

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: #BlackLiteracyLivesMatter: REVEALING AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS' MULTIMODAL LITERACY PRACTICES IN ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS AT A COMMUNITY CENTER

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This study investigated the multimodal literacy practices of African American adolescents as they navigated online social networks. Participants ranged from ages 13 to 17 and resided in an inner city East Coast neighborhood. Data collection tools included an online social network survey, online social networking activities log, audio recorded literacy interviews, and screenshots. Pieces of data were carefully analyzed and coded for potential literacy practices.

The study revealed four distinct literacy practices of this particular group of African American adolescents: communication, entertainment, information gathering, and taking a stance. Participant data defined each multimodal literacy practice while explaining how and why skills and experiences combined to create the practice. Engagement in online social networks involved these multimodal literacy practices. Often they involved interactions with peers and family members. Participants did not readily compare their multimodal online social network literacy practices to traditional forms of literacy, however, they used traditional words such as reading, writing, and spelling to explain their skills and experiences.

Literacy was brought to life in a unique way through the words and multiple modes of communication, entertainment, information gathering, and stance taking of participants. This study questions 'what' and possibly 'whose' literacy counts. Technology and its affordances allowed participants to engage in practices through multiple modes. Additionally, this group of African American adolescents exposed an avenue through which race related injustices and tensions might be expressed through multimodal literacy practices in online social networks. The results of this study encourages future research to examine what

literacy counts, whose literacy counts, and how or why adolescents engage through literacy practices. #BlackLiteracyLivesMatter

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ADOLESCENTS' MULTIMODAL LITERACY PRACTICES IN ONLINE
SOCIAL NETWORKS AT A COMMUNITY CENTER

by

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to

My parents Stuart and Robena

My grandparents,

And all of the kids I ever tutored, taught, and mentored.

Thank you for helping me find my Black Girl Magic.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Figures	vii
Table of Tables	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
PERSONAL NARRATIVE	1
AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS’ LITERACY PRACTICES IN TODAY AND TOMORROWS ON AND OFFLINE WORLD.....	2
DEFINING AND REDEFINING AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENT LITERACY PRACTICES: FROM READING TO LITERACY	6
<i>Reading</i>	7
<i>Literacy Practices</i>	9
<i>Literacy Skills</i>	14
<i>Literacy Experiences</i>	16
CHOOSING ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS	22
COMMUNITY CENTERS, AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS’ AND A SHARED EXPERIENCE.....	23
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	26
SUMMARY	28
Chapter 2: Literature Review	32
INTRODUCTION.....	32
DEFINING LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY.....	33
<i>Literacy Defined</i>	33
<i>Writing Defined Within Literacy</i>	36
LITERACY PRACTICES IN THIS REVIEW	40
LIMITATIONS OF THIS REVIEW	41
CONTEXTS OF LITERACY: LOCAL MULTIMODALITIES	43
<i>Local Literacies: Tapping Into Everyday Practices</i>	44
<i>Multimodalities: Defining Literacy Practices in the 21st Century</i>	49
STUDYING PURPOSES OF ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS.....	56
<i>Why Adolescents Choose Online Social Networks</i>	57
<i>Online Social Networks as Contexts of Literacy Practices</i>	60
CONCLUSIONS	70
Chapter 3: Methodology	72

INTRODUCTION.....	72
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	74
<i>Researcher’s Background and Role</i>	77
<i>Setting and Participants</i>	80
<i>Data Sources</i>	87
<i>Questions and Data Analysis</i>	98
<i>Data Collection and Analysis</i>	102
SUMMARY	108
Chapter 4: Findings.....	109
INTRODUCTION.....	109
PARTICIPANT PROFILES	110
<i>Defining Moments: Adolescents’ Definitions of Research Terms</i>	116
<i>Online Social Networks: A People Place</i>	116
<i>‘Wired’: Multimodal Technology</i>	118
<i>Typing, Talking and Texting: Defining Communicate and Engage</i>	120
<i>Literacy: Reading and Writing Just Right</i>	123
FROM PROFILES TO PRACTICES	127
<i>Multimodal Practices</i>	128
<i>Communicating: “It Goes Down in the DMs”: Interacting, Talking, and</i> <i>Messaging</i>	129
<i>Information Gathering- Points of View: Adolescents’ Searches and</i> <i>Observations</i>	154
<i>Entertaining: To be or Not to be Bored</i>	169
<i>Taking a Stance</i>	188
COMPARISONS TO TRADITIONAL LITERACY	222
<i>Reading Not Writing</i>	224
<i>Making Meaning: Potential for Context Clues</i>	226
<i>Potent Posts and Paragraphs</i>	228
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	233
INTRODUCTION.....	233
FINDINGS.....	236
<i>Communicating, Information Gathering, Entertaining and Taking a Stance:</i> <i>Multimodal Literacy Practices</i>	236
EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY	239
<i>Reading, Writing, Relationships, and Riots: Literacy Brought to Life</i>	239

LIMITATIONS	248
IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	251
APPENDIX A: PARENT INVITE LETTER.....	255
APPENDIX B: MINOR CONSENT FORM.....	256
APPENDIX C: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM	261
APPENDIX D: ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK SURVEY	266
APPENDIX E: ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIVITIES LOG.....	268
APPENDIX F: LITERACY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	269
APPENDIX G: RESEARCHER LOG.....	270
REFERENCES	271

Table of Figures

Figure 1.....	27
Figure 2.....	133
Figure 3.....	139
Figure 4.....	140
Figure 5.....	144
Figure 6.....	156
Figure 7.....	157
Figure 8.....	161
Figure 9.....	171
Figure 10.....	174
Figure 11.....	175
Figure 12.....	176
Figure 13.....	182
Figure 14.....	197
Figure 15.....	201
Figure 16.....	210
Figure 17.....	211
Figure 18.....	225
Figure 19.....	229

Table of Tables

Table 1	88
Table 2	112
Table 3	125
Table 4	128

Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Narrative

I am a life-long learner. I am an African American female. I am a reader, writer, watcher, and doer. I have unique literacy experiences. As a little girl I listened to my mother read bedtime stories to my siblings and me every night. I was fascinated by a newly built library full of fresh smelling books, tables and chairs for reading, and whimsical decorations draped magically from the ceiling. At six years old, I emulated my oldest sister in a game called “college” full of reading and copying words and definitions from our collection of encyclopedias and dictionaries. As a pre-teen and teenager I attended majority white catholic schools during the school year and spent every summer attending or volunteering at community center camps in predominately African American neighborhoods filling a void I hadn’t known existed. During the school year, I filled this void with research on African American history, diving into the political worlds of Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael, and Huey Newton, while finding creative poetic refuge in the words of Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, and Langston Hughes. The magical creation of the Internet couldn’t have come at a better time. Gaining knowledge and staying in contact with friends and family, became accessible through the tips of my fingers. The skills I gained and interests I fed through the years, paved the road I currently travel.

I am not sure I intended to use reading and writing to “play games” and seek information, but these skills found their way into other interests in my life. As young children, my siblings and I loved to play and create new games. We were given a book of 150 things to do on a rainy day that became our Bible of creativity. The book was full of instructions on how to create the perfect game or activity to cure any rainy day blues. When we weren’t stuck inside we were outside riding our bicycles or playing basketball. As my interest in sports grew I joined the school basketball team and later track and field. The ability to search for information online made exploration of new ideas even easier. I can remember my very first Internet search consisted of visiting www.nba.com. Quickly after that, the Internet became a source of social interaction. When my family moved to another state during my freshman year of high school, AOL instant messaging became a cheap and convenient way of keeping in contact with old friends. Once again literacy skills proved to be an important part of my life. To this day, I continue to use social media to keep in contact with friends and family near and far.

African American Adolescents’ Literacy Practices In Today and Tomorrows On and Offline World

Literacy, is perhaps naturally grounded in academic settings. However, we know that this is not the only context in which literacy happens. I am especially interested in literacy that occurs in non-academic settings. Technology and the

Internet play a major role. Ninety-five percent of American teens use the Internet (PEW Teens and Technology, 2013). According to the PEW Internet and American Life Project 2009, 73% of Internet users use some type of social networking site such as, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, or *Instagram*. I am one of 483 million *Facebook* users (newsroom.fb.com/statistics) and I believe that African American adolescents may share in my experience in some ways. Specifically, 92% of African American adolescents frequent the Internet (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Coresi, & Gasser, 2013). A survey by Knowledge Networks of about 1,000 teens ages 13-17, revealed that 49% of African American teens were *Facebook* users and 19% were members of the *Twitter* community (Madden et al., 2013). Online social networks may be seen as “not serious enough and suspiciously fun” (Williams, 2005), and do not utilize measurable literacy skills. However, online social networks often require literacy skills in order to create or respond to text (Greenhow, 2010; Ahn, 2011). Thus, it is possible for online social networks to be places where fun and learning take place through literacy skills. In fact, navigation of the Internet and online social networks, allow a person to acquire skills “transferrable to future educational, employment, social, and civic contexts” (Turner, 2011, p. 622).

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) reported that computer and information technology industry jobs have grown by 37% since 2003. Additionally, BLS has determined that the software development and application

field will continue to grow another 23% from 2012 to 2022. Thus, it is very likely that African American adolescents of today will either create or consume this new technology. In order to be employed in this setting, a new language of graphic and screen based text is required (New London Group, 1996). It is possible that African American adolescents gain skills through their participation in online social networks, which could be used in employment and civic engagement of the future. If current use and access of technology is a contributing factor of future employment then it is important to consider current situations. In 2013 the Pew Teens and Technology Survey, 98% of white adolescents and 92% of African American adolescents reported having access to the Internet (Madden et al., 2013). Although both groups appear to be accessing the Internet at close to the same rate, the avenue through which they arrive, varies. For example, in 2013, 81% of white adolescents owned a computer at home compared to 64% of African Americans, yet 24% of white adolescents and 33% of African American adolescents most often use a smart phone to access the Internet (Madden et al., 2013). Therefore, many African Americans may be accessing the Internet, away from school, in social settings, on public computers or personal tablets and smartphones.

I have chosen to focus on online social networks because of the inherent existence of participation among African American adolescents. The literacy practices of African American adolescents as they engage an online social

network, may prove to elicit practices that are of use now and will be in the future. In my study, I reveal the multimodal literacy practices of African American adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 as they engage in online social networks, who may or may not share my unique lived experience. Educational researchers have long used ethnographic studies to tell the story of unique groups of people. The online literacy experiences of African American adolescent remains to be a mystery. An ethnographic approach reveals rich, authentic, “from the mouths of babes” findings, that expose a world previously left untapped.

The prominence of online social networks in my life and the lives of many adolescents can be a great source of literacy experience research. There has been a strong prevalence of social networking, in both my life as a fifth and eighth grade teacher, and the lives of my students. Even today, I often receive *Facebook* messages from former and current students. In this study, I opened a window that revealed my literacy experiences. It is a peek into a world that is often hidden. My research will offer more than just a peek through a window; it may open a door that exposes the unique literacy experiences of African American adolescents through online social networks. We are building upon, yet moving beyond research that compares in and out of school literacies or the use of out of school literacies, such as rap lyrics, to teach academic concepts (Kirkland, 2010; Joaquin, 2010). In this study I explored the literacy lives of African American adolescents

through online social networks, in order to reveal a world no one knew existed because few have ever asked. The answers and responses to these questions exposed a whole world of literate practices that were unique to adolescents within online social networks. In order to explore literacy within the context of online social networks, it is first important to determine what counts as reading and literacy and how aspects of literacy are defined.

Defining and Redefining African American Adolescent Literacy Practices: From Reading to Literacy

“What are you doing ?!”, yells just about any parent to their adolescent locked away in their bedroom. “NOTHING!”, yells the adolescent from their cocoon. In many cases the “nothing” the adolescent is engaged in is a lot more than just “nothing”. Perhaps he or she is creating a six second video for *Vine* or *Snap*-chatting a friend on their cell phone. Maybe he or she is sending direct messages to “friends” on Instagram. Or maybe he or she is listening to music or surprisingly plugging away at a government paper. Nonetheless, whether academic or non-academic tasks, it is possible that literacy is involved.

In order to comprehend how literacy may be involved in today’s (and the future’s) adolescent practices and skills in online settings, it is important to understand how we arrived at this point. I have adopted the perspective of a popular Ghanaian word and symbol, called “Sankofa”, which in English loosely means “to reach back and get”. In order to know where we are going we must

know where we have been. My attempt to explore African American adolescent multimodal literacy practices has required an investigation of what has come before. In order to research today's world I have "looked" back, to determine how literacy of today came to be.

Reading

Defining what constitutes reading is an integral place to begin. Describing reading in various settings requires being able to recognize what "counts" as reading, therefore at least a broad definition is helpful. I define reading as an interpretation and understanding of words, images, and sounds. Hull (2000) expressed that reading was done in order to "do" a task. A task could range from reading a book for pleasure, reading cooking directions, or reading an article in order to write a response. More specifically, reading to "do" could be imposed upon the notion of an African American adolescent using literacy in order to "do" an online social network. "Doing" on an online social network might translate to participation in the online social network. Reading, as it occurs in offline literacy settings, is "static" in which text is simply the words on a page, void of moving graphics or musical accompaniment. However, in today's online settings, literacy is no longer static (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008); it has become "non-static", where text is continuously changing under the control of the creator or consumer, with hyperlinks, photographs, and sounds. Determining and defining

reading and literacy practices relies on the understanding that text in online settings is non-static. This type of text incorporates meaning and movement beyond the words on a page. Images, videos, and sounds have the potential to connect creators and consumers of content in a manner that transmits meaning in unique ways. Therefore, reading as it relates to “non-static” or constantly changing text, requires a deeper investigation into what comprises the act of reading.

Reading is a “critical perception, interpretation, and rewriting of what is read” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 36). This reading requires a reader to integrate, evaluate, and respond in order to participate. The appearance of participation might vary, depending on task and situation. For example, on *Facebook* an adolescent might participate by typing a witty response to a sarcastic comment written on his or her timeline. This person had to evaluate the sarcastic comment in order to respond with a witty comment.

Reading our real world, as it relates to literacy, may impact what counts. Freire and Macedo (1987) explain that often before learning to actually read words, one has learned to read the world surrounding it. Although we all exist and function theoretically in the same “world”, we may “read” it in different ways. Thus, the literacy experiences gleaned, are unique to individuals. For example, my literacy experience growing up during the age in which the Internet was

created, is vastly different from my 20 year old niece's experiences, who has never known a world without access to the Internet. When I learned to read words and my world, I did not interact with words and text through technology. However now, it is part of my everyday world and words. Adolescents of today are reading their words and worlds through a technology interface. The instantaneous and infinite access to words has become the norm. Interactions often occur through online social networks where worlds and words merge. The literacy practices, comprised of adolescents' skills and experiences, may be unique as they occur in an online social network in today's technology filled world.

It becomes our everyday experiences (Luke & Elkins, 2002) or "ways with words" that help us define literacy (Heath, 1983). In determining "what counts" we must cast a broad net in order to gather and create a definition. If the definition of literacy is subjectively based on our everyday experiences and the way in which we interpret and read the world, then there could be many things that "count". Researchers have attempted to narrow and categorize some aspects of literacy practices within our everyday experiences.

Literacy Practices

A literacy practice is a person's reading and writing skills and experiences in a given context. Moje's (2000) definition of literacy practice broadens notions

of *just* reading and writing to include many forms of representation (verbal, performance, and artistic) through a system of symbolic meaning-making. Thus, while stating reading and writing skills as the focus, I subscribe to a broad definition, encompassing multiple forms of what could be considered reading and writing. The definition of reading and writing becomes a process of creating and consuming meaning through reading and writing with paper and pencil and beyond, including various modes of speaking, writing, viewing, and listening words, images, and sounds. Reading could occur while someone turns the pages of *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire* while seated in the children's section of a public library. Reading could also occur as someone uses their iPad to "google" Rihanna, and must sift through the "dead" hyperlinks of her latest leaked single. In the same vein, writing could occur when this Rihanna fan decided to voice his opinion by typing and posting a comment. Similarly, writing could be seen in use during state testing week of a classroom or while a teen drafts an interest letter to apply for a job as a summer camp counselor. The wide range of acts that could be considered reading and writing are the driving force behind my research. Since the skills and experiences needed to be successful in various environments could be developed in multiple non-traditional literacy settings. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) studied literacy as a social practice among two adolescent girls as they participated in online journaling known as blogging. From this study, I adopted parts of the definition of literacy practice that focused on the reading and writing

(i.e. skills) that occurred in an online setting (experience), which constituted a “practice”.

In my study I will focus on the context of online social networks of African American adolescents. Specific literacy practices that are unique to online social networks may exist. Since literacy practices are skills combined within a context, I will begin with where and by which multimodal reading and writing skills these practices take place. Literacy practices occur over time and can be observed through repeated observation (Pahl, 2007). A person’s participation in an online social network has the potential to be a literacy practice since participation occurs over time, through multimodal reading and writing skills, within a particular context.

Participation in an online social network is an example of a multimodal literacy practice (Mills, 2010). There are many literacy practices that could be considered multimodal. Literacy that is multimodal involves two or more modes of communication, including linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural, and visual (New London Group, 1996). Serafini (2015) used the term “ensemble” to define the interwoven factors of written, visual and design features of a given text. This idea supports my idea that potential literacy practices within an online social network cannot be separated and inform one another as meaning making occurs. Additionally, multimodal literacy can be seen as a ‘negotiation’ of static and non-

static materials to make meaning (Castek, Lenski, & Hryniuk-Adamov, 2014) Thus in an online social network, comprehension of static and non-static, text, pictures, and sounds, requires potentially context specific reading and writing skills would be considered multimodal literacy practices as a user may navigate and negotiate through skills and experiences. Researching literacy practices from a multimodal perspective has helped to further define skills and experiences that may occur in technological environments.

Literacy, in terms of reading and writing, exists on the Internet in innovate, fun, yet purposeful ways (Haas & Takayoshi, 2011). The purpose of an online social network may be to communicate with “friends” through words and images. Belonging to and participating in an online social network may involve a skill set that moves beyond proficient word usage (Mills, 2010). Therefore, a multimodal literacy practice exists in unique online environments where reading and writing skills are contingent upon the way the text and images are organized and presented. According to Mills (2010), words are integrated with pictures and sounds to create multimedia text. A person who is able to create and consume the words, images, and sounds across multiple modes in an online setting, is engaged in multimodal literacy practices. Writing using hashtags to keep up with trending topics online is a multimodal literacy practice. Similarly, reading becomes a multimodal literacy practice as a person may view an image sparking an interest in an article posted on a completely different website. I have adopted these

multimodal definitions because they will allow me to explore the multiple ways reading and writing text, images, and sounds, could occur in online settings. In some regards, this perspective is quite “new” and has been deemed so through current research and theoretical perspectives.

Researchers have studied literate practices as they occur under the lens of “New Literacies” (Gee, 2003; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2008). Given that new literacies include text with valued communication, ranging from rap lyrics, graphic novels, still images, audio text, and oral performances (Collier, 2007), then literate practices elicit skills that allow one to engage in the given form of text. Literacy practices within online settings have often focused on comprehension (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Alvermann & Heron, 2001; Morrell, 2012). Participation in online settings require an “understanding” of how to consume and create text and images. For example, since text in online settings come from multiple sources, full of many distractions, a reader then has to use prior knowledge, inferential reasoning, and self-regulated reading processes in order to comprehend their world (Coiro & Dobler, 2007). The skill of comprehension and the necessary strategies, within the online context, create the literacy practice. In this setting, comprehension “means understanding everything that is written as well as mp3s, jpegs, wav files, being able to program HTML on a personal website, and emails from mobiles/tablets”(Morrell, 2012, p.301). The representation of “things” in online settings are a part of meaning making

processes. Moje (2000) considered literacy practices as forms of representation used to make and represent meaning. Hence it is the literacy practices that are used as tools in meaning-making processes (Moje, 2002). Since online social network users of today play a role in contributing to content (Lapp, Fisher, Frey & Gonzalez, 2014), then the meaning-making process becomes co-constructed building upon shared comprehension.

Literacy Skills

A skill is defined as a learned power of doing something competently or a developed aptitude or ability (merrian-webster.com). Definitions of skills appear to be void of context. Given that I believe context to be an integral part of literacy, I choose to define literacy practices as both literacy skills and literacy experiences within a given context. Skills are what allow a person to read and/or write. Thus, practices are comprised of skills. Comprehension is one major skill that allows a person to both read and write. Given its major role in the world of literacy, comprehension is a focal point of my research study.

Comprehension is an act that allows a user to participate in an online environment. Alvermann and Heron (2001) explained that shared experiences through online affinity groups added to reading comprehension through meaning making processes. Online affinity groups are unique and specific places where literate practices may impact comprehension skills. Coiro and Dobler (2007)

explored the online reading comprehension of sixth grade students. Participants were given the task of locating information about tigers. The researchers found that Internet readers constructed meaning from text, through “flexible and purposeful choices” (Coiro & Dobler, 2007, p. 218). As participants navigated an informational website about tigers and conducted research through a kid friendly search engine, they used a series of skills to comprehend the rapid dissemination of information. Specifically, the students were able to gather the necessary information by choosing what and where to read, through self-regulated reading processes (Coiro & Dobler, 2007). The ability to choose relevant hyperlinks, icons, and interactive diagrams that would potentially lead to valuable information proved to be a sign of comprehension. The researchers observed the adolescents’ think aloud processes as they navigated through the websites. Participant use of skills were focused on the ability to search, locate, and comprehend information in order to evaluate its purpose or contribution to a given task. A person’s ability and desire to comprehend could be connected to their skills and experiences, thus creating a literacy practice. One’s skills and experiences in a given context may determine whether or not comprehension is obtained.

Since comprehension proved to be a major skill allowing a person to navigate the Internet, then it is possible that it is a skill in settings, such as online social networks. In an online social network, users often read and respond to the

status updates of their friends. A user might write about R&B/Pop sensational singer, Beyoncé’s amazing performance on an award’s show, prompting a friend to write a comment offering a different opinion about the performance. Another user might choose to express their opinion about government involvement in Egyptian conflicts by posting an article from the Washington Post. In an online social network a user could respond to, and create text from a personal perspective in order to “do” or engage in and participate in the online world. Research exists that supports the idea that there are certain literacy practices embedded within navigation through online worlds. Literacy experiences address how skills and contexts come together. The experience is an event comprised of and dependent upon the various skills a person uses in order to participate within a given context.

Literacy Experiences

What constitutes a literacy experience? I define a literacy experience as the engagement across multiple contexts while reading and/or writing. Experience, engagement, and context require further elaboration due to the variety with which each term may be used. Firstly, experience here does not necessarily refer to a sum of events or skills that improve or solidify ability. For example, an “experienced” teacher might be chosen to be a lead teacher or department chair due to the number of years they have taught and background knowledge in the

field. Experience in this study refers to a person's involvement or engagement in a given context. Secondly, I borrow from Guthrie's (1996) definition of engagement that describes engaged persons as motivated (often socially) to explain or make meaning. Engagement becomes social when a person is required and desires to interact with others (Guthrie, 1996). This is especially important to my study because of the inherent socialness of online social network participation. Additionally, online social network users are in constant interaction with others as they make meaning. Engagement can be further broken down to describe how a person participates, values, and deeply understands (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Thus, exploring engagement allows me to consider why adolescents participate in online social networks. Reasons for participation may be dependent upon engagement based on values and comprehension. Thirdly, the term context refers to location and setting. Contexts can be on or offline social networks. These may occur at school, home, neighborhoods, or in the case of my study, at a community center. Finally, definitions of reading and writing, as they relate to literacy, move beyond pencil, paper, and books. I subscribe to expanded definitions of reading and writing that include multimodal text and images in online settings. Therefore, the literacy experience is based upon the engagement fueled by reading and writing skills. The experiences, much like the definition of literacy, is dependent upon context.

I will focus on contexts that occur within technological settings with non-static texts. Online social networks are spaces where literacy occurs between thought and text, and could be unique literacy experience. This could be an experience known as a local literacy in which literacy occurs as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The social environment where literacy takes place would be considered a person's local literacy. Social environments are "textually" mediated and therefore encompass everyday life practices that are infused with reading and writing (Barton & Lee, 2013). Such environments are exclusive to its given members. For example, as a fifth grade teacher, my students keep me in the know about the best shows on Nickelodeon and Disney Channel. I know premiere dates of new episodes and that a popular new R&B singer was once a co-star on a Nickelodeon sitcom. This exemplifies what is termed as "vernacular literacies" which are literacies rooted in everyday experiences and serve as everyday practices (Barton & Lee, 2013). My students' shared experiences became my everyday experiences and allowed me to engage in everyday practices such as conversations about what occurred on the latest episode of a popular show. The "everydayness" of local literacies is a major part of defining and recognizing its existence. A sense of community allows local literacies to exist. These social relationships are maintained through mutual engagement via language (Tusting, 2005). Exploring African American literacy experiences within online social networks merges new literacy studies and local literacies. The community center

itself and the online community of social networking is a new literacy within a local literacy. Reading and writing as it occurs through technology, satisfies the new literacy criteria. Whereas the use of “popular knowledge, unregulated by formal rules and procedures” (Barton, 1998), speaks to local literacy definitions. In exploring these experiences, we begin to reveal the why and how of a person’s use of literacy practices. Participation within a group seems to be a guiding premise. Perhaps participation in a face-to-face setting versus an online setting, differ. Additionally, the online literacy practices of adolescents might further expand definitions of what counts as literacy and how adolescents experience it.

The use of valued communication in an environment of non-static text truly exemplifies new literacy. Coiro et al (2008) explained that participation through the use of new literacies includes skills such as reading, writing, viewing, listening, composing, and communicating in a rapid non-static process. The non-static or non-linear process occurs as a reader opens various windows or clicks on hyperlinks. Participants use their literacy skills to read and respond to posts they create or access online. A literacy practice is created as a person is engaged in an experience, such as an online social network, through the use of reading and writing. Online social networks, “provide new text formats, new purposes for reading, and new ways to interact with text” (Coiro, 2003, p. 458). It becomes a literacy practice because the “new” ways of reading and writing and the context of an online environment. An ability to read and write is important but it is no

longer the only skill that is needed in order to meaningfully participate (Mills, 2010). Thus, online social network users potentially capitalize on particular literacy practices and skills in order to engage in an experience. The study of online social networks and adolescents appears to be a growing field of research. However, the connection between literacy and adolescents' online social networking habits do not seem to be at the forefront of some research agendas.

Ahn (2011) synthesized current theories on the impact of social networking sites on adolescents with respect to literacy. One aspect of the review focused on the effect of social networks on learning outcomes. Research has revealed that online social networking participation outside of school serves different purposes that require literacy skills allowing users to dive into interest driven communities (Ahn, 2011). However, literacy practices in online social networks are not necessarily void of seemingly academic skills, and are therefore unique experiences. Greenhow and Robelia (2009) investigated the role of social networks in the lives of 11 high school students ages 17 to 19 in effort to consider the notion of non-academic literacies. Participants were avid *MySpace* users. Interviews and profile page screenshots revealed literacy skills through writing. The experience is generated from the context and environment of online social network. Elements typically found in "academic" writing were found as users carefully considered word choice, style, and tone when addressing a particular audience (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). It was the users' ability to use a given

skill set to participate within the context of the online group that created the literacy experience. Skills used to participate may govern users' rationale for participation. Hence experiences lead by skills create literacy practice.

Online social networks can be accessed through smart phones, tablets, laptops, desktop computers, televisions, and video game consoles. The endless connectivity allows a literacy experience to occur almost anytime and anywhere. Navigation and participation in an online social network creates a context for a literacy experience. However, it is important to consider where an adolescent accesses their online social network. The experiences from navigating an online social network on a personal smart phone compared to a public library computer may differ. For example, a user might limit what they do or how they say it, if at a public computer station, where others can see their actions. However, while on a smart phone, a user will likely feel a sense of privacy and freedom to navigate. In order to investigate African American adolescent literacy experiences with online social networks, I needed to find a space that was both public enough for me, as an outsider, to enter, yet private enough for potential participants to naturally engage in their online social networks. Ideally this could occur in a space where adolescents merged public and private worlds through in and out of school friends and activities. For some adolescents, online social networks are spaces where public and private worlds convene through communication with "friends" in and out of school. Online social networks represent a virtual space. However, local

community centers are actual spaces where adolescents may communicate with their “friends”.

Choosing Online Social Networks

It is no secret that adolescents frequent online social networks. Rationales for participation may vary. Researchers have found that many adolescents choose to engage in online social networks to increase or maintain social relationships (Ahn, 2011; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2005). For example, in a Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) study involving adolescent girls’ blogging, researchers found that the girls used the online social network to make connections and obtain emotional support while creating and representing identities. Therefore, an adolescent may choose to participate in online social network to build upon existing or create new relationships. An online social network allows such participation to occur through constantly changing text, images, sounds, and videos. A person’s rationale behind participation may be based on both social needs and the manner in which they prefer to communicate with “friends” online. “Technology tools shape relationships and practices” (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012, p. 467) thus making online settings potential grounds for social interactions and literacy practices. There is a variety of online social networks available in today’s world. *LinkedIn* allows members to create profiles that resemble resumes to maintain a professional network. *Instagram*

provides users with a platform to share pictures and videos with certain friends or to entire online network. Whereas, *Twitter*, from original inception, allotted 140 letter characters for users to send and receive messages with friends. Thus, each type of online social network may rely on certain modes of communication over others. This calls into question why a person may choose one, none, or all types of online social networks. If participation in online social networks provides certain purposes, then the level of engagement required to fulfil the purpose may utilize certain skills, potentially pertaining to literacy. Therefore, I argue that determining the literacy practices in use an adolescent navigates an online social network, may lead to uncovering why an adolescent chooses to engage in a given online social network.

Community Centers, African American Adolescents' and a Shared Experience

Community centers can be places for adolescents to create and maintain social relationships. The term “community center” is difficult to define however, defining community allows for a starting point. A community is a group of diverse people who are connected by “social ties, common perspectives”, and participate in actions within one setting (MacQueen, McLellan, Metzger, Kegeles, Strauss, Scotti, Blanchard, & Trotter, 2001). Therefore, a community center is the space, or recreation center, where individuals come together. Adolescents, may frequent these spaces for various reasons. King (2000) found that some

adolescents, specifically the African American girls she interviewed, appreciated community centers where they felt a sense of ownership over the social space. Additionally, adolescents reported choosing to attend a community center because of the chance for social interaction and pre-existing relationship with adults and peers in attendance (King, 2000). Other researchers have further explored adolescent motivation for attending community centers. Eccles, Barber, Stone, and Hunt (2003) surveyed about 1,800 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17. Participants were already a part of The Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions. All were from white, middle class communities outside of Detroit. Survey participants were followed from 10th through 12th grade. They were asked to indicate involvement in the following activities: prosocial (church and community service), performance (band, dance, and drama), team sports, school clubs (student government, pep or cheer squad), and academic school clubs (student government, math, or chess club). Survey participants who were engaged in such activities, reported engaging in “less risky” behaviors, such as drugs and alcohol. Additionally, those who maintained involvement in prosocial activities from 10th through 12th grade reported continued overall support. For example, 89% reported they felt teacher support, 83% felt supported by a counselor, and 47% reported feeling supported by a coach (Eccles et al., 2003). All adolescents in this study reportedly participated in one to two prosocial activities. Fredericks and Eccles (2008) explained that structured extracurricular activities support

youth's developmental needs. This statement and the previous findings of Eccles et al.(2003) support my decision to conduct my research within Tomorrows Community Center. Many adolescents are likely to be engaged in activities already in place at Tomorrows. It offers a safe space where socialization naturally occurs and according to research, adolescents will feel supported, comfortable, and engaged. My study is a "social" activity for adolescent engagement and support.

Recently, I paid a few visits to an inner city community center, where many African American adolescents pass the time, after school and throughout the summer. The center is located on the middle Atlantic coast, in an urban city neighborhood. As a summer camp academic teacher, at similar community centers, I strategized and executed ways to effectively instruct, engage, and entertain my campers as they straddled childhood and adulthood in a technology rich world potentially full of literacy practices. Therefore, my research interests are inspired by both my experiences as a camper and teacher at community centers attended by African American adolescents.

The community center is a space in which I have experience yet am not currently involved. My experience as a summer camp teacher, at similar locations with similar populations allows me to be sensitive to participants. Membership familiarity has inspired my research while granting me access to an appropriate

sample population. Access and familiarity are especially critical as I attempt to gain the trust of adolescents, so that they will allow me to observe and question their online social network actions.

During the school year, Monday through Friday, the center is open to community members 9am to 7pm. After school activities operate from 3pm to 7pm. The community center is fully staffed with a director, assistant director, and several counselors who are willing to support my efforts, under the permission of the city's recreation center management. Adolescents voluntarily attend and will be recruited based on their membership and participation in online social networks. For approximately 12 weeks, spanning from July 2015 to November 2015, adolescents will be asked to commit to one 30-45 minute session per week. Participants will be compensated with snacks during each session and a \$10 gift card, to the place of their choice, if they attend 12 sessions.

Research Questions

The connection between literacy practices and online social networks is brought to life through Figure 1 below. Definitions of what counts as literacy in our multimodal world help fuel my research interests. Literacy skills and experiences comprise practices. Yet, everyday and local literacies within multimodal environments, are what may impact online social network engagement.

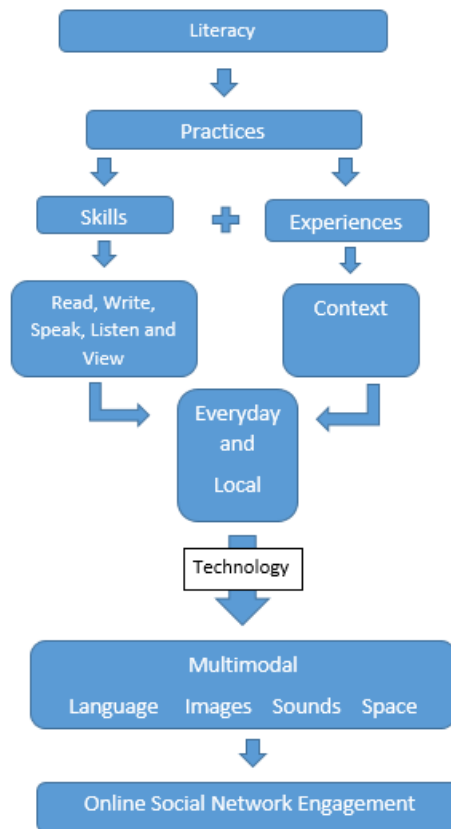


Figure 1. Defining literacy and interconnected skills and experiences.

The following questions guided my research:

1. What are the multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) of African American adolescents ages 13-17 engaging in online social networks at a community center?
 - a. Which multimodal literacy practices, found through engagement in an online social network, may compare to traditional forms of literacy practices?

- b. How are multimodal literacy practices in an online social network informed by a site's technology features?
- 2. Why do African American adolescents ages 13-17 engage in multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) in online social networks at a community center?
 - a. How do adolescents define multimodal practices and online social networks?
 - b. How do adolescents define engagement (communication) in online social networks?

Summary

In this study I propose to explore the multimodal literacy practices of African American adolescents as they engage in online social networks. Current research has revealed literacy practices used within technologically rich multimodal environments. In an online social network, members may use reading and writing in the form of linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural, and visual forms in order to participate, engage, or communicate with other members online. New Literacy Studies explore multimodal literacy skills and experiences within the 21st century. Technology has played a major role in the potential development of literacy practices in online settings. Endless connections to technology and the variety with which text, images, and sounds are created and consumed have also

inspired my study. Although social networks have been explored from solely linguistic aspects or their impact on socialization/identity, there remains to be little research surrounding actual multimodal literacy practices (skills and experiences) of groups who appear to prevalent online social network users. Although technology plays a major role in the lives of African American adolescents, their unique experiences in online settings and the potential connection to literacy appears to be absent from current research. This occurs even as technology use is a major component of careers today and the future, diversity of classroom populations increase, and black/white achievement gaps remain relatively unchanged.

Thus, I argue that not only are African American adolescents underrepresented in new and multimodal literacy research, but that they may possess skills hidden in a unique online literacy experience. The multimodal literacy skills utilized while navigating and participating in an online social network, may mirror or precede skills that may be required of work in our future technologically rich world. Ignoring this possibility, prevents researchers from continuing to expand definitions of literacy and potentially limits positive literacy experiences in and out of the classroom for African American adolescents. There is great value in knowing and understanding a person's whole story, whether it occurs in a classroom setting or on their personal time outside of school. Determining why adolescents choose to engage in an online social network adds

to this new body of research. Participation in an online social may rely on both purely social aspects impacted by the type of literacy skills and experiences afforded in a given online social network. Hence, exploring new literacies within the local literacies of African American adolescents could expose literacy practices we didn't know existed, that could be unique to a given online social network of a certain literacy practice. Field investigations of African American adolescents as they engage in online social networks, will reveal the literacy practices in use and the rationale behind engagement.

My personal experiences as a young African American girl attending community centers, as a classroom teacher bombarded with online social network friend requests from adolescent students, and as a life-long learning researcher, guided me to this research study. In the following chapters I will provide a literature review and research design for my study. I will expose a gap in the literature, to be filled with literate practices used by adolescents in online social networking experiences. In order to paint this picture, the research design will provide a plan for investigating African American adolescents' participation in online social networks the potential multimodal literacy practices. An ethnographic approach will allow for the voices of the participants to tell their story. As we poke and peruse our way through the world of online social networking under the guise of African American adolescents, unique literate practices may surface.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

I recently attempted to “find a needle in haystack”. In other words: define literacy. I began by conducting a *Google* search with the question “What is literacy”. The search yielded about 149,000,000 results in .44 seconds. This simple search is indicative of current literacy research in the field of education. Next I searched, “Adolescents and online social networks”. This search yielded 18,000,000 results. Perhaps one needle could be found in 167,000,000 pieces of hay (results). My current research requires a breadth of knowledge that may lie somewhere within the millions upon millions of search results. Like finding a needle in a haystack, this literature review will meticulously navigate through the many definitions of literacy and adolescent experiences with online social networks in order to ground my research study of African American adolescent literate practices (i.e. skills and experiences) in online social networks.

This review will begin by defining literacy in the 21st century, as it relates to reading and writing. Next, I will discuss the contexts where literacy can occur including local and multimodal settings within given communities, such as online social networks. Then, I will review the literacy practices of African American adolescents as they engage in online settings. Finally, findings and limitations will be summarized.

Defining Literacy in the 21st Century

Literacy Defined

The *Google* searches I conducted on literacy, verified my suspicion of it being nearly impossible to actually “define” literacy. However, the overwhelming number of results provided a sense of hope in that the definition of literacy is expanding. Expanded definitions of what counts as literacy allow for a variety of experiences to be counted as literacy. Defining literacy becomes focused on determining what counts in a social context (Scribner, 1984). Definitions are dependent on the social setting in which they occur. For example, youth and perhaps marginalized groups could possess literacy practices that serve as meaning-making tools within their setting (Moje, 2002). Therefore, attempting to create a single definition seems counterproductive and potentially detrimental to learning and research, as one definition may fail to acknowledge the many forms literacy may take across multiple contexts. Keefe and Copeland (2011) explained that there is no “general” definition of literacy. These researchers perhaps conducted a similar *Google* search. Before *Google* existed, Scribner (1984) determined that there were many clashing definitions of literacy, concluding that literacy is a many-meaning thing. Despite the opinion that there are many “meanings,” there are researchers who have been able to “define” literacy, at the very least in a manner that fits their research.

Literacy has been quite simply defined as reading and writing (Moje, 2000; Barton & Lee, 2013). However, it is possible to unpack the layers of this seemingly simple definition. Barton and Hamilton (1998) described literacy as “something” people do between thought and text. It is possible that the “something” is reading and writing, but there could be more. Literacy definitions that take into consideration literacy’s socialness, more closely begin to define the “something” that happens. Barton and Lee (2013) explain that literacy is our everyday life practices, infused with reading and writing. Therefore, literacy can take on many shapes and forms based on our everyday experiences (Moje, 2000). These definitions have informed my ideas about literacy. Narrowing definitions any further at this point would be counterintuitive and counterproductive to my research interests. However, I have chosen to focus on broad ideas of what counts as literacy within social settings.

Moje (1996) defined literacy as reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that are embedded as one engages and makes sense of their social context. This definition speaks volumes towards my study. First, it accepts and recognizes skills that are beyond the academic, school-like setting. Literacy is not just reading and writing, but includes the social skills of listening and speaking. Second, it states the role of social context as it relates to defining literacy skills. Specifically, reading, writing, speaking, and listening are stated as being embedded as one engages in a social setting. Finally, it added a sense of humanity

and recognition of an individual person. This type of broad world view perspective could be considered limiting in that it appears to claim that any and everything could be literacy. However, it is possible that the uniqueness and complexity of the human fabric affords such truths. My study focuses on the unique individual (African American adolescents) in a given social context (online social networks), hence a literacy definition that recognizes this existence is especially meaningful.

Definitions thus far did not acknowledge the impact of technology. As I define literacy, as it relates to my study, situated within a technology environment, I am further drawn to definitions that describe literacy through a 21st and new literacy lens. New literacy studies reveal how meaning-making changes, due to technological evolution (Knobel & Lankshear, 2014). My study will reveal a potential meaning-making process of African American adolescents as they engage in the technologically evolving world of online social networks. Meaning-making within technological settings often involve reading and writing, as defined through literacy. If we take into consideration that reading is a 21st century literacy (Gee, 2012), then the new texts formats and valued forms of communication, such as audio and visual non-static representations that a person may read, would be considered a new literacy (Collier, 2007; Mills, 2010). Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, and Leu (2008) defined new literacies as non-static rapid changes that are essential to participation, within such places like the Internet. On

the Internet and with other technologically rich settings, readers are reading in new ways with an increased reliance on visual aspects (Gee, 2003). Experiences with literacy that occur in online settings require researchers and readers to reconsider definitions of what is considered “new” and “21st century.” Therefore, I define new literacies as non-static, constantly changing, forms of reading and writing that occur in technology rich environment, communicated through text, images, and sounds. Throughout this review I will continue to extrapolate elements of current research and definitions that have influenced my perspective on new literacies. One aspect, I will explore further is writing within new literacies. Although the act of “reading” is often prominent in definitions, aspects of writing are especially critical. The act of writing serves as a vehicle through which those engaged in literacy, communicate with one another.

Writing Defined Within Literacy

The definition of writing within a literacy context is perhaps as difficult as defining literacy itself. The evolution of literacy over time, impacts definitions of writing. Dyson (2001) explained that writing cannot be singularly described. Thus, there may not be one event or action that constitutes an act of writing, at any age of learning. Dyson (2008) explored the writing of first grade learners. The study occurred over the course of an academic school year. Students participated in structured writing time, under the direction of their teacher. Typically, the teacher directed students to sketch their ideas prior to writing. Each “story” began

with time sensitive starters such as “today” or “yesterday”. The teacher and her students played by specific rules when engaged in writing. There was a clear brainstorming and construction process. Writing became a situated practice, shared by classroom participants. Since, “any situated practice has limits as to what is considered appropriate” (Dyson, 2008, p.122), then writing is bound by what the creators and consumers deem acceptable. Thus, it is necessary to determine where and how writing practices occur, in order to be able to define what counts.

Multiple factors could be taken into consideration. The social context within literacy definitions is one integral factor that seeps into definitions of writing. More importantly “context” may be embedded within a practice. For example, Pahl and Rowsell (2011) explained that writing could be “inscribed” within artifacts, such as books and toys, used in a person’s daily life. Writing becomes influenced by the context, tangible/intangible objects, and the skills needed in order to participate. This notion is appropriate for studies with multimodal environments, where consuming and creating text is multilayered and intangible in the sense that technology such as the Internet is “invisible”. Multimodal environments are often social in nature, and require a set of skills in order to navigate. The online environment, where text consists of non-linear words, images, and sounds, elicits a “multimodal writing process” involving

“designing, producing, and presenting, using new technologies” (Edwards-Groves, 2011, p.63). New technologies often involve the non-static words, images, and sounds that occur on the Internet. Inherent undertones of “socialness”, are brought to the surface because writing occurs collaboratively as meaning is co-created (Edwards-Groves, 2011). Meaning-making is not only co-created through a person-person exchange. The textual meaning-making is combined with visual and audio modes of communication (New London Group, 1996). The collaboration between persons and the various modes of communication, combine for a unique “writing” experiences, governed by an agreed upon execution of words and symbols. An online social network, is a multimodal environment where one may witness this type of writing process. Therefore, in order to participate in the online social network, a user must be knowledgeable of how to “write” online.

Written words are central components to all forms of online interactions and content creation (Barton & Hamilton, 2013). Communication in online social network, relies on the written words between members. Freebody and Luke (1990) determined that in order to participate in social activities, one needs to take into consideration the central role writing may play. Writing and images are now combined in new ways (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; New London Group, 1996). For example, the online social networking site *Twitter*, requires a user to understand

certain conventions, in order to participate in a conversation (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). On *Twitter*, user names are identified by a “@” symbol followed by a nickname or screen name. Additionally, someone might write a “RT” or “re-tweet” and “re-post” to show they have quoted or repeated what someone written or graphically presented. On *Facebook*, users typically represent themselves with first and last names, with an occasional “poppinbottles” or similar pseudonym middle name. Information on the site is set in a “news feed” where a person’s online “friends” posts, comments, and likes can be viewed. Additionally, the newsfeed and margins are littered with suggested websites, news articles, and a “trending” list of nation and worldwide current events.

The way language is graphically represented in written form in technology rich settings warrants further exploration. This type of digital writing that occurs in online settings operates under a set of adopted writing conventions (Turner, Abrams, Katic, & Jeta, 2014; Haas & Takayoshi, 2011; Jacobs, 2008). Digital talk (Turner et al., 2014) allows adolescents to experiment with language in response to the evolution of technology and a user’s ability to participate. Turner et al.’s (2014) interviews and surveys of 81 adolescents dispelled the myth that the online language of teens rarely follows conventions of writing. However, researchers found that adolescents there were specific writing conventions for digital talk. Complete sentences were used in 97% of online messages, 96% of messages did

not end in a period, and 94% did not use standard capitalization (Turner et al., 2014). Interestingly, question marks, were requirement and were seen as bad online etiquette if not used when a question was asked. Similarly, Haas and Takayoshi (2011) found that quotations, dropped letters, and number abbreviations were all done to emphasize a point or create appropriate word play, after they reviewed 54 instant messages of 103 young people. Writing online should no long be seen as without purpose. If good writing is “writing that meets the purposes of the author and fulfills the requirements of an audience as defined by social and cultural expectation of the community in which the writing is used” (Jacobs, 2008, p. 205), then the writings in online social networks would not only classify as “writing”, but “good writing” as well.

Literacy Practices In This Review

I have defined literacy practices as reading and writing skills and experiences within a given context. As skills and experiences combine over a time, a practice is created. It is not bound by words on pages of a book that sits on our lap or tweets posted to *Twitter* from the latest iPhone. Endless connectivity to the Internet and technology has impacted how literacy occurs. However, defining literacy practices allow us to define reading and writing as multimodal in online settings as well (Guzzetti and Gamboa, 2005; Mills, 2010). Therefore, reading and writing as it occurs across time, context, and mode of communication, allowing one to engage, is the source from which a literacy practice is born.

Limitations of This Review

This entire review of literature is not without limitation. However, I was able to synthesize literacy research before and after the technology boom. The peer reviewed books and journals from which research was gathered were selected based on attention to expanded and new definitions of what counts as literacy, adolescents and online social networks, and the literacy practices of African American adolescents. In many studies, this type of “non-academic” or “out-of-school” literacy research is positioned juxtaposed classroom experiences and expectations. Although I did not fully omit such studies from my search, I chose to focus on the aspects of investigations that highlighted experiences in a non-academic setting. This may be seen as a limitation because in some cases I have broken apart the intended study of the researcher. In doing so, the context of questions and findings within a researcher’s given framework may have been clouded or absent. However, it was necessary to support my research study.

Literature about various types of online social networks and African American adolescents may be a growing body of research to which I plan to add. In my study, I have chosen to focus on African American adolescents who are between the ages of 13 and 17 years old. A potential limitation of this review is the varying ages of what was deemed as an adolescent. However, studies involving older adolescents to young adults helped provide potential evidence that might support a trend seen with younger adolescents. Additionally, many of the

studies did not focus on a particular racial or ethnic group. Yet similarly to age, trends may still be possible.

Literacy practices have been investigated in multimodal settings. It is important to remember that literacy is both reading and writing. Therefore, construction of meaning and actual writing is also of importance. Roswell and Burka (2009) investigated the literacy practices of two adolescents as they navigated niche websites. Here they mostly focused on actually reading processes and comprehension. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) followed two girls as they blogged on an online journal. There was focus on the content of what was written, but not necessarily the construction process. It would seem that both construction and content would be important to a research investigation involving literacy.

Additionally, studies in this section were limited in size and participant choices. For example, Roswell and Burka (2009) selected one girl, who happened to be labeled as a “successful” reader, and one boy who was labeled as “struggling”. Unfortunately, there is a stereotype in existence that believes girls to be better readers than boys. Whether intentional or coincidental, this aspect of the study is somewhat limiting. This is perhaps unavoidable, as with Joaquin’s (2010) study of hip hop with only African American boys, given that in the past hip hop has been inherently linked to African American culture. This is not necessarily true in today’s world. Nonetheless, the studies within this section have added to

the growing body of adolescent literacy research, by revealing unique experiences with literacy in online settings.

In this section, I have focused on articles that present definitions through a consensus of previous research findings. This may be limiting because with each step removed from the original source there is the potential for misinterpretation. However, my decision to do so is based primarily on the fact that a review of current research studies requires a clear background of developed definitions. The vastness of literacy research can be daunting. Limiting my review to a certain number of years allows me to explore with depth rather than breadth. It is possible that definitions may be missing. However, as the old adage states, history repeats itself. Therefore, definitions of the past are likely to be found in the present.

Contexts of Literacy: Local Multimodalities

Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) coined the term “funds of knowledge” and explored the literacy practices within the context of adolescents and their families in an American town bordering Mexico, a naturally occurring context. This study highlighted the value of literacy practices outside of schools. Heath (1983) compared literacy experiences and the use of language within unique communities and classrooms. Communities and classrooms are also naturally occurring contexts. They are ‘local’ places of socialization. Barton and Hamilton (1998) specifically defined literacy as a social practice, always within a

social context. A community center full of adolescents is its own context. Adding the layer of online social networking, to an already existing community, creates a space for my study to take place. Both are spaces where adolescent build and rebuild relationships. Both are spaces where adolescents engage with one another through a serious of skills. Heath's (1983) study supported the idea that valuable skills experiences exists outside of school walls. Therefore, engagement in online social networks at community centers have the potential to be spaces of unique literacy skills and experiences.

Local Literacies: Tapping Into Everyday Practices

The definition of local literacies operates under the premise that literacy is a social situation involving a person's everyday practices (Barton & Lee, 2013). Ethnographic studies that explore literacy practices within particular communities capture events as they occur in a given space and time. Therefore, socially situated everyday practices, known as local literacies, may exist in many spaces and times in various settings.

Barton and Hamilton (1998) conducted an ethnographic study about the local literacies of members of a small community. The study was situated in Lancaster, London during the 1990s. Participants were recruited through an adult basic education course at a community college with the research goal of uncovering the phenomenon of cultural artifacts of literacy. Twenty participants

completed surveys and semi-structured interviews. Of the 20 participants, 12 were selected for case study. Additionally, artifacts such as signs, advertisements, and graffiti, were collected in order to describe the visual literacy of the community. Participants revealed their everyday or local literacy practices as it related to their environment, educational background, and personal purpose for reading and writing. Through in-depth interviews participants explained how reading and writing were a part of their everyday lives. Visual literacy allowed participants to create and comprehend signs, public notices, and election posters. For some, the creation and consumption of printed text was used to better the community through a community organized housing project to improve living conditions, a resident sponsored book exchange, and to obtain and disseminate health information.

In this study, literacy was defined as the acts people perform between thought and text (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). This definition appears to be accepting of multiple and changing ways that literacy may happen. In studying literacy in an online social network, I am also interested in the many ways that literacy can be experienced.

The researchers in this study were truly seeking what and how people used literacy in their community. Defining literacy simply as an act that occurs between thought and text may seem broad. However, a broad definition allows for

a researchers to capture a wide range of acts. Findings are not forced to fit within one single definition in order to be valid or counted. Ethnographic approaches that seek to capture an experience, may benefit from a broad definition because findings are often meant to describe naturally occurring events. On the contrary, Barton and Hamilton's (1998) use of a broad definition could seem problematic because it leads some to believe that any and every act between thought and text could be considered a literacy practice. I do not argue that any and every act involves literacy, yet I believe there is a high possibility that many do involve literacy.

Through interviews, the researchers were able to tell the community member's "literacy lives" stories. Themes surfaced across all participants however, four members were the focus of the reported data. Education appeared to be a focal point, whether participants believed it was the key to success or that they were constantly excluded from it. Community operations proved to be full of literacy skills as members became involved in a local housing issue by researching, writing, and obtaining signatures for petitions. Literacy skills were also a part of "leisure and pleasure" activities. For example, a community hairdresser, collected books as a hobby and wrote letters to friends and celebrities. It became evident that these practices were specific to members of the community because what they read and wrote was almost always connected to community people or events. As a result, Barton and Hamilton (1998) concluded that local

literacies were not governed by formal procedures from outsiders and relied on socially situated popular knowledge. These were in essence, “the texts of everyday life” captured in one moment through an ethnographic study (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 257). The notion that text can be a part of an “everydayness” of people’s lives resonates with my research. For many adolescents, engagement in online social networks is part of their everyday lives. In my study, this becomes “localized” by situating investigations within the online networks of adolescents’ choice and the community center. Researchers have focused on the “everydayness” of literacy in social settings of groups of people.

Heath’s (1983) *Ways with Words* told the story of two communities and the members’ use of literacy throughout their lives. Heath did not approach the literacy experiences within the communities with a deficit lens by trying to determine how the “home” literacies were lacking in comparison to school literacies. Over the course of nine years Heath immersed herself within the homes and schools of both communities. Although the focus was to explore the manner in which literacy or language played a role in the home and community life of two communities, there was a move to incorporate how the home literacies of learners could be seen, fostered, and valued in the literacy community of school. One teacher in particular stated that the goal of learning was not to determine what students lacked, rather to determine what they already have (Heath, 1983). This research and statement speaks powerfully toward my study involving adolescent

literacy and social media. Although I will not spend nine years exploring the literacy experiences of adolescents as they engage in online social networks, I will immerse myself in their online world as they digitally move through the sites. I will approach the literacy lives of adolescents in online social networks in a similar way by focusing on the experience as its own event, separate from any school connection. I have previously and will continue to visit the community center prior to my research.

Researchers have focused on the literacy skills used by people in neighborhood and community settings (Heath, 1983; Moll et al., 1992; Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo, 2004). Often, the next step is to determine how these skills “fit” within an academic setting. My research study does not attempt to “fit” the literacy skills used in online social networks into the world of academia. Outside of academia, there is a world that exists in the homes and communities of people. Online social networks are a part of this everyday world of many people. Through my research I will reveal the literacy practices of African American adolescents, as they engage in online social networks. I seek to uncover the skills and experiences of adolescents within this setting. Adolescents spend an absorbent amount of time engaging with literacy in this setting possibly creating a unique practice of skills and experiences. Therefore, since this is not an academic setting, academic literacy will not be the focal point.

Multimodalities: Defining Literacy Practices in the 21st Century

Technology is a part of most people's lives in some way. A 2010 PEW research study surveyed about 3,000 adults and found that 85% owned a cell phone, 59% owned a desktop, and 52% owned a laptop. Additionally, 95% of adolescents between the age of 12 and 17 participate in some online activity (Teens and Technology PEW, 2013). The prevalence of technology at home and school is evident. Therefore, what counts as literacy and the context within which literacy may take place, is not void of the presence of technology throughout many aspects of our lives.

Has technology changed the way that we read and write? Being literate, is being able to read and write. Today, being literate means being able to use online social networks, digital documents, text messages, and a variety of other online digital sources (Leu, McVerry, O'Byrne, Kiili, Zawilinski, Everett-Cacopardo, Kennedy, & Forzani, 2011). This calls into question whether or not "new" skills are needed in order to read and write online. Some researchers believe that the online reading and writing require an extension of existing skills typically used with static text (Coiro, 2003; Leu et al., 2011). Coiro (2003) explained that online texts are interactive and coauthored unlike static texts that require a reader to follow a certain path to comprehension. Unique experiences, specific to the individual reader and writer, are created in ways unlike static text. Each person

may search for information and approach reading tasks in different ways. With an interactive text, a reader has to plan to answer a question while taking into consideration how to navigate, how to add to sources, and maintain an awareness of his or her role as a reader (Coiro, 2003). This is unique because it creates an experience where no two readers read the same text, in the same way, to answer the same question (Leu et al., 2011). For example, *Webquests*, and similar academic tasks that pose questions to learners, encourage web-based inquiry projects that extend traditional forms of search and locate skills into a world of digital content. Thus these seemingly new experiences and skills, could be extensions of existing experiences and skills. Throughout this section I will use the multimodal lens to describe new and 21st century literacy practices.

Morrell (2012) stated that being literate in the 21st century with new literacies requires a person to be endlessly connected to online friends through interpretation of images and sounds. The technological and social piece of new and 21st century literacies is especially important to my research. If these “new” literacies incorporate an endless social connection to the use of a given set of literacy skills then online social networks provide an avenue through which an adolescent literacy experience with a social network can be investigated. These definitions have guided my interest in my current research topic. Recognizing and defining new and 21st century opens the door to help researchers and learners

begin to address the actual skills needed in order to be successful as experiences and definitions of literacy change.

New technologies of today have not replaced or erased older systems, but have merged the two, with perhaps new sets of demands (Luke & Elkins, 1998). Gee (2003) has worked extensively with new literacies, with a focus on alternative forms of text, such as video games. Video games and similar mediums, have created new ways of reading where books are not necessarily replaced, but readers are provided with new ways of interacting with them (Gee, 2003). Collier (2007) echoed that new ways of “reading” create new ideas about what is considered text based on a shift from page to screen. The transition from page to screen involves the dissemination and consumption of rapidly morphing text (O’Brien & Scharber, 2008). How a user navigates and participates in this world of rapidly changing technology is the source of past, current, and my future research study.

What does it look like as a user engages in their online world of rapidly changing text? Coiro (2005) states that reading online is a complex process requiring knowledge about how search engines work and the manner in which information is organized. Therefore there is an element of choice that influences “the look”. Online readers flexibly move through the online world, constantly problem solving and monitoring comprehension (Coiro, 2011). Hence, navigation

is dependent upon the task at hand and the options available to complete the task. As a result, digital literacy becomes intertwined with multimodal literacy. The multiple literacy characteristics that occur in a digital setting that require a user to know how and when to use multiple modes of communication, reveal the presence of new literacies.

Roswell and Burka (2009) focused on two specific types of learners as they experienced “new” literacy in an online setting. A 13-year-old girl and a 14-year-old boy were observed and interviewed as they navigated the online website of their choice. I will conduct my investigation in a similar fashion, observing adolescents as they navigate the online social networks of their choice. I will also interview participants about their skills and experiences as they engage in the online social networks. The male participant was a “struggling” reader, as described by his teacher, in special education class. The female participant was deemed a “successful” reader by her teachers. According to Roswell and Burka (2009) modes within multimodal literacies each offer distinct pieces of meaning. Words, illustrations, plots, and characterization all come together in different modes in an online setting. Modes include patterns of meaning making that incorporate linguistic (language), visual (images), audio (music), gestural (body language), and spatial (environmental) spaces that relate to one another as one multimodal meaning-making process (New London Group, 1996). For example, the screen layout, equipped with specific author vocabulary and sound effects,

would be considered multimodal. More importantly, since “all written text is also visually designed”, it is possible that “all meaning making is multimodal” since modes are in constant interaction with one another (New London Group, 1996, p. 81). Therefore, an adolescent similar to Roswell and Burka’s (2009) participants and the future participants of my research study, may engage in unique literacy skills and experiences as they participate in multimodal meaning making processes.

The adolescent boy frequented a website for the popular anime series, *Naruto*. On the website, he viewed images of the characters at different points in the story. Characters were seen in unique individual attire and with facial expressions matching their personalities. Although the adolescent boy was labeled as a struggling reader he was able to comprehend the *Naruto* storyline and perform different actions, despite the presence of challenging vocabulary. Therefore, familiarity, experience, and interest played a role in his success showing evidence of knowing how and when to use many forms of technology (Roswell & Burka, 2009). A literacy practice is defined by the experiences and skills of a reader. The boy within this study either possessed or gained the necessary skills that enabled him to willingly engage based on interest level. Therefore, his participation in the online world of *Naruto* could be a literacy practice because he was able to use and experience multimodal reading and writing skills.

A young girl was also interviewed and observed as she navigated the website *Webkinz*, where she was able to feed, house, and clothe a virtual pet. The online world mirrored the offline world through the act of shopping, ownership, and being responsible for a pet. In order to keep the pet alive she had to know how and when which actions on the website to use. In both cases, the non-linear print required visual interpretation (Roswell & Burka, 2009). For example, on *Webkinz*, in order to keep the virtual pet alive, a user needs to recognize visual cues performed by the pet and then which actions to perform based on the pet's needs. Information about the pet is presented in written text, images, and sounds. A user must read and interpret what is being presented. In order to continue the "life" of the pet, they must be able to not only consume but to produce written text, images, and sounds. Therefore, a multimodal experience was created in the online environment and understood by the visiting members.

When expanding our view of what counts as literacy, we expand the way we view and value multimodal and digital literacy. Hip hop and rap are popular among some adolescents. Accessing hip hop fashion, lyrics, and videos can take adolescents on a digital literacy journey. Joaquin (2010) used hip hop and digital literacies to explain how adolescent experiences can inform pedagogical approaches. However, in this investigation, three 14-17-year-old African American boys attended a Saturday morning mentoring program where they were

interviewed about their Internet use. The participants reported using the Internet for listening to music and watching music videos. Researchers were interested in adolescent perceptions of hip hop through a digital literacy lens. Adolescents repeatedly described hip hop as “fun” with a message (Joaquin, 2010). The researcher and participants discussed the message and popular themes of violence, money, sex, and drugs found in hip hop songs. “Roc Boyz” (The Winner Is) by rapper Jay-Z was the source of one conversation. The boys recognized the inherent materialism as Jay-Z rapped about expensive sneakers, liquor, and cars. In the music video the materialism was brought to life. The boys also recognized how and when certain statements were made and images portrayed in order to perform a goal. It was concluded that the goal was to present a wealthy and powerful image. This type of analysis brought an out of school literacy into school sanctioned skills of critiquing, analyzing, and synthesizing information. Researcher and participant use and observation of literacy in two different modes add another facet to defining new and digital literacies. Once again a connection to multimodal literacy is found. Participants created and consumed static and non-static text in a multimodal environment. The purpose of my research is not to marry the outside and inside of school literacy experiences of adolescents. However, Joaquin (2010) exposed the inherent presence of literacy practices within a multimodal environment that could potentially resemble today’s online social networks. For African American adolescents, this is especially pertinent.

The findings support claims that African American adolescents are frequently engaged in multimodal environments and that literacy practices are possible. Thus, the literacy practices of this group may appear and occur in other technologically rich environments, such as online social networks. Before, delving into the world of online social networks and adolescent literacy practices, I will define online social networks and why adolescents may choose to participate in them.

Studying Purposes of Online Social Networks

Online social networks are online websites or applications that facilitate socialization through words, images, sounds, or videos. Researchers have focused on the impact of socialization in online social networks on adolescents' identity, well-being, and friendship relationships (Ahn, 2011; McLean, 2010; Williams, 2007). Although the impact of online social networking is critical, I argue that there is substance in the manner in which communication occurs. For example, in order to participate in a given social networking site, a user must be engaged in reading, writing, and other modes of communication (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012). Since, participation in online social networks such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*, involve "sharing" or communicating through words and pictures, then it is possible that it is its own literacy experience. More importantly, "successful" participation depends on well-developed literacy skills that are in agreement with the norms of a given online social network (Kimmons,

2014). Therefore, my research focuses on African American adolescent literacy practices in online social networks and why they may choose to participate.

Why Adolescents Choose Online Social Networks

“What’s in it for me?” could be the question one asks themselves, adolescent or otherwise, before engaging in an online social network. In some cases engaging in online social network fosters social capital (Ahn, 2011). From my perspective, social capital is “being in the know”. For example, in case you missed the most recent BET awards or episode of *Scandal*, your online social network is likely to be flooded with what people wore, who said what to whom, and comments of shock and disbelief, all of which keep you in “the know”. Rules and purposes for navigating online social networks might remain the same across sites and users as a part of literacy practices. African American adolescent literacy practices within an online network is an area of untapped research, of which I do not feel “in the know”. Literacy practices emerge as the skills and experiences merge. It is perhaps the self-imposed guided purpose that elicits the use of reading and writing skills in an online social network. Therefore, uncovering the potential rationales that encourage adolescents to participate in online social networks, will open the door to the reading and writing skills and experiences.

Davies (2012) explored the purpose of *Facebook* as it relates to adolescents presenting themselves through the use of new literacy practices. In

this study, the *Facebook* profiles of 25 adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 were “toured” and screenshots analyzed. After the initial exploration, interviews were conducted. Participants reported joining *Facebook* for a more mature crowd that their friends were a part of. Upon further investigation there was a strong desire to present the self in a new way (Davies, 2012). For example, there were at least two instances of “couple pretending” where a pair might pretend to be dating online just for “show”. Thus the influence of the online world in the offline world became real. The pretend couple would later keep up the “act” at a party if they knew their online friends were watching. Maintaining dating relationships has been a part of adolescent development for years. It is a social act that plays itself out in the hallways, classrooms, sporting events, and parties of middle and high school students. This study revealed that in an online setting, social literacy practices, such as commenting, messaging, and posting pictures using multimodal literacies on a social network allow a person to perform a range of social acts (Davies, 2012). Such findings are poignant to my study because it shows how literacy was used to maintain relationships in online settings. Thus, some adolescents may choose to participate in an online social network to be a part particular relationships. Maintaining these relationships may be a considered literacy practices because certain multimodal literacy skills are required within the particular experience.

Reich, Subrahmanyam, and Espinoza (2012) uncovered similar ideas about building relationships when they surveyed 251 high school students between the ages of 13 and 19. Among the participants, 58% showed an online to offline overlap in friendship. Additionally, they reported that they communicated with offline friends in online settings in order to “strengthen” their relationships (Reich et. al, 2012). If adolescents are using online social networks to create or maintain relationships, and the rules for communication on such websites are governed by an ability to read and create text, then there may be some set of literacy skills that describe how navigation is managed.

A study involving the review of 100 blogs created by 16 to 18 year olds revealed a high propensity of positive “comments” made to or about online friends in addition to references about school or family issues (Williams & Merten, 2008). This particular source of online social networking focused mostly on conversations between “friends” who were also acquaintances offline. Just as there are social rules for conversations that occur face-to-face, there are rules for interactions online. In the Williams and Merten (2008) study, there seemed to be a sense of positivity that was a part of the online community where participation relied on adherence to on and offline social cues and practices. For example, when speaking with a friend in person, one may keep their voice within a particular tone or octave and may stand at particular distance or closeness to the person. Similarly, online social networking requires negotiation skills to navigate

the complex and dynamic world (Hull & Stornaiuolo, 2010). For instance, a person might want to use the correct “hashtags” known as a pound sign followed by a popular phrase or topic, in order to add to a trending or popular topic online. Different online social settings might require unique adherence to “rules”.

The “socialness” of an online social network is inevitable, but given the multimodal nature of the site, it is evident that reading and writing skills play a major role. In order to participate a person must be able to consume and create, under the available multimodal settings of a given online social network. Hence, an online social network focuses on creating media (Ahn, 2011) in a voluntary setting (Williams & Merten, 2008). The voluntary co-construction of words and meaning creates a unique setting (Williams & Merten, 2008). It seems that adolescents use online social networks to maintain on and offline social relationships and read or create media. The actual use of literacy skills and experiences that allow this type of participation still remain somewhat of a mystery. If untapped, potential lies hidden, then it may be uncovered by investigating literacy skills and experiences within the context of online social networks.

Online Social Networks as Contexts of Literacy Practices

“Hi ms pope its your fav students” or “Are u my teacher”. These are the friend requests messages I have received from several former students. It would

be naïve to think that my students merely used *Facebook* to stalk their teacher. Surely they have better things to do. Several researchers have explored how adolescents engage in various online social networks. If we subscribe to the notion that reading and writing are a part of our everyday lives, then reading and writing occur online in social networks in ways that may be unique to adolescents. Many studies that surfaced utilized groups of young adults, slightly older than the target group of my research study. Therefore, although the demographics of some participants in the studies reviewed in this section are not my intended group, the findings have been included due to the valuable information they provide about how literacy happens in online social networks. In general researchers found literacy practices to be a means to present oneself and maintain relationships with others. The theme of “sharing” and “socialness” can be seen throughout the studies.

Before online social networks like *Facebook* and *Twitter* exploded with popularity, there was American Online Instant Messaging and blogging. This form of online social interaction was the source of some multimodal studies. Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) used a social lens to focus on the performance acts, beyond reading and writing, of two adolescent girls as they participated in online journaling known as blogging. These performance acts were connected to ideas about socialization through reading and writing in online setting.

One participant, emotionally expressed herself through chat rooms, live or “real time” forms of blogging. The second participant predominately used blogs and viewed online teen magazines at a distance, void of strong emotion. Both girls were white upper class adolescents who voluntarily chose to use the literacy practice of writing to participate in an online social network. The participant pool is small, however it allowed the researcher to dig deep into each girl’s world. In my study, I use a small participant pool to dig deeply into the world of African American adolescent experiences with online social networks. Guzzetti and Gamboa’s (2005) work is important to the growing body of literature surrounding adolescent literacy practices in online settings because it calls for a reconsideration of how writing can occur. In this case, the girls wrote argument-based claims against their frustrating parents or difficult impending projects at school. Regular discussions between users took place as they read and left comments on one another’s online journals. Online social networks of today are quite similar. African American adolescent participants of my study are very likely to be involved in at least one type of online social network that allows them to communicate with another person by adding a comment to what was already posted. The Guzzetti and Gamboa (2005) study focused on the text created and read by adolescents who chose to write or read a given blog entry. Thus the text was non-static because it was constantly changing and being linked previous and future entries. However, multimodal and digital literacies encompass more than

just non-static text. Research that focuses on including various non-static elements including text, video, music, and art is of importance to this literature review and my study.

Reiterating the complexities of digital and multimodal literacies within a social online setting, Kirkland (2010) expressed that adolescents used literacy skills to explore and express themselves through multiple modes of communication. Ten boys and girls were observed commenting and “flirting” with one another on various websites. One girl was observed writing about what it means to be an African American woman. Other participants were observed writing comments and verbally offering ratings on potential romantic interests. Navigation across and throughout websites was constant. Participant interaction with online “friends” mirrored “real life” adolescent socialization. For example, while navigating *MySpace* one girl stated she was “chattin with a boy who like me”. During another session, a group of boys were rating girls by looking at pictures and making comments such as “Man she’s an 8” and “Nah man she’s a 10!” These comments were based upon review of pictures and profile content. One young girl, used a literacy practice to showcase triumph. She wrote a poem on her blog entitled “Note to Self”, about loving herself. Different users participated in online social networks for varying purposes. However, all were engaged in acts of reading and writing. In general, social relationships were

created and maintained in ways similar to offline relationships. For example, this spring, middle and high schools across nation may field with young boys and girls attempting to find the right prom date. Before a young person chooses just the “right” person to attend the popular dance with, he or she may “evaluate” their choice with their friends or even “research” them by asking other classmates. This is possibly similar to how adolescents evaluate and rate others’ on online social networks. Findings from my research may reveal how the use of reading and writing to allow adolescents within an online social network to enact similar relationship building and maintaining acts.

The online literacy experience proved to exist within a non-static space (Kirkland, 2010). The term “space” is being used to describe the multiple environments in which online literacy could occur, including online social networks, video websites like *YouTube*, or even chat applications such as *Snapchat* through a cell phone. Although limited in the number of participants, the unique presence of literacy skills within an online social network gives life to the idea that online social networks could be a world of new literacy specific to the adolescent experience. Surely, online social networks are not simply used to present oneself and critique the profiles of others. If literacy skills serve multiple purposes across experiences, in the offline world, then it is plausible they serve multiple purposes in the online world.

In a 2010 study, Greenhow observed 16-25 year olds as they created and participated in a social networking site (linked to *Facebook*) concerned with global warming. The 2,174 members of the group posted, read, and responded to articles and videos about the effects of global warming in America. Greenhow (2010) asked whether or not young people would critically participate in a niche network located on an existing social network, what potentially novel forms of expression would their participation take, would their interests in and knowledge of environmental science issues increase, if so how, would a sense of community develop, and would their online contributions translate into real world actions or consist solely of virtual activism. Such questions steer the investigation and its findings in an academic direction, yet could potentially highlight literacy practices through navigation of the site.

The site page entitled “Hot Dish” included links to and from news articles and encouraged members to participate in a recycling challenge to reduce carbon footprints. During the course of three months, participants shared and created content about their stance on climate change. Data was collected from the researcher’s observations of “Hot Dish” activity and user profiles. Analysis revealed the youth’s new ways of thinking about current events and content producing skills (Greenhow, 2010). Technological influences on learning, social learning resources, and new literacy practices within online social networks informed this study. “Hot Dish” users engaged in literacy practices through the

use of reading and writing skills through the social and technological avenue of an online social network. Thus the potential use of literacy skills in an online social network, potentially exists. I will be observing the profiles and actions of adolescents in a similar manner, as I analyze content production and consumption as relates to reading and writing skills and experiences in an online social network.

Fife (2010), a college professor and researcher, discovered *Facebook's* potential ability to “teach” rhetorical analysis. After reading about and discussing rhetorical analysis, the professor asked the college aged students if they thought *Facebook* was a place where rhetorical analysis could be exercised. At first participants were unsure if *Facebook* profiles could be the source of analysis because of the presence or lack of interaction between the text, author, and audience. In order to spark further conversation, the teacher-researcher asked students to compare their dorm room doors to *Facebook* profiles. Participants and the researcher agreed that both dorm doors and profiles were spontaneous, showed exhibitionism, and displayed personal messages. Therefore the overarching rhetorical strategies were narcissistic/ “please like me” approach to presenting oneself (Fife, 2010). Users posted pictures and words to convince a reader of a certain viewpoint. The creation and analysis of the information that was presented, using rhetorical strategies, shows the presence of literacy skills. The focus of the study was literacy, however, the participants guided the manner

in which literacy skills in the online social network were investigated. It showcases the rich literacy potential found within online social networks.

Greenhow (2010) and Fife (2010) both focused on a slightly older adolescents who may have been considered highly experienced in the navigation of the site and possibly possessed background knowledge that could have influenced how literacy skills were used. Yet literacy in an online social network, with seemingly “less” experienced users can be an opportunity for further exploration. Barden (2012) studied the social networking activities of dyslexic learners transitioning from high school to college. The teacher-researcher and student participants co-created a *Facebook* page informing viewers of the life of dyslexic. All five participants were diagnosed as having dyslexia. Over a five week period, the participants shared their personal definitions and feelings towards dyslexia through in class discussions and comments posted on the *Facebook* page. They also researched current definitions and public perceptions of dyslexics. Researchers posed the following question for students to consider: Do dyslexic people prefer to think in pictures? Not only did this require research outside of class discussions, but forced participants to consider their own learning identities. Information was produced and consumed in a multimodal fashion. In order to comprehend and create text and images in a manner that allows one to reflect and respond requires some type of critical literacy skills. The co-

construction of knowledge allowed the participants to understand their position and identity as a learner compared to other perspectives (Barden, 2012).

A recognition of multiple perspectives, based on an evaluation requires critical literacy skills. Online social networks potentially provide opportunities for users to express and explore skills. Therefore in my study I investigated how adolescents explored and expressed literacy practices through an online social media lens. Although the researcher set out to help learners develop a better sense of learner identity, the use of literacy skills within an online social network found its way into the study. The multimodal setup of *Facebook* perhaps provided a viable canvas to express and explore potential use of literacy skills, in a setting much like my future research. Although I did not directly seek challenged learners they could be a part of my participant pool. This study showed that perhaps online literacy practices are not contingent upon one's ability to succeed with traditional offline forms of reading and writing.

Although the studies in this section have informed my research, they have areas of concern. Davies (2012), Reich et al. (2012), and Williams and Merten (2008) all relied heavily on surveys and self-reporting. These studies could have been strengthened through actual observations. Greenhow (2010), Fife (2010), and Barden (2012) attempted to make "academic" literacy connections to literacy experiences observed outside of school. This is a limitation because in an attempt

to make academic connections, valuable literacy practices could have been overlooked. I have taken these gaps into consideration as I conduct my research. First, I utilized surveys, interviews, and live/recorded observations in order to fully capture the literacy practices of the adolescents. Second, I addressed literacy practices as they exist solely in the online social network setting, instead of imposing academic literacy definitions and practices upon my observations. Hence, this will contribute to the field of adolescent literacy research. By specifically focusing on African American adolescents, I will address these issues through the lens of marginalized minority groups, under or misrepresented in current data. The studies reviewed here are perhaps limited in population selection. Access to technology involving literacy could have been previously connected to class or income, thus creating a bias in participant pools. However, as technology has become more readily available to a variety of populations regardless of race, ethnicity or income, more recent research has a greater potential to represent a given population.

This review began with a many-meaninged “thing” called literacy. Across the pages I have interwoven literacy practices, as skills and experiences, through a multimodal social context. I finally propose that such concepts may be found in African American online social networking participation.

Figure 1, in Chapter 1, represents the connections I have outlined in the review. The term “literacy” is presented first in this review and in the graphic. This idea is broken into practices which I have defined as a combination of skills and experiences. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing, within various contexts are part of everyday and local literacies. Technology is impacting literacy and is therefore a part of my exploration of literacy practices in the technologically rich multimodal environment context of online social networks.

Conclusions

Online social networks offer a place where adolescents can present themselves in the manner they wish to be viewed (Williams & Merten, 2008; Davies, 2012; Reich et al., 2012; Barton & Lee, 2012). Literacy skills such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking allow this to happen. Critical, analytical, and evaluative literacy skills allow online social network users to navigate the site (Greenhow, 2010; Fife, 2010). Distinct factors have inspired my research proposal. First, expanded definitions of what counts as literacy exist. Second, online social networks require some type of literacy skills. Third, African American adolescents participate in online social networks. Given these factors, it seems appropriate to explore how African American adolescents use literacy skills to participate in online social networks.

Literacy and technology are evolving as I type. The newest online social network could be old news at any minute. Thus, continuing to expand definitions of literacy within a rapidly changing multimodal world is critical. In doing so, the navigation of an online social network has the potential to be defined as a literacy practices involving skills and experiences. Consequently, African American adolescent online literacy practice could exist as skills and experiences that allow them to be engaged with 'text' today in preparation for tomorrow.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the literate practices (skills and experiences) of African American adolescents as they engage in online social networks. Online social networks are not only popular, but may also expose the literacy skills and experiences of African American adolescents as they rely on their ability to read and write in a multimodal setting in order to participate. Literacy practices of African American adolescents, as they navigate online social networks will be explored through the following questions:

1. What are the multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) of African American adolescents age 13-17 engaging in online social networks?
 - a. Which multimodal literacy practices found through engagement in an online social network may compare to traditional forms of literacy practices?
 - b. How are multimodal literacy practices in an online social network informed by the site's technology features?
2. Why do African American adolescents, ages 13-17 engage in multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) in online social networks at a community center?

- a. How do adolescents define multimodal, literacy, and online social networks?
- b. How do adolescents define engagement (communication) in online social networks?

Through qualitative methods, my goal was to uncover a unique experience that has yet to be revealed or documented. Exposure of African American adolescent literacy practices as they engage in online social networks contributes to our greater sense of knowing and understanding of the complex world in which we all live. Participation required a unique skill set of valuable practices to the creator and consumer of multimodal texts.

Participants were purposefully chosen from a suburban community center. Community centers facilitate out of school engagement (Eccles et al., 2003). Community centers offer opportunities of engagement through socialization while participation in social activities such as sports or the arts. Additionally, literacy experiences in online settings often occur outside of school. African American adolescents navigate online social networks and potentially engage in literacy practices that allow them to effectively and efficiently create and consume text in meaningful ways that benefit themselves and the world around them. Given that literacy practices involve both skill and experience, there is a certain socialness within contexts. People within environments (contexts) share skills and experiences with one another through reading and writing. Therefore, I approach

research through an ethnographic lens where meaning making happens between people (Anderson-Levitt, 2006). Across the following pages, I will describe my personal background as a researcher as well as my inherent assumptions and motivations to pursue my investigation. Next, I will describe the setting and participants to be recruited. Then I will outline the design of my sessions. I will explain my sources of data, methods of collection, and analysis. Finally, I will discuss the connection between my theoretical framework and study.

Research Design

My study involved ethnographic methods within an observational case study to reveal African American adolescent literate experiences while navigating an online social network. The multimodal literacy practices given adolescents were the cases. Specifically, the cases were the adolescents' collection of multimodal reading and writing skills in use, as they engaged in the online social network. Additionally, due to the transient population, I was able to secure two focal cases. These focal cases developed from the adolescents with the most consistent attendance to the center. The cases and focal cases allowed me to conduct a qualitative case study investigation of African American adolescents and their literacy practices in online social networks.

The collection of data within a field of naturally occurring events constitutes a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014). In my study the literacy practices

elicited through the navigation of an online social network are naturally occurring events to be explored. I used multiple sources of data, such as audio recordings, screenshots, participant interviews, and researcher observations, to address my research questions. Immersion within the world of my participants allowed me to capture authentic experiences, void of my personal influences and agendas. However, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stated, no science is truly free of value. Therefore, I attempted to recognize and address my personal values, biases, assumptions throughout my study. A case study approach has assisted me in this study.

Case studies are grounded in people, places, and real life situations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2006). Cases in my study are the African American adolescents' literacy practices as they engage in an online social networks. This act is a naturally occurring real life situation. Meaning making occurs in this space. As I explored the literate practices of the adolescents as they engaged in the online social network, I focused on their meaning making experience within a multimodal setting. More specifically, observational case study methods, within an ethnographic framework guided my study. Ethnography allows for a thick description of meaning making among people in their everyday lives (Holman-Jones, 2008; Anderson-Levitt, 2006). A large portion of uncovering meaning occurs through observation. Bloome and Clarke (2006) explain that discovery of meaning occurs through observation and understanding

of the process as it occurs. Thus, observed participants as they engaged in the naturally occurring event of online social networks through the potential use of literacy skills to make meaning.

I used the online social network surveys, online social networking activities log, literacy interviews, audio recordings, and researcher notebook to reveal the online social networking literacy practices of African American adolescents. I view the literate practices of adolescents as a phenomenon. In qualitative research, data sources create and suggest properties about a general phenomenon (Glaser, 1965). The phenomenon exists as a reality for participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) echo this by stating that combinations of measures show the many realities that may exist. Each participant of my study has a reality that exists within the phenomenon of literate practices in online social network. As was previously stated, I used a small group of participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) discuss that a case study should involve a group that is big enough so that the researcher doesn't stand out, yet small enough so that the researcher is not overwhelmed. There is a limited number of adolescents available to participate therefore the group size will be kept moderate. During each summer session, the case study group ranged from five to 12 adolescents each meeting. Adolescents' multimodal literacy practices within a session, as well as, focal adolescents and their practices across at least ten sessions will allow for triangulation across multiple cases.

Multiple cases allow for multiple representations of a given phenomenon (Borman, Clark, Cotner, & Lee, 2006). The multiple cases are the observed literacy practices of adolescent as they engage in an online social network. Focal cases are the observed literacy practices of the two adolescents who attended all ten fall sessions. Observations of literacy practices were compiled according to the date of the session. The group size during the summer was manageable and provided enough cases to expose multiple perspectives about literacy, adolescents, and online social networks. Therefore, the fall sessions were narrowed to two focal cases, due to consistency in attendance and potential for a more in depth exploration due to findings during summer sessions.

Researcher's Background and Role

A researcher's background and role are pertinent factors within qualitative research. Although all researchers are members of various groups, often based on educational attainment, they must recognize and avoid bias (Strike, 2006). Once a researcher recognizes and accounts for his or her biases, then they may address their role as an instrument of data within a study. Background knowledge, point of view, and subjectivity through data collection and interpretation, cement the researcher's role as an instrument (Barrett, 2007; Stewart, 2010). In the following paragraphs I will describe my background as it relates to my role as a researcher and an instrument of data.

I am an African American woman, who happens to be a teacher, researcher, loving sister, doting daughter, and friend. Each of these descriptions rely on the other to create a whole which is me. As a result, I am simultaneously pulled in different directions as I teach, read, write, and think. I grew up and attended school in both inner city and suburban neighborhoods. I found a love in teaching those who looked like me, but had different experiences. This bond has yet to be broken. As a millennial who knew life before iPhones, but now will *Google* any and everything, I have found a second love.

My life-long learning path as a classroom teacher of predominately African Americans and research interests in a technology rich world has given life to my research study. I am an avid online social network user. Every school year a small handful of my students manage to locate my online social networking profile pages. My personal use of online social networks seem to require literate practices such as reading, writing, reflecting, and responding. I often wondered if my students who claimed to hate reading and writing, were actually fully engaged in these acts outside of school in an online social network.

The African American adolescents who attend the community center from which I will recruit, attend urban public school. I attended and later taught in a similar environments. I am also racially and culturally similar to the potential participants, therefore putting me in the position to be an “insider” to their world.

Thus, my desire to study African American adolescent literacy practices in online social networks has grown legs to walk down a path hardly trodden.

I am drawn to research that gives a voice to the silenced, ignored, under or misrepresented populations. Stories from these groups of people teach us not only about a particular group, but about ourselves as well. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe qualitative research as an avenue through which the “other” can be represented. The “other” may be adolescent African Americans. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) also explain that qualitative methods have been useful to researchers who study marginalized groups of people. Once again adolescent African Americans would be considered a minority within a majority. Therefore I approached my research with this in mind. Ethnographic qualitative methods of interviewing and observing adolescents allowed me to explore my research interests while using the best methods to capture this unique group. Ethnography has been described as a thick description of meaning making among people in their everyday lives (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Anderson-Levitt, 2006; Holman-Jones, 2008). Literacy is a part of person’s everyday lived experience. Therefore an ethnographic research design that focuses on the lived experiences of participants was ideal.

The unique nature of my study challenges current conventions of research. In order to capture the voices of African American adolescents as they practice

literacy in an online social network, I chose to employ case study methods. The multimodal literacy practices of adolescents in online social networks will be the case of study. A case study reveals a general phenomenon, while studying a common or particular object of social inquiry (Stake, 1978). Generally case studies occur over a period of time, long or short, but with a strong concentration on engagement with the case (Stake, 1994). My research study exposed the phenomenon of African American adolescent literacy practices in online social networks. The collective experiences garnered is the case. Each adolescents' experience and skills was synthesized to define the online social networking literacy practices of this group. The setting and availability of participants guided my initial approaches and will be explained in the following sections.

Setting and Participants

Adolescents were recruited from Tomorrows (all names are pseudonyms) Community Center located in an inner city neighborhood on the East Coast. Tomorrows serves a neighborhood in the city with a population that 95% African American. The mean income per household in 2014 was approximately \$41,000 (city-data.com). In 2012, the center was in danger of being closed, however, the neighborhood received \$100,000 in seed money to begin restoring the center and programs available to the community. The privatization of this type of recreation

center was a part of the city mayor's plan to provide youth athletics, summer recreation, and senior programs to revive the neighborhood.

During July 2015, I spoke with Tammi about the research study plan. Renovations were incomplete to Tomorrows site, so the summer camp was being housed in an elementary/middle school a few blocks away near a small neighborhood church. The school during the academic school year served as feeder to the recreation center, with students ranging from grades Kindergarten through eighth grade. The main entrance of the school sits atop a winding hill and drive on one side of the block, however the summer camp was housed in the back of the building halfway around the block. Campers and counselors traveled between three classrooms, the gym, and cafeteria. The first classroom was used as the game, craft, movie, and meeting room. A second classroom was "reserved" for the pre-teens who appeared to think they were too "old" for camp, but knew they weren't quite ready to be youth worker or counselor. The third classroom, which was later reserved for my sessions, was used as a "time-out" or calm down room for campers (and counselors). The hallways were crowded with furniture and boxes, leaving barely enough space for a sign-in welcome table for campers. Although space within classrooms had been provided, they were drab, humid, unkempt, and clearly abandoned by the teachers and students that inhabited them during the school year. Handmade signs of markers and construction paper advertised reminders about payments and upcoming trips. Lunch had to be eaten

in the cafeteria located in the basement of the building, a small hike from general camp happenings. In the gym there were two basketball hoops on a standard sized court. The gym doors opened into a politely mulched area with two yellow and blue jungle gym structures and a black top area used for chalk drawings, jump rope, or four square.

Camp hours were from 9am to 4pm Monday through Friday. The director, Tammi and three assistant directors managed daily camp activities with the kind of ease that comes from job familiarity and a strong positive relationship with campers. I typically arrived between 12:30 and 1:30 in the afternoon. This time of day was chosen because it was during the “shift” change at camp during which time as many as fourteen potential participants would be either arriving or leaving the site. As the shift change occurred campers were usually finishing a camp provided lunch of a sandwich, some type of fruit and a milk or juice. Swimming days were especially chaotic as counselors attempted to corral 30-45 five to 12 year olds through lunch routines that ended with a packed and properly attired camper ready for swimming. Despite the ‘organized’ chaos, each week I was greeted with friendly smiles from campers and countless helpful efforts to ensure the success of my research from counselors. Weekly trips were taken to amusement parks, museums, and the pool at the original community center location.

After speaking with Tomorrows director I returned the following week to speak with potential participants and collect consent forms. As I was buzzed into the building it became clear that lunch had just ended as remnants of sandwiches could be seen on the smiling faces that greeted me and directed me to “Mrs. T”. Campers were being split into two groups, “big” kids and “little” kids as the natural pecking order of typical camp life would have it. The smaller campers were being guided through writing thank-you letters to a group of adults who had come and read to them the previous week. Meanwhile, the “big” kids appeared to gathering for some type of teen meeting that just wouldn’t seem to come together. In the final empty classroom, I gathered two small round tables and all of the extra chairs I could find into the middle of the room. After a few minutes of crowd control and redirection into the room, I was able to hold the attention of the potential participants ages 13 to 18 years old, long enough to explain the project and rewards for participation.

The following week, I arrived to find all campers eating lunch in the main classroom. Tammi told me they were no longer allowed to use the cafeteria as the maintenance staff had begun heavy summer cleaning in that area. Older and younger kids were divided again, as adults handed out boxed lunches. Seven of the potential participants had returned their signed forms so we were able to meet. They completed participant profiles and surveys in typical teenage fashion, giggling about online social networking dating sites and making off topic

comments to one another as they wrote. Although they all claimed to have cell phones that could access the Internet, this was not to be the case, so two boys left with activity logs to be completed “later”.

Camp was to last for another four weeks. Five boys and two girls were consistent during the four week span. The boys ranged from 13 to 17 years old and the girls were 14 and 15 years old. Over the next four weeks observed participants as they navigated the online social network of their choice. In attempt to keep participants focused and sessions moving along, I set a five-minute timer for navigation, followed by about ten minutes for activity log completion. Instagram proved to be a crowd favorite, followed by Twitter and gaming sites. During sessions and when asked about activities, participants claimed to do more “viewing” than “posting”. This rang true across the type of online social networking site, gender, and age.

Tomorrows summer camp came to a close as the hot and humid days made way for a crispy fall. As we all busied ourselves for the start of another school year, the finishing touches were be made to Tomorrows renovations. At least five of the teens gave their word that they would be volunteering and “hanging out” at Tomorrows during the fall. By October, Tomorrows renovations were complete and the after-school program was in full swing. I met with Tammi to discuss our plan to continue the study. There were 35, Kindergarten through

fifth grade students from three surrounding elementary schools that attended the program on a regular basis. A majority of kids came from the public charter school across the street. According to Tammi the school loosely resembled a Montessori design, however she felt the kids who attended the school were at a disservice. From her perspective, instruction was disorganized and not challenging, which was especially concerning for a school comprised of majority African American learners. Tammi envisioned the site as a place for kids' lives to be enriched emotionally, socially, and academically.

Tomorrows renovations appear to be minor yet necessary to create a comfortable community space for youth. Outside contractors and community members collaborated to in order to modify the space. If you weren't actually looking for it, you might miss Tomorrows tucked away at the end of a street off a major road in the city. A fenced field greets you first as you turn down the street. Next, a large playground area equipped with two jungle gyms backed into a full basketball court. A drained, not quite Olympic sized swimming pool sits closest to the building. A small faded sign displays the name of the community center. A blue metal door entrance, on one side of the windowless stucco building is not exactly inviting. However, beyond those doors there is a sense of warmth that radiates from the walls through the staff.

The brick walls have been painted various shades of blue and yellow. To the right of the entrance are the directors and assistant directors' offices. Down a short hallway there is a large multipurpose room of tables and chairs. Two smaller rooms were off to the side of the larger multipurpose room. One had a few small stools, a dollhouse, and two small bookshelves lightly loaded with beginning reader and chapter books. Tammi informed me that the plan was to add beanbag chairs and more books in the upcoming months. The second small room was to be the computer lab, complete with wiring for the Internet and a few tables and chairs. Down another small hallway was an indoor gym with basketball hoops. To the side of the gym was a room that was to be turned into a teen lounge room. A pool table, a few lounge chairs, and small kitchenette finished out the room.

Four teens volunteered at the site after-school, however the "teen lounge" and accompanying programs were not yet fully organized. Renovations to the lounge and implementation of teen night programs were dependent upon staffing and availability of funds, likely to be settled in the fall. Additionally, Tammi informed me that one of the boys from the summer, who'd recently turned 18, had decided he didn't really need to go to school, was not interested in getting a GED or any other form of education because he knew he was about to "blow up" as a rapper. Another young man from the summer had recently been arrested but no one knew when or if he was going to get out of jail. With all of the disappointing news I began to wonder how my study would flourish in this environment.

However, the issues that plague community centers in urban cities, such as Tomorrows, are often overlooked, despite funding that allegedly “supports programs” for the youth. Tomorrows after school program began in 2013 after funding from the Mayor’s initiative to “revive” the community by providing youth with athletics/summer recreation and seniors with relevant programing. Youth from the neighborhood ranging from five to 18 years old, could receive homework help, physical activities, life skills training, as well as a light snack and dinner, between the hours of three and seven. Although funding and programs were put in place, it appeared that youth in the community were not consistently reaping the benefits.

The compounding challenges I was facing became inspiring instead of discouraging. My research agenda had not changed as fuel was added to my fire. I would truly be able to give a voice to the silenced and overlooked. Tammi and I decided we would continue my research study with the consent of the four adolescents (and their parents) who attended the center most frequently and were avid online social networking users. Given the unique backgrounds of those attended the center, I became even more interested in their online social networking habits and the potential for literacy practices.

Data Sources

Data was collected using the following measures: online social network survey, online social networking activities log, audio recorded literacy interviews, screenshots and researcher field notes. Each data source was used with the intended outcome being a collection of skills and experiences capturing the literacy lives of African American adolescents in online social networks. Thus there was a combination of participant self-reporting and researcher observation to ensure a sense of validity. Observational case studies take place in naturally existing events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). All participants are current members of an online social network. Additionally, they are already avid users of an online social network outside of the study. In order to capture what takes place as it “naturally” occurs, observations and data collection were made as participants engaged in their online social network.

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Sources

Question	Data Collection and Occurrence	Data Analysis
1. What are the multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) of African American adolescents ages 13-17 engaging in online social networks at a community center? a. Which multimodal literacy	Survey Field notes Researcher Notebook -Sessions 2-12	Online social network survey Online social networking activities log Screenshots Observed online social network practices

<p>practices, found through engagement in online social networks, may compare to traditional forms of literacy practices?</p> <p>b. How are multimodal literacy practices in an online social network informed by a site's technology features?</p>		
<p>2. Why do African American adolescents, ages 13-17 engage in multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) in online social networks at a community center?</p> <p>a. How do adolescents define multimodal and online social networks?</p> <p>b. How do adolescents define engagement (communication) in online social networks?</p>	<p>Survey Field notes Audiotape -Sessions 2-12</p>	<p>Interview transcriptions Online social network survey Online social networking activities log Screenshots Observed online social network practices</p>

Online Social Network Survey

The survey (Appendix D) provided a general overview of the participant's online social networking habits. A survey's purpose is to expose relevant characteristics of an individual or a group of individuals (Berends, 2006). In my study, information that related to an adolescents typical or daily online social networking behavior was deemed relevant. Each participant had the opportunity to share their usage and most frequent activities. Reich, Subrahmanyam, and Espinoza (2012) surveyed adolescents to determine a potential overlap in face-to-face and online socialization. I am looking for an overlap in what adolescents report on the survey and what I observe during the sessions. Reich et al. (2012), explained that self-reports such as surveys, report what is done rather than how or why it is done. Additionally, surveys alone do not always accurately portray reality. Therefore, additional sources such as interview questions and still screenshots, served to either support or refute what is reported through survey. In order to investigate how or why African American adolescents use literate practices to engage in their online social networks, I need to be able to define what they are doing first. Surveys allowed me to define what adolescents were doing when they used an online social network.

Participants were asked to choose a “pseudonym” to be used for the duration of the study. However, many did not choose one, so it was created for them. The first question inquired about the online social networks to which they belong. The second question asked the participant to tell how they access their online social networks, while the third questions asked participants to estimate how many of their offline friends are also a part of their online social network. Questions four and five were adapted from Reich et al.’s (2012) online social networking survey and ask participants to report frequency and activity type. These questions answered what adolescents “do” online. The final question asked adolescents to list their preferred online social network and their reason for the preference. I used this as a preliminary question that helped to explain how and why adolescents use literate practices in an online social networks. For example, online social network participation is often network specific with either a focus on text or images. I chose not to specifically ask adolescents about literacy or reading as this discussion or thought might taint future responses.

The online social network survey was completed during an adolescent’s first day of participation. Due to the transient nature of attendance, the survey was available for newcomers to complete during each session. Survey results revealed the frequency with which this particular group of adolescents participate in an online social network, and the type of activities they engaged in.

Online Social Networking Activities Log

Upon survey completion adolescents navigated through the online social network(s) of their choice while completing the online social networking activities log. Directions for completing the online social networking activities logs were reviewed at the beginning of each session. The checklist format of the participation log was such that it could be explained briefly and/or while an adolescent is participating so that if they arrived late or once a session had already begun, then I did not lose valuable observation time. Participants began the session by navigating on an online social network. In the cases when Internet access to the online social network was unavailable, participants were permitted to complete the online social networking activities log based on their last log-in as long as it occurred at some point on the day of our session.

Participants engaged in their online social networks for a self-selected amount of time. It is belief that time spent on an online social network depends on the type of site and the type of activities engaged in. For example, someone may log onto *Instagram*, an online social network interface that uses images to communicate, and spend less than five minutes scrolling through and glancing at pictures. While in another instance, a *Twitter* user may spend upwards of ten minutes reading through ‘tweets’ and ‘re-tweets’ of 140 characters per post. When participants felt that they were “done” they completed the online social

networking activities log. One log was completed for each site visited. The logs exposed the online social networking actions in “real” time during “real” life. The literacy practices (skills and experiences) were captured through the logs, as participants recorded how, what, and why they performed certain actions. The online social networking activities logs were also an important tool of data collection because they captured the adolescents’ voice. The logs were free of researcher “coaching” and wording. I monitored adolescents as they navigated, but did not physically or verbally interfere.

Screenshots

Screenshots allowed the participant to provide a “snapshot” of any part of their online social networking activity, including pictures, words, videos, and any other aspect they felt necessary to capture. Participants were allowed to take screenshots during or after their navigation of the online social network. I encouraged them to take the screenshot when they felt it was natural. Participant who did not feel comfortable taking screenshots were not required to do so. Screenshots were sent to the researcher either through text message or email, depending on the participants’ preference. I was able to view the screenshots as a part of my data analysis.

Audio Recorded Literacy Interview

Authentically portraying African American adolescent literacy experiences while navigating online social networks was a critical piece of my study. Interviews allowed participant voices to be heard. Fontana and Frey (2008) described the purpose of the interview as a way to depict a true and accurate picture of participants as they see themselves and their lives. Participant responses to survey items and participation logs were succinct yet vague at times. An interview revealed, clarified, and rationalized adolescent actions while navigating an online social network. Flexibility and the potential for rich data through a stimulating environment are additional benefits to the interview process (Fontana & Frey, 2008). Navigating an online social network, on a smart phone while at a community center, among friends served as the flexible, stimulating environment. The interview questions (Appendix F) was the portal to a thorough description of the potential use of literate practices among adolescents in an online social network. Questions one and two were “icebreakers” that addressed the background of the participants, they were as follows: 1) How long have you been coming to Tomorrows? 2) What is your favorite thing to do while you’re at Tomorrows? Questions three through four began to address what adolescent did while online and the choices that governed those actions. The questions were as follows: 3) Which online social networks do you belong to and why?, 4) What did you read or write on any of your online networks today? Questions five through

10 directly addressed the potential literacy practices with a strong focus on justifications behind actions. The questions were as follows: 5) Show me something (a comment, picture, video, link, or game) that you've recently posted online. What does this mean? How and why did you decide to post this? 6) Show me something you left on someone else's profile. Explain why and how you did this, 7) When performing any actions on your online social networks, did you need to read, write, listen, view, or speak anything in order to complete it? If so: how, which actions, and which social networks? 8) Which online social networks do you prefer and why?, 9) Considering your favorite online social network, what actions do you most often perform that involve reading, writing, viewing/posting images or videos?, and 10) Do you think you read/wrote more at school or on your online social network today? These questions guided my initial sessions in both the summer and the fall.

However, as sessions continued and data analysis continued I developed questions that allowed for further and deeper analysis of what was happening as the adolescents were engaged in their online social network and how it was happening. Therefore, the process became semi-structured as many questions were created after a participant's response. The following questions developed from the original questions and the participant responses: 1) How would you define or describe an online social network in general? 2) What do you use your online social network for? Why? What is the purpose? 3) Do you think you

“communicate” through your online social network? If so, how? 4) Someone said “What’s the point to having an online social network if you can’t read or write”, do you agree or disagree and why? 5) Explain Kik, Snapchat or other texting/video messaging type of social media sites. What do you usually message/send? 6) When you comment or post, what types of things do you say or post? Why do you say them? 7) Do you ever screenshot or repost anything? If so what do you screenshot/repost and why? 8) Someone said they like to go back and “recall” things from their online social networks. Do you ever go back to different things on your online social network? If so what kinds of things and why? 9) Are there specific applications you need to know how to use? 10) How did you learn to use the different (applications on) online social networks? During some sessions the literacy interview also consisted of the researcher asking the participant to explain something they’d mentioned in the previous sessions or something they screenshot or posted during the current session.

Finally, participants did not necessarily readily use words like “technology” or “engagement”. However, in my research I often described online social networks and potential adolescent literacy practices using said terms. Therefore I asked participants to define technology and engagement on different occasions. These questions were not initially asked in conjunction with their definitions about online social networks. This decision was made because it was feared that such questions might taint definitions about the type of practices (skills

and experiences) to be discussed. I was interested to see if the terms would develop organically, but this did not prove to be the case, so the questions were asked a little later in the sessions.

Adolescents were asked to share as little or as much as they deem appropriate. In some cases, the interview served as a reflection activity because it occurred after the participant navigated their online social network. Through the log reflection, they shared their perspective on the use of literacy skills in an online social network. Interviews occurred from the second session through the 12th, because the first session was used for myself and participants to become acquainted with one another and the data collection tools. When a particular action or comment raised in a previous sessions, required clarification, and the participant was in attendance, then that participant was interviewed. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed. When clarification was needed, follow up questions were asked when the participant was in attendance.

Researcher Notebook

The researcher notebook was used to record weekly observations. As participants engaged in their online social networks, observed and recorded details of the session. I recorded observations made in both individuals and the entire group. Field notes often serve to supplement interviewing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My research notebook supplemented the surveys, participation log,

screenshots, audio recordings, and interviews. Notes included the sites participants chose to frequent, actions performed while on those sites, and conversations and behaviors that occurred between participants. During the first session I did not conduct any interviews during the second half. I chose to do this because I used first session to familiarize myself with the participants and the type of online social networks that were popular among them. During literacy interviews audiotaped participant responses while writing my own additional observations.

My researcher notebook will be utilized after a session has taken place as well. I will record both descriptive and reflective notes. Descriptive notes used details to describe the participants, setting, activities, and general observations during sessions. Reflective notes were written when I listened to or read comments from participants. I used both to garner greater potential for analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated that successful studies often rely on detailed and accurate field notes. Therefore, both written field notes and reflective notes after the session created a detailed and accurate account of the literacy experiences of adolescents as they engaged in their online social networks.

Questions and Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What are the multimodal literacy practices (experiences

and skills) of African American adolescents ages 13-17, engaging in online social networks at a community center?

1a) Which multimodal literacy practices, found through engagement in an online social network may compare to traditional forms of literacy practices?

1b) How are multimodal literacy practices in an online social network informed by a site's technology features?

This question was answered through the 12 week investigation. During each session, newcomers completed the online social network survey. The survey provided an overview of the types of online social networks frequented by a participant, as well as the actions most frequently performed. It was a form of adolescent self-report. I was able to compare this with what I observed as they navigated, the screenshots that were taken, and the interviews I transcribed. The online social network survey responses were compared across individual cases. This allowed me to capture a snapshot of general online social networking practices of African American adolescents.

The online social network surveys, online social networking activities logs, researcher notebook, audio recordings, and screenshots will help to answer this question. Literacy practices have been defined as the reading and writing skills, coupled with experiences within a given context. Each data tool captured a different or multiple literacy practices. The online social networking activities log

and screenshots captured the online social networking navigation in “real time”. For example, as a participant scrolled, clicked, or posted they were able to take an immediate picture of what they were doing or seeing. Additionally, the researcher notebook and screenshot combined had the power to possibly capture what the participant missed because he/she was fully engaged with their online social network. Data from this question was compared across participants. Once again the idea was not to generalize, but to reveal unique experiences within a given phenomenon. Anderson-Levitt (2006) explained that ethnography analysis requires keeping an ongoing inventory of research. Therefore, I constantly collected information from surveys, online social networking activities logs, interviews, audio recordings, and screenshots.

Research Question 2: Why do African American adolescents ages 13-17 engage in multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) in online social networks at a community center?

2a) How do adolescents define multimodal and online social networks?

2b) How do adolescents define engagement (communication) in online social networks?

This question was answered primarily through online social networking activities logs, literacy interview questions, researcher log/notebook, and screenshots. The online social networking activities log asked participants to

explain their reasoning behind actions. Literacy interview questions further elaborated on the type of online social network engaged in, reasons behind actions, and finally a potential connection between actions and literate practices in the online social network. Interview data was recorded and promptly transcribed. The screenshots were integral pieces of data. As adolescents engaged in a given online social network, their actions were recorded in some form. In most cases it was the adolescents' activities log and screenshots. This was supported by interviews and my reflective notes. I borrowed from a method known as conversation analysis. This type of analysis involves exploring the structure and process of a social interaction often through the use of video from a naturally occurring interaction (Peräkylä, 2008). The online social network may reveal literacy practices through interaction. A video recording allows for continuous record of a social interaction (Ericsson, 2006). I consider the adolescent screenshots to be snapshot of a video. Although, 'still' I was able to capture interaction. Therefore, I used the interviews and screenshots of the online social networking navigation to reveal literacy practices within social interactions

The use of online social network surveys, online social networking activities logs, screenshots, audio recordings, and adolescent literacy interviews were critical to my study. I triangulated data from all sources. Triangulation merges lines of evidence (Yin, 2006). Each piece of data collected over the course of the study will be analyzed. Multiple sources analyzed through triangulation

leads to verification of facts (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In my study I am investigating the “facts” that will expose literate practices. I was able to combine pieces of evidence in order to reveal the African American adolescent online literacy practices.

Data Collection and Analysis

Over the course of approximately 12 weeks, participants produced multiple sources of data through surveys, logs, screenshots, audio recordings, and interviews. Participation surveys were collected each time a participant joined the project. The surveys were analyzed to determine types of online social networks visited, frequency of visitations, and actions performed. Online social networking activities logs were collected from each participant during each session. The logs were analyzed to define what and how participants read and write while navigating an online social network and why they chose to do so. This was compared to the screenshots taken during each session. Events or actions that occurred on the screen but were not listed in the participation log, will be recorded in the researcher’s notebook. Finally, literacy interviews were conducted during sessions that followed an initial meeting with new participants. Participant responses were analyzed for connections between actions performed during participation in an online social network, and literacy practices (skills and experiences) related to reading and writing. My researcher’s notebook served as

another source of data garnered from observations of adolescents as they engaged in their social networks. Additionally, the researcher's notebook was used after sessions, to compare and contrast what I observed, what adolescents reported on participation logs, what was captured through screenshots, and what was discussed during the interviews. Sources of data were compared across websites and participants. I looked for patterns in the type of action performed and the rationale behind it.

In order to maintain a trustworthy and robust study I took several precautions. Shenton (2004) explained that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are necessary in trustworthy qualitative investigations. First, I have reviewed relevant research relating to adolescent literacy and online social networks. The examination of previous research has guided research design decisions while allowing for room to build upon the past. Second, through triangulation, I analyzed data across all sources. This created multiple "realities" that were not necessarily sequential or linear (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Inferences about how African American adolescents engage in online social networks guided the construction of my data collection tools. The triangulation of data gathered across multiple sources has the potential to confirm these inferences (Smith, 2006). Finally, I employed member checking techniques. When possible, due to the transient population, I verified participant interview

responses during sessions that followed the interview. Participants had the opportunity to confirm, deny, or clarify meaning.

Summer Sessions Study Design

Flexibility with purposeful change became an integral part of my study. During the summer adolescents naturally had a greater amount of “free” time, however I had to convince them to spare some of their time to do something other than swim, Snapchat, and snack. Therefore, I had to schedule my arrival to Tomorrows at midday, in order to catch adolescents before they went off to their regularly scheduled summer shenanigans. By time my research site was secured, there were approximately four weeks left in Tomorrows summer program. Following the four weeks, Tomorrows would be closed until the start of school and upon completion of renovations to the community center.

The first session consisted of an explanation of the study details and compensation for participation. Each of the seven participants completed an online social networking survey. After an initial review of the surveys and my researcher notebook, one participant reported visiting his online social network several times a day and was very vocal during our initial meeting. Additionally, Facebook and Instagram proved to be the most popular sites. Therefore, my plan for the following session was to ask the most vocal participant the literacy interview questions, and to look for patterns of activity in the navigation of

Facebook and Instagram. I began session two by reminding participants of their responsibilities as participants. Due to limited to non-existent WiFi connection, we used Tammi's cell phone hot spot connection so that participants could log onto their online social networks using their cell phones and in some cases my laptop. They all navigated for a self-selected amount of time, ranging from five to 12 minutes. At the end of the time they all completed an online social networking activities log.

I interviewed the previously mentioned participant when he'd finished his online social networking activities log. Before questioning began I asked him to take screenshots of the parts (of his choice) of the online social network he visited during today's session. This was followed by the structured literacy interview questions. His responses were audio recorded. After this conversation was complete I asked him to describe his screenshots explaining what they were and why he'd screenshotted, commented, liked, or posted them on the given online social network. This session gave me insight to one young man's perspective. Thus, I structured the final two sessions so that there would be a boys and girls focus group.

Prior to the focus group portion of the two sessions, participants navigated their online social network and completed the activities log. Both groups were asked to take screenshots of the items of their choice on the online social network

they logged into during the day's session. Afterward, the literacy interview questions were asked of the group. Questions about screenshotted information were asked privately to individuals who were willing to discuss the content. Activities logs, screenshots, and transcribed interviews were analyzed from all four sessions. I organized findings according to their relation to the research questions. Initially, no glaring differences between boys' and girls' multimodal literacy practices appeared evident. However, differences between the type of online social network and the purpose with which a user navigated varied. Thus, although the "break" in data collection was not ideal, it provided time for an in-depth analysis of initial sources of information.

Fall Sessions Study Design

The fall sessions were similar in design to the summer sessions but were slightly different due to the number of participants. As was previously mentioned, participant consistency in attendance had become a greater challenge during the fall. Therefore, I used fall data to develop the best plan to capture the literacy practices of the adolescents. Summer data indicated a potential for variety in practices across site, but not necessarily across gender or age. Therefore, I recruited participants on the premise that they would be available at the center and frequented 'different' online social networks. On average during the fall, anywhere between four and six, adolescents volunteered after school to assist with

different activities. From this group, two boys (13 and 14 years old) were avid gaming and traditional online social network users and participated as volunteers at least twice a week. The boys became focal cases because of their participation in differing online social network on a regular basis.

The first session consisted of review of the purpose of the study, the requirements for participation and compensation. Both boys were quick to inform me that they preferred a Taco Bell gift card as compensation for participating. The following sessions consisted of a greeting, in which I asked the boys about their day at school to break the ice and create a conversation flow. Next, the boys logged onto the online social network of their choice using their cell phones. When they felt “finished”, online social networking activities logs were completed. Finally, I asked literacy interview questions and clarifying questions about things they wrote on the log or sent to me in a screenshot. The interview time during sessions that followed became especially less structured as conversations revolved around what was said in previous sessions as well as the latest screenshots. My researcher’s notebook, participant online social networking activities logs, and interview responses were analyzed after each session. Data was constantly compared to across sessions (both summer and fall) and between participants.

Summary

Exploring the world of adolescent literacy in online social networks will be challenging and rewarding. I was immersed in the online social networking world, littered with the literate practices of African American adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17. In this ethnographic study, I used various methods to expose the phenomenon of this experience. The stories that were told revealed an event previously left covered. My study investigated the online social networking experience of African American adolescents. The goal was to determine what, how, and why this unique group of people engaged in literate practices while navigating an online social network. Determining and defining literacy practices within a variety of experience across diverse groups of people immensely adds to current research. Through an understanding of others, we better understand ourselves. It is the greater understanding and quest for knowledge that fueled exploration of African American adolescent literate practices while navigating online social networks.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

Hashtags, emojis, viral memes, and videos flood an online social network users' newsfeed and timeline. At first glance it may seem that 'literacy' could not be present in such a multimodal world. However, literacy has and always will be a part of our lives, even in social media. The manner in which it actually happens is at the root of my research study. Specifically, I seek to answer: 1) What are the multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) of African American adolescents ages 13-17 engaging in online social networks at a community center? 1a) Which multimodal literacy practices may compare to traditional forms of literacy practices? 1b) How are multimodal literacy practices in online social networks informed by a site's technology features? 2) Why do African American adolescents age 13-17 engage in multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) in online social networks at a community center? 2a) How do African American adolescents define multimodal, literacy, and online social networks? and 2b) How do African American adolescents define engagement in online social networks?

In this chapter, I will synthesize the overall analysis of data collected across twelve weeks involving eight participants. First, I will summarize the collective online social networking habits of a group of African American adolescents living in an urban neighborhood. Next, I will define and describe the

multimodal literacy practices of African American adolescent online social network users, as represented through skills and experiences. Then I will explain adolescent definitions of key terms within the study. Finally, I will compare the multimodal literacy practices in the online social network to traditional literacy practices and describe the limitations of the study.

Participant Profiles

Membership to the community center and online social network communities grounded participants in this study. The voices and multimodal artifacts of six African American boys and two African American girls defined unique experiences and skills of online social networking. It was important to determine why participants chose both Tomorrows Community Center and online social networks. All participants reported they attended Tomorrows as a cure for boredom in some way. For example, one girl reported that she enjoyed the “kids” because they were “fun and energetic” (Interview, 7/28/15). A group of boys explained that they visited Tomorrows to keep from being “bored” at home and to “keep from sitting in the house” (Interview, 8/7/15). The center offered space for socialization and basketball, which the boys, especially took advantage of. Attending Tomorrows was purely by choice for all participants. They appeared to enjoy their time spent whether it was helping younger children or socializing with their friends. Similarly, reasons for engaging in online social networks were

centered around a seemingly simple quest to cure boredom. However, the study revealed a much more complex set of experiences, skills, and reasons for participation.

Scrolling, clicking, screenshotting, and texting within online social network sites from Facebook to YouTube, this group of participants performed and participated in a variety of skills and experiences. The endless connectivity to online social networks, provided by smart phones and WiFi, allowed adolescents to navigate their online social networks whenever and wherever they pleased. Therefore, participants logged on and navigated their online social networks at Tomorrows similar to how they would at other locations. While some participants initially appeared to share very little, and others shared a great deal, it became clear that each participant had a story to tell, no matter how big or small. Interaction typically took place online, however the community centered became a place where participants could merge their on and offline worlds. For example, they might share or discuss different videos or pictures from their online social networks while relaxing with one another at the community center.

From the brief overview of who the participants were outside of their online social networks, I explored and compiled what was reported on their online social network surveys. I was able to compare what was reported through survey,

with what was collected through interviews and screenshots. Table 2 below was generated to create an overview of initial data collection through surveys.

Table 2

Participant Profiles

Name Gender/Age	Method of Access	Sites Visited	Frequency	Top 3 Actions
Lisa F/15	Cell phone	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Kik	Once or twice a day	Chat a user, listen to music, update status
Donna F/16	Cell phone	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Open all the time	Listen to music, read comments, play a game
Alex M/17	Cell phone	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Kik	Several times a day	Read comments/posts, chat user, play game
Quincy M/15	Cell phone	Facebook	Once or twice a day	Read comments/posts, chat user, write comments
Keion M/13	Cell phone	Instagram, Kik	Open all the time	Chat user, play a game, post picture
Tim M/17	Cell phone	Facebook, Instagram, Kik	Several times a day	Read and write comments/posts, post a picture, chat user
Emmanuel M/15	Cell phone	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	Open all the time	Read comments, edit profile, update status
Damon M/13	Computer	Facebook, Other (Minecraft, YouTube)	Once a week	Play a game, read comments/posts, chat user

Participant personalities revealed through interactions uniquely infiltrated online social networks. Lisa and Donna, the only girls in the study, attended Tomorrows frequently over the past year, yet participated in this study on two occasions. Both were quiet and often giggled at my questions, as they kept a watchful eye on any boys in attendance. The girls reported using Instagram frequently, but preferred looking at other's posts instead of creating their own. Neither wanted to look 'dumb' while online so they explained how following online rules of 'spelling' was important. Quincy and Keion were equally as quiet as the girls. They were also younger than some of the other boys and appeared to follow the crowd without actually participating. During interview sessions they often reported that they agreed with the other boys and repeated their responses. Both Quincy and Keion were unwilling to share screenshots of their online social networks.

Alex was perhaps the most vocal, during early sessions. He'd attended Tomorrows during the school year and summer over the past two years. Alex spoke with a smile during an interview session by himself with me. When in a small group with the other boys he often challenged what other's said about their online social networks. Adult staffers often requested Alex's assistance, thus suggesting he was responsible and reliable. I was able to witness this during my visits to Tomorrows while school was in session. On several occasions, Alex was present, assisting adult staffers in various activities including playing with

younger kids, helping others with homework, and assisting with dinner distribution. His playful yet responsible personality was evident in his online social network posts. He laughed at videos, enjoyed figuring out puzzles, and on occasion spoke of politics.

Tim was also a vocal participant, yet had poor attendance. When I visited Tomorrows to recruit participants, I noticed the boys circled around Tim, following his lead. Wherever Tim chose to sit during our meetings, other boys usually followed. His following translated to his Instagram, which will be discussed later. Tim reported that school was boring, and that he wanted to be a rapper. During the summer Tim was 17 years old and would turn 18 in the fall. He'd failed a grade in school and all of his friends would be graduating. I did not see him at Tomorrows after school started. However, Tammi reported that during a recent conversation they'd discussed his truancy. Tim's response was that he was 'blowing' up as a rapper and wouldn't need school.

Emmanuel and Damon attended Tomorrows most frequently. Damon had been attending Tomorrows since the fourth grade and Emmanuel over the past year. Emmanuel, the older of the two often took his time to respond, stating he was looking for the 'right' words. Damon was a little more candid, appearing to say what he felt and then correcting it, if he felt the need. The boys had conflicting opinions on school. Damon described school as boring, whereas

Emmanuel felt it was only sometimes boring. Emmanuel felt he was a good student, especially when it came to language arts. At the start of many of our sessions the boys talked about how school was that day. On several occasions Damon reported getting in trouble for disrespecting a teacher. Once Emmanuel reported his cell phone had been taken. At one point, both boys had gotten into trouble for playing basketball near school staff members' cars and accidentally causing damage; neither received serious consequences. As online social network users both boys used traditional forms of online social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, as well as gaming online social networks. The boys were very interested in my role in the study as well as details about earning your doctorate. Although they did not always enjoy school they believed in its role in their lives. Emmanuel explained that he once wanted to be an NBA player before a teacher told him the statistical breakdown stacked against him. He now has aspirations of owning his own business or dealing with an aspect of marketing that promotes grocery stores. At the end of nine weeks, I had an understanding of the literacy lives of African American adolescents as they navigated online social networks enhanced by Damon and Emmanuel rich descriptions of their practices and experiences.

Defining Moments: Adolescents' Definitions of Research Terms

As I interviewed participants in the study, I was often met with one of two initial reactions. When using words like 'literacy' I was met with blank stares or frowns of puzzlement. However, words like 'reading' or 'writing' garnered quick school-like responses where participants responded in scripted format, making sure they restated the question first. In many cases my preconceived notions of how adolescents would define terms were confirmed. For example, many definitions were rooted in traditional school-like terms. However, they used the same words to describe their online experiences, yet saw their online and offline world as 'different'. Also, participants struggled with defining terms that related to technology, rarely moving beyond computers or the Internet. Nonetheless, allowing adolescents to define the terms of research study was an integral piece in representing an authentic voice as they explained their navigation through online social networks.

Online Social Networks: A People Place

This study was based on the online social networking multimodal literacy practices of African American adolescents. Prior to the start of the study I defined online social networks based on my personal experiences with them. In general, online social network allow people to communicate through various mediums, creating and consuming content. Each word in the term 'online social network'

brings meaning. Damon and Emmanuel defined social as ‘socializing’ or talking to someone, media was associated with the Internet, and a network was defined WiFi. (Interview, 11/19/15). This break down of each term emerged in the literacy practices. Communication connected to socializing, while the Internet related to the reliance on technology and all its features bring to online social networks.

Adolescents also defined online social networks in terms of their purpose. Donna and Lisa defined online social networks as places where you could interact with new people (Interview, 7/28/14). Although other participants echoed this definition through the explanation of communication as a literacy practice, Emmanuel and Damon added the idea that online social networks could also be persuasive or stupid (Interview, 10/28/15). The persuasive part of their definition was further explained as they justified different types of websites and games as online social networks. Damon determined a site could be defined as online social network if it involved a lot of people talking about what was happening, or as Emmanuel explained, “current events” or what’s going on in the world (Interview, 10/29/15). Therefore, video sites such as YouTube and gaming sites like Minecraft counted as online social networks according to Damon and Emmanuel. Each practice was explained in terms of ‘what’, followed by a ‘how’ which often related to the technology features that allowed the practice to happen. Thus important terms to define became multimodal and technology.

‘Wired’: Multimodal Technology

“If it wasn’t like computers, phones, it won’t be no online social network.”-

Damon

Multimodal was a completely foreign term to participants. No one had any idea how to define it. However, some adolescents possessed working definitions of technology.

Researcher:

What is technology? How would you define technology?

Emmanuel:

I would define technology by like something that you could get like with on the Internet with. Something that like, I can’t really explain, but like a smart phone, computer, things like that.

Damon:

Well, I think television and stuff, more like well stuff you can watch and look at things and play things. Electronic, I would say

Emmanuel:

Electronic devices.

Damon:

(points) That computer, is definitely electronic, because of the wires, tiny wires, and those tiny wires have wires.

Emmanuel:

And wireless things.

Damon:

And they have built in communicators, and stuff and batteries.

Researcher:

Do you think that online social networks rely on technology?

Damon and Emmanuel:

Yeah. (Interview, 10/29/15).

Technology was based on electronics and the idea of being connected either wired or wirelessly to the Internet. It was believed that online social networks relied on technology in order to exist. The multimodal literacy practices of participants revealed a technology dependency. Alex explained how he enjoyed videos on Facebook and was able to preview them before actually clicking 'play'. This was possibly due to technology. Lisa and Donna depended on technology when they uploaded pictures to Instagram. Tim described how navigation of an

online social network depends on a users' ability to use the application and all of the technology features.

As participants shared how they engaged in the literacy practices, there was an inherent use of technology. The multimodal literacy practice of communication relied on the technology feature of the keyboard in order to type messages. Gathering information as a practice relied on the search features and embedded links through profiles and hashtags. Entertaining was able to happen because of features within online social networks, allowing users to watch and play. Finally, taking a stance appeared to rely on all of the technology features from the other literacy practices, coupled with the user's ability to evaluate what technology presented. Although not all participants were able to define multimodal or technology, they recognized and utilized its presence across all literacy practices.

Typing, Talking and Texting: Defining Communicate and Engage

Communication emerged as a literacy practice, but was also a word adolescents often used to describe their online social network purposes. Donna and Lisa explained that the purpose of an online social network was to "communicate" (Interview, 7/28/15). When asked to expand upon this definition, Donna defined 'communicate' as 'talking to' (Interview, 7/28/15). Since talking in an online social network didn't always involve oral speaking, participants

explained how talking could happen without actual spoken words. Emmanuel, Damon, Alex consistently described communication through talking by text. Emmanuel stated “You can communicate with people back and forth. You can send somebody something like over a message.” (Interview, 10/29/15). One popular network among the boys was Kik, an online social network almost based solely on messaging. Although most participants viewed communication as talking and text, Damon added reading, writing, and math to his definition (Interview, 11/4/15). A fluid definition of what counted as communication was not surprising. The fluidity with which adolescents participated in various online social networks and their ability to adapt to changing technology features coincided with the ever evolving definition of communication.

Engagement became necessary to define, as I’d infused it within my questions to determine why adolescents participated in given online social networks. Damon and Emmanuel shared how they knew they were engaged, thus helping to define the term.

Researcher:

So when I say the word engagement, if you are engaged in something, what does that mean?

Emmanuel:

Like a commitment. If I'm really into something, like say if I like that TV show I spend a lot time watching it.

Researcher:

So, what are the types of things that you do when you are engaged?

Emmanuel:

Like, I probably talk about it a lot.

Damon:

I think when I'm doin' it a lot or watching it a lot. (Interview, 10/29/15).

Time spent on one activity or task constituted commitment, which became synonymous with engagement. Participants reported through surveys that they logged on to their online social networks on a regular basis. Tim pointed out that he was not necessarily 'constantly connected' but left notifications turned on so that he could be alerted about online social networking activity (Interview, 7/28/15). Emmanuel and Damon reiterated this point by alluding to the fact they could see if someone was talking to them or about them (Interview, 10/28/15). Therefore, whether constantly connected or persuaded to engage through a notification or a name tag, time spent on a task appeared to be the working definition of engagement for this group of adolescents.

Literacy: Reading and Writing Just Right

Within this study I sought to uncover any possible connections between literacy in online social networks and literacy as it happened in offline settings. Earlier I explained my definitions of literacy, as it related to reading and writing. However, it's also important to define literacy, according to this group of African American adolescents. Using the term literacy was somewhat foreign to participants. Emmanuel and Damon began a conversation about literacy that quickly turned to reading and writing.

Researcher:

When I say literacy what do you think that means?

Emmanuel:

Literacy...hmmm

Damon:

Like language arts and stuff, like writing essays and boringness.

Researcher:

Elaborate on language arts.

Damon:

Reading and writing books.

Emmanuel:

Yeah, like reading and writing things to help us out in the future.

(Interview, 11/5/15).

Since participants used ‘reading and writing’ to define literacy, I asked them to define these words as well. Both Damon and Emmanuel defined reading as “pronouncing the words” (Interview, 11/4/15). The underlying purpose for reading often found its way into the definition. Damon and Emmanuel explained that reading was often done so that you will know something, to use currently or perhaps in the future (Interview, 11/4/15).

Writing was defined by participants in the same fashion as reading. The purpose for being engaged in writing was at the forefront of definitions. Emmanuel defined writing as “Writing down the words that you know how to spell. If you don’t know how to spell it, try your best to spell it and all (Interview, 11/14/15). Other participants did not outwardly define writing in the same fashion, however, Tim, Alex, and Lisa explained how ‘writing’ was a necessary skill for participating in online social networks (Interview, 7/28/15 and 8/7/15). Writing developed as a skill within the literacy practice of communication as participants cited messaging and commenting as a means of communicating. As definitions of reading and writing surfaced, I began to question if participants felt

they needed to read and write in order to participate in their online social network.

Table 3 below summarizes participant responses.

Table 3

Participant Explanations of Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Viewing in an Online Social Network

Researcher: Do you think you need to be able to read, write, listen, speak or view to participate in your online social network?	
Participant	Response
Alex	<p>“Yes, because if you post something and somebody comment back on it and you don’t have nothing to say you just gon’ look dumb because you just got the one comment sittin’ there and you don’t know what you talkin’ ‘bout.”</p> <p>“If you can’t read what somebody talking about, you can’t comment back. If you can’t listen to the video then what you looking at, the screen?”</p>
Lisa	<p>“How to read and write. Cuz you can’t be dumb, well not dumb, but you gotta know how to spell your captions right.”</p>
Donna	<p>“No, ‘cuz I was on Instagram and I can’t update a status.”</p>
Tim	<p>“Yes, because I was texting somebody on Kik.”</p>
Damon	<p>“Probably not write, but yeah, well, kinda write because you be texting.”</p> <p>“Probably reading yes, but you don’t ‘have’ to write anything.”</p> <p>“I mostly read game worlds.”</p>
Emmanuel	<p>“Probably reading yeah.”</p> <p>“Well, you have to be able to read and write, because somebody might put up a comment about you. If you can’t read, you don’t know what it say and if you can’t write then you can’t text back what that person is talking about.”</p>

Alex firmly believed in the presence of reading and writing in his online social network. Tim focused on writing in the form of texting through Kik. Lisa,

Donna, Damon, and Emmanuel were more conflicted when presented with the idea of reading and writing in their online social networks. Lisa initially stated she thought you had to read and write, but later in the interview Donna said that reading and writing were not necessary because “You could just be on there looking at everything”, to which point Lisa agreed (Interview, 7/28/15). However, Lisa ended on the premise that reading and writing prevented a user from appearing ‘dumb’. Damon and Emmanuel’s conflict stemmed from the idea of reading and writing as a requirement. The boys both agreed that reading and writing was not a necessity, but it did exist in some cases. The boys offered a reading/writing scenario.

Researcher:

Give me an example of where you would just read and not ‘have’ to write anything or vice versa?

Damon:

Well, if someone posts a funny picture, you could just read it, and then if says ‘do you comment’ you just don’t have to.

Emmanuel:

You don’t have to, if you don’t feel as though you want to do it.(Interview, 10/28/16)

Participants' apprehension to using traditional words, such as reading and writing, to describe their online social networks was not unexpected. Online social networks were places where adolescents potentially engaged in reading and writing by choice. However, at school engagement with reading and writing took on more traditional forms through required tasks. Essentially, I caused them to think about how their 'fun' world, might possess some of the 'boringness' of traditional forms of reading and writing, Damon described (Interview, 11/5/15). Therefore, once I'd obtained definitions of literacy from participants' perspectives, I examined the skills and experiences within each practice, in search of a comparison to traditional literacy practices.

From Profiles to Practices

Multimodal literacy practices are defined and created by a person's skills and experiences. Data analysis revealed four major practices: communicating, gathering information, entertaining, and taking a stance. These multimodal practices were the result of skills used with the context of online social networks through various experiences. I developed a chart to categorize the practices and the corresponding skills and experiences. Participants revealed these practices as they performed various actions across different online social networks.

Multimodal Practices

Table 4

Participant Multimodal Practices

Skills	+	Experiences	=	Practices
Texting-writing		Through emojis, hashtags and typing messages		Communicating
Liking-reading, viewing		Through googling, searching, and observing		Information Gathering
Watching-listening, playing		Through videos, memes, games, and music		Entertaining
Evaluating-right vs. wrong		Through “glorifying” or not and current events		Taking a Stance

Analysis revealed how each practice involved a ‘what’ and a ‘how’. As participants explained what they were doing and how they were doing it, they inevitably exposed their reasons for given actions. Practices were deemed multimodal because of both the skills and experiences that took place in a technology rich environment. The use of a cell phone or computer afforded users with quick and reliable access to their online social networks. Applications and features within the online social networks allowed users to message, ‘like’, watch, play, and evaluate through emojis, hashtags, memes, music, and games. Words, pictures, and sounds simultaneously existed as online social networks consume and create content, thus solidifying the practices as multimodal. In this section I

will unpack the practices of communicating, gathering information, entertaining, and taking a stance. Within each practice, I will highlight the skills and experiences reported and observed from participants in the study. During interviews participants were typically asked to share their reasons for various actions. Therefore, their reasons will be shared alongside the practices as they occurred.

Communicating: “It Goes Down in the DMs”: Interacting, Talking, and Messaging

A popular 2015-16 rap song by Yo Gotti references “DMs,” or direct messages within many online social networks. Messaging features in online social networks allow users to interact and talk with one another privately, thus communicating. As participants described their navigation of online social networks messaging and talking was often the topic of discussion. Hence, communication emerged as a multimodal literacy practice across all participants. I define communication as a literacy practice through which the multimodal skill of texting traditionally defined as writing experienced through emojis, hashtags, and typed messages. Participants used their abilities or skills along with the features of the online social network application to ‘communicate’ with other users. Additionally, participants stated that the purpose of an online social network was to be able to communicate. Lisa, Donna Emmanuel, and Quincy used words such

as “communicate”, “talk” and “message” to describe their online social network practices while relating to the overall purpose of navigation.

Donna stated that the purpose was to “communicate with people” or “to talk to” people (Interview, 7/28/15). Emmanuel echoed this, but added that you communicate with people “back and forth” (Interview, 10/29/16). From these quotes it appeared that communicating involved talking back and forth. However, the fact that this is taking place in an online social network where multiple mediums are available, clarification was needed. Lisa explained that communication involved “interaction” (Interview, 7/28/16). While, Quincy added that you could “message people” (Interview, 8/7/16). Although word choice varied, a consensus about communication as a purpose for online social networks for this group of adolescents became evident.

Donna used the word “communicate” adding that ‘talking’ was an element of communication. Talking is generally considered a conversation or exchange between two or more people. Thus, Emmanuel supported this idea by reiterating the back and forth exchange necessary in communication. The manner in which the back and forth communication occurred was better defined by Quincy, who used the word “text” to explain how exchanges occurred. Participants appeared to have similar definitions, yet referenced nuances unique to their individual experiences. For example, Lisa focused on the word ‘interact’ in her definition of

communication. Therefore the collection of participant responses exposed the ‘what’ aspect of communication as a multimodal literacy practice. Determining what was happening within the practice of communication, naturally led to a search of ‘how’ participants essentially communicated.

#HowDoesItWork?: Communication through multiple modes .

Participants explained that communication was ‘talking’ and ‘messaging’, but how did that happen in an online social network? Communication appeared to be quite simple at first. Participants explained their experiences with communication in their online social network.

Emmanuel:

Like if someone tell me ‘Hi’, I tell ‘em ‘Hi’ back.

Tim:

Because I was texting somebody on Kik earlier. I responded to a message.
I don’t know what it say.

Donna:

Talking to people... uploading pictures (Interview, 7/28/15).

Emmanuel and Tim explicitly stated they were texting and messaging. Donna held on to the idea of talking as a form of communication. Tim’s mention of Kik, showed that messaging was the main feature of his favorite website,

allowing users to communicate. Instagram, Facebook, and Kik were favorited among participants. Within these online social networks communication often happened via text and or message, thus revealing ‘how’ participants engaged. Many online social network utilize message systems. Kik, is solely based on message, whereas Instagram and Facebook have messaging capabilities. Emmanuel described his experience with ‘messaging’. “On Instagram you able, well you kinda is able, to text on Instagram, because you can direct message them, like through their Direct Messages (DM) – you know send them this talk to a person that way. Or like Kik, you can directly talk to someone or you can have a group chat. But, if somebody DM me, then yeah, I’ll talk to them back.” (Interview, 11/12/15).

The ability to message is one side of communication, however the ‘back and forth’ requires users to interact. Naturally, within the messaging and texting features of online social networks, there are nuances that perhaps enhance communication allowing for this interaction. Participants revealed the features of ‘emojis’ and ‘hashtags’ as a form of communication. Since communication was a form of talking or messaging, emojis and hashtags fit the criteria. An emoji – an emotional icon – can be messaged to someone to communicate feeling. A hashtag exists in a similar fashion, yet involves a ‘#’ and often shortened forms of words. In Figure 2, Alex shared the following post and explanation, exhibiting the use of emojis to communicate.



Figure 2. Alex's communication with online friends.

Communication between Alex his friends online was captured in the comments of the post. Even when unclear, Alex participated, stating that “I don’t even know what they was talking about, all I said was y’all both need to go to sleep ‘fore daddy get mad, and I put the laughing emoji.”(Interview, 7/28/15). He did not include his personal emoji response, but the emojis of other users are visible. The post was sprinkled with emoji and abbreviations. Emojis are a common form of communication across multiple platforms from cell phones to smart TVs. They are widely accepted ways of expressing emotions without using words. The straight faced 😐 emoji showed that the users was “not playing” as he stated. The young lady responded with the laughing crying emoji 😂. It became clear that the young lady was laughing or joking even though she did not use

actual words. Later, it seemed that young man softened his approach by using, 😊 to show he was pleased or at least content. Alex joined the conversation and thus ended the exchange. Emmanuel and Damon supported emoji's as a form of communication in online social networks.

Researcher:

What kind of things did you say?

Emmanuel:

I probably just put like emojis like, me laughing at it like, smiley faces or something.

Researcher:

Would you say you use more emojis than you do actual words?

Emmanuel and Damon:

Mm hmm.(Interview, 10/29/15).

Variations of actual words were not uncommon across the participants. Emmanuel and Damon further explained that they both used emojis, but there were rules as to 'how' emojis could be used to communicate.

Emmanuel:

You can't just draw a picture, to describe the thing and not have no words to describe what it is so...

Researcher:

So you can't just have an emoji there has to be some words?

Emmanuel:

Yeah.

Damon:

Sometimes you can, if there's words like way before [in the post]
(Interview, 11/12/15).

Emmanuel and Damon reiterated what could be seen in Alex's post. Interacting or talking without actual emojis are acceptable forms of communication, and are generally 'texted' or 'messed' back and forth. However, Damon argued that some form of word needed to be part of the communication. Therefore, in typical multimodal fashion, communication could happen via multiple modes. Pictures or emojis were acceptable, as long as words were present in some fashion. Considering Alex's post of comments, what counted as words was called into question. One participant in the conversation can be seen posting 'idk', the online familiar version of 'I don't know'. Emmanuel was able to elaborate on these abbreviations of actual words and

phrases by explaining “Like sometimes I’ll put it in the short term. Words like “what’s up” just “sup” yeah things like that” (Interview, 11/19/15).

Pictures with or without words, whether abbreviations or fully written, were a part of the multimodal literacy practice of communication. A user within an online social network could communicate their emotions through emojis while perhaps making a point in speedier fashion using shortened versions of words. Donna and Lisa mentioned the “comments on news feeds” and the “pictures and stuff” on their online social networks that fit in with how they communicated or interacted (Interview, 7/28/15). Although the girls were willing to share their thoughts in surveys and interviews, they were not open to sharing actual screenshots from their online social networks. They preferred to have their information remain private and perhaps did not feel comfortable with me as the researcher reviewing their posts. However, their descriptions of practices were often seen throughout other participants in the study. As our conversations around texting and messaging as a form of communication in an online social network continued, I was met with technological nuances of communication as multimodal literacy practice of these African American adolescents.

Words, whether ‘long’ or ‘short’ term, were a major mode of communication among participants. However, words remained fairly stationary, unless animated in some digital fashion. Similarly, emojis represented pictures,

yet appeared to remain unmoving or lacking interactive characteristics. Some online social networks allow users to communicate using a graphics interchange format or 'GIF', a typically animated series of combined condensed images. None of the participants in this study appeared to use or come in contact with them during the time of the study. I began to wonder if the participants' practice of communication involved any interactive technology features, especially as participants consistently explained that they viewed more than they posted. Essentially, they viewed more forms of communication more than they created them.

Despite the fact that GIFs were not a part of this group of adolescents' communication, another form of interaction surfaced. The multimodal feature known as a 'hashtag (#)' developed as a part of communication. Emmanuel was an especially active online social network user and attendee of Tomorrows. He mentioned the use of hashtags on several occasions. A hashtag (#) is a feature that seemingly represents one idea or topic, yet is a 'link' that when clicked takes the user on an endless journey of communication. The hashtag symbol is usually made up of key words or topics that may or may not be 'trending' or popular. Emmanuel explained that on Instagram he once used a hashtag with the location Myrtle Beach and other general uses.

Researcher:

What kind of things do you hashtags?

Emmanuel:

Like if I was at Myrtle Beach with my family, and I'll just take a picture, post it on there and then hashtag Myrtle Beach or whatever. That's it really. Hashtag tragic or something like that... like a tragedy. If I hashtag something, it's gonna be like hashtag stupid or hashtag funny.

Researcher:

So when you click on one (hashtag) what happens?

Emmanuel:

It'll show like pictures of people and that hashtag, the same one, yeah.

(Interview, 10/29/16)

Emmanuel explained how hashtags might be used across multiple online social networks. However, he revealed another definition, highlighting different interpretation. During an interview he explained "Hashtags are... things that like... well my version of hashtags is like if somebody write down 'what's your hashtag?', that means your number. On Instagram, I didn't really know, but just oh hashtag this so I just started going after hashtags" (Interview, 11/10/15).

Analysis of this response was two-fold. The pound symbol or 'number sign' used to represent a hashtag is used by some adolescents in a literal sense to request

someone's phone number. In this instance, traditional forms of literacy and technology collide, because they seemed to evolve around one another to fit the needs of adolescent socialization. Although Emmanuel knew of the term 'hashtag' he possessed a different use for it outside of his online social network. Additionally, during his early days of online social networking he simply used a hashtag because he came across them on other profiles.

The increased popularity of hashtags could be seen in participants' news feeds and profile pages. Hashtags were designed to connect Internet users with trending content. However, their popularity with adolescents in this study varied. Tim's profile page, in Figure 3 and Emmanuel's news feed post in Figure 4 show the variety with which hashtags were used in their online social networks.



Figure 3. Tim's Instagram profile page.



Figure 4. A “liked” post from Emmanuel’s news feed.

Emmanuel’s post captured the trending hashtag of the season. Other users could post similar images, using the tagline “#ThanksgivingWithBlackFamilies” in order to be included. However, Tim’s profile includes hashtags that make reference to his friends and other affiliations. In order to be a functioning hashtag (i.e. one that will connect to other posts when clicked) only the ‘#’ symbol and letters may be used. Thus, Tim is using a hashtag however, it is not functioning. Emmanuel’s regard for the rules and Tim’s rejection of rules coincided with their on and offline personalities. Whether used with the creators intended purpose, or adapted to fit one’s needs, various forms communication continued to exist and evolve for this group of adolescents.

For Emmanuel and perhaps many adolescents, communication as a literacy practice is impacted by technology and its constant evolution. Users adapt to changes in the technology features applications while adopting various features to fit their needs. Therefore, the final piece of ‘how’ communication happens as a literacy practice in online social networks is rooted in the technology features. Alex and Tim explained how technology features played a role.

Alex:

You gotta know the basics.

Researcher:

What are the basics?

Alex:

You gotta know how to screenshot important information, to recall back on later.

Tim:

First of all you gotta know how to use the app.(Interview, 8/7/15).

The boys’ responses began to highlight what was necessary in order to be able to communicate. Damon and Emmanuel explained what they needed to know and how they learned it.

Damon:

Well to be able to know how to use the keyboard, um, yeah well the keyboard or the screen, and well how to um, well yeah that's really it, using the keyboard and the screen.

Emmanuel:

[I learned] By my sister, cuz by my sister, she had a Instagram and she made mine, and made my Facebook for me too. Like she showed me how to set up an email address and how to sign up for it.

Damon:

Well, I learned how to type and stuff, I was probably in... well actually I don't remember.

Researcher:

Were you in school?

Damon:

At school and at home. I kinda taught myself a little bit. When I seen the letters, I knew just press the button. I can't type fast, but I can type.

Emmanuel:

I might just miss a letter and hit the wrong letter, and it look stupid, so I just have to go back to that to fix it. (Interview, 10/29/15).

The use of the keyboard and minimum proficiency in typing were ways of ‘how’ communication as a literacy practice existed. However, knowing how to use the application is equally as important. For example, Lisa and Donna explained that on their Instagram and Facebook, features included “likes and videos” and that they both “posted pictures and stuff” (Interview, 7/28/15). Therefore, aside from knowing how to type, the ‘basics’ that Alex and Tim mentioned, must include application features as well. Common application features supporting communication through words and pictures were evident. For example, Alex’s post of a friend exemplifies a friend communicating a feeling through a picture, as seen in Figure 5 below. The girl’s face has been blurred in order to maintain confidentiality, yet a portion left untouched. The only word accompanying the picture is “Mood” but this is accompanied by a seemingly silly face. Alex explained that the girl is a friend from school and that he didn’t know she was “that goofy” so he liked the post (Interview, 7/26/16). Therefore, the girl communicated a feeling or emotion through her picture.



Figure 5. A “liked” post from Alex’s news feed.

Additionally, in Figure 5, a notification bubble can be seen in red at the top of the navigation bar indicating a message alert. Although Tim did not share such a post, he explained the presence of notification or message alerts. “Like if I see a notification pop up for one of them. I’ll scroll down to the screen like this and I’ll just clear it or I’ll go check it out if it’s something I really need to look at.” (Interview, 8/7/15). Alex’s post shows how communication might appear, while Tim’s comment explains how communication might begin. Both occurrences relied on the technology features of the application. Damon and Emmanuel explain how features of Oovoo and Instagram allow them to communicate. Oovoo is an application that allows users to directly video chat, similar to iPhone’s FaceTime capabilities that allow users to communicate through live video.

Emmanuel:

Things that you can post, you can post a lot. Like you can have a video responding to someone, and not put no caption at the bottom. Because it's like FaceTime really, but you can also text, group chats, I don't think FaceTime can have group videos, but yeah videoing each other like what you doin' right now and all.

Damon:

Like videos, pictures...

Emmanuel:

Yeah, like videos, pictures, have a link in your bio for a video or something like that. (Interview, 11/12/15).

An online social network user could potentially use many types of media to communicate with other users. Words, pictures, and videos appear to be the most popular features of today. However, as technology evolves, FaceTime in a group chat, as Emmanuel describes, may be available soon. What and how communication exists as a literacy practice for this group of adolescents navigating an online social network naturally developed into 'why' participants may choose to engage. With communication at the crux, I began with why the participants would want to 'talk' or 'message' with others as they stated.

K.I.T. (Keeping In Touch): Decisions to stay connected. Why would an adolescent choose an online social network as a form of communication? Lisa, Alex, and Emmanuel offered their purposes.

Lisa:

To interact with new people or people you met a long time ago. And then you find them again on a social network and then start to reunite with each other. (Interview, 7/28/15).

Alex:

Instant message your friends, all that (Interview, 8/7/15).

Emmanuel:

Communicate with a friend, because most people they don't give out they phone number. They rather give out they social media. Like they Kik or Instagram or Facebook to talk to them through that and not they phone. Yeah, and like talk to friends, sometimes family. To get to know people, mostly sometimes. But, most of my friends, is family on Facebook. (Interview, 11/4/15).

The participants expectedly used their online social networks to talk to friends and family members they already knew. However, on occasion it appeared they were used to communicate with new friends or reunite with old friends.

Emmanuel unknowingly exposed the impact technology and online social networks are having on communication. The idea that a person would rather provide an online social network screenname before providing a phone number contact shows that modes of communication vary. Perhaps the multiple modes of communication an online social network offers are especially appealing to adolescents. In short, maintaining contact with new and old friends was a key reason for communication as a literacy practice.

Communication, specifically with ‘friends,’ was evident. Participants reported that they joined certain online social networks because their friends were already members. Additionally, they cited using online social networks to keep in contact with friends. Friends are naturally a part of adolescent life offline. Adolescents are often confronted with positive and negative influences known as peer pressure from friends. It is possible that similar peer pressure exists in online social networking navigation. Tim and Alex statements supported the possible influence of peers in deciding to participate in an online social network while reiterating the appeal of communicating with another person outside of a traditional phone call.

Tim:

Everybody else had one. So I thought why don't I just create one.

Alex:

I got one because people asked me and kept asking me for mine. Facebook was the first I had because I was in middle school. When I got it [in] 6th grade, everybody got one. I was like, no I don't want one. Then kept saying come on, come on, get one, get one. Because it's certain people didn't have their phones on so they used the instant messenger from Facebook to contact other people. So I was like I'll get one so I can start using my Inbox to hit everybody phone, but then I got caught into and started liking it. (Interview, 8/7/15).

Emmanuel:

Like things that people was talkin' 'bout like, oh yeah, this was on Instagram and all. I kinda want to see that. I ain't never had no Instagram, so it was like the thing that was like popular for real. (Interview, 10/28/15).

The boys explained how peer pressure – or the idea that everyone else had one – encouraged them to engage in communication in an online social network. Additionally, online social networks continued to provide an alternative form of communication between peers. Alex's mention of people's phones not being on, refers to the notion that a person cell phone service might be turned off, however, through WiFi, a person would be able to use online social networking

applications. This may be especially unique to adolescents from this low income neighborhood. Such occurrences throughout the study truly began to characterize the skills and experiences of this particular group of African American adolescents as they navigated their online social network. The desire to remain connected became an embedded part of conversations. The decision to join the crowd through an online social network became the next question to answer.

A user's decision to be an online social network user became equally as important as why they chose to engage in the 'back and forth' communication participants in this study described. Participants explained why they would or would not communicate.

Damon:

Well, if someone posts a funny picture you could just read, and then if it say do you comment on it, you just don't have to. I wouldn't write anything, unless talking specifically to me or about me.

Emmanuel:

You can also put comments under the video, you can like the video. Yeah, cuz you can contact with someone, over the comments you can't directly text the person but you can go to comments, type they YouTube name in it and talk to the person, that person might respond back. Because on social

medias, you read a comment and tell the person what you think about it or you see the picture and tell the person what you think about it. (Interview, 10/28/15).

Emmanuel's description about reading a comment or viewing a picture in order to respond to the person who posted it, reiterates the literacy practice of communication. The purpose here would be to continue a virtual conversation with someone. Tim mentioned earlier that he would text or message someone back if they said 'Hi'. Damon and Emmanuel explained that they responded on a seemingly case by case. If someone was speaking directly to them, then they would likely respond in some way.

Participants in this study often claimed they did not feel inspired or compelled to add content to their online social networks. Alex and Lisa expressed a desire to know about other people, without others knowing about them. Hence, they preferred to view content rather than create their own to be shared across the network. Most participants did not explain their reasoning behind not wanting to share information online. However, Emmanuel explained negative experiences that resulted in him being resistant to posting content online.

Alex:

I don't post a lot – I don't like people in my business and I hate puttin' my 2 cents in something that ain't got nothing to do with me. (Interview, 7/28/15).

Lisa:

Cuz I don't gotta, I dunno, it's just sometimes I don't like postin' pictures. I just like being on there so I can be nosey. (Interview, 7/28/15).

Emmanuel:

I posted a picture of me and my sister. One of the boys said my sister was fat. It was kinda funny, but again, it was not funny at all. I tagged my sister in the picture and they kinda went at it with the comments so I deleted it. (Interview, 11/10/15).

The very 'peer pressure' that brought our participants to use online social networks was very same force that made them apprehensive about communicating openly. Synthesis of research surrounding adolescents and online social networks revealed that adolescents used online social networks as places for support and communication while developing a sense of self (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Participants used communication as a literacy practice and therefore supported this idea. Additionally, research has shown that adolescents develop a sense of self through relationships with others, including those made and maintained in

online social networks (Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). Peer influences have a greater impact on adolescents than outside media (Ferguson, Munoz, Garza, & Galindo, 2014). Therefore, the peer created and consumed content of an online social network could potentially garner pressure. In general, it appeared that this group of adolescents did not initiate communication, but found it necessary to continue communication once it had begun. This was also subject to peer pressure, as participants explained their fear of judgment for what was being communicated.

Lisa:

Cuz you can't be dumb. Well, not dumb, but you gotta know how to spell your captions right. (Interview, 7/28/15).

Emmanuel:

Somebody might put up a comment about you, and if you can't read, you don't know what it say. And if you can't write then you can't text back what that person is talking about. (Interview, 10/29/15).

Alex:

Because if you post something and somebody comment back on it and you don't have nothing to say you just gon' look dumb because you just got

the one comment sittin' there and you don't know what you talkin' bout almost. (Interview, 7/28/15).

Responding appropriately is at the heart of the adolescents' ideas about why they communicate. To avoid looking 'dumb' in front of peers a user may avoid responding completely. However, on the contrary, the lack of response could be perceived as 'dumb' as well. Therefore, it is best to respond by using correct spelling, but only if someone is being spoken to or about. All of the spoken and unspoken rules of communication did not deter adolescents from continuing to engage in online social networks.

Elements of communication as a multimodal literacy practice could be seen throughout the entire study and existed as a bridge to other multimodal literacy practices. Communication was also often the purpose of many online social networks. Users communicated in order to maintain friendships and express feelings or ideas. In order to maintain communication, users continually avoided looking 'dumb' by adhering to rules of correct online spelling and back and forth banter. Therefore, within this purpose were other practices. When a person communicates with another person, it is not without purpose. Often that purpose is to garner or disseminate information. In this study, specifically gathering information proved to be a literacy practice that relied somewhat on

communication. The manner in which this occurred will be defined and described in the following section.

Information Gathering- Points of View: Adolescents' Searches and Observations

Once communication was established as a clear multimodal literacy practice for participants in this study, three more practices emerged, slightly related to communication. The practice of gathering information is defined by the skill of reading (viewing) and the experience of 'searching' in an online social network. Some participants used the word 'observe' and 'view' to begin to explain their information gathering practice. During an interview session with five of the participants, all explained that they "viewed more than posted" on their online social networks (Interview, 8/7/16). Donna and Lisa expanded on the idea of 'viewing' as a form of 'searching' and 'observing,' but did not specify this as an actual skill.

Researcher:

Do you prefer to view or post?

Lisa:

View.

Donna:

Viewing. Cuz you could just be on there just looking at everything.

(Interview, 7/28/15).

Emmanuel explained what he would “search” for on his online social networks by stating, “You have to search for someone user name. Like say if you on Kik someone will give you their Kik. Sometimes, topics, yeah, like hashtags. Sometimes I use an online social network or Google.” (Interview, 10/29/15). Donna, Lisa, and Emmanuel had clear ideas about what searching and observing might look like on their online social network. Additionally, they explained how viewing and looking were a part of gathering information. However, did users truly look at “everything” as Donna suggests, or did they primarily use hashtags and a user’s name as Emmanuel notes? These questions and many others made it imperative to determine how and why participants looked, viewed, observed, or searched, as they became critical components of defining gathering information as a multimodal literacy practice.

Online hunting and gathering: The search and collection of knowledge. Gathering information and observing came to life through the skill of searching. Like the practice of communication, it relied on the technology of the Internet and application features of the online social network. The first instance of information gathering occurred when participants revealed that they searched for current events on their online social networks. Emmanuel and Damon both revealed that they used their online social network or Google to look up information. The act of searching through their online social network is made readily available through many applications, such as the Facebook and Instagram profiles below.

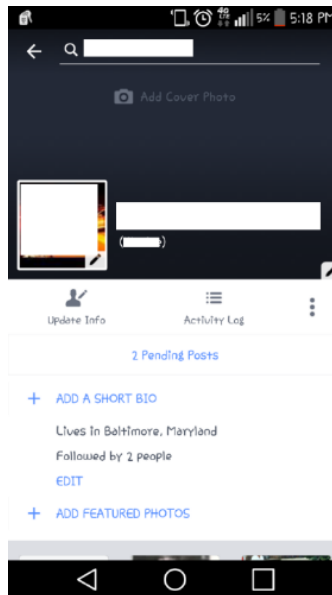


Figure 6. Facebook profile page.



Figure 7. Instagram profile page.

Both applications use the familiar magnifying glass (at the top on the Facebook profile in Figure 6 and at the bottom on the Instagram profile in Figure 7), such that users know where to actually begin their search. A search within an online social network allows users to search for information, other users, links, and hashtags. The application mirrors that of a Google or Bing search, therefore if a user is familiar with such sites, he or she will be able to search within an online social network. In many instances, when participants were asked how they thought they used technology in their online social network, they gave answers dealing with the typing. However, Damon and Emmanuel explained how the searching feature was an important part of their online social network experience.

Researcher:

Do you think that there are certain skills that you need in order to use your Instagram?

Emmanuel:

No, not really.

Researcher:

But you said your sister had to show you and teach you?

Emmanuel:

Yeah, like showing me how to search out things and edit my profile at the time, because it wasn't that upgraded at the time (Interview, 10/29/15).

During subsequent interviews, the boys explained that the act of searching has 'rules,' similar to those found through communication as a multimodal literacy practice.

Emmanuel:

You have to search for someone user name. Like, say if you on Kik, someone will give you their Kik. Like, if someone in class they telling you they Kik, like spelling it out and you don't know how to spell you gon' have trouble and its gon' take a long time to get they Kik. (Interview, 11/19/15).

According to Emmanuel, in order to search effectively and efficiently you must know how to spell. He furthered justified his response in that “You have to know how to spell. Like say if you was looking up someone’s profile, you would have to know how to spell they name the correct way or your can’t find their profile.” (Interview, 11/12/15). Spelling had become a part of communication as a literacy practice as well. A user needed to spell, whether using short terms or full words in order to ‘talk’ to other users. Hence, communication highlighted how technology features impact user navigation. The practice of gathering information was not immune to the influences of technology features. Instagram and Facebook originally offered simplistic profiles, options to post pictures, and little to no opportunity to directly communicate with a given user at one time, let alone how to search or seek out users and information. Emmanuel described such ‘primitive’ sites, “Like you couldn’t really search much on Instagram, before it came real popular, not everybody was on Instagram as much” (Interview, 11/10/15). The popularity of Instagram perhaps created the need for enhanced features.

Searching to gather information through a variety of features in an online social network expanded ideas about the role of technology. The ability to search has now become a critical feature of online social networks, however, hyperlinks or ‘links’ allowed a participant to continue to search for information or broaden a search, while remaining connected to the online social network.

Researcher:

Can you describe a technology feature that might be on Instagram or Facebook?

Emmanuel:

Well, things like links.

Researcher:

Ok, so describe that.

Emmanuel:

Like, something that's like... say if it's like a website, and somebody will tell you the link is in their bio, like the link to their website, so you could see it. (Interview, 11/24/15).

Adding another layer, a user needed to be able to post and click on links. As a part of the information gathering process a user might click on a given link in order to learn more about the user or some other information. Links can often be a series of letters and dots that if entered just right will take you exactly where you want to be and if not will send into a world of frustration. In some cases a 'link' could take a user to the profile page of another user by using an '@' or allow you to email another user. In yet another case, a hashtag could 'link' a user to additional posts from that user. Tim shared his Instagram profile below.



Figure 8. Tim’s Instagram profile page.

Tim’s profile, as seen in Figure 8, shows that he used an “@” symbol to connect his followers to “Lil Sis”. He uses a series of hashtags to connect users to his various affiliations connected to his budding rap career. As was described earlier, he failed to develop a functioning hashtag. However, a user may send him an email simply by clicking his Gmail account. Anyone interested in gathering information about Tim could simply begin by perusing his Instagram bio in the profile.

The profile represents the multimodalities that allow information gathering to occur. Emmanuel and Damon began our discussion on this topic by referencing an information gathering scenario based on a sign in the room.

Damon:

Like (points to the no smoking sign) you can observe that no smoking sign by reading what it says on the bottom.

Emmanuel:

Also by the picture and the how it has the cross




Researcher:

Does that happen online where there's words and pictures that you have to read?

Emmanuel and Damon:

Yes. (Interview, 11/4/15).

The technology features of online social networks appeared to elicit similar methods of observing and searching for information. Emmanuel specifically explained the upgrades and features of Instagram that allowed for greater use of the search feature and allowed a user to gather information. He began the following response in reference to Instagram: "The location updates. Like put the location on your pictures, like where you went and all that. Like you could put comments under pictures and like them. Plus you can send pictures and videos now on Instagram." (Interview, 11/10/15). All participant profiles of Instagram showed these features. For example, Figure 8 of Tim's profile shows

, the symbol to indicate a location. When clicked, a user may type the name of a real or make believe location. Additionally, the  symbol allowed users to type the name of a friend or topic of interest. Finally, the  symbol allows users to capture a picture or access a photo library from their device to be uploaded to the site. All three features played important roles in the multimodal literacy practice of information gathering.

Users could search for friends, information, and locations simply by clicking a link or a hashtag. What participants did in order to gather information was determined by how they were able to engage. However, their reason for choosing to gather information was also an integral part of the literacy practice. Alex provided the first glimpse into why a participant would observe and gather information. He stated that being able to “screenshot important information” in order to use at a later time was an important skill. (Interview, 10/28/15). Here it is evident that information gathering is a practice with an inherent purpose or reason determined by the user. It appears they do not just look at everything or simply search for a user’s name, suggesting there is a method to the madness, creating a reason for the practice. What participants searched for and gathered was impacted by how and why this was able to happen. Technology features of sites and the individual purpose of the participant were two guiding factors that uncovered why participants engaged in information gathering as a multimodal literacy practice.

Why might an online social network user like Alex, screenshot information to use at a later time? Why would someone like Emmanuel be especially interested in being able to search or put locations on Instagram posts? The skills and experiences that created the practice, perhaps influenced participant desire to engage in online social networks. In this section I will discuss the reasons this group of adolescents engaged in the literacy practice of gathering information.

The first reason participants in this study engaged in gathering information as a literacy practice would be to search for ‘friends’ on their online social network.

Researcher:

Do you think it’s an important part, do you think you search a lot on your online social network?

Emmanuel:

You have to search for someone user name. Like say if you on Kik someone will give you their Kik. Like if someone in class, they telling you they Kik like spelling it out. (Interview, 11/19/15).

Searching for friends represents a ‘why’ for the multimodal literacy practice of gathering information. Emmanuel stated that a purpose of an online

social network is “getting things out there” (Interview, 11/24/15). If the ‘there’ Emmanuel is describing is on social media, a user must have friends or followers who will see what he or she posts. Thus, having ‘friends’ online becomes critical in the practice of gathering information because friends are often the source of information in the form of links, hashtags, and other features within the online social network. Incidentally, the search boxes found on many online social networks are capable of searching users and topics. Although other participants did not state they searched for ‘friends’, they did explain that they used their online social networks in order to communicate with friends. This suggests that they likely, at some point, used the search feature of their online social network, to locate current or old friends on and offline.

The second reason participants engaged in gathering information was to “get the inside scoop” or increase their knowledge of a particular topic. Once again, participants initially revealed this idea through their discussion of what constituted an online social network. Damon and Emmanuel defined an online social network based on what it offered in terms of content, in this case what happened to be information.

Damon:

If there a lot of people on there and they’re talking about lots of stuff that has been happening about.

Emmanuel:

A lot of current events that went on... going on in the world. (Interview, 10/29/15).

The boys suggested what type of information could be found on an online social network. Donna and Lisa did not explicitly reveal gathering information as a multimodal literacy practice. Donna explained that she “liked being noseey.” (Interview, 7/28/15). Her information gathering practice is more implied through this statement. In being noseey, she was gathering information about her peers, online friends, or celebrities, as she peruses her news feed. The next step was to elaborate on ‘why’ they chose to gather information. Emmanuel stated that “life stories” often caused him to gather information (Interview, 11/10/15). Life stories appeared to represent both personal and global current events. Emmanuel often shared his reasons for gathering information about a topic.

Researcher:

Do you look at a lot of current events on your online social network?

Emmanuel:

Like stories, I can also use social networks to see unseen videos, that they didn’t show on the news or something. Well, if it’s important, like what happened in Paris (referring to the deadly terrorist attacks of November

2015 that resulted in the murder of 130 people), if it's something like that then yeah, I'll stop or something like a missing girl, or something like a big event, an emergency. (Interview, 11/19/15).

Emmanuel's desire to see the 'unseen' is truly telling. It suggests that he possesses some information, but seeks more. An online social network as a source of additional information rang true on several occasions for Emmanuel. In some instances, it was to dig deeper into current events, yet at other times it appeared to serve a more personal interest.

Emmanuel:

Like businesses, you know, like that business have a Instagram page. You know, like follow that Instagram page, see what it's all about and all. You know, like puttin' that business out there so people could know about it and things.

Researcher:

Do you ever look up businesses based on their social media?

Damon:

Yes.

Emmanuel:

Sometimes, yeah.

Researcher:

So what makes you want to look at a business' social media page?

Emmanuel:

If I get hungry-or fascinated.

Damon:

Yeah fascinated.

Researcher:

So what makes, what would make you fascinated?

Damon:

Um, fighting games and new consoles and new television series.

Emmanuel:

Yeah. (Interview, 10/28/15).

The multimodal literacy practice of gathering information served an important purpose for this group of adolescents. Fueled by the need for friendship and a thirst for knowledge in some area, participants utilized the skill of searching within the technological parameters of a given online social network. In gathering

information, they fulfilled a purpose for their online social networks. Communicating and gathering information coexisted as multimodal literacy practices for participants in this study as part of their personal purpose for using online social networks. Participants shared their desire to stay connected with friends and to find out information. The last two multimodal literacy practices become more personal in individual purpose as users created and consumed posts in a more individualized manner. Although not racially unique, items participants found entertaining or worthy of taking a stance for or against were often associated with urban African American culture. Additionally, some aspects of the practice of taking a stance, developed from racially charged current events. Therefore, African American adolescents and their peers, from similar and varying backgrounds, may reveal practices of entertaining and taking a stance.

Entertaining: To be or Not to be Bored

When asked about his online social networking purposes and habits, Alex, had the following to share: “To entertain myself and others. Or whenever I’m bored or I got a little free time in between doing anything, I’ll just check just to see if anybody said something funny or mentioned me in a comment or something.” (Interview, 7/28/15). Alex’s comments embody the general perspective of all participants. Through skills and experiences in an online social network, this group of adolescents created and consumed entertainment, thus

engaging in the literacy practice of entertaining oneself and others. What entertaining looked like for the adolescents involved watching and playing.

Watching and playing: Entertainment in online social networks.

Watching or viewing allowed participants to be entertained. Donna and Lisa maintained their favoritism towards Instagram because of the “pictures, likes, and videos” as what typically kept them entertained on their online social network (Interview, 7/28/15). Quincy and Alex remained loyal to Facebook because of the videos, specifically “cuz it be fights on there” (Interview, 8/7/15). Emmanuel consistently stated that he viewed or watched “funny pictures and important things” (Interview, 11/19/15). Participants were entertained by things that were communicated to them or things they searched for, thus potentially tying in the previous literacy practices. The content of ‘entertaining’ posts across participants was fairly similar.

Fighting videos proved to be a common theme across the boys, although Damon and Emmanuel would later have an internal conflict about this type of video. While they were entertained by the video, they felt it wrong or disrespectful to the persons in the video. This conflict will be expressed fully in the follow practice. However, Alex was fully committed to the idea of entertaining fighting videos, thus sharing the following post from his Facebook page.



Figure 9. Fighting video from Alex’s news feed.

Researcher:

Ok, what is the video about?

Alex:

This is the old Sharkeisha video, when she had knocked the girl down wit’ one hit and then she kicked her.

Researcher:

So do you watch a lot of videos like this?

Alex:

If I see them. (Interview, 7/28/16)

The still shot of the video, as seen in Figure 9, that Alex shared had 16,000 ‘likes’, so clearly he was not alone in his affinity for such videos on his online social network. Alex explained that if he comes across a video similar to this he would stop to watch it. Emmanuel shared the following similar sentiments, “Like certain posts, like fights, well, some fights I like it, and I’ll just watch it.” (Interview, 11/4/15). Previously, participants mentioned that through the literacy practice of gathering information in an online social network they were able to obtain previously unseen or hidden information. Hence, participants were potentially entertained by viewing rare video footage or obtaining a different perspective.

Watching videos that were funny was common across all participants. Donna and Lisa were willing to describe the videos they’d watched, but did not care to screenshot any examples.

Researcher:

What was something that you did while you were online today?

Donna:

It was a video that I saw.

Researcher:

What was the video about?

Donna:

It was my homeboy. He was with some kids and he was doing something, making jokes and it was funny.

Lisa:

A lil' boy. It was this man and his baby and the caption was like "challenging a baby to a dance battle" and the father started dancing and the baby started moving and it looked like he was dancing. It was cute. (Interview, 7/28/15).

The girls were entertained by videos with kids doing 'funny' things. The literacy practice takes on multimodal characteristics as the videos are equipped with images, sounds, and in many cases accompanied by a caption. Still images were counted as a form of 'viewing' or 'watching' as participants deemed them funny, even though they were not full videos. Emmanuel shared an image that represented this notion, as seen in Figure 10. He stated "Well the first one was funny, because the person said that his girl can't open a can of soda on her own, but she can break his phone with superhero strength." (Interview, 11/19/15).



Figure 10. Entertaining post from Emmanuel’s Instagram news feed.

Emmanuel provided an example of entertaining as a literacy practice. The red heart indicates that he viewed the picture and liked it, in this case because he thought it was funny. Watching or viewing funny things in an online social network further solidified the practice of being entertained. Through entertainment came the act of ‘playing’ within an experience. This act took on two major forms, best displayed by Alex and Damon.

What do you see?



Figure 11. Entertaining post from Alex’s Instagram news feed.

Alex shared the post above, Figure 11. He described it as “a picture where they make you look for the secret thing that’s hiding inside the picture” (Interview, 7/28/15). It is similar to a magic eye trick in that the seemingly pile of colorful rocks actually hides a man painted to be camouflaged. The act of viewing and watching becomes more active. The viewer is playing a game in the sense that he or she is trying to locate the hidden item. Damon portrays a more active profile as an online social network gamer.

Researcher:

So would you like to show me something that you looked at or posted on your online social network?

Damon:

Well, it's not really a website it's like a game.



Figure 12. Screenshot of the game Minecraft showcasing a structure built by users.

Researcher:

Could you explain Minecraft to someone who doesn't know what it is?

Damon:

A game where blocks take the shape of human form, like block people, block everything, literally. Like a tree will be a block.

Researcher:

Do you get to build whatever you want?

Damon:

If you have the materials, it's two different versions. There's the version creative where you have unlimited resources, and survival where there's limited resources and you need to get food in order to survive the night.

Researcher:

Oh, so this is still an online social network?

Damon:

Mmm, yeah.

Researcher:

What makes it an online social network?

Damon:

The fact that a lot of people on YouTube like it and a lot of people in the world itself like it. If there a lot of people on there and they're talking about lots of stuff that has been happening about it. And well cuz, well at school a lot of people in, well a couple of people in 7th grade have it and we pretty much play online. (Interview, 10/29/15).

Damon justified the classification of Minecraft as an online social network. He explained the game in a way that highlighted its entertaining characteristics. Emmanuel was also a member of Minecraft and participated in the website with Damon. In one interview, the boys further explained how members of the site interacted with one another for entertainment.

Damon:

You can do whatever you want. You can build, you can wander.

Researcher:

So this is a picture of a house you built?

Damon:

We built (motions at Emmanuel)

Researcher:

So you log on, and it's not just you who builds the things and does stuff?

Damon:

Yeah, sometimes he builds stuff, sometimes I build stuff.

Researcher:

Is it at the same time, could both of you get on at the same time, or do you have to take turns?

Emmanuel:

Take turns. (Interview, 10/29/15).

Participant actions ranged from watching videos, viewing pictures to playing games. Knowledge of technology features allowed for the various forms of entertainment to take place. A user's ability to watch videos, view pictures, and play a game depended on the site's features and the level of interaction within videos, pictures, and games.

Connect, click, create: Engagements in entertainment. Profile pages, newsfeeds, and timelines may be flooded at any given time with videos, memes, and even game requests. Watching, viewing, and playing happen as the user elicits skills for the purpose of being entertained. The concept of scrolling did not initially seem important until participants explained how technology features allowed more than just a simple ‘scroll’ through. Alex described how he began to watch something online: “As I’m scrolling, I just gotta look at it. Like ‘cuz on my Facebook, the videos play without sound before I click on ‘em, so I can see a little bit of the video.” (Interview, 8/7/15). The act of scrolling allowed users to engage in the literacy practice of entertaining. Due to upgraded features, online social networks like Facebook, no longer required a user to double click a video to make it play. Now a video begins to play without sound so that a user can decide whether or not click to hear the sound or to continue to scroll.

Videos that begin to play automatically allow users to continue to scroll until they find the true video of their choice. This technology feature enhanced the literacy practice by giving the user the option to click play or continue to scroll, without having to watch every single video. Donna and Lisa both expressed an affinity for videos and pictures through online social networks like Facebook and Instagram. They inherently relied on the video capabilities allowed through enhanced technology features, when they described captions that caught their attention. Other technology features existed that are a part of ‘how’ entertaining

happened as a literacy practice. Tim combined scrolling and the notifications feature he used to tailor his practice. He stated, “If I see a notification pop up for one of them. I’ll scroll down to the screen like this and I’ll just clear it or I’ll go check it out if it’s something I really need to look at.” (Interview, 8/7/15).

Notifications can be enabled on any cellular device and are intended to alert a user of activity on his or her online social network. Emmanuel explained notifications as “Like if it says someone added a photo or someone liked a comment” (Interview, 11/10/15). Both boys exposed how the feature added to the ability to be entertained. Instead of being constantly bombarded with pictures and videos, users could sift through all of the posts or wait until a notification popped up to tell them where to go and what may be waiting. These features of ‘how’ entertaining occurred in an online social network specifically related to pictures or videos, however, for gaming as a part of entertaining features were unique.

Damon and Emmanuel, our resident online social network gamers, explained ‘how’ entertainment worked.

Researcher:

What skills do you need?

Damon:

Well to visualize everything, what you're going to build or anything.

(Interview, 10/29/15).

Being able to visualize is an especially critical component in Minecraft.

Initial game boards appear like the Figure 13 below. In order to 'build' as the boys explained the purpose of the game, a user first has to visualize their items.

Then he or she may begin to use the tools and pieces provided, or go in search of what they need.



Figure 13. Screenshot of the game Minecraft showing availability of tools.

From this perspective shown in Figure 13, it appears that Minecraft was not as 'social' as was previously discussed. However, Damon and Emmanuel adamantly combined other 'social' games such as Grand Theft Auto, which allowed users to play one another virtually, into the category of an online social network. Damon stated "it's a lot of people roaming around" and Emmanuel added that "you can communicate with people back and forth" (Interview, 10/29/15). The boys' justification for defining games as online social network and the explanation of 'how' entertainment happened caused me to reevaluate my initial suspicions about what counted as an online social network.

Researcher:

Is it something where you have to talk to other people online in order to participate?

Damon:

It's not as open, but 5 people can get on your game. You don't have to talk to them, you could just play with them.

Emmanuel:

Sometimes I play by myself, sometimes I play so I can talk to other people

Damon:

It's better playing by yourself because you can walk around.

Play, as a form of entertainment, could happen with or without the presence of another user. It appeared to happen with and without purpose, at the user's discretion.

Researcher:

But what about the object of the game, what is it?

Damon:

I dunno.

Emmanuel:

Well, really to complete the mission. There isn't. You're just having fun.
Like a heist.

Researcher:

So that still counts as an online social network.

Emmanuel and Damon:

Mm hmm. (Interview, 10/29/15).

A player of the game may be entertained through the completion of a mission or by simply traveling through game boards. Various technology features allowed users to do anything from building a structure in Minecraft to collecting cars or supplies in Grand Theft Auto. In games like Grand Theft Auto, users could interact or talk with one another through messaging or headsets. In games like Minecraft, users are entertained through the creation and consumption of content. In this fashion, entertainment was gained through creativity. An ability to visualize allowed for creativity to flourish. For example, the boys explained that being able to visualize was key because not everything was already built or available on the screen from the beginning. Hence an entertaining experience was tailored to fit each individual user. Additionally, how users interacted or did not interact with each other also impacted 'how' entertainment happened. It became

evident that ‘choice’ became the final aspect of entertaining as a multimodal literacy practice.

A cure for boredom and more: Choosing to engage in online social networks. The ‘what’ and ‘how’ of entertaining as a multimodal literacy practice was naturally influenced by ‘why’ adolescents chose to engage in the practice. The cure for boredom and the search for something ‘funny’ ranked high in adolescent reasoning. Tim explained that he waited for notifications to alert him. “Unless I get bored then I’ll just go to it” he later explained (Interview, 8/7/15). Therefore, the act of entertaining oneself became a way to avoid boredom and feed interests. Similarly to Tim, Emmanuel stated he waited for notifications in the following manner. “Like if it says someone added a photo or someone liked a comment, or just if I’m bored and I need to check up on my Facebook” (Interview, 11/10/15). Participating in a practice simply out of boredom appeared to be only one layer of why they chose to engage. Therefore, out of boredom came the idea that searches were fueled by interests.

Researcher:

What makes you want to look?

Emmanuel:

Something very interesting like, a post that’s like, if it’s about me.

(Interview, 10/28/15).

Alex:

If it... I dunno. If it catches my attention, like if I see one key word that'll catch my attention, I'll just look at it to peek my interests. Whatever catch my eye as I'm scrollin'. I just gotta look at it. (Interview, 7/28/15).

“Interests” became a murky term that needed to be defined. Since fighting and funny videos were a theme earlier participants naturally elaborated on these in terms of their interests. Donna and Lisa described their videos of choice as “funny” or “cute” (Interview, 7/28/15). In these examples the girls described videos and posts involving kids, thus better defining their interests. Alex explained why often chose to watch a video that had peeked his interests. “So as I’m scrolling if I so happen to see a fist swing or some weird dance or anything, I just gotta go back and watch it just see what it was.” (Interview, 8/7/15). This relies on ‘how’ online social networks offer various mediums of entertainment and ‘how’ technology allows users to get a sneak preview before committing to any form of media. Thus, ‘why’ a participant chooses to engage is determined by these factors and if it fits within their interests.

Gaming, of particular interest for Damon, was based on more than just ‘fun’ as well.

Researcher:

Well, what draws you to it?

Damon:

The game, the game itself. It's, well, I like it because the game has no end.

(Interview, 7/28/15).

The freedom to create without boundaries within online worlds was an important aspect of gaming for Damon. He explained that he liked the fact that the game had no end. Participants could potentially engage in endless play as the user was in control of what happened. Although other participants did not describe their interests and reasons for navigating in the same fashion, their choices were actually more closely linked to Damon than I'd realized. In many cases, traditional online social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, a user may choose to create an open or private profile. An open profile allows all users to view and explore the content without being friends through the network. Being able to explore any and all 'open' profiles, create unbounded search capabilities. Hence, persons like Alex or Emmanuel may engage in an infinite or unending experience as they scroll, search, and play through the open profiles of online social network peers.

What started as generic descriptions of reasons for seeking entertainment, began to blossom into the final multimodal literacy practice uncovered in this study. African American adolescents in this study communicated, gathered

information, and entertained themselves. Each practice served a purpose or was rooted in reason. The last literacy practice is perhaps fully situated in reason. As users continually communicate, gather information, or entertain, they may in fact evaluate all practices and thus take a stance as a part of multimodal literacy practice. It is possible that through evaluation, users became “critical” consumers. Therefore, as this group of adolescents communicated, gathered information, and engaged in entertainment, there was a critical lens with which all was consumed. Park (2012) described critical literacy as the act of speaking back to the text in order to garner understanding. As participants in this study evaluated posts within their online social networks they had the opportunity to ‘speak’ back to the text through messages, emojis, and hashtags. Additionally, they embodied a “critical stance” using their background knowledge to make sense of their ideas and ideas presented by the “author” (DeVoogd, 2004). In the next section, I will unearth taking a stance as a literacy practice, where users rightfully or wrongfully navigated through their online social networks.

Taking a Stance

Multimodal literacy practices of this group of African American adolescents were revealed through repeated exploration of a variety of actions engaged in while navigating an online social network. On the surface, communication became a clear practice as it enabled participants to talk, text, or

message one another, which proved to a popular purpose for participating in online social networks. Gathering information and entertaining, emerged as a practice when a user was guided by their quest for knowledge and interests in particular topics. Finally, the seemingly less prominent practice of taking a stance surfaced when users took ‘action’ after examining and processing information to determine a response or reaction. A users ‘stance’ was expressed through their opinions shown in online profiles, posts, comments, and likes. They chose what and how content was created and consumed. An evaluation of self and outside content, played a major role. I will describe this practice through the skill of evaluation where users most frequently determined ‘right’ from ‘wrong’.

‘Right’ versus ‘wrong’ stances appeared to be rooted in morality.

Participants were concerned with behaviors. ‘Good’ and ‘bad’ behaviors were determined with slight variance. It seemed that some participants defined ‘right’ and ‘good’ behavior as honest, modest, and kind posts. Other participants, whose profiles revealed less than modest or kind behaviors, did not express that they felt what they were doing was ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’. However, participants on either side of the morality pendulum often consumed content that might be deemed immoral. As participants took a stance their morality meter was tested. Participants revealed they were often conflicted by the high entertainment value of posts associated with ‘bad’ behaviors, such as fights and girls dancing provocatively. Thus

participants took a stance, in how they chose to represent themselves and the posts they chose to consumer, based on an internal (case by case) morality meter.

Judge not, that ye be not judged: Representing self through constant evaluation. What constituted taking a stance? A like? A comment? A video post? It appeared that taking a stance took on many forms beginning with the profile pages of participants. Tim described his Instagram page in the following way “My Instagram got the juice. I got a lotta likes. I got a lotta comments.” (Interview, 8/7/15). Tim’s use of the word ‘juice’ caused me to immediately think of the 1992 urban drama *Juice* (Moritz, Heyman, Frankfurt, & Dickerson, 1992) starring four African American high school boys, among them, Bishop (Tupac Shakur) and Q (Omar Epps). The movie follows the four friends as they navigate the streets of Harlem, getting caught up in petty crimes that turn serious and relationships that turn volatile. Bishop quickly emerges as the “villain” and leader of the crew through hyper-masculine actions of drugs, sex, and violence. On the streets Bishop has the “juice”. However, a series of unfortunate and fortunate events, result in the demise of Bishop and his street credit or ‘juice’. In the final scene of the movie, a nameless character confronts Q and says “Yo, you got the juice now, man.” Tim prided himself on the amount of likes and comments he’d obtained on his social network. Although Tim did not acknowledge the term ‘juice’ as being derived from the movie, the inherent connotation is present. As ‘slang’ terms become used and reused over the years, present users may not be aware of the

word's origin, as appears to be the case with Tim. Nonetheless, the meaning has remained the same. Tim's Instagram profile was shared early as Figure 7, showing over 1,000 followers. He took a stance in creating and maintaining an online social network that had 'juice'; followers, likes, and comments.

Other participants in the study took a stance in their profile representation as well, however they were more modest. Emmanuel explained that he preferred a private page, where he rarely posted, due to unwarranted opinions of others (Interview, 10/29/15). Damon stated he didn't have a preference as far his profile being private and did not post much on his profile. (Interview, 10/29/15). Donna and Lisa declined to share their actual profiles, yet admitted to viewing more often than they posted (Interview, 7/28/15). All participants took a stance through the representation of self on their profiles. Tim was more concerned with the attention from other users, whereas the other participants were trying to avoid the attention of other users. Hence, taking a stance became personal as users created their online selves through multimodal literacy practices.

Adolescents chose right from wrong as they created their online profiles and engaged with content across other profiles. In creating a personal profile a user needed to ensure that he or she presented in a way that would elicit the desired attention. For example, Tim, the aspiring rapper interested in women online, created a profile that could be connected to his rap persona and that

expressed his interest in women, as seen in his profile. This was the ‘right’ presentation of self for Tim. Money, followers, and women are potentially of interest and therefore the ‘right’ presentation for an adolescent like Tim. However, other participants in this study did not promote themselves or their profiles in such a way. In fact, they rarely shared information about themselves or content. This type of participant, like Emmanuel and Damon, held to a belief of right versus wrong, abstained from presenting themselves, yet took a stance against or for what others posted. In doing so, they inadvertently presented themselves based on what they deemed right or wrong.

Participants had varying perspectives on appropriate and inappropriate posts within online social networks. Some participants were concerned about what was posted online as well as how it was perceived by viewers. Alex explained that he would peruse the “business” of another user “if they post it” (Interview, 7/28/15). Hence, if something is posted online is public and free for viewing, right or wrong. Tim also did not appear to be concerned about ‘right or wrong’ posts. His Instagram profile page included nudity and profanity, which by most standards would be considered ‘wrong’. On the contrary, Emmanuel and Damon typically based their determination of right or wrong on whether or not the content would offend someone or “hurt” someone’s feelings (Interview, 11/12/15). Although determination of right and wrong varied across participants,

individual justifications were influenced by the purpose with which they engaged in their online social networks.

Considering the purpose with which participants believed online social networks were created allowed for further exploration into the literacy practice of taking a stance. Emmanuel and Damon explained the purpose of some online social networks as it related to taking a stance.

Emmanuel:

Sometimes stupid – sometimes you know.

Damon:

Persuasive.

Emmanuel:

Yeah.

Researcher:

Tell me what you mean by stupid?

Emmanuel:

Some people might post a stupid... like somethin' dumb and it just irritates me.

Researcher:

So what is persuasive about it?

Damon:

They try, well, most of the time they try, to get you to do weird things and send you pictures, and will tell you to send them pictures.

Researcher:

Do you ever get persuaded by anything that you see?

Damon:

No.

Researcher:

It never works?

Emmanuel and Damon:

Nah. (Interview, 10/28/15).

Although the boys viewed online social networks as persuasive, they took a stance against the powers of persuasion. An Internet term, known as “catfishin” involves a person using their powers of persuasion through a false online social network profile. The “catfish” essentially uses fake pictures and biographical

details to trick someone else into an online relationship. The concept of “catfishin” was also brought up, to which Emmanuel explained it as “Like somebody is on social media and they claim to be that person and have fake pictures of that person” (Interview, 11/12/15). Both boys claimed it was ‘stupid’ and admitted that it never worked on them or anyone they knew (Interview, 11/12/15). Taking a stance coincided with adolescents’ consumption of media on their online social networks. Users were presented with opportunities that required them to take a stance, in some cases in order to proceed. Information gathering was most closely linked to taking a stance. A desire to find unseen video footage or information surrounding current events appeared to affiliate participants with a stance. Particularly a mistrust for the government and the inability of media outlets to portray a ‘full’ story. These perspectives will be developed later in this section. Participants took particular interest in events that were relevant to their community. Therefore, relevance and personal interest were driving factors in taking an evaluative stance. In one interview, Emmanuel explained events that were relevant and of personal interest.

Emmanuel:

Well, right now, the Baltimore riots is still kinda huge. People still talk about it a lot.

Research:

So what makes something huge?

Emmanuel:

Like if it happened and it was like a big scene about it and definitely if it was on the news and everybody knew about it. (Interview, 11/24/15).

In the spring of 2015, Baltimore city communities were thrust into riots due to the death of an African American young man named Freddie Gray while he was in police custody. Youth were a large part of the riots that spread throughout the city for almost a full 24 hours. This type of current event was definitely a huge event in the community of participants in this study. Taking a stance appears here as a literacy practice because participants combined skills and experiences to determine ‘what’ to do next. Emmanuel explained what he would do.

Emmanuel:

Like stories, I can also use social networks to see unseen videos that they didn’t show on the news or something.

Researcher:

Like what?

Emmanuel:

Like during the riots like I could get on Instagram, get on any type of teen page, and I know they part of the riots and just see unseen footage of it. (Interview, 11/24/15).

Emmanuel shared the followed post that is indicative of how taking a stance might be represented in the multimodal setting of online social networks.



Figure 14. A meme posted in Emmanuel’s Instagram news feed representing a stance.

The post in Figure 14 combines what might be considered important or huge events according to Emmanuel. It represents a meme in which words and pictures are combined in parody to make a point. The poster of this meme insinuates this has to do with the recent riots. The top picture shows riot behavior

in Baltimore from the spring. During this time the terrorist group, Isis, had released a list of cities in the United States, they planned to attack, of which Baltimore was not included. Emmanuel 'liked' this post as it was in line with his stance on the riots and how online social networks offered opportunities to see the unseen footage.

Since teens were believed to be riot instigators, Emmanuel knew that if he went to one of their online social networks he would see footage. He also took a stance in knowing the unseen footage could be seen there and not on a typical news outlet. In some ways, Emmanuel was taking a stance towards powers beyond his control. Alex and Damon shared similar perspectives on taking a stance as it related to powers such as the government.

Alex:

Just looking at different videos to show me something about like how most people be tryin' to say how like the government be doin' things.

Researcher:

What kind of things about the government?

Alex:

Like how they was talkin' bout the drones, mosquito drones, and they got lil' microphones or something inside them. (Interview, 7/28/15).

Alex was not the only participant to mention the government. Damon had similar speculation about the government and their involvement in citizens' lives.

Damon:

I think they use tomcat to spy on you

Researcher:

Who?

Damon:

Talking Tom, the little cat. They, the little government agents, is probably through his little eyes.

Researcher:

What makes you think that?

Damon:

Because he just looks at you the whole time, and once you say something he copies you. (Interview, 11/5/15).

Talking Tom is an application that involves an animated 3D cat. Users can record Talking Tom mimicking what they say, then upload it to their social media accounts. Although Talking Tom is not an online social network, the features can be shared across various online social networks. Both Damon and Alex took a

stance, seemingly against the government, through their experiences and reactions while navigating their online social networks. In this case it appears that participants felt this type of ‘government’ interference was not ‘right’. Hence, taking a stance becomes determining ‘right’ from ‘wrong’.

Emmanuel had seemingly clear ideas about right from wrong, when taking a stance. **Emmanuel:**

Some wrong things is like, oh, if you stole somebody stuff and you put it on Instagram like ‘ha ha ha’ I stole your stuff. And tag them in the post, that’s basically like doing the stupidest most wrong thing.

Researcher:

Ok, and you said like things from school?

Emmanuel:

Yeah, like fights. What if that person don’t wanna be on Instagram or whatever and the person might get mad and try to fight you. (Interview, 10/29/15).

Despite the fact that Emmanuel “watched some fights” he still took a stance against the content being posted in an online social network (Interview, 11/4/15). The conflict between interests and right from wrong existed for Damon as well.



Figure 15. A popular meme shared across many online social networks (including Damon's).

Figure 15 inspired the conversation below. It highlights another occurrence where adolescents felt conflicted. Here they found something 'funny' but thought it might be the 'wrong' thing to post online.

Damon:

I have something, but you might get offended.

Researcher:

I might get offended?

Damon:

Yeah. (To Emmanuel) Do you think she'll get offended by this?

(Sends meme of African baby with 'joke' about women's breasts)

Researcher:

Whose Instagram is this from?

Emmanuel:

It's from my page.

Researcher:

Is this an example of the right thing or the wrong thing?

Damon:

The wrong thing.

Researcher:

So even if you think it's funny, you still think it's the wrong thing?

Damon:

Yeah, because it might offend certain women. (Interview, 10/29/15).

It appeared that on occasion, adolescents straddle the world of right and wrong. Although they may be entertained by certain things that may be inappropriate, they still hold true to the idea that it may be wrong. Both Damon and Emmanuel explained that they “try not to post things might offend” someone else. (Interview, 11/12/15). This type of conflicted existed for Alex as well. He explained that he didn't like people in his “business” but would look at other people's “business if they post it” (Interview, 7/28/15). Lisa and Donna spoke of

liking and watching videos that were ‘cute’ or ‘funny’. Although this does not reference a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ stance, there is an element of evaluation. For example, the girls’ decision to view more than post represented this idea. Donna stated that she engaged in online social networks so that she “could be nosey” (Interview, 7/28/15). Her stance existed in that she viewed the posts of others as more interesting than creating posts of her own. Therefore, ‘what’ taking a stance looked like could be described as a constant process of evaluating. ‘How’ participants arrived at his or her stance due to constant evaluation will be discussed next.

Determining the “truth”: Exaggerations and analysis of online selves.

Taking a stance arose as a literacy practice due to how users expressed their ‘juice’ and how users determined the ‘truth’. Both factors relied on the skill of evaluating. An online social network user first evaluates what he or she wishes to portray while taking into consideration what their peers may want to see. In some cases, they may weigh a case of right vs. wrong before posting. Simultaneously, a user might evaluate another user’s post based on their own definition of right vs. wrong or the believability of a given post.

How does a user actually ‘show’ off on their online social network?

Emmanuel and Damon coined the term ‘glorifying’ to explain how users show off, exaggerate, or promote the wrong things on their online social network.

Emmanuel:

I think some people on social media is glorifying the wrong things. Like it's a lot of drug dealers that's trying to rap and the kids, I don't know why they look up to them. They might post a picture on Instagram with a lot of money.

Damon:

They probably screenshot it off the Internet. They just want to act tough or show online.

Researcher:

You guys said people were 'glorifying' things what did you mean by that?

Emmanuel:

Like glorifying the wrong things, like drugs, fightin', guns (Interview, 10/29/15).

The examples of glorifying Emmanuel and Damon showed how users promoted negativity through violence and drugs. Damon explained that users might screenshot money, guns or drugs, glorifying their negativity. The user who posts such things evaluates them as a means to present a particular version of self. A viewer must evaluate the picture, determining if the presentation is right, wrong, or true. For participants in this study, determining the realness or validity

of posts appeared to be based on technology features and actually knowing a person in an offline setting.

Researcher:

How do you determine if someone's posts are real or fake?

Emmanuel:

Sometimes they don't crop out their pictures. Something that they need to do, because most of them don't crop out their picture, and try to take most of it out. You can see they looked up a Google slash whatever and stuff, like really, that's just making you look bad.

Researcher:

So the place where they got the picture from is still part of the picture?

Emmanuel:

Mmhm and if you see the person in real life that person might not really have it. (Interview, 11/12/15).

A user's inability to correctly crop a screenshot would foil any attempt to 'glorify' their lives into someone worthy of online social network 'juice'. Additionally, if the users actually know one another outside of the world of online social networking, how they 'glorify' their world becomes easily falsified. Hence,

determining the ‘truth’ became a critical piece of taking a stance. The skill of evaluating allowed users to determine right or wrong, and now existed as the truth was sought.

Falsified screenshots were one way to present an untruth. In these cases, the fighting, drugs, or money clearly did not belong to the person who posted. However, in some cases of ‘glorifying’ the wrong things a person uses themselves to act outside of their character. Emmanuel and Damon explained that on several occasions adolescent girls and boys could be seen using themselves to glorify the wrong things.

Damon:

Mostly when girls glorify they do three things: glorify them twerking, dancing, and or in nude clothing.

Emmanuel:

Girls – that’s twerking (dancing in a provocative manner) and glorifying themselves like that – I just look at them like it’s something wrong with them. Then again a part of me likes and a part of me don’t because that’s making them look like...

Damon:

THOTS (an acronym for “That Hoe Over There” describing a person with numerous sexual partners), or strippers, prostitutes...

Researcher:

So the glorifying thing is that more of a girl thing or a guy thing?

Emmanuel and Damon:

Both.

Damon:

Most girls glorify themselves doing things that they wouldn't be doing in front of anybody.

Researcher:

So the girls are more so doing that, but what are the guys glorifying besides their body parts?

Damon:

Mostly they be talking 'bout how big their thing is. Most boys when they say their thing's big, they go on the Internet, look up another man's private and screenshot and then post it and be like look how big my thing is.

Emmanuel:

Yeah, like really like what he said, and also things like how much money they got or how much clout they got. (Interview, 11/12/15).

Emmanuel and Damon were conflicted again. They thought the girls' glorification of their bodies was wrong, but often looked anyway. This was not surprising since earlier, both Tim and Alex explained they often looked at "females" on their online social networks (Interview, 7/28/15). Unlike the boys, Lisa and Donna did not express romantic interest through online social network navigation during the sessions. Additionally, their attendance was scarce and did not allow for interview opportunities to compare to boys' claims. However, these findings revealed potential gender differences in what, how, and why literacy practices occurred in online social networks for African American adolescents.

The idea of gender surfaced within this literacy practice. Online social networks provide opportunities for adolescents to present themselves, interact with peers, receive immediate feedback and social rewards (Doster, 2013). Although neither boys nor girls were frequent creators of online content, their actions reinforced gender findings from previous researchers. A 2011 study of high school aged Facebook users revealed that both genders used online social networks to maintain relationships, however boys were more likely to create 'new' relationships online (Mazman, 2011). Participants in this study reported

communicating with friends of both genders. In a 2006 PEW study, adolescent boys older than 15-17 were twice as likely as girls to report they used their online social networks to ‘flirt’ with someone of romantic interest (Lenhart and Madden, 2006). Tim, the oldest in the study, exhibited the closest resemblance of such behavior. However, the younger boys did not report actively being interested in girls, yet Emmanuel and Damon, referenced ‘liking’ and ‘not liking’ girls’ provocative behavior. As Emmanuel and Damon evaluated posts, the consensus on how girls and boys ‘glorified’ themselves was more wrong than right. Again, Damon brought up how using screenshots from the Internet allowed users to ‘glorify’ their ‘parts’ in the manner they saw fit. The evaluation of ‘juice’ whether one’s own or another user lead to the factor of ‘truth’.

Online social network users, like Damon, Emmanuel, Tim, and Alex took a stance in order to determine the ‘truth’. Initially this required evaluating whether or not the post as real or false. A user might then consider whether or not the post seems plausible given their personal offline relationship with the user who posted it. As the findings have revealed, the Internet and online social networks alone do not solely stand on the “truth”. Therefore, determining truth in order to take a stance begins to utilize a combination of what is seen and what the users inherently know to be personally true.

The use of 'real life' knowledge in order to evaluate to take a stance was best expressed through a series of posts from Emmanuel.



Figure 16. A post from Emmanuel's Instagram news feed that prompted evaluation.



Figure 17. A post from Emmanuel's Instagram news feed that was positively evaluated.

In reference to Figures 16 and 17, Emmanuel explained why he 'liked' each post, exhibiting that he took a stance.

Emmanuel:

Well, this one (Figure 16) is like someone just posted on here. It is true and it's a true fact. It's certainly a person talking about when people coming to him with I heard about you things and that is true so.

Emmanuel:

It's true. (In reference to Figure 17) The picture is talkin' 'bout something that the person that learnt is if a person did once they'll do it again and that is a true fact, because for example say if you steal something you might steal again, you don't know.

Researcher:

So is that personal to you, because it's happened to you before?

Emmanuel:

Yeah. (Interview, 11/19/15).

Emmanuel claimed that both posts were 'true' because they happened to him before. His Truth was based on real life experiences. Therefore, he evaluated the post, resulting in a 'like' based on the fact that he'd experienced something similar before. 'How' the multimodal literacy practice occurred for adolescents in this study was impacted by 'why' they chose to take a stance. Participants like Alex felt that if someone posted their 'business' then it was fair to judge. However, Emmanuel and Damon, were more critical of what was being posted and whether or not it should be posted.

Reasoning rules: Choosing to take a stand. Participation in the multimodal literacy practice of taking a stance stands on adolescent reasoning. Adolescents' decision to take a stance and how they determined 'right' from 'wrong' was based on an evaluation. Emmanuel and Damon often expressed their evaluation of items in their online social network and how they decided if something was 'right' or 'wrong'. First, it appeared that the boys subscribed to the notion of a 'Golden Rule' where one should do something they don't want done to them.

Emmanuel:

Some people don't necessarily have to care. But again, they should care because it might hurt them but they might act like it don't. But it really do and that person might know something about the person that's bullying them and just don't wanna say it because they know it's gonna really hurt that person. That person might want retaliation that person might not know how you feel or how much that person been hurtin' you.

Researcher:

So when you post on social networks do you care about offending people and do you try not to post things that might offend someone?

Damon:

Try not to...

Researcher:

And so why is that?

Emmanuel:

Because I know if someone post something about me I'm not gon' like it so why do it to someone else? (Interview, 11/12/15).

Damon and Emmanuel used their own feelings as ground to stand in their evaluation. They also were empathetic to how someone else might feel, therefore they chose to stand against making people feel bad because of an online social networking 'Golden Rule'. Emmanuel explained that the better thing to do would be to "Post good things to make that person feel better about themselves" (Interview, 10/29/15). Offending someone or hurting their feelings explained why someone should post the 'right' things in their online social network. All participants built or maintained relationships through their online social networks. Relationships have the potential to increase one's ability to empathize (Wagaman, 2011). Hence, participants experiences building relationships both on and offline could have reared them empathetic towards others, thus following the 'Golden Rule'.

Emmanuel and Damon were clear about why someone should post the right things, even though they were aware that this was not necessarily the norm for many online social networks. Therefore, it was important to determine why other users might decide to post the wrong things. The need for attention was perhaps the leading reason. Alex, Tim, and Quincy explained earlier that they focused on things that "grabbed their attention" (Interview, 7/28/15). Emmanuel provided a scenario where a user's attention would be grabbed by something wrong or negative.

Researcher:

Would you say people into bad things?

Emmanuel:

Bad things. Into violence, negative things a bunch a lot of negative things.

Researcher:

Than positive things?

Emmanuel:

Yeah. Like. say if someone post something like. I just got this new job interview, and it's a picture under it. And somebody got a gun and they smoking or something and they just gon' like that picture instead of liking the other picture. They gon' pay no attention to the other picture, they just gon', they think the negative stuff is actually popular but it makes them look bad. (Interview, 11/12/15).

Popularity appeared to be a driving force throughout the study.

Participants revealed they joined social networks because they were popular.

Emmanuel shared the idea of 'follow train' in which "That person follow that person and that person follows that person, and keep it going then that person gets a like. They get a thousand something followers on their page, then act like yeah,

this much people.”(Interview, 11/12/15). I questioned Emmanuel about this concept.

Researcher:

Why would someone want you or another person to like their pictures?

Emmanuel:

To make it seem like they’re popular and basically to rub it in someone’s face like ‘oh I got this much followers oh I got that much likes.’

Researcher:

Do you think that’s the purpose of online social networks?

Emmanuel:

No, some people use that as a purpose of online social networks but it’s not.

Researcher:

So why do you think they do that?

Emmanuel:

Really like how much money they got or how much clout they got. Yeah, I got this much followers and try to rub it in your face, but you really don't care. (Interview, 11/12/15).

Emmanuel and the others had shared that they used their online social networks to keep in contact with friends and family, for entertainment, and on occasion for information. However, participants also shared that they had many friends online and that their pages had 'juice' inferring their popularity, an underlying motive of an online social network. A balancing act of sorts, perhaps ensued as users attempted to maintain online friendships with friends and family, retain 'clout' or 'juice' all while avoiding negativity. This called into questions when taking a stance against something negative became the best choice.

Emmanuel and Damon were the only participants to articulate this thought process. During one interview Emmanuel explained that he'd once posted a picture of himself that his friends made fun of, slightly bothering him, but not as much as when other's made fun of a picture of his younger sister (Interview, 11/10/15). This real-life experience influenced how he created and consumed content. It made him empathetic to negative posts about others and apprehensive about posting things about himself.

Damon described a time on gaming site when someone used foul language about his mother so he no longer 'talked' to people he didn't know online

(Interview, 10/29/15). Damon also explained that younger kids, like his brother, might see ‘negative’ things online which is “setting a bad example” (Interview, 10/29/15). In this case, evaluation of right and wrong was based on the level of appropriateness for a younger person. Hence, if negative things were popular it became a plausible reason why some online social network users post seemingly ‘negative’ or ‘bad’ things. Whether a creator or consumer of online social network content, a user takes a stance based on reason. Some users evaluate wrong vs. right and either choose to follow the crowd of negativity or step into the seemingly solo world of positivity.

Perhaps easier said than done, Emmanuel faced this conflict. He expressed on several occasions how an online social network could be used to promote positivity, but struggled with why he had not done so on any of his personal pages. During one session Damon and Emmanuel explained their frustration with school conditions.

Emmanuel:

Well, I think they should help out school a lot.

Damon:

Yeah, by giving them money.

Emmanuel:

It's a lot of schools that don't have that much money to pay for certain things

Damon:

Like better, well, more up to date textbooks.

Emmanuel:

Yeah, textbooks, desks. They should give the school school supplies.

Damon:

Yeah, and computers, we should get tablets for our school. So yeah, so every child can study for their homework and stuff.

Researcher:

Would you ever put anything like that on your social media?

Emmanuel:

Yeah, I'd say it on my social network.

Researcher:

And what would be your purpose for saying it?

Emmanuel:

Because someone might see it and be like “yeah, he got a point.” And probably one of the Baltimore City school companies will pick that up and probably do decide to give schools more supplies.

Researcher:

Do you think that those kinds of things are possible?

Emmanuel:

Yeah

Researcher:

Have you ever tried to put something out there to see if other people saw it?

Emmanuel:

No, not really.

Researcher:

Is it something you would try?

Emmanuel:

Mm hmm (Interview, 11/5/15).

The boys explained their disappointment in their educational supplies and facilities. They recognized an online social network as a platform for putting the information online for others to read. However, they had yet to attempt to post positive messages to get what they wanted and needed. They had a justifiable reason for taking a stance, as the educational environment directly impacted them. But the stance for a better education did not translate into something to be posted on their online social network. Nonetheless, ‘why’ participants took a stance was most accurately based on what was right or wrong and the desire to be popular. Stances existed in the forms of right vs. wrong for themselves, content they viewed, and the greater good of their community. Emmanuel and Damon did not post a great deal of content, but agreed that negative posts or ‘bad’ things shouldn’t be a part of online social networks. Whereas, participants like Alex viewed ‘bad’ posts such as fights as entertaining. For some the ‘Golden Rule’ applied to everyone, both creators and consumers of content, yet for others it did not. Taking a stance remained individualized in this regard, yet could be generally framed within the context of right vs wrong.

The multimodal literacy practices of this group of African American adolescents were based on the skills and experiences as they navigated various online social networks. The practices of communicating, entertaining and gathering information are likely to be found among adolescents of different races. However, the skills and experiences connected to taking a stance may be unique

to African American adolescents. In this study, the community uprisings and hashtags such as #ThanksgivingWithBlackFamilies or #BlackLivesMatter were specifically unique to African American adolescents and may not be common among other races. Thus, it may not be the practices that are unique to particular races, rather it may be the type of content created and consumed. Participants revealed their practices through words and screenshots. In order to truly understand practices from their perspective, it was necessary to capture their voices. Although, participants answered questions and expressed their thinking using words I initiated, I was sure to define terms according to their personal meanings.

Comparisons to Traditional Literacy

“If you can’t read, write, or hear it’s no point to having a social network”. ~ Tim

Tim made a valid and poignant point early on in the study. He explains that online social networks rely on the basic literacy skills that already exist. The multimodal literacy practices of communicating, information gathering, entertaining and taking a stance, perhaps evolved from traditional forms of literacy. For example, the act of communicating required users to read and respond in similar fashion to how one might read and produce a written response about heroine Katniss in *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008) in an eighth grade language arts class. Through information gathering a reader might synthesize

hyperlinks, hashtags, and memes in order to obtain pertinent details as if compiling a traditional research report. The practice of entertaining embodies a great deal of multimodal aspects in that a person is involved in pictures, videos, and games. However, traditional forms of literacy possess entertaining characteristics. Readers today engage in graphic novels and literary texts in digital formats, perhaps adding an entertaining characteristic. Finally, taking a stance within a multimodal setting becomes closely linked to traditional forms of literacy. The evaluation process involved in taking a stance relies on traditional forms of comprehension, text connections, and synthesis of background and new found knowledge. Readers in both on and offline worlds evaluate the text they are reading in order to continue or discontinue reading. Hence, terminology used to define literacy in traditional and non-traditional settings appear to bleed together as each realm simultaneously impacts the other. It is not that skills and experiences do not transfer is that they are transferred in a manner that may be hidden from outsiders.

Participants used traditional terms, such as reading and writing, independently of my questioning. However, they were eventually questioned about how reading and writing may have played a role in their navigation of an online social network. Like Tim, Lisa and Alex explained that without reading and writing were important to online social networking, but added that the skills were used in an effort to avoid appearing “dumb” (Interview, 7/28/15).

Additionally, although reading was most frequently named by participants, there were mentions of writing, visualization, and the use of math. In this section I will discuss reading, writing, visualizing, and computing as traditional practices that compared to the multimodal practices within the online social network.

Reading Not Writing

Participants reported using their online social networks for communicative purposes. However, they did not report nor was there excessive amounts of data expressing their communication through commenting or ‘writing’. Thus, reading became a more prominent traditional literacy comparison. In the traditional settings, such as classrooms, reading is often associated with comprehension and response. During this study, participants alluded to the practice of reading for comprehension. Alex reported the need to use screenshots in order to “recall” information for later use (Interview, 8/7/15). His comment implies that he would ‘read’ content on his online social network and determine whether or not he may need it later. Hence, some level of comprehension was required. A screenshot becomes a multimodal skill resembling that of literacy skills found in traditional settings. Someone might screenshot information in the same fashion they might highlight or Post-it note pages or paragraphs in text.

Comprehension through reading was most commonly seen through the multimodal literacy practices of gathering information and entertaining. Damon

and Emmanuel often shared experiences on their online social networks that appeared to involve traditional literacy practices. Emmanuel explained that on Facebook, “It’s a story. It got long paragraphs, things like that, explaining what happened, and details.” (Interview, 11/5/15). Emmanuel’s comparison connected to his definition of literacy at school. He stated that literacy at school involved “reading books and writing correct paragraphs” (Interview, 11/5/15). The connection here to reading is quite literal, yet evident in content found on participants online social networks.



Figure 18. A representation of traditional literacy from Instagram.

Figure 18 is an example of a “meme”, a mode of media that is spread from person to person usually making fun of someone or something. However, this meme uses a dictionary format, thus combining the multimodal and traditional world. Emmanuel confirmed how he read and comprehended the meme.

Researcher:

Did you know the definition before or how did you learn it?

Emmanuel:

Really, it's from social media.

Researcher:

How did you determine what that means?

Emmanuel:

Well the definition and the girl from the picture... yeah. Everything's good except her face. (Interview, 11/24/15).

Although Emmanuel does not use the word “meme” to describe his post, he stated that it is from social media. I could then infer that it had been a form media that was being passed around in a humorous way. He made sense of the meme by reading and comprehending the definition. According to Emmanuel the picture within the post, supported the definition written above it. The format resembled that of what you would see in a print or online dictionary, both forms of traditional literacy.

Making Meaning: Potential for Context Clues

Determining the meanings of words became a topic of conversation on occasion. The multimodal literacy practice of gathering information that involved

the skill of searching became a part of defining and meaning-making, in a tradition-like format. Participants reported that they often searched for information, including friends' screennames or current events. Knowing what words mean became an important skill. Emmanuel once explained that "If you don't know what a word mean, you just be like kinda looking at the picture trying to get through your mind what it mean" (Interview, 11/19/15). Thus a viewer of meme cannot simply rely on the picture or text alone. A holistic approach to comprehending or making meaning appeared to exist in an online social network setting, in the way a reader of a book draws upon many textual elements to comprehend. Emmanuel explained this type of situation.

Researcher:

So a lot of things are pictures and words, do the pictures help you understand?

Emmanuel:

Yeah.

Researcher:

Do the words help?

Emmanuel:

Mm hmm. I think sometimes the picture, it's like sometimes, yeah, the picture that is more helpful. Because it'll show the person, well, sometimes in certain circumstances it's the words and then sometimes it's the pictures. (Interview, 11/24/15).

Emmanuel struggled with determining the feature that most likely contributed to his comprehension. It is perhaps that the combination of features allows for a reader or in the case of an online social network, a 'viewer' to comprehend. Similarly, text in the traditional literacy forms might include many features that aid in a reader's comprehension. Although most of the online social network content shared by adolescents was in multimedia format such as memes, videos, and games, on occasion participants encountered content that resembled both the structure and information of that in their traditional literacy settings.

Potent Posts and Paragraphs

Damon explained that people make "online books or write comments" as a form of literacy that is similar to that in a traditional setting (Interview, 11/5/15). Emmanuel echoed these sentiments by stating he "read" a post from Instagram that was part of a larger article (Interview, 11/10/15). The following screenshot represents the example he described.



Figure 19. An example of “traditional” reading from Emmanuel’s Instagram.

Information in Figure 19 was presented in an online newspaper article format. Although the post surfaced on an online social network, it embodied elements of traditional literacy. There is a heading and title followed by subtitle. A user could then click on a link that would take them to the full article on another website. Online social networks perhaps follow the ‘rules’ of traditional literacy. For example, many online social networks allow users to upload many characters, thus creating more of paragraph than a blurb. Content is often preceded by a title, similar to articles and books. While format and features from both and on and offline worlds appear to collide quite often, there exists an ‘unexpected’ chance for content to also overlap.

During an interview session, earlier in the study Emmanuel shared that his language arts class at school was reading the book *Getting Away with Murder: The True Story of Emmett Till* (Crowe, 2003) When asked how he thought things he saw online related to school in a later interview he immediately returned to the book.

Researcher:

Do the things you read in school relate to things you post or view in you online social network?

Emmanuel:

View well yeah, because we reading this book called *Getting Away With Murder* with the Emmett Till case and with Chicago and how it went in the south. I just happened to see it on Instagram when I was scrolling down like ‘How did they know about it?’

Researcher:

So it connected to Emmett Till, what was that about, do you remember?

Emmanuel:

Yes with men kidnapping Emmitt Till, killing him and putting him the lake, and gettin’ away with it. Well, it was something similar because the person did get killed, I don’t know if they got away with it...

Researcher:

So it was a different person, but a similar story?

Emmanuel:

Yeah. (Interview, 11/19/15).

The story of Emmett Till had become newly familiar to Emmanuel and seemed to intrigue him as he brought it up on multiple occasions. His reference of ‘Chicago’ refers to the case of Tyshawn Lee, a nine year boy murdered in a gang related attack in the city of Chicago. In the case, Lee’s killers were unknown. They essentially got away with murder as did Emmett Till murderers. Emmanuel appears to be making a connection to the text on several levels. Making text connections is often comprehension strategy used traditional settings. Text connections allow readers to use background knowledge to comprehend new information (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Elaborating and connecting to text allows readers to make more coherent mental representations (Wolfe & Goldman, 2005). Participants in this study often used background knowledge and new information to navigate and participate in their online social networks. Emmanuel makes a ‘text’ to text connection as he compares the book he was reading at school to content found within his online social network. Unfortunately, violence among young African American males was not just a book to read, but was a part of the Emmanuel and his peers’ communities that essentially existed in the virtual

world. Hence there are implications for this finding that will be discussed in the following chapter.

These findings suggest that traditional forms of literacy practices may exist within the multimodal literacy practices of African Americans as they navigate online social networks. The skills and experiences within practices on and offline resemble one another once unpacked to the core. It is the nuances of multimodal experiences through reading, writing, viewing, speaking, and listening that transform traditional practices. This transformation brings shifts in what constitutes 'literacy'. Most participants remained loyal to traditional terms and descriptions when explaining their online social networks. However, Damon explained that he "mostly read game worlds" (Interview, 11/5/15). Minecraft, a favorite of Damon, was not necessarily flooded with text. Damon further explained his idea of reading by stating that a player had to "visualize" what they were going to build (Interview, 10/29/15) and needed math so that they could "count" the players online (Interview, 11/4/15). Emmanuel added to the seemingly simplistic idea of math in an online social network by confirming that math was necessary so that you could "count the time, and predict the time that the game would be over so that you can get your points up" (Interview, 11/12/15). The idea of the need for other skills related to literacy but not directly connected shows the infinite possibilities of skills within the navigation of an online social network.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

African American adolescents and their literacy practices are often studied through a narrow lens that focuses on deficits. For example, their lack of academic achievement in comparison to white counterparts, their high propensity to be referred for discipline issues, and their overrepresentation in special education. Instead of examining what this group of people lacks, I sought to determine what they possessed. My approach consisted of capabilities instead of inabilities. Through many modes, I unveiled the multimodal literacy practices of African American adolescents at a community center.

My guiding research questions were: 1) What are the multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) of African American adolescents ages 13-17 engaging in online social networks at a community center? 1a) Which multimodal literacy practices may compare to traditional forms of literacy practices? 1b) How are multimodal literacy practices in online social networks informed by a site's technology features? 2) Why do African American adolescents age 13-17 engage in multimodal literacy practices (experiences and skills) in online social networks at a community center? 2a) How do African American adolescents define multimodal, literacy, and online social networks? and 2b) How do African American adolescents define engagement in online social networks?

There exists a timeliness to the findings revealed in my study thus solidifying its relevance. Many online social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter claim to have age requirements, however ‘underage’ users create profile pages, much like participants in this study. According to 2015 PEW Research Center data, 56% of teens ages 13 to 17 engage in online social networks several times a day, with 71% choosing Facebook (Lenhart, 2015). Additionally, boys (45%) are more likely than girls (36%) to engage in Facebook, while girls (23%) are more likely than boys (17%) to engage in Instagram (Lenhart, 2015). Findings in my study support these notions. Multimodal studies exist surrounding online social networks yet tend to focus on ‘legal’ participants, identity development void of the presence of literacy. Furthermore, research involving African American adolescents often propose interventions or explanations for low achievement. My study proposes neither. Instead, I confirm notions of African American adolescent participation in online social networks while revealing the presence of multimodal literacy skills. This study creates depth and breadth to studies involving adolescents, online social networks, and literacy.

As a researcher, I consistently uncovered traditional literacy practices involving African American adolescents yet wondered about non-traditional practices. As an online social network user, I was familiar with the websites and its features. As a classroom teacher, I had experience teaching this particular

group and the ‘pleasure’ of knowing their affinity for online social networks, as many of my students went so far as to request my online social network friendship. I became interested in the potential literacy practices, in a non-traditional setting, such as online social networks, that might uncover skills and experiences that exist as assets instead of the all too often reported deficits. The findings of this study revealed what might result when we expand what is considered to be literacy. Groups of people, specifically African American adolescents, previously believed to be lacking literacy skills, in fact possess unique skills and experiences that allow them to engage in literacy practices. Hence, it is possible that those who appear to be deficient in literacy are in fact proficient in some literacy skills within the setting of an online social network.

Four multimodal literacy practice emerged. Communicating existed as a literacy practice as participants texted and messaged their way through their online social networks. The literacy practice of gathering information required users to search and observe in order gain more knowledge or details on a particular topic. Entertaining was obtained by watching videos or playing games. Finally, participants took a stance by evaluating right from wrong using personal experience and analysis of content presented. Communicating as a multimodal literacy practice was the most consistently observed and reported practice. Additionally, the other practices appeared to rely on the skills and experiences within communicating. Taking a stance was not the most common across

participants, however, it revealed an unexpected unique set of skills and experiences. In this chapter, I will first summarize my findings. Next, I will explore the implication for research, educational practices, and policies, of multimodal literacy practices in online social networks and the potential for the collision of African American adolescents on and offline literacy worlds. Then I will describe limitations of the study. Finally, I will explain how the findings of the study may inform future research.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal the multimodal literacy practices of participants and the potential connection to traditional forms of literacy. What, how, and why participants engaged in multimodal literacy practices while navigating online social networks framed four practices influenced by traditional literacy terminology and skills.

Communicating, Information Gathering, Entertaining and Taking a Stance: Multimodal Literacy Practices

Communicating first emerged as a literacy practice as participants explained their purpose for engaging in a given online social network. Shapiro and Margolin (2014) cited staying in touch with friends as a highly ranked motivator for adolescent participation in online social networks. Similarly, participants in this study reported using their online social networks to

‘communicate’ with friends. Communication allowed for ‘information’ to be passed back and forth, whether it was an emoji or a perhaps a link to an article.

Information gathering as a multimodal literacy practice was common among all participants. Since they viewed more frequently than they posted, there existed a constant consumption of information. For example, the 2015 riots in Baltimore generated a great deal of media coverage, however, the youth population closely involved with the riots, took to social media by posting personal video footage. As the potential quest for knowledge ensued literacy practices continued to emerge in different ways. A fun and playful side of literacy practices in online social networks existed aside from communicating and gathering information that served to entertain users.

Entertaining involved the act of watching/viewing and playing. Through gaming online social networks users engaged in communicating and gathering information in a way that created an entertaining experience. The element of choice inspired by an evaluation transpired and the literacy practice of taking a stance began to emerge. This was based on interest, peer participation and technology features within each site. Therefore, it became evident that participants constantly evaluated themselves and others as they navigated their online social networks. Whether, liking a post, commenting, watching, messaging, or playing participants made choices based on some type of

evaluation, rendering a stance. Taking a stance was often based on the “Golden Rule” in which participants believed that people should not post content that they themselves would be offended or hurt by.

Repeated evaluations of right versus wrong created truth seekers in the participants. Knowledge of technology features allowed users to determine credibility of posts. As some participant presented ‘true’ representations of themselves, there existed online social network users that presented exaggerated selves and content. Those equipped with the skill of evaluation in order to take a stance, were able to examine a given photograph or post online. Upon evaluation a person might find that a user may have ineffectively cropped a picture, revealing the true source of the post. Knowledge of one’s offline persona could be compared to an online persona in order to take a stance in determining the truthfulness of a post.

All four multimodal literacy practices within this study told of a story of the navigation of African American adolescents within online social networks. Their literacy lives were exposed through communicating, entertaining, gathering information, and taking a stance. Reading, writing, watching, playing, and evaluating were the skills needed in order to experience events within a multitude of online social networks. As participants shared their experiences, posts, and profiles a peek into the uniqueness of experiences of adolescents as they engaged

in online social networks. The findings of the study have implications for educational practices, policies, and future research. In the next section I will discuss the impact my work has on the field.

Educational Implications for Practice and Policy

This research study adds to existing research on adolescent literacy yet creates a new space for multimodal literacy practices involving African American adolescents who navigate online social networks. The evolution of technology plays a role in the development and use of online social networks. Participants in online social networks elicit literacy skills that can be seen in traditional settings. Therefore, implications for how literacy happens for people in online social networks exist. Most directly related to this is how literacy is defined, taught and learned in multiple settings.

Reading, Writing, Relationships, and Riots: Literacy Brought to Life

Defining literacy is a challenge. Adding a multimodal layer to definitions further muddles the already murky water of literacy definitions. However, within this study the ideas of reading and writing consistently surfaced as what constituted an act of reading, whether at school or within an online social network. Reading in online social networks took place when participants communicated, gathered information, were entertained, or attempted to take a stance. These occurrences force readers, researchers, teachers, and policy makers

to reexamine what has previously ‘counted’ as literacy. The literacy practices elicited by participants in this study were steeped in traditional forms yet embodied new and unique experiences and seemingly transformed skills. The findings of this study challenge preconceived notions of African American adolescents as deficient literacy learners. Instead, it reveals the literacy strengths this group possesses.

Define and redefine what constitutes literacy. Participants consistently referenced reading and writing as a part of their online social network skills and experience. However, the manner in which such skills and experiences appeared was not necessarily clearly visible and comparable to traditional forms. Thus, when looking for literacy in non-traditional settings it is important to consider what might not look like the norm. For example, Damon and Emmanuel received average grades in their reading language arts classes. Damon specifically claimed to dislike reading. However, both boys showed reading comprehension skills and an ability to express themselves in written form. Similar to reading comprehension and writing within a traditional setting, there were certain rules that needed to be followed. Lisa, Emmanuel and Damon expressed the need for correct “spelling” within their online social network. This differed in execution, but not in principle. Within an online social network ‘correct’ spelling could be seen through proper or well-known abbreviations, hashtags or emojis, much like the correct arrangement of consonants and vowels in a traditional literacy setting.

Hence it was revealed that literacy happened online. Thus to assume that adolescents don't read, write, or know how to 'talk', is false. Dispelling this myth allows adolescents to be represented as literate individuals. A literate individual can essentially communicate in meaningful ways, much like the participants in this study.

Comment to communicate. From a principle perspective, the main objective was to be able to communicate one's thinking, ideas, or emotions. This is true for both traditional (offline) and non-traditional (online) settings. In order to effectively communicate a participant must follow the setting's given rules. The fact that all participants in this study could effectively communicate with other users within their online social networks, showed potential masked in the confines of traditional literacy settings. As a result, online social networks became places where users essentially built and maintained relationships. Whether family, offline friends, or newly made friends, participants often massaged in order to keep in contact. The act of messaging inherently involved literacy. One had to follow the 'rules' of writing within online social network. Therefore, acts originally seen as just for fun or a cure for boredom were actually rooted in purpose and skill.

Effective communication between users was revealed as a strength through the presence of literacy skills. What and how they chose to communicate

were significant pieces of evidence that revealed further decision-making within their online social networks. The multimodal literacy practice of taking a stance embodied communication skills. For example, Tim, who claimed his profile page had the ‘juice’ or ‘social clout’ to use Emmanuel’s words, had effectively communicated his stance as a braggadocios male. He had many followers or friends and likes connected to his Instagram page. Given the presence of “reading and writing” in online social networks, as revealed in this study, it is possible to connect the acts of communicating and taking a stance to literacy skills. In order to effectively communicate or take a stance a user needed to be able to ‘read’ another users post or profile that may be littered with any variety of multimodalities. Additionally, users would then decide on how to respond whether it be a written comment with words or emojis, a like, or post directed to specific person. All of this supported the purpose with which participants used their online social networks: to communicate or interact.

To that end, online social networks are places where reading and writing takes on a purpose with the same fervor that they do in traditional classroom settings. It may be difficult to turn adolescents on to reading and writing, however, they are already turned on and tuned in to their online social networks, exercising the skills being taught at school. Being seen and taught as an efficient learner bears benefits not afforded when seen and taught from a deficient perspective. A belief in learners and their abilities allows prior knowledge and

strengths to be fostered, thus furthering growth. This recognition is critical to practice surrounding the literacy instruction of adolescents.

Standing your ground: Raised voices and riots. Created and consumed acts of communication again connected back to taking a stance based on an evaluation of online social network content. Taking a stance was not solely based on one's evaluation of self and the subsequent profile representation or the critique of another's presentation of self. Instead, this study revealed the multimodal literacy practice of taking a stance as a vehicle for adolescent voice and social change. The death of Freddie Gray under the watch of law enforcement incited the Baltimore riots of 2015, amidst the growing Black Lives Matter movement. Adolescents were caught physically and emotionally in the middle of the volatile situation. Participants in this study revealed that they sought unseen video footage about the riots through their online social networks. They expressed a sense of curiosity beyond what the media portrayed. Not only had participants evaluated the world outside of their online social network, but they believed there to be a greater wealth of knowledge serving their needs and perspectives within the online world. The voices and beliefs of the peers verified and supported their stance. Coincidentally, mainstream voices and beliefs dominate traditional forms of literacy within educational settings. African American adolescents could be at a disadvantage as they could be seen as deficient or lacking mainstream skills and experiences. However, participants of this study and their peers proved to possess complex literacy skills and experiences that allowed them to evaluate their world and take a stance. In this sense, online social networks give marginalized groups

of adolescents a voice. Listening to this voice reveals a wealth of knowledge and skills masked by traditional definitions of acceptable literacy skills and experiences. When both seen and heard an adolescent will feel validated. A sense of validation has the potential to inspire growth and prosperity. This is not a call to teach or practice the multimodal literacy skills that emerged through adolescent navigation of online social networks. Embedding such practices in traditional settings could potentially ruin the freedom and enjoyment for adolescents. If outside practices were suddenly turned into 'school-like' practices, adolescents may naturally begin to reject these skills and experiences, and begin to explore other avenues. Hence, I do not suggest a push to bring the two worlds together in a traditional setting. I do suggest that investing in the literacy lives of adolescents, through acceptance, recognition and validation, is beneficial to present and future educational practices and policies.

Teachers and their tools. Implications for policy exist in the dichotomy of teaching and learning. Such positions and labeling become interchangeable due to the findings of my study and previous research. Teachers and all other investors in education could be impacted. Policy is now focused on The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative that propose objectives to create college and career-ready learners. As technology and all of its many facets continue to evolve into permanent entities in all of our lives, it becomes impossible to ignore the impact on learning and teaching. As social networks continue to draw the attention of adolescent learners, the potential influence on how we all learn and teach surfaces. For example, I knew of Minecraft and similar online gaming sites. However, this study revealed how freedom, creativity, and reasoning potentially played a role in how and why a person might communicate, entertain themselves, gather information and take a stance. Each skill embodied some trace of traditional literacy, yet the literacy skills and experiences of adolescent online social network users are often thought of as fun or lacking structure or purpose. This study proved the opposite. From correct spelling and analytical evaluation of information, there existed strong purposeful skills. Therefore, when considering how to ensure that learners will be college and career ready, it is important to build on and enhance the learner's current abilities. Tailoring these skills to fit more than just online socialization could be potential next steps for CCSS.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each learner often gets lost in sweeping policies. Although the goal is to provide effective and efficient standards based instruction, learning and teaching becomes much more individualistic in reality. Additionally, the execution of policy differs between schools, districts, and states. An attempt to provide 'equality' through effective and efficient standards in education does not necessarily result in equity. Participants in this study attended public schools in an urban area. This district boasts with one of the highest teacher salaries in the state, in an attempt to attract 'effective' teachers. However, an effective teacher cannot exist in an inefficient environment. In this study, the boys complained about teachers not respecting them, old textbooks, and not enough supplies. There is the small possibility that this was just adolescent rebellion-I-hate-the-world talk, however, the boys' passion behind the comments led me to believe otherwise. Interestingly, participants took to the streets of their online social networks to voice their opinions or respond to any and everything. Yet, they did not use their platform of an online social network to advocate for themselves. This group of adolescents had a voice, a platform, and something to say, but had not previously thought to utilize their online social network to be a vehicle change in their subpar educational setting. Hence young learners would benefit from policy implementation of standards that would incorporate self-advocacy. Such policies would allow avid adolescent online social networkers to use their multimodal literacy skills. They would enhance their abilities to take a

stance by gathering information and communicating their needs. Through teaching and learning, policy and practice could better inform one another in ways that would positively impact the literacy lives of African American adolescent online social network like Tim, Alex, Emmanuel, Damon, Leah, Donna, Quincy, and Kevin.

Limitations

There are limitations within this study in a few areas. The participants are limited in size and diversity. Eight African American participants agreed to join the study. Of those eight only two were girls. Furthermore, six participants were engaged in the study for three weeks, whereas two remained for the duration. The small participant pool provided insight to the presence of multimodal literacy practices within online social networks. However, a larger number of participants would add greater variety in type, frequency, and content of online social network site activity. These findings would create a more in depth representation of literacy practices within online social networks. Multiple voices would personalize experiences and skills while enhancing understanding of what, how, and why African Americans engage in literacy practices within online social networks.

Another limitation of my study relates to the research site. The study began at temporary housing for Tomorrows and later moved to a renovated space.

As adolescents in the area transitioned from summer to fall, school and other responsibilities pulled them in many directions. As a result, the population became more transient than I would have liked. A more secure and consistent population would have been beneficial. This would create greater opportunities for follow up and expansion of research questions through interviews and focus groups. Additionally, the researcher participant relationship would have been strengthened such that all participants might feel comfortable and safe enough in the space to offer full disclosure of their online social networking habits. More of the content that was created by participants could have been revealed rather than just the content they consumed. Therefore, a consistent site, location with consistent participants may have created greater opportunities to gather rich data.

Finally, limitations exist within the data collection tools. Initially, I planned to capture participant navigation in ‘real’ time using a screen to video recording application. However, the lack of computer access prevented the use of the video application. Additionally, participants most frequently used their cell phones to access their online social networks. Downloading an application to essentially record their keystrokes seemed too invasive. Therefore, I opted for screenshots of content the participant chose to share. Capturing actions as they occurred instead of as they were reported or frozen in time through a screenshot would have created another layer of authenticity. It would have allowed for a realistic representation of what, how, and why a participant engaged in given

multimodal literacy practices. Another data collection tool that proved to be limited was the online social networking activities log. This tool was limited as it related to more diverse forms of online social networks. Since I had not viewed gaming and video sites as online social networks, the logs did not necessarily address the actions within these sites. Therefore, users who engaged in more unique online social networks, were limited in their ability to record their actions, due to the format of the log. This was compensated for during interview sessions.

As a researcher my position as an outsider created a limitation. For example, I had not previously known any of the participants so it was unlikely they would feel pressure to participate. Being an African American female, familiar with the culture and community, possibly worked to my advantage. However, my role as a researcher may have limited the study as participants verbalized their online social network. The boys often paused before speaking, stating they wanted it to sound 'smart or correct'. This likely stemmed from our early introductions. I informed participants that I was a graduate school student, explaining that it was education beyond college. After our discussion, I noticed some participants changed their mannerisms and attempted to use more standard English when answering questions. Although this may not have impacted what participants shared, but it could have impacted how and why they shared it.

Implications for Future Research

This study has implications for future research surrounding multimodal literacy, African American adolescents, and online social networks through a literacy lens. Findings revealed that literacy practices existed within online social networks. However, they also revealed that this field remains to be fairly under researched. The ‘newness’ and continual evolution of online social networks is perhaps to blame. Additional research involving adolescents that dive deep into both literacy practices and online social networks would reveal the valuable literacy lives of underrepresented youth, such that their abilities can shine light on a rich non-traditional experience of reading and writing.

Research involving multimodal literacy in various forms exists (Morrell, 2012; Greenhow, 2010; Kimmons, 2014). Studies have focused on multimodal skills and features ranging from video games to Twitter (Gee, 2009; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). However, there is a need for research that better defines the skills and experience that garner a multimodal literacy practice. This study begins to expose how spaces that initially seem void of any substantial literacy practices, may in fact possess skills and experiences similar to traditional settings. This speaks to the notion that expanded definitions of what counts as reading and writing are necessary. Incorporating and accepting multiple forms of literacy across many modes validates experiences and skills. Thus, a reader that seems to

be lacking or deficient in literacy skills may in fact be proficient when his or her literacy life outside of a traditional setting is validated. Currently, there is not enough research that allows researchers and investors of education to be able to confidently make such claims. First, research should focus on how traditional literacy may be impacted by or transformed by technological advancements. The manner in which reading and writing happen in traditional settings, such as classrooms is beginning to shift. Second, research should investigate an infusion of proficient literacy skills initiated by adolescents. Too often skills not typically recognized in a traditional setting are unnaturally imposed, resulting in possible disengagement of learners. Finally, future research could utilize a framework similar to local literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), however, with a focus on the impact of technology in everyday literacies of adolescents.

This study focused specifically on African American adolescents. However, a group of eight may not be representative of the greater population. Although similarities existed within this group, on a larger scale, they may vary by age and gender. Examining literacy practices by age may reveal at one point skills might be stronger or where skills need to be nurtured. Additionally, different ages may use online social networks at different rates and varying types. A study revealed that 55% of 12 to 13 year olds compared to 82% of 14 to 17 year olds engaged in online social networks (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). There may be reasons associated with age that draw adolescents to online

social networks. In my study, the younger participants were more likely to engage in games through their online social networks than the older participants. Hence, future research could focus on a closer analysis of age and participation in online social networks.

Taking gender into consideration might support or refute current presumptions. Girls' and boys' literacy success has been linked to opportunities and expectations of parents and educators (Sanford, 2005). Literacy as it happens in technological settings has the potential to shift cultural assumptions about girls being more likely to succeed in traditional settings (Williams, 2006). Studying and comparing the literacy practices of genders (male, female, or transgender) might reveal skills and experiences that lead to success. Similarly, it is difficult to determine if the literacy practices revealed in this study are uniquely specific to African Americans. A comparison study across multiple ethnicities would confirm or refute patterns in skills and experiences. There may be practices unique to certain groups that other groups could benefit from. Future research could focus on demographics in order to fill in this missing information.

Research surrounding online social networks often focuses on identity, peer relationships, and similar topics. Additionally, young adults are the focus of many online social network studies, as 18 years of age is "required" for membership. Findings from my study add to the almost non-existent body of

research involving adolescents and online social networks through a literacy lens. In this study communication, entertainment, gathering information and taking a stance were literacy practices that involved reading and writing. Traditional online social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram were dominant among participants and thus where practices were gleaned. However, future research could look to non-traditional forms of online social networks such as gaming and videoing specific sites. Navigation of these websites might involve unique literacy practices, possibly involving traditional forms of reading and writing. Recognition of non-traditional online social networks may occur in the same way recognition and validation of what counts as literacy. Exploring various types of online social networks as potential spaces where literacy practices flourish, adds to ever-evolving definitions of what counts as reading and writing. This qualitative study and the future research it inspires will continue on as a hashtag linking and building a literacy legacy. #BlackLiteracyLivesMatter

APPENDIX A: PARENT INVITE LETTER

Greetings Parents and Guardians!

Your child is invited to participate in a study about the potential literacy practices of African American adolescents as they participate in online social networks conducted by Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner, through the University of Maryland, College Park. The Internet and online social networks have become very prominent in all of our lives. Those who choose to engage in online social networks communicate through words, videos, pictures, hyperlinks, and much more. It is possible that this participation involves literacy skills and experiences. Uncovering this may reveal the ways that literacy is evolving for African American adolescents.

Please consider allowing your child to participate investigation, taking place over 9 weeks, after school hours at _____ Boys and Girls Club. The child will complete a written survey during the first session and will participate in interviews and observations of their online social networks in the following weeks. Please carefully review the attached consent form and return it to the center. Thank you for your consideration and feel free to contact Kelsey Pope or Dr. Turner with any questions or concerns. We look forward to working with you and your child.

If you agree to your child's participation in the study, please read and sign the entire attached permission slip. If you have any questions or concerns please email Kelsey Pope.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Pope (kpope@umd.edu) and Dr. Jennifer Turner

APPENDIX B: MINOR CONSENT FORM

Project Title	African American Adolescent Literacy Practices in Online Social Networks
Purpose of the Study	<p>This research is being conducted by Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are an adolescent who identifies themselves as African American and participates in one or more online social networks and could reveal the potential literacy skills and experiences in this environment. The purpose of this research project is to expose the potential literacy practices.</p>
Procedures	<p>Participants will be informed of the study by the researcher and the employees at the community center during regular facility hours. Parents will be invited to speak with the researcher and the Boys and Girls Club employees prior to the start of the study. Duties as participants will span 12 weeks with meetings after school during the Fall and Winter. Each meeting will take place for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. They will be asked to complete a survey of online social networking activities, an activities log while they participate in a given online social network and participate in individual or focus group interviews. Participation will be audio and video recorded.</p> <p>All participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher question throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.</p> <p>Meetings will be held on Tuesdays and/or Thursdays over the course of the study in the computer lab and using available Internet capable devices at the community center. During the first meeting participants will complete an online social network survey. This will take approximately ten minutes. In subsequent meetings participants will log on and engage in activities on various online social networks. This will occur for a minimum of ten</p>

	<p>minutes. During this ten minute span I will observe participant actions. They will record their actions via a screen recording application or on a written activity log.</p> <p>The interview (individual or focus group) will last for approximately 30 minutes. Each interview session will be audio recorded. The interviews will occur in a private room (computer lab) at the research site. Each participant will participate in one to two individual or focus group interviews. Over the course of the 12 sessions, participants who continue to attend, will navigate their online social network during the first ten minutes and will either be invited to participate an interview/focus group or will be released from the session for the day. Due to the transient population the sessions will look fairly similar each week, as participants may vary. Those who attend at least 9 out of 12 sessions will be compensated with a \$10 gift card at the end of the study.</p> <p>Potential interview questions include: What did you read or write on any of your online networks today? , Show me something (a comment, picture, video, link, or game) that you've recently posted online. What does this mean? How and why did you decide to post this? , Show me something you left on someone else's profile. Explain why and how you did this. At the end of the study participants will be able to member check their interviews in order to ensure that their perspectives are clearly represented.</p> <p>There are no known risks or discomforts with participating in this study. Rare feelings of embarrassment are likely due to the potential sharing of information on a private online social network page. Participants do not have to answer any questions or show parts of their online social network, that make them feel embarrassed. They will be encouraged to ask questions throughout the study and will be informed that there will be no penalty for withdrawal.</p>
<p>Potential Risks and Discomforts</p>	<p>There are no known risks or discomforts with participating in this study. Rare feelings of embarrassment are likely due to the potential sharing of information on a private online social network page. Participants do not have to answer any questions or show parts of their online social network, that make them feel embarrassed. They will be encouraged to ask</p>

	<p>questions throughout the study and will be informed that there will be no penalty for withdrawal.</p>
Potential Benefits	<p>There are no direct benefits to participants Potential benefits to you may include an opportunity to explore various purposes of online social networks. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of literacy practices from various in groups of in a multitude of settings.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized. Only, Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner will have access to all data. Data collected will be stored in a password protected computer under participant pseudonyms. Surveys, interviews, and observations will be kept confidential. Data, including, original video/audio recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed one year after the completed study. Data will not be linked to any personally identifying information. Screen recordings will not be used during research presentations, however “screenshots” of the screen recordings may be used once they have been edited to avoid personally identifying information.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I agree to audiotaped/screen recorded during my participation in this study.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to be audiotaped/screen recorded during my participation in this study.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
Compensation	<p>You will receive a \$10 gift card, if you participate in at least 9 out of 12 sessions. This will occur one week after the study has ended.</p>

<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigators:</p> <p>Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner 2233 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742</p>
<p>Participant Rights</p>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<p>Statement of Consent</p>	<p>Your signature indicates that you and an adult of at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p>

	If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT (MINOR) [Please Print]	<hr/> <hr/>
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	<hr/> <hr/>
	DATE	

APPENDIX C: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Project Title	African American Adolescent Literacy Practices in Online Social Networks
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting your child to participate in this research project because he/she is an adolescent who identifies themselves as African American and participates in one or more online social networks and could reveal the potential literacy skills and experiences in this environment. The purpose of this research project is to expose the potential literacy practices.
Procedures	<p>Participants will be informed of the study by the researcher and the employees at the community center during regular facility hours. Parents will be invited to speak with the researcher and the Boys and Girls Club employees prior to the start of the study. Duties as participants will span 12 weeks with meetings after school during the Fall and Winter. Each meeting will take place for approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. They will be asked to complete a survey of online social networking activities, an activities log while they participate in a given online social network and participate in individual or focus group interviews. Participation will be audio and video recorded.</p> <p>All participants will be encouraged to ask the researcher question throughout the duration of the study and will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.</p> <p>Meetings will be held on Tuesdays and/or Thursdays over the course of the study in the computer lab and using available Internet capable devices at the community center. During the first meeting participants will complete an online social network survey. This will take approximately ten minutes. In subsequent meetings participants will log on and engage in activities on various online social networks. This will occur for a minimum of ten minutes. During this ten minute span I will observe participant actions.</p>

	<p>They will record their actions via a screen recording application or on a written activity log.</p> <p>The interview (individual or focus group) will last for approximately 30 minutes. Each interview session will be audio recorded. The interviews will occur in a private room (computer lab) at the research site. Each participant will participate in one to two individual or focus group interviews. Over the course of the 12 sessions, participants who continue to attend, will navigate their online social network during the first ten minutes and will either be invited to participate an interview/focus group or will be released from the session for the day. Due to the transient population the sessions will look fairly similar each week, as participants may vary. Those who attend at least 9 out of 12 sessions will be compensated with a \$10 gift card at the end of the study.</p> <p>Potential interview questions include: What did you read or write on any of your online networks today? , Show me something (a comment, picture, video, link, or game) that you've recently posted online. What does this mean? How and why did you decide to post this? , Show me something you left on someone else's profile. Explain why and how you did this. At the end of the study participants will be able to member check their interviews in order to ensure that their perspectives are clearly represented.</p> <p>There are no known risks or discomforts with participating in this study. Rare feelings of embarrassment are likely due to the potential sharing of information on a private online social network page. Participants do not have to answer any questions or show parts of their online social network, that make them feel embarrassed. They will be encouraged to ask questions throughout the study and will be informed that there will be no penalty for withdrawal.</p>
<p>Potential Risks and Discomforts</p>	<p>There are no known risks or discomforts with participating in this study. Rare feelings of embarrassment are likely due to the potential sharing of information on a private online social network page. Participants do not have to answer any questions or show parts of their online social network, that make them feel embarrassed. They will be encouraged to ask</p>

	<p>questions throughout the study and will be informed that there will be no penalty for withdrawal.</p>
Potential Benefits	<p>There are no direct benefits to participants Potential benefits to you may include an opportunity to explore various purposes of online social networks. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of literacy practices from various in groups of in a multitude of settings.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized. Only, Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner will have access to all data. Data collected will be stored in a password protected computer under participant pseudonyms. Surveys, interviews, and observations will be kept confidential. Data, including, original video/audio recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed one year after the completed study. Data will not be linked to any personally identifying information. Screen recordings will not be used during research presentations, however “screenshots” of the screen recordings may be used once they have been edited to avoid personally identifying information.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I agree to audiotaped/screen recorded during my participation in this study.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to be audiotaped/screen recorded during my participation in this study.</p> <p>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p>
Compensation	<p>You will receive a \$10 gift card, if you participate in all 12 sessions. This will occur one week after the study has ended.</p>

<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</p> <p>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigators:</p> <p>Kelsey Pope and Dr. Jennifer Turner 2233 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742</p>
<p>Participant Rights</p>	<p>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</p>
<p>Statement of Consent</p>	<p>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to all your minor to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</p>

	If you agree to all your minor to participate, please sign your name below.	
Signature and Date	NAME OF PARTICIPANT (MINOR) [Please Print]	_____
	PARENT NAME [Please Print]	_____
	SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR GUARDIAN	_____
	DATE	_____

APPENDIX D: ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK SURVEY

Name: _____

Gender _____ Age _____

Choose a “fake” name that you would like to be called during the study and write it on the line.

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

1. Which online social networks do you belong to? (Check all that apply)

Facebook Twitter Instagram Vine
 Kik

Others (Please specify on the line _____)

2. How do you access your online social network? (Check all that apply)

cell phone computer at home/away from school computer at
Tomorrows

3. Estimate how many of your friends are also on online social networks:

none a few some many all

4. How often do you visit one or all of your social networks? (Check what most closely applies to you)

It is open all the time. Several times a day. Once a
week.

Once or twice a day. Every 2-3 days. Less than
once a week.

5. When you visit your online social network page, which of 5 following activities do you do most often? Put a “1” next to the one you do the most, a “2” next your second most frequent activity and a “3” next to your third most frequent.

Edit my profile. Update my status. Change my profile
picture.

Read comments/posts on my timeline or other people’s timeline.

Write comments/posts on my timeline or other people's timeline.

Read and comment on my news feed

Read or write a direct message. Chat with another user. Play a game.

Post/tag a picture. Listen to music. Create a group or invite.

6. Which online social network do you prefer and why?

APPENDIX E: ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIVITIES LOG

Name	Edit my profile	Update my status	Change my profile picture	Read comments/ posts on my or other's timeline/ news feed	Write comments/ posts on my or other's timeline /news feed	Read or write a direct message	Chat with another person	Play a game	Post/tag a picture	Listen to music	Create a group or invite	Watch a video
Online Social Network												
Place a check under items you did during today's session												
Place a check under items that you think you spent the most time with												
	I was bored	I was responding to someone else	Someone was responding to me	I'd heard about something being online	I'm used to being online often	I was searching for something	I was searching for someone	Other (please specify)				
Place a check under any reason(s) you participated online today												
	Family I see often	Family I don't see often	Friends at school	Friends outside of school	People I have never met	Celebrities	Boyfriend/ Girlfriend	An enemy	Other (Please specify)			
Place a check under who you communicated with today												
	Excited	Happy	Sad	Angry	Annoyed	Anxious	Other	Why?				
Place a check under emotions felt while online and explain why												

APPENDIX F: LITERACY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been coming to Tomorrows?
2. What is your favorite thing to do while you're at Tomorrows?
3. How would you define or describe an online social network in general?
4. Which online social networks do you belong to and why?
5. What do you use your online social network for? Why? What is its purpose?
6. Do you think you "communicate" through online social network? If so, how?
7. What did you read or write on any of your online networks today?
8. Someone said "What's the point to having an online social network if you can't read or write" Do you agree or disagree and why?
9. Explain Kik, Snapchat or other "texting/video messaging" type social media sites. What do you usually "message/send" about?
10. Show me something (a comment, picture, video, link, or game) that you've recently posted online. What does this mean? How and why did you decide to post this?
11. When you comment, what types of things do you say? Why do you say them?
12. Show me something you left on someone else's profile. Explain why and how you did this.
13. When performing any actions on your online social networks, did you need to read, write, listen, view, or speak anything in order to complete it? If so: how, which actions, and which social networks?
14. Do you ever screenshot anything? If so what do you screenshot and why?
15. Someone said they like to go back and "recall" things from their online social media, do you ever go back to different things on your online social media? If so, what kinds of things and why?
16. Are there specific applications you need to know how to use?
17. How did you learn to use the different (applications) on social media websites?
18. Considering your favorite online social network, what actions do you most often perform that involve reading, writing, viewing/posting images or videos?
19. Do you think you read/wrote more at school or on your online social network today?

Updated Questions (based on data)

APPENDIX G: RESEARCHER LOG

Date

:

Participant _____	Approximate Minutes of Observation _____
Check = Observed	
Tallies Within () = Number of Times Activity Was Observed	
Online Social Network(s)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Facebook ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Twitter ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Instagram ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Kik ()	
Other _____ ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Edited profile ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Updated status. ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Changed profile picture ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read comments/posts on timeline ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read comments/posts on other's timeline()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Wrote comments/posts()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read news feed ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Made a comment on news feed ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Read or wrote a direct message ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Chat with another user ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Play a game ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Post/tag a picture ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Listened to music ()	
<input type="checkbox"/> Created a group or invite ()	

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