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So tell me, what's different but the skin I'm in? Seven adolescent black girls making sense of their experiences in an online school book club featuring African American young adult literature

Benita Rutonya Dillard
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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SO TELL ME, WHAT'S DIFFERENT BUT THE SKIN I'M IN? SEVEN
ADOLESCENT BLACK GIRLS MAKING SENSE OF THEIR
EXPERIENCES IN AN ONLINE SCHOOL BOOK CLUB
FEATURING AFRICAN AMERICAN
YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

by

Benita Rutonya Dillard

Bachelor of Arts
Johnson C. Smith University
1996

Master of Arts
Murray State University
1999

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

Benita Rutonya Dillard

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Helen Harper, Committee Co-Chair

Thomas Bean, Committee Co-Chair

Marilyn McKinney, Committee Member

Lori Olafson, Committee Member

Lois Helmbold, Graduate Faculty Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies
and Dean of the Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

So Tell Me, What's Different But The Skin I'm In? Seven Adolescent Black Girls Making Sense of Their Experiences in an Online School Book Club Featuring African American Young Adult Literature

by

Benita Rutonya Dillard

Dr. Thomas Bean, Examination Committee Co-Chair
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Dr. Helen Harper, Examination Committee Co-Chair
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Believing the claim made by Black feminist research and scholarship that Black women writers and Black female social networks were safe spaces for Black females to come to voice, this qualitative multiple case study examined how seven adolescent Black females enrolled in a public virtual charter high school positioned themselves as they responded to contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors in an online single-gendered book club. This study captured participants as some interacted in Tuesday's group and the others in the Thursday's group. Interpretivist methods are used to specifically examine the ways in which the participants responded to the spaces provided: (a) an online chat room, (b) a single-gendered book club, and (c) African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. The participants' responses confirmed the argument made by some educational researchers that identities are fluid and multifaceted. Moreover, the participants' responses to the spaces provided called into question Black feminist claims that Black women's writers and Black female social networks are safe spaces. Although most participants identified

the anonymity as the component that made the online chat room a safe wholesome environment, one participant, in particular found the anonymity as the catalyst that led to the disrespect that erupted in her group. Furthermore, some participants described their experiences in the single-gendered book club as contentious while others described their experiences as fun and comfortable.

This study problematizes the notion that online book clubs are neutral spaces, devoid of the power issues that operate in small group classroom discussions. Some found the literature mirrored their experiences, while others struggled to connect with protagonists and issues addressed in the literature. In addition, the participants' responses to the online single-gendered book club depended on the group dynamics and the literature selected for the study. Findings in this study suggested that adolescent Black females reading contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female writers was not always a safe space as described by some Black feminist scholars. The findings revealed that race was more complex, and as a result, the exact match from literature to girls was not enough to meet their needs. Thus, the findings suggested that the online single-gendered book club featuring African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction was no panacea in adolescent Black females' coming to voice.

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First, I thank my Lord and Savior, for whom my help and strength came. There were times when my mind was cluttered, and I had to call on the Lord. When I called, He always answered and blessed me with clarity. I thank Him!

Throughout this process, I met seven courageous young women who did not know what this study really entailed, yet chose to embark on this journey with me. Without your participation, this study would not have materialized.

Words cannot express how much I appreciate my committee members. I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the compassion, patience, and support that I received from my co-chairs, Drs. Tom Bean and Helen Harper. Dr. Bean directed me to research a topic that meant a lot to me. At the time, I did not understand. After going through this process, I realized how important it was to feel passionate about a topic. Without the passion, it would have been difficult to complete this research study.

In addition, Dr. Harper taught me to include words of encouragement when providing students with constructive criticism. While there were times when I felt the revision process was never going to end, I had the privilege to remind myself that you wanted the best for me! For this, I will always cherish these lessons and the moments the three of us spent sitting at the table laughing and talking about ways to strengthen my writing.

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keeping the dialogue going on the African American female experience in your Women's Studies courses.

Unquestionably, my great grandfather and Grandma Gail would be proud. Both instilled a love for reading and writing in me, yet Grandma Gail and my mother, Johnnie Ruth Dillard instilled Black pride in me. They taught me to be an unapologetically proud southern Black woman. Equally important, my mother taught me to always dream big. You always found a way to make my dreams become reality. For this, I dedicate this dissertation to my great grandfather, my Grandma Gail, and my mother.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It's like nothing ever happens for us and if there is then people think it's always in a negative way... No, I haven't read any books by [African American female writers in my English classes] and now that you have brought it to my attention I wonder why? (Angel)

I don't remember reading any books by African American females, so I want to read the books and see if I can relate to them. (Isabella)

I was concerned that if OTHER people could see me, would they wonder, why did she pick the whitest Black girl to be a part of her study? (Bianca)

In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Angel shared that she decided to participate in this study because it was about African American girls. Excited about this online school book club, Angel revealed that she had not read any books written by African American female authors in her high school English classes. Like Angel, the other participants revealed that they had not read any literature by African American female authors in their high school English classes. In fact, some had never read any literature written by African American female writers inside or outside the high school English classroom.

I am haunted by the words of these young African American females, who, in the 21st century, could not recall reading one book that they had read by African American female authors in their high school English classes. I am also haunted by the fact that these young females are still struggling in America with ascribed historical and cultural myths. In response, this research study offered a small cadre of adolescent Black females

an opportunity to discuss what reading contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors can and might do in their lives. In addition, this study asked how these young females used an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club to position themselves and their reading in relation to the study of African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. More specifically, this qualitative study asked the research questions listed below to get as close as possible to each participant's thoughts, feelings, and desires:

1. How did African American teenaged girls respond to the online chat room environment?
2. How did African American teenaged girls respond to the single-gendered book club?
3. How did African American teenaged girls respond to African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction?
4. How did African American teenaged girls' responses to the online environment, single-gendered book club, and African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction influence the way they used the study to make sense of their experiences?

As such, this qualitative study offered seven young Black females an opportunity to use an online single-gendered book club to make sense of themselves and their experiences as they discussed what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction did for them.

The terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably throughout this study. In this context, the term *African American* designates a shared ethnicity, while the term *Black* is broad enough that it can identify the seven participants who possessed visible characteristics ascribed to Black people despite identifying as *mixed*, *Black*, or

African American (Henry, 1998b). In addition, the terms *Black* and *White* are capitalized to emphasize a collective political identity. In this study, the term *Black* is capitalized “to denote the 1970’s political history of Black empowerment from which Black feminist theorizing and activism emerged” (Springer, 2002, p.1059). In brief, the term *Black* is capitalized throughout this study regardless of it serving as a noun or an adjective in a sentence. The next section provides a historical overview to shed some light on how the origin of this dissertation began with my literacy experiences as a Black female growing up in the South.

Origin of the Research Study

The origin of this dissertation came from comparing my own personal literacy experiences with the experiences of the participants in this study. For some participants, this was the first time they had ever read anything written by African American authors. Other participants revealed that they had read young adult novels written by African American female authors outside school but had not been exposed to it in their high school English classes. Unfortunately, I had the same experience. My high school English teachers never exposed me to literature written by African American authors. Yet, my family used family discussions, storytelling, and reading time at home to expose me to literature by and about local activists, Black history, and Black pride. Although there were various forms of formal and informal literacies within my family, my great grandfather, grandmother, and mother instilled in me what generations of African Americans in the South believed about literacy. Collectively, they believed it was the key

to rise above the racism that plagued the South. The next section reveals the impact that they had on my literacy experiences.

My Family and Their Literacy

Jim

I grew up in a unique household where several generations lived. My great grandfather, Jim, lived downstairs in the basement. We called him Mi Jim, which was short for Mr. Jim. For this study, I used Jim. Nevertheless, we called him that name to show him respect. Born in 1902, Jim did not know how to read or write. All he knew was how to pick cotton, work the coal mine, and take care of us. He spent most of his adult life working for George Sparks, a Coal Mining Company and caring for his garden to provide food for us to eat.

When I was a small child, I did not know he could not read. He enjoyed collecting western themed picture books that included moving images. He read twice a week to me, at least I thought. I looked forward to listening to him read because he always let me turn the pages and move the images. When I started reading, I realized he did not know how to read. I never said anything. I just continued to go downstairs every week to listen as he described the pictures in the picture books to me. He died in 1984. His picture books are still stacked on the bookshelf downstairs in the basement.

Jim was a very proud man and was respected as the man of the house. As long as he was able, Jim made it a point to retrieve the mail from the mailbox and give it to my mother to open and read it. Jim and my mother were the only two who discussed family business. Whenever a document needed his signature, my mother always showed him

where to sign his name. Although he knew his name, he always signed his name as X. My great grandfather valued education, but Jim Crow laws ruled in South Carolina and restricted Blacks from using schools, hospitals, drinking fountains, restrooms, and restaurants that were used by White people. In addition, there were no schools available for him to attend.

Nonetheless, my great grandfather took pride in driving me to school. My elementary school was located less than five minutes away from our house. Every morning, he got up to drive me to school. At 2:30PM, Monday-Friday, Jim was always parked first in the carpool lane. He drove me to school until lung cancer zapped all his energy. It got to the point where he could no longer come upstairs. Because he was physically impaired, I went downstairs every morning before walking to school to say goodbye. My Grandma Gail, his daughter, stood on the back porch and watched as I walked to school. Once I arrived on the school's premises, I looked over through the field of trees and waved to signal to my grandmother that I arrived safely.

As a child, I did not understand why he did not allow me to walk to school. When I got older, I learned from my grandmother that he felt blessed to live to see the day that his great grandchildren entered an integrated school without fearing for our lives. Jim took pride in a whole lot of things. He may not have had any formal education, but he was a smart man. He left his picture books behind. Whenever I go home, I go downstairs, retrieve a picture from the bookshelf, sit on his bed, and just read the pictures like he used to do. Nevertheless, Jim was not the only family member I had who did not have a chance to get an education. Although there is no information recorded on my great

grandmother's educational experiences, her daughter, my Grandma Gail got the opportunity to attend elementary school for a few years.

Grandma Gail

My Grandma Gail, Jim's daughter, did not finish school. After attending elementary school for a few years, she had to drop-out and help her parents, my great grandfather and grandmother pick cotton. Born in 1932, my Grandma Gail knew how to read and write her name. As a child, my grandmother and her sister Mary Elizabeth practiced writing the alphabet by recording family members' names in our family's *Holy Bible*. Mary Elizabeth died many years before I was born.

In the family Bible, my grandmother and her sister recorded our family history dating back to the 1800's. This *Holy Bible* included names and dates of birth, marriages, and deaths. My grandmother took pride in this *Holy Bible*. She always talked about how she and her sister sat down, in the late evening to read the information they recorded in our family's *Holy Bible*. On one occasion, my grandmother told me that she and her sister went around asking family members about our history. My grandmother called her sister the family historian. She claimed that her sister was determined to keep our family history as accurate as possible because some relatives did not know the actual year they were born. As the family historian, Mary Elizabeth interviewed their parents, Jim and Lillie Mae, their maternal grandmother, Lizzie, and their mother's sister Mary "Big Mae" about our family history.

My grandmother was determined to keep the information in the family's *Holy Bible* accurate. When a child was born, my grandmother got someone to retrieve it, so she could record the names and birthdates. In July 2001, my niece Madison was born. Sadly,

my Grandma could not record Madison's name because she no longer had the ability to write. At this point, my grandmother had moved on to a nursing home. In this same year, I went home for the Thanksgiving holiday. While home, my grandmother asked me to record Madison's name and date of birth. After doing this, my grandmother looked at me and smiled. She passed away on March 31, 2007. I wrote this date beside her birth date in the family *Holy Bible*.

Mama

Growing up, in the 1950's and 60's, my mother attended Sterling High School. She ended up graduating from Greenville Senior Adult High School because Sterling burned down. Sterling was the first public high school for Black students in the state of South Carolina. It was founded in 1896 and destroyed by fire in 1967. Although no one was charged, witnesses claimed the Klu Klux Klan set fire to the school. While attending Sterling, my mother learned about several African American activists in her English classes. She remembered discussing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, and local activists, including Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. My mother shared that teachers at Sterling High always discussed local activists to illustrate how to stand firm for their beliefs in spite of persecution.

My mother graduated in 1968. She became a widow on February 12, 1978. My father passed away at the age of 33. Shortly after, she was accepted into Greenville Technical College's nursing program. Due to the debilitation of rheumatoid arthritis, she had to withdraw. Despite all the heartache, she provided her four children with every opportunity known to ensure that we had the opportunity to go to college. My mother was definitely an inspiration in my life. She never set limitations on my hopes and dreams!

Mama and Grandma Gail

Above all, my mother and grandmother ensured that my dreams were never deferred. To ensure my dreams were never deferred, they felt it was important for me to know about Black female activists that paved the way for my generation to succeed. They felt it was important for me to know about the challenges that Black women faced in order to decrease the dropout rate in schools, overcome fear of White supremacists, eliminate attacks by police dogs, and integrate public schools. For instance, we watched Cicely Tyson play Harriet Tubman in *A woman called Moses* and Jane Pitman in *The autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman* every time the movies came on television. Born into slavery in the 1850s, Miss Jane Pitman, at the very end of her life, became involved in the Civil Rights Movement in Louisiana in 1962. She lived over 100 years, and near the end of the movie, she drank from a *Whites Only* water fountain, which marked a turning point in the segregated South. Miss Jane Pitman lived long enough to participate in the removal of this most obvious symbol of racial discrimination.

Once this scene ended, both my grandmother and mother discussed their experiences as Black females in the segregated South. My grandmother recalled the times when it was against the law for her to walk through front doors and not being able to call White people by their first name. My mother mentioned the challenge that she faced when purchasing our home in 1979. According to my mother, there were three strikes against her: Black, female, and a widow. The homeowner, an older White man, would not sell the house to my mother because, he claimed, a woman should not own a home without a husband. In the beginning, the homeowner was happy to work with her because he knew she had just lost her husband and had four children.

When they met face-to-face, she claimed he looked at her with disgust. He told her that he could not sell the house to an unmarried woman. In reality, he did not want to sell the house to my mother because she was a Black woman. Interestingly, after going back and forth with him, Jim, my great grandfather, met with the home owner. Today, we still do not know what they discussed, but soon after, my mother purchased the home where she currently resides.

As soon as we moved in, my mother filled the house with scriptures from the *Holy Bible*. She placed scriptures on the refrigerator and on the walls in the kitchen. My mother was a firm believer in God's Word and believed it superseded any literature written. Put simply, she read more material written about the Lord than anything else. As an active member in an African American Baptist church, my mother attended Vacation Bible School, participated in Wednesday night Bible Study, and served as president of the usher board. In particular, my mother was an avid supporter of the School of Prayer ministry for women in the church. Every Saturday morning, my mother and the other women in the church gathered to pray and discuss Bible study material written by such Christian authors as Beth Moore.

Undoubtedly, my mother believed loving the Lord was primary and embracing literature written by and about local activists and Civil Rights leaders were secondary. In fact, the first book that she allowed me to check-out from the local library was Judy Bloom's novel *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*. My mother thought it was a Christian book, so she was excited about me wanting to read it. She did not know Bloom's coming of age novel was about a protagonist named Margaret that longed to mature physically. Nonetheless, my mother used the Bible as a tool to inculcate moral

and spiritual values in me. Notably, she used the Bible to show me the underlying reason behind the opposition that people faced and how those in the Bible that faced it responded. In addition, my mother and Grandma Gail taught me to value a literacy tradition that protested and educated the Black community.

Last but not least, my great grandfather suffered at the hands of laws enforced by Jim Crow. Yet, he took the time to use pictures from books about the Wild West to tell stories. By exposing me to this oral tradition, my great grandfather enabled me to see that there was more to literacy than just acquiring reading and writing skills. He allowed me to experience the power in storytelling. Although Jim Crow laws prevented him from experiencing traditional forms of literacy, I realized later on that my great grandfather was a man who believed literacy held great promise.

My Literacy Experiences

Unquestionably, my great grandfather, grandmother, and mother were instrumental in my journey to acquire language and literacy skills. Along this journey, however, I attended church meetings with my mother and watched as she and other women in the church met to discuss their responsibilities in the church. These meetings were exclusive to female church members. At the beginning of each meeting, the women gathered and prayed first. After prayer, they began discussing church business. Watching my mother interact with other women in the church led me to create a single-gendered book club in elementary school. Joaquina, Poochie, and I created the Swan's book club. We invited several other Black girls to join. As the president, Joaquina always selected the books and encouraged us to read them. In fact, she was the one that told us to read Judy Bloom's

novel mentioned earlier in this chapter. Yet, I cannot recall one book that we read by African American female authors. In fact, I do not recall reading any books written by and about African American people in elementary, middle, or high school.

Despite the fact that I attended predominately Black student populated schools, most teachers were not African American. In fact, I attended Southside High School, which was known as the Sterling High School's contemporary. At Southside, most teachers were White. Yet, Southside was unique. Most students held on to their African American heritage despite having a majority White teacher population. For instance, the student body insisted on inviting locals and those that attended Sterling to speak on days that we had assemblies. We did not just wait for Black History Month. Most students that attended Southside knew a relative that participated or lived during the Civil Rights Movement, so we believed in recognizing those individuals. In other words, Southside celebrated Black History throughout the year. In particular, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., a Sterling High School graduate, spoke to the student body during his 1988 presidential campaign. At this particular school assembly, he made us stand and repeat, "I am somebody." My friends and I cheered at the top of our lungs. For us, it was electrifying! We were proud to be Black.

We also had opportunities to invite recording artists to our school. In the late 1980's early 90's, New Edition was a popular R&B group. To get them to perform, WHYZ, a local radio station had a contest that required high school students to submit handwritten letters stating, "We want New Edition to come to our school." The school that mailed the most letters to the radio station won. The contest was very competitive. Our rival was

Greenville High School. Despite having more financial support, business connections, and a larger White population, Greenville High School did not win. We did!

To win, our student body president helped us form teams. For instance, my brother Bernard and all his friends were members of the twelfth- grade team. My friends and I were all part of the ninth- grade team. Each team sat at different tables writing letters to the local radio station. To collect the letters, the student body president stopped by our house and got them. He felt it was better to mail all the letters at the same time. A few days later the radio station announced that Southside High School had won. Hearing the news was so exciting because most of our parents could not afford to purchase concert tickets. So, we got to see New Edition perform for free. Despite not reading literature written by African American authors, the school always provided opportunities for us to embrace our African American heritage and culture. In addition, the teachers in the school found ways to tie literacy meaningfully to political activism, instead of making it seem more about just acquiring a skill to achieve a satisfactory score on a standardized text.

However, my high school English teachers had us read canonical works. In ninth- grade, I read John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*. During my senior year, I read Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*. In between, I read F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Nevertheless, reading Shakespeare did not do for me what *Yo, MTV Raps* with Ed Lover and Dr. Dre did. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, I was exposed to the hip-hop culture. I could not wait to get home from school to watch videos. When I first heard the lyrics to northeastern rappers KRS-One's "My Philosophy" and Public Enemy's "Rebel Without a Pause," I could not believe it. For the first time, I heard music that told the

truth about the Black experience. In KRS-One's rap, he addressed the stereotypes that are often imposed on Black men. This song resonated with me. I often heard my brothers, uncle, and great grandfather talk about their experiences.

Moreover, I felt empowered as a Black female when I saw Queen Latifah, a female rapper, ride a motorcycle in her "U.N.I.T.Y" video. This was the first time I had ever seen a woman ride a motorcycle. Furthermore, the lyrics to this song made me feel proud to be a young Black female. Because hip-hop reinforced the sense of pride that I experienced with my great grandfather, grandmother, and mother, it became my lifeline to what was going on in the Black community and a resource to improve my vocabulary!

Growing up, I was only familiar with events that happened in the South. Through hip-hop, I learned about the Black experience in other parts of the country. In particular, I learned about the Black experience in the northeast. Nevertheless, hip-hop was a reflection of the diversity that existed within the African American culture. For instance, I listened to KRS-One's song "My Philosophy" and heard terminology (i.e., commercialize and vegetarian) that helped improve my vocabulary. I had never heard of a vegetarian, but through hip-hop, I learned that not all Black people ate the same southern cooking that I did.

Overall, hip-hop impacted my life so much that I began competing against my brother Bernard to see who could memorize lyrics first. There was no reward. It was just about proving to him that his "little sister" had mastered a literacy practice uncommon among other girls in the neighborhood. Most girls in the neighborhood liked hip-hop, but they were not in love with it like me. In fact, my love for hip-hop was so deep that my female friends knew not to call while *Yo, MTV Raps* was on television.

I memorized more hip-hop songs than my brother Bernard did. Eventually, he asked me to teach him the strategy that I used to learn the songs so quickly. I shared with him that it was about the rhythm. For me, hip-hop was poetry, and I loved poems that had a rhyme scheme. In most cases, I waited for *Yo, MTV Raps* to show the video. Once the video came on television, I turned it up as loud as my mother allowed, put my boom box, a radio, up to it, and pressed record. My mother could not afford to purchase the actual cassette tape, so I waited for the video to come on television to record the song. After recording, I played the song repeatedly, so I could write it down. At times, the recordings were not clear, so I had to wait for the video to come on television again. Nevertheless, once I recorded it and wrote the lyrics down on paper, I memorized them. Interestingly, learning to memorize rap songs taught me how to study for tests in high school. For me, the best strategy was to take notes first. The hip-hop culture provided communicative practices that enabled me to succeed academically and engage in dialogue with other peers familiar with the lyrics about the disenfranchisement of Black people.

After graduating high school, I continued to listen to hip-hop, but noticed it began to change. In the mid 1990's, it began to expand and more artists produced music that degraded Black women instead of uplifted them. Hip-hop videos also began to embrace a gangster lifestyle. I was not drawn to this genre of hip-hop because it did not speak to my experiences as a Black female from the South. Growing up, I did not hear people talk about gangs, so I found it difficult to understand the messages conveyed in lyrics by some West coast rap groups. For this reason, I began to search for other resources that resonated with my experiences and beliefs about uplifting Black people.

As an undergraduate at Johnson C. Smith University, a historically Black college (HBCU), I enrolled in a course that examined the rich African American literary tradition. Dr. Donald Mager, my undergraduate advisor, taught this course. Ironically, Dr. Mager, a White male professor, introduced me to African American female writers such as Geneva Smitherman, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Gwendolyn Brooks. To understand the content, Dr. Mager taught me how to cite writings by Geneva Smitherman in my senior paper to highlight the impact that race, class, and gender had on African American literacy. Specifically, my senior paper examined the different ways that African Americans used the *To Be* verb system (Dillard, 1996).

While writing, Dr. Mager taught me the difference between active and passive voice. In addition, he taught me how to memorize and recite poetry written by African American female poets and poetry written in Old English. In the end, my senior paper received an honors award for its creativity and content. Equally important, I developed a deep appreciation and an understanding of the profound impact that African American female writers had on the literary tradition. Furthermore, African American female writers allowed me to see there was nothing that women of color could not achieve. In particular, they allowed me to see my hopes, dreams, and experiences as a Black female.

After graduating in 1996, I decided to apply for graduate school at Murray State University. I enrolled at the beginning of spring semester in 1997. I did not know much about Kentucky, but I knew there were still some areas heavily populated with White supremacists. Later on, I learned that Marshall County, one of the neighboring counties restricted people of color, in particular Blacks from living there. It was understood among African Americans to stay away! However, when I arrived at Murray State, I noticed

there was only one African American professor in the English Department. After my first semester, she left to join the military. At this point, I was the only African American in the entire department. There were no graduate students or professors of color. As a result, I felt like a stranger in a strange land. I had never lived or worked in a place where there were no people of color. Entering an all White educational environment was totally out of my comfort zone. I felt uncomfortable engaging in conversation with my peers and even some professors. I remembered thinking, “These people did not understand me or even care to get to know me.”

Positioned as the outsider, I realized this was the first time in my life that I co-existed in an environment where no one looked like me. Feeling both uncomfortable and afraid, I began to utilize the deliberate silence approach, a silence that meant “to speak and beware of too much heard speech” (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1997, p.24). I reverted into survival mode. Growing up, I learned about the deliberate silence approach from my mother and grandmother. I learned power existed in knowledge untold; the more a person did not know what I thought, the more advantage I had. Because some of my peers were from Marshall County, I did not trust them, and I did not share my ideas about the assigned readings with them. I only conveyed my thoughts in writing to my professors.

I survived for a while, but then I had to present Kenneth Burke’s (1951) article “Othello: An essay to illustrate a method.” On the day that I presented Burke’s article, I impersonated Chief Wiggums, a male cartoon character on *The Simpsons*. I decided to impersonate this character because I knew my audience would recognize the impersonation and it would prove that there was more underneath my Black skin! A few days later, my professor provided me with feedback on the presentation. Included in the

feedback, he wrote, “Excellent job. You are so articulate.” In fact, several peers told me that they did not know I had it in me. I remembered looking at them thinking, “Had what?” What were they implying?” It made me think about all the papers I wrote before this presentation. I began to wonder if my professor’s compliments about my writing style were sincere. Neither my professor nor peers realized that they had insulted me. Calling me articulate was an insult because it implied that most Black people were not.

After this, I contemplated withdrawing but decided against it because most of the people in the department were not condescending, or at least, did not show it. However, this experience shed some light on a larger problem. My experience provided a glimpse into the backward and negative views that some people had of Black people. In particular, my experience showed what researchers have been arguing for years about the status of the Black female. Sutherland (2005) found that young Black females are often expected “within the larger social context to ‘be’ a particular something, to hold particular values, and to exhibit particular behaviors” (p.366). In particular, Black females are expected to be loud and smart-mouthed, poor and thievish, and even sexually promiscuous (Sutherland, 2005; Richardson, 2002). Evidently, my professor and peers expected me to “be” a particular something.

Unfortunately, research found that Black females are often invisible to their teachers as serious learners (Henry, 1998a; Fordham, 1993). In my case, I knew two strikes were against me: affirmative action and the Ebonics debate. As the only African American in the entire department, I felt that I needed to prove that my admission was not based on meeting a quota. To do this, I emulated the voice of a cartoon character to prove to my

professor and peers that I deserved a place in the academic setting other than just “a desk and a book” (McElroy-Johnson, 1993, p.85).

Furthermore, I knew the Ebonics debate had gained national momentum after the Oakland, California school board passed a resolution on December 18, 1996 stating that Ebonics was a distinct language from English and should be implemented in instruction to teach African American children. After listening to my presentation, I suspected that my instructor and peers sighed with relief. When they told me that I was articulate, I wondered if this was their way of saying thanks for not using Ebonics. Examining this experience as an outsider looking in, I knew some in my class had a negative perception of Black people that some believed the Ebonics debate reinforced. Knowing this, I was determined to use different literacy practices as tools to forge a self-definition that countered the “ghettoized image” of Black women and girls (Richardson, 2002, p.676).

Undoubtedly, my great grandfather, grandmother, and mother believed literacy was the key to removing the barriers that had been placed to foster the oppression of the Black people. Yet, when I told my grandmother and mother about impersonating a cartoon character, they did not approve. In fact, my grandmother was very disappointed. She told me to always remain true to myself. During this time in my life, I did not understand or even care about what she meant. I decided to ask my mother to explain after my grandmother passed away in 2007. My mother shared that Grandma Gail did not believe Black people should change to appease other people. To illustrate this point, my mother shared an incident that happened between my grandmother and the mail carrier.

When I was around 10 or 11 years-old, my grandmother overheard the mail carrier refer to me as *gal*, short for *girl*. The next day, she waited by the mailbox to address this

issue. When the mail carrier arrived, she made it very clear to him that the Jim Crow era was over, and he could not address anyone in her family as *gal* or *boy*. She threatened to contact his supervisor. The mail carrier apologized and from that day forward, he always referred to her as Mrs. Miller. My mother shared this story to illustrate how important it was to my grandmother that Black women and girls never “learn to live in a society that devalues Black females” (Henry, 1998b, p.155).

Indeed, my mother and grandmother believed literacy was the key to removing these barriers created to foster the Black female’s oppression. In the end, my mother explained that they sent me to college to acquire language and literacy practices to counter “White supremacist and economically motivated stereotypes conveying subhuman or immoral images” (Richardson, 2002, p.677). Put simply, they did not send me to college to impersonate a cartoon character; they sent me to acquire knowledge that empowered and enabled me to counter distorted images that often plagued Black people, in particular Black women and girls.

Embedded in this empowerment to counter distorted images was the struggle for self-determination and self-definition. My great grandfather, grandmother, and mother believed acquiring language and literacy skills offered opportunities for Black people to reinvent themselves. In the same way, African American people, particularly women have historically used literacy as a form of resistance to construct and reconstruct their lived-experiences about the meaning of Black womanhood. According to Royster (2000), African American women wrote poetry, music, essays, and novels to insert themselves directly and indirectly into arenas for action and for doing whatever they could to mediate and manage the critical process of change. As part of this history, my family believed

sending me to college to acquire language and literacy practices would enable me to forge a self-definition that countered the degradation that Black women in the South often confronted. Considering the racial tension that existed in the South, it took meeting Dr. Mager, a White male professor, teaching at a HBCU to expose me to a vast array of African American literature. Through this process, I was able to see my hopes, dreams, and experiences as a Black female from the South.

Nevertheless, most young Black females do not get the opportunity to see themselves and their experiences in texts that they read in the classroom. For this reason, I decided to offer seven adolescent Black females an opportunity to use literature written by African American female authors to make sense of their experiences. I wanted them to have the opportunity to see what reading literature written by African American female writers could do for them.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned earlier, most adolescent Black girls do not get the opportunity to see themselves and their experiences in texts that they read in the classroom. Although it is the twenty-first century, young women of color are still confronted with an academic canon and a classroom pedagogy that, in most cases, do not legitimate their understanding of themselves and their perspective of the social world (Morris, 2007; Evans-Winters, 2005; Henry, 1998a). As a result, one researcher believed this was one of the leading causes to Black girls' literacy experiences remaining undertheorized and unnoticed (DeBlase, 2003). Because literacy shaped identities and provided a way of being in the world, DeBlase (2003) argued that it was an educator's moral duty to provide

girls with an opportunity “to express their voices so they can learn to resist and construct cultural meanings found in texts” (p.325).

In support of this, Au (2001) believed that when adolescent readers shared the author’s cultural identity, it enabled them to gain insight about themselves, their families, their communities, and discover the value of their own experiences. Hubler (2000) declared that girls are better served by novels that offered, “a structural map of social reality,” one which revealed “the historical development, and interrelationship, of the institutions of gender, race, and class” (p.85). For instance, Sutherland (2005) found in her qualitative research study on adolescent Black girls’ literacy experiences that they used the selected young adult novel as “a launching point from which they analyzed their own life experiences” (p.365). After reading this study, I realized that more adolescent Black females need opportunities like the experiences that the participants in Sutherland’s study and I had to use literature applicable to their lives to read and make sense of their experiences in the twenty-first century.

Purpose of the Study

In response to the need to offer more young Black females opportunities to read literature reflecting their experiences, this qualitative study offered seven Black females attending a virtual high school an opportunity to use an online school book club to discover “the power of their own stories and their own lives as they are situated within their raced and gendered identities” (DeBlase, 2003, p.322). More importantly, it offered a small cadre an opportunity to use an online chat room environment and single-gendered

book club featuring African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction as spaces to come to voice.

McElroy-Johnson (1993) defined voice as “identity, a sense of self, a sense of relationship to others, and a sense of purpose” (p.86). According to McElroy-Johnson, voice was power that allowed a person “to express ideas and make connections” and power that directed and shaped “an individual life towards a productive and positive fulfillment for self, family, community, nation, and the world (p.86). As such, the purpose of this study was to examine how seven young women of color used three alternative in-school spaces to “try on various ideas, beliefs, and behaviors” as they discussed what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction did for them (Boston & Baxley, 2002, p.561). The three spaces include: (a) an online chat room environment, (b) single-gendered book club, and (c) African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction.

Online Chat Room Environment

One space offered in this study was the online chat room environment. According to Mazarella (2005), there has been a tremendous growth in academic and popular writings about girls and the Internet. In one study, Schofield- Clark (2005) examined how adolescent girls used a range of new media including instant messaging. She found that teenage girls’ use of the Internet and instant messaging provided them with a sense of control over their environment. Mazarella defined instant messaging (IM) as “a technology that allowed computer users to have real-time, text-based conversations with others online” (p.9). In particular, the online chat room is defined as instant communication between two or more people over the Internet using tools such as instant

messenger or *E-College*. Unlike e-mail, which can be edited and reformatted, IM supported real-time conversations. In this study, I used *E-College* to create online chat room group discussions that took place in real-time.

Thiel (2005) argued that as society moved towards the age of the Internet, girls would rely more on technology as a means to communicate and “articulate their own identities to the world” (p.181). Although some researchers believed IM was no different from note- passing during class, Thiel found in IM conversations that girls often appeared to “try on” different tones with different persons (p.196). Thiel posited that the girls preferred IM to the phone because it was a more efficient way of reaching friends and family. In addition, they considered IM conversations to be a “safe” and “free” space that allowed them to experiment with using different conversational norms. Thiel believed that IM conversations provided “a ripe landscape for a girl to shift from identity to identity and from moment to moment” (p.197). She concluded that if IM conversations continued as a preferred means of communication, then the next generation would be a group that constructed and negotiated much of its identity primarily online.

Thiel (2005) wrote that most participants in her study were White females while only two were Black. In addition, there were two Korean American participants and one Korean girl. Although some claimed that this body of research was growing, adolescent Black girls and their online experiences remained under-theorized and unnoticed in academic circles. As an aside, when I plugged in the phrases “online chat rooms for Black girls” and “Black girls and the Internet” in the Google search engine, sites related to pornography and dating came up. For this reason, this research study offered adolescent Black girls an opportunity to use an online chat room environment to “to

locate and take up as their own, narratives of themselves that knit together the details of their existence” (Thiel, 2005, p.187).

Single-Gendered Book Club

Another space offered in this study was a single-gendered book club. Collins (1990) identified three safe spaces that allowed African American females to use their own voices to define their own experiences and challenge the dominant discourse that either marginalized or pathologized their experiences. These spaces that provided African American females with opportunities to define their own standpoint as agents and creators of knowledge were the voices of Black female writers, the church, and the community. Some Black feminists believed these sites strengthened and unified both African American women and the Black community (Reynolds, 2002; Royster, 2000). As such, Henry (1998b) added an “all girls” book club to the list of safe spaces for adolescent Black females to engage in authentic conversations about how the intertwined effects of gender and race influenced their ways of thinking about themselves and their lives.

In support of this, Appleman (2006) described book clubs as a setting for participants to help each other make connections between their own experiences and texts. According to Appleman, there were no expectations as to what the participants voiced or learned in out-of-class book clubs. She considered out-of-class book clubs to be liberating because there was no pressure to participate in the conversations or prepare for some form of assessment. As such, this single-gendered book club offered seven adolescent Black females an opportunity to (a) challenge negative images, beauty standards, and notions of education, (b) tell their own stories, and (c) critique and challenge the intersectionality of

race and gender. In particular, this single-gendered book club offered them similar opportunities that I had as a member of the Swan's book club in elementary school. It offered them an opportunity to find strength in an all-girls space.

African American Contemporary Realistic Young Adult Fiction

The third space offered contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors. Black feminists considered writings by African American female writers as a site that strengthened and unified Black women and girls. As such, the material used in this study featured Kiri Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me* and the following four novels: Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) *Hush*, Sharon Draper's (2002) *Double Dutch*, Lori A. Williams' (2001) *When Kambia Elaine Flew In From Neptune*, and Sharon Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In*. The material used in this study is discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

Offering adolescent Black females an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club featuring contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female writers is significant because most girls in this study could not recall reading any literature written by African American female authors. The few that read literature written by African American female writers had not been exposed to it in their high school English classes; they read it outside the classroom. Yet, I wanted to offer the girls in this study the same opportunity afforded seven of my nieces. After meeting Jacqueline Woodson, I purchased several copies of *Hush* for my nieces. They

got the opportunity to share with each other what reading this novel did for them as young Black females growing up in South Carolina.

I wanted to offer the girls in this study the same opportunity that both my nieces and I had. We got the opportunity to read our experiences in literature written by African American female authors. This study offered seven young Black females located in the Western part of the United States an opportunity to use contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female writers to make sense of themselves and their experiences. Moreover, it offered an opportunity that current research on adolescent Black females' literacy experiences did not (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008; Sutherland, 2005). It offered opportunities for participants to take risks with their ideas and form relationships in an online single-gendered chat room environment. Overall, this research study offered three spaces that researchers identified as safe for girls "to try on", "grapple with", and make sense of the intertwined effects of race and gender in their lives.

To get as close as possible to each girl's thoughts and feelings about the three spaces offered in this study, I employed the following methods to collect data: (a) one initial one-on-one chat room interview, (b) one group chat room discussion on Davis' documentary, (c) four group chat room discussions on African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction, (d) four e-mail interviews, (e) one Voicethread project, and (g) reflective fieldnotes and memos. In this study, a chat room group discussion consisted of three or four participants that engaged in instant communication with me over the Internet using *E-College* chat room feature. All chat room interviews consisted of both

semi-structured and open-ended questions to hear each participant as she told her own story. For more details, Chapter 3 provides the methodology employed in this study.

Theoretical Framework

This research study offered three alternative in-school spaces for seven young Black females to use to negotiate their raced and gendered identities. In order to examine the ways that they responded to the spaces provided, I employed Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework to make sense of the ways that each participant responded to the online chat room, single-gendered book club, and African American contemporary realistic fiction thoughts. In searching for a theoretical framework, I examined critical race theory (CRT) and Womanist theory before selecting Black feminist thought. Critical race theory (CRT) is a form of oppositional scholarship that worked towards the elimination of raced, classed, and gendered forms of social oppression (Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado- Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT extracted from a broad literature based in law, women's studies, education, ethnic studies, economics, sociology, and history. Womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker, has a broad theoretical makeup that placed emphasis on culture, implicitly rooted in Black women's varied experiences across the Black Diaspora (Taylor, 2001).

According to Taylor (2001), Womanism is a theoretical construct that allowed Black women to select the most attractive parts of the theory to suit the multiple voices of Black women. Yet, the flexibility of the term left room for the "disposal of unappealing aspects of the theory" (Taylor, 2001, p.27). Black feminist thought did not leave room for negative appropriation. Despite the fact that Womanism is almost interchangeable with

Black feminist thought, Womanism is a fairly new empowerment theory that has not undergone a critical examination while Black feminist thought has been identified with the historical tradition of Black female activists' commitment to empowering themselves both inside and outside the African American community (Taylor, 2001).

Black feminist Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) identified three "safe spaces" that allowed African American women to use their own voices to define their own experiences and challenge the dominant discourse that either marginalized or pathologized their experiences. The first was Black women's relationships with one another. The other two safe spaces were the Black women's blues tradition and the voices of Black female writers. Historically, these spaces gave voice to those who were denied political or academic power an opportunity to express their ideas and experiences through poetry, books, and stories. The most important aspect of these spaces was that they provided opportunities for self-definition and an opportunity to escape the negative images and ideas about Black womanhood. In the same way, this research study offered three alternative in-school spaces to young Black females in an attempt to provide them with safe spaces to see themselves, express their voices, and resist and construct cultural meanings found in texts.

Instructional Framework

I also employed reader-response to forward Black feminist thought. Reader-response emphasized the uniqueness of students' backgrounds and encouraged them to develop their own individual and authentic responses to literature (DeBlase, 2003). Yet, there were limitations in reader-response's ability to address issues raised around race and

gender in this study. As a result, this study relied heavily on Black feminist thought because it offered a “culturally specific lens” that allowed me to initiate discussion around issues of race and gender (Hinton, 2004, p.60).

Although grounded in Black feminist thought and forwarded by reader-response theory, this research study supported the “New Literacy” promises to engage students with their worlds (Gee, 2000; Henry, 1998a; Street, 1995), and it also added social meanings of race and gender as components to this new literacy education (Henry, 1998a). Relying upon these theories guided my research question, informed my research, and directed my instructional framework. Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and more specifically Chapter 6 shed some light on the ways in which the theoretical frameworks informed this research study.

Limitations of the Study

Like all studies, this research study has several limitations. First, it only focused on one semester and did not follow the girls further. Second, it included typed expressions only. There were no face-to-face meetings, which made it difficult, at times, to interpret the meanings undergirding the girls’ responses. Unfortunately, this led to several misunderstandings. Next, some participants typed faster than others; and as a result, those who typed slower became frustrated and did not respond as often as anticipated. Last, but not least, technology did not always work. At times, participants’ computers disconnected from the chat room group discussions. In one case, my computer did the same thing. When it happened, I contacted one participant by phone, so that she could tell others to be patient.

Whenever this happened to a participant, I contacted her by phone to make sure everything was fine. Unquestionably, Internet disconnections are major distractions, especially when in the process of typing a response in the chat room group discussion. Nonetheless, this study contributed to the body of research interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences in classroom spaces.

Summary

This qualitative research study offered seven adolescent Black females an opportunity to use three alternative in-school spaces to make sense of their experiences as young teenage African American females. The study is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 identifies the problem, purpose, and research plan necessary for examining the opportunities afforded adolescent Black females in this online single-gendered book club. Chapter 2 presents the literature review and conceptual context for this qualitative research. Chapter 3 details the methodology used to carry out the study. Chapter 4 examines how participants in Tuesday's group used an online single-gendered book club to make sense of themselves and their experiences as they discussed what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction did for them. Chapter 5 examines how participants in Thursday's group also used the online single-gendered book club. Chapter 6 concludes with a short discussion of the results, practical implications for theory and practice, and recommendations for future research. In addition, Chapter 6 highlights the results of the study in relation to the theory and scholarship in the field.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. (Audre Lorde, 1984, p.42)

According to Annette Henry (2005), most Black girls are often ignored and afraid to speak out in co-education classrooms, given less attention, and assessed on how they behave rather than on how they perform academically. Yet, she found that race, ethnicity, language background, and socioeconomic issues figured in the girls' academic assessment and success. Nonetheless, research on race, class, gender, and schooling rarely took into account the school experiences of Black girls (Henry, 1998a). In fact, Muhammad and Dixon (2008) found while conducting a recent study that there was little research to explain who young Black girls were as students. In support of this, educational researchers reported that we know very little about the consequences of implementing young adult literature written by African American female authors for students who occupied similar social positions marked by race and gender.

The current study offered seven adolescent Black females an opportunity to use an online school environment, particularly an online chat room and single-gendered book club featuring African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction to read, analyze, and critique their experiences in twenty-first century America. Although school is rarely a place for open discussions of private discourses, Henry (1998b) declared that these discussions needed to take place in classroom settings. As such, this chapter examines research and scholarship that support transforming the high school English

curriculum that limits adolescent Black females from gaining opportunities to have extended conversations about complex issues such as race and gender identities within classroom literature discussions. Specifically, the contributors to this research and scholarship seek “to imagine schools as potential sites for socially transformative work to occur for young women” (Wissman, 2007-2008, p.15).

Key studies tracing adolescent Black females’ experiences in literature discussions include but are not limited to high school English classrooms: Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008), Davis (2000), DeBlase (2003), Henry (2005), Sutherland (2005), and Wissman (2007-2008). Few qualitative studies have addressed the specific topic of the high school English classroom as a possible site for young Black females to gain experience in self-expression and in articulating their own views about being Black and female. According to Henry (1998a), in a patriarchal society, the needs of young girls can get lost in schools. Nevertheless, I focus on research conducted by Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008), Wissman (2007-2008), and Sutherland (2005) because they present compelling arguments about how traditional high school classrooms can be designed in ways that support the need to enlarge learning spaces to provide Black females with opportunities to discuss and research issues pertinent to their lives.

This chapter presents research and scholarship that envision different kinds of educational spaces such as an online chat room environment that permitted young Black females to develop confidence in using their own voice to challenge, resist, and construct cultural meaning found in texts. In addition, it highlights certain spaces that Black women considered safe to come to voice and resist the exploitation of Black womanhood. Black feminist Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) located three “safe spaces” wherein Black

women can authorize, entitle, and empower themselves and offer resources to influence and inspire others (Royster, 2000). One of these spaces exists within the voices of Black female writers. According to Collins (1990), reading literature written by Black female authors creates an intellectual and personal space that allows Black women to see the world differently, change it, and construct, and reconstruct their own ideas about Black womanhood. Similarly, DeBlase (2003) and Sutherland (2005) found opportunities for young Black females to engage in extended conversations about complex issues of race and gender identities within classroom literature discussions (Wissman, 2007-2008).

This chapter begins with tracing the literacy education of young Black females to highlight an unjust educational system that reflects “ongoing, pervasive silencing as well as curtailed access to literacy learning for social, economic, and personal empowerment” (Wissman, 2007-2008, p.341). Although sparse, the key research exploring the challenges that young Black females face include: Eggleston and Miranda (2009), Muhammad and Dixon (2008), Evans-Winters (2005), Fordham (1993), Grant (1984), Horvat and Antonio (1999), Mirza (1992), and Morris (2007). While all contribute to this current body of research, I center my attention on the most recent study conducted by Eggleston and Miranda (2009) and the most cited research study by Fordham (1993) to shed some light on how after sixteen years, the educational experiences of high school Black females are still comprised of racism, isolation, and alienation, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Moreover, traditional forms of literacy education still required young Black females to remain silent and invisible. In response, the subsequent sections present research and scholarship that envision different kinds of educational spaces such as an afterschool

book club and alternative in-school spaces that offer young Black females' opportunities to find their voices. Included in this section are more alternative spaces (e.g., the online environment and single-gendered book club). I employed the online environment and single-gendered book club as alternative spaces for educators interested in literacy research and practice that are committed to students' voices and to teaching them "to understand the 'why' of literature in the context of their personal and social experiences" (DeBlase, 2003, p.325). In the following section, I provide a review of the literature on adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences.

Overview of Adolescent Black Females' Literacy Experiences

In the twenty-first century, adolescent Black females continue to confront an academic literary canon and a classroom pedagogy that require immersing themselves in the "sedentary activities of reading, writing, and speaking in a way that is structured by certain racist, gender, and class privileges" (Henry, 2005, pp. 72-73). According to DeBlase (2003), this type of academic literary canon did not "legitimate their understanding of themselves and their perspectives of the social world" (p.323). Thus, young women of color are forced to use other people's words to define their reality and sense of self. In fact, this was the case with my nieces, participants, and me.

Although located in different places, my nieces and most participants in this research study revealed that they had not read any literature written by African American female authors in their English classes, particularly high school. In fact, Angel, a participant in the current study, asked, "I haven't read any books by African American female writers in my English classes and now that you have brought it to my attention I wonder why?" I

had the same experiences as they did in my high school English classes. In fact, many young women of color share this experience and have found themselves critiquing their experiences alone, “without trust in social institutions, without shared identity with other women, and without any sense that individual analysis could incite broad-based social transformation” (Wissman, 2007-2008, p.341).

Yet, there are no definitive explanations as to why this is the case. Yet, research on adolescent Black girls’ school experiences revealed that most are required to separate their lived realities from their classroom life (Henry, 2005). Although young Black females’ lived realities are just “shut out of the official school curriculum,” Wissman (2007-2008) noted that “young women themselves are voicing critiques of the practices of silencing, miseducation, and isolation in schools and articulating visions of possibility” (p.341).

In Eggleston and Miranda’s (2009) qualitative study on Black girls’ lived experiences in a predominately-White populated high school, the researchers interviewed eleven girls to explore how the participants made meaning of their experiences and how they saw themselves in relation to those experiences within the school setting. Because young women of color experienced cultural alienation, physical isolation, marginalization, and “Othering” within predominately White educational settings, Eggleston and Miranda thought asking for their participants’ views, beliefs, and perceptions would offer insight into “the lived experience of coming of age as an African American female who, by the inherent nature of American society, is subjected daily to racism and sexism” (p. 263).

In this study, the researchers divided the general perceptions of the participants’ academic experiences at Liberty High School into five themes: (a) teacher expectations,

(b) teacher relationships, (c) extracurricular activities, (d) honors/advanced placement courses, and (e) lack of courses on African American culture. The last theme speaks to this current body of research because it sheds light on how high schools lacking any culturally relevant curriculum reflecting African American culture can potentially contribute to the difficulties experienced in school, particularly adolescent Black girls. At this particular school, the participants told the researchers that, “February is the only time you see anything at all... and that’s not much...” (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009, p.273). The participants claimed the White students raised in the school’s district did not receive enough education about African American culture, and as a result, most of the White students interacted with them relying on the negative stereotypical images portrayed in the media. According to Eggleston and Miranda (2009), the social acceptance of dominant images increased the “Othering” of African American females. The girls in Eggleston and Miranda’s study felt they were regarded more as a subgroup than as a part of the main school population.

In addition, the researchers identified how the girls perceived their social experiences. In this case, they were expected to be something other than themselves. Eggleston and Miranda (2009) found most of the participants repeatedly mentioned the term *stereotype* when asked how they are perceived in the school. In fact, the participants claimed that they are perceived as *loud* and *obnoxious* by other African American females and males enrolled in the school. One participant noted that the Black male students that sat at the lunch table with them considered “every Black girl at the table loud” (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009, p.274).

Although many of the participants acknowledged that their behavior was dependent on who was around, some revealed that they chose to distance themselves from the *loud* and *obnoxious* stereotypes by disassociating themselves from the female students that perpetuated the stereotype. The participants admitted that there were separate groups of Black girls in this school. One group associated themselves with the White girls and focused more on academics, while the others attended the school to socialize. Most of the participants did not think the message that African American females acted in ways counterproductive to their academic achievement applied to them. For example, a participant named Kira shared that she had the ability to monitor her own behavior and could reduce the likelihood of being identified as a member of that category.

Furthermore, the researchers found that the participants viewed the stereotypes *loud* and *obnoxious* differently. Most of the participants that grew up in the Liberty district did not feel the stereotype applied to them. Surrounded by a predominately-White community, these young women felt penalized for the other young women who resided outside the district. On the contrary, the girls that moved into the district felt compelled “to assimilate into the culture of the school to prevent the negative stigma from affecting them personally” (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009, p.276). When the researchers asked how they survived in this type of environment, the girls reported they had to change their attitude, speech, and behavior.

Having to change their attitude, speech, and behavior is very common among young Black females regardless of the school population. In the early 1990’s, Signithia Fordham (1993) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study at a predominately African American populated high school in Washington, D.C. and documented how recognizing gender

diversity in this school was absent and, as a result, “mutilated the academic achievement of large numbers of Black female students” (p.5). Fordham found that the high achieving girls often used the deliberate silence strategy to deflect any hostility and anger that might be directed at them if they were both highly visible and academically successful. Fordham defined the deliberate silence strategy as “a controlled response to their evolving, ambiguous status as academically successful” (p.17).

In addition, the high achieving girls in Fordham’s study felt they had to disassociate themselves from the loud Black girls because those being labeled as *loud* meant that they were often denied opportunities to learn. In this school environment, it was mandatory for the females that wanted to achieve academic success to conform to White middle-class views on femininity. White womanhood was often defined as a cultural universal while Black womanhood was always presented as the antithesis of White women’s lives. As such, the high achieving Black females in Fordham’s study felt compelled to work hard, remain silent, and when they vocalized, speak “in a different voice” (Fordham, 1993, p.6).

Fordham (1993) found that when the high achieving female spoke, she had to impersonate a male image in self-presentation, including voice, thinking, speech pattern, and writing style. Although the school had a predominately-female staff, Fordham found the males were in power at Capital. Regrettably, the Black female was the most successful at Capital High, yet the least visible. She described them as the people passing for someone they were not, “the White American female, and ultimately, the White American male” (Fordham, 1993, p.23). At this school, high-achieving Black girls paid

an enormous price for academic success; they remained silent to conceal their Black female voice, and their resulting gender expectations.

Nonetheless, the findings from Eggleston and Miranda's (2009) study and the results from Fordham's (1993) research revealed that the school population and the socioeconomic status did not make any difference in the treatment and perception of the adolescent Black female. Although she worked hard, the young Black female always had to disassociate from other Black females that refused to conform to the universal standard of White womanhood. Eggleston and Miranda shed more light on this matter. They found that, in most cases, the participants did not feel comfortable sticking with one group of friends, particularly other Black students because they did not want to be labeled or limited to one type of friend. One participant shared that she had White friends and felt like an outcast by the other African American students. Another participant revealed that she had difficulty befriending those that were not Black. In any case, the young Black female found herself always having to choose between academic success and friendships with other Black female peers, particularly the *loud* ones.

Thus, the participants' stories in Eggleston and Miranda's (2009) study revealed their unique experiences as young Black females within a predominately-White school culture. In other words, they experienced similar challenges, yet they responded to those challenges differently. Collins (1986) addressed this issue in her article, "Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought." In this article, she argued that common themes might link Black women's lives, but those themes are experienced differently by Black women of different classes, ages, regions, and sexual preferences. For this reason, Collins declared, "there is no monolithic Black

women's culture-rather, there are socially-constructed Black women's cultures that collectively form Black women's culture" (p.522).

In support of this, Eggleston and Miranda's (2009) research study provided evidence that the participants' lived experiences determined the way they responded to the cultural images ascribed to them. For example, some participants appeared to understand that racism still existed and that the views of the majority culture did not necessarily reflect how the girls were individually. Yet, other participants appeared to have internalized the messages and were faced with the personal struggle of believing in the stereotypes and viewing their own negatively. By viewing their African American female peers negatively, these particular girls felt compelled to distance themselves from "the stereotype and the African American community as a whole" (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009, p.281). Contrarily, some participants had strong racial and gender identities and felt the need to prove the stereotypes wrong by refusing to be silent, yet succeeding academically and maintaining friendships with a diverse group of girls. Eggleston and Miranda found that most of the girls that moved into Liberty and the girls that had ties to the African American community appeared "to feel a need to be an emissary" (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009, p.281).

Although some felt the need to become emissaries, Eggleston and Miranda (2009) found that these young women still had to change themselves to fit better within the school culture. In fact, Fordham (1993) reported similar findings in her research study on the high achieving Black girls at Capital High. In Fordham's study, she found that "white and middle class are the hidden transcripts for femaleness" (p.4). Similarly, a participant in Eggleston and Miranda's study admitted that she did not want "to change the way I

talk or who I am for anybody, but I guess I have to” (p.274). Sadly, the participants in both studies had to learn or relearn their status as different, lesser, and as the ‘other’ in these school settings. In brief, Horvat and Antonio (1999) found in their qualitative study on six Black girls attending a predominately-White private, college-preparatory high school for girls that these young women had to surrender their sense of racial pride and listen to different kinds of popular White music. In any case, the findings presented here revealed that young Black females “pay an inordinate price for academic success” (Fordham, 1993, p.23).

Central to the current study was the fact that participants in Eggleston and Miranda’s (2009) research study got an opportunity to tell their own stories. They had a chance to share their experiences within this school environment despite the fact that their experiences involved separating their public and private lives to fit within the school culture. In addition, the fact that this particular school did not offer the girls an opportunity to read their experiences in texts was also central to the current study. According to Davis (2000), when educators helped students connect their life experiences with classroom experiences through a culturally relevant curriculum, it greatly facilitated learning and self-esteem. This did not happen for the participants in Eggleston and Miranda’s research study. Instead, they had to enroll in courses that relied on curricula that lacked any information about African American culture. Although discouraged by apparent lack of interest in African American culture, the participants were generally pleased with the curricula used in their courses.

Yet, it seemed appropriate that if the school offered courses on the African American experience or even implemented it into the content area curricula, then some of the White

students would stop relying on stereotypical images perpetuated by the media to interact with the Black female students. One participant concluded that even if the school offered courses, then “we would have to deal with the ignorant comments from the white kids, like ‘Oh, I’m gonna sign up for the black class’” (Eggleston & Miranda, 2009, p.274).

Although these young women got the opportunity to tell their stories, they did not get the chance to engage in the telling of stories of personal experience in response to what they read in school. DeBlase (2003) argued that literacy played an important part in the construction of gender and race because it shaped identities and provided “a way of being in the world” (p.325). When educators did not provide these opportunities to girls, particularly young Black females, it caused them to use the words of others to define their reality and sense of self. According to DeBlase, it is our moral responsibility as literacy educators to enact curricula that provide an opportunity for young women of color to see themselves, express their voices, and resist and construct cultural meanings found in texts.

A body of research revealed the commitment that has already been made by some to ensure that young Black females get the opportunity to use literature written by African American female authors to take up and negotiate meaning congruent with their lived experiences (Brooks, Browne, & Hampton, 2008; Davis, 2000; DeBlase, 2003; Henry, 1998b; Sutherland, 2005; Wissman, 2007-2008). In order to do this, most researchers created spaces that were exclusively for adolescent Black females. According to Henry (1998a), girls needed spaces “to speak and write from their own subjectivities” because “they cannot always authentically learn about/express themselves in subjective ways in mixed-sex classrooms” (p.166).

In support of this, Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) identified three “safe spaces” that allowed African American women to use their own voices to define their own experiences and challenge the dominant discourse that either marginalized or pathologized their experiences. The first was Black women’s relationships with one another. The other two safe spaces were the Black women’s blues tradition and the voices of Black female writers. Historically, these spaces gave voice to those who were denied political or academic power an opportunity to express their ideas and experiences through poetry, books, and stories. The most important aspect of these spaces was that they provided opportunities for self-definition and an opportunity to escape the negative images and ideas about Black womanhood. Although these spaces recognized diversity, Collins posited that if they did not exclude, they would not have been safe for Black women to define their own standpoint as agents and creators of knowledge.

The subsequent section presents research and scholarship that envision different kinds of educational spaces as safe for young Black females to find their voices. This section focuses on research conducted by Brooks, Browne and Hampton (2008), Wissman (2007-2008), and Sutherland (2005) because they crafted alternative in-school out-of- school spaces specifically designed for high school Black females. In these spaces, the girls read and responded to texts written by African American female authors. The next section begins with a brief overview to show how African American women have historically spoken, written and used their own texts to insert themselves directly and indirectly into arenas for action and for doing whatever they could to change hearts, minds, and conditions.

Historical Overview of Black Females Reading Their Experiences in African American Women Writers

According to Jacqueline Jones Royster (2000), the story of African American women's literacy is a story of visionaries using "sociocognitive ability to re-create themselves and to reimagine their worlds" (p.110). The story began with such visionaries as Sojourner Truth that offered a place to begin understanding literacy as originating from lived experience. Although categorized as illiterate, Truth made it very clear that "I don't read such small stuff as letters, I read men and nations" (as cited in Royster, 2000, p.45). Given this perspective, literacy is understood as sociopolitical action. Royster claimed Truth's commitment reflected the analysis of Paulo Freire's (2004) perspective on literacy as reading the word and the world. In this way, literacy meant more than just acquiring a monolithic and autonomous skill. Literacy, in this sense, meant implicating "voice, community, cultural life, class, gender, race, and relations of power" (Henry, 1998a, p.72).

African American women across generations and locations have consistently regarded literacy as a sociopolitical act because it enabled them to see the world differently and construct and reconstruct their own ideas about the meaning of being Black and female (Royster, 2000). In *Talk Back, Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, bell hooks (1989) recalled becoming a writer through making poems. Because poetry was one literary expression respected in her family's household, she found her voice as she read and recited poetry written by mostly African American writers (e.g., James Wheldon Johnson, Gwendolyn Brooks and Langston Hughes). As hooks described it:

Poetry was the place for the secret voice, for all that could not be directly stated or named, for all that would not be denied expression...The magic of poetry was transformation; it was words changing shape, meaning, and form. Poetry was not mere recording of the way we southern black folks talked to one another, even though our language was poetic. It was transcendent speech. It was meant to transform consciousness, to carry the mind and heart to a new dimension. (p.11)

Although hooks argued that any writing about feminism has overshadowed writing as a poet, she believed the feminist focus on “coming to voice” was one such space that allowed women, particularly women of color who wrote and spoke for the first time to engage in active self-transformation by realizing that women had something meaningful to say all the time.

Nevertheless, hooks (1989) learned about a notion of “voice” in college creative writing classes. She learned that voice embodied the distinctive expression of an individual writer. While the only Black student, hooks recalled teachers and students praising her using her authentic voice when she read a poem written in the particular dialect of southern Black speech. In the beginning, this troubled her because she thought the comments masked racial bias.

Later on, hooks (1989) reflected on her experiences in all-Black segregated schools. In this environment, she understood Black poets as being capable of speaking in many voices, with no single voice ranking more or less authentic. She realized that “the insistence on finding one voice, one definitive style of writing and reading one’s poetry, fit all too neatly with a static notion of self and identity that was pervasive in university

settings” (p.11). hooks understood that many Black students found their situations problematic because “our sense of self, and by definition our voice, was not unilateral, monologist, or static but rather multi-dimensional” (p.12). Yet, she declared that individuals that speak languages other than English should find it “a necessary aspect of self-affirmation not to feel compelled to choose one voice over another, not to claim one as more authentic, but rather to construct social realities that celebrate, acknowledge, and affirm differences” (p.12). In sum, hooks realized the importance of educators privileging authentic voices in classroom settings.

The research on young Black girls’ literacy experiences revealed they are presented with limited opportunities to use texts written by African American authors, particularly female writers to develop their own authentic voices. Notably, there are a few qualitative studies that have introduced alternative spaces existing inside and outside the classroom setting where young women of color can authentically learn about and express themselves in subjective ways. Some alternative spaces identified as safe for adolescent Black females to read and make sense of their experiences were: (a) literature written by African American female authors, (b) book clubs, (c) charter high schools, (d) honors English classes, and (e) chat room environments. Some researchers found that young Black females were able to use these spaces to negotiate, challenge, reject, and recreate representations of themselves.

Adolescent Black Females Reading Their Experiences in an Afterschool Book Club

Featuring Contemporary Realistic Young Adult Fiction

In current studies, educational researchers offered contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female writers for young Black females to create self-definitions (Boston & Baxley, 2007). According to Rudine Sims- Bishop (2007), contemporary realistic young adult fiction are stories that addressed current problems in contrast to historical fiction, which placed the characters in a past time and re-created that era in accordance with the social environment and historical events during that time. Although many authors have chosen to write contemporary realistic fiction, Sims- Bishop warned that “what feels contemporary to an adult may seem like ancient history to a young reader” (pp.195-196). Nonetheless, writing realistic fiction was a response “to the near exclusion of Black people, Black history, and Black cultural traditions from the existing body of African American children’s literature” (Sims- Bishop, 2007, p.195). Some believed that good literature connected with readers through particulars such as: (a) credible characters, (b) the dilemmas they face and resolve, and (c) the specifics of the sociocultural context and the time and place evoked in the story. Prior to the late 1960’s, these particulars along with the distinctiveness of growing up Black in America had been missing from the canon of children’s literature. As a result, African American children and young adult writers began to emerge.

One African American female writer that emerged as a contemporary realistic young adult fiction author was Sharon Flake. In the novel, *The Skin I’m In*, Flake (1998) illustrated through the protagonist Maleeka Madison how the social construct of skin color impacted a dark-skinned female’s life. Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) used

Flake's novel to conduct a qualitative research study on middle school students' experiences in an afterschool book club. Because research on high school age Black females' literacy experiences is limited, much attention is given to this qualitative study because the voices of working class and middle-class African American female students are heard. This particular study included ten young Black females, along with seven Black male participants. The researchers focused more on how the girls responded to the literature to show how race and gender emerged as themes. In this study, Black feminist thought undergirded much of the discussion.

Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) selected Flake's novel because it offered the participants opportunities to identify with the main character Maleeka Madison through personal story connections. They believed African American girls gained self-affirmation from and identify with stories about trustworthy representations of African American female adolescents. Despite providing trustworthy depictions of African American girls, Brooks et al. found the participants revealed a more complicated and multifaceted nature of "reader-text identifications, partly because of the shifting identities" (p.662). One participant, in particular, named Evan shared personal experiences that appeared to be a strong identification with Maleeka's attempts to overcome colorism. The researchers used the term *colorism* as a reference to the social construct skin tone. Yet, the researchers realized that although Evan's gender, race, skin color, and academic ability resembled that of Maleeka Madison, her experiences as a adolescent Black female differed from the protagonist in several ways.

Unlike Maleeka, Evan was self-confident, well groomed, earned high grades, and regarded highly by her peers. Because Evan's identity and social positioning were quite

different, she did not position herself as someone with low self-esteem despite having dark-skin. Moreover, Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) found that the participants were willing to discuss the sensitive topic of skin tone, but they never steered toward a highly sophisticated discussion on skin tone. As a result, Brooks et al. agreed with bell hooks' (2000) call for a massive education movement to help educate twenty-first century young Black girls about the intersecting oppressions of race and gender.

After considering the findings, they began to wonder if it was enough for the participants to recognize the teasing and self-esteem issues embedded in the narrative, but not grapple with or reposition Maleeka as a gendered and racialized participant in a larger social structure. What led to this consideration was the fact that many of the girls personally resisted and defied larger systems of exploitation and oppression because their experiences expanded beyond the issues presented in the novel. For example, several girls were in honor's classes; some played on basketball teams, and others were well versed in African American history.

Because the participants' involvement in other educational programs or extracurricular activities influenced the way they positioned themselves as they constructed meaning, Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) argued that their responses represented a small portion of "the meaning they constructed with the text and the ways in which they positioned themselves as readers and actors in larger societal contexts" (p.668). As such, Brooks et al. recommended that when using Flake's novel and others with similar subject matter, educators should model interpretive strategies in which there exists "a deliberate focus on a synthesis of ideas from the text with a reader's own knowledge, experiences, and identity" (p.668). More specifically, they suggested to

educational researchers that the reader's identities be thought of as fluid and multifaceted because ways of identifying with stories- even stories reflecting the same ethnic background as the readers- will likely vary across "a continuum as protagonists and events in stories change, reveal complexities, or evolve" (p.668).

The current research study built from Brooks, Browne, and Hampton's (2008) study. I decided to examine how seven adolescent Black females attending a public virtual charter high school used an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club featuring African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction to challenge the reading of their experiences as young Black females. Using an online chat room as an alternative setting for a book club was central to this study because I attempted to create spaces whereby Black adolescent girls felt comfortable making sense of themselves and their experiences. Scharber (2009) believed online book clubs effectively wove together old and new literacy practices. As such, the online chat room environment served as a platform to host the single-gendered book club. In this single-gendered book club, I framed the interview questions around key themes such as identity and significance of race to help participants engage in dialogue about themselves and their personal experiences in relation to self-image, identity, and positioning by themselves and others.

Adolescent Black Females Reading Their Experiences in Alternative In-School Spaces

My study is also informed by both Wissman (2007-2008) and Sutherland's (2005) qualitative research studies. Both locate alternative in-school spaces that provide opportunities for young Black females to take up and negotiate meaning found in African

American texts. Wissman's (2007-2008) research study examined sixteen African American female students reading and writing poetry in an urban public charter high school. Informed by teacher research, she hoped to add to the conversation about the possibilities for "imagining different kinds of educational spaces informed by epistemologies of feminism and social justice" (Wissman, 2007-2008, p.15).

As an educator, Wissman (2007-2008) decided to create an alternative in-school space that allowed young women of color to explore poetic work by African American women authors (e.g., Margaret Walker, Sonia Sanchez, June Jordan, and Nikki Giovanni). She selected certain authors because their work envisioned literacy "as a dynamic tool for change and regeneration" (p.16). Wissman believed that "grounding literacy work within the literacy tradition of African American women supported learning environments where literacy is enacted as a social practice, where inquiry is pursued, and where knowledge is constructed relationally" (p.18). Moreover, it was her desire to build a course that not only focused on writing but also provided opportunities for young Black females to come to voice.

Wissman (2007-2008) found it difficult to articulate on paper what transpired in the classroom. Yet, she described the experience as electricity feeling the room when the girls read their work out loud. In this context, she asked participants to read, discuss, and write a poem in response to the one that they read. For example, the participants read Margaret Walker's (1989) poem, "I want to write." In this poem, Walker used imagery to describe her desires to write "the songs of my people" (Wissman, 2007-2008, p.16). After reading the poem, Wissman asked participants to discuss the images that resonated with them the most and discuss the meanings and purposes that the author assigned to the

poem. After the class discussion, each participant had the opportunity to write her own “I want to write” poems.

In one particular poem, a participant wrote about teenagers feeling the need “to scream to be heard” because they feel their voices are disregarded (p.17). By drawing on the work of Margaret Walker, Wissman (2007-2008) noticed that the girls were speaking to themselves and to the other students about how “writing can be a place to name desires for personal and social transformation” (p.17). As an educator in a public charter high school, I am encouraged by the possibilities that exist within public charter high school spaces. Wissman demonstrated the possibilities that existed in alternative in-school spaces. As such, the current study adds to this body of research by showing what happened when young women attending a public virtual charter high school got the opportunity to use an alternative in-school space (e.g., a chat room) to respond to and grapple with deep social issues located in African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction.

In another study, LeeAnn M. Sutherland’s (2005) qualitative research on six Black females enrolled in a high school honors English class also contributed to my research. In this particular study, Sutherland focused on adolescent Black females’ use of literacy practices to negotiate boundaries of ascribed identity. These boundaries of ascribed identity included: a Eurocentric view of beauty and beliefs about who young Black females are expected to be and how they should behave. As such, she selected Toni Morrison’s (1994) novel *The Bluest Eye* to examine how participants’ literacy practices enabled them to negotiate boundaries ascribed to them, talk with one another, and co-construct identities throughout the process. She believed that “as people read, write, and

talk about text, those practices shape and are shaped by how those people think about themselves and their place in the world” (p.366). Undergirding this research was Black feminist thought.

Sutherland (2005) found that Morrison’s novel provided “an opportunity for participants to use literature to shape their reality into one they could represent and confront on their own terms” (p.391). For instance, one participant named Naya is often assumed to be mixed or identified as “a Westport girl” used this novel to represent herself as Black or as mixed- “a combination of Hispanic, Latina, Black, and Indian” (Sutherland, 2005, p. 392). In this case, a Westport girl was typically associated with acting White. Naya did not like the label. In fact, when asked to write about her name using a style patterned after a Native American naming poem, Naya associated her name with all her relatives, regardless of race. From Naya’s perspective, she had “been told never claim one more than the other, never deny any of them” (Sutherland, 2005, p.377). She considered her family the most influential in shaping her personal identity.

In the same way, Bianca, a participant in the current study, approached the novels with a similar attitude. While religion shaped Bianca’s personal identity, she resisted privileging one raced identity over another. Living as a mixed girl with a Black mother and White father, I assumed she would have identified more with her Black heritage. On the contrary, she did not. In fact, at the beginning of the study, Bianca was concerned that, if other girls in the study could see her, they would think her skin shade was “too fair” to be considered for this study.

In Sutherland’s (2005) study, the participants made sense of both life and literature through narrative rendering of their personal connections with the novel. In this way, the

participants used narrative to invoke stories of their everyday experiences that enabled them to make sense of the social problems raised by the literature and voice how they related to the social problems raised in the novel. According to Sutherland, telling their stories, in their own words, “bridge...gaps in imagination and conception and offer opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway” (p.393). In order to meet them halfway, Sutherland declared that it was necessary for all involved to remember that as adolescent Black females studied literature, the representation and construction of their identities could possibly reveal the complexities of their identities.

Similarly, Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008) found this to be the case in their study on adolescent Black girls reading their experiences in African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. Brooks et al. argued that the reader- response theory represented only a small portion of the meaning that the participants in their study constructed with the text. In addition, they claimed that reader- response represented a small portion of the ways in which the girls positioned themselves as readers and actors in larger societal contexts. According to DeBlase (2003), reader-response approaches did not attend to the social determinants underlying the kinds of life experiences narrated in the stories that young women of color often told.

Sutherland (2005) also argued that researchers must be careful not to “oversimplify” complex responses in an attempt “to provide clear, concise, or easily applicable findings from studies” (p.395). In response, she framed the contradictions and inconsistencies in participants’ talk as struggles, yet she admitted that parts of her participants’ identities did not always coexist peacefully. As such, Sutherland proposed that more researchers and practitioners needed to create more opportunities for larger conversations about the

combined effects of race, gender, and social class in the lives of adolescent Black females. Specifically, she emphasized that the themes identified and categories named in her study should not be ascribed to all African American females because they are the shared experiences of many. She argued that researchers and practitioners needed to remember that Black female adolescents' responses varied based on life experiences informed by race, culture, class, context, and gender. Although they are members of the same cultural community depicted in novels read in the study, she cautioned that the responses of young Black girls should not be over-generalized to represent responses of African American women and girls as a whole.

Patricia Hill-Collins (1986) argued the point that Sutherland made in her study. As stated previously, Collins noted that there was no monolithic Black women's culture. In response to this claim, I crafted individual profiles on each participant (Seidman, 1998). The purpose was to show how each girl responded to and used three alternative spaces: (a) online chat room environment, (b) single-gendered book club, and (c) African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. The participants had the opportunity to use a chat room, an instant messaging (IM) feature. Shayla M. Thiel (2005) considered IM conversations to be a "safe" and "free" space that allowed girls to experiment with using different conversational norms. Thiel believed that IM conversations provided "a ripe landscape for a girl to shift from identity to identity and from moment to moment" (p.197). In response, the section below demonstrated how several young Black females used a chat room to establish relationships and claim ownership of the communication that existed in the chat room.

Adolescent Black Females Reading Their Experiences in an Online Environment

In Kimberly Scott's (2004a) qualitative ethnographic study "African American girls' virtual shelves," she interviewed fifty-eight middle-school age African American girls attending an urban school district. Drawing on Black feminist thought, Scott compared the findings from two projects. The first project involved examining how fifty-eight girls developed socially and academically in a state-operated school district. In the second project, Scott examined how a subgroup of twenty-two participants perceived girl sites in a one-week summer technology camp for girls. Although Scott encouraged more girls to participate, only twenty-two of the fifty-eight volunteered. I focused on the findings from the second project.

Scott (2004a) admitted that there was little attention given to the intellectual benefits of technology in this study. Yet, she found technology facilitated friendships among young Black females. In this context, she noticed that friendship was just as important online as it was in a face-to-face school setting. In particular, instant messaging was the preferred communication because it enabled the girls to get to know each other and seek clarification about questions related to class. According to Scott, the preferred virtual location for communication was the chat room. It enabled the girls to maintain the lines of group communication. She concluded that technology allowed the girls to claim ownership over communication represented in their culture-sharing group.

More recently, Scharber, Melrose, and Wurl (2009) argued that online book clubs offered a forum that capitalized on adolescents' familiarity with computers and New Literacy practices while staying rooted in traditional practices. According to Castek,

Bevans-Mangelson, and Goldstone (2006), New Literacy practices “build upon the foundational literacies we have always taught in schools” (p.715). For this reason, they argued that the Internet was a tool that extended opportunities in the classroom for all students to acquire New Literacy skills that included “new reading, writing, viewing, navigating, and communication skills” that continually appear in our lives (p.715). Underlying their argument (2006) that New Literacies are required for participation in a digital world, Scharber, Melrose, and Wurl (2009) created a “girls-only” online book club to provide further insights into how a book club operated online.

In Scharber et al. (2009) research study, they found girls were very active and enthusiastic to talk about books in an online format. In this format, they found the girls-only space provided “safe, guided social experiences” (p.188). According to Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, and Goldstone (2006), many exciting “literacy adventures” await our students online (p.715). For this reason, I used an online chat room along with a single-gendered book club and African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction to examine how participants used the three alternative in-school spaces. Considering the fact that researchers found the online chat room provided girls with safe social experiences, I offered seven adolescent Black females opportunities to read literature in this “girls-only” chat room. I hoped the spaces provided an opportunity for them to move beyond just talking about behaviors expected of them and others’ attitudes toward them as Black females to replacing externally derived negative images imposed upon them with authentic representations of themselves. As such, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 reveal what happened when the participants accessed and used the online environment, single-

gendered book club, and contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors.

Literature Review Summary

In sum, this chapter presented research and scholarship that envisioned different kinds of educational spaces (e.g., afterschool book clubs and online chat room environments) that permitted young Black females to develop confidence in using their own voices. Moreover, it highlighted certain spaces that Black women have historically considered safe to come to voice and resist the exploitation of Black womanhood. This chapter began with tracing the literacy education of young Black females to highlight an unjust educational system. The last section presented research and scholarship for educators interested in literacy research and practice that are committed to hearing the voices of young Black females. Chapter 3 provides a discussion on the methodology used to carry out this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative multiple case study examined how seven young Black females used an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club to position themselves and their reading in relation to the study of African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. The case study was the best method for revealing the participants' perception of their realities with high credibility, as well as "integrity, validity, and accuracy" (Patton, 1990, p.49). According to Yin (1994), a case study is an empirical inquiry that examined "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.13). Put simply, Merriam (1998) described it as an "intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p.27).

For this study, the social unit consisted of seven individuals answering, "how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p.6). The research question asked how seven Black adolescent females used an online single-gendered book club featuring African American young adult literature to make sense of their life experiences? More specifically, I asked the following research questions to get as close as I possibly could to the thoughts, feelings, and desires of each participant:

1. How did African American teenaged girls respond to the online chat room environment?
2. How did African American teenaged girls respond to the single-gendered book club?

3. How did African American teenaged girls respond to African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction?
4. How did African American teenaged girls' responses to the online environment, single-gendered book club, and African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction influence the way they used the study to make sense of their experiences?

As such, this study examined how young Black females used three alternative school spaces that are considered safe (e.g., an online chat room, single-gendered book club, and African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction) for Black girls to come to voice. In this research study, the phrase *coming to voice* referred to the girls using the three alternative in-school spaces to talk about their own experiences, reread their experiences, and rename their experiences. Although Henry (1998a) argued that silence is a text in itself, this study focused more on what the girls actually stated and not on their silence. Specifically, the girls did not come to voice if they remained silent or left the study. They came to voice when they actually used the three spaces, particularly the literature to talk about their experiences even if their experiences contrasted those that the characters encountered in the novels.

Moreover, Black feminist scholars considered a space safe when Black females had opportunities to engage in dialogue with one another about the behaviors expected of them and others' attitudes toward them as Black females (Collins, 1990). In the current study, the single-gendered chat room group is considered safe only when participants used the contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors to openly discuss their experiences, displayed a willingness to see their perspective of the world differently even when their experiences were not represented in

the literature, or worked to change any representations, including characters in the literature, that portrayed Black females negatively. This chapter details the following methodology used to carryout this study: (a) the research design, (b) the methods, (c) the procedures for data analysis, (d) and the ethical and political dilemmas.

Research Design

This qualitative study is situated in an interpretive naturalistic setting where “human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p.5). Using an online chat room as an alternative setting for a book club is central to this study because I attempted to create a space in which Black adolescent girls’ dreams, hopes, pain, and struggles could be voiced (Scott, 2004a). It was in this interactive setting where the participants revealed the different ways that they saw “the spaces of their everyday lives” (Moje, 2004, p.15). It allowed the girls to relish the opportunities offered by technology. This alternative setting offered anonymity, an opportunity for relationships to be established, and participation in “a range of information activities and learning experiences” (Lankshear, Peters, & Knobel, 1996, p.160).

Moreover, this qualitative research provided the participants with opportunities to think about and reflect on their own experiences and think about how their perspectives are socially and historically constructed and how, at times, their perspectives limited their actions (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Furthermore, this study allowed me to see how a community is “...comprised of persons, each of whom has her own subjective experiences” (Fossey, et al., 2002, p.720). In other words, each

participant had her own story to tell despite the common challenges they faced as a group. Since the participants' perspectives are of essential concern to this qualitative research, as the researcher, I attempted to "get behind the curtain" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p.297) in an effort to make sense of, and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings made by the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) presented qualitative research as an interpretive, naturalistic inquiry. Because the interpretivist approach is closely tied to feminist research perspectives and methodologies, my research methodology is aligned with Denzin and Lincoln who argued that "Behind these terms [theory, method, analysis, ontology, epistemology, and methodology] stands the personal biography" of the researcher who speaks from a particular race, class, gender, culture, and ethnic community perspective (p.11). As a Black woman, teacher, and qualitative researcher, my experiences are embedded in this work, to the extent perhaps of being a "participant-observer" who brought "fidelity" to the social realities as told by the participants (Freebody, 2003, p.57).

However, Black feminist theory provided an interpretive framework to examine how the participants made sense of their experiences as they read and responded to young adult literature written by African American female authors in an online single-gendered book club. Given the fact that Black adolescent females cannot always authentically express themselves in mixed-gender classrooms, I created a single-gendered book club in an online high school setting where participants could take risks with their ideas and form relationships with other peers. Within this online space, I became "chameleon-like" to allow "life-worlds of the other to surface in as complete and unencumbered a manner as

possible” (Schwandt, 2000, p.203). My role as the researcher was to be “the conduit through which such voices are heard” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.23).

This study is an inductive and interpretive exploration of how seven adolescent Black females used the following spaces: (a) an online chat room environment, (b) African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction, and (c) a single-gendered book club to make sense of their raced and gendered identities in the 21st century. Most qualitative researchers analyzed their data inductively. As such, I attempted to understand the ways that the girls made sense of their experiences without imposing preexisting expectations on the data (Patton, 1980). In the following section, I detailed the methods used to conduct this study.

Methods

This study offered the following opportunities in an effort to understand the minutiae of each participants lived experiences as they transacted with the literature: First, the study provided the participants with an online single-gendered space. Henry (1998b) described a “girlspace”- as a space where young Black girls can speak and write openly and freely about their experiences and connect their multiple and shifting identities to the literature. Second, this study provided the participants with opportunities to construct meaning from all sorts of texts, socialize with other peers in a real-time chat room, and engage in digital literacies practices. Kist (2002) argued that students needed a large and well-stocked literacy "tool kit" in these "New Times" (p.2). According to Scharber (2009), online book clubs effectively wove together old and new literacy practices. Sharing a similar belief as Scharber, it was my goal to provide multiple opportunities to

each girl in this study, so she could participate in this exciting, socially networked online community. To do this, I had to do the following first: (a) locate a research site, (b) select participants through purposeful sampling, and (c) identify the process used to collect data. As such, the next section detailed the research site, the process used to select participants, and the process used to collect data. Following this discussion is a section on the procedures used to analyze the data.

Research Site

Sahara Charter High School (pseudonym) is a public virtual charter school located in the western part of the United States. Sahara is a full-time publicly funded alternative to “brick-and-mortar” schools (Cavalluzzo, 2005, p.58). In other words, Sahara is opposite to a traditional public school because it offers students the opportunity to complete most coursework online. Although some describe this as a hybrid model, Sahara markets itself as a virtual school. In brief, hybrid courses are a combination of face-to-face and online instruction (Blomeyer & Dawson, 2005).

One of Sahara’s school policies requires students to attend school one day a week for four hours. During this four-hour block, students spend one hour in homeroom, one hour in math lab, and two hours in an applied communications course. During the one-hour homeroom block, students submit assignments for their classes online or arrange student-teacher conferences. During the math lab hour, students work one-on-one with a math teacher. However, in the applied communications class, students work collectively on group projects to eliminate the isolation that can occur in online learning environments.

Sahara also offers students the option to attend school more than one day a week. When students attend school on a day other than their designated time, they have to sign-

in at the front office and go to the learning lab. The learning lab is similar to a computer lab that offers additional space and computers for students to work. During the learning lab hours, Monday-Thursday 8AM-3PM and Friday 8AM-12PM, a licensed teacher is required to be present.

In 2007-2008, the high school's demographics consisted of 20% Hispanic, 12% Black, and 60.9% White. More specifically, the African American female population was less than 40. There are less than 40 Black female students enrolled in the high school, with a total population of 65 African American students enrolled in the high school. Unfortunately, Sahara did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2007-2008. Based on the results, the AYP designation, Sahara is in its fourth year of need to improve.

Nonetheless, I chose this site to locate participants because I am a ninth- grade English teacher at the school. Given this school is deeply involved in teacher research and the administrative team is very supportive, it was easier for me to conduct research where I could get help. In this school, I would serve as the "gatekeeper" and recruit possible participants for this study. Furthermore, Sahara has the reputation of being an *IEP* school where students with an *Individualized Educational Plan* can attend and get a diploma without high quality learning opportunities. In this case, high quality learning opportunities meant going beyond expanding access to technology to assisting every learner in meeting individual educational goals and ensuring high-quality courses. I wanted to show that Sahara could provide high quality learning opportunities. With this idea in mind, I felt Sahara was the perfect site to conduct research to capture how this particular school can provide opportunities for high quality learning that allowed all

students to apply real-life applications. To do this, I had to get this study approved (see Appendix A).

I used *E-College*, also known as *E-Classroom*, to provide participants with high quality learning opportunities. Sahara purchased *E-College* as the online platform for teachers to build their courses at the beginning of the 2007-2008 academic year. *E-College's* platform offers several features used in this study: e-mail, chat room, and discussion board. In brief, Sahara does not employ course designers to build the online content. The school's administration believed teachers needed to experience designing their own courses in order to improve their pedagogy.

Given the school had an account with *E-College*, I had direct contact with *E-College* technicians, and my assistant principal's research interest was finding effective ways to communicate with K-12 students individually and collectively online, I asked him to contact *E-College* to see if the company could create an account for this research study. Immediately, Mr. Jones (pseudonym) contacted *E-College*, and the company agreed to create an account for my study. An *E-College* representative, Mr. Jones, and I agreed to give my account the title *Research Study*, so everyone involved with the study would recognize the title in their course list.

Once we finalized the account with *E-College*, my assistant principal and I discussed the importance of anonymity. He recommended that, once I received consent forms from participants and parents, he would use each participant's student identification number to enroll her in the study. By doing this, it meant each participant's student identification number would appear when she logged-on to the chat room, and other participants would not be able to identify her unless she revealed her identity. I agreed to this

recommendation because it would enable me to keep track of each participant, and it would make it easier for the participants to remember their log-on information. Most importantly, it would ensure that each participant remained anonymous.

Participants

In 2007-2008, the population of Black female students in Sahara's high school was extremely low. Given the total population of Black females enrolled was below 40, and I was the only Black female teacher in the high school, I purposefully sampled Black female students. The selection criteria were students between the ages of 15-17 in grades 10-12 with good attendance records. I also made sure that the potential participants did not know each other by asking them to name their friends at school. By selecting potential participants that had good attendance records and no relationship with other potential participants, it provided an opportunity for me to collect "information rich" data (Creswell, 2005, p.204).

The process of purposeful sampling began after I posted a flyer around the school (see Appendix B). Fifteen girls inquired about the study. I collected names and met with the school's registrar in charge of pupil enrollment. She printed out a list of all the potential participants. I reviewed the list and highlighted all the names of the potential participants between the ages of 15-17 in grades 10-12. Because I taught ninth-grade English, I chose potential participants in grades 10-12 to avoid conflict of interest although I knew some from the previous year. After reviewing the list, I returned to the school's registrar to get her to print another list that included each potential participant's homeroom schedules. This list also included their attendance record and contact information. I contacted the potential participants that had good attendance records to

schedule a meeting with them. To protect their identities, I met with them individually in the high school boardroom to explain my research project and answer any questions.

The meetings lasted for approximately 30 minutes. During these meetings, I used my recruitment presentation to ensure I did not omit any important information (see Appendix C). I discussed the project; shared personal information; shared examples of contemporary realistic fiction written by African American female authors; answered questions, and distributed to any interested student a consent packet containing the participant informed consent, a parental/guardian informed consent, an example of the research study platform, and a summary of the novels (see Appendices D, E, F, and G).

I openly described my goals in the informed consent forms to make the potential participants and their parents aware of the study's goals and objectives from the beginning. I emphasized the materials would be provided and that, in the event, the participant withdrew from the study, she could keep the novels as a gift for her participation. I used my teacher's discount at a local bookstore to purchase the material. In addition, I informed the potential participants that the English teachers agreed to give them extra credit points for participating in this study. I distributed ten consent form packets and reminded each girl to keep the duplicate copies of the consent forms for their own personal record. They had two weeks to complete and return the forms.

During this two-week period, I spoke with the potential participants and, at least, one of their parents or guardian. I contacted them by phone to answer questions and concerns about the study. The summaries below detail the conversations that I had with the seven participants and their parent or guardian prior to returning the signed consent forms to

participate in this study. The summaries are in the order that I spoke with each participant and her parent or guardian.

Esperanza

I contacted Esperanza's mother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. Due to her work schedule, she could not schedule a face-to-face meeting. As such, we spoke by phone. During the phone conversation, both Esperanza and her mother shared their concerns about the study. In the beginning, they thought the study was face-to-face. Esperanza did not want to participate in the study if it required face-to-face interaction. Esperanza recalled the negative experiences that she had as a Black female with other Black girls in the past.

As a result, she did not want to participate in anything that required her to interact with other Black girls face-to-face. At this point, her mother refused to sign the consent forms and justified it by explaining that she did not want her daughter subjected to any criticism that caused her daughter to feel insecure about the way she looked, dressed, or styled her hair. I told both Esperanza and her mother that this study was online with no face-to-face interaction. I explained that her identity would remain anonymous as long as she did not reveal herself to the other girls. I also shared that this study would potentially help Esperanza develop a different perspective on Black females. I discussed each novel and explained the purpose of the study. After much consideration, Esperanza returned signed consent forms the following week.

Bianca

I contacted Bianca's mother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. During the phone conversation, Bianca's mother arranged to meet with me face-to-

face to make sure her daughter's identity remained anonymous and to make sure she did not read anything that went against their moral and religious beliefs. As a Jehovah Witness, her mother wanted to make sure that her daughter did not read anything contrary to their beliefs. We met in the computer lab, and during the meeting, her mother requested a copy of each novel to skim through with her daughter. I explained the content of each novel and the format of the study to them. I also gave them a copy of each novel, and Bianca's mother guaranteed that it would not take them long to read the novels and make a decision. Bianca returned signed consent forms the following week.

Star

I contacted Star's mother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. Due to her work schedule, she could not meet face-to-face. I spoke with Star's mother by phone. During the conversation, I explained the content of each novel and the format of the study. She was more than gracious to allow her daughter to participate in this study. She shared that she had to work but would do whatever I needed, so that Star participated. Her motto was "We have to help one another." In this case, the "we" meant Black people. Star returned signed consent forms the following week.

Isabella

I contacted Isabella's mother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. During the phone conversation, I scheduled to meet with them in person. We met in the teacher's workroom. I explained the content of each novel and the format of the study. As a White female, Isabella's mother emphasized that she wanted her daughter to know about her African American heritage. Isabella's mother revealed that her father passed away when she was very young, yet she never explained the reason why they did

not communicate with her father's side of the family. She hoped that this study enabled her daughter to understand and appreciate her Black identity. Isabella and her mother signed the consent forms during the meeting.

Angel

I contacted Angel's mother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. During the phone conversation, she asked to meet in person, and I scheduled to meet with them. We met in the teacher's workroom. I explained the content of each novel and the format of the study. After this, Angel's mother began to express how excited she was to hear that someone was willing to listen to Black girls share experiences. During the meeting, she shared with her daughter that she never had this opportunity in school. They signed the consent forms during the meeting.

Aurora

I contacted Aurora's mother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. During the phone conversation, she asked to meet in person, and I scheduled to meet with them. We met in the teacher's workroom. I explained the content of each novel and the format of the study. Aurora's mother explained that she wanted her daughter to read African American literature to learn about her heritage. Aurora's father, an African American, passed away when she was very young. As a Filipino female, Aurora's mother felt this study would provide her daughter with the opportunity to read and talk with other girls with similar experiences. Aurora returned signed consent forms the following week.

Jade

I contacted Jade's grandmother by phone to answer any questions that she had about the study. During the phone conversation, her grandmother requested that she, her

granddaughter, and Jade's father met to discuss their concerns. I scheduled a meeting, and we met in the school's boardroom. I explained the content of each novel and the format of the study. After I explained the study, in a soft-spoken voice, her father shared that he wanted her to read more. He believed that exposing her to literature written for and about Black women and girls would be appealing to her and make her more interested in reading. He believed that her reading comprehension would improve if she read more books. Jade had an IEP, an Individualized Educational Plan for students with special needs. The goals on her IEP targeted strengthening her reading comprehension skills. He wanted to make sure that this study did not overwhelm his daughter. I assured them that if she ever felt overwhelmed, she could withdraw from the study. Jade returned signed consent forms the following week.

I collected and processed seven consent forms after the deadline for returning the consent forms. Once I collected the consent forms, I met with the assistant principal to give him a copy of the participants' names. Mr. Jones enrolled each participant in the research study by using her student identification number. Once he completed the enrollment process, I e-mailed each participant individually at the e-mail addresses that *E-College* created automatically after Mr. Jones enrolled them in the study. In other words, when Mr. Jones enrolled the participants, *E-College* automatically created an e-mail address that included the participant's student identification number. For example, if the participant's identification number was 12345, then her e-mail address was 12345@saharak12.org.

The participants received the information listed in an e-mail format: (a) a sign-up schedule for the initial one-on-one chat room interview, (b) a schedule to sign-up for

literature discussions in the chat room, (c) a list of questions to answer and submit by e-mail after each chat room group discussion, (d) and a weekly reminder about what to read, when to log-on to the chat room, and when to submit the final project and the e-mail interviews. For example, each participant received an e-mail that included the sign-up schedule highlighted in Table 1 for the initial one-on-one chat room interview.

Table 1

Sign-Up Schedule for the Initial One-on-One Interview

	Tuesday Oct. 9, 2007	Wednesday Oct. 10, 2007	Thursday Oct. 11, 2007	Saturday Oct. 12, 2007	Sunday Oct. 13, 2007
Time	4-5PM		5-6PM		4-5PM
Time	6-7PM	7-8PM	7-8PM	7-8PM	
Time	8-9PM	8-9PM	8-9PM	8-9PM	

Prior to logging-on for the initial one-on-one interview, I asked participants in the e-mail that included the sign-up schedule to visit the research study website to watch a Teacher Tube video that I created to welcome them to the study. In this video, I spoke directly in a Webcam, so the participants could watch me reiterate the purpose of this study. In this video, I also disclosed my contact information and reminded the participants that they could withdraw from this study at anytime. I created this video to build a rapport with the participants and remind them that they could call my cell phone number or e-mail me during any chat room discussion. Once the first participant e-mailed the day and time that she could log-on to the initial one-on-one chat room interview, the

data collection began. The initial one-on-one chat room interview questions addressed school experiences and reading preference (see Appendix H).

Data Collection

According to Yin (1994), a major strength of qualitative case study data collection was the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence. Using multiple sources in qualitative research meant that data was richer in a study because multiple sources led to a better understanding of the phenomena studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Although the term *triangulation* (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1980) came to mean the use of multiple sources, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) argued that it confused more than clarified and intimidated more than enlightened. They concluded that it was best to describe what you did rather than use “the imprecise and abstract term *triangulation*” (p.108). As such, the data collection for this study consisted of four major parts: (a) one initial one-on-one chat room interview, (b) five chat room group discussions, (c) four e-mail interviews (d) one Voicethread project, and (e) fieldnotes.

The data collection began with an initial one-on-one chat room interview. This interview required participants to log-on at the scheduled time. In order to access the one-on-one chat room, I had to create a group for each participant. To create a group, I had to log-on to the *Research Study* Website and click on the Course Administration tab (see Appendix I). Once I clicked on the Course Administration tab, I gained access to the Group Management tab. After I clicked on the Group Management tab, I created a new group. I created seven new groups for the initial one-on-one chat room to interview each participant. To create each group, I used the participant’s student identification number

and date she agreed to log-on as a title for the initial chat room. By using this information as the title, the participant could see the date that she agreed to log-on.

By creating individual group accounts, the participants could not access other participants' one-on-one chat room interviews. They only had access to their own. For example, Bianca scheduled to log-on Tuesday for the initial one-on-one interview. Once she logged-on and clicked on the chat room tab, she saw a link that included her student identification number and date that she agreed to log-on. Once she clicked on the link, she gained access to the initial one-on-one chat room interview. Once each participant completed the initial one-on-one interview, she had access to review the transcript anytime during the data collection process. *E-College* automatically saved the chat room interviews.

It was important to begin data collection with an initial one-on-one chat room interview to provide each participant with an opportunity to talk about her experiences, exposure to African American literature, and reasons for participating in this study. Each one-on-one chat room interview lasted for one hour. This initial interview required participants to respond to both semi-structured and open ended questions. The initial interview included background information on each participant. All participants completed the initial one-on-one chat room interview. This information is located in Table 2.

However, I used data from the initial one-on-one chat room interview to determine if the participants should select the reading material for this study. Researchers recommended that students select their own books to read in a book club (Appleman, 2006; Davis, 2000; Alvermann, Young, Green, & Wisenbaker, 1999). After reading the

data from the initial one-on-one chat room interview, I found that most participants had not read African American young adult literature in their English classes or had not read enough young adult literature written by African American authors to decide what was appropriate for this study. Knowing this, I decided to select and purchase the novels to accommodate any participant who had not read any African American young adult literature, or could not afford to purchase the novels, or did not have transportation to get to a local library to check-out the books.

Table 2

Initial One-on-One Chat Room Interview

Background Information	Esperanza	Bianca	Star	Isabella	Angel	Aurora	Jade
Age	17	17	17	15	17	15	16
Race	Black	Biracial	Black	Biracial	Black	Biracial	Biracial
Read A.A. literature in school	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Read A.A. literature at home	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reading Preference	Mystery	Science-Fiction	A.A. Romance	Science-Fiction	A.A. Literature	A.A. Literature	A.A. Literature
Reason for joining study	Extra Credit	Talk to others	Help with study	Relate to novels	Hear Black girls' speak	Talk to others	Read more books

I chose four contemporary realistic young adult novels based on the following criteria: (a) books written by award-winning authors that represented an insider's view on adolescent Black female life (b) and books that uniquely constructed lasting characters, endearing plots and story lines, and rich themes (Boston & Baxley, 2007). After I

collected the consent forms, I ordered and purchased seven copies of each book. The participants received a copy of each novel. The online school book club consisted of the following novels: Jacqueline Woodson's *Hush* (2002), Sharon Draper's (2002) *Double Dutch*, Lori A. Williams' (2001) *When Kambia Elaine Flew In From Neptune*, and Sharon Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In*.

Material for Online Chat Room Group Discussions

In the first chat room group discussion, the participants discussed Kiri Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me*. Prior to the discussion, they were asked to watch Davis' documentary. The participants could access it from the *Research Study Website*: (http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/films/a_girl_like_me/). This documentary introduced the participants to Kiri Davis, an African American adolescent female that decided to interview a variety of Black females that attended the same high school as she did. Davis decided to create this documentary after constructing an anthology as part of a high school literature class assignment. In this anthology, she included a wide range of different stories reflecting what she believed to be adolescent Black females' experiences for a high school literature class assignment.

To collect data, Davis interviewed a variety of adolescent Black female peers. As she conducted the interviews, Davis saw how a number of issues surfaced concerning the standards of beauty imposed on today's Black adolescent females and how this affected their self image. In the end, Davis submitted this as a film idea to the *Reel Works Teen Filmmaking Program* and got accepted. Included in the documentary, Davis performed the "doll test" initially conducted by Dr. Kenneth Clark, which was used in the historic desegregation case, *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

In the second chat room group discussion, the participants discussed Sharon Flake's (1998) novel *The Skin I'm In*. In a live chat room interview with a New York Public Library (2002), Sharon Flake revealed that the inspiration behind writing the novel came from her own personal experience (<http://www.nypl.org/chat/flake.html>). Flake described her daughter as a beautiful dark-skinned young woman. Flake began telling her daughter stories about phenomenal dark-skinned females who were very successful. From this, Flake decided to write the novel not to capture her daughter's experiences but to capture the struggles that exists within the Black community between light and dark-skinned people. More importantly, she wrote *The Skin I'm In* to help Black girls learn to value themselves despite other people's opinions. The novel captured the protagonist Maleeka Madison's long and painful journey of self-acceptance as a dark skinned African American female adolescent. For this particular chat room group discussion, some of the interview questions came from the *Anti-Defamation League Curriculum Quarterly* Website: (<http://www.adl.org>).

The third chat room group discussion included Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*. In an interview with *TeachingBooks.net* (2006), Woodson revealed that she wrote realistic fiction because she wanted to offer African American children an opportunity to read their experiences in literature (http://www.teachingbooks.net/content/Woodson_qu.pdf). Growing up in Brooklyn, New York, Woodson shared that she did not know many writers that wrote about African American girls. As such, she began writing literature that spoke to the experiences shared by many adolescents in the African American community.

Identity is a central issue in Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*. Because identity is a major issue among African American adolescents, it seemed appropriate for this study to include one of her novels. In the novel, the protagonist Toswiah (Evie), searched for answers to define who she was while she and her family were in a Witness Protection Program. In this novel, Toswiah asked, "Does it matter what I am, I wanted to scream, if I'm not anyone" (Woodson, 2002, p.75). Based on Toswiah's statement, she is experiencing an "ongoing journey of self-discovery" (Jones & McEwen, 2002, p.173). Some of the interview questions for this chat room group discussion came from the following *Penguin Reading Guide* Website: (<http://us.penguin.com/static/rguides/us/jacquelinewoodson.html>).

The fourth chat room group discussion included Draper's (2002) novel *Double Dutch*. Draper's novel was more than a story about the jumping rope activity Double Dutch. Several of the characters in the novel lived, in a sense, double lives. They had hidden secrets. Delia, the protagonist, hid her inability to read from her parents and teachers but doubted she could pass the school's proficiency test to enter the ninth- grade and continue competing in the Double Dutch tournaments. Randy, whose mother walked out several years ago, had a secret also. He did not tell anyone that his father, a long-distance truck driver, had been missing for weeks. This novel addressed how lies and deception can have major consequences.

The final chat room group discussion was on Lori A. Williams' (2001) novel *When Kambia Elaine Flew in from Neptune*. In an interview with Cynthia Leitch Smith (2000), Lori A. Williams revealed that she wrote the book in an attempt to give voice to children (http://www.cynthialeitchsmith.com/lit_resources/authors/interviews/LoriAureliaWillia

[ms.html](#)). During her childhood, Williams' father molested her. As a child, she did not know she lived in an abusive home. According to Williams, no one discussed issues such as sexual abuse in her community. As she grew older, she learned that there were other children in her community that lived in secret about being physically and mentally abused by people who were supposed to love and protect them. Sadly, they were all afraid to discuss their pain.

In this novel, the protagonist, 12-year-old Shayla Dubois, was an aspiring writer with a gift for language. Shayla filled her notebooks with observations and emotions that she could not express openly. In the meantime, Kambia shared stories with Shayla about Wallpaper Wolves that came to her at night. In the beginning, Kambia's strange tales and antics annoyed Shayla, but when she accidentally saw Kambia's bruised and bloodied thighs, Shayla realized something was wrong. This novel captured what happened when children are afraid to discuss their pain.

The novels used in this study pressed readers to probe their own identities by creating characters like Maleeka and Toswiah who “struggle to construct identities that offer unquestionable certainty and reassurance about why they are and how they are perceived by others” (Boston & Baxley, 2007, p.572). In addition, they captured how young Black girls resisted controlling images and affirmed other definitions. Knowing this, the five chat room group discussions included questions that asked the participants to reflect on incidents in the literature that resonated with their experiences or interested them. I also interjected questions from interview protocols when I felt the need to bring the chat room group discussions back on a track more central to my research study, but often, I let the participants talk because they were engaged, and I had no way to know in advance if their

conversations were relevant to my study (Sutherland, 2005). In sum, Table 3 highlights the material used in each online chat room group discussion.

Table 3

Material Used for Online Chat Room Group Discussions

Discussions	Material Discussed	Author
First	<i>A Girl Like Me</i>	Davis, 2000
Second	<i>Skin I'm In</i>	Flake, 1998
Third	<i>Hush</i>	Woodson, 2002
Fourth	<i>Double Dutch</i>	Draper, 2000
Fifth	<i>When Kambia Elaine flew in from Neptune</i>	Williams, 2001

E-mail Interview

E-mail interviews were used in this study also. The purpose was to provide the participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences after each chat room group discussion on the assigned novel. In all, I e-mailed four e-mail interviews to each participant. I did not include an e-mail interview for the first chat room group discussion on Davis's documentary because I wanted the participants to get comfortable with the study first. The e-mail interviews required the participants to answer both semi-structured and open-ended questions, reflecting on how the online environment, single-gendered book club, and literature enabled them to make sense of their own experiences as young Black females (see Appendix J).

Voicethread Project

The final phase of the data collection was a Voicethread project. Instead of a final one-on-one chat room interview, I decided to offer the participants an opportunity to use the free web-based digital storytelling program Voicethread to share what they learned about themselves after participating in this study (www.voicethread.com). As an online digital storytelling tool, Voicethread provided tools that allowed the participants to use visual images, add voice recordings, and incorporate written texts. To complete the Voicethread project, however, the participants had to create individual accounts first. Once they created an account, they were able to access the tools provided by Voicethread. For the most part, the participants used their own voices, displayed images, and wrote texts to share how they used this study to make sense of their experiences. Table 4 highlights the links to the participants' Voicethread projects.

Table 4

Participants' Voicethread Projects

Participants' Names	Voicethread Link
Esperanza	http://voicethread.com/share/44862/
Bianca	http://voicethread.com/share/44419/
Star	http://voicethread.com/share/44576/
Isabella	http://voicethread.com/share/32786/
Angel	http://voicethread.com/share/40909/

Participants' Group Affiliation

Prior to the first chat room group discussion on Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me*, I contacted each participant by phone to find out which day and time she preferred to log-on and participate in the chat room group discussions. During the phone

conversations, I reminded each girl that there were only seven participants and each group had to include three to four participants. After conversing with each participant, I was able to narrow the schedule to Tuesday and Thursday. I e-mailed the schedule to each participant. Once participants received the e-mail, they had to send an e-mail to me confirming the day and time that they preferred to log-on. Three participants signed-up for Tuesday's group for the 4-5PM hour. Four participants signed-up for the 5-6PM hour for the Thursday's group. There were several occasions when the time varied for Thursday's group due to some of the participants not logging-on at the assigned time. Nonetheless, once I placed the participants into a group, they only had access to that particular group. The participants could not access both groups. Table 5 highlights the chat room group discussion schedule to show the different times that the participants could log-on.

Table 5

Chat Room Group Discussion Schedule

	Tuesday	Thursday
Time	4-5 PM	5-6 PM
Time	6-7 PM	7-8 PM
Time	8-9 PM	8-9 PM

Participants' Extent of Participation

In all, four participants completed the study. All participants in Tuesday's group, Esperanza, Bianca, and Star completed the study. They logged-on to the initial one-on-one chat room interview, participated in all the chat room group discussions, submitted

the e-mail interviews, and completed the Voicethread project. Isabella was the only participant from Thursday's group that attempted to complete the entire study. She logged-on to every chat room group discussion at the assigned time despite the fact that other group participants Angel, Aurora, and Jade did not log-on or admitted to not reading the book in its entirety. Unfortunately, Isabella could not join Tuesday's group because she attended school from 12-4PM on that particular day. For this reason, I attempted to reschedule the fourth and fifth chat room group discussions to offer participants in Thursday's group, in particular Isabella, an opportunity to discuss the novels. This did not work.

By this time, two members, Aurora and Jade, had withdrawn from the study. After the third chat room group discussion, they did not log-on to participate in the study anymore. Angel, however, did not complete the fourth and fifth chat room group discussions, but she did complete the Voicethread project. As for Isabella, she did not get the chance to discuss the assigned novels for the fourth and fifth chat room group discussions but still got the opportunity to use the e-mail interview forum for the fourth and fifth chat room group discussions to reflect on her experiences in this study.

Table 6 highlights each participant's group affiliation and the extent of her participation. For instance, if a participant received an "X" in a chat room group column, that meant the participant did both: read the novel and logged-on to the chat room group discussion. If a participant did not finish reading the novel but logged-on to the chat room group discussion, the column remained blank. If the participant did not finish reading the book, then she could not participate in the chat room group discussion. Isabella received

an “X” in all categories although she did not get the opportunity to discuss the novels in the fourth and fifth chat room discussions.

Table 6

Participants’ Group Affiliation and Extent of Participation

Group/ Participation	Esperanza	Bianca	Star	Isabella	Angel	Aurora	Jade
Group	Tues.	Tues.	Tues.	Thurs.	Thurs.	Thurs.	Thurs.
One-on-One	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chat 1	X	X	X	X		X	X
Chat 2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chat 3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chat 4	X	X	X	X			
Chat 5	X	X	X	X			
E-mail 1	X	X	X	X			
E-mail 2	X	X	X	X			
E-mail 3	X	X	X	X			
E-mail 4	X	X	X	X			
Voicethread	X	X	X	X	X		

In sum, this section detailed the research site, participant selection, and the data collection process. The following section demonstrates how the data analysis consisted of “taking the data apart” to determine individual responses and then “putting it together” to summarize the data collectively (Creswell, 2005, p.10). It illustrates the basic strategy of the constant comparative method as explained by Merriam (1998) in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. The basic strategy is “to do just what its name implied-constantly compare” (Merriam, 1998, p.159). According to Merriam, those not seeking to build substantive theory can still use the constant

comparative method of data analysis. In this case, the constant comparative method is used to develop categories, while Black feminist thought is used to identify the themes that undergird the categories.

Procedures for Data Analysis

The constant comparative method of data analysis involved collecting data and analyzing it simultaneously, with analysis beginning with the first interview, the first observation, and the first document read. Because qualitative research is emergent, Merriam (1998) argued that analysis should be conducted after collecting each piece of data to determine the next phase of data collection. Contrarily, Stake (1995) declared that the “analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions” and not about when data analysis begin (p.71). In support of this, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) wrote that the constant comparative method of data analysis should begin early in the study and almost completed by the time data collection ended. Adopting this approach to data analysis, I employed the constant comparative method as outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) in *Qualitative Research in Education: An Introduction to Theory and Method*.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) identified the following as the six steps in the constant comparative method of data analysis: (a) collect data, (b) look for key issues, recurrent events or activities in the data that become categories for focus (c) continue to collect data that provide incidents of the categories of focus, (d) write about the categories explored, (e) work with the data and the emerging model in order to discover the basic social processes and relationships among and between the individuals in the group, and (f) summarize, code, and write as the analysis focused on the most meaningful categories.

While some argued that the constant comparative method was linear in its steps, Bogdan and Biklen claimed that the steps occurred simultaneously in a completely integrated manner.

In this study, the data analysis began with reading the fieldnotes on the first chat room group discussion on Davis' documentary. While reading the field notes, I coded data bits that stood out as potentially relevant to the study. Merriam (1998) wrote that data bits can be as "small as a word a participant used to describe a feeling or phenomena, or as large as several pages of field notes describing a particular incident" (p.179). In this case, data bits included key words, phrases, and statements addressing the research questions. For example, Esperanza used the phrase *wholesome safe environment* to describe the online chat room.

While working through coding the fieldnotes, I asked of the data three questions. How did the participants respond to the online environment? How did the participants respond to the single-gendered book club? How did the participants respond to African American contemporary realistic young adult literature? Asking these questions enabled me to keep the data analysis manageable. It also enabled me to develop preliminary categories that reflected the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998). For instance, if four participants mentioned something related to feeling safe in the online chat room environment, I made *safe* a category for the online chat room environment. I created separate computer files to store each category and data bits placed in that category.

I used memo writing to devise an inventory list that characterized each category's properties. For instance, if one participant stated that the online chat room environment enabled her to express herself freely, and another participant mentioned that it allowed

her to say whatever and not be afraid of judgment, then key phrases (i.e., express myself freely and no fear of judgment) became properties and were placed in the *safe* category for the online chat room environment. Creswell (2008) defined properties as subcategories that provide details about the category. In this research study, I extracted properties of each category from the participant's responses from the first chat room group discussion, so that those properties functioned as criteria for the systematic comparison of the other responses found in the chat room group discussions, e-mail interviews, and Voicethread projects (see Appendices K and L). I scanned the other chat room group discussions, e-mail interviews, and Voicethread projects searching for data bits that fit into the categories that I already had. When data did not fit the pattern, I made new categories (see Appendix M).

Moreover, I employed the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to determine when to stop processing data: (a) exhaustion of sources, (b) saturation of categories, (c) emergence of regularities, and (d) overextension. Once the data saturation occurred, I analyzed each category. During this phase, I realized the data begged for continued analysis past the formation of categories. According to Merriam (1998), data often seemed to beg for continued analysis past the formation of categories when the category scheme did not tell the whole story. In this case, I needed to dig deeper to hear the stories that undergirded the categories. To do this, I employed Black feminist thought as an interpretive framework.

Collins (1990) identified the following three safe spaces where Black women found their voices (a) Black women's relationships with one another, (b) Black women's blues tradition, and (c) the voices of Black women writers. According to Collins, these spaces

allowed Black women to challenge the controlling images used to define African American womanhood, construct independent self-definitions, and redefine and explain the importance of Black women's culture. This research offered adolescent Black females three spaces to make sense of their experiences: (a) an online environment, (b) single-gendered book club, and (c) contemporary realistic young adult literature written by African American females.

Using a Black feminist analytical framework, I analyzed the categories that emerged during the constant comparative analysis to examine the participants' perspectives on the spaces provided and how their perspective influenced how they made sense of their experiences as adolescent Black females. Appendix N provides an excerpt from Tuesday's final chat room group discussion. Appendix O provides an excerpt from Thursday's third chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel *Hush*. The themes emerged from the categories by "determining which categories were predominant in the data and summarizing their content" (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005, p.6). I tested the themes found in level three of Table 7 by paying close attention to the participants' responses in the e-mail interviews. By doing this, I was able to test the emerging interpretations against the participants' perspectives, a process that some educational researchers called "member checking" (Harry, et al., 2005, p.7). According to Harry et al., testing the themes allowed the researcher to go a step further than member checking by using level three themes as a frame for examining subsequent data and by testing that frame against the perspectives of the participants. At this point, I asked, "To what extent do the data support these themes" (Harry, et al., 2005, p.8).

Once I answered this question, I moved on to level five as described by Harry, Sturges, and Klinger (2005) in their article. Level five consisted of coming to conclusions about contradictions within an explanation, such as Isabella felt the anonymity in the chat room allowed her to overcome fear of judgment, yet she felt the anonymity had negative effects in Thursday's group. Level six consisted of delineating the theory. Harry et al. claimed this level required distinguishing between formal and substantive theory. In this case, the later is more appropriate. Harry et al. defined substantive theory as "a set of explanations that account for phenomena within a specific or substantive field" (p.10).

The findings provided enough evidence to conclude that identities must be thought of as fluid and multifaceted. In addition, the findings called into question Black feminists claim that African American female writers and social networks exclusively designed for Black females are safe spaces where they can make sense of their experiences and define themselves without recrimination. Table 7 provides a data analysis map that highlights the six levels of analysis. In Table 7, the numbers at the far left represent the six levels of analysis, moving upward from the bottom of the table (Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005). Ethical and political dilemmas are discussed in the section below Table 7.

Table 7

Data Analysis Map

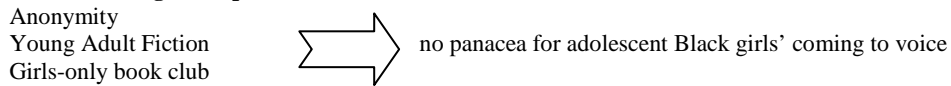
6. Theory: The findings called into question Black feminist scholars claim that Black female writers and social networks are safe spaces where Black females can make sense of their experiences and define themselves without recrimination. The findings also revealed that identities are fluid.

Online Chat Room: There is no certainty in the online chat room environment.

Young Adult Fiction: Although the young adult fiction provided Esperanza, Star, and Isabella with opportunities to name racism and try on multiple identities, it did not provide Bianca with the same opportunities. Due to her religious beliefs, Bianca found the literature depressing and immoral at times. As a result, she rejected it.

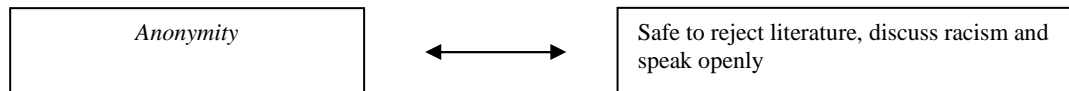
Single-Gendered Book Club: While participants in Tuesday's group felt comfortable, Isabella felt cheated in Thursday's group due to the lack of respect for different opinions and the other participants' failure to read the novels.

5. Interrelating the explanations:

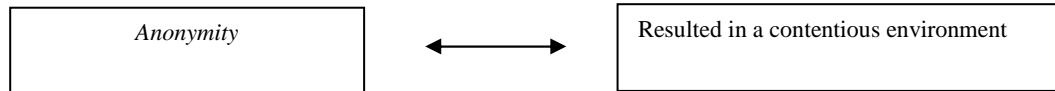


4. Testing the themes: (data from interviews and Voicethread Projects):

Tuesday's Group



Thursday's Group:



3. Themes:

Online Chat Room	Young Adult Fiction	Single-Gendered Book Club
<p><i>Anonymity=Safe</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Express self -Comfortable talking about race, racism, and religion 	<p><i>Relate to characters/issues</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identified w/ characters - Self-Discovery 	<p><i>Tuesday's Group</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Encourage Others -Respected Different Opinions
<p><i>Anonymity=Negative Effects</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Misunderstood -Lack of Respect -Uncomfortable 	<p><i>Did not relate to characters/issues</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Opposed issues in books due to religious beliefs and experiences 	<p><i>Thursday's Group</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Contentious -Did not respect different opinions -One participant read all the books

2. Categories:

Online Chat Room	Young Adult Fiction	Single-Gendered Book Club
Anonymity = Safe	Relate to characters	Group Dynamics
Anonymity= Negative Effects	Did not relate to characters	

1. Open Codes: Based on the chat room group discussions, e-mail interviews, and Voicethread projects

Ethical and Political Dilemmas

Johnson-Bailey (2002) found women of color and poor people are “Othered” in the telling of their stories in some educational research. As an African American female, it was important that I did not design a study that replicated this same experience. To prevent this from happening, I attempted to gain the participants’ trust by relying heavily on participants throughout data collection and analysis. In addition, I employed strategies to enhance internal validity and reliability. Throughout the study, I remained cognizant of the political and ethical problems that could arise during the study. The ethical and political dilemmas are discussed in the following sections.

Internal Validity and Reliability

According to Merriam (1998), every researcher wants to contribute results that are believable and trustworthy. Merriam argued that the question on internal validity- the extent to which research findings are congruent with reality- is addressed by using triangulation, engaging in member checking, involving participants in all phases of the research, and clarifying researcher biases and assumptions. Reliability referred to “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 1998, p.205). Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggested thinking about reliability as it applied to qualitative research as dependable or consistent results obtained from the data. To ensure that results are dependable, Merriam identified three strategies to ensure that results are consistent: (a) investigator’s position, (b) triangulation, and (c) audit trail.

In this research study, I explained the assumptions and theory undergirding this study. Moreover, I used memo writing as a tool to address the shifts and challenges with identifying as a Black female, teacher, and researcher in this research study. According to

Lincoln and Guba (2000), clarifying the investigator's position is also known as reflexivity because it forced the researcher come to terms with the research problem, with participants, with ourselves, and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting. In other words, reflexivity required the researcher to interrogate the ways the research efforts are shaped around contradictions that form our own lives. I used memo writing to eliminate any biases.

Although some research argued that triangulation was a quantitative term, in this case, it meant using multiple methods of data collection and analysis to strengthen reliability as well as the internal validity of the study. Merriam (1998) identified the third strategy as the audit trail. According to Merriam, the audit trail involved describing the data collection in detail, the emergence of categories, and the decisions made throughout the study. This took place in the methods and analysis sections of the current chapter.

Furthermore, this study involved a form of member checking that required participants to read, react, and approve constructed narrative descriptions, data sets, and interviews. One member check session took place on the school's campus and each lasted for 30 minutes. During this particular member check session, I met with each participant to seek clarification on certain responses made during the chat room discussions. Because participants had the opportunity to rename themselves to protect their identity, I confirmed the pseudonyms during this member check session. The second member check session took place after I analyzed the data. I e-mailed data excerpts found in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 to each participant. The next section provides a detailed discussion on the importance of establishing trust in this research study.

Trust

Trust is an important component of this research study. Prior to data collection, I contacted participants' mothers to ensure them that this study would not hinder their daughters from completing their assignments. I gave each participant and her mother a list of materials that explained the content of each novel. In addition, I ensured each participant and her mother that the participants' identities would remain anonymous. There were times, however, when participants waited for me to log off the chat room group discussions to engage in private chat room conversations. Because the chat discussions were private, I did not include the data in this study. Furthermore, there were moments in Thursday's chat room group discussions when participants felt misunderstood. When participants made offensive remarks, I did not address the issues during the chat room group discussions. I waited to discuss matters after the discussion by phone or in a private chat room discussion.

Although majority shared that they felt safe talking about issues applicable to their personal experiences online in a single-gendered book club, a few participants shared that, at times, they felt misunderstood or irritated that others did not finish reading the assigned book. Fortunately, I was able to bond with the participants during the initial one-on-one chat room interview. By the time we accessed the first chat room group discussion to talk about Flake's novel, most participants felt comfortable contacting me by cell phone to let me know if they were going to be a few minutes late logging-on to the chat room group discussions. I also felt comfortable contacting them whenever I had technical difficulties with my computer. For instance, I could not log-on to Tuesday's group discussion on Flake's novel. Because I had Star's cell phone number programmed

into my phone, I called her first. I asked her to tell the other participants in the chat room that I would log-on as soon as I could. When I finally logged-on, I read Esperanza and Bianca's responses to Star's post. All participants agreed to wait patiently. Based on the comments made, the reciprocal relationship made this experience memorable for all who participated.

Reciprocity

Creswell (1998) argued that there should be reciprocity between the researcher and the participant. In exchange for their participation, each participant received a copy of the young adult novels used in this online school book club. Despite sudden withdrawals from the study, I stated in the consent forms that the participants could keep the novels for future use. In addition, participants received extra credit from their English teachers for participating in this study. Finally, each participant will receive a bound copy of this dissertation, so she can share the opportunities that this online school book club offered.

Methodology Summary

This chapter featured the research methodology utilized in this qualitative dissertation study. This chapter explained the theory of qualitative research, outlined the specific methodology employed, defined the research design, explained the site and participant recruitment selection, identified the procedures for data collection and data analysis, and outlined the ethical and political dilemmas. In Chapter 4, a discussion on the ways the three participants in Tuesday's group used the (a) online chat room, (b) single-gendered book club, and (c) African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction to position themselves with respect to their experiences as adolescent Black females.

Chapter 5 provides a detail discussion on the ways the four participants in Thursday's group responded to the spaces provided.

CHAPTER 4

TUESDAY'S GROUP: NAMING RACISM, FINDING SELF

This chapter addresses the ways participants in Tuesday's group used an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club to discuss what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction for the first time did for them. More specifically, this chapter reveals how the participants' experiences influenced the way they responded to the literature and to each other in the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club. Nonetheless, this chapter examines the ways that the participants in this group used the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club to position themselves and their reading in relation to the study of African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. This chapter sheds some light on Black feminist Patricia Hill-Collins' (1990) claim that Black women's relationships with one another and the voices of Black women writers are safe spaces for Black women to find their voices.

According to Collins (1990), these spaces offered opportunities for Black women to challenge negative images ascribed to them, speak out when the representations of the Black female's experiences did not speak to their realities, and create new self-definitions to validate their own standpoints. As such, this study offered participants in this group an opportunity to use an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club featuring contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors to discover the power of their own voices and their own lives as they are situated within their raced and gendered identities.

There are three sections in this chapter. The following section includes background information to explain the origin of Tuesday's group. The subsequent section highlights the participants' thoughts and feelings about the online chat room environment, single-gendered book club, and the literature used in this study. In brief, the participants discussed Kiri Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me* in the first chat room group discussion. The second chat room group discussion involved Sharon Flake's (1998) novel *The Skin I'm In*. The third chat room group discussion addressed Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*. The fourth chat room group discussion included Sharon Draper's (2002) novel *Double Dutch*. The final chat room group discussion involved Lori A. Williams' (2001) novel *When Kambia Elaine Flew In From Neptune*. This section included themes that emerged from the categories as each participant responded to the literature in the online single-gendered book club. The themes are *naming racism* and *finding self*. Presented in the final section is a summary on this chapter.

“Speaking Up” and “Speaking Out” on Tuesday Afternoons

Esperanza, Bianca, and Star decided to designate Tuesday as the day to participate in the chat room group discussions after contacting them by both e-mail and phone. In the e-mail, the participants received a schedule that included the days and times to sign-up. I listed the two days, Tuesday and Thursday, based on the phone conversations that I had with each participant. I contacted each participant by phone to discuss the day that she preferred to log-on and participate in the chat room group discussion. I explained to each participant that there were only seven girls participating in this study. To make the chat room discussions rich, I told each participant the groups needed, at least three to four

girls, just in case, someone failed to log-on at the specified time. Esperanza and Bianca chose Tuesday because it was the only day they could participate in the chat room group discussions. Star, however, was more flexible, so she joined Tuesday's group. In all, three participants joined this group.

The participants agreed to log-on at 4PM. In the first chat room group discussion, the participants discussed Davis' documentary. In the second group chat room, the participants discussed Flake's (1998) novel *The Skin I'm In*. The third chat room group discussion involved Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*. The third chat room group discussion included Sharon Draper's (2002) novel *Double Dutch*. The final chat room group discussion included Lori A. Williams' (2001) novel *When Kambia Elaine Flew in from Neptune*. Using the participants' own words, the following section provides a detailed discussion on how each participant responded to the spaces provided and how each participant's response influenced the way she made sense of her experiences as an adolescent Black female.

Esperanza's Story: "If I Believe in Something, I Will Stand Up for It"

I began with Esperanza because she was the most difficult to persuade to participate in this study. In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, she recalled bad experiences that clouded her perspective on Black people. Esperanza wrote that she had been running from her Black peers calling her "too white" and an "Oreo" cookie. According to Esperanza, Black peers often used these phrases to describe her because "I listened to metal and couldn't care less about rap." The phrases "too white" and "Oreo" cookie are both referred to an African American appearing Black on the outside but White on the

inside. Nonetheless, adolescent Black males would not date Esperanza because “I’m Black.” In Esperanza’s case, adolescent Black males found the color of her skin too dark and less attractive, yet continued to stereotype her as acting “too white.” These experiences contributed to skewing her feelings towards Black people and hindered her from attending traditional public high school on a regular basis. She claimed:

I didn’t like traditional high school because I had to learn how to mold my personality to fit with whomever I was with. Like, if I want to I could speak in slang when I’m around Black people. But I also know how to talk proper around others. I didn’t like it so I stopped going. I just showed up like once every two or three weeks.

When asked what she did instead of attend school, she wrote, “I would go to the library during the day. No one asked why I wasn’t in school. I just stayed on the computer playing games and e-mailing my friends.” Because teachers did not try to help with attendance, Esperanza claimed, “My mom didn’t even find out until a few months.” Once she found out, her mother withdrew her from the traditional public school and enrolled her in Sahara Charter School. At Sahara, Esperanza did not find herself “trying to fit in.”

Nevertheless, she self-identified as a 17 years-old Black female. Esperanza admitted in the initial one-on-one chat room interview that she only joined this research study to receive extra credit in her senior English class. In the beginning, Esperanza was indifferent to the fact that she had no prior experience with African American literature in any of her high school English classes. When asked if she had read literature written by African American authors, she could not recall any and asserted that, “I don’t really keep

track.” Yet, she recalled reading books written by Jeffrey Deaver, a White American mystery and crime writer, known for having books such as *The Bone Collector* (1999) produced into movies.

Esperanza’s perspective on the study changed shortly after watching Davis’ documentary for the first chat room group discussion. She appreciated the fact that the documentary showed “Black women in a positive way. None of the girls were ghetto nor did they talk bad about any other race.” This documentary allowed Esperanza to see “there are other Blacks who went through the same thing I did.” Learning about the struggles that other Black girls experienced led Esperanza to admit that she was glad “to participate and not just for the extra credit.”

During this chat room group discussion, Esperanza recalled specific instances from the documentary that resonated with her experiences. In the documentary, the girls discussed how female family members used skin-bleaching cream to lighten their skin. In the chat room group discussion, Esperanza shared that she also used skin bleaching cream “to fade out blemishes on my skin.” In addition, she recalled hearing her own family members say on a regular basis, “Don’t play in the sun too long.” After hearing the girls share similar experiences, Esperanza claimed watching the documentary, “opened my eyes and readjusted my thinking toward the Black community.” She admitted that, in the past, “I have had some very negative experiences dealing with Black people.” After watching and discussing this documentary, she concluded that, “It’s good to discuss issues that we face as Black people in our community in a very wholesome safe environment.”

Esperanza committed to the entire research study. She read all the assigned novels, logged-on to every chat room group discussion on time, submitted all e-mail interviews, and created a Voicethread project. She used the e-mail interviews to disclose her thoughts and opinions on the online chat room environment. In the first e-mail interview, she revealed that it gave “Black girls a chance to express themselves and encourage one another.” In the second e-mail interview, she claimed the online chat room environment helped “others anonymously express their feelings.” In the third e-mail interview, she wrote that the online chat room “gave them a chance to talk and freely discuss” issues relevant to their lives. As she continued to describe her experiences in the online chat room, it became evident that the anonymity provided by the online chat room enabled her to feel there was “No reason to hold back ideas or opinions.”

Moreover, she used the e-mail interviews to describe her experiences in the single-gendered book club. In the first e-mail interview, she shared that, “I didn't feel uncomfortable” talking about race. She referenced the fact that, “Race is an open subject in my household.” This single-gendered book club made her feel as though she was discussing race with a relative in her home. Expressing the comfort that she felt in the single-gendered book club did not stop with the first e-mail interview. In the second e-mail interview, Esperanza expressed that, “I never felt uncomfortable in any of the discussion groups because everyone is always friendly and understanding. I like how if there is a statement made that someone doesn't get then they nicely ask.” Esperanza stated repeatedly in the e-mail interviews that she never felt uncomfortable in the single-gendered book club. As a result, she felt the online chat room group discussions were very open, friendly, and understanding.

Based on Esperanza's statements, the comfort that she experienced in sharing her thoughts and experiences in the single-gendered book club was attributed to the group dynamics and the anonymity afforded by the online chat room environment. Nonetheless, she expressed in the e-mail interviews that the African American young adult literature addressed issues that most people are afraid to discuss openly. According to Esperanza, the authors wrote the novels in a "Classy way that won't step on anyone's toes." In the first e-mail interview, she expressed how much she appreciated the way the author Sharon Flake addressed a very important issue in the Black community: skin color.

As a darker skin adolescent Black female, Esperanza shared in the chat room group discussion that she never had a problem with being darker than the rest of her friends; the adolescent Black males had a problem with it. Esperanza believed, "The lighter you are, the closer you are to being accepted." For this reason, she appreciated the fact that Flake's novel addressed this issue because she felt "it's important that girls know that being black or dark isn't an ugly thing." She also liked how the author "brought out the issue of money." Esperanza appreciated the fact that the novel presented characters that saw beyond Maleeka's external beauty and material possessions. In the first e-mail interview, she wrote, "I liked the character Caleb because he liked Maleeka for her and not just because she had the fancy clothes. That is important because everything revolves around money and the way people dress."

In support of this, Esperanza recalled never wearing Nikes. She just wore "jeans and a t-shirt." She claimed, "I was never worried about labels." Yet, she felt ostracized by her Black peers because she dressed different, talked proper, and listened to metal. According to Esperanza, "Everyone thought that I thought I was better than them." When asked to

explain, she admitted to the other group participants that she blamed herself for the way her peers felt about her. For instance, Esperanza longed for acceptance by her Black peers. To be accepted, she believed that she needed to mold her personality. In some cases, molding her personality meant speaking in slang “when I’m around like Black people.” Through Caleb, Esperanza saw that molding her personality in this way was just as degrading as her peers calling her “too White.” Realizing this, Esperanza admitted to the other group participants that she was going to stop “looking down on people” and “accept myself for who I was/am.” When asked if she liked the book, she wrote, “I liked the book because I could relate to it.”

Moreover, Esperanza revealed in the second e-mail interview that, “I got depressed” reading Woodson’s novel. She explained that Woodson’s novel made her think about how “I would react if that happened to me, losing everything I know.” Despite feeling depressed, Esperanza thought the book addressed an important issue that many in the Black community felt uncomfortable discussing. According to Esperanza, the book addressed the issue of major changes. She believed this issue was important because “everyone deals with changes.”

In the chat room group discussion, Esperanza used her own experiences with change to explain what she meant by this statement. In the novel, Evie’s sister, Anna, admitted that she hated being Black, and it resonated with Esperanza. When asked if there was a time she ever hated being Black, female, or anything else, Esperanza wrote, “I use to dislike being Black because I was different. Now, I’d rather be different than be like anyone else.” Once again, Esperanza declared that she was not like her Black peers. Because she continued to bring up the fact that she was different, I asked Esperanza to

explain what it meant to have a Black identity. She replied, “I think that how you carry yourself as a Black person is your identity... I think identity is who you are and what others see you as.” Based on this statement and Esperanza’s appreciation for the way the girls in Davis’ documentary presented themselves, I inferred that Esperanza believed Black girls needed to forge self-definitions that countered the controlling images used to define them.

Nonetheless, it became evident that Esperanza believed Black females needed to forge independent self-definitions to counter stereotypical images. In the final chat room group discussion on Williams’ novel, Esperanza shared with the other group participants that she thought the author portrayed Black females in stereotypical ways. In this chat room group discussion, she explained:

Well it's saying Black women are loud. What they say goes. They are stubborn. They either work 2 jobs or they "pay their rent on their backs" (that's a quote from the book btw). It's the typical way people look at Black women... I mean there are a lot of Black women that are like that, but that is the typical stereotype.

When asked what she would change about the novel, she wrote, “I would change the way Black people are depicted in here.” Because she felt the novel portrayed stereotypes that are often ascribed to Black women, Esperanza believed Black people, in particular Black female writers, needed to stop perpetuating them. She addressed this issue some more in the fourth e-mail interview. In this e-mail interview, Esperanza posed the following question, “If we don’t stop putting each other down, then who will?” Reading Esperanza’s statement and learning about the challenges that she faced as a Black female

led me to infer that Esperanza embraced the fact that she was different from her peers because it allowed her to challenge stereotypes ascribed to Black females, and it enabled her to construct an independent self-definition. In this final chat room group discussion, Esperanza concluded that, “If I believe in something, I will stand up for it.”

Overall, Esperanza considered the online chat room environment, single-gendered book club, and African American young adult literature as safe spaces that allowed her to talk about race matters openly, create new self-definitions that validated her own standpoint, and speak out when the representations of the Black female experiences perpetuated stereotypes. Moreover, she attributed the safety in the online chat room environment to the anonymity. Because she could remain anonymous, she felt comfortable sharing her opinions and encouraging others in the group. She considered the single-gendered book club to be safe because the other group participants were always friendly and considerate.

Likewise, she believed the young adult literature written by contemporary African American female writers offered a safe space for her to talk about issues that “most people are afraid to bring up.” Because she could identify with characters and issues in the novels, the literature served as a springboard for Esperanza to talk about her experiences with race and personality differences. In fact, she recorded in the Voicethread project that, “*The Skin I’m In*” was the book that really related to me because “I have dealt with similar issues when I was in school.” In sum, this online single-gendered book club featuring African American young adult literature ended up meaning more than just an extra credit project. It helped Esperanza “to see Black people in a more

positive light” and “discuss issues that we face as Black people in our community in a very wholesome safe environment.”

Bianca’s Story: “Nothing in My Life Mirrored Anything the Characters Went Through”

Bianca self-identified as a 17 year-old Biracial female. Bianca’s mother is Black, and her father is White. In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Bianca revealed that she thought the research study was face-to-face. Because she thought it was face-to-face, she feared that, “I was too fair-skinned to be considered 'right' for it.” When asked to explain, she wrote, “I was concerned that if OTHER people could see me, would they wonder why she picked the whitest black girl to be a part of her study?” Bianca thought the other participants would consider her unfit for the study because of her skin complexion. In fact, she recalled being discriminated against based on her appearance. She wrote:

When people ask me ‘what are you?’ I get thrown for a loop. What do they mean, what am I? I am a regular girl. I don’t get asked that a lot, just sometimes, but I always am nervous about how to answer. I don’t want to sound prejudiced.

When asked if she struggled with her racial/ethnic identity, Bianca declared, “I am proud of who I am.” She continued, “I have been given the greatest friends and family on earth. Because I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I have friends of all ages and races. I never think about what 'color' I am.” In fact, Bianca claimed that she never encountered stereotypes, primarily because of her religion, and she had been home-schooled all her

life. She wrote, “I have never encountered stereotypes, primarily because of my religion, and I have been home-schooled all my life.” According to Bianca, she never attended a traditional public school because she thought, “...there would be too much work to get all straight A's. This would force me to accept that it is not always possible to get straight A's.” Nonetheless, she assumed that if the other participants could see her, they would think she was “too fair-skinned” for this study. Bianca claimed that she had never encountered stereotypes, so where did she get the idea that the other participants would consider her “the whitest black girl.” As Bianca continued to tell her story, it became evident that her religious beliefs and experiences influenced the way she responded in this online single-gendered book club featuring African American young adult literature.

In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Bianca shared that she enjoyed going to the library. When asked about her reading preference, Bianca made it very clear that she preferred science fiction and anything “that doesn't have gods or sorcery in it. Oh, and I dislike stories with cussing.” In addition, Bianca shared that she also enjoyed writing stories and poetry that “completely go out into fiction” and influence people’s emotions. She wrote:

With my poetry, I have written both rhyming and non-rhyming. I like the rhyming ones, but I feel that my non-rhyming ones have more power. I have been able to make people tear up when they read my poetry. That is what I really like-being able to influence their emotions. With my stories, I like to completely go out into fiction. No realistic fiction stories here! I have written about talking animals, a girl who found out that she and her parents were aliens, and that she had an alien sister on a different planet. I

have written about alien abductions as well. These are only short stories by the way, and they sound more impressive than they really are. My current story is about time travel. Another current one is realistic fiction. This was a request by a friend. It is written from a guy's point of view, and it explains his experience of moving from the 8th to 9th grade in a completely new town. There, I'm done. Phew!

When asked if she ever read any African American literature, she could only recall reading “a few selected books for book reports.” In the beginning, Bianca could not recall any African American female authors’ names; yet, later in the interview, she posited, “In English II we did read a story written by an African-American woman. I don't remember her name, but it was an auto biography. I think it was about running, or exercising, or maybe both.” When asked to recall her favorite African American female author, she wrote:

I don't really notice the authors of the books I read, unless I am looking for more work by that author. Often I don't realize if it's a man or woman, much less if she was African American. So I really don't know.

Moreover, when asked if she discussed any literature with friends, Bianca disclosed that she read and discussed *New York Times* bestselling author Scott (2004a) Westerfeld's the *Uglies* series with friends. She explained:

I do discuss some with a friend of mine through e-mail. We talk about the *Uglies* series, by Scott (2004a) Westerfeld (I know, I remembered his name, ironic), and we recommend books to others. She is about my age, so we like the same things.

After sharing this information, I let Bianca know that I had never heard of this series. As such, she happily provided a detail description:

The *Uglies* series is about Earth in the future. We destroyed our civilization by creating a virus that attacked gasoline. Millions of people died. In the future, everyone is normal, like you and I are considered ugly. All people receive an operation when they turn 16 to become gorgeous. The first three books follow a girl named Tally as she decides whether or not to be 'pretty'.

Towards the end, Bianca wrote in the initial one-on-one chat room interview that she was excited to be a part of this study.

Bianca committed to the entire research study. She read all the assigned novels, logged-on to every chat room group discussion on-time, submitted all e-mail interviews, and created a Voicethread project. Yet, she admitted in the first chat room group discussion that she had “no idea that some people bleach their skin to make it lighter.” According to Bianca, she did not relate to the girls in the documentary. When asked to explain the reason why she could not relate, Bianca wrote:

Well, the girls said that they had people tell them to not wear their hair a certain way, or not to play out in the sun too long, because they would get too dark. I never have had an experience like that; I actually like to get tan because I am so fair.

Because Bianca's experiences did not mirror the girls in the documentary, she found the documentary was exactly discriminating against girls that were not of African descent. In support of this, she explained that if she could make her own

documentary, she would not make one just about Black girls or White girls. As Bianca explained it, “I don't really like to discriminate against skin color, like I don't want 2 say, OK, she's white, or, she's black, so I wouldn't really want to make a movie just about colored girls.”

After stating that she would not make a documentary just about “colored girls,” I asked her to explain in further detail. She wrote:

I dislike how society puts absolutes in front of people and forces them to choose one thing, when taking a test, it makes you put in 1 race, skin color is either good or bad, etc. It's not really fair.

As a Biracial female, Bianca felt standardized tests tried “to put people into little boxes.” As such, I inferred that Bianca refused to make a documentary about Black girls only because it would be showing racial preference. I met with Bianca’s mother on several occasions, and as a result, I assumed Bianca would identify more with her African heritage because her mother was Black. This did not happen. As the study continued, Bianca’s resistance to the African American young adult literature used in this study became excessive. In one e-mail interview, she admitted, “I don’t feel anything different reading books written by African American females.” However, she described the online chat room environment as a space that allowed them to discuss “other things in our lives that we all have in common.”

In the first e-mail interview on Flake’s novel, Bianca claimed the online chat room environment enabled the group participants to see different perspectives. For instance, in the chat room group discussion on Flake’s novel, the participants discussed how darker

skinned females faced more challenges than lighter skinned females. During this discussion, I asked them to talk about where the idea that darker skin is less attractive originated. All participants in this group agreed that this idea originated during slavery. While discussing this, the participants agreed that racism was the catalyst that caused the divide between lighter skinned and darker skinned Black people. As the conversation continued, the other participants argued that racism still existed because race was the way to put one set of people above another. Bianca, however, countered this argument by claiming that “there are over 6 million people today who have completely thrown prejudice and all racism out the window.” When the other participants challenged Bianca’s claim, she declared:

I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Racism never comes between me and my friends; I have friends of all ages and races. True, there are many billions of people who have prejudices, but the fact many people have gotten rid of racism shows that it can be overcome.

Although the other participants disagreed with Bianca, she appreciated the fact that she could share her perspective despite the fact that she never shared the reference to the statistical data that she cited. I inferred that she would not have mentioned her religious affiliation if it were not the source of her information. Moreover, Bianca continued to assert her claim that the online chat room environment allowed her to see different perspectives. In the second e-mail interview, she explained that it enabled her “to get insight into other peoples’ opinions on the book and consequently view circumstances in the book differently.” In the third e-mail interview, she wrote that the online chat room enabled her “to get different perspectives on the book.” In all the e-mail interviews,

Bianca stated that the online chat room environment allowed her to see different perspectives.

She used the e-mail interviews to describe her experiences in the single-gendered book club. In the first e-mail interview, Bianca described the chat room group discussion on Flake's novel as "slow going at first, but then it started moving faster." Once the pace began to pick-up, she appreciated the fact that this single-gendered book club was interactive. Yet, she felt uncomfortable "when we started talking more about specific instances in the book." Because she read the book several weeks prior to discussing it, she admitted that the "situations weren't familiar to me" and "I had to go and flip through the book to find what was being discussed." In the second e-mail interview, she wrote that "there was no specific point where I felt strongly or uncomfortable" in the single-gendered book club.

In the third e-mail interview, Bianca admitted once again that she felt uncomfortable. In this chat room group discussion on Draper's novel, she felt misunderstood because she mistyped the following sentence, "I didn't think bullying and lying are big problems in today's world." In response to this misstatement, she wrote, "I do think that they are big problems, but my meaning was lost since I typed my sentence wrong." In the final e-mail interview, Bianca shared that she only felt uncomfortable when "we were discussing Kambia's abuse." Based on Bianca's statements about the single-gendered book club, it appeared as though the reasons she felt uncomfortable had nothing to do with the group; it was the subject matter in the literature that made her feel uncomfortable.

Overall, Bianca valued the fact that the online chat room environment provided a space for participants to share different perspectives. Despite feeling uncomfortable, she

enjoyed interacting with the other participants in the single-gendered book club. Bianca appreciated reading different perspectives in the online chat room and interacting with other participants in the single-gendered book club, yet she found that her life experiences did not mirror those presented in the young adult literature used in this study. As a result, she did not “feel anything different reading books written by African American females.” She made this point very clear in the first e-mail interview. Bianca declared, “I don’t really care who the author is or what color the main character is, so long as it’s a good story.”

Moreover, the author, Sharon Flake, disappointed Bianca with Maleeka’s handling of peer pressure. In the e-mail interview, Bianca wrote that, “The author made me feel a little disappointed with Maleeka because she wouldn’t stand up for herself.” Because it took Maleeka so long to take a stand, Bianca thought, “the author consistently reinforces Maleeka’s deference to Charlese.” In the chat room group discussion, she told the other participants that she could not “understand allowing someone to walk all over me.” She admitted that she will “sometimes do things so my friends won’t make fun of me, but not to Maleeka’s extent. I would never destroy anything to fit in with anyone.” Although she did not relate to the issues examined in the novel, Bianca remained critical of Maleeka’s insecurity. When asked if she thought Maleeka’s negative attitude toward herself influenced the way others treated her, Bianca felt it did. In fact, she told the other participants that “people can subconsciously recognize vibes that say 'I’m not self-confident, so you can pick on me and I won’t stand up to you'.” Throughout the chat room group discussion, Bianca continued to discuss Maleeka’s mishandling of peer pressure.

At one point, she asked the other group participants, “Why can't we be the person who says 'OK, I am good enough', and have others try to fit in with us?”

Bianca continued to express disappointment with the literature used in this study. In the chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel, Bianca agreed with the other participants that she found *Hush* depressing. Although she never explained the reason why she felt the book was depressing, she made it very clear that she did not relate to the book. In fact, in the second e-mail interview, Bianca revealed that, “no issues were raised in my mind.” Nonetheless, she argued that Evie and Anna's outlook on life would have been different if they had been raised Jehovah's Witnesses. She claimed, “If Evie and Anna had been raised as Jehovah's Witnesses, they would have had a different outlook. They would know that they would have friends wherever they went. They would not have been as depressed.” Bianca attributed Evie's mother being a Jehovah's Witness as the reason why she did not lose it like the father. When asked if she thought religion kept the mom from losing it, she responded, “Part of it, yes.”

Although she claimed the book did not raise any issues in her mind, it appeared as though her personal experiences as a Jehovah's Witness guided her response to the literature. As the research study continued, Bianca's experiences as a Jehovah's Witness continued to guide her responses to the novels. In the third e-mail interview on Draper's novel, Bianca revealed that she was “kind of disappointed with the characters” inability to tell the truth. She thought:

There were so many secrets- if they had all opened up, they might have gotten the help that they needed. I am glad that everything works out in

the end, but I feel that things would have gone much better had they simply told the truth.

She mentioned once again in this e-mail interview that this particular novel did not raise any issues in her mind. Bianca made this statement in all the e-mail interviews. After noticing that she used the statement several times, I began to suspect that the novels did not raise issues in her mind because the issues addressed in the books contradicted the teachings of her religion.

As the study continued, it became evident that Bianca's resistance to the novels was in part due to her religious beliefs. In the final chat room group discussion on Williams' novel, Bianca described the novel as depressing and disgusting. She thought, "This book was really depressing." When asked to explain, she wrote, "I mean we get enough bad things happening in real life. Why read about it when we can just turn on the news?" She continued to write, "I would not recommend this book to a friend because I didn't really like it." Bianca revealed in the final e-mail interview that she would not recommend this book because she was "disgusted with the amount of depravity in it." According to Bianca, the book showed that "no one has morals today." When asked to explain the reason she felt that way, she used Tia's relationship with Doo-Witty as one example to illustrate her point. Bianca made this point very clear when she stated, "I would never get involved with someone in that way unless I was married to that person. I would never hide it from my parents either." She continued, "If they really loved each other that much, they should have waited until they were in a position to marry." As such, she found the author's handling of Tia and Doo-Witty's relationship inappropriate for young adults to read.

Moreover, the novel made Bianca feel uncomfortable when she read “the parts when it described Kambia's abuse- when she was wearing Jasmine's lingerie, when she talked about the wallpaper wolves, and when Shayla's family and the police had to tell her what Kambia went through.” Bianca believed it was inappropriate for authors, in this case African American female authors, to write young adult literature that included graphic details such as sexual abuse. In this chat room group discussion, Bianca reiterated that the novel was too depressing, and she did not like “to read depressing books” because “reading is my time to get away into a fantasy world.” I concluded that Bianca rejected the issues discussed in the literature because it contradicted the teachings of her religion, and she did not like to read realistic fiction. As she explained it, “I like to completely go out into fiction. No realistic fiction stories here!”

In sum, Bianca enjoyed the online chat room environment because it allowed her to read different perspectives. In most cases, she felt comfortable in the single-gendered book club. She only felt uncomfortable when she mistyped a word or found the material in the novels inappropriate. Overall, she enjoyed interacting with the other participants in the single-gendered book club. However, the young adult literature written by African American female authors did not resonate with her experiences. As she described it in the Voicethread project:

Reading the books always left me puzzled; when asked if I could relate to any characters or which character I was most like, I found myself unable to answer; nothing in my life mirrored anything the characters went through.

Yet, she enjoyed getting “other view points that I had not thought of before” in the online chat room environment and she valued “talking with other participants about the books” in the single-gendered book. Nevertheless, the African American young adult literature did not mirror her experiences, and as a result, Bianca did not “feel anything different reading books written by African American females.”

Star: “I Feel Like I Shouldn’t Judge Someone by the Way They Look Because
I Don’t Want to Be the Cause of Someone’s Sadness.”

Star self-identified as a 17 years-old Black female. She decided to participate in the research study to help the researcher. However, in the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Star shared that she did not have a good relationship with some teachers in the traditional public high school that she attended prior to enrolling at Sahara. According to Star, some teachers tried “to boss me around with authority they didn’t have.” In this case, she meant her African American female teachers talked to her in ways that she found offensive. She described one instance in which this happened. When one teacher told her “Sit your Black ‘A’ down,” Star believed the teachers “thought that since we both were Black, they could say things to me that they wouldn’t say to another student.” Star found it offensive, and as a result, she defended herself. Consequently, Star’s teacher sent her to the office. When asked how her mother responded, she claimed “...my mama would go down there and have to act a fool.” In other words, her mother let the school know that she was there to advocate for her daughter.

In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Star also mentioned that she got into an altercation with a White female student. Star claimed this student “called me the ‘N’

word and I wasn't having that." When asked if she ever used that word, at first, she was hesitant to respond, but then, she openly admitted, "To tell you the truth, I do say it to my sisters, but I never use it in public. I always tell my friends not to call me that, and I ask them to chill out on saying it too much." For Star, this was a hot button issue when it came to a White person saying it. Yet, when the word is used by family and friends, Star claimed that she "always tell my friends not to call me that." Nonetheless, Star's mother withdrew her from the traditional public high school after the altercation and enrolled her in Sahara. Star described Sahara as more contained because "people aren't making out in the hallways and there isn't a lot of violence there."

Despite the fact that Sahara provided Star with a safe environment, she admitted that she hated English. She disliked English whenever she had "to read too much" or was not "interested in reading." She explained that it was hard to focus when she was not interested in the book. Star also admitted that she was "not good with writing essays and research papers." Yet, she only enjoyed reading African American literature that interested her. If it did not, she claimed, "I would feel the same way" about it as she did any other reading material. Star could not recall reading any African American literature in her English classes, but when asked to recall one of her favorites, she mentioned *Pieces of a Man* by Cas Sigers.

The only reason she "read this book about 2 months ago" was because "it caught my attention in the first chapter; it didn't start slow and boring; it was all interesting and plus it was a love story and I'm a sucker for those." Because I had never heard anyone mention the African American female writer's name, I researched the book that Star mentioned and found the storyline involved a Black female protagonist torn between

three men: a musician, real-estate broker, and a good sex partner. She struggled to make a decision on which man to have a relationship with. All options were good, but she needed to decide which was better. I inferred that Star enjoyed reading adult literature because, as she noted in the Voicethread project, “I am family oriented,” “a big fan of marriage,” and “I want to live the rest of my life with a husband and six kids.” She also enjoyed reading *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

Nevertheless, she appreciated the fact that Kiri Davis, director of the *A Girl Like Me* documentary, presented Black girls in a positive way. In the first chat room group discussion on Davis’ documentary, Star revealed, “I could relate to what the director said about how she feels like a part of our culture is missing.” Star used her own experiences as a dark-skinned female to explain what she meant by the statement. Living as a dark-skinned female has not always been easy. Star claimed, “a lot of boys would complement my sister and not me” because she was lighter skinned and “I am darker than her.” She shared that there were times when “I didn’t feel as pretty as her” because “I used to think dark skin was ugly just because my sister would always make fun of the dark boys she knew.” In addition to this, she claimed people thought “I knew how to fight and do hair because I was black and lived in the ghetto.” Based on Star’s experiences, I suspected the part missing from our culture was embracing the diversity in skin color within the Black community. In support of this, Star shared with the other participants that if she could make her own documentary, she would make one showing how Black girls are treated “compared to their friends or other people who are not of the same race. I would make this because I know racism still exist but I want to know if it’s as bad as it used to be.”

Star committed to this entire study. She read all the assigned novels, logged-on to every chat room group discussion on-time, submitted all e-mail interviews, and created a Voicethread project. As such, she used the e-mail interviews to disclose her thoughts and opinions on the online single-gendered book club featuring African American young adult literature. In the first e-mail interview on Flake's novel, Star revealed that the online chat room environment allowed them "to express ourselves without the concern of what others think." In the second e-mail interview, she claimed the online chat room environment enabled her "to express myself freely." In the third and final e-mail interviews, Star concluded that the online chat room environment "gave everyone their opportunity to speak exactly what they wanted to say, because they don't have to be embarrassed or shy because no one knew who they were." Put simply, Star found the anonymity provided by the online chat room environment was a safe space to express her thoughts freely.

Moreover, she liked the single-gendered book club because, as she stated in the first e-mail interview, "everyone interacted with one another." According to Star, the single-gendered book club allowed her to think about experiences that she had not encountered before. In addition, she described the single-gendered book club in the second e-mail interview as "awesome" because it "gave me the opportunity to think about and explain my reasons." Overall, Star valued the single-gendered book club because it provided a space for her to think. For instance, in the chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel, Star took her time to answer a question about the importance of religion in Evie and Anna's lives. When asked if she thought their outlook on life would have been different if raised in a religious home, at first she wrote, "I need one second." Six minutes

later, she provided the following response, “I’m Christian, so when I read my Bible or think about God, it’s like I have no problems.” Based on this statement, she implied that their outlook would have been different. Nonetheless, Star felt the single-gendered book club provided time and space to say exactly what was on her mind.

From Star’s perspective, the anonymity in the online chat room environment enabled her to feel comfortable expressing herself openly and freely. Along with the online chat room environment, the single-gendered book club gave her an opportunity to think about responses before she wrote them. She believed the African American female writers used in this study “brought the real life issues to the book.” Star believed the authors presented real life issues that resonated with her experiences as a Black female. In other words, the novels contained information that allowed her to connect with some characters, express compassion for others, and see real life issues from different perspectives. Most importantly, she felt each novel taught her something about life.

In the chat room group discussion on Flake’s novel, Star related, “to how Maleeka felt that she wasn’t as pretty as the light skinned girls.” Maleeka’s struggle to like her skin color really resonated with Star because “I didn’t feel as pretty as the light- skinned girls.” According to Star, Maleeka’s character shed some light on how difficult it was “to love who you are” when “everyone talked bad about your skin color.” In fact, she wrote that the author did a “pretty good job” emphasizing the negative experiences that dark-skinned females encountered within the Black community. Star believed the overall theme in the novel was to teach, in particular those in the Black community that they “shouldn’t judge someone by the way they look.” As she explained it, “I feel like I

shouldn't judge someone by the way they look because I don't want to be the cause of someone's sadness."

The protagonist in Flake's novel also allowed Star to see how she grieved over the loss of her father. In the chat room group discussion, Star revealed that she lost three important people in her life. Like Maleeka, she lost her father but she also lost her stepfather. For Star, the pain was almost unbearable. She described it as:

I lost my dad and my step dad to heart attacks; they were the ones I went to for everything... after they died I wanted to die because my heart felt like I was squeezing it day and night and it hurt to breath; and I felt like everyone who loved me was dead so I should die.

In addition, she lost her best friend. She did not share what happened to her best friend; she just provided how it made her feel. She claimed, "I didn't have any one to talk to because she was my only friend." According to Star, these three people loved her "no matter what I looked like." Star claimed they that taught her how to love others. This became evident as the study continued. Star showed a great deal of compassion towards the characters even when their experiences did not mirror her own. For example, she told the other group participants, "I felt sad that Maleeka thought she had to suck up to Charlese so she can fit in."

Furthermore, she appreciated the fact that Woodson's novel made her think about identity. Prior to reading the novel, Star claimed that she had never thought about identity. Star wrote, "I had never thought about identity" and Woodson's novel "gave me the opportunity to think about it." In fact, reading this novel gave her the opportunity to

think about what she wanted other people to know about her. When asked to share how other people described her, she wrote:

I don't know because some people say I look stuck up and others tell me I always look sad and even mad, some even call me a White girl because I'm quiet and keep to myself, but I want people to look at me and say she looks like a sweet young lady and that she's going to be something special when she's older.

In the chat room group discussion, Star defined identity as “the way you act.” Because she remained quiet and kept to herself, some peers equated her behavior with acting like a white girl. Like Esperanza, Star experienced the “acting white” syndrome when she did not ascribe to being a loud Black girl. The novel enabled Star to think about how the family “had to lose their identities” and how Evie and Anna “weren’t raised to be religious.” She exclaimed, “I would hate to lose my identity and since I was raised to be religious, I think that it’s unorthodox that they didn’t have one.” Star blamed the mother and described her as someone who was “basically thinking about herself.” In the novel, Evie’s mother was an active Jehovah’s Witness, but she never introduced it to her family. Although she did not relate to any characters, Star exclaimed, “The novel made me thankful for what I had.”

It became evident that Star appreciated the fact that the novels enabled her to see real life issues from different perspectives. In the final e-mail interview, Star described Williams’ novel as a “good book.” She thought it was a good book because “Kambia was a cool character, and it always kept me wanting to read more.” The book taught Star “a little lesson about what will happen if children are not protected.” Star believed, “No one

should have to go through what Kambia went through, especially not a child.” She felt “bad for Kambia because she was such a young girl.” Star admitted in the final chat room group discussion that she knew a little girl about five or six that had been molested. She claimed, “One day she started talking to me and my mom so we got her some help.” Star saw the little girl that she knew in Kambia. From Star’s perspective, the novel depicted how “there is so little innocence left in the world.” Because the novel addressed what happened when parents neglected their children, Star believed it was imperative that she recommended the book to friends and family members, so they would know what needed to happen to prevent kids “like Kambia from being raped.”

Star considered the contemporary realistic young adult fiction used in this study to be very informative. Because she felt the novels addressed real life issues, the novels provided teachable moments that allowed her to talk about her experiences in the world. Overall, Star considered the online chat room environment, single-gendered book club, and African American young adult literature as safe spaces that enabled her to talk about “real life issues” such as race matters and sexual abuse openly. Star attributed the safety in the online chat room environment to the anonymity. Because she could remain anonymous, she felt comfortable sharing her thoughts and opinions. She described the single-gendered book club as interactive where “everyone had an opinion and they were anxious to say what it was.” In sum, this online single-gendered book club featuring African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction enabled her to think about issues and explain the reasons why she felt the way she did.

Summary of Results

This chapter examined the ways the participants in this group used the online chat room and single-gendered book club to position themselves and their reading in relation to the study of African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. Based on the responses, the participants agreed that the anonymity in the online chat room environment and the comfort experienced in the single-gendered book club enabled them to express themselves openly and freely. Although Bianca found, at times, the single-gendered book club was uncomfortable, she expressed in her responses that it was not the other participants; it was when she mistyped a word or found the material in the novels inappropriate. Overall, she enjoyed chatting with the other participants in the single-gendered book club.

Nonetheless, the participants responded to the literature differently. While Esperanza and Star related to characters and agreed that the literature addressed real life issues, Bianca did not. She exclaimed, “Nothing in my life mirrored anything the characters went through.” However, Esperanza and Star were able to use the novels to address some complex questions that Tatum (1997) highlighted in her study:

Who do my parents say I am? Who do my peers say I am? What message is reflected back to me in the faces and voices of my teachers, my neighbors, etc...? What do I learn from the media about myself? How am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or am I missing from the picture altogether? (p. 18)

For instance, Esperanza and Star used Flake’s novel as a springboard to talk about their experiences as dark-skinned females. Like Maleeka, both girls faced ridicule and

rejection from other Black peers. Although they responded differently to the ridicule and rejection, Esperanza and Star understood the challenges that Maleeka faced as a dark-skinned female at a predominately African American traditional public school. Bianca, however, did not relate to Maleeka and oftentimes found herself disappointed by the way she handled peer pressure.

The participants also responded in different ways to Williams' novel. Although Esperanza believed the author stereotyped Black females, she still agreed with Star that the novel addressed an issue that more people, particularly Black people needed to discuss. She wrote:

I think books about getting raped could be a good thing...I know that came out wrong. But think about it. Think about how Shayla didn't know about rape. This shows what a person should do in that situation.

Bianca, on the other hand, found the novel disgusting and depressing. She felt uncomfortable reading about sexual abuse and premarital sex in a young adult novel. Because Bianca was a Jehovah's Witness, she saw the book through a different lens. She read it and thought, "I was disgusted with the amount of depravity in it. No one has morals today." From Bianca's perspective, Kambia getting raped "shouldn't even happen in fiction, let alone real life."

Black feminist, Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) identified the voices of Black women's writers as a safe space that helped "its participants see their world differently and act to change it" (p.103). Although the literature enabled Esperanza and Star to read their experiences, construct meaning, and position themselves in a larger social context, it did

not afford Bianca the same experiences. For Bianca, the literature did not mirror her experiences, and as a result, she rejected it.

Nonetheless, the participants' responses highlighted what Black feminists argued. According to Collins (1986), common themes may link Black women and girls' lives, yet these themes are experienced differently based on class, region, gender preference, religion, and age. Collins declared that there was "no monolithic Black women's culture- rather, there are socially-constructed Black women's cultures that collectively form Black women's culture" (p.522). The responses made by participants in Tuesday's group revealed that their identities are fluid and multifaceted. In addition, their responses highlighted the overarching theme: naming racism and finding self.

In sum, the online chat room environment and the single-gendered book club offered these girls, who rarely had opportunities to talk about their experiences, safe spaces to accept, challenge, and even reject prevalent controversial themes and issues found in the African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction used in this research study. Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the ways that participants in Thursday's group positioned themselves in the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club.

CHAPTER 5

THURSDAY'S GROUP: A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

This chapter focuses on participants in Thursday's group. It is organized in similar ways as Chapter 4. It examines how participants in Thursday's group used an online chat room environment and single-gendered book club to discuss what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction did for them. This chapter examines the ways that the participants in this group used the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club to position themselves and their reading in relation to the study of African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. Moreover, it shed some light on Black feminist Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) claim about Black women's relationships with one another and the voices of Black women writers being safe spaces for Black women to find their voices. Put simply, this chapter presents an unsuccessful online single-gendered book club.

This chapter has three sections. In the following section, the background information explains the origin of Thursday's group. The subsequent section highlights each participant's thoughts and feelings about the online chat room environment, single-gendered book club, and the literature selected for this study. Included in the subsequent section is a glimpse of how the emerging theme, *a journey of self-discovery* reflected in each participant's responses as she discussed the literature in the online single-gendered book club. Presented in the final section is a summary on the current chapter.

The Origin of Thursday's Group

Prior to the first group chat room discussion, I e-mailed each participant a schedule to sign-up for the group chat room discussion. The schedule included Tuesday and Thursday and a time frame ranging from 4PM-8PM. I listed the two days based on the information that I retrieved from the phone conversations that I had with each participant. Before making this decision, I contacted each participant by phone about which day of the week she preferred to log-on and participate in the first group chat room discussion. During the conversation, I explained to each participant that there were only seven girls participating in this study. To make the chat room discussions rich, I told each girl that I wanted, at least, three to four girls per group, just in case one failed to log-on at the specified time. Several participants could not log-on to the chat room on Tuesday because it was their day to attend school. These participants were Isabella, Angel, Aurora, and Jade. Four participants signed-up for the 5-6PM hour for Thursday's group.

However, Isabella was the only participant in this group that logged-on to all chat room group discussions, read all the assigned novels, completed the e-mail interviews, and submitted a Voicethread project. In the first chat room group discussion on Davis' documentary *A Girl Like Me*, Isabella, Aurora, and Jade were the only participants that logged-on. The second chat room group discussion on Flake's novel included Isabella, Jade, Aurora, and Angel. The third chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel involved Isabella, Aurora, Jade, and Angel. In the fourth chat room group discussion on Draper's novel, Isabella, Aurora, and Jade logged-on, but Aurora and Jade admitted that they did not finish reading the book. As a result, the chat room group discussion ended early. In the final chat room group discussion on William's novel, Isabella and Angel

logged-on. It became evident that Angel did not read the book, so I ended the chat room group discussion abruptly. Nonetheless, Isabella and Angel submitted Voicethread projects.

Isabella's Story: "I Am Happy with Me. If Someone Isn't Happy With Me
Then Who Needs Them. I'm Just Me, Take It or Leave It."

I began with Isabella because she committed to this study despite the challenges that she faced with getting other group members to read the novels. Isabella self-identified as a 15 year-old Biracial female that embraced her African American heritage. She claimed most people assumed that she was Hispanic and spoke Spanish because she was light-skinned. Yet, she often told people that she was Black despite the fact that her mother was White and her deceased father was Black. In the chat room group discussion on Flake's novel, Isabella shared, "I don't know anyone on my dad's side... My mom and dad divorced when I was 4 and then my dad died when I was 7."

When asked to explain why she did not communicate with her father's side, she chose not to respond. Instead, she revealed, "Most of my friends are white and the only family I know is white so it is kinda hard sometimes." Isabella struggled with the fact that "no one on my mother's side looked like me." To make matters worse, in her grandmother's eyes, "I am not black at all." In fact, her grandmother prohibited her from braiding her hair because "She doesn't like my African American background."

According to Isabella, her grandmother showed favoritism towards the other grandchildren because they were White. After spending a day with her grandmother, she claimed, "I have low self-esteem. She makes me feel bad about myself. She cuts me

down all the time. If I don't know something I am stupid. If I do know something I am a know-it-all. I can never win.” Isabella felt rejected by her grandmother. Yet, she did not understand the reason behind her grandmother’s disdain for the African American culture. As a result, Isabella joined this research study hoping to learn about her African American heritage. As she explained it, “I want to read the books and see if I can relate to them.”

In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Isabella admitted that she hated high school, and as a result, “I decided to stop going all together.” Isabella attended an independent learning based charter school. At this school, she was required to attend four days a week. While there, she taught herself. According to Isabella, the teachers “basically sat us all in a little room and told us to do projects.” She claimed, “They gave us textbooks to read out of but I can't learn like that.” Isabella exclaimed:

I don't know how they can expect kids right out of 8th to know 9th grade subjects. The teacher didn't tell us much. We had to research a topic and then write and present a report. Our project had to have biology, history, math, etc. I had to involve all the subjects regular freshman took. I only did one project and it was about Zebras. I guess I had all the subjects in it but I didn't learn about the subjects. I just learned about Zebras.

When she stopped attending school, Isabella claimed the high school did not offer any help. Yet, the middle school offered to help Isabella’s mother because her brother “had worse attendance than I did.” The middle school office told her mother about Sahara. In the beginning, her mother was hesitant. Her mother thought Sahara was homeschooling, and she did not want to home school them. In

addition, she thought her children would not get enough socialization.

Nonetheless, they enrolled in Sahara. After enrolling, Isabella exclaimed, “I think it is great! I really really love Sahara. I am learning at my pace and on my own time. I feel like I am learning more from Sahara than I would at a traditional school.”

In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Isabella stated that she enjoyed reading books about the paranormal but could not recall reading any books written by African American female writers. In fact, her favorite book was *Twilight* by Stephanie Meyer. She looked forward to reading the novels in this study. In the first chat room group discussion on Davis’ documentary, Isabella thought, “it was cool how a young girl made it.” When asked to explain, she responded, “Well a girl like us thought it up and put together a nice informative video that many young black girls can relate to.” While surprised about Black females bleaching their skin, Isabella shared, “I don’t have issues with my skin color, but I only wear my hair down if it is straight.” She described her hair as kinky, thick, and poufy. Isabella’s grandmother did not like the kinky, thick, poufy texture of Isabella’s hair. She associated it with her African American background.

In this chat room group discussion, Isabella recalled a time when “this girl was calling me bad names but my mom was standing right there and the girl didn’t know it.” Because the girl thought Isabella was Hispanic, she called her derogatory names that Isabella’s mother did not understand. Isabella noted that this happened on more than one occasion. However, when asked what stood out

the most in the documentary, Isabella wrote, “The director at the end said there was a part about body shape. I would have liked to see that part.” Based on this statement, I assumed she also faced challenges because she did not have a petite size figure. Isabella wanted to hear what a Black girl with a similar body shape thought about it. Nonetheless, she desired to make her own documentary about girls of color “to see if they have to deal with serious racism issues like being made fun of and stuff.” In the end, Isabella revealed that she learned “having natural hair is ok.” Isabella concluded, “I think it was an awesome video.”

Despite the fact that other participants in this group did not read all the assigned novels and could not participate in the chat room group discussions, Isabella still committed to the entire research study. She read all the assigned novels, logged-on to every chat room group discussion on-time, submitted all e-mail interviews, and created a Voicethread project. As such, she used the e-mail interviews to disclose her thoughts and opinions on the online single-gendered book club featuring African American young adult literature.

In the first e-mail interview on Flake’s novel, Isabella wrote that she liked online chat room environment because it allowed her to express her feelings and hear other people’s feelings. She stated, “I liked expressing my feelings and hearing other people's feelings on the book.” In the second e-mail interview, she described the online chat room environment as a space that enabled her to “open up” and “express myself more.” In the third and fourth e-mail interviews, she wrote, “We can say whatever we want and we do not have to be afraid of being judged because our identities are secret.” In other words, Isabella valued the

anonymity offered in the online chat room environment. She appreciated the anonymity because it made her feel safe opening up and sharing personal experiences.

In the first e-mail interview, she described the atmosphere in the single-gendered book club as contentious at times. Yet, she claimed, “We understood each other most of the time. We had some moments where we didn't see eye to eye but it wasn't a big deal!” In this particular chat room group discussion on Flake’s novel, *Isabella and Aurora* went back and forth on their opinions about Caleb cleaning the bathroom. In this e-mail interview, Isabella revealed that she reacted strongly because Aurora “couldn't imagine why Caleb would clean the gross bathrooms when it wasn't his job.”

In addition, she noticed, “The other participants didn't finish the book before the discussion.” Isabella declared, “I don't know how they expected to discuss the book if they didn't read it all.” In fact, she exclaimed, “I wish everyone respected each other's opinions and didn't argue with each other.” In the second e-mail interview, she described the incident that occurred in the chat room group discussion on Woodson’s novel. She wrote, “There was one part in the discussion where two of the girls were arguing and we tried to change the subject but they kept on arguing. I think it was senseless because they were arguing the same point.” Isabella described the atmosphere in this chat room group discussion as senseless.

Moreover, she revealed that in the final chat room group discussion, she could tell the other participant did not read the book. For instance, in the chat room

group discussion on Williams' novel, Isabella thought that "she didn't read the book when she thought Mr. Fox was an abuser because we were talking about abusers and then Mr. Fox." In the end, Isabella wished "there were more people in the discussion and that we all read the whole book." Overall, however, Isabella felt understood most of the time in the single-gendered book club.

From Isabella's perspective, the anonymity in the online chat room environment enabled her to feel comfortable expressing herself openly and freely. Yet, she felt the single-gendered book club could have been more successful if participants read the books and respected each other's opinions. Despite the interruptions in the chat room group discussion, Isabella found the young adult novels written by contemporary African American female writers enabled her to think about herself, "about past experiences, and about the world outside my own."

In the beginning, Isabella did not know "the darkness of skin color was an issue for some people." She believed it was important to address the issue of skin color because it showed how Maleeka felt like an outcast and succumb to peer pressure. Isabella thought Flake did "a very good job addressing the issues because we all sometimes feel like outcast and want a place to belong." In the chat room group discussion, Isabella recalled feeling like an outcast and trying to belong just like Maleeka. She wrote:

I kinda related to Maleeka. I like to do schoolwork and get good grades. I read a lot and sometimes my friends make fun of me because of it.

Sometimes I ditch my book and schoolwork to act and hang out with my friends but I am not as comfortable.

In addition, she mentioned feeling like an outcast when around her grandmother. According to Isabella, her “grandma likes her white grandchildren better.” Because she believed her grandmother showed favoritism, it made “me feel bad about myself.” Nonetheless, she tried not “to let my grandma get to me and besides I am around her more than my cousins are and she only shows favoritism when they are around.” Despite feeling like an outcast, she believed people saw her as someone that was shy and had hidden potential. She claimed, “My mom says people see me as a spiritual person.”

When asked how she saw herself, Isabella responded with, “I am Christian; I am bi-racial, I am a teenager; I am a student; I am an American; I can also be very rebellious. I am me.” In the chat room group discussion on Woodson’s novel; Isabella defined identity as having many different sides. From Isabella’s perspective, a person had many identities and not just one. Nevertheless, Isabella appreciated the fact that Woodson addressed the Witness Protection program.

According to Isabella, she has always been interested in the program but never realized “how it would affect the people involved.” This novel enabled Isabella to see that “a family is one unit....if one person is in a bad mood than the whole family can feel the effects.” In other words, it allowed Isabella to see how her own actions affected her mother and brother. Although she never specified, Isabella mentioned “some people get too much stress from their family and it affects the family in the long run.” Based on what she shared about her

experiences, Isabella stressed whenever she had to go around her grandmother. Instead of responding negatively, she chose to do like Evie and “find an escape from the pressures of her family.” In doing this, Isabella believed it enabled her to avoid confrontation.

Avoiding confrontation was not the only thing that Isabella learned from the novels used in this study. According to Isabella, Williams’ novel was very interesting. In fact, she claimed, “I loved it. I will probably reread it in the future.” Isabella considered Williams’ novel her favorite in this research study because it addressed many issues such as sexual abuse, keeping secrets, fights, and judgment. The issue that resonated with her the most was not “to judge someone for their looks.”

Isabella saw in the character Doo-Witty how “Everyone judged him and thought he was a big dummy.” Isabella believed he was “far from a big dummy.” She saw in Doo-Witty “an amazing artist” that enabled her “to imagine what his pictures look like.” In fact, Doo-Witty opened Isabella’s eyes and allowed her to see that people, in particular her grandmother, were going to judge her regardless. Through Doo-Witty, she realized that it was time to stop blaming herself for her grandmother’s unwillingness to accept the fact that being Black was part of her heritage. After reading about Doo-Witty and the challenges that he faced, Isabella concluded, “I am happy with me; if someone isn’t happy with me; then who needs them. I’m just me; take it or leave it.”

In the beginning, Isabella could not recall reading any books written by African American female writers. In the end, she was able to recall “a bunch of

books out there about subjects I can relate to.” She claimed, “Now I know of at least 4 amazing books written by extraordinary people; can’t wait to read more by them.” Overall, this research study opened Isabella’s eyes to a world that she knew little about. She really enjoyed the novels in the study, and wrote that she would “probably read books by authors in the study and ones similar to it.” Moreover, she attributed the safety in the online chat room environment to the anonymity. Because she could remain anonymous, she did not fear being judged. Although she found the single-gendered book club confrontational at times, she felt understood most of the time. In the end, she wished everyone respected each other’s opinions and more people in the discussions read all the books. Despite the fact that she did not get a chance to discuss all the novels, Isabella concluded that this study “warmed my heart” and “taught me that it was ok to talk about my thoughts and feelings.”

Angel: “My Heart Beats Just the Same as Yours. My Blood Flow
Just as Yours, Get a Disease Just Like You Do. So Tell Me
What’s Different but the Skin That I’m In?”

Angel decided to participate in Thursday’s group because it was the only day available she had available. Angel self-identified as a 17 year-old Black female that lived with both parents. In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Angel described her hectic schedule at pursuing a modeling career as hard. She wrote:

When I do go out, like auditions and things, it is really hard because I have to be basically the outcast or the person who shines out... I have to

because it's like these other girls are basically blond. They get more attention because they don't have to go through things I do. I have to have an education or simply the fact that I have to speak proper and you know they can walk in and speak country and just came from the woods of South Carolina or North Carolina and they'll take um, they don't care. They know how to prep them. They are willing to prep them. But with me, I have to come already prepared.

In Angel's case, she believed certain criteria are imposed upon her by the modeling agents because she was Black. Surrounded by White female images that were synonymous with beauty and success, Angel was expected to look and act a certain way. Despite the standards imposed upon her, she refused to emulate those images, and as a result, she did not get modeling assignments as often as she liked. She realized that there was a distinct difference in the treatment that she received in comparison to the White girls auditioning for the same job.

During this interview, Angel revealed that she lived in North Carolina for an extended amount of time. While living there, Angel claimed that she witnessed racism. Before withdrawing from a local traditional public high school, she recalled "a big controversy between the blacks and the whites at the high schools." In addition, she did not have a good relationship with some teachers. One reason was that she tried to follow the cool kids in order to be popular. Because she longed to be popular, at times, she sat in the back of the classroom and "talked a lot... and never really tried to do any class or homework." When asked to explain, she wrote, "I wanted to be known throughout the school." Nonetheless, Angel saw what happened to her brother who also longed to be popular. He

almost did not graduate. Witnessing what happened to her brother, Angel realized that the cool kids were not “trying to amount to anything.” As such, she began to “put her head into the books.”

Although she put her head into the books, the teachers and students did not respond to her change positively. The cool kids still considered her “a loser and didn’t too much want to talk to me.” The teachers thought, “I was a troubled student; it was like they didn’t want to help me; they really tried to ignore me when I got my head back into the books.” She claimed one teacher told her that it did not matter because she “would not amount to anything but work at McDonald’s.” According to Angel, hearing this from a teacher “gave me a reason to just push harder to get to where I wanted to go without having them telling me that again.” Based on this statement, the teacher’s response motivated Angel to push harder and reject what her teacher assumed would happen to her.

For most of Angel’s life, she found herself having to go the extra mile to prove to others that she could get beyond the stumbling blocks placed in her path. After relocating, Angel “enrolled into Sahara to get my grades where they needed to be.” She described her experiences at Sahara as “really great because I can balance out everything and I don’t have to worry about it not being done the way I thought it could have been.” Moreover, Angel revealed in the initial one-on-one chat room interview that she enjoyed reading African American young adult literature. Her favorite book was Sharon Flake’s (1998) novel *The Skin I’m In*. When asked to explain, she wrote:

I like that book because she was a chocolate sister. And the fact that she got picked on but still stayed strong even though she was poor. I like that

she was strong enough to not let them get to her throughout the whole book.

Angel also enjoyed reading African American young adult novels written by Angela Johnson. She liked her books because “they have very good points and very good meanings about the everyday struggle that we go through.”

Nonetheless, Angel enjoyed reading when she had time. Yet, when asked if she had read any books written by any African American female authors in her English classes, she could not recall any and “now that it has been brought to my attention I wonder why.” When Angel heard the study was going to be based on Black girls, she became excited because “its like nothing ever happens for us and if there is then people think it’s always in a negative way.”

Due to a schedule conflict, Angel did not get a chance to log-on to the chat room group discussion on Davis’ documentary. Furthermore, she did not submit the e-mail interviews. Because she did not submit the e-mail interviews, there was no data on how she felt about the online chat room environment and the single-gendered book club. However, she logged-on to the second chat room group discussion on Flake’s novel. She also logged-on to the third chat room group discussion on Woodson’s novel. After the discussion on Woodson’s novel, Angel did not log-on to the fourth chat room group discussion on Draper’s novel. She attempted to log-on to the final chat room group discussion on Williams’ novel, and it became evident that she did not finish reading the novel. Nevertheless, Angel submitted a Voicethread project.

In the second chat room group discussion on Flake’s novel, Angel shared with the group that she had read the book twice before joining this study. Nonetheless, Isabella

revealed that she could relate to Maleeka in the sense that, “When I was young I never felt pretty because I always got picked on by girls because I am light- skinned.” Angel admitted that it “really hurt because I could never find a friend because of my skin color.” As the discussion continued, I asked the participants to discuss the ways that they internalize judgments about their appearances. Angel wrote:

We all internalize judgments about our appearances by looking at these women on covers and saying OMG they are so beautiful because they are on the front cover. It affects our self- esteem because we are led to believe that we are not good enough to believe I’m beautiful.

In other words, Angel believed most adolescent Black females internalized judgments about their beauty by looking at women on magazine covers. Angel claimed it affected Black girls’ self-esteem because they are led to believe that they are not beautiful. Angel spoke from personal experiences. Despite the fact that she was light-skin complexion, the modeling agents did not offer her the same opportunities as the White girls auditioning. According to Angel, the modeling agents judged her by Eurocentric standards of beauty. For instance, at the auditions, they expected her to wear “a tank top, pants, and heels.” When she chose otherwise, the agents considered her overdressed. If she wore a tank top, pants, and heels to auditions, Angel claimed the agents still did not pay her any attention. In the end, Angel enjoyed reading Flake’s novel for the third time.

Angel revealed in the third chat room group discussion that she identified with Evie’s father in Woodson’s novel. In the chat room group discussion, she shared that there were times when she felt depressed. According to Angel, she felt depressed because she lost one of the most important people in her life, her

grandmother. Losing her grandmother left her feeling all alone. Although she felt alone, Angel overcame it and began counseling other teenagers that felt the same way she did. Angel believed loneliness caused so many teens to commit suicide.

She wrote:

I think so many teens kill themselves because they feel like no one cares for them. I can see that pain all over their faces; that's why I try to talk to people like that as much as I can because they need a friend.

During this particular conversation, however, Angel expressed her thoughts and opinions on teens committing suicide. Due to a misunderstanding, Aurora assumed Angel suggested that committing suicide was okay. As a result, the girls began to argue in the chat room group discussion. Unfortunately, I had to end the chat room group discussion because the two girls would not stop. In fact, they continued to go back and forth on the very last question even after I attempted to end the discussion. Prior to ending the discussion, I asked the participants to respond to a quote that Evie made about life providing rewrites. As soon as I asked them to respond, Angel and Aurora argued for approximately 10 minutes.

Angel: I think so because I lived to see another year as a new beginning for me

Aurora: No, I think my life was written and not re written. God makes no mistakes and he sees how my future will become before it began.

Angel: I felt my life started off different. Yes God makes no mistakes but sometimes people's lives do start over.

Isabella: I think God already knew that. He's smart.

Aurora: Very smart.

Angel: Yes he is, but some people choose to feel they want to start life again not because of God but maybe because of what may have happened to them in the past.

Aurora: Because they choose to start off different. It's all by choice.

Angel: But some people choose to feel they want to start life again not because of God but maybe because of what may have happened to them in the past.

Aurora: Then they can start all over, if they want but God already gave you your life from the beginning; it's your choice if you want to change it.

Angel: But some people can't change it because maybe they are stuck to it.

Aurora: But like I said God gives you a blank piece of paper, it's your choice if you want to draw on it or not, if you make a mistake you can throw that piece of paper away and start all over.

Angel did not complete the study. After the chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel, Angel told me that she "felt like that one girl was really bringing me down on situations that I brought up." Angel claimed everything, "I would say she shoot me down and made it seem like I was wrong all because of her belief in God I guess." As such, Angel did not log-on to discuss Draper's novel in the fourth chat room group discussion but logged-on to the final chat room group discussion on Williams' novel. In this chat room group discussion, she admitted that she did not finish reading the novel.

She could not answer most of the questions, and as a result, I had to end the chat room group discussion.

Based on Angel's responses, she did not find the single-gendered book club to be a safe space where she could speak openly and freely. At times, she felt misunderstood in the single-gendered book club. Yet, the African American young adult novels used in this study offered opportunities for her to connect with characters and reflect on her own experiences as an adolescent Black female. Despite the fact that she did not complete the study, Angel's Voicethread project shed more light on what participating in this study did for Angel.

In the Voicethread project, Angel admitted, "When I was a lot younger, I felt really depressed and alone; I didn't know why. I now feel a lot better than I ever felt before." Yet, she described herself as "a very sweet and kind" that "people take advantage of." Angel, however, believed she was a "free spirit." In this case, Angel meant she could "do whatever I had to do possible to free whatever I felt was on my chest." Because Angel felt stymied in the single-gendered book club, I inferred that she did not feel comfortable speaking openly and candidly about her personal experiences.

Aurora: "I Use to Think That If I Don't Hear It From Other People
That I'm Beautiful, Then I Won't Believe It for Myself."

Aurora was a 16 year-old Biracial female that felt "blessed to be mixed." Aurora's mother was Filipino and her deceased father was Black. Aurora admitted to struggling with her Black identity. She claimed, "There have been times when I thought I was nothing because of my skin color, my height, and my nose. Everything! I have kinky hair

and I have to use a pick comb to brush it out.” In fact, she resented the fact that she inherited her father’s features, including his nose. When asked to explain, she wrote, “It was too round like my dad’s. I wanted to inherit my mom’s nose.” Anything that reminded Aurora of her blackness, it appeared as though she wanted to replace it with her Filipino heritage. In fact, she admitted that there were times when, “I hated being black.”

I did not know Aurora was Biracial because she did not possess any external features that led me to think otherwise. However, Aurora did not communicate with relatives on her father’s side. When asked to explain, she did not respond. Instead, she shared the challenges that she faced with relatives on her mother’s side. She claimed her aunt on her mother’s side treated her differently. According to Aurora, her aunt did not “really greet me as her niece.” Aurora felt “it is almost like she does not approve of me because I’m not full Filipino.” In some instances, she felt “left out, like I don’t belong.” Aurora found it difficult to feel comfortable around relatives on her mother’s side because she did not possess any features that resembled her Filipino heritage. As such, Aurora felt rejected by a heritage she so desperately wanted to embrace.

Despite resenting her African American heritage, Aurora revealed in the initial one-on-one chat room interview that she enjoyed reading books by African American female authors. In fact, she spent last summer reading Mary Monroe’s book *God Don’t like Ugly*. Monroe was the recipient of the Essence bestselling author award for this book, and she also earned the PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles National Literary Award and a nomination for the Black Writers Alliance’s Golden Pen Award. Because she enjoyed reading, Aurora looked forward to joining this study. Yet, she thought “all of us were going to meet face-to-face almost like a regular classroom and discuss our feelings about

the book with one another.” I explained to Aurora that the only difference between here preference and this study was the online chat room environment.

Aurora desired to meet face-to-face because she loved interacting with people. When asked about her experiences in schools, she claimed that she had “great experiences in traditional public schools.” According to Aurora, she was involved in many extra-curricular activities. Yet, she enrolled in Sahara because she witnessed “kids doing drugs and having sex in the bathroom.”

When I asked about her experiences at Sahara, she claimed there were a few female students that degraded her because of her skin color. She identified one as Hispanic and the other as Black. She alleged that they called her “gorilla bitch, afro puff, smart ass nigger,” and they would tell her, “I should go back to Africa.” Working in a close-knit environment, like Sahara, I would have heard about this experience. I never did. When asked how she responded to the girls, she shared, “I did not want to stoop down to their level, and I just said “Well God don’t like ugly.”

Aurora did not complete the study. She did not submit the e-mail interviews. Because she did not submit the e-mail interviews, there was no data on how she felt about the online chat room environment and the single-gendered book club. However, she logged-on to three chat room group discussions. She attempted to log-on to the fourth chat room group discussion on Draper’s novel, and it became evident that she did not read the novel. She did not log-on to the final chat room group discussion, and she did not submit a Voicethread project.

In the first chat room group discussion on Davis’ documentary, Aurora thought, “it was very educational.” She found it interesting “how these girls say that light-skinned

girls will not be accepted in an all black community even if they are naturally black.”

Because Aurora spent time with family members on her mother’s side, she was unfamiliar with the fact that skin color was a major issue in the Black community.

Moreover, Aurora shared that she could “relate to all the girls being interviewed in this video by their life experiences.” When asked to explain, she wrote, “...people judge me right away” because “my mom is Asian” and “they see me as a half African American girl.” She did not specify who judged her, but I inferred based on previous responses that she was talking about relatives on her mother’s side.

As the discussion continued, I noticed a pattern developing. Aurora continued to talk about how she had been “picked on a lot of times.” She claimed, “People would call me Chinky because of my eyes.” According to Aurora, people even called her a “Chinese Nigger... and I’m not even Chinese.” It became evident that Aurora struggled with raced identity. To illustrate, in the third chat room group discussion on Woodson’s novel, Aurora shared that she had “grown to accept myself, as a mixed girl.” She claimed, “I feel very blessed to be mixed.” In fact, Aurora made it very clear that she was not just Black when asked to share her perspective on her Black identity.

When asked to provide a pseudonym for the study, at first, she was adamant about not changing her name. She exclaimed, “Nope, I’m not changing the way I act, or my name, because that’s what makes me unique and different from the rest of the human kind.” Shortly after, she wrote, “I wanted mine to be Cinderella when I was like 2 lol ... or Snow White lol... or Sleeping Beauty lol.” After listing the cartoon characters’ names, Isabella told Aurora that Sleeping Beauty’s real name was Aurora. She accepted that name immediately. Nonetheless, Aurora’s comment shed some light on how she felt

about her Black identity. Unknowingly, she rejected it. I suspected that she resented being a “half African American girl” because it caused her to feel like an outcast around the only relatives that she knew.

Because Aurora did not complete the study, questions still lingered. Despite the fact that she related to characters, Aurora never made it clear how relating to those characters influenced the way she made sense of her experiences. In particular, what did she learn about herself and Black people from participating in this study? Did it help her like it helped Isabella? Because she withdrew from the study, I wondered if she did it because the material used reminded her of everything that she disliked about herself.

Jade: “I Have Never Been Picked on Because of Skin Color.”

Jade, self-identified as a 16 year-old from a family “mixed up of different races.” She never self-identified as Black or Biracial, but I inferred that she identified more with her African American heritage because she lived with her father, an African American, and her grandmother. In addition, she never identified her mother’s raced identity. When asked about her parents, she shared that they divorced when she was little, and that “I have to go back and forth to my mom’s every other weekend.” According to Jade, it was hard going back and forth, but “I guess I get use to it.”

In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Jade revealed that she had difficulty learning in a traditional public classroom setting because she was easily distracted and the class size was too large. Although teachers attempted to help her, she still struggled. As she explained it, “I couldn’t concentrate, and when I needed help with my homework the teachers would help but the way they explained it still didn’t make sense.” Because

she struggled, her parents agreed to enroll her in a private school. In this learning environment, Jade felt more comfortable. She described the classes as very small with only 8 to 10 kids in a classroom. Because the tuition was so expensive, she had to withdraw from the private school. As a result, she enrolled in Sahara and found it “reminded me of my private school” because the “teachers are really helpful.”

Jade shared that she was trying to get into the habit of reading on a regular basis. When asked about her reading preference, she listed Maya Angelou’s novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as a good novel. Jade mentioned that she usually spent about 35 minutes each day on reading the book. She had not read a book written by an African American female author in her English classes. Yet, she looked forward to “reading the different types of books” in this study.

Jade did not complete the study. She did not submit the e-mail interviews. Because she did not submit the e-mail interviews, there was no data on how she felt about the online chat room environment or the single-gendered book club. However, she logged-on to three chat room group discussions. She attempted to log-on to the fourth chat room group discussion on Draper’s novel, but soon after, it became evident that she did not finish reading the novel. She did not log-on to the final chat room group discussion, and she did not submit a Voicethread project.

Nonetheless, Jade revealed in the first chat room group discussion that she did not relate to the girls in the video, but thought “it was a really good video.” It surprised her when the girls said, “some black people went out and bought bleach to change their skin color.” Jade thought, “that was really weird.” As such, Jade seldom responded in the chat room group discussions. I attributed her non-response to the fast pace of the chat room

group discussions. Jade needed more time to process her thoughts. When asked about the need to discuss negative experiences that Black females encountered, Jade wrote, “Sorry I’m kind of stuck on that question.” To help, Aurora explained the question to her. After explaining, Jade replied, “Ok....I think I get what you’re talking about. Thank you.”

Jade continued to have difficulty keeping up in the chat room discussions. In fact, in the chat room group discussion on Flake’s novel, *Isabella* and Aurora debated Caleb’s reason for cleaning the school’s bathrooms. During this particular conversation, Jade did not respond because she did not “get what you guys are talking about?” When asked to explain what her face said to the world, she responded, “I don’t know I’m still thinking.” A few minutes later, she wrote, “Ok I have an answer sorry for taking so long.” She explained, “Hmmm.....I think my face tells the world that I’m brave, outgoing, and I’m not afraid to speak my mind.” After making this statement, I shared with Jade that this was a very candid response. I responded in this way because I began to notice that she began doubting her own responses. For instance, when the group responded to a question about prejudice towards darker-skinned females, Jade wrote, “I don’t think it matters.....I mean know one is better than someone else. I think I worded that right.”

She revealed in the third chat room group discussion on Woodson’s novel that she could not relate to the characters. In this chat room group discussion, Jade’s responses remained very brief. When asked to provide a pseudonym, she revealed, “I would change my name to Jade or Alicia. I really don’t like my name it doesn’t fit me.” This is the most she stated in this chat room group discussion. Yet, when asked to explain why she felt the way she did, she did not respond. Five minutes later, I asked if I could use either name for the study, and she replied, “Yea sure.” As the discussion continued, the girls

responded to a question that asked them to share which character's personality resembled their own if they were in Dad's shoes. In response, Jade wrote, "I am not sure."

Throughout this discussion, she wrote a brief response or no response at all. I suspected that this happened because she had difficulty keeping up with the pace of the chat room group discussions because most participants in this group typed extremely fast. To keep up, it seemed Jade began in the third chat room group discussion to respond to questions that did not require a detailed response. In fact, when Aurora and Angel argued back and forth in this chat room group discussion, Jade did not say anything.

Based on Jade's responses, I inferred that she felt intimidated by the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club. It was difficult for her to process the questions and keep up with responding at the same time. On the contrary, Jade revealed that she learned a lot. In the first chat room group discussion, Jade shared, "Well I've learned that we should be happy in our skin color and we shouldn't use bleach and we shouldn't care about what people think about us." In the second chat room group discussion, she mentioned that Flake's novel was a good book. She identified it as "one of my favorites." She never shared her thoughts on Woodson's novel. Unfortunately, Jade did not complete the study. She attempted to log-on to the fourth chat room group discussion but finally admitted that she did not finish reading the book. Overall, Jade tried, but this particular online chat room environment did not offer her enough time to process the questions.

Summary of Results

This chapter examined the ways the participants in this group used three spaces (a) an online chat room environment, (b) a single-gendered book club, and (c) African American young adult fiction to name and challenge their experiences as young Black females. Based on the responses, the participants in this group had mixed feelings about the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club. Isabella described the atmosphere in the single-gendered book club as contentious at times. Although she felt free to express herself in the online chat room environment, the arguing seemed to have made other participants feel uncomfortable. For instance, Angel felt misunderstood in the single-gendered book club. Because the book club was located in an online chat room environment, she assumed that it was safe to be candid about her experiences. Yet, she concluded that this online single-gendered book club “proved my point to be true. I’ve always kept things bottled up and that’s why I never tell anyone because of the way they react.” In other words, this online single-gendered book club left Angel believing no space was safe.

Jade, on the other hand, felt intimidated by the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club’s pace. Because Aurora did not offer any opinions or make any comments about her perspective on the online chat room environment or single-gendered book club, I found it difficult to make any inferences. Also, I found it difficult to make any inferences on Aurora’s thoughts and opinions on the African American young adult literature. Although she wrote that she identified with characters, it was never made clear how identifying with characters enabled her to make sense of her own experiences. As for Isabella, the literature used in this study “warmed my heart” and

“opened my eyes to a bunch of books out there about subjects I can relate to.” Reading about the challenges that adolescent Black females faced with skin color, hair texture, and body image allowed Isabella to see that she was not alone. Like Isabella, Angel found that she could also relate to the characters in the novels, in particular Maleeka Madison. Nevertheless, the participants in this group had mixed feelings about the online chat room environment and the single-gendered book club. Because they experienced the online chat room environment and single-gendered book club in different ways, the girls did not conclude as a group that they felt safe in the spaces provided.

For this particular group, the online chat room and single-gendered book club were not used to ask each other questions, interject when necessary, and find and express one’s voice. Although Isabella and Angel attempted to “speak up” and “speak out” on issues that they felt strongly about, they spent more time in the online chat room and single-gendered book club trying to defend their own positions. Unlike participants in Tuesday’s group, Isabella and Angel did not get the chance to discuss in detail what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction did for them.

Nonetheless, Collins (1990) identified a single-gendered space and the voices of Black women writers as safe spaces that offered opportunities for Black women to challenge negative images ascribed to them, speak out when the representations of the Black female’s experiences did not speak to their realities, and create new self-definitions to validate their own standpoints. The girls in this group did not respond in ways that made the spaces appear safe. Yet, Isabella did the best that she possibly could to use the literature as a springboard to embark on a journey of self-discovery. However, Chapter 6 provides a summary to detail the complexity of the intersection between literacy and the

lived-experiences of the young women participating in this study. Included in Chapter 6 are practical implications and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 6

A CAUTIONARY TALE

This study offered three alternative spaces in response to the research and scholarship that envisioned different kinds of educational spaces for adolescent Black females to come to voice: (a) an online chat room environment, (b) single-gendered book club, and (c) African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction. Offering alternative spaces provided opportunities for seven young women of color to express themselves and learn to resist and construct cultural meanings found in texts and in their lives (DeBlase, 2003). The spaces provided in this study enabled Esperanza, Star, and Isabella to try on different ideas, beliefs, and behaviors as they read and discussed what reading African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction did for them. For example, the online chat room and the single-gendered book club provided Bianca with a safe environment to resist and call into question the issues that she read in the literature. The three girls in Tuesday's group defined *safe* as not having to worry about someone judging or criticizing them. Because the online chat room and the single-gendered spaces enabled Bianca to feel safe, she felt comfortable expressing the dissatisfaction and discomfort that she often felt with the literature.

Unlike Bianca, Angel seemed to dismiss the notion that the online chat room environment and the single-gendered book club were safe spaces. Although she did not complete the study, Angel felt misunderstood in the chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel. Although Jade did not complete the study, she felt that she learned a lot from the literature. Nonetheless, Jade withdrew from the study possibly because she struggled to keep up with the pace in the online chat room group discussions.

In this particular online single-gendered book club, technical aspects haunted most participants including myself. One aspect that haunted other participants besides Jade was the speed in the online chat room group discussions. According to Castek, Bevans-Mangelson, and Goldstone (2006), writing in the rapid back-and-forth online exchanges can be difficult for the most proficient writer. Although Jade never mentioned this as a problem explicitly, Bianca alluded to it in the first email interview on Flake's novel. She wrote, "The only thing I would have changed is being able to type faster. Sometimes, by the time I finished writing a relevant response, the conversation has moved on, and I would have to adjust to the new topic." As such, the participants' responses revealed that technology is no panacea to creating community, especially when technical difficulties occur unexpectedly.

However, Aurora specified that the online chat room environment was fun, but when it came time to discuss race and racism, it appeared as though she struggled to negotiate a racial identity for herself. Reflecting on the participants' responses revealed an issue identified by Brooks, Browne, and Hampton (2008), DeBlase (2003), and Sutherland (2005) as they conducted their research on adolescent Black females' literacy experiences. In the Brooks et al. (2008) study, they suggested that the "identities of readers be thought of as fluid and multifaceted" (p.668). They advised educational researchers to remember that the reader's identity "will likely vary across a continuum as protagonists and events in stories change, reveal complexities, or evolve" (Brooks, et al., 2008, p.668). Even when readers identified with stories or stories reflected their own ethnic background, Brooks et al. (2008) reminded the educational researcher to remember the complexity of the intersection between literacy and the lived-experiences of

adolescent Black females. Remembering this detail enabled me to examine the ways that the participants positioned themselves in their responses to the literature as “actors with complex identities” (Sutherland, 2005, p.391). For example, Bianca exhibited this complexity when she proclaimed, “I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Racism never comes between me and my friends.”

Nonetheless, this chapter provides a response to the research and scholarship that envisioned certain locations (e.g., Black women writers, single-gendered spaces, and online chat room environments) as safe spaces for adolescent Black females to use their own words “to begin to define their reality and sense of self and to constitute and reconstitute their social identities” (DeBlase, 2003, p.323). By responding to the research and scholarship, this chapter highlights significant moments to show the ways that certain participants positioned themselves as individuals with complex identities. In the following section, I respond to the body of research and scholarship that consider writings by African American female authors as a safe location for young women of color to make sense of their experiences. Included in this section is a response to the research that supports single-gendered book clubs for Black girls. Put simply, the following section provides a discussion of findings related to the research questions.

The subsequent section offers a response to the research and scholarship that claims an online book club effectively weaves together old and new literacy practices (Scharber, 2009). In addition to the responses, this chapter provides practical implications for those interested in this topic. In sum, the final section concludes with recommendations for future research interested in literacy research and practice that support alternative in-school spaces where adolescent Black females experience coming to voice.

Discussion of Findings Related to Research Questions

Response to Black Female Writers as a Safe Space

Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) identified Black women writers as a safe space for African American women to use their own voices to define their own experiences. When participants used the young adult literature to engage in dialogue with each other or displayed a willingness to see their perspective of the world differently and worked collectively to change any negative representations of Black females found in the literature and in their lives, the African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction represented a safe space.

Assuming that the literature selected for this study provided a safe space for participants to shape their ideas and definitions about themselves and others, I offered seven young Black females an opportunity to read and respond to contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female authors. As such, the literature enabled Esperanza, Star, and Isabella to speak and write from multiple identities. For instance, Esperanza explained in the Voicethread project what reading this literature did for her as a young Black female. First, she described the research study as a great opportunity for herself and other adolescent Black females “to discuss books written by Black authors that address issues that we face in our community.” Second, she identified Flake’s (1998) novel *The Skin I’m In* as “the book that really related to me because I have dealt with similar issues when I was in school.”

Yet, she revealed in the final chat room group discussion on Williams’ novel that she believed the author presented real life issues, but she portrayed the Black female in stereotypical ways. As someone speaking from experience, Esperanza thought Williams’

portrayal of the Black female reinforced the stereotype that she is loud, stubborn, and promiscuous. In support of this, Collins (1990) argued that these stereotypes used to justify the economic, social, and political exploitation of Black females emerged when the Black female arrived in America as a slave. Nonetheless, Esperanza's response to the way Williams portrayed the Black female spoke to the call made by contemporary Black feminist Joan Morgan. Morgan (1999) argued that it was time "to take an honest look at ourselves" and tell the truth about how "we have internalized new myths and have been indiscriminate in crafting our identities from them" (as cited in Springer, 2002, p.1069). Esperanza concluded that she would recommend the book to friends because it addressed how important it was for African Americans, particularly women and girls to voice their concerns about issues pertaining to their experiences.

Williams' novel resonated with Star because she also helped a young girl that had been molested. Although Star agreed with Bianca in the final chat room group discussion that reading a young adult book about sexual abuse made her feel uncomfortable, she still showed empathy towards Kambia. I concluded that the novel made Star feel uncomfortable because it forced her to recall a horrific experience with helping a young girl heal that had been molested. For Star, this novel was too realistic and left her hesitant to share this novel with friends and other peers. Moreover, Star described Kambia as "a loving person" in the Voicethread project. She felt bad for Kambia because like the young girl she knew, Kambia was also "such a young little girl." Like Shayla, Star felt compelled to be gentle with the young girl that she knew because she did not know anyone else that would. Star's affection towards Kambia is described by Black feminist thought. According to Collins (1990), the best way of understanding another person's

ideas was “to develop empathy and share the experiences that led the person to form those ideas” (p.210). For Star, reading this novel enabled her to grapple with and make sense of her experiences with the young girl.

Similarly, Isabella identified Williams’ novel as her favorite book in the study. In her Voicethread project, she wrote that this novel “has many messages.” The message that resonated with her the most was “not to judge someone for their looks.” In particular, she believed “Dew Witty was an amazing artist but everyone judged him and thought he was a big dummy. He was far from a big dummy; I could just imagine what his pictures look like; it would be cool to see in real life.” Reading about characters such as Dew Witty opened her eyes to “a bunch of books out there about subjects I can relate to.” The literature offered in this study offered Isabella the opportunity she hoped to receive. In the initial one-on-one chat room interview, Isabella shared that she joined the study to see if she could relate to the characters in the stories. In the end, she found what she was looking for- “four amazing books written by extraordinary people.”

Contrarily, Bianca found “reading the books in this study always left me puzzled.” When asked if she could relate to any characters, Bianca responded, “I found myself unable to answer; nothing in my life mirrored anything the characters went through.” In fact, Bianca used her inability to relate to the literature as a means to challenge the authors’ intentions and express disappointment with characters and issues addressed in the books. For example, Bianca blamed the author Sharon Flake for making her feel “a little disappointed with Maleeka because she wouldn’t stand up for herself.” In the third chat room group discussion, she described Woodson’s novel as *depressing*. Similarly, she used the same term to describe the tone in Williams’ novel. Yet, she went a step further

by expressing that Williams' novel made her feel "disgusted and depressed." To support this, in the final chat room group discussion, Bianca emphasized that it was inappropriate for young adult literature to address issues related to sexual abuse.

Bianca's resistance to the literature revealed identification was complex. Bianca's resistance was due in part to her religion. Bianca claimed that she never experienced prejudices or racism as a Jehovah's Witness. For this reason, she read the experiences of the characters differently. In some cases, she seemed disengaged from the literature. She admitted in the first email interview on Flake's novel that, "I don't feel anything different when I read novels written by or about African American females. I don't really care who the author is or what color the main character is, so long as it's a good story." Yet, Bianca's disengagement from the literature did not result in silencing her voice. In fact, her inability to connect with characters amplified her voice. As she entered each chat room group discussion, Bianca's voice grew louder as she expressed dissatisfaction with some of the issues and characters.

In complex and multiple ways, Bianca used her religion and not the literature to define her reality and sense of self. In particular, she used her religion to shape and act out social identities in this online single-gendered book club. Thus, Collins' (1990) claim that the work by Black female writers is a safe space for Black women and girls to find voice is not always true. While Esperanza, Star, and Isabella got the opportunity to use the literature to try on beliefs, behaviors, and values, this alternative in-school space did not validate Bianca's experiences. Nonetheless, Bianca appreciated the fact that she could see other participants' perspectives in the Tuesday's single-gendered book club. Although she rejected the issues addressed in some of the literature, Bianca's

appreciation for hearing different perspectives showed that one did not have to identify with the characters in the literature in order for the literature to work.

Response to Single-Gendered Book Club as a Safe Space

Researchers identified single-gendered spaces as another safe space that provided opportunities for Black women and girls to speak openly and write freely about their own experiences (Collins, 1990; Henry, 1998b). In this study, the participants in Tuesday's group described the single-gendered book club as a friendly, safe, and comfortable environment where no one felt others judged them. In contrast, participants in Thursday's single-gendered group did not always feel safe and comfortable. Isabella described the atmosphere in this particular group as contentious. In the e-mail interview on the chat room group discussion on Woodson's novel, she described the argument between Aurora and Angel as "senseless." Overall, Isabella felt cheated in this single-gendered book club. She exclaimed repeatedly, "I don't know how they expected to discuss the book if they didn't read." In the final e-mail interview on the chat room group discussion on William's novel, Isabella wrote, "I wish there were more people in the discussion and that we all read the whole book."

According to Appleman (2006), a book club is supposed to be a setting for participants to help each other make connections between their own experiences and texts. Because the other participants did not finish reading the novels, Isabella did not get to experience helping others make connections between their own personal experiences and the texts. Furthermore, she did not get the opportunity to experience what some argued would happen when African American females valued a female network that offered a safe space (Collins, 1990; Scott, 2004a). When young Black girls valued a

female network that offered a safe space, Scott (2004a) found that they began to voice their hopes, dreams, and struggles. Unfortunately, Isabella did not get this opportunity, as did participants in Tuesday's single-gendered book club. Nonetheless, she appreciated the anonymity that the online chat room environment provided despite the fact that she could not depend on the group dynamics to work to advance discussions and voice.

Response to Online Chat Room as a Safe Space

In the Scharber, Melrose, and Wurl (2009) research study, they found girls were very active and enthusiastic to talk about books in an online format. They found the girls-only space provided "safe, guided social experiences" (Scharber, Melrose, & Wurl, 2009, p.188). In support of this, Schofield- Clark (2005) found teenage girls' use of the Internet and instant messaging provided them with a sense of control over their environment. In one study, Scott (2004a) found that the chat room became the preferred virtual location for communication among young Black females attending a technology summer program. At this camp, the participants used the chat room to maintain lines of group communication. From Scott's perspective, the online chat room enabled the girls to claim ownership over the context.

In this study, the participants that submitted the e-mail interviews revealed that the anonymity in the online chat room environment enabled them to feel safe because they did not have to worry about any form of accountability or assessment. Because the anonymity made them feel safe, the participants in Tuesday's group felt comfortable sharing different perspectives on delicate issues such as racism and sexual abuse.

On the contrary, some participants in Thursday's group did not consider the online chat room a safe space. In Thursday's group, Angel appreciated the anonymity because it

enabled her to feel safe leaving the chat room whenever she felt uncomfortable or misunderstood. Isabella, on the other hand, noticed the anonymity had negative effects. She wrote, “I wish everyone respected each other's opinions and didn't argue with each other.” Isabella felt some in Thursday’s group took advantage of the anonymity and used it to disrespect others instead of help other participants make connections with their personal experiences and the texts.

Considering the fact that more research on adolescent Black females’ literacy experiences in online forums and single-gendered book club spaces is needed, this dissertation showed how fluid and multifaceted adolescent Black females’ identities are in different alternative in-school spaces. In essence, this study showed what Black feminist Patricia Hill-Collins (1986) argued over twenty- years ago about the Black women’s experiences. According to Collins, there is no monolithic Black women’s culture. In this case, themes linked some girls’ lives, but it was evident that the girls experienced the themes differently, depending on class, location, ethnicity, and religion. Bianca felt her experiences were missing altogether from the literature, yet she used the chat room and the single-gendered spaces to discuss her dissatisfaction with the literature.

This research study called into question Black feminist researchers and scholars claim that Black female writers and Black female social networks are safe spaces where Black women can continuously define themselves without recrimination (Scott, 2004a). Based on the findings, this study showed that it depended on the group dynamics and the literature discussed. While Tuesday’s group participants experienced collegiality and worked collectively using the literature to make sense of their experiences, some

participants in Thursday's group found themselves defending their experiences and struggling to move beyond interruptions and outbursts.

In essence, this research study showed that *safe* is a relative term and that there is no certainty in an online single-gendered book club featuring contemporary realistic young adult fiction written by African American female writers. Although this study showed how an online chat room environment, single-gendered book club, and African American contemporary realistic young adult fiction can be sites of possibilities for scholars and practitioners supportive of providing opportunities for young Black females to find their voice, the results from the current study revealed that the promise of these alternative spaces were not always met.

Yet, the online chat room provided Black girls in the Scott (2004a) study with safe social experiences. As such, I expected the online chat room and single-gendered book club to provide opportunities for participants in both groups to establish relationships with one another, and as a result, feel comfortable speaking and writing from their own subjectivities. Equally important, I expected them to move beyond talking about behaviors expected of them and others' attitudes toward them as Black females to replacing externally derived negative images imposed upon them with authentic representations of themselves.

Based on the findings, Thursday's group revealed that group dynamics are unpredictable, and as a result, creating spaces exclusively for adolescent Black females to authentically learn about and express themselves in subjective ways might not be as safe as some researchers and theorists have argued (Collins, 1990; Henry, 1998b). This reality raised an important issue that educators and researchers interested in adolescent Black

girls' literacy experiences in classrooms need to consider. While group dynamics might have worked for African American women and girls in the past, the findings in this research study showed that group dynamics in the twenty-first century might not be the way to go for adolescent Black girls, particularly for those that attend high schools that have limited or no face-to-face interaction.

This study allowed me to see there was no simple approach to implementing contemporary realistic young adult literature written by African American female authors. While some researchers argued that the implementation of multicultural literature by and about teenaged Black girls played an important part in helping Black girls validate their existence, the results from this research study revealed that the exact match from multicultural literature to these girls' raced identity was not complex enough to meet their needs (Hinton & Berry, 2005). I expected the girls to use the literature to reread and rename their experiences because research and scholarship in the field of adolescent Black females' literacy experiences provided evidence that literature written by African American female writers was a safe space for young Black girls to come to voice (Henry, 1998a; Sutherland, 2005). Honestly, I expected literature written by and about African American female writers to do for the girls in this study what it did for me.

Reading literature written by African American female authors enabled me to see my hopes, dreams, and desires as a Black female. It provided a springboard for me to discuss my own experiences and forge self-definitions that countered the images used to stereotype, ridicule, and malign African American females. While some participants experienced the literature in similar ways as I did, other participants, particularly Bianca did not see her experiences in the literature. Yet, Bianca's dissatisfaction with the

literature enabled her to voice an important issue that research and scholarship on Black females' literacy experiences need to address. As a participant in Tuesday's group, she felt safe enough in both the online chat room and the single-gendered spaces to express the dissatisfaction with Flake's novel and the discontent with Williams' novel.

I expected the girls to come alive since most of them had not read any literature written by African American female authors. This did not happen. While it was shocking and upsetting, at times, to read the strong resistance that some had towards the literature, I realized that in the twenty-first century, I could not take my own paths and use them with adolescent Black girls. In other words, I could not impose on them what I experienced because I would risk essentializing the experiences of adolescent Black females. O'Brien, Moje, and Stewart (2001) defined *essentializing* as "the assumption that all people with particular physical markers, or who identify in particular ways have the same thoughts, experiences, and needs" (p.41). To avoid essentializing Black girls' experiences, Scott (2004b) challenged scholars and practitioners to consider "the multiple locations in which Black girls find themselves and the contextual variables that influence behavior" (p. 385). In response to this challenge, I provide practical implications in the following section to inform teachers, researchers, and practitioners interested in teaching young women such as my nieces about how to acknowledge the complexities of their identities.

Practical Implications

Based on the data from the chat room group discussions, e-mail interviews, and Voicethread projects, several practical implications emerged related to providing young

women of color with opportunities to use an online single-gendered book club to make sense of themselves and their experiences. These implications involve details so that other researchers can capitalize and create their own online school book club for young women of color.

According to Moje (2004), adolescents' lives take them through multiple spaces, and as a result, their identities are consequently articulated, "in multiple spaces that make their identities a complex hybrid of many different qualities of difference" (p.18). Moje argued that rather than identifying adolescents as having a strong raced identity simply because they are a part of a particular ethnic identity, researchers must consider how their ethnic identities connected to the ways that adolescents positioned themselves and how different spaces positioned them. In this way, Black feminist thought's concept of intersectionality would be appropriate because it takes into account the complexities of the impact that Black femaleness (e.g., skin complexion, social class, religious affiliation, and culture) have on the lived experiences of Black girls (Scott, 2004b). O'Brien, Moje, and Stewart (2001) argued that literacy researchers and practitioners must examine how "people are different on the basis of their experiences and the ways they have been positioned or positioned themselves in their social worlds" (p.41).

O'Brien, Moje, and Stewart (2001) found locating difference along the lines of experience are powerful because this allowed researchers and practitioners to avoid essentializing with the assumption that all people with particular physical markers (e.g., race or gender characteristics) or who identify in particular ways (e.g., Christian or Jehovah's Witness) have the same thoughts, hopes, experiences, and dreams. In addition, O'Brien, et al. (2001) argued that thinking about difference in terms of experience and

positionality also allowed researchers and practitioners to think about intersections among categories of difference. Thus, I can acknowledge that the experiences of the participants in this dissertation are different from those of my nieces located in South Carolina. Considering the difference in terms of experience and positionality, it is imperative that literacy researchers and practitioners offer a wider spectrum of literature to young Black females because race and gender are more complex than just matching these identities with characters in African American young adult fiction.

In a recent study, Moje and Luke (2009) suggested more theorizing of both literacy and identity as social practices and how “the two breathe life into each other” (p.415). In this particular case, Moje and Luke’s metaphor identity-as-position is relevant because it took into account discourse and narrative, and it acknowledged the power of activities, interactions, artifacts, space, and time. According to Moje and Luke, the identity-as-position metaphor invited people “to stand in certain positions, to take up particular identities” (p.431). Put simply, the identity-as-position metaphor allowed people to tell stories about themselves, represent themselves in narrative, and shift positions as they told new stories. In this way, literacy’s role in identity-as-position served as “an enabling tool, a device for making meaning of and speaking back to or resisting the call to certain positions” (Moje & Luke, 2009, p.431).

The findings in this research illustrated how differently positioned the girls were in terms of identities in different spaces. For instance, Isabella’s grandmother positioned her in negative ways due to her Biracial identity. Positioned by her grandmother as an outsider looking in, Isabella felt rejected. She joined the study hoping to find a place where others shared similar experiences. Fortunately, she found it in the novels. Because

the novels addressed issues that resonated with Isabella, she was able to reposition herself as someone with confidence, hope, and optimism about her African American heritage. Similarly, the literature repositioned Esperanza to become outspoken on negative images ascribed to African American females. In fact, the literature repositioned her to see the Black community in a more positive light. On the contrary, Bianca's religious beliefs as a Jehovah's Witness shaped how she responded to the literature. In some cases, she found the literature addressed issues inappropriate for young adults to read. With such strong religious beliefs, Bianca's resistance to the literature presents a cautionary tale for researchers and practitioners interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences.

Her resistance also should remind researchers and practitioners to consider other factors (i.e., religion) in order to avoid controlling identities that students produce and making assumptions based on particular recognitions of students' identities. According to Moje and Luke (2009), making assumptions might lead to getting in "the way of critical tools for naming, understanding, representing, or enacting the self" (p.433). Moje and Luke posited that research on literacy-and-identity studies must remember that people are constantly in the process of identifying and making meaning of identifications. Bianca's resistance provides evidence for the need to consider Black girls' youth and optimism along with "multiple text types and media in our literacy curricula" (Moje & Luke, 2009, p.433). Equally important, researchers and practitioners interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences should consider other alternative spaces, particularly online that allow young Black females to read and position themselves in different ways.

In essence, this dissertation presented a cautionary tale. I was fortunate to learn from family members about the history in the South. Learning from family members enabled

me to appreciate and understand literature written by African American female authors (e.g., Gwendolyn Brooks and Sonia Sanchez). Most participants in this study had parents that did not grow up in Las Vegas, but the participants did. Because most participants grew up in Las Vegas, they experienced race differently. This may have influenced the way some responded. In the end, I realized that I did not know them as well as I thought. Given three months of intensive data collection, I only got a snapshot. Yet, I hope that the girls carried something with them. In particular, I hope Bianca got more out of this dissertation than what she revealed. The following section provides recommendations for future qualitative research seeking to understand the different ways adolescent Black females respond to young adult fiction in alternative spaces and the ways their responses exhibit the complexities of their identities and identifications as young women of color in the twenty-first century.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study adds to the bits and pieces of fragmented knowledge about adolescent Black girls' perspective on their literacy experiences. Reflecting on the methods used in this study, as well as the results obtained, led to the following recommendations for future research:

1. Future research studies interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences should consider conducting a longitudinal study using alternative spaces to examine, if, at all, how adolescent Black girls' identities shift over time as they grapple with and make sense of themselves and their experiences.
2. Future research interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences should

consider developing Black feminist theory in relation to adolescent girls.

3. Future research interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences should complicate race by conducting an intergenerational book club or expand the book club to include adolescent Black girls from different geographical locations.

4. Future research interested in adolescent Black girls' literacy experiences should consider focusing on the approach of literacy, specifically with critical literacy to move adolescent Black girls into a more deconstructive stance in regards to multicultural literature.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL NOTICE



**Social/Behavioral IRB – Full Board Review
Approval Notice**

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: September 24, 2007
TO: Dr. Tom Bean, Curriculum and Instruction
FROM: Office for the Protection of Research Subjects
RE: Notification of IRB Action
Protocol #: 0708-2426

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is September 5, 2008. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

PLEASE NOTE:

Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond September 5, 2008, it would be necessary to submit a **Continuing Review Request Form** *60 days* before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu or call 895-2794.

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH STUDY FLYER



WOULD YOU LIKE TO PARTICIPATE?

This year I will be conducting a research study at Sahara Charter High School to complete my dissertation (a long research paper) for UNLV, and I would like you to participate. I am interested in talking to African American girls about what they think as they read, write about, and talk about literature and multimedia that features young adult African American females as characters. Those of you who would like to participate will be required to communicate in online focus group discussions in *E-College* chat room, one-on-one interviews, e-mail, and discussion board. I will assign usernames to log-in in order to protect your identity. Each group discussion or one-on-one interviews will take approximately 1 hour. This study will last 1 semester, starting September 24, 2007 ending January 18, 2008.

If you are interested, you must be an African American female between the ages of 14-17, enrolled at Sahara, enrolled in Ms. Lyons, Ms. Scarborough, Ms. Smith, or Ms. Smitherman (pseudonyms) English class, and have access to the Internet, particularly in the home. If you are an African American female over 17, or enrolled in my English class, or do not have access to the Internet, or are not enrolled at Sahara, you cannot participate in the study.

If you decide to participate, you will also need parental permission. Once I receive permission from both you and your parent (s), you will meet with me during school hours and I will give you copies of 4 novels, and you will be able to keep them as a gift for participating in the study. If you participate in the study and decide to withdraw, you will still be able to keep the 4 books. The materials include 17 year-old Kiri Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me*, Sharon Flake's (1998) novel *The Skin I'm In*, Sharon Draper's (2002) novel *Double Dutch*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*, and Lori A. Williams' (2000) novel *When Kambia Elaine flew in from Neptune*. The online documentary and novels will include sensitive themes such as beauty, illiteracy, spirituality, physical abuse, oppression, and racism. The sensitive themes will be discussed in the materials reviewed.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT PRESENTATION

Initial one-on-one recruitment presentation with all potential participants

This text is provided in order to communicate the intent of my initial one-on-one recruitment meeting with all potential participants. I will not distribute or read from this document but composed it as a way to think through the elements I wished to detail in my presentation.

I am so glad you agreed to meet with me today, so I can tell you a few things about my research study, and you can decide whether you want to participate. And, even if you decide now that you do want to participate, you can change your mind later- I need to be sure that's especially clear. What we will do together has nothing to do with your grade for your English class or how your English teacher rates your "class participation." Do you have a question at this point? Okay, let me tell you a little about myself, and then we'll see if you have any questions.

Currently, I teach ninth grade English at Sahara, and I've been teaching at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas part-time. I taught a course called "Literacy Issues for a Diverse Society" this past summer that focused on students' writing and discussing what they read- a lot like a high school English class, really, but for college students when they want to get their masters' degrees to improve their teaching.

I started to have some questions about teaching and learning that made me decide to go back to school and become a student again, so I enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Literacy, meaning that I am interested in how teenagers use reading, writing, and speaking to learn, to communicate with other people, and to think about who they are in the world. So, I've finished 4 years of taking classes, and now I'm about to spend the next year writing a dissertation- which is like writing a huge research paper.

Dissertations are usually over 100 pages, and some are even more than 300 pages. I had to design a research project-something I thought would be interesting to study and learn about- then I spend time collecting information about that topic- then I get to write about what I learn, and hopefully it will get published in journals that teachers read. Do you have any questions at this point?

I am interested in what it is like for African American teenage girls to study literature and multimedia in an online environment written and produced by African American females and is about African American people. I'm interested in what you have to say as you read this literature, as you write about it, discuss it with other African American girls online, and even discuss it with me.

What I want to do with you, then, is to meet, during a 14 weeks period, 4 times online as a group for approximately 1 hour to discuss what you read. I will give each of you

a username to log-on the chat room that I assign so participants will not know who you are. You will also be expected to meet with me online for 2 one-on-one interviews in the same assigned chat room. When we meet one-on-one, it will just be you and I talking about what you have read, concerns about the group discussions, or any other concerns or questions you might have. There will be 4 e-mail interviews, in which you will be required to respond to questions that I e-mail to you. During e-mail interviews, you will be required to reflect on all of your experiences during group discussion and one-on-one interviews. You will also have the option to post any comments about the reading assignments on a discussion board.

However, I will read along with you, so we can refer to parts of the book or whatever, but I mean this to be an opportunity for you just to talk and for me to learn more about what you are thinking about, what is important to you, what you think is great, what bothers you as you read this literature, and even what bothers you during group and one-on-one discussions, etc... Do you have any questions or do you just want to say something about all this stuff that I am telling you?

Both you and your parents will have to sign a form that says it is okay for you to participate in this study and that it is okay for me to include what you say in my dissertation. Nevertheless, if you and your parents sign the forms and you start participating and then change your mind and decide you don't want to participate any more, it is alright. You are not committed to continuing. I won't be sharing what you say with any of your teachers; what you talk about online will be confidential.

After we are all done working together, I have the job of figuring out how all the stuff discussed online can help make teachers in both online and traditional public schools better teachers- especially for African American teenage females. So, eventually, I'll be writing about our work together. I'll let each of you make up a name for yourself- whatever you want me to call you in the paper I write- so that people who read it can't identify you. I also have to make a different name for Sahara, and I will have to call any other person that I reference by a different name.

This is the kind of project that you hear on TV or read about, "According to a study, the researchers found that..." So, I am a researcher, and I would like you to be a part of one of those studies that other teachers are going to read about and hopefully learn from.

I am done telling you everything that you need to know for today. Do you have any questions or comments about my project?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Youth assent FORM

My name is Benita Dillard and my faculty advisor is Tom Bean.

We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about the opportunities a high school African American girls' experiences in an online noncredit after school book club provide when they read young adult literature and watch multimedia about issues that commonly concern them. For this study, we will be reading and discussing young adult literature and watching an online documentary that deal with issues of beauty, education, oppression, identity, physical abuse, family, spirituality, and fictive kinship, etc.

If you are interested, you must be an African American female between the ages of 14-17, enrolled at Sahara, enrolled in Ms. Lyons, Ms. Scarborough, Ms. Smith, or Ms. Smitherman (pseudonyms) English class, and have access to the Internet, particularly in the home. If you are an African American female over 17, or enrolled in Ms. Dillard's English class, or do not have access to the Internet, or are not enrolled at Sahara, you cannot participate in the study.

If you agree to be in the study, we will meet online in a live chat session to discuss young adult novels and other literature dealing with issues that African American adolescent girls experience. There will be a one-on-one interview in a live chat room at the beginning of the study to learn more about experiences with reading young adult literature written by African American females in a traditional public school English course, in an online high school English activity after school, and in your home and community. We will meet as a group and one-on-one in a live chat room to discuss the literature we read. These group discussions will require you to talk about the assigned readings with other participants. The one-on-one discussions will allow you to talk about the literature and ease any discomfort that you may experience. Also, we will meet one-on-one using e-mail, so you can write about your thoughts on the reading and the issues related to the focus group and one-on-one interviews. You will also have access to a discussion board to post thoughts, comments, or questions about the reading assignments. The chat room sessions will not be open to the general public on the Internet. To ensure your privacy and protection, we will assign each participant a username for the group discussions. Nevertheless, if you give your username to other participants, then your information will not be confidential. However, due to the small study population, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality in the chat room if you reveal potentially discernible information. Furthermore, I cannot guarantee that other study participants will not disclose information from the chat room discussions.

You may feel awkward or uncomfortable at first sharing in an online group or feel self conscious about me interviewing you one-on-one. For this research, your written comments will be recorded and documented. However, you will not be identified by

name in the research study; your identity will be coded to help protect your own privacy.

This study will give you the opportunity to read and discuss books and multimedia with other African American girls in ways you might not normally get to in your English classes. We will provide the 4 books, so there will be no cost to you for participating in the study. You will read Sharon Flake's (1998) novel *The Skin I'm In*, Sharon Draper's (2002) novel *Double Dutch*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*, and Lori A. Williams' (2000) novel *When Kambia Elaine flew in from Neptune*. You will be able to keep the 4 books as compensation for participating in the study. Also, you will watch 17 year-old Kiri Davis' documentary "A girl like me" and respond to it. If you decide to withdraw from the study before it ends, you will still get to keep the books. Also, you will not have to worry about staying after school; all communication will take place online unless you need to meet in person. We hope this will be an opportunity for you to do some reading, thinking, and talking about issues that really matter to you as African American teenage girls.

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say "yes" you can still decide not to do this.

If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop. This is a voluntarily online afterschool English activity that takes place outside of the 4 hours you are expected to be at school. You will receive no credit for participating in this study.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study.

Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study. You and your parents will be given a copy of this form after you have signed it.

ALL INFORMATION THAT YOU SHARE DURING CHAT ROOM GROUP AND ONE-ON-ONE DISCUSSIONS AND IN E-MAIL AND DISCUSSION BOARD WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SHARED WITH ANYONE ELSE, UNLESS YOU SHARE INFORMATION THAT LEADS US TO BELIEVE YOU ARE IN DANGER OR AT RISK OF HARMING YOURSELF OR OTHERS. IN SUCH A SITUATION, WE WOULD FOLLOW SCHOOL PROCEDURE AND INFORM YOU COUNSELOR AND ALLOW YOU TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES AND MAKE A DETERMINATION ABOUT WHAT SHOULD BE DONE OR IF YOUR PARENTS NEED TO BE CONTACTED. IN ADDITION, WE ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO INFORM YOUR COUNSELOR AND POSSIBLY CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES IF WE BELIEVE YOU ARE BEING ABUSED OR NEGLECTED. THESE WOULD BE THE ONLY SITUATIONS IN WHICH ANY INFORMATION YOU SHARE IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE SHARED WITH ANYONE ELSE. WE WILL NOT

SHARE PERSONAL INFORMATION DISCUSSED IN GROUPS, ONE-ON-ONE,
E-MAIL, AND DISCUSSION BOARD UNLESS WE BELIEVE YOU ARE IN
DANGER.

Print your name

Date

Sign your name

Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is
expired.

APPENDIX E: PARENTAL/GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT



Parental Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.

PARENTAL PERMISSION

Purpose of the Study

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to examine African American adolescent females' experiences and responses in a voluntary online after school English activity where girls read young adult novels and watch multimedia written by African American females that deal with issues related to African American adolescent girls' experiences. (For example: beauty, education, identity, family, spirituality, fictive kinship, oppression, racism, and physical abuse).

Participants

Your child is being asked to participate in the study because she has shown voluntary interest in joining an online after school English activity that involves literature and multimedia discussions in group and one-on-one chat room forums. She meets the criteria for inclusion in the study if she is an African American female between the ages of 14-17, enrolled at Sahara, enrolled in Ms. Lyons, Ms. Scarborough, Ms. Smith, or Ms. Smitherman (pseudonyms) English class, and has access to the Internet, particularly in the home. If she is over 17, or enrolled in Ms. Dillard's English class, or do not have access to the Internet, or are not enrolled at Sahara, she cannot participate in the study.

Procedures

If your child wishes to volunteer to participate in this study, she will be asked to do the following:

Participate in 5 group interviews for approximately 1 hour each at a designated time in a chat room forum with researcher and other participants to discuss literature and multimedia that focus on issues that interest her as an African American, female, student, daughter, and friend. Each participant will receive an assigned username by the student researcher to protect her privacy.

Participate in 1 one-on-one interview for approximately 1 hour at a time agreed upon by student researcher and participant to discuss literature, multimedia, and any concerns. Participate in 4 e-mail interviews that will require the girls to respond to open-ended questions at their convenience to reflect on her experiences as participants in this study.

Voluntarily post thoughts about her readings and group discussions on an online discussion board.

Benefits of Participation

There may be direct benefits to your child as a participant in this study. She will receive the opportunity to discuss experiences with other participants like her, speak in her own authentic voice, interact with researcher and participants beyond the regular school day, and learn about African American female writers and producers. In addition, her participation will contribute to the field of research and knowledge about literacy instruction for African American adolescent girls, which will help inform other researchers and teachers of African American girls.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. For example, girls may feel uncomfortable at first participating in discussion groups in an online chat room or feel awkward about communicating with the student researcher one-on-one online. Also, there may be risks associated with discussing the sensitive themes present in the study materials. The research investigator is not a clinician or trained to deal with such risks. Nevertheless, all interviews and discussion board postings will only be viewed and transcribed by the research investigators to protect participants' sense of privacy and confidentiality.

Cost /Compensation

There *will not* be a financial cost to your child to participate in this study. As a compensation for participating in the study, your child will be able to keep the 4 novels that will be used. The novels are Sharon Flake's (1998) *The Skin I'm In*, Sharon Draper's (2002) *Double Dutch*, Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) *Hush*, and Lori A. Williams' (2000) *When Kambia Elaine flew in from Neptune*. Also, the participants will watch 17 year-old Kiri Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me*. This study will take approximately one hour of her time during each interview session, for a period of 14 weeks. Your child will be able to keep the books even if she withdraws from the study before it ends. However, she will not receive credit for participating in this voluntary online after school English activity.

Voluntary Participation

Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. It is a noncredit voluntary online after school English activity. Your child may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. Your child may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with Sahara or the university. You and your child are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study. Your child will also be receiving an assent form that she must sign to participate in the study.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept completely confidential. Each

participant will be assigned a username to ensure her privacy in the designated chat room. Nevertheless, if the participant gives her username to another participant, than her information will not be confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link your child to this study. Yet, due to the small study population, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality in the chat room if the participant reveals potentially discernible information. However, all records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for at least 3 years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be shredded and discarded.

ALL INFORMATION THAT YOUR CHILD SHARES DURING CHAT ROOM GROUP AND ONE-ON-ONE DISCUSSIONS AND IN E-MAIL AND DISCUSSION BOARD WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL AND WILL NOT BE SHARED WITH ANYONE ELSE, UNLESS SHE SHARES INFORMATION THAT LEADS US TO BELIEVE SHE IS IN DANGER OR AT RISK OF HARMING HERSELF OR OTHERS. IN SUCH A SITUATION, WE WOULD FOLLOW SCHOOL PROCEDURE AND INFORM HER COUNSELOR AND ALLOW HER TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES AND MAKE A DETERMINATION ABOUT WHAT SHOULD BE DONE OR IF YOU NEED TO BE CONTACTED. IN ADDITION, WE ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO INFORM HER COUNSELOR AND POSSIBLY CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES IF WE BELIEVE SHE IS BEING ABUSED OR NEGLECTED. THESE WOULD BE THE ONLY SITUATIONS IN WHICH ANY INFORMATION SHE SHARES IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE SHARED WITH ANYONE ELSE. WE WILL NOT SHARE PERSONAL INFORMATION DISCUSSED IN GROUPS, ONE-ON-ONE, E-MAIL, AND DISCUSSION BOARD UNLESS WE BELIEVE SHE IS IN DANGER.

Parent Consent:

I have read the above information and I agree that my child may participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Parent Name (Please Print)

Date

Signature of Parent

Name of Participant/Child (Please Print)

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH STUDY PLATFORM

Research Study
Instructor: Benita Dillard

Course Author Course Admin Gradebook Email Chat Doc Sharing Dropbox Weblography

Course Home ? Help

▼ Course Home

- Syllabus
- Calendar

▼ Introduction

1st Interview

Girl like Me

Skin I'm In

Hush






Double Dutch

Kambia Elaine

Final Project

Course Home

Expand All

Announcements	Submitter	Date
 Week of Nov. 26th	Instructor Dillard	24 Nov 07
 Week of Nov. 5th	Instructor Dillard	6 Nov 07
 Week Of Oct. 29th	Instructor Dillard	29 Oct 07
 Week of Oct. 15th	Instructor Dillard	14 Oct 07
 Week of Oct. 8th	Instructor Dillard	8 Oct 07

12-11-2007

APPENDIX G: SUMMARY OF MATERIALS USED

Kiri Davis' (2006) documentary *A Girl Like Me*

Site to find summary:

http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/6/a_girl_like_me/index.php?fs=bios

Sharon Flake's (1998) novel *The Skin I'm In*

Site to find summary: <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~d2baker/skinplans.htm>

Jacqueline Woodson's (2002) novel *Hush*

Site to find summary:

http://utopia.utexas.edu/explore/books/book_reviews/book_reviews.php?book_id=54

Sharon Draper's (2002) novel *Double Dutch*

Site to find summary:

<http://www.simonsays.com/content/book.cfm?tab=22&pid=413195&agid=21>

Lori Williams' (2000) novel *When Kambia Elaine Flew in From Neptune*

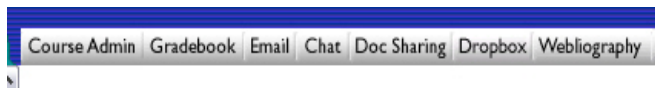
Site to find summary: http://www.bookpage.com/0004bp/lori_aurelia_williams.html

APPENDIX H: LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR INITIAL
ONE-ON-ONE CHAT ROOM INTERVIEW

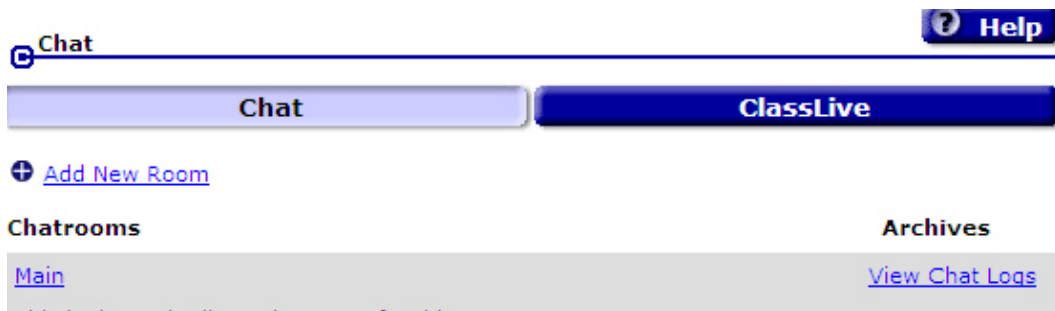
1. Tell me about your educational experiences in traditional public schools?
2. Tell me about your educational experiences at Sahara Charter High School
3. What do you like best about traditional public school?
4. What do you like about Sahara Charter High School?
5. Which learning environment do you prefer? Why?
6. What do you like best about English classes?
7. What are your favorite things to do in your English classes?
8. How many books by and about African American females did you read in your English classes at Sahara?
9. Which was your favorite?
10. How often do you read at home? What do you read?
11. Do you ever discuss literature online, on the telephone, at home? Whom do you talk with? What kinds of things do you talk about?
12. What excited you the most when you heard me talk about this project?
13. What makes you feel uncertain or unsure, or what are you concerned about at this point?
14. What questions do you have about the project or about what I'm asking you to help me with this semester?

APPENDIX I: HOW TO CREATE A GROUP IN *E-COLLEGE* CHAT ROOM

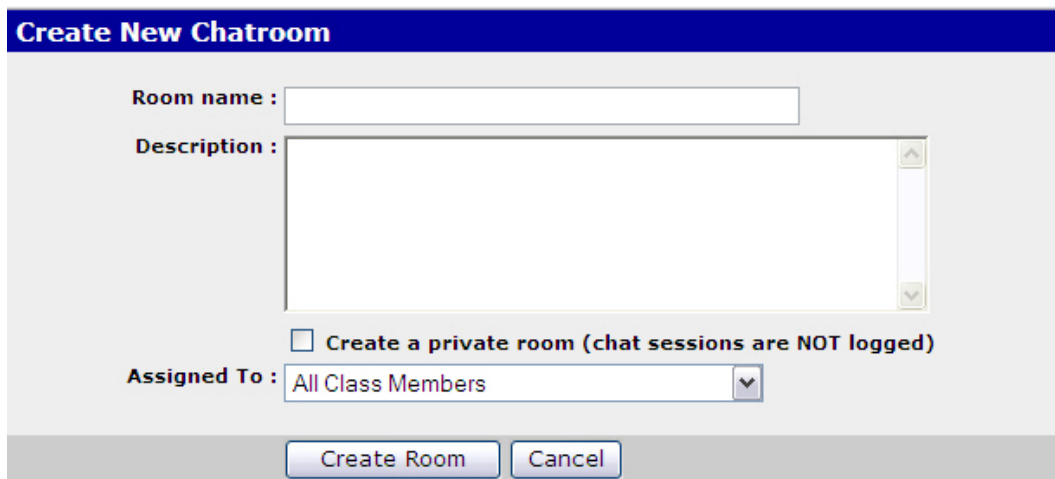
STEP ONE: CLICK ON “CHAT”



STEP TWO: CLICK ON “ADD NEW ROOM”



STEP THREE: TO CREATE A NEW CHAT ROOM INTERVIEW, FIRST, ENTER THE CHAT ROOM NAME, ASSIGN MEMBERS TO THE GROUP, AND CLICK ON “CREATE ROOM”

A screenshot of the 'Create New Chatroom' form. It has a blue header with the title 'Create New Chatroom'. The form contains several fields: 'Room name' with a text input box, 'Description' with a larger text area, and a checkbox labeled 'Create a private room (chat sessions are NOT logged)'. Below these is an 'Assigned To' dropdown menu currently set to 'All Class Members'. At the bottom, there are two buttons: 'Create Room' and 'Cancel'.

STEP FOUR: SAMPLE INITIAL ONE-ON-ONE GROUPS

General Course Info Preferences Course Enrollment Group Management

[+ Add New Group](#)

Groups

Group A: 1027033-1st Interview [Edit Group](#) [Delete Group](#)

Last Name	First Name	Email Address	Status
1027033	Student	1027033@odysseyk12.org	Student

Group B: 135124 1st Interview [Edit Group](#) [Delete Group](#)

Last Name	First Name	Email Address	Status
135124	Student	135124@odysseyk12.org	Student

STEP FIVE: ONCE THE GROUP IS CREATED, PARTICIPANTS SAW THE LINK DESCRIBING THE SPECIFIC INTERVIEW TO ENTER

Chatrooms **Archives**

[Main](#) [View Chat Logs](#)

This is the main discussion room for this course

[Edit](#)


[One on One Interview](#) [View Chat Logs](#)

[Edit](#) [Delete](#)

STEP SIX: CLICK ON “CLICK BUTTON TO ENTER CHAT”

Research Study One on One Interview - Windows Internet Explorer

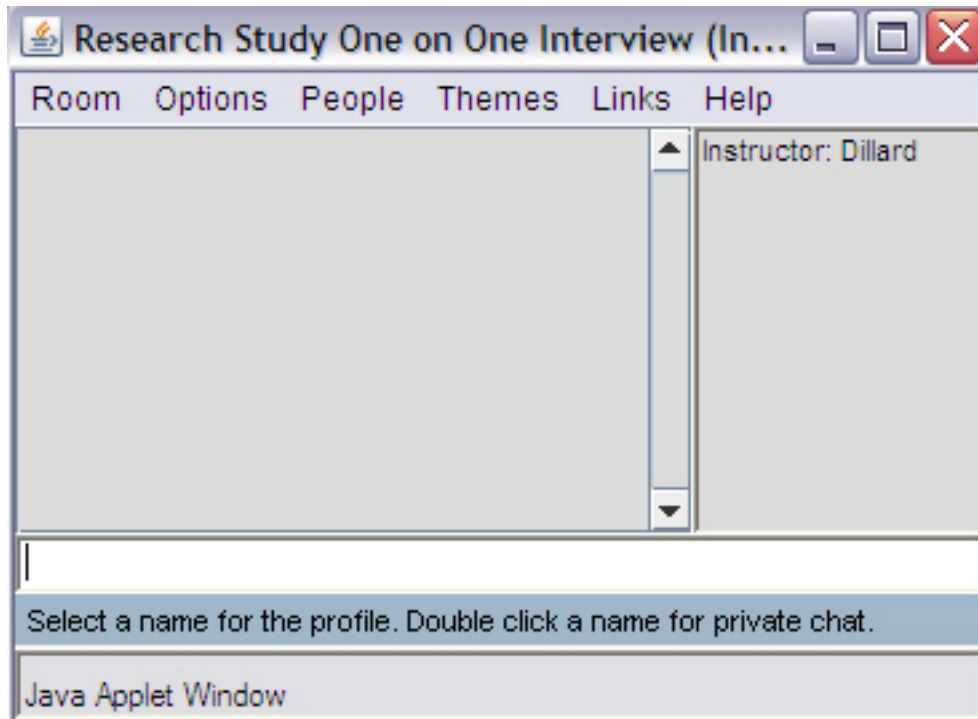
<http://odyssey.ecollege.com/cv/chat/ChatApplet.aspx?CourseID=2761050&guid=75DdsRIS6D>



Click Button to Enter Chat

IMPORTANT: This window **must** remain open in order to use the Chat feature. If you close this window, the Chat application will shut down.

STEP SEVEN: EXAMPLE OF CHAT ROOM INTERVIEW FORUM



STEP EIGHT: *E-COLLEGE* AUTOMATICALLY SAVES THE CHAT ROOM
INTERVIEW FOR VIEW



APPENDIX J: LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR EMAIL INTERVIEW

1. What effect do you think discussing this book in an online school is having on you and other participants?
2. What did you think of today's group chat room interview?
3. Tell me about a moment in the discussion that caused you to react strongly or feel uncomfortable? Why do you think you had that reaction?
4. How well did other participants/researcher understand what you had to say?
5. What did you want to discuss that did not get discussed during the group chat room interview?
6. Can you explain why you chose not to talk about certain topics/scenes/incidents during group chat room interview?
7. What did you think about a particular participant's response or question?
8. How well does the author address the issues? How well does the researcher deal with those issues during the group chat room interview?
9. What do you wish had happened differently during group chat room interview?
10. How do you feel when you read contemporary realistic fiction written by African American female authors?

APPENDIX K: LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR FIRST
CHAT ROOM GROUP DISCUSSION

Link to site:

http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/6/a_girl_like_me/index.php?fs=bios

1. Could you relate to any of the girls in the video?
2. What's your first impression of the girls in the video?
3. What stereotypes impact black girls' experiences in school, at home, at church, and in the community? Think about what the girls said about Black girls' intelligence and appearance?
4. Would you agree with some of the stereotypes?
5. Which girl do you relate to the most in the video?
6. What are some of things black girls are doing to fit in?
7. What stereotypes impact your experiences in school, at home, at church, and in your community?
8. Do you feel your race, gender, or both create negative or positive experiences?
9. Do you ever wish you were not black, female, or both a black female? Explain?
10. Why did most of the black children prefer the white doll over the black doll?
11. What was something you did not already know that you learned from the video?
12. If you were to produce a video about black girls, what story would you tell and why?

APPENDIX L: LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR ALL

CHAT ROOM GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Skin I'm In by Sharon Flake

Some questions are from the following site: <http://www.adl.org>

[/education/curriculum_connections/winter_2005](http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/winter_2005)

[/The_skin.asp?cc_section=The_skin](http://www.adl.org/The_skin.asp?cc_section=The_skin)

1. In what ways do we all internalize judgments about our appearance? How do these feelings affect our self-esteem and identity?
2. When someone says something negative about us, we tend to think about it a lot and sometimes let it bother us. Why?
3. Maleeka describes herself as "the kind of person folks can't help but tease." Do you think her negative attitude toward herself influences the way others treat her?
4. Why do we let our peers have so much control over our happiness? What do you think?
5. Why do you think Maleeka is ridiculed for being dark-skinned in a school that is predominately African American? (Question from Site)
6. Where do you think such attitudes about skin tone come from?
7. Think about this: why is Sweets able to see past color and stand confident? What does it take to remain self-assured in the face of prejudice and cruelty? (Question from site)
8. Why do you think Maleeka changed her mind about attending the better school? How do her feelings about color and appearance play into her decision? (Question from site)
9. What do you think your face says to the world? What qualities do you think you project and how do you think others perceive you? (Question from site)
10. How do your own self-perceptions differ from what others see in you? (Question from site)
11. What does it take for us to look beyond our external appearances (looks and hairstyles) and really get to know and appreciate ourselves? How can we strive in this

direction? (Question from site)

12. No one has mentioned Caleb. Why does Maleeka see Caleb's acts of kindness and service as crazy? Would these acts be considered weird at Sahara?

13. Do you agree with Caleb that "you have to take a stand when things aren't right?" Have you had to take a stand at Sahara? What obstacles, if any were in your way?

14. If you were Maleeka, how would you handle all the characters that mistreated you? (Question from site)

15. Sometimes we associate with people or situations that are bad for our self-esteem. What things can we do to increase our self-acceptance and help us feel comfortable with the skin we're in? (Question from site)

16. Could you relate to any of the characters?

Hush by Jacqueline Woodson

Some Chat Room Group Discussion Questions taken from the Penguin Reading Guide

Site: http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/jacqueline_woodson.html

1. Could you relate to any of the characters?
2. If you were in Dad's shoes and witnessed an African American murdered, what would you have done?
3. What if someone in your family was murdered by cops, would you want justice to be served?
4. Do you feel you have one identity or multiple identities? If so, what are they?
5. On page 42, Cameron says sometimes she hates being black. Have you ever hated being black, a female, or anything else?
6. Do any of you consider being black a separate identity?
7. When I asked if you had multiple identities, some of you said you just have one. Would being black be a part of that one or is it separate?
8. How would you define identity?
9. On the discussion board, I asked if you had to choose another name, what name would you choose and would it change the way you act?

10. suicide?
 11. What disorder do you think Dad had?
 12. Who do you blame for Dad's condition?
 13. If you were in Dad's shoes, which character's personality would you have resembled- Dad's, Mom's, Anna's, or Evie's?
 14. Do you think religion is what kept Mom from losing it?
 15. Do you think a person's life could ever be normal after something like this happened?
 16. How important is religion? Do you think if they had been raised in a religious home, Evie and Anna's outlook would be different?
 17. So, who's to blame for the family's depression? Mom or Dad? or both?
 18. On page 179, Evie said Lulu said, "God having set our stage long before we were even in this world." Do you think this is true?
 19. On page 180, Evie stated, "My life is a rewrite. I hope this is the last revision." Do you look at your life as a rewrite? Explain why or why not?
-

Double Dutch by Sharon Draper

Chat Room Group Discussion Questions

1. Could you relate to any of the characters?
 2. Do you know of anyone who was placed in foster care?
 3. What do you think about Delia's inability to read?
 4. Is it possible for a parent to not know if her/his child is illiterate?
 5. What about the Tolliver twins and Charlene? Did you identify with any of the characters? Is this novel realistic?
 6. What stood out to you the most in this novel?
 7. Did Draper, the author, do a good job addressing the issues of illiteracy, abandonment, bullying, stereotyping, lying etc..?
 8. What questions are left unanswered?
 9. Have you ever felt misunderstood? How did you handle the problem?
-

When Kambia Elaine flew in from Neptune by Lori A. Williams

Chat Room Group Discussion Questions

1. Could you relate to any of the characters?
2. Were there any parts of the story that made you feel uncomfortable?
3. If you were Shayla, how would you handle a friend like Kambia?
4. Have any of you ever known someone who was sexually abused or abused in other ways?
5. What do you think about Shayla's mother letting her dad Mr. Anderson Fox back into the house?
6. Why do you think Shayla felt uncomfortable around her dad?
7. If you were Shayla, how would you respond to Anderson Fox?
8. Have you ever felt uncomfortable around an adult? If so, what did you do?
9. Who would you blame for Tia's defiance with Doo-Witty?
10. What do you think about the lady in the church who protected Tia? Should she have contacted Tia's mom or grandmother? Why do you think she did not?
11. What do you think about the teacher who just kicked Kambia out of the classroom?
12. Does the author do a great job depicting the lives of African American females?
13. Would you recommend this book to a friend?
14. If you could change anything in the novel, what would you change and why?

APPENDIX M: EXCERPT OF CATEGORIES AND PROPERTIES

Excerpt of Categories and Properties

Online Chat Room

Remain Anonymous: safe environment, say whatever and not be afraid of being judged b/c our identities are secret, express themselves, encourage each other, see different perspectives, re-affirm our own reactions to matters, Discuss things that we have in common, express ourselves w/o the concern of what others think, express myself freely, misunderstood

African American Young Adult Fiction

Related to Characters/Issues: literature addresses issues in society that most people are afraid to bring up; "Classy way that won't step on anyone's toes." Talk about skin color, talk about stereotyping and issues in black community, authors did a pretty good job, brought the real life issues to the book led to thoughts about identity, all of the issues are very important.

Did not relate to Characters/Issues: Don't feel anything different reading books written by AA females; don't care about the color of characters, disappointed w/ Maleeka's handling of peer pressure, author didn't raise issues in my mind, read for pleasure and enjoyment; so "I don't think about issues in books at all," no issues were raised in my mind; "I was disgusted w/ the amount of depravity in it. No one has morals today."

Single-Gendered Book Club:

Comfortable: Discuss race openly, ask others to explain a question or comment, interactive, interesting, felt understood, everyone had an opinion

Uncomfortable: felt understood most of the time, "I don't know how they expected to discuss the book if they didn't read it all," "I wished everyone respected each other's opinions and didn't argue with each other... I wish there were more people in the discussions and that we all read the whole books," contentious

APPENDIX N: EXCERPT FROM TUESDAY'S FINAL CHAT ROOM GROUP

DISCUSSION ON WILLIAMS' NOVEL

1. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:52:13 PM>Instructor: Dillard: Does the author do a great job depicting the lives of African American females?
2. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:52:54 PM>Student 321198: On the whole, no. Not everyone lives like the characters in the book.
3. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:53:19 PM>Student 86267: I AGREE
4. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:53:26 PM>Student 135124: in a way yes and in a way it's kind of a stereotype.
5. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:53:46 PM>Instructor: Dillard: How is it a stereotype 135124?
6. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:56:09 PM>Instructor: Dillard: Are you there 135124?
7. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:56:11 PM>Student 135124: well it's saying black women are loud. What they say goes. They are stubborn. They either work 2 jobs or they "pay their rent on their backs" (that's a quote from the book btw) It's the typical way people look at black women
8. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:56:30 PM>Student 135124: sorry it took a bit long hahaha
9. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:56:50 PM>Instructor: Dillard: What does btw mean?
10. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:56:55 PM>Student 321198: By the way
11. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:57:00 PM>Student 135124: or sorry. yeah by the way
12. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:58:06 PM>Student 135124: I mean there are a lot of black women that are like that but that is the typical stereotype
13. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:58:21 PM>Instructor: Dillard: What do you think 86267 and 321198. Do you agree with 135124?
14. Tue Jan 08, 2008 05:59:38 PM>Student 321198: Yes, I agree with her. I know several black women. They are not prostitutes, working two jobs, cussing, getting pregnant early- none of that. They have families who deeply love them.
15. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:00:25 PM>Student 86267: I DUNNO YEA SOME BLK FOLKS IS LOUD AND DEMANDING BUT NOT ALL ARE. AND I BELIEVE THAT EVERY

RACE HAS A FEW FREAKY WOMENT (IF YOU KNO WHAT I MEAN)16. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:01:18 PM>Instructor: Dillard: Would you recommend this book to a friend?

17. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:01:21 PM>Student 135124: hahaha yeah I meant to apologize if that sounded harsh, but I was using examples from the book. I didn't mean to offend anyone

18. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:01:53 PM>Instructor: Dillard: I don't think you offended anyone 135124.

19. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:02:05 PM>Student 86267: YEA YOU DIDN'T

20. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:02:08 PM>Student 135124: ok good

21. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:02:24 PM>Student 135124: I just wanted to say sorry just in case

22. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:02:28 PM>Student 86267: BUT YEAH I WOULD RECOMMEND THIS BECAUSE ITS A GOOD BOOK

23. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:02:42 PM>Student 321198: I would not recommend this book to a friend because I didn't really like it. And yea, 135124, I wasn't offended.

24. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:03:32 PM>Student 135124: I would too but only because it teaches them the consequences of bad communication

25. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:03:39 PM>Instructor: Dillard: Why do you think it is a good book 86267?

26. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:04:41 PM>Instructor: Dillard: Why didn't you like it 321198?

27. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:05:31 PM>Student 86267: I THINK IT WAS BECAUSE KAMBIA WAS A KOOL CHARACTER AND IT ALWAYS KEPT ME WANTIN TO READ MORE, AND I ALSO HAS A LITTLE LESSON IN LIKE HOW NOT TO CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

28. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:06:05 PM>Student 321198: Like I said at the beginning-- It was too depressing. I don't like to read depressing books- reading is my time to get away into a fantasy world.

29. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:06:41 PM>Instructor: Dillard: If you could change anything in the novel, what would you change and why?

30. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:07:15 PM>Student 86267: KAMBIA GETTING RAPED... THAT'S MY WORST FEAR AND NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO GO THROUGH THAT

31. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:07:35 PM>Student 135124: I would change the way black people are depicted in here

32. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:07:59 PM>Student 321198: Exactly 86267. That shouldn't even happen in fiction, let alone real life.

33. Tue Jan 08, 2008 06:08:54 PM>Student 135124: I think books about getting raped could be a good thing...I know that came out wrong. But think about it. Think about how Shayla didn't know about rape. This shows what a person should do in that situation

APPENDIX O: EXCERPT FROM THURSDAY'S THIRD CHAT ROOM GROUP

DISCUSSION ON WOODSON'S NOVEL

1. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:02:19 PM>Instructor: Dillard: If you were in Dad's shoes, which character's personality do you think you would have resembled- Dad's, Mom's, Anna's, or Evie's?
2. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:03:25 PM>Student 1027033: I think the Dad's because sometimes I'm like that I get in a situation where I'll really pull myself away from the world where I feel I don't want to tell anyone how I feel or just want to be alone
3. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:04:17 PM>Student 93884: I would say the father, because I would like to just have some alone time, with myself and meditate
4. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:05:04 PM>Student 248177: I think I would resemble Evie's personality the most
5. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:05:12 PM>Student 160327: Evie, I would find something else to do to keep my mind off things but not to the extreme like the mom
6. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:05:46 PM>Student 1027033: Yeah the mom was tripping
7. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:05:44 PM>Instructor: Dillard: 1027033 and 93884 do you think you would have attempted suicide also?
8. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:06:06 PM>Student 1027033: I've already tried it before
9. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:06:27 PM>Student 93884: no I would not try to attempt suicide, never have never will.
10. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:06:35 PM>Student 1027033: but now I'm a stronger person so no but I mean I think about it sometimes
11. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:07:06 PM>Student 93884: I don't really let the negative things effect me as a person. I have a strong self- esteem, besides I don't have the guts lol.
12. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:07:48 PM>Student 160327: I don't agree with suicide because it really hurts the people around you
13. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:07:54 PM>Student 93884: * I mean high self esteem**yeah that too. I don't want my family to go through all that pain

14. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:09:07 PM>Student 1027033: Well sometimes people don't believe something wrong with you and they tend not to believe there is something wrong
15. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:10:05 PM>Student 93884: if you don't address your problems or if you don't communicate, then of course they won't know
16. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:10:34 PM>Student 1027033: no not like that
17. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:10:39 PM>Student 1027033: I mean if you tell ppl
18. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:10:48 PM>Student 160327: true, they won't understand
19. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:11:20 PM>Student 93884: yeah if you tell them, but if you keep your emotions bottled up inside then no one will know
20. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:11:23 PM>Student 1027033: I mean some ppl don't say anything and you can tell
21. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:11:50 PM>Student 93884: unless you keep a smile on your face, and act like nothing is wrong or pretend there is nothing wrong with you there*
22. Thu Nov 29, 2007 08:12:35 PM>Student 1027033: yeah

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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Benita R. Dillard

Degrees:

Bachelor of Arts, English 1996
Johnson C. Smith University

Master of Arts, English 1999
Murray State University

Publications:

Dillard, B. (1996). It bees that way sometime: A paradigm analysis of the Black English 'Be' Verb System. *Johnson C. Smith University Undergraduate Research Journal*, 31-43.

Dillard, B. (2005). Afterthought: Cultural Congruity in African American Art, History, and Music. *Black History Bulletin* 68, (2), 33-35.

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Walker, N., Bean, T., & Dillard, B. (2010). *Using Multiple Texts to Improve Comprehension*. Pasadena, CA: Heinemann.

Dissertation Title:

So Tell Me, What's Different but the Skin I'm In? Seven Adolescent Black Girls Making Sense of Their Experiences in an Online School Book Club Featuring African American Young Adult Literature

Dissertation Examination Committee:

Thomas Bean, Ph.D., Co-Chairperson
Helen Harper, Ph.D., Co-Chairperson

Marilyn McKinney, Ph.D., Committee Member
Lori Olafson, Ph.D., Committee Member
Lois Helmbold, Ph.D., Committee Member