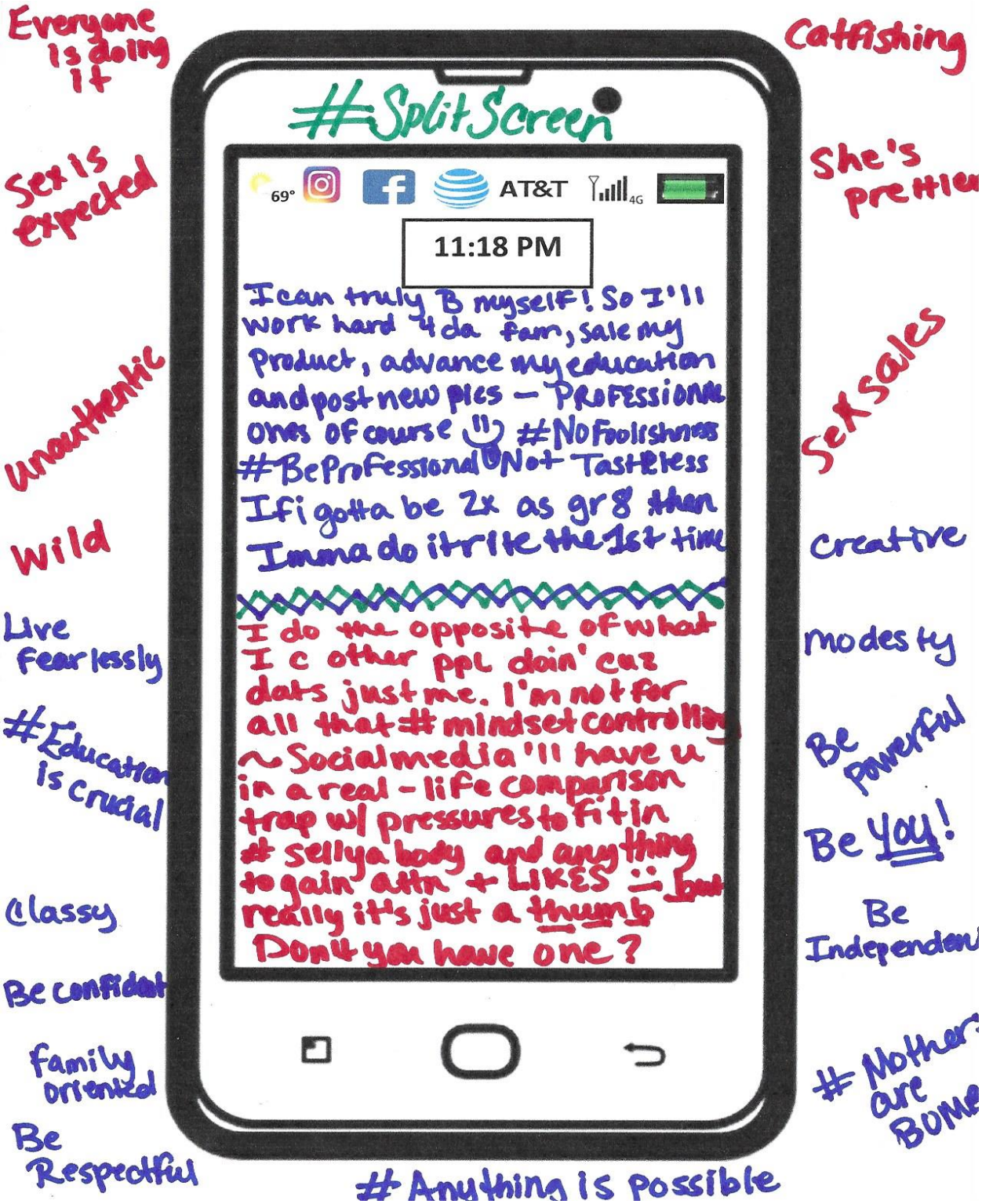
> *I definitely feel sexy and confident [when I take my sexy selfies] which is the way I feel all Black women should feel about themselves. I think most people my age have some issues with their self-esteem and that's why they go overboard and do the extremes of sexiness in their selfies. But I try to be respectable to myself and not show everything.*

While she admits to exchanging sexier images, she passionately expressed that trust must be established with her receiver before sending sexy selfies because she is not okay with others (her family, friends, neighbors, potential employers, and her child) knowing that this is something that she does. She also adamantly expressed concern when thinking about someone outside of the intended person seeing and/or viewing her sexy selfies. When asked about whether or not she

felt her sexy selfies were sexually explicit she continuously stated that the images were not 100% nude. She made sure to put emphasis on the nudity aspects of explicit images which made me wonder if she was implying something more.

In the next section, I will describe Shanny's multi-modal concrete poem, which is entitled, "#SplitScreen." This poem was co-written to reflect Shanny's unique sexy selfie experiences, member checked, and then titled based on image and message it transcends. When member checking with Shanny, she specifically stated that she wanted to be represented creatively and that we should attempt something new and fresh. Rationales will be explained later.

**#SplitScreen**



***Rationale***

Shanny used very direct phrases and concise responses when interviewing about her sexy selfie experiences. She seemed to be very brief when retelling her specific experiences with engaging in sexy selfie practices as well as sending and receiving images. When strategizing with Shanny we discussed how even when she is having regular conversation, she uses shortened phrases and pop cultural references to hashtags and trending topics. With this in mind, I inquired if she felt that she could be represented via a multimodal text.

Multimodal texts are texts that are created with several different modes of activity and occurrences in mind. Multimodal texts are usually digital texts that includes specific information and graphics. Thus, for Shanny's representation we discussed the creation of a concrete poem that would include both text messaging and hashtag features. Since Shanny already engages in conversation using texts—electronic messages with alphanumeric characters and emojis, we found that this would represent her true style.

Furthermore, since a true text message typically includes up to 160 characters, we agreed that the use of hashtags—key words and phrases without spaces typically used on social media sites—would be best suited to how she would want her lived experiences with sexy selfies to represent her story, culture, and personality. The interconnections of the various modes depicted in a concrete (or shape) poem was ideal for thinking of the multiple layers that were not explicit during her interview but emerged from the analysis of her experiences.

In the image above, Shanny's multimodal concrete poem, which is entitled, "#SplitScreen," depicts an image of a fully loaded cellphone with a split screen. Similar to opening up two separate apps on your phone and viewing them both at the same time, Shanny's

concrete poem depicts two contrasting viewpoints of her engagements with sexy selfies and specifically on social media. It includes aspects of her identity, culture, sexuality, Black femininity, and influences of the other.

### *Categorical Meaning Making*

In this next section, I will attempt to make meaning of Shanny's identity and sexuality as they are both impacted significantly by her culture and outside influences. Additionally, connections to the poems title and structure will be further explained.

**Identity.** Shanny's identity is influenced by her culture because she focuses a lot on what she will and will not be based on comparative examples from her sociocultural and media-saturated contexts. Similar to having split ideologies, Shanny's poem is spilt into two ideas: (1) where she focuses on the good qualities of culture and media; and (2) where she focuses on more of the negatives. It is evident that although she may feel certain ways about her culture, she attempts to take ownership and controls her environment. While she attempts "*to do the opposite of what [she] sees other people doing"* she actually is fitting and blending into the norm of what other in her age range is also doing (Coulthard, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Ryan, 2013). With the short scripts surrounding the cell phone, Shanny and I discussed an influx of ideas, catch phrases, and other bombarded messages that typically come to an individual while engaged in sexy selfies online. Thus, the verbatim phrases that dominated Shanny's synthesized data and her main messages are represented in the poem.

It is evident that Shanny's identity is not only impacted by culture, but also outside influences like her daughter and family. Young Black women like Shanny are influenced by the opinions of others (Levine & Munsch, 2019; Milkie, 1999; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). Thus,

Shanny's identity as a "*family-oriented," "mother,"* and a "*professional"* is all influenced by and through her interactions with others. During the interview, she indicated that "*social media has the tendency to control our mindsets";* however, she advocates for people to be themselves, be powerful, independent, and confident. She also advocates for people to live fearlessly and pursue an education.

**Sexuality.** Although Shanny did not go into great detail about her sexuality and preferences, what she did mention regarding her sexuality seemed to also be impacted immensely by culture and others. She uses hashtags like, "#SellYaBody," "#SexIsExpected," and "#SexSales" to depict that everyone is doing it and culturally it is not only expected but normalized (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Sales, 2016). Furthermore, Shanny's sexuality is impacted by the influence of others because as indicated in her data and represented in her poem, since she has to "*work hard for her family*" she must be professional, seek educational opportunities, and "*be twice as great*" in order to provide for her daughter and uphold the values within her family. While not as prominent throughout her interview, in her participant journal, Shanny indicated that she felt pressured to be classy, modest, and independent so that she could achieve her personal goals as well as the goals set forth for her by her family members. Therefore, her sexuality and sexual explorations are at a minimum. When she does engage in sexy selfies, she feels that they could still be publicly displayed because she rarely takes nude images or images that she would feel uncomfortable showing her family. This led me to believe that she must feel some pressures from her family that do not allow her to truly live fearlessly with regard to her sexuality.

Chapter 5, which is the conclusion and general discussion of this study, will include the cohesively identified themes as well as a response to each of the research questions. I begin with a recap of the study's findings, and conclude with the implications of the findings, recommendations, limitations of the study and goals for future research.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

The findings from this study indicate that the young Black women born between 1995 and 2002, aged 18 to 24 years old, and members of Generation Z, like the ones who were the subjects for this study continue to engage in sexy selfie practices as well as more sexually explicit practices. Nevertheless, because they have matured, many of them have changed their image and practices, and they no longer share their sexy selfies with random people. Also, many of the young women no longer post their sexually explicit pictures online; but they all indicated that they must build a rapport and feel trust between themselves and the partner that they are sharing the sexy selfies with regardless of the level of explicitness. Although many of the participants struggled to understand that their behaviors and sexy selfie practices are linked to their identity and how others view them, they still defined themselves in unique ways. Each participant personally identified as a Black woman who was a consumer of Hip Hop and social media, which were participation requirements for this study. Furthermore, each participant had not only one intriguing experience with sexy selfies, but they all had multiple experiences and engagements with sexy selfie practices.

After an iterative process of fully immersing myself in the data, I noticed that the following themes emerged:

1) *Outside Influences: There is an "other" that impacts young Black women's display of sexiness.* The other as identified from this study could include a person, entity, or place. Moreover an "other" could be as concrete as the participant's child or immediate family, or abstract as the participant's current or future profession and/or their community. Participants with a strong sense of self implied that their "other" was influenced by their job/profession or children. This has practical implications for education and development.

2) *Empowerment: Sexy selfies empower Black women to fuck with the grays and bring wreck to oppressive sexuality constraints.* Whether shared publicly or privately, sexy selfies provide young Black women with the opportunity to explore their sexual interests, desires, and autonomy while engaged in sexy selfie practices. Although "fucking with the grays" and "bring wreck" typically deal with public disrupt, the young Black women from this study provided insight as to ways that Black women and even younger girls can still send a deafening message about who they are as young Black women and how they want to be (re)presented without exposing themselves and their sexuality to the world.
3) *Expression of Freedom: Social Media is a creative space and an outlet for Black women to represent themselves.* All the participants express joy in being able to expose possible selves while engaged on social media sites. While only a few of them admitted to "testing out" other identities and styles, all of them seemed to enjoy the availability and flexibility of being exposed to myriad of others. This allowed them, as most of them indicated, to see what they want to be as well as who/what they do not want to be.
4) *Sexual Oppression: Everyone is doing it; so protect, not silence us.* Per the requirements of this study, all participants previously engaged with sexy selfie practices or continue to do so. As the findings of this study show, all the participants continue to currently engage in sexy selfie practice. The only exception to this is my participant named Melanie, who unfortunately passed away before this dissertation could be written, defended, and published. While many of the participants seemed to shun the idea that younger girls should engage in sexy selfies, some of them began as young as 12 themselves. Even though most of the girls began after the legal age of 18, most of them regret their first

sexy selfie experience (for various reasons), but at the same time find freedom, empowerment, and joy from continuing to engage in sexy selfie practices.

To address and answer the leading research questions, inductive thematic analysis and the co-creation of nine narratives were employed. This next section attempts to address each research question that guided this research study.

**Application to the Research Questions**

1) How is young Black women's identity development influenced and shaped by sexy selfie practices?

First and foremost, sexy selfies afford young Black women an outlet to explore their sexual identity, their desires for intimacy, their sexual autonomy, and sexual readiness. In one to two cases (e.g., Destiny Thomas and Andriana Clark), by engaging in sexy selfie practices also allowed them to explore other sexual orientations. In other words, young Black women's identity development is influenced by sexy selfie practices because these practices allow them to step outside of the box and define who and what they want to be sexually.

Secondly, the results of this study indicate that these young Black women engage in sexy selfie practices to cope with the silences and oppression placed on them regarding their sexual identity development and exploration. Thus, these young Black women are challenged to either follow the traditions and norms of society or break from those traditions and create and define for themselves their identity.

2) In young Black women, what characteristics of identity are influenced by sexy selfie practices?

The young Black women included in this study expressed a strong need to explore. They were all interested in trying something new and stepping outside of the box. As a critical

component of identity development, it was evident from the findings of this study that Black women can explore when engaged in sexy selfie practices. Furthermore, because all the participants indicated that identity deals with their ability to explore and experiment with the various identities that they are exposed to and whether or not they have the opportunity to adapt to new identities feasibly. Because exploration and commitment are critical to identity development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1980) and young women engage in sexy selfie practices that afford them this opportunity, it is imperative to understand these practices help them determine exactly who they are and how they want others to view them.

Another characteristic of identity development that this study illuminated was the participants' need to feel accepted and related to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). One of the other major components of identity development is being able to self-identify as well as understand how others view you. Several of the participants sought out opportunities while engaged in sexy selfie practices to gain a sense of belongingness/relatedness, love, and acceptance. All the participants were seeking opportunities to understand, change, or improve how specific others viewed them by sending and/or exchanging sexy selfies. Trust, which is a component of believing in and relating to others, was also a major factor for all participants. They each specifically indicated that trust was a mandatory factor in engaging in sexy selfies or continuing to engage in sexy selfie practices with their significant other or others.

3) In young Black women, how are these characteristics of identity shaped by social media and sexy selfie practices?

Pertaining to identity development, individuals must define for themselves who and what they want to be identified as. Several of the participants denied that their engagement with sexy

selfies and their involvement on social media sites had any effect on their identity. For example, although many of the participants (e.g., Jaz Dean, Keisha Sanders, Alexis Green, Andriana Clark, and Shanny Crews) could not personally see how their identity could be shaped by social media and sexy selfie practices, they all shunned the idea that girls under 18 should be engaging in sexy selfie practices. They indicated that if younger girls engage in certain activities too young, then it could taint their image. In this aspect, they could see the connection between identity and someone's personal actions and practices, but they could not see it within themselves. I believe that this is due to three major factors: the age of the participants, denial, and the strict adherence to respectability politics that Black women are culturally subjected to.

While the participants within this study were all aged 18-24 and had a well defined self-schema, many of them (e.g., Keisha Sanders, Destiny Thomas, Ashley Brown, Andriana Clark, and Draya Peaches Smith) all indicated that they still needed to explore and commit to new identities. Furthermore, these young Black women also expressed a continued need to feel accepted, loved, and a sense of relatedness in their shared sexy selfie narratives. Thus, their age and needs exemplify that they are still developing and re/shaping their identities. Although these young women are all considered adults, by American standards, they are still within a developmental period of emerging adulthood where they are still engaged in highly risky behaviors as well as assuming adult roles and responsibilities. Therefore, when asked if their engagement with sexy selfies, social media, or Hip Hop influences their identity, they have a difficult time making those connections due to their desires to assume their "adult roles". Additionally, many of these young women are still very much influenced by both the younger and older generations. Thus, while they "privately" embrace pleasure politics, their public actions are more aligned with respectability and "white is right" politics. Because of their unique

age and developmental experience, many of these young women baffle with these conflicting messages regarding their sexuality and identity. With this in mind, many of them were also evidenced to be in denial because they seem to have forgotten that just a few years prior they were engaged in sexy selfies at a young age.

## Implications

This research study holds implications for theoretical, methodological, and cultural research. It also holds implications specifically for educational curricula, instructional practices, and developmental psychology to re-conceptualize educational equity and social justice in literacy classrooms and the overall society for young Black women. The following implications can be made from the results of this study.

### Theoretical

All the participants identified as a Black woman and stated it was hard to think of their Blackness separate from their womanhood, therefore it is imperative to use gendered racial identity theory to define their identity (Thomas et al., 2011). When studying Black women especially, it is imperative that researchers understand that participants will define themselves in terms of their gendered racial identity and may not understand or want to look at these as separate (Carter et al., 1996; Hoffman, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011).

The results of this study indicate the need to include both Black and HHF because of the conflicting messages in the Black community in regard to respectability politics. While HHFs advocate, within their tenets, the need for pleasure politics, this generation of young Black women have not evolved to accept pleasure politics just yet. While many of them do feel empowered to engage in sexy selfie practices, most of them still hide this side of themselves from the world even though some like Destiny, Melanie, Ashley, and Draya Peaches all

indicated that they would not mind sharing more of themselves to the world. Nevertheless, as expressed in some of their interviews and journals, they elect not to post explicit images of themselves to help preserve their own image as well as uphold the integrity of the Black woman to the world. This is the foundation of respectability not pleasure politics!

Identity development research addresses how the internet, cell phones, social media sites, and mass media have become important sources of sexual information and exploration for Black women (Baumgartner et al., 2015; Shafer et al., 2013); and that young Black women especially feel empowered to overtly express their sexuality through posting/sharing their sexy selfies online (Chua & Chang, 2016; Stokes, 2007). Furthermore, Hip Hop Feminism posits that Hip Hop cultivates a safe space for Black women to creatively and freely construct themselves (Stokes, 2007) Thus, this study provides evidence that Black women should be afforded the opportunity to use their own voices and personal profiles to creatively (re)define how they want their sexuality to be represented. While the master narrative related to women and sexuality shuns sexual agency and liberties (Morgan, 2015), this study provides implications for ways in which individuals can begin to critically analyze how the contradictory messages and oppressive factors contribute to a young Black woman's sexuality and identity development.

When investigating identity development especially as it relates to sexual, gendered racial, and cultural identity development there seems to be a trifecta of displayed identities. There is this whole idea that the participants are code switching and role playing with the ways in which they represent themselves in the world. For example, when looking at the trifecta approach there was the idea of who they are, which is their real self, and it is based on character integrity and personal identity; who they desire to be, which is their idealized or future self; and who they present or portray themselves to be to the world. This last category is the perception of

who they want people to think of them as. In other words, the roles that they play because their real self is often in conflict with their ideal future self in what they hope they are portraying. In essence, this last category of the identity trifecta is a representation of their perceived real self.

**Methodological**

The results of this study imply the use of several different methodological approaches, such as: the use of multiple case study, photo-elicited interviews, narrative analysis instead of narrative inquiry, Rhizomatic analysis, and Policy/ Law Action Research.

As evidenced above, Hesse-Biber, et al. (2010) states that Black youth are not monolithic. Therefore, employing case study methodology would allot for the individual differences on a deeper level as well as an examination of the participants across their shared experiences.

Similarly, by seeking to conduct a photo-elicited interview versus a semi-structured interview or questionnaire may yield different results and very rich data. Having previously conducted a pilot study utilizing photo-elicitation, I am aware of how rich the interviews can be by having the participant bring in and describe the images they chose related to the topic. Nevertheless, because sex and sexuality are still a very taboo natural phenomena for most people, requesting sexy selfies for an interview may be challenging. What I do respect about photo-elicited interviews is that they allow the researcher and her participants to explore other entanglements of the phenomena, like possibly exploring the non-human aspects of the sexy selfie photos and videos being described.

Seeking to employ narrative analysis or Rhizomatic analysis may also yield differing results as these forms of analysis have their very own set of tenets and processes for interpreting the data. Through the use of Rhizomes, the researcher could begin to explore other connections

related to sexy selfies like probing deeper for connections to Hip Hop and the specific sites that individuals prefer to use when uploading their sexy selfies. Narrative analysis would allow the researcher and her participants to construct a narrative based on a systematic examination of how and why certain stories are shared. When thinking about this study in particular it was evident that certain things were still been left unstated and in some cases the participants silenced a particular portion of their sexy selfie narrative. Thus, narrative analysis would provide the foundation to further examine the hows and whys of these silences.

Finally, taking on a methodological approach that focuses on action research would be beneficial for illuminating the need for certain policies and laws to be put in place to help combat the oppression, issues, and concerns of sexy selfies.

**Developmental**

This research implied additional developmental and educational implications. In the next two sections, I will discuss how this research, the results, and even future research infers certain development and educational aims.

Participants often questioned whether identity is fickle or malleable or if identity is something that is stagnant, inflexible or unable to change as they continue to grow older. Thus, many of them used the rationale that what you put out there for the world to see will follow you and "taint" your image. Additionally, a few of the participants like, Destiny, Alexis, Jaz and Ashley all indicated that various social media sites capture a digital footprint of your activity online. Because of these thoughts, many of these young adult women have changed several of their practices and while all are still engaged in sexy selfie practices, they do so secretly or privately. All the participants identified as a young Black woman all of whom are still exploring their identity and trying to understand who they are and who they want to be separate from what

their families and/or society says they should be. Thus, developmentally, they are all still trying to make informed decisions regarding their identity and overall actions.

As previously mentioned, many of the participants did not see the connection between their identity in their action or their engagements in sexy selfies. They do not see that what they do reflects who they are in the moment. This is an aspect of their developmental age/maturity and implies that because of their unique age range they are being reflective, assuming more adult roles, and are now feeling challenged to make improvements within their behaviors as well as how others view them.

***Educational—Teaching and Learning***

As explained earlier, youth are learning from their peers and media (Chia, 2006; Shafer et al., 2013; Tajfel, 2010; Ward, 2003; Weber & Mitchell, 2008), but desire to have an outlet to learn from more experienced adults who will not make them feel bad about developing and all that comes with developing (Brown & Gilligan,1993; Chapin, 2016; Stokes, 2007); that can include exploration, commitment, and possibly having a negative identity separate from their parents' and guardians' desires (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). While social media does provide space for youth to engage with and learn from others, the participants from this study indicated that exposure to certain content on social media may negatively impact the development of younger girls, especially younger girls who are exploring these sites without guidance or support. For example, the findings from this study indicate that there is a need to help youth navigate these spaces so that they make healthy choices based on knowledge.

This research study also provides additional evidence for the use of technology and media-rich literacy analysis in the classroom. With over 85% of Americans (Drouin & Dibble, 2014; Perrin, 2015) utilizing social media sites daily, educators (e.g., policy makers,

administrators, and teachers) should employ ways to reach and teach students where they are gaining most of their knowledge—online. Therefore, by including discourses around media-based content would allow Black women to analyze, challenge, and critique how Black women are portrayed; and to create images and profiles that they feel are more representative of their gendered racial identity (Stokes, 2007). Furthermore, young Black women like Ashley Brown and Melanie Staples, who are just two examples of the nine participants from this study, indicated that they wished they had more guidance and support with understanding the images and an unconditional support for exploring their own (re)presentations of their Black feminine identity whether that included sexual references or not.

Based on the findings of this study, six out of the nine participants began taking sexy selfies before they turned 18. There were four participants that specifically began taking sexy selfies and explicit images and posting them or sharing them before turning 15 years old. With pedophiles and other dangers lurking, youth need to be protected and provided safe spaces to explore and define their sexual identity. Youth that begin sharing sexy selfies prior to the legal age of 18 need to be educated on laws pertaining to minors who are nude or seminude in images. While they may be only exchanging the images with their same aged peers, these images are still considered child pornography. Individuals identified by law enforcement that have these types of images in their possession face dire consequences ranging from criminal charges, incarceration, fines and fees, and some are placed on a sex offender registry for life. Thus, this study solidifies that youth must be educated on the potential outcomes of engaging in sexy selfie practices, which could be done the school-based programming, infomercials, and disseminating the laws through other sociocultural facilities where youth frequent. At the same time, this study also

indicates that there is a need to develop safe spaces for youth that will still engage in the practices regardless of their consequences and outcomes.

**Cultural Identity**

When questioned about their cultural identity, all the participants indicated that they were Black female Christians, heterosexual, and living in an unauthentic world. Only two of the participants, when describing their sexy selfie encounters implied that they could be bisexual. Then, when member checking one participant specifically stated that she was indeed bisexual regarding her sexual orientation. Some of the participants (e.g., Ashley Brown, Andriana Clark, and Alexis Green) indicated that they have used and posted images on various social media sites to explore and embrace other cultures in efforts to truly define their own. This implies that the participants are utilizing sexy selfie practices to explore not only their own cultural contexts and sexuality but also other cultures and other sexual orientations that they may not have considered before.

Many of the participants question why sexiness must be separated from respect. When speaking candidly about their sexual explorations through sexy selfies, the participants indicated that just because they want to be sexy, display their sexual readiness, and take and send sexy selfies does not mean that they are incapable of being respected. This ties together both theoretical implications as well as cultural implications due to the mixed messages sent from within Black culture. This pondering from both me and my participants specifically deals with the aspects of pleasure politics as discussed in the tenets of Hip Hop feminism. Although all the participants were aware of various prominent Black women within Hip Hop culture who vividly display their sexiness and embrace Morgan's (2015) concept of pleasure politics, many of the participants did not feel that individuals within their personal and family contexts would accept

them if they attempted to display their sexuality and negotiate for their own pleasure politics the same way. An example of this is evident in the co-created short story representing Melanie's sexy selfie experiences when she was praised by her peers but shunned by her family and church members. Because Hip Hop has been used within classroom settings to provide safe, freeing spaces for Black and urban youth to express themselves (Evans-Winter et al., 2010; Love, 2012).

Beyond the value in relation to academic concepts, Hip Hop can provide youth with a creative space to critique societal conditions, dominant ideologies, and promote critical, social consciousness especially regarding women and sexuality (Love, 2012). By recognizing that both Hip Hop and Social Media are important creative spaces and a vital source of knowledge construction for the development of a Black woman's identity, researchers and educators can help empower Black women while simultaneously creating culturally relevant pedagogies that are aimed at increasing academic performance and developing well-balanced, psychologically healthy women. Thus, this study implies that when the cultures of Hip Hop and sexy selfie practices meet, the young women may find more sexual autonomy and agency.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, I have the following recommendations for educators and family of individuals who engage in sexy selfie practices. Although I recognize that none of my participants had a monolithic experience with engaging in sexy selfie practices, they could have all gained something from each of the following recommendations before they began. See the suggested recommendations below:

1) I suggest that we teach critical media literacy in schools. Youth are perpetually exposed to sexually explicit content within Hip Hop culture, social media culture, and throughout the Black community. Thus, teaching youth how to decipher the messages that they are

exposed to and what that means for them should help them to understand the pervasive messages about Black women and combat the (mis)representations by showcasing their own identities.

2) I recommend that parents and/or guardians should begin teaching their youth about sexual identity and their developing bodies earlier. By engaging in discourse with their child, parents/guardians may find that youth are indeed curious about their developing bodies and want to feel safe to talk with someone who is more knowledgeable and willing to listen to, explain and support them through their development.
3) Community facilities and outlets, similar to Planned Parenthood and Choices, could be created that do not necessarily promote sexual encounters and solely focus on reproductive health, but possibly focus on sexual identity development generally. Community leaders such as nurses, counselors, etc., could be hired to run the centers. These centers would provide safe spaces for youth who do not feel safe and those that feel silenced at home and school regarding their sexual development exploration. They would be opened to the public and preferably would be a not-for-profit agency. Youth would be allowed to book appointments with the staff and receive support from professionals as they work to decipher media messages and form their own identity through challenging developmental crises and explorations.
4) The results of this study indicate that many Black women begin engaging in sexy selfie practices before the legal age of 18; therefore, this study illuminates the need for laws that can be enacted to help protect Black youth who feel oppressed, demoralized, and silenced when engaged in sexy selfie practices. I am recommending that community leaders, politicians, law enforcement, and educators work together to enact laws that

govern protection and incite the development of safe spaces for youth who engage in sexy selfie practices.

## Limitations

While this study did yield beneficial results, there were a few limitations to this study. For example, although the participants were aged 18 to 24, many of these emerging young adults indicated that they were still trying to understand who they are and what they like, which is expected from a developmental standpoint (Tajfel, 2010; Woolfolk & Perry, 2012). Specifically, there were instances during a few of the interviews were participants found it difficult or expressed an inability to answer some questions related to their identity. For instance, when trying to specify how and why identity development could be impacted by their preferences and engagement with sexy selfies and social media, the participants struggled to understand these connections. For many of the participants, it is not clear as to how they are using the selfies as a part of their self-constructed identity; therefore, it is possible to conduct a similar study with older women who would then be able to analytically look at how sexy selfies demonstrate one's identity as well as how they become a part of one's identity. Moreover, when asked to describe themselves, many of the participants used adjectives to define their identity but struggled to describe themselves in using more complex identities such as their roles, preferences, occupation, habits, values, and principles unless probed further. And in some cases, such as with Keisha, Alexis, and Shanny, they found it very difficult to find more identity descriptors even when probed.

One of the most disheartening limitations was that one of my participants died during this study. Although I was able to collect all data sources from her and confirm via member checking that her interview transcript was accurate, I was not able to send her the final narrative. However,

we were able to discuss strategies and make plans for how I intended to represent her. Because I wanted to follow the tenets of both narrative inquiry and HHF by honoring her lived experiences using a co-constructed narrative, I found it very challenging to compose her narrative and finish it without her. As evident from the analysis above, Melanie had a lot to offer and her passions were going to take her far in life. Unfortunately, she was not able to accomplish all her desired dreams before passing. Furthermore, she was not able to share her sexy selfie experiences with younger Black girls like her younger sister. Thus, I was tasked with the responsibility to write her story in a way that not only represented her and her experiences with sexy selfies accurately but also so that her story could be shared with others. It is my hope that I represented her well and that I can help spread the message of self-love and empowerment that she shared with me.

Sexy selfies, sexual development, and generally sharing personal information about oneself can be very sensitive topics to discuss with anyone especially a researcher. Thus, I truly believe that my authority as a researcher, an educator, and my presence in general was another limitation for this study. Although I was able to recruit some of the ladies from flyers and snowball sampling—meaning that they contacted me first—I still believe that there were so many things left unspoken and some things that were under-revealed. Because of this, I believe that there could be critical and substantial data missing.

After reviewing my theoretical perspective guiding this study, I felt that it was an appropriate choice considering I was working specifically with Black youth. However, while completing the analysis, I pondered if tenets from within queer theory should have been applied instead. Taking on an initial inaccurate assumption about queer theory, I realized that this theory might have aligned with this research as well. I would be interested in investigating this study and the findings through a theoretical approach using queer theory and identity development

because this theory, very much like the other critical theories, aims at challenging “the norm”. Specifically, Queer theory’s main goal is to deconstruct the existing master narratives and monolithic social norms, which would be ideal for sexy selfie research. Because Queer theory explores and critiques normative gender categories and conceptions of sexuality, I feel that this would have been an interesting way to explore Destiny’s and Andriana’s bi-sexual and bi-curious experiences with sexy selfies. Furthermore, Queer theory would have provided a unique lense to analyze the discourse around sex and sexuality with the participants.

Lastly, after revising this study per the recommendation of my committee and reflecting on the data collected. I realized that I still needed to probe deeper for the participants’ motivations for engaging in sexy selfie practices. Originally, I did include a more centralized focus on motivation and needs fulfillment, but a more narrowed focus on identity development was conducted for this study. In the next section I discuss potentials for future research and ways to address some of the limitations. See the future research proposed below

## Future Research

There are several options available for future research as a follow up to this study. For example, I plan to conduct a study on hair—textures, styles, and color—in conjunction with identity development. Black women take extreme pride in their hair. This was not only evident in every interview conducted for this study, but also through personal hair struggles and successes, I have found myself. Due to the fact that all of my participants indicated that hair styles and certain textures were major determining factors in whether or not they posted or sent a sexy selfie, I will seek to understand how Black girls aged 4-17 and Black women 18-70 express themselves and allow their hair to represent their self-defined identities.

Due to the intriguing facts gathered on each participants' family structure, I would be interested in investigating and probing more on an individual's engagement in sexy selfies and using the demographics shared about their family structure to guide another research study investigating sexy selfies. The findings from this study specifically indicated that three out of the nine participants have a secure relationship with their father figure (i.e., Melanie, Ashley, and Draya Peaches). While on the other hand, the remaining six out of the total of nine participants (i.e., Jaz, Keisha, Alexis, Destiny, Andriana, and Shanny) indicated that they have/had a strained or distant relationship with their biological fathers and stepfathers. I would like to further investigate whether their fathers' presence, absence, or lack of involvement contributes to their engagement in sexy selfies behaviors. I would also want to probe deeper for understanding how their family structures impact their identity development, and their views on and interactions with men. During the interview with Jaz, it was very evident that she was over Black men and "disgusted with how big of disappointments" they can be. I was left pondering whether the other participants especially those who had absent or distant fathers also felt similar sentiments as Jaz. By seeking to explore demographic and family structure dynamics in connection to sexy selfies may also shed light into whether or not there are certain characteristics or profiles that are more aligned to sexy selfie engagement.

I am also interested in investigating sexy selfies from the perspectives of individuals who identify with a non-heteronormative sexual orientation. As previously mentioned, building a study from a Queer theory framework may yield intriguing results. There was a strong sense of heteronormativity and I often noticed that there were tensions when participants would allude to other sexual orientations (e.g., Destiny and Andriana).

Moreover, I am interested in understanding the following as it relates to sexy selfie engagement: the dating practices within the 21st century and how sexy selfies factor into dating; how motivation and needs fulfillment factor into sexy selfie practices; and how the lack of laws governing the protection of youth who engage in sexy selfie practices impacts youth in other areas. Future research could employ other factors such as laws to protect younger aged youth engaged in sexy selfies as well as other developmental trends connected with sexy selfies such as how one uses coping strategies and imagery to combat oppressive dominant narratives.

Finally, while this study yielded substantial results regarding the sexy selfies practices and experiences of young Black women, I would still like to conduct a study with individuals from other demographic groups, such as with men, other ethnic groups and different age ranges and varied gender identities and sexual orientations to compare the data and findings.

## Conclusions

The results of this study show that Black women utilize social media platforms and other media-based technological devices to post and share their sexy selfies with not only their friends, but also complete strangers. This research indicates that the taking and sharing of sexy selfies is a freeing experience for Black women who continue to find creative ways to do so by creating new profile pages on social media sites, posting/sharing their sexy selfies in private messages, or by using filters and other digital graphics to hide their distinguishing features. This study provides evidence for the vital role that cultural and contextual influences such as 21st century social media culture, Hip Hop culture, sexy selfie culture, and porn culture all play in impacting, influencing, and shaping one's gendered racial identity and one's sexual identity. Black women have perpetually been presented as hypersexual beings; nevertheless, some women feel that it is their right to enjoy the pleasures of sex and do not want to feel oppressed when finding new

ways to express their sexuality. Therefore, I wholeheartedly believe that sexy selfies will remain an intricate part of identity development for youth and young adults across the globe. Furthermore, many women like the ones in this study engage in sexy selfie practices in an effort to exert their autonomy of their own bodies and thus use the images to represent their sexual identities. However, many of them continue to do so secretly and privately to hopefully avoid the negative stigma and consequences of their images being exposed and affecting their futures. Therefore, I believe that just like with other covert behaviors, sexy selfie engagement will continue to be coveted by those who want to engage but fear the judgement of others and punishment from the law. Additionally, because Black women also use sexy selfies to help (re)present their perceptive gendered racial identity and (re)create the ideal of a young Black woman who can embody a myriad of characteristics and personas including being sexy as well as poise, I believe that sexy selfie engagement will continue to proliferate within younger and older generations and continue to influence what and how much is shared about one's sexual identity and desires. The women who participated in this study attempted in subtle ways to challenge the respectability politics, but still feel bound by the constraints from society viewing sexuality as taboo and only sacred between a man and a woman. Younger generations, who tend to be more nonchalant and carefree in their sexual identity explorations, may not place as much emphasis on respectability politics as compared to the women within Generation Z. And, similarly, women within older generations who elect to engage in sexy selfie practices may also be more interested in their own sexual autonomy, desires, and needs than to worry themselves with the opinions of others and therefore they will not focus on abiding by respectable policies. Through the consumption of both Hip Hop and social media, Black women are especially influenced to engage in sexy selfie practices and oftentimes find empowerment and courage in

doing so. Thus, this study suggests that sexy selfies can be used to gain insight on Black women's sexuality development and general preferences. This study specifically demonstrates the importance of Hip Hop and social media as outlets for creative and expressional freedom and establishes the need for critical social media literacy to be taught within educational settings as well as the implementation of laws to help protect Black youth who feel oppressed, demoralized, and silenced with regard to their sexy selfie practices and identity development.

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## Appendix A—Observation Look Fors and Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Date

Pseudonym: _____ (Age: _____)

Racial Identification: Start time:

Occupation: End time:

Attire

Setting (Location)

Other Preliminary Observations [Body language, etc.]

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### Guided Questions for Interview

1) How would you describe yourself?

2) How would you describe the culture in which you live?
   - 21st century
   - Social media
   - Black culture*
   - Hip Hop Culture*

3) How has culture influenced how you identify?
   - What does it mean to be a Black girl/woman in today's society?
     - When you think about Black women in Hip Hop who/what comes to mind?
     - Why do these women/images represent Hip Hop to you?
   - How has Hip Hop influenced who you are (as a Black woman)?
   - How has your family or school contexts influenced who you are (as a Black woman)?
   - How has social media influenced who you are (as a Black woman)?

4) How often do you use social media sites?
   - If you could choose your favorite social media site, what would it be and why?
   - What motivates you to use this site?
   - Describe a typical day for you on _____ [social media site].

5) What kinds of messages or ideas about being a woman are being portrayed on ___ [social media site]?

- How are Black women portrayed online/in the media?
- To what effect to do think this has on Black girls?

6) How do these messages affect how you portray yourself online?
   - Describe your best selfie.
   - How is this selfie an expression of your Black feminine identity?
   - Would you describe this selfie as "sexy"? Why/why not?
     - How would you add/change this selfie in order for this selfie to be considered sexy?
   - What do you consider to be a "sexy selfie"?

7) How do you believe women of other ethnicities define sexy selfies?
   - Are sexy selfies the same across all ethnic and racial backgrounds?
   - Are sexy selfies the same for all Black women? Why or how would they be different?
     - Can you provide an example within today's society (or within Hip Hop culture)?

8) How would you describe something that is sexually explicit?
   - How do you think other young women your age define sexual explicitness?
     - Do you believe that younger Black girls define sexual explicitness this same way? Why/Why not?
   - How do you think young men around your age define sexual explicitness?
     - Do you believe that younger Black boys define sexual explicitness this same way? Why/Why not?

9) How do you think Black women perform or express their sexuality in the images they post online?
   - Do you believe this is the same for women of other ethnicities? Why/why not?
   - Do you believe this is the same for women of different ages/in other generations? Why/why not?
   - Do you believe men express their sexuality in the same way? Why/why not?

10) Describe a time in which you and your peers did something that you feel exemplifies Black femininity and sexuality.
   - What were you doing?
   - What do you remember seeing/hearing?
   - How did it make you feel?

11) Tell me about a time that you took a selfie or made a video that you consider to be sexually explicit.
   - What were you doing?
   - How did it make you feel?
   - At what age did you first begin taking sexy selfies?
   - What motivated you to express yourself this way? …at this age?
     - How/why were these motivators important to you?

12) How would you describe the sexy selfie that you took?
    - Has there been more than one instance in which you took sexy selfies?
        - Why, and what motivated you to do so?
        - Why were these motivators so important/ influential to you?

13) Do you believe that the media encourages sexually explicit images and behavior online?
    - If you wanted to learn something new about sexy selfies and Black femininity, what do you do?
        - Where would you go to look for information about what is trending?
        - Who/what does society view as experts in these practices?
            - Who/what do you value as experts in sexy selfies?
            - Why do you consider these people or sites to be experts?
            - What qualifies them to be experts?

14) What is the youngest age that you believe younger girls are starting to take sexy selfies?
    - How does that make you feel?
    - If you could offer some advice to an 8- or 9- year old that has been asked to take a sexy selfie, what would you say to her?

15) Do you feel that media sources, such as TV shows, movies, magazines, and social media sites, influence the development of young girls?
    - Do you believe that media has a positive or negative effect on younger girls' development and maturity? Why?

16) Do you believe that certain images could be dangerous? If so, how are they dangerous?

17) How do you believe the overall society feels about sexy selfies, Black femininity, and sexuality?
    - How does this make you feel as a woman?
        - How does this make you feel as a Black woman?
    - How will you use your social media platforms to influence how people view or perceive Black women?
    - If you knew that your parents and neighbors could Google your name and see all of the images online, would you still take them? Why/why not?
    - If your future boss could see the images you post online, would this change the types of images you take and post online?

18) Have your family members or educators been supportive of or influential to your developing femininity or sexuality?
    - In what ways have they (or not) been supportive or influential?
    - How do you suggest that schools or families support the development and exploration of young Black girls who may be interested in taking sexy selfies?

## Appendix B—Journal Topics

Throughout this research study, I would like you to reflect on your culture, identity, sexuality, femininity, and exposure to sexy matters on social media sites. For this study, I am asking that you COMPLETE AT LEAST **FOUR** JOURNAL ENTRIES related to any of the aforementioned topics and any additional thoughts, feelings, or memories that arise while you are an active participant in this study. Feel free to write freely using your favorite genre (poems, stories, songs), or simply list any questions or concerns that you have regarding this topic. You may also draw and/or add in any artifacts that you desire to your journals. Although you will be submitting this as a part of your research file, this is your journal, so be creative! Below are some suggested journal topics and tasks to help guide your thinking. If you would like to, choose any of them from below or come up with your own; but please do at least four entries total. The first one will be completed before leaving the focus group meeting; and the second entry must be completed prior to your scheduled interview date. Two additional journals must be completed after your interview. The journals will be collected in its entirety on or before February 28, 2019; so please be sure to have all entries included by this date.

1) Write a letter to your younger self regarding your experience(s) with social media and sexy selfies. Include your personal thoughts, feelings, and emotions concerning this topic.

2) Describe your favorite sexy selfie that you have sent to someone. Why is this your favorite sexy selfie? What made this sexy selfie so unique and memorable? What motivated you to send this image? What was so unique and special about the person you sent it to? Would you do it again? Why/why not?

3) Describe someone that has motivated or influenced you to take a sexy selfie. How were you encouraged to send the images? What is it about what they said, or did that made you comply?

4) Tell me about the first time you…

5) Tell me about one experience that you have had with a Social Media Site and/or Hip Hop that was particularly meaningful to you.

6) Do you believe schools should include a class on social media? Why/why not? And if so, what do you think needs to be included in the classes or lessons taught? Ideally, who would be best suited to lead these classes?

7) Please read the following news story located at: [INSERT NEWS WEBSITE HERE]. What are your thoughts about this case? Is this fair? What do you think should be done about it?

8) How will you use your social media platforms to influence how people view or perceive Black women?

**Appendix C—Participant Solicitation Flyer**

# ATTENTION ALL THE SEXY LADIES

## RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

- ✓ **Are you between the ages of 18 and 24?**
- ✓ **Are you an African-American (or Black) woman?**
- ✓ **Do you like to take sexy selfies?**
- ✓ **Do you currently use social media?**

**IRB ID: #PRO-FY2019-406**

**If you answered YES to these questions, please contact the key researcher to hear more about a research study being conducted on Empowerment and Sexy Selfies. If possible, please tell a friend or two! The key researcher will discuss with you the details of the study and go over the next steps for those that meet the participant criteria.**

**Thanks in advance for your interest and willingness to participate!**

## DID YOU KNOW?

- ❖ **Sexting and sexual self-presentations are forms of sexy selfies that include pictures, videos, and suggestive emojis.**
- ❖ **85% of girls and young women are influenced by their peers and/or social media to engage in sexy selfie practices.**
- ❖ **72% of InstaGram's millions of users have uploaded and/or sent a sexy selfie through a DM.**
- ❖ **In 2013, researchers found that women feel empowered by their sexy selfies.**

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 | Contact Crystal White (Key Researcher)<br>Email: Clyates1@memphis.edu<br>901.870.0434 |

## Appendix D—Consent Form

I agree to take part in a research study titled, **"Acknowledge or Respect It, But Never Silence My Sexy—A Hip Hop Feminist Narrative Inquiry Into the Lives of Black Women Who Take Sexy Selfies"** which is being conducted as a partial degree requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the College of Education, at The University of Memphis by principal researcher, Ms. Crystal White under the direction of Dr. Denise L. Winsor, in the Department of Educational Psychology and Research. I am aware that my participation in this study is completely voluntary; and I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I am aware that the purpose of this study is to understand the cultural perceptions of young adults and that I will not benefit directly from this research. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to sit and answer questions for an interview lasting one to two hours long, and complete at least four reflective journal entries. I may also be asked to involve the researcher in representing my storied experience by reviewing the interview data. If I participate in the interview and reflective journal entries, I will be willing to answer researcher questions in order to improve her understanding of my experiences. Depending on my desire for involvement in this study, my participation will last from 1 day to 6 weeks (maximum) and can vary from participation in a one to two-hour-long interview to participation in numerous un-timed encounters with the researcher. No discomforts or stresses are expected during this interview or research process. There are no significant risks to participation in the study. If my reflection on experiences leads to any type of emotional upset, the researcher is prepared to give me contact information for community mental health services or any other community services that I may inquire about.

I give permission for my collected stories and journal entries to be used by Crystal White as long as my name is kept confidential. The only person who will know that I am a research participant in this study is Crystal White. Information provided by me will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with my permission or as required by law. An exception to confidentiality involves information revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse which must be reported as required by law or if the researcher is required to provide information by a judge. Individually identifying information, such as my name, will not be published in connection with this study. I am aware that a pseudonym will be used throughout this study to ensure anonymity and that both I and the researcher will agree upon. All results and all tape recordings from this study will be disguised by a fake name and this name will be used on all of the research records. All recordings and written documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office. All audio/video recordings will be destroyed by the following year.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at **901-870-0434** or via email at **clyates1@memphis.edu**. My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of questions to my satisfaction, that I understand the procedures described above, and that I consent to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Crystal White

| Name of Researcher | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

Phone: 901-870-0434 Email: clyates1@memphis.edu

**Please print your full name, sign and date indicating that you understand and consent to be a participant in this study:**

| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |
|---|---|---|

***Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The IRB at Administration 315, Memphis, TN 38152, 901.678.2533 or irb@memphis.edu.***

## PRO-FY2019-406 - Initial: Approval - Expedited

Flag for follow up.

irb@memphis.edu
Fri 3/15/2019 12:10 PM
To: C L White (clyates1); Denise Lynne Winsor (dwinsor)

Institutional Review Board
Division of Research and Innovation
Office of Research Compliance
University of Memphis
315 Admin Bldg
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

March 15, 2019

PI Name: Crystal White
Co-Investigators:
Advisor and/or Co-PI: Denise Winsor
Submission Type: Initial
Title: Acknowledge or Respect It, But Never Silence My Sexy: A Narrative Inquiry Study with Young Black Women Who Have Engaged in Sexy Selfies
IRB ID **:** #PRO-FY2019-406

Expedited Approval: March 15, 2019

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:

1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required to be kept current at citiprogram.org every 2 years

For additional questions or concerns please contact us at irb@memphis.edu or 901.6783.2705

Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
The University of Memphis.